

## We Need Wakandan Principles in Our Society

By Shawnta S. Barnes – February 20, 2018



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When it comes to movies, I'm a Netflix and chill kind of girl. I typically watch movies after all the spoilers have appeared online. My husband, on the other hand, wants to be in the movie theater the weekend a film is released. What

typically happens is my husband goes to the movie theater alone, with colleagues or with friends.

Last weekend was different. Even though I prefer to watch movies in the comfort of my own home in my pajamas without the overpriced snacks, I knew I would be entering a movie theater during a premiere weekend. The fact that my husband arranged for our boys to stay with his mother for the weekend was a dead give away. He rarely ever makes the arrangements for our children (that's my job), so I knew he was serious. He wasn't alone.

### **“On my way to Wakanda!”**

I saw this status appear multiple times, in addition to pictures of moviegoers in African dress, on social media. It was great to view the positivity and excitement on my social media feed for *Black Panther*, a movie with a black director and predominantly black cast about a black superhero.

Even though I don't like going to the movie theater, there is a myriad of reasons why I, as a black woman, loved this movie. There were gems of wisdom dropped throughout the film and I believe we, as a society, could learn plenty of lessons from this movie.

Before you even start flapping your gums to say, “It's a fictional story,” let me remind you if fiction wasn't that powerful, we wouldn't have had book burnings as part of our history or books that are banned now. Below are the lessons we can learn from *Black Panther*.

### **The collective is more important than self.**

If you have seen the movie, you know you have done it. You've crossed your arms over your chest and belted out, “Wakanda forever!” Within that proclamation is so much power. People in Wakanda put the stability and safety of Wakanda above themselves as individuals. Every role in the Wakandan society was important and no one was bragging about what he or she had done because it was all about what was good for the society as a whole. Even when there was conflict, it was resolved for the sake of the kingdom.

In our highly politicized and capitalistic society, we can't seem to take self out of the way. It is all about using people as stepping stones to get to the next level. Isn't peace worth giving up some selfish desires?

**Women are equal to and maybe even more important than men in society.**

Yeah, I just said that. I felt empowered as a black woman watching *Black Panther*. Yes, T'Challa is King of Wakanda, but make no mistake that brother could not have done anything without those strong black sisters using their intellect and physical strength to advise and protect him.

In our paternalistic society, women are many times seen as less than. We are seen as less intelligent, physically weaker, and are overly sexualized. I appreciated in this movie there weren't any unnecessary scenes of the camera following the curves of the women's bodies. The focus was on what the women had to offer intellectually not on their shape. Their ideas were listened to and implemented.

**We should be proud of our natural beauty.**

Okoye, General of the Wakanda's royal guard, had to wear a wig that had straightened hair during a mission. When she later ripped that wig off and said, "disgrace" in reference to the wig, I almost fell out of my seat during the movie. Ripping off that wig was symbolic to a lot of black women. There has been a natural hair movement sweeping across the world with black women and this needs to continue. I loved how the movie highlighted the various ways black women can rock their hair. You had Queen Ramonda's dreadlocks, Princess Shuri's braids, and Nakia's natural curls.

Even though I have been natural for 12 years, it wasn't until recently that I would leave my house with my hair in its natural curly state. I would straighten it, twist it, or braid it, but not wear it in an afro. I'm over that now; I even rock my afro at work sometimes. Regardless of how a black woman chooses to wear her hair, our society doesn't have a right to regulate it.

**Intergenerational relationships strengthen the community.**

In our society, you have baby boomers, generation x, and millennials, but those divisions were nowhere to be found in Wakanda. The council that advised King T'Challa had people of various ages. Elders weren't at odds with the younger generation. Elders were respected by the young and the elders were willing to implement ideas of the young.

We have a "put out to pasture" mentality in our society where elders are many times seen as out of touch. Younger generations are seen as taking too many risks. Wakanda's council showed how you need a continuum of wisdom from elders all the way down to the youngest to help move society forward effectively.

### **Be direct about history and forget political correctness.**

Another time, I almost fell out of my seat with laughter was when Princess Shuri referred to a white man in the movie as a colonizer. He responds, "That's not my name." That's the problem; we are too busy dressing up situations instead of just calling it like it is. Yes, technically he wasn't alive when the colonization took place, but Princess Shuri made sure to let him know from the jump that she had no illusions about how Wakanda's way of life could be endangered by bringing him inside their walls based on history. She knew he may have had the mentality to exploit and conquer what they had built. Instead of being politically correct, she addressed the situation head-on.

We can do this too. Princess Shuri was direct, but she didn't tear down his character. Once she established her view and he understood where she was coming from, they were able to move forward and work together. We will never be able to work together in our society if we can't be direct about history, the good, the bad, and the ugly.

**Based on these principles, maybe we should not say "Wakanda Forever" maybe we should say "Wakanda Future!"**