

Chadwick Boseman didn't just play icons; he was one

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Image 1. Actor Chadwick Boseman poses for a portrait in New York to promote his film "Black Panther." Boseman, who played Black icons Jackie Robinson and James Brown before finding fame as the regal Black Panther in the Marvel cinematic universe, died of cancer on August 28, 2020. He was 43 years old. Photo: Victoria Will/Invision/AP, File

The actor Chadwick Boseman was famous as the star of "Black Panther." On August 28, he died of cancer. He was 43 years old.

Boseman's death was surprising and painful for many. Boseman has played several Black heroes on screen. Jackie Robinson is one. He also played James Brown and T'Challa from "Black Panther." All were men who helped further the progress of Black people.

Robinson was the first Black baseball player in Major League Baseball. Brown was a musician. He was called the "Godfather of Soul."

Boseman was blazing a trail, too. In the entertainment business, Black actors are often not picked for big, starring roles. Boseman's success made him a role model.

The actor learned he had cancer in 2016, his family said. Still, he acted in movies that became popular. All that time, he struggled with the disease. The public did not know he was sick. It only makes his accomplishments look more remarkable.

Going To Howard Helped Him As An Actor

Boseman was raised in Anderson, South Carolina. He was the youngest of three boys. Before he was a Hollywood star, he wrote several plays. In New York, he performed with the National Shakespeare Company.

For college, he attended Howard University. It is a historically Black university in Washington, D.C.

He compared Howard to the land of Wakanda from "Black Panther."

At Howard, Boseman met Black people from all over the world, he said.

The experience helped him gain a broad understanding of African American history. He used that knowledge to bring truth to his roles.

"Black Panther" Changed Hollywood

For years, Boseman only got small acting jobs on TV. In his mid-30s, he finally landed his first leading role. He played Robinson in the movie "42." It was obvious Boseman was going to be a star.

Boseman's characters were known for showing inner strength. "When I hit the stage, people better be ready," he says in "Get on Up." "Especially the white folk."

The actor would reach his peak with "Captain America: Civil War" in 2016. He played the character King T'Challa for the first time. In 2018, Boseman was the main character in "Black Panther." It became the biggest movie in the world.

In 2019, "Black Panther" won a big award. Boseman spoke at the event. "We all know what it's like to be told that there is not a place for you to be featured — yet you are young, gifted and Black," he said. "We know what it's like to be told there's not a screen for you to be featured on."

It's remarkable what Boseman was able to accomplish. In about 10 years, he changed Hollywood for the better for actors of color.

