

The Theology of



MARVEL

**BLACK
PANTHER**

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Why Talk About Black Panther?

- Commentary on modern political and race issues
- Relationship between diaspora and origins: African-Americans and Africans
- Great story!

What This Is Not About

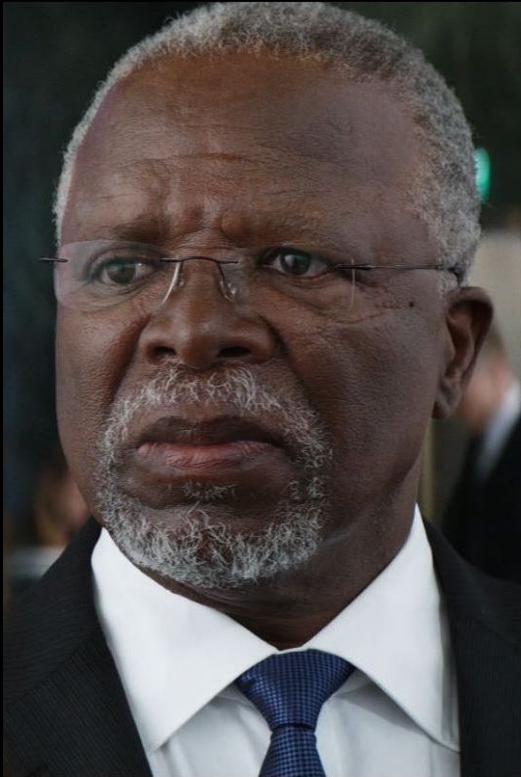
- Ryan Coogler's original or secret intent
- A prediction about the Marvel movie universe
- An exploration of African religious ideas

What This Is About

- An analysis of Black Panther as commentary on real history
- An analysis of Black Panther as a story
 - What is a Hero? Villain?
 - What are Good and Evil?
 - How can Good defeat Evil without becoming Evil?
 - Comparisons to the Bible as a story

Black Panther as Commentary

- Isolationism vs. Involvement vs. Imperialism



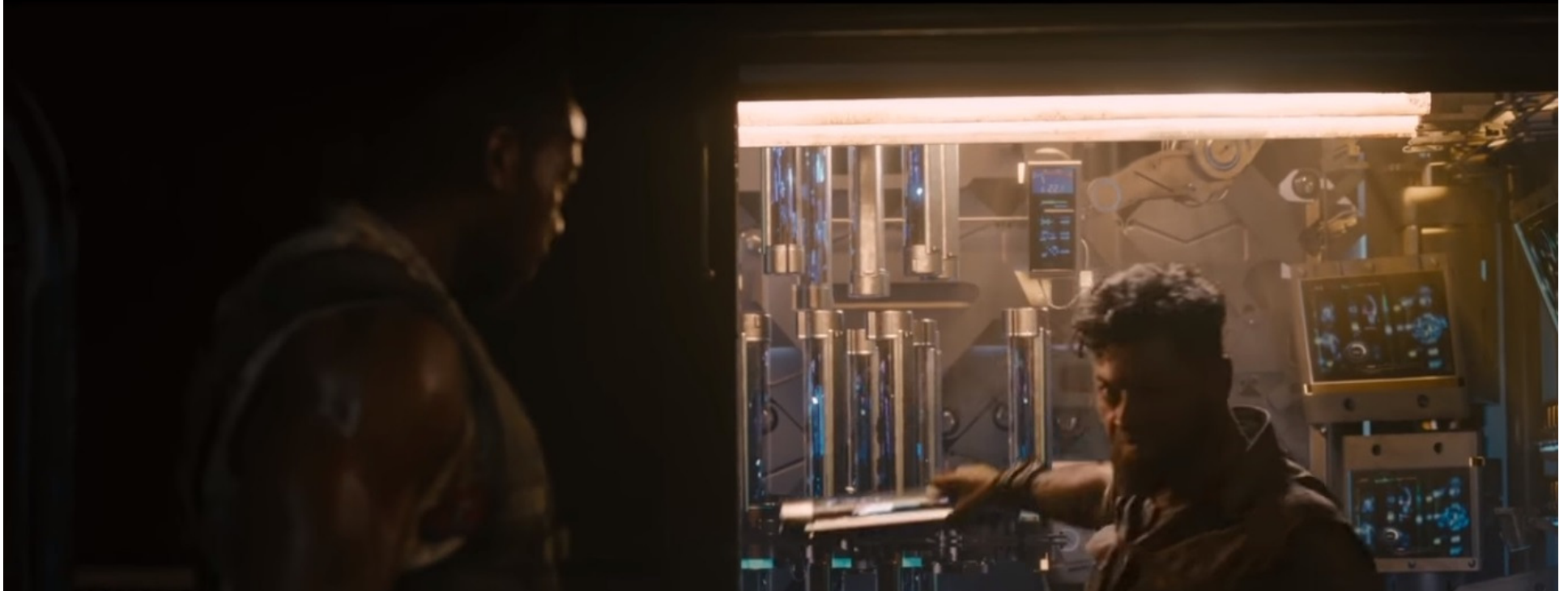
Black Panther as Commentary

- Fear of Immigration (reverse colonialism)
 - “The wise build bridges; the foolish build barriers.”



Black Panther as Commentary

- Fear of Colonialism
 - Ulysses Klaue is South African
 - Wakanda's precious resource: Vibranium



Black Panther as Commentary

- Overturning Colonialism: A New Imperialism?
 - Eric Stephens (Killmonger) corrects the Museum of Great Britain curator about the artifacts lifted from their origins



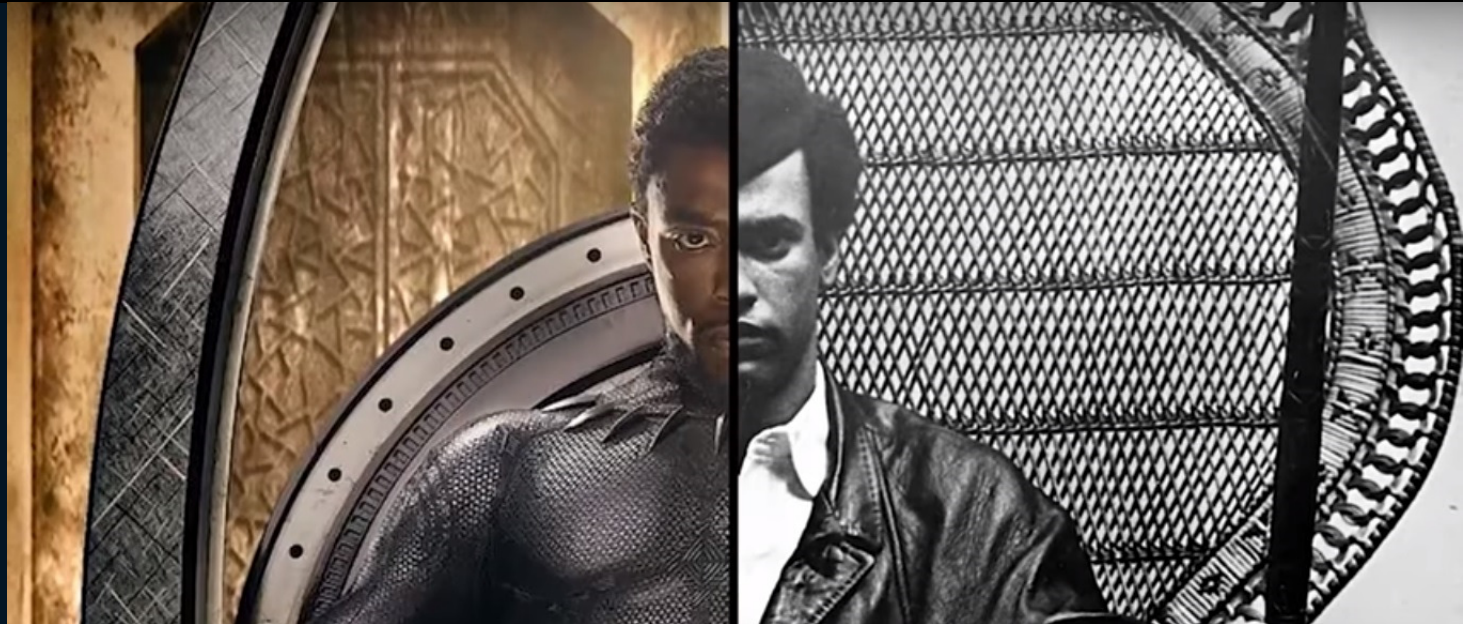
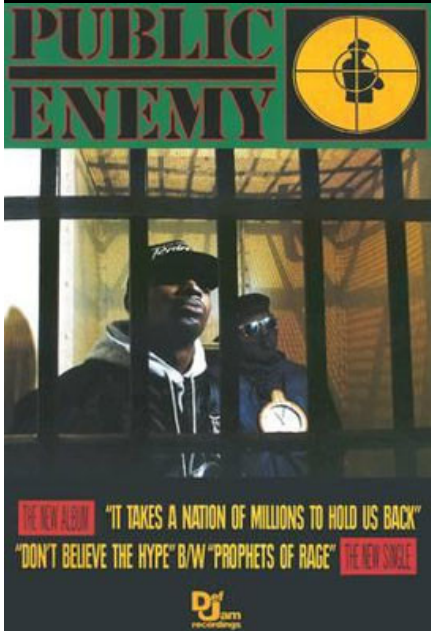
Black Panther as Commentary

