

All Forms of Heroism Available in 'Black Panther'

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Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The fortune of the latest Marvel Studios superhero epic, “Black Panther,” lies in its solid foundation in African mythos and intelligent storytelling. And with Ryan Coogler (“Creed”) as director, there are still major confrontations and battles, intertwined into the soul.

There are many pleasures in the journey of the narrative, including tributes to other films and eras. The cast is top drawer, led by the sizzling hot Chadwick Boseman (“42”) and Michael B. Jordan (the lead in “Creed”). They portray star-crossed cousins, one an African king of an isolationist nation and one a “boy from the hood” of Oakland. The truth of their confrontation is part of the destiny for their homeland, both in America and the fictional kingdom of Wakanda. The clash of culture and ideology is a stunning tribute as well to Black History Month. The heroics of “Black Panther” is about several layers of salvation.

After a glimpse of the hero Black Panther/T’Challa (Chadwick Boseman) in “Captain America: Civil War,” and the death of his father T’Chaka (John Kani), the young African prince must go back to his homeland of Wakanda to become king. His nation is third world to the rest of the planet, but harbors a secret – the harvesting of a space ore called vibranium has given the nation a utopia of technology and self sustaining economy.



The Title Character (Chadwick Boseman) in 'Black Panther'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios

Black Panther's first assignment as king is to bring down his enemy Klaue (Andy Serkis), who has stolen a vibranium artifact with the aid of American Erik Stevens (Michael B. Jordan). Stevens has a past secret and desires to confront T'Challa with that history. Their fates are tied together, and has future implications for Wakanda and the world around it.

The tying in of America through Erik Stevens, living a double life beginning as a kid in Oakland, is the most fascinating thread throughout the story, and keeps coming back in surprising ways. Both Stevens and T'Challa are seeking their identities in the absence of their influential fathers, which is rooted in mythos and African and black American culture. Their yin-yang battle is the final test in their search, and who emerges will create their authenticity.

Women are a strong and equal presence in this film, again rooted in culture. The warrior general of Wakanda, Okoye (Danai Gurira) is vital and proud, and T'Challa's sister Shuri (Letitia Wright) is the tech minister at 16 years old. The great Angela Bassett is Ramonda, the Queen Mother of Wakanda, and her energy is necessary when the dark times are upon them. Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o) would rather seek justice than sit as queen next to T'Challa. This equality of gender in the fight is reminiscent of civil rights battles in American history, with the sisters creating as much freedom as the brothers.



The Cast of 'Black Panther'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios

The film also has that inner core that is immediately connective, which characterizes the most rousing adventure films. Director Ryan Coogler, an intense and different kind of artist, seems to have a love for plugging into cinema history in this tale, with echoes of "The Lion King," "Coming to America," the James Bond series and of course the superhero ethos. As he did in "Creed," Coogler (with writing partner Joe Robert Cole) relies on his deep respect for what has come before him and injects his own energy into it.

I cannot think of a more appropriate film for Black History Month, not because it tells the history but reflects upon it, in a hero package that generates a path of heritage for African based descendants... both from nations like the Wakandas and like Oakland, deep in the heart of their own neighborhoods.

"Black Panther" opens everywhere on February 16th, in 3D IMAX and regular screenings. See local listings for IMAX theaters and show times. Featuring Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong'o, Martin Freeman, Angela Bassett, Forest Whittaker, Andy Serkis and Sterling K. Brown. Written by Ryan Coogler and Joe Robert Cole. Directed by Ryan Coogler. Rated "PG-13"



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