



“From Where I Sit ...”

“The Church, the Black Panther, and Wakanda”!

At the writing of this article, it is March 11th and the Marvel Movie Black Panther has just surpassed the \$1 billion mark in worldwide sales. This is a tremendous phenomenon since the movie has only been out in the U.S. for less than a month. And it is significant because of its nearly all-black cast. Can you believe it?

For this article, I chose not to use copyrighted images and instead have inserted a general image of the panther that represented the mascot of my high school in Beatrice, AL. However, like many others, I was drawn to this movie because it had a purpose that far exceeded what we have come to find in films of the blaxploitation genre. I’ll not try to explain the movie since by this reading most will have seen it or know of it. And because, it would take far more space than available for this article.

Instead, I will focus on a March 10th presentation at the Birmingham Spring Convocation of the Alabama Regions. Approximately ten days earlier, Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton invited two young adult pastors (*Reverends Rickdrieka Sanders-Phillips School of Theology [PST] ‘17 and Keenan Winters-a current PST student*) and two Generation X pastors (*Reverends Anderson Graves-a former assistant school principal and Eddie C. Richardson-PST ‘17*) to give a special presentation entitled, **“The Symbolism of Black Panther as it Relates to the Traditional Black Church.”**

These young people did an extremely, outstanding job with their presentation that paralleled the mythical Wakanda with the “real” Wakanda as found in Africa and in history citing both locations and historical characters. They identified the participants behind the scenes (director, writer, costume designer), the lead characters and their roles, and finally many of the [negative] cinematic stereotypes.

With an intended effort to initiate a dialogue within church congregations on **The Characteristics of the Church As It Relates to Wakanda**, the presentation moved to sample Bible Study questions from Matthew chapters 5, 25 and 28. It also included a two-page document entitled *“Young Adults in Ministry: A Discipleship Challenge”* written by Retired Bishop Ronald M. Cunningham during his tenure as General Secretary of Christian Education.

I’m not sure how other Episcopal Districts may respond to this very current and relevant Black Panther phenomenon, but I was quite proud, as a member of the Fifth Episcopal District and in a time such as this, to sit in session and witness such a presentation, prepared and presented by young leaders of our next generation. Their presentations were both theological and pastoral while addressing the strong roles of black males and females in the mythical Wakanda and in the Church. At its conclusion, Bishop Jefferson-Snorton announced that the entire presentation would be placed on the Fifth District website and would be accessible to any wishing to take advantage of this excellent work.

Black Panther is not just a cinematic masterpiece in the Marvel Universe, it is also an opportunity for us to identify superheroes of color on the movie screen and superheroes of color in our everyday lives. *Or at least that’s the way it looks to me...*

“From Where I Sit”

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