- Overturning Colonialism: A New Imperialism?
 - “The sun will never set on the Wakandan Empire”
 - ...“British” ...



Black Panther as Commentary

- Overturning Colonialism
 - Killmonger origin in Oakland
 - Black Panther Party origin in Oakland



Black Panther as Commentary

- Overturning Colonialism
 - Black Panther Party: food; stop police brutality
 - Later, “two basic options”



Actual History

- Global 20th century non-violent resistance movements
- Christian influence and leadership
- Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement was only one manifestation

Leo Tolstoy in Russia



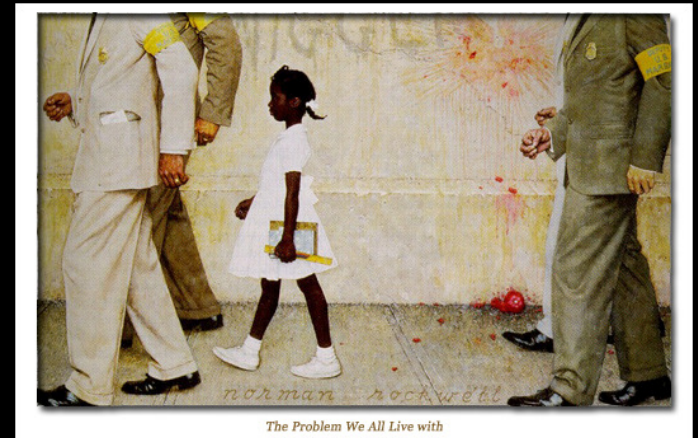
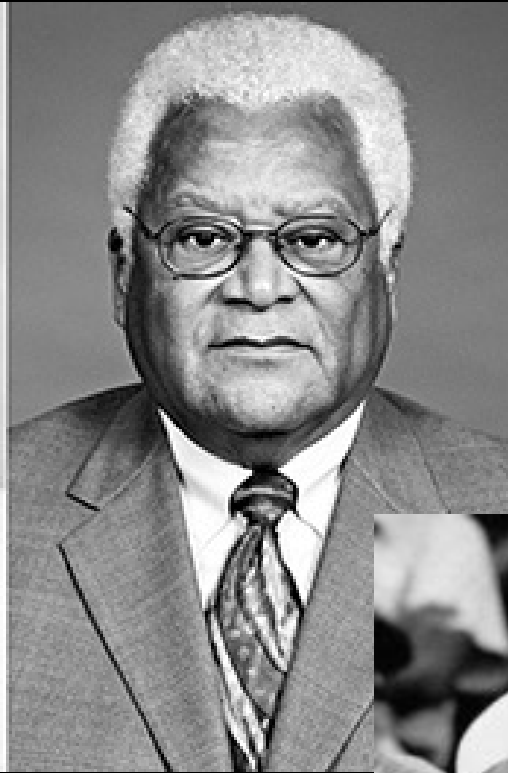
Gandhi* in South Africa & India



Ahn Chang-Ho in Korea



The Black Church in the U.S.



People Power in the Philippines



EDSA Revolution

Solidarity in Poland



Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovakia



Truth & Reconciliation in South Africa

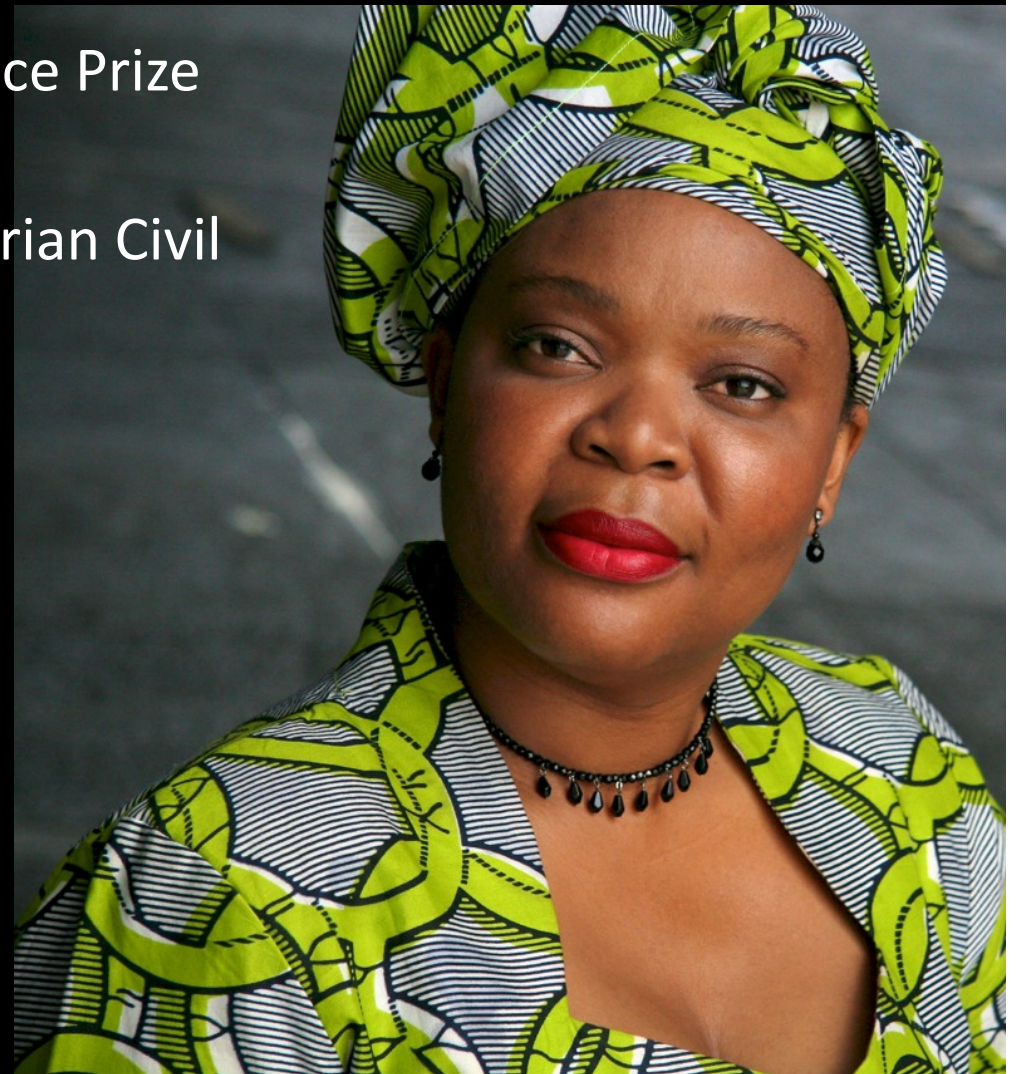
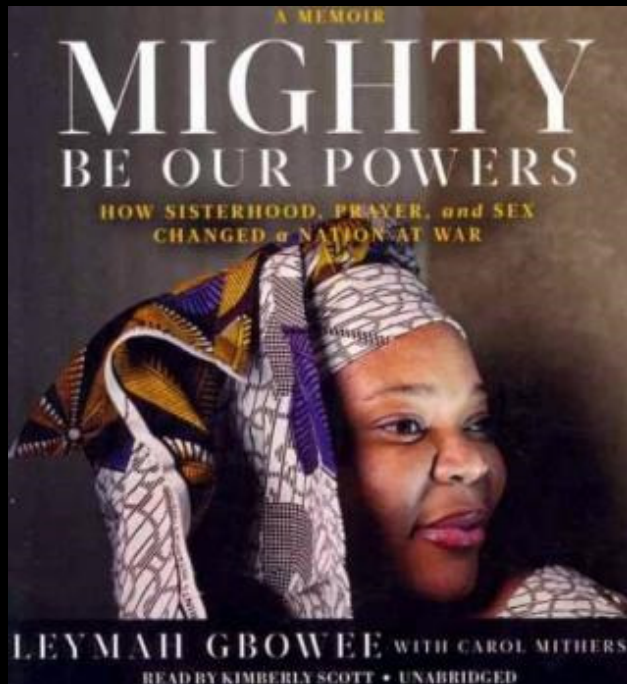


