



Black Panther



US, 2018, 134 MINUTES, COLOUR

Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong'o, Danai Gurira, Martin Freeman, Daniel Kaluuya, Letitia Wright, Winston Duke, Sterling K. Brown, Angela Bassett, Forest Whitaker, Andy Serkis, Isaac de Bankole, Sebastian Stan. Directed by Ryan Coogler.

Within a week of its release, *Black Panther* had received very favourable reviews, a further development of the Marvel Comics universe – although the character had appeared in *Captain America: Civil War* (and a scene from that film is reproduced here to explain the origins of T'Challa, the Black Panther, the death of his father and some disastrous consequences of his father's decisions). Within two weeks of the film's release, it had taken almost half \$1 billion at the world box office.

But, it is also become something of a social phenomenon. Here was a superhero film with black characters, most performed by African or African-American actors, opening up a different world from the expected, introducing a mythical kingdom of Wakanda, hidden somewhere in the southern part of Africa, all traditions and rituals combined with contemporary and futuristic technology. And, the screenplay puts a lot of emphasis on the history of slavery, the slaves going to the United States, human rights. In hindsight, it is not surprising to find that the film was embraced not only by African-American audiences in the US but by various cultures all around the world who identified with the colonised as well as the enslaved.

The film was directed by an African-American director, Ryan Coogler who had made his mark with small socially-concerned film, *Fruitvale Station*, and then the rebooting of the *Rocky* series with *Creed*.

As a superhero film, it is certainly striking in its visuals, especially the city capital of Wakanda, skyscrapers, transport, people freely walking around, and, more especially, the last waterfall and cliffs settings for the establishing of T'Challa as the Black Panther King and as the scene for a challenge from a rival, a vigorous battle. (And another vigorous battle later on when the mysterious black American character and villain arrives to challenge T'Challa). The screenplay draws on a lot of mythical lore which may or may not have grounding in fact. But, it creates the setting for a mysterious kingdom, the source of its power, Vibranium, not known anywhere else in the world, preserved for the people of Wakanda who are finally challenged to contribute to world progress and peace. In its presentation of Wakanda and the potential of an African nation to contribute to the world on the responsibility of its leaders, there seem some criticism of leaders past and present local Robert Mugabe and Jacob Zuma.

Chadwick Boseman is T'Challa, the Black Panther. He had already played real-life characters as Jackie Robinson, James Brown and Chief Justice Marshall Thurgood. T'Challa is a strong hero but is not unvanquishable. In fact, those of a religious frame of mind with references might note something of a death and resurrection.

He receives his power from the traditions, from

his father who was assassinated in 1992 in Vienna, from his strong mother, Angela Bassett, from the wise adviser, Forest Whitaker, and from costumes and masks with special inherent powers and from the Vibranium. His technological-whiz sister, Nakia, played with verve by Lupita Nyong'o, has vast resources of technology, expertise in managing them, virtual cars and plane cockpits, and still has the time to go out to battle and give communication advice in the middle of conflict. There is also Okoye, Danai Gurira, also a warrior, in love with T'Challa. In fact, this seems to be a Pretorian guard of powerful female warriors.

So, the concerns of the story focus on black characters. And for token whites in the film – there is Andy Serkis as a sleazy arms dealer from Johannesburg, Martin Freeman as a former pilot and CIA agent (interestingly, both these whites are British rather than from the US).

But, the main villain, is also a black, with an interesting back story about his father, an ambassador to the United States, his vision for the

use of Vibranium, his death and his heritage for his son. The son is part Wakandan, part American, involved in "CIA activities and learning a brutal trade. He is played by Michael B. Jordan (who also appeared in Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station* as well as *Creed*).

Whether *Black Panther* will be a social rallying cry for some time, the raising of black consciousness, or will be a phenomenon of 2018, it is hard to say. However, it continues the tradition of Marvel superhero films (with Stan Lee doing his usual cameo, at a casino, and billed as *Thirsty Gambler*), and T'Challa will become part of *The Avengers* (that rather clogged series with an abundance of superheroes each waiting their turn for a battle sequence).

The audiences who rush to the exit as soon as a word appears on screen will miss a significant rousing and encouraging speech from T'Challa about world peace and development. And, there is a mini preview of another *Black Panther* film at the end of the credits.

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