

To Chadwick Boseman: A Most Gracious Thank You

By [Murjani Rawls](#) · Aug 29, 2020



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At the 2014 iteration of Comic-Con, Marvel [unveiled their](#) Phase 3 slate of movies. Within a string of announcements was *Captain America: Civil War* due on May 6th, 2016. I'll never forget the image of the two pillars of the MCU, **Robert Downey Jr.** and **Chris Evans** squaring up, and then **Chadwick Boseman** coming in spitting the difference as Black Panther. Besides that, there was a Black Panther solo movie in the works. Boseman had just come off performances as **Jackie Robinson** in 2013's *42* and **James Brown** in 2014's *Get On Up*. The Marvel Cinematic Universe needed more diversity in their lead characters – now, looking back, it was poetic that Boseman took that role of ushering that era in.

As a comic book movie fan, we've gotten spoiled with some wonderful memories in abundance over the years. I remember the day of Black Panther's release like it was yesterday. It was Thursday, February 15th, and my friend and I had gotten tickets early. The movie was [tracking at](#) a 170 million dollar opening weekend. Think about that – a Black superhero movie with a majority Black cast poised to make that amount of money in one weekend.

As my showing was later in the evening, I had looked at social media to see the response. Across the country, fans packed movie theaters. Generations of Black people – people that I'm sure would not go see a comic book movie otherwise. It was an event, and we were witnesses. When my friend and I sat down and watched the movie, two Black boys sat beside us. They were engaged the entire time – rooting for characters such as T'Challa, Shuri, and the Dora Milaje every step of the way. To see the depiction of the themes in African history and Black people thriving in a beautiful, fictional society such as Wakanda gives people hope. You never know how representation hits you until you see it up close and personal.

Black Panther made 75 million dollars on the [first day of release](#), and 1.5 billion dollars overall. Saudi Arabia broke its 35-year ban on movies to [show the film](#). That was a referendum and statement that Black superhero movies are profitable. The world got to see Black people in a position of power and a regal standing of history. The Wakandan salute became a staple. Black children got a hero. Now, Black parents across the country have to tell their children that their hero passed away. What? When your younger, the concept of morality is still very new. Superheroes can't die. Just like in *Avengers Endgame*, we hope that T'Challa will walk out of a portal to thunderous applause and this all be a bad dream.

To take on these roles, there has to be something within a person to bring them to life. A bond shared between the actor and what they are trying to portray. I'm thankful for Chadwick Boseman, the man. Boseman won best hero at the MTV Movie Awards and [gave the award](#) to James Shaw Jr., a man who disarmed a gunman at a Nashville Waffle House and saved lives. In his 2018 Howard commencement speech, Boseman stressed the importance of purpose, protest, and keeping a higher standard of the roles he played when he portrayed Black people on screen. He knew the importance of these roles. Boseman's talent was a conduit for our heroes to live again.

I read about **Jackie Robinson** and **Thurgood Marshall** in textbooks when I was younger. I watched footage of **James Brown** in his heyday. Because of Boseman, I could see those heroes in Black history come alive. Hopefully, it led others to look into why they were so important. In taking those roles and making them his own, he became a hero. This extends more outside the roles that he would lose himself in.

While Boseman was fighting his battle with colon cancer, he [visited terminally ill children](#) and inspired those who were in a similar fight. He met them with grace and hope, even though he was fighting for your life. Do you know how strong you have to be to do that? To suffer from an illness silently, yet to gather the strength to encourage those who fates are unsure of a disease such as cancer.

I think about how physically demanding a role such as T'Challa asked of Boseman and brim with admiration. During his four-year battle with colon cancer, he still actively pursued his craft with unwavering determination. The most important thing to note is that no matter how big or small the feat, anybody living with a deadly illness and fights on is a hero. It could be as simple a decision to get out of bed in the morning.

Along with the collective experience of COVID-19, the Black experience in 2020 has been mired in grief and loss. From losing heroes ranging from **Kobe Bryant**, **John Lewis**, and **Katherine Johnson** to the ongoing racial unrest that won't seem to let up. We meet our days with heavy hearts and try to brace ourselves for the next tragedy. Now, this year has taken another illustrious life from us. Boseman's journey is complete, but not in how many of us hoped. If there's anything that 2020 has taught us, it's to expect the unexpected.

Chadwick Boseman did not lose his fight with colon cancer. He lived his life in full despite this illness, and that is something to admire. As his role as "Stormin'" Norman Earl Holloway in *Da 5 Bloodz*, Boseman is the hug at the end of the movie and telling us, "it's ok, brotha," as we cry out our grief. He's the one that urges us and his fellow soldiers about the importance of Black history.

I re-watched *Black Panther* for the first time in a while, and it reminded me of T'Challa's character arch and how Boseman portrayed it. T'Challa's ascent to the throne saw challenges, defeat, but ultimately saw him choosing his own path and overcoming it. The ancestral plane scenes feel different. As T'Challa says in *Civil War*; "In my culture, death is not the end. It's more of a stepping-off point." Rest peacefully, Chadwick – you are a king.

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