TRUTH
THE ROAD TO
RECONCILIATION



Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace

- Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Prize winner 2011
- Helped end the Second Liberian Civil War, 2003
- 'Pray the Devil Back to Hell'



War Related Deaths

16th Century	1.6 million
17th Century	6.1 million
18th Century	7.0 million
19th Century	19.4 million
20th Century	108.0 million

Source: R.J. Rummel's statistics at www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/SOD.TAB2.2.GIF.
Also, 20th-century governments murdered 7.3% of their people, through needless famine, labour camps, genocide and other crimes, vs. 3.7% in the 19th century and 4.7% in the 17th (from Rita James Simon's foreword to Moore and Simon, *It's Getting Better All the Time*, Cato Institute, January 2001)

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Nation-building
Organized atheism

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The Role of Jesus in Reconciliation and Justice Movements: Original Context

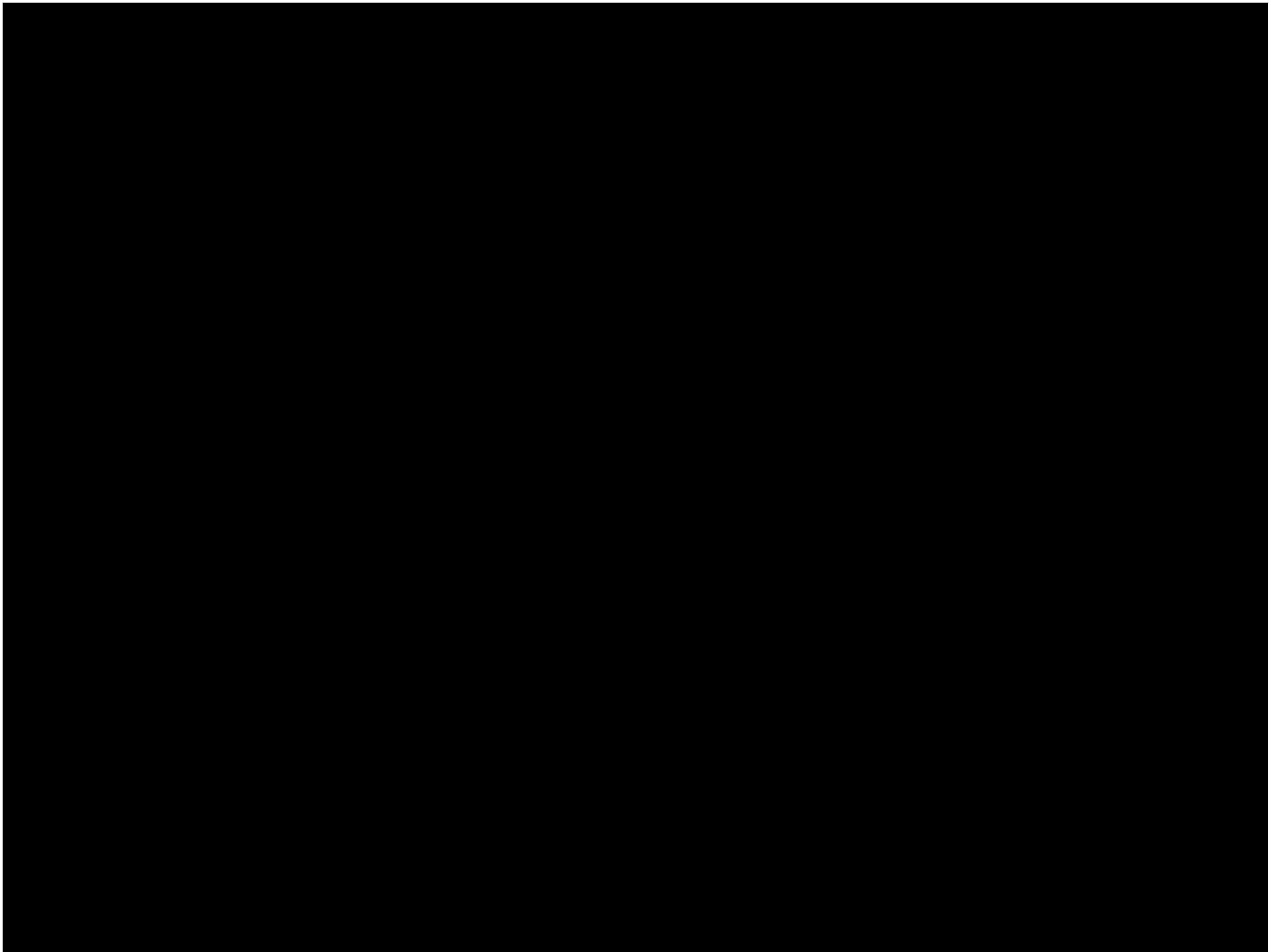
- Colonizing Power: Roman Empire
- Oppressed Minority: Israel
- Long Awaited King: Jesus
- Opponents: ethno-nationalists (Pharisees), militarists (Zealots), compromisers (Sadducees, priests)
- Good and Evil:
 - In human nature, in everyone
 - Engagement with everyone

The Role of Jesus in Reconciliation and Justice Movements: Original Context

- To read a presentation on this subject, please see:
- Mako Nagasawa, *The Role of Jesus in Revolution and the Pursuit of Justice*, on newhumanityinstitute.org

The Role of Jesus in Reconciliation and Justice Movements: Original Context

- Discussion Questions:
 - Have you heard of this history before?
 - What questions does it leave you with?



