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Chadwick Boseman: Remembering a King

Antonio Ometeotl · Monday, September 21st, 2020

Chadwick Aaron Boseman was born on November 29th, 1976, in South Carolina. Boseman attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in directing. He later studied at the British American Drama Academy in Oxford, England. Throughout his illustrious career, Boseman starred in, directed, and wrote multiple stage productions, such as *Breathe*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Bootleg Blues*, *Zooman*, *Willie's Cut and Shine*, *Hieroglyphic Graffiti*, *Deep Azure*, and *Rhyme Deferred*. In addition to his extensive theatrical resume, Boseman had several appearances on television such as his recurring role as Nathaniel Ray on the ABC Family drama *Lincoln Heights*. Despite his long list of notable roles outside of cinema, Chadwick Boseman is most widely recognized for his incredible portrayals of multiple prominent Black role models and figure heads throughout history. Whether it be through his incredibly emotional portrayal of Jackie Robinson in *42*, or his extreme dedication to master the footwork of James Brown in *Get on Up*. Chadwick Boseman was well on his way to creating consistently powerful and impactful movies, but the role he will forever be remembered for is that of the *Black Panther*.

In an era where young children and teens are growing up watching superheroes on the big screen, there has been a significant lack of representation of the Black community. In a similar way that *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry was able to bring Black audiences for the first time to the theatre, *Black Panther* for the first time gave the young Black generation of children and teenagers a superhero that looked like them. In 1959 Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* brought Black people to the theatre in droves, because "never in the history of the American theatre had so much of the truth of black people's lives been seen on the stage," said James Baldwin. Likewise, Boseman's embodiment of the Black Panther inundated movie theatres with a diverse audience of Black and Brown people who had been waiting to see themselves reflected as the superhero of a Hollywood film. Instead of the overplayed tropes of Black people as the crook, thief, drug dealer, gang banger, and so many other one-dimensional roles often found in Hollywood. In the same way that Black people, as Baldwin stated, had "ignored the theatre because the theatre had always ignored them." The enthusiasm from the Black community to attend the cinema to watch your average superhero film was minimal because they simply did not see themselves reflected within the film.

Chadwick Boseman was able to not only give Black audiences a driving force to watch a superhero film, but he also portrayed the pinnacle of Black excellence through *Black Panther*. The Black Panther was wealthy, powerful, a fearless warrior, a fair and just leader, a philanthropist, and most importantly a King of his own independent nation of Wakanda, technologically superior to every

other nation on the planet. Boseman gave young Black audiences someone to look up to and find a sense of hope for the future within. Although the Black Panther is a fictional character, the immense inspiration and self empowerment that has been instilled within the Black community is far from it. **Even though Boseman collected countless accolades as a result of this film, the immortalization of himself as a symbol of Black excellence through Black Panther is his greatest achievement.** Chadwick Boseman simply redefined what a superhero can be and should be.

Chadwick Boseman was diagnosed with stage III colon cancer in 2016, yet he still pushed himself beyond what was not only expected but thought possible. Despite Boseman's diagnosis, he visited St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee to visit young children who had cancer or other life threatening diseases. The simple fact that Boseman visited these patients, while he himself was simultaneously fighting his own cancer, is nothing short of remarkably heroic. This exemplifies Boseman's innate heroism.

Boseman died peacefully in his own home surrounded by his loving family on August 28th, 2020. Boseman's greatest legacy is not in the box office stubs, but in the children that he left an everlasting impression of Black excellence upon.

Wakanda forever.

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