Wakanda as Chosen People

- Parallel to Ethiopia: Never Colonized
- Jewish Ethiopians, Haile Selassie, and Rastafarians
- Interpreting the Longing

Wakanda as Chosen People

- A Nod: Christian Ethiopia



Wakanda as Chosen People

- A Nod: Christian Ethiopia

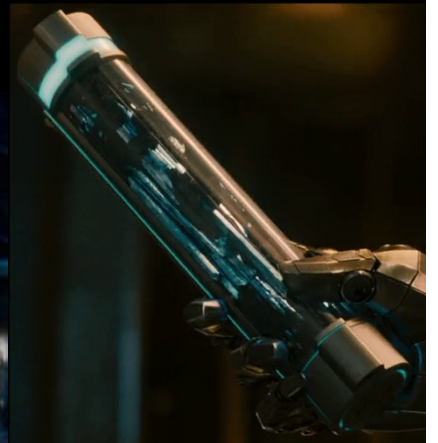
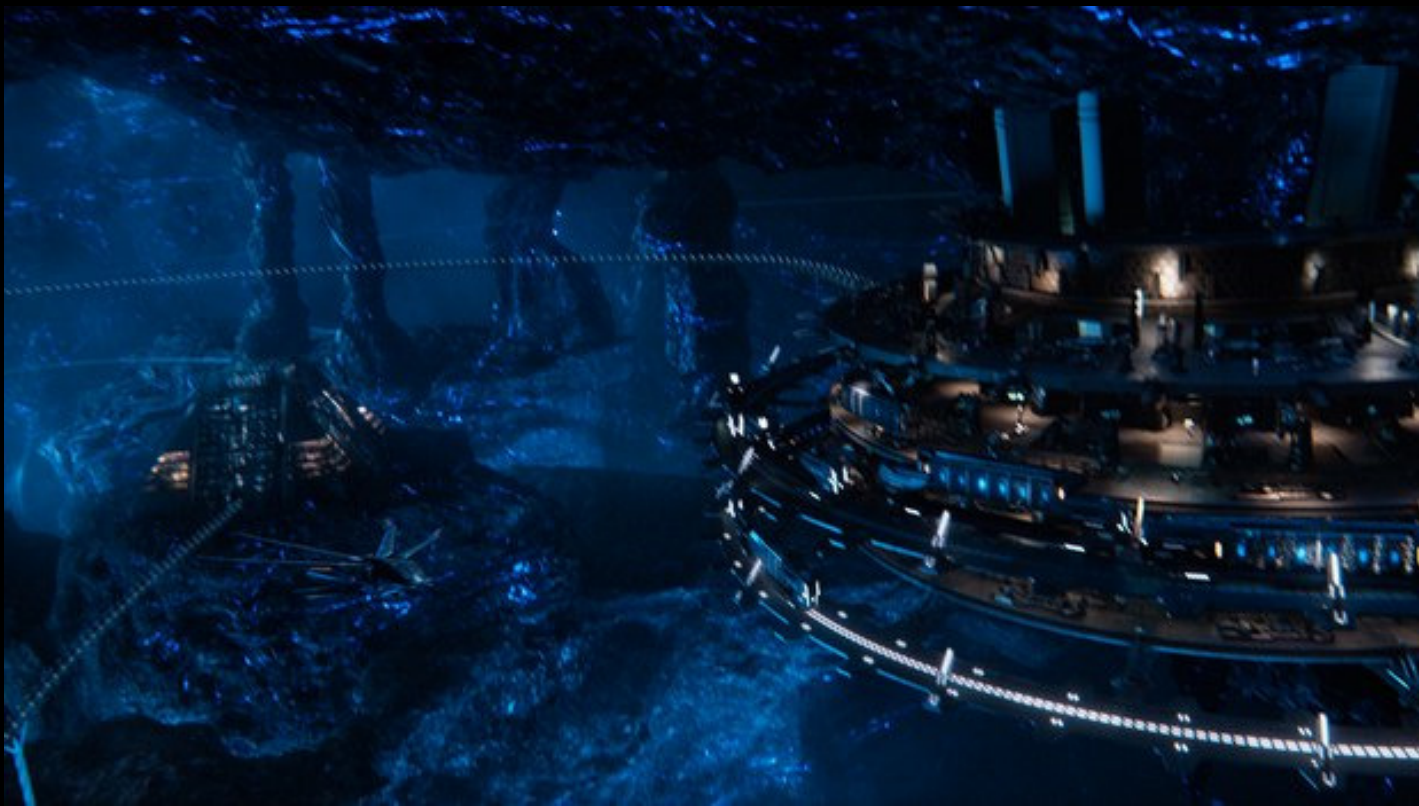


Wakanda as Chosen People

- The Gift from Above: Vibranium
- Adjusting to the Gift: Tribal Conflict, then Unity
- The Way It Should Be: Men and Women
- The Union of Humanity and Gift: The Heart-Shaped Herb
- The King of Wakanda: The Chosen One and the World

Wakanda as Chosen People

- The Gift from Above: Vibranium



Israel as Chosen People

- The Gift from Above: God's Presence



Wakanda as Chosen People

- Tribal Conflict, Then Unity



Israel as Chosen People

- Tribal Conflict, Then Unity



Wakanda as Chosen People

- The Way It Should Be: Men and Women



Israel as Chosen People

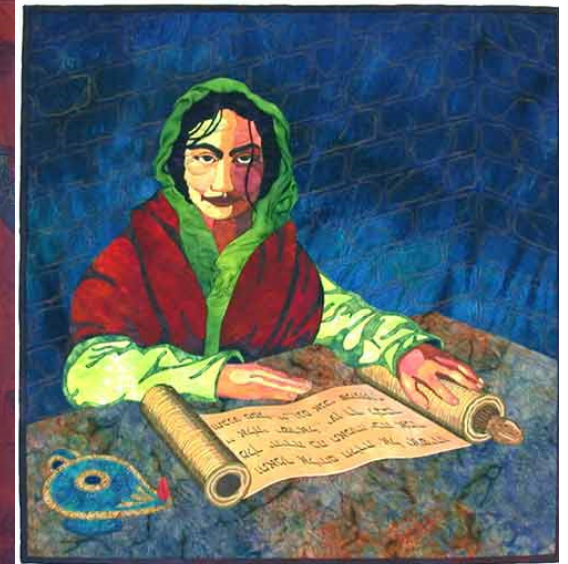
- The Way It Should Be: Men and Women
 - To some degree, like the Garden, before the Fall



Miriam (Exodus 15ff.)



Deborah (Judges 4 – 5)



Huldah (2 Kings 22)

Wakanda as Chosen People

- The Union of Humanity and the Gift: The Heart-Shaped Herb



Israel as Chosen People

- The Union of Humanity and the Gift
 - Moses in Exodus 34



Israel as Chosen People

- The Union of Humanity and the Gift
 - Isaiah in Isaiah 6

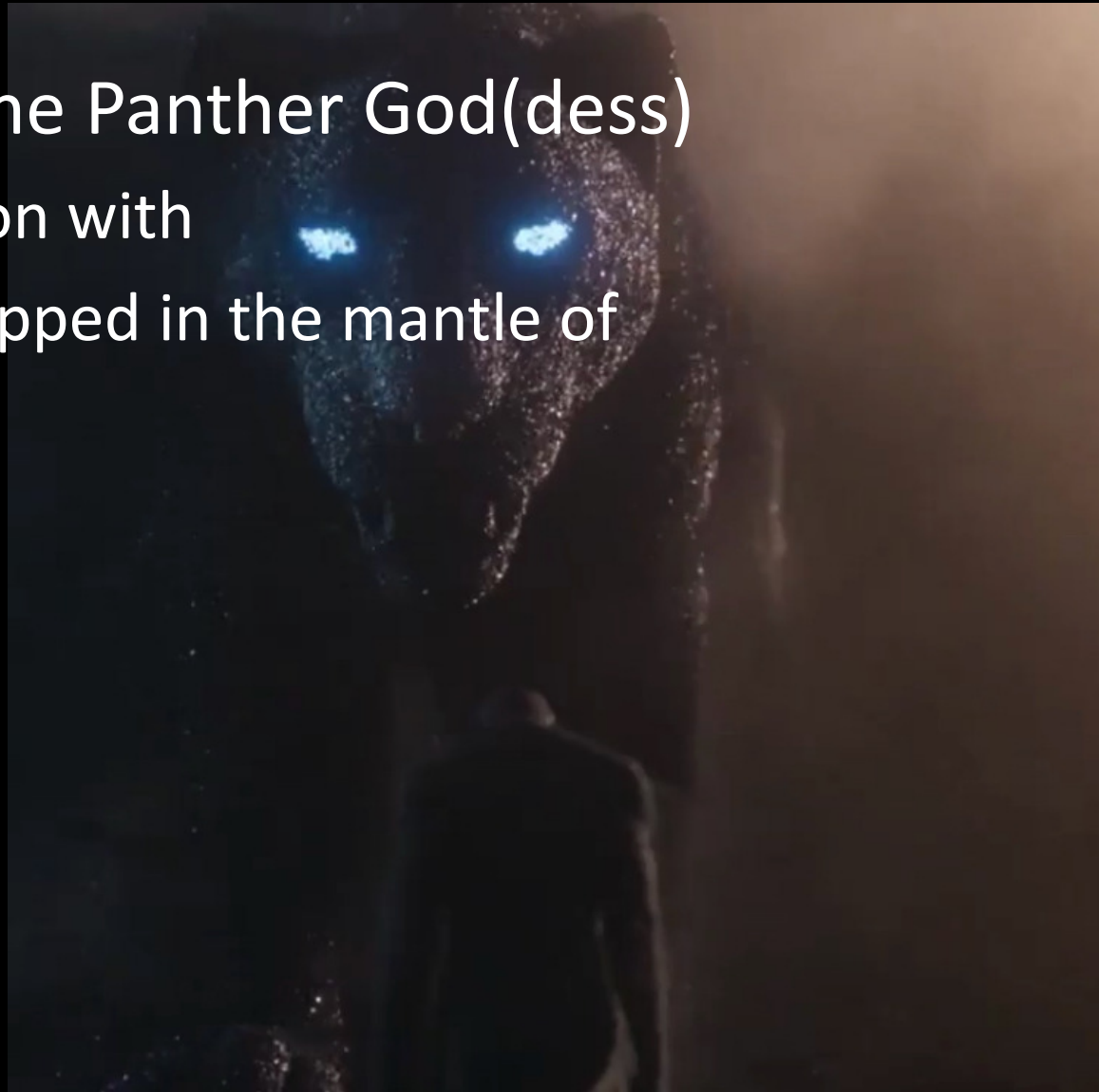


Wakanda as Chosen People

- The King of Wakanda: The Chosen One and the World
 - Bast the Panther God(dess)
 - Two Visions for Wakanda and the World

The King of Wakanda

- Bast the Panther God(dess)
 - Union with
 - Wrapped in the mantle of



Chosen People, Chosen One

- Discussion Questions
 - Why is Wakanda so attractive?
 - Is Wakanda a better version of ourselves?
 - “We would be like this, if only...”
 - Where else do we look?



The King of Wakanda

- Two Visions for Wakanda and the World



The King of Israel

The period 163 BCE – 135 CE was filled with military, revolutionary movements as Jews struggled against Greek, then Roman oppression. For 300 years, the uniform view was: the Jewish Messiah would oust the foreigners and recapture Jerusalem. Below is a greatly shortened list of such movements:

Timeline of Jewish Independence Movements 163 BCE to 130 CE

163 BCE Judas Maccabeus recaptures Jerusalem, cleanses the Temple, and sets a pattern	40 BCE Hezekiah leads skirmishes, revolts	3 BCE Judas leads a revolt	6 CE Judas the Galilean leads a Jewish independence movement	28 CE Pilate puts down a revolt in Jerusalem	40's CE Jacob and Simon , sons of Judas, lead a rebellion	66 CE Menahem , son or grandson of Judas, seized the Temple and burned the records	67-70 CE John of Gischala leads revolts in the Jewish-Roman War	130 CE Bar-Kochba leads the Jewish rebellion
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The King of Israel

- Two Visions for Israel and the World
 - Militant Vision of Messiah
 - Jesus' Vision of Messiah
 - Deeper Battle Lines: Good and evil within people, not between people
 - Deeper Goal: Defeat the evil within human nature
 - Deeper Spirituality: Union with a 100% good God brings restoration, reconciliation, and justice
 - Broader Mission: A new humanity for all humanity – engagement without imperialism



The “Villain”

- His Portrayal as Revolutionary
- Was He Wrong? In What Sense?
- What Made Him Not the Hero?



The “Villain”

- I wish his portrayal were different
 - No mother?
 - Killing his girlfriend?
 - No strategy of governance?
- Too easy to discredit the Black Nationalist cause?
- But accepting the movie as is...



The “Villain”

- Was He Wrong? In What Sense?
 - Caring about the oppressed is a “+”
 - But vibranium weapons for revolt, not defense or stable resolution of conflict is a “-”

The “Villain”

- Wakanda as new arms dealer? What about:
 - Afghanistan: US armed Taliban against USSR
 - Osama bin Laden: US trained
 - Rwanda: genocide due to past colonial influence
 - Liberia: former American slaves took over
- Experiencing oppression
 - Makes people morally defensible
 - Doesn't necessarily make people morally good

The “Villain”

- Was He Wrong? In What Sense?
 - “Ain’t all people your people?” is a “+”
 - But was a pretense “-”



The “Villain”

- Was He Wrong? In What Sense?
 - “I killed... I took life from my own brothers and sisters from this continent... And all this death, just so I could kill you.”



The “Villain”

- Was He Wrong? In What Sense?
 - Honoring tradition/ritual of procedure is a “+”
 - But became a pretense “-”



The “Villain”

- Was He Wrong? In What Sense?
 - T’Challa: “I never yielded”
 - Killmonger: “All that challenge s*** is over with. I’m the king now.”



The “Villain”

- What Made Him Not the Hero: In Response to Suffering...
 - “Your heart is so full of hatred, you’re not fit to be a king” (Okoye, to Killmonger)



The “Villain”

- What Made Him Not the Hero: In Response to Suffering...
 - The True Hero becomes willing to suffer for others again
 - The Villain, or Tragic Hero, becomes unwilling to suffer again

The “Villain”

- What Made Him Not the Hero: In Response to Suffering...
 - “I’ve learned from my enemies” (Killmonger)
 - “You have become them” (T’Challa)



The “Villain”

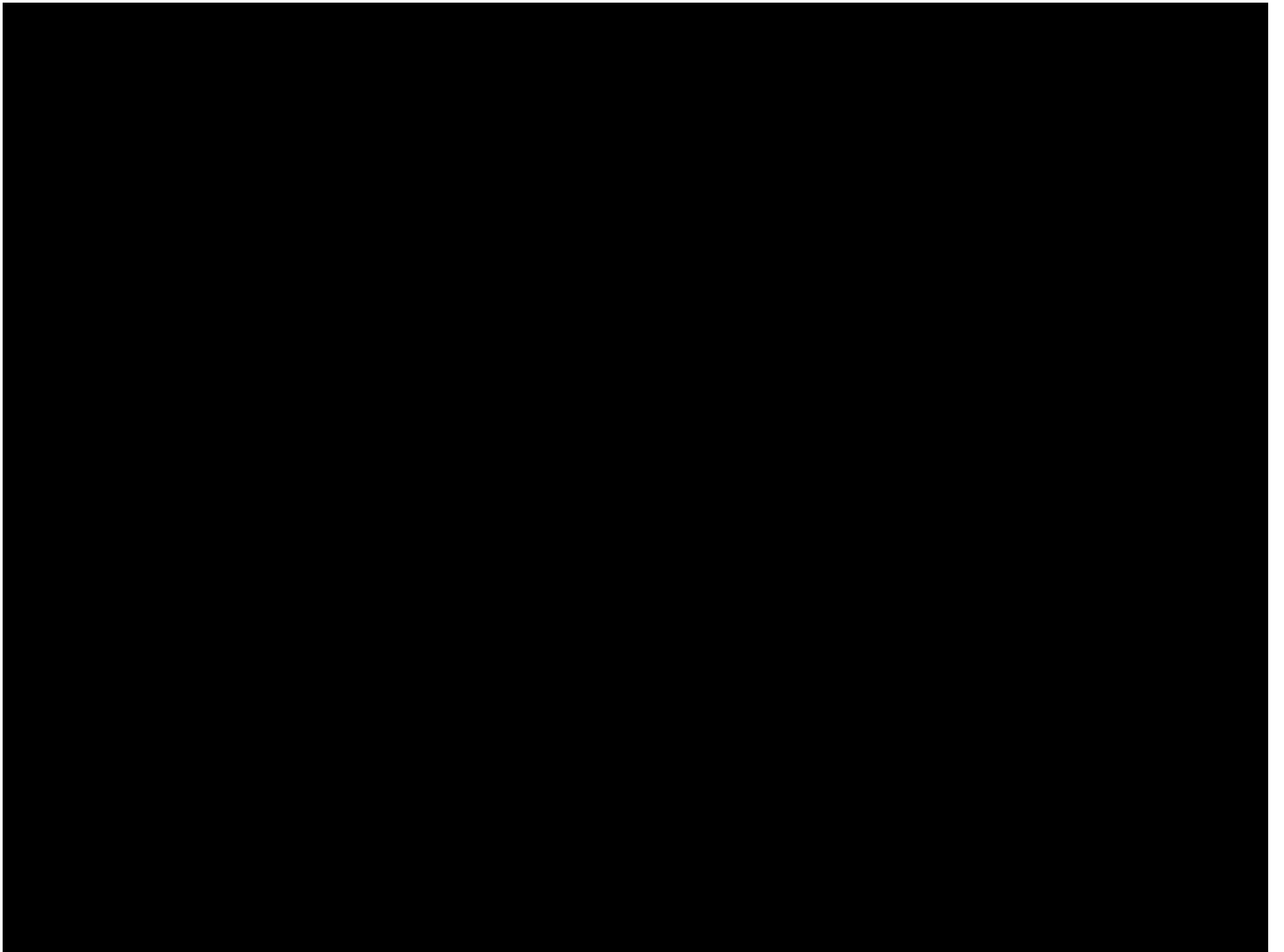
- What Made Him Not the Hero: In Response to Suffering...
 - “Why? So you can just lock me up? In bondage?”
 - *Important Note: T’Challa did not say that*



The “Villain”

- Discussion Questions:
 - Was Killmonger a “villain” in the sense of “a tragic hero”? Is there even such thing as a villain who is “pure evil”?
 - Are we “villains”? Are we “tragic heroes”?





The Struggle of the King

- T'Challa Sees Others with Honor
- Receives From His Ancestors
- Becomes One with the Gift from Above
- Wrestles With His Inheritance
- Handles Suffering, Descends with Grace
- Struggles Against His Counterpart, Temptation
- Dies and Rises Again
- Achieves Victory Through Human Vulnerability
- Offers the Gift Through His Leadership

The Struggle of the King

- T'Challa Sees Others with Honor
 - To M'Baku: “Your people need you”



The Struggle of the King

- T'Challa Sees Others with Honor
 - To Killmonger: “Throw down your weapons, and we can handle this another way”
 - Also, T'Challa waits for Killmonger to get up



The Struggle of the King

- Receives From His Ancestors



The Struggle of the King

- Receives From His Ancestors: Red Earth Rite



Kenya

Uganda

The Struggle of the King

- Becomes One with the Gift from Above: The Heart-Shaped Herb



The Struggle of the King

- Wrestles With His Inheritance



The Struggle of the King

- Struggles Against His Counterpart, Temptation
 - Two suits represent one kingship, two options



The Struggle of the King

- Handles Suffering, Descends with Grace
 - Lost his father, but becomes more compassionate



The Struggle of the King

- Handles Suffering, Descends with Grace
 - Lost his girlfriend, but learns from her



The Struggle of the King

- Handles Suffering, Descends with Grace
 - Premonition at the Waterfall – the Ethiopian Cross



The Struggle of the King

- Handles Suffering, Descends with Grace
 - Lost publicly, but is not humiliated or vengeful



The Struggle of the King

- Handles Suffering, Descends with Grace
 - Inherits an incredible burden not of his own making, but shoulders it
 - Expresses the *true calling* of Wakanda



The Struggle of the King

- Handles Suffering, Descends with Grace
 - “I cannot stay here with you. I cannot rest while he sits on the throne. He is a monster of our own making. I must right this wrong.”



The Struggle of the King

- Rises Again: By His Mother's Hand



The Struggle of the King

- T'Challa's Life is Filled with Motifs of Descent
 - They reflect his willingness to suffer



The Struggle of the King

- Achieves Victory Through Character
 - “Your heart is so full of hatred, you’re not fit to be a king” (by contrast – Okoye, to Killmonger)



The Struggle of the King

- Achieves Victory Through Human Vulnerability
 - Depowers the vibranium suits
 - Like taking M'Baku's spear to the chest



The Struggle of the King

- Achieves Victory Through Human Vulnerability
 - “We can still heal you” (T’Challa, to Killmonger)



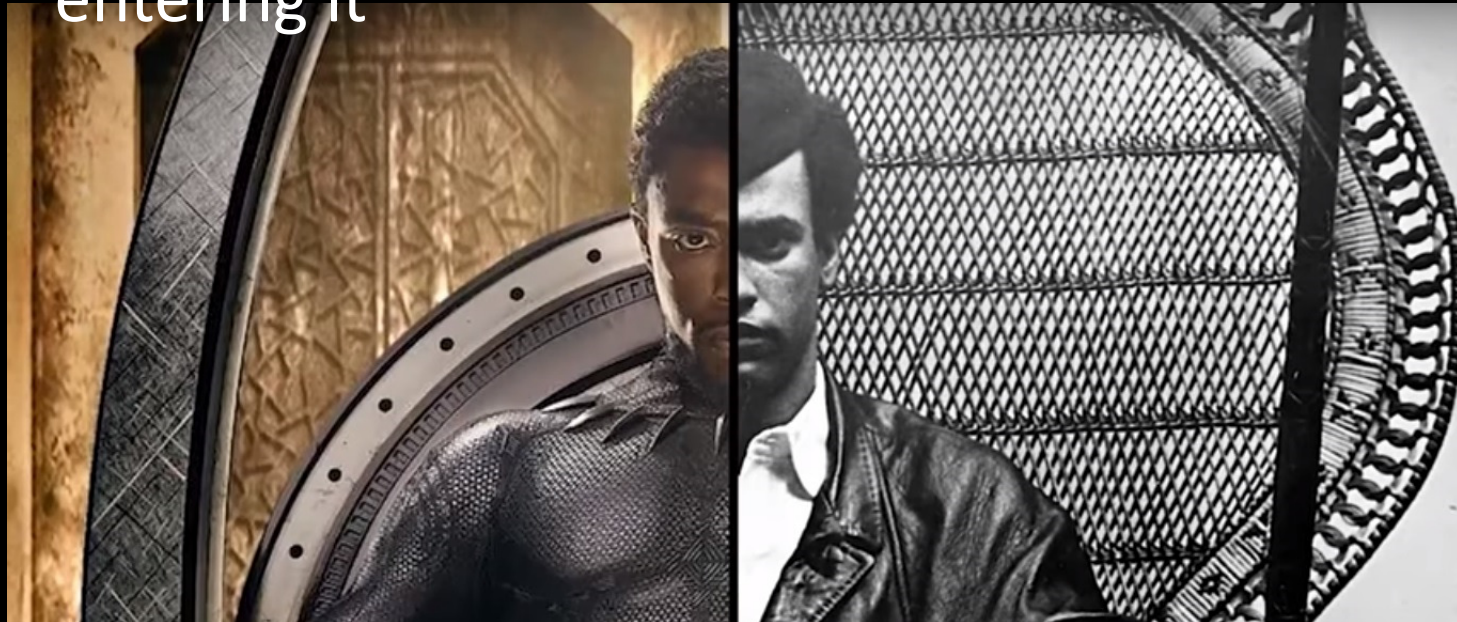
The Struggle of the King

- Offers the Gift Through His Leadership



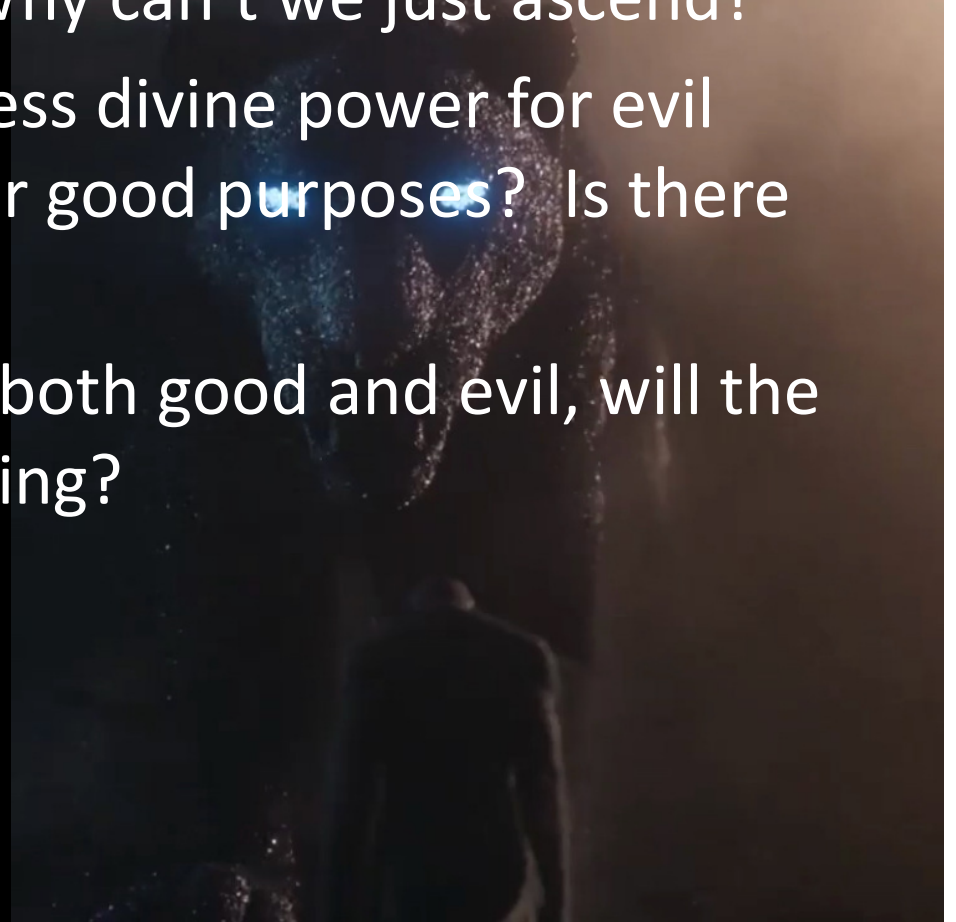
The Struggle of the King

- Starting from Oakland, retelling the story, redeeming the past
 - Tells Shuri about father's murder of uncle
 - Not Black American, but honors the story by entering it



Theology: The Character of God

- Discussion Questions:
 - Is decent necessary? Why can't we just ascend?
 - What if people can access divine power for evil purposes as much as for good purposes? Is there a two-faced God/gods?
 - If God is (the gods are) both good and evil, will the story have a happy ending?





The Struggle of the King

- Jesus' Descent and Suffering
- Receives From His Ancestors
- Wrestles With His Inheritance
- Sees Others with Honor
- Becomes One With the Gift from Above
- Struggles Against the Temptation
- Dies and Rises Again
- Achieves Victory Through Human Vulnerability
- Offers the Gift Through His Leadership

The Struggle of the King

- Jesus' Descent and Suffering



The Struggle of the King

- Receives From His Ancestors
 - Human beings are tragic heroes
 - No villain is 'pure evil' in the Bible



The Struggle of the King

- Wrestles With His Inheritance
 - Human nature corrupted, human responsibility
 - Shoulders an incredible burden for others



The Struggle of the King

- Jesus Sees People with Honor
 - “You are Simon... you will be called Peter” (John 1:42)
 - “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit” (1:47 – 50)
 - Even though Jesus knew people would fail or betray him (2:24 – 25)



The Struggle of the King

- Becomes One With the Gift from Above



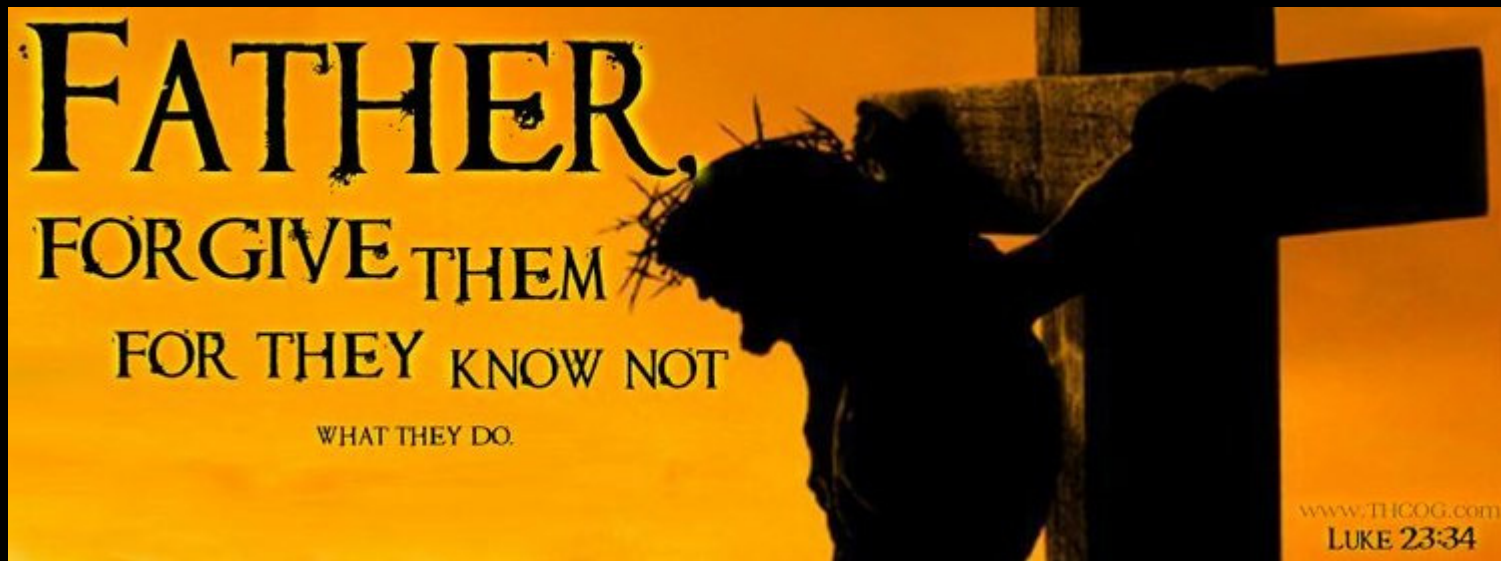
The Struggle of the King

- Struggles Against the Temptation



The Struggle of the King

- Dies for Others



The Struggle of the King

- Dies for Others
 - Body enters into the earth, Death, creation's plight
 - Soul visits the realm of souls (1 Peter 3:18 – 20; 4:6)



The Struggle of the King

- Rises Again: By His Father's Hand
 - Resurrects a God-soaked new humanity



The Struggle of the King

- Achieves Victory Through Human Vulnerability
 - “I cannot rest while he sits on the throne” (T’Challa)
 - “All authority is given to me” (Jesus, Matthew 28:20)



The Struggle of the King

- Offers the Gift Through His Leadership
 - God's new humanity for all humanity



The Struggle of the King

- Offers the Gift Through His Leadership
 - “Ain’t all people your people?” (Killmonger)
 - Jesus is a “new Adam” (Luke 3:23 – 38; Romans 5:12 – 21; 1 Corinthians 15:20 – 28; Philippians 2:5 – 11; etc.) so he does claim all people



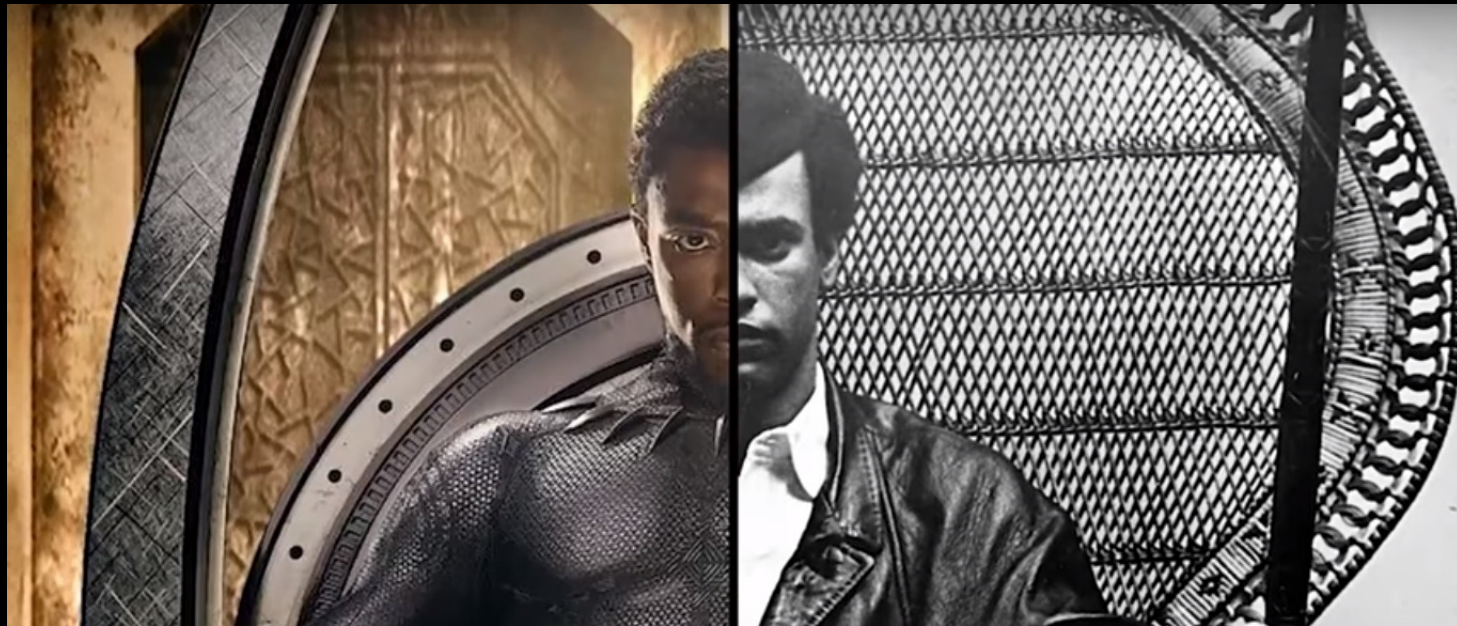
The Struggle of the King

- Offers the Gift Through His Leadership
 - “We can still heal you” (T’Challa, to Killmonger)
 - “I came that they may have life” (Jesus, John 10:10)



The Struggle of the King

- From the “Oakland’s” – places of pain in our world and lives – retelling our stories, redeeming our past



The Struggle of the King

- Calls for us to follow his leadership, lordship
 - “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn.3:30)



Jesus Tells Our Deepest Story

- Social commentary inevitably engages Jesus
 - Not conquered, also not conquerors
 - E.g. Christianity in Ethiopia for 900 years; etc.
 - Christian reconciliation moments



Theology: The Character of God

- Why do we admire heroes who sacrifice for others? Who do our hearts long for?
- Who does Jesus as hero reflect?
 - One good God who is 100% goodness



Theology: The Character of God

- A quote about Jesus healing the evil in human nature, by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, Egypt (298 – 373 AD), who:
 - Blessed and commissioned Frumentius, Aba Salama, the first Abuna of the Ethiopian Church
 - Defended the divinity of the Son, the Nicene Creed, and the articulation of the Trinity
 - First identified the New Testament as the 27 books we receive



Theology: The Character of God

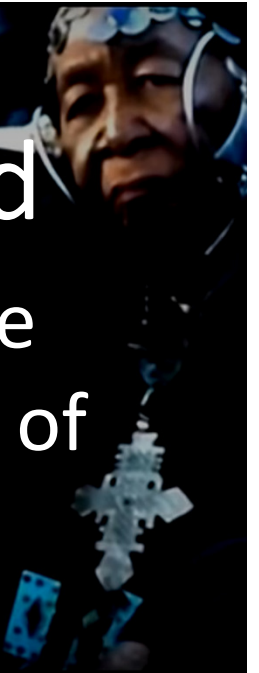
‘Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent **corruption**, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as **creatures in the Image of God**. No, repentance could not meet the case...’



Theology: The Character of God

‘...Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father...

that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.’ (*On the Incarnation*, 2:8 – 9)



Theology: The Character of God

MARVEL STUDIOS

- Discussion Question:
 - Why do we admire heroes who sacrifice for others? Who do our hearts long for?

BLACK PANTHER

