



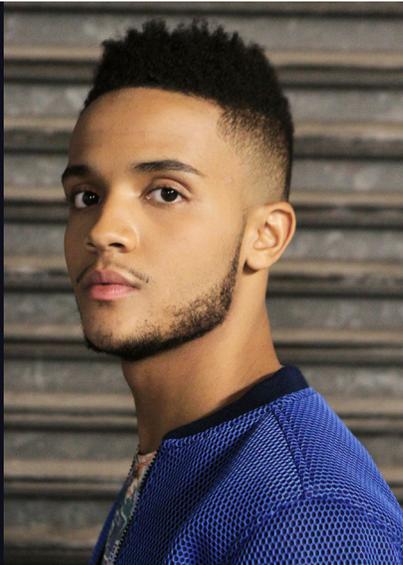
BLACK PANTHER WOMAN

a film by **RACHEL PERKINS**
(Australia) 60 mins.

AfroPoP X
the ultimate cultural exchange

DISCUSSION GUIDE
SEASON 10

HOST: NICHOLAS L. ASHE stars as Micah West in the critically acclaimed OWN series *Queen Sugar*, directed by Ava DuVernay and executive-produced by Oprah Winfrey. Earlier he played Viola Davis's son in the courtroom drama *Custody*. Ashe made his acting debut at age 10 in the role of Young Simba in the national tour of *The Lion King*. Ashe is also a talented vocalist, pianist and composer. In 2015, he created a scholarship for young artists in his hometown of Freeport, Long Island. Ashe collaborated with Cierra Glaude on a short film titled *Last Looks*, which had its world premiere at the 2017 Urbanworld Film Festival.



AfroPop: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange is a US-based public television show featuring independent documentaries and short films about life, art, and culture from the contemporary African Diaspora. The African Diaspora includes Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, South America, Europe, the US, and anywhere people of African descent have made a significant contribution to the culture.

The films are always carefully selected to portray a more balanced view of Africa than you'll get on the nightly news and to provide fuel for what must be a global conversation on the present day realities and contemporary lifestyles of Africans, both on the continent and in the Diaspora.

USING THIS GUIDE

BACKGROUND

The first section of the guide provides

- A synopsis of the film and information on the filmmaker, along with a list of central characters and topics
- Background on the film's key issues, focused on brief historical, cultural, and political context

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The second part of this guide provides questions crafted to be springboards for dialogue, inviting audience members to engage with the issues raised in the film and with one another.

The prompts are designed to meet the needs of a wide range of audiences and circumstances, so you'll want to choose those that best meet your particular needs. You may want to dive directly into an issue-based prompt, or you can gauge the interests of the audience by starting with a general question. There's no reason to cover them all or to use them in order (except for the "wrap-up" questions, which are intended to help people synthesize information at the end of a discussion). Typically you'll only need one or two questions to get things going; let the audience take it from there, using their interests to guide the path of the discussion.

Recommended for: high school, college, and adult audiences

RESOURCES

The final section the guide lists related resources. You can use them to prepare for leading a discussion or recommend them to audience members seeking additional information.



AFROPOP: THE ULTIMATE CULTURAL EXCHANGE

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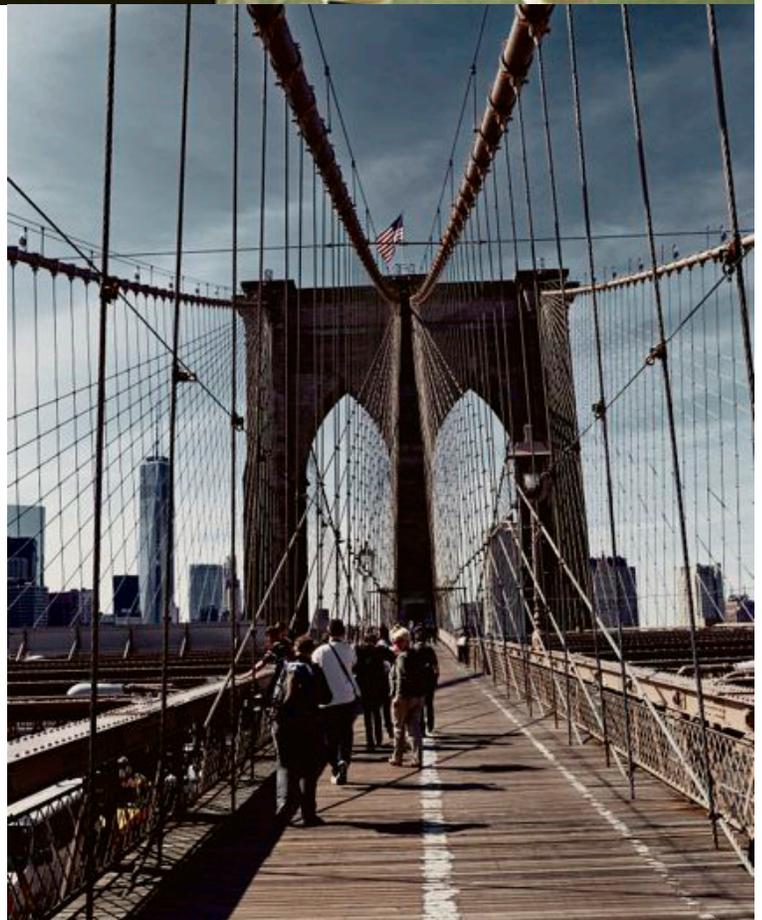


BACKGROUND

Film Synopsis

In 1972 Marlene Cummins fell in love with the leader of the Australian Black Panther Party. With the breakup of that relationship, she spiraled into a cycle of addiction that left her on the streets and vulnerable. Forty years later, the now renowned musician, radio host, and activist travels to a gathering of international Black Panthers in New York. The journey takes her back in time as she reveals the secret of abuse she once held onto as a sacrifice for the greater political cause. Now, working to overcome addictions, she believes it's time to break her silence instead of breaking herself.

Topics: *activism, addiction, Australia, Black Panther Party, Black Power movement, feminism, gender-based violence, government suppression, history, intersectionality, racism, sexism, substance abuse, violence against women, womanism*



Selected People Featured in the Film

Marlene Cummins

Marlene Cummins is Australia's foremost Indigenous female blues writer and performer. She refined her skills as a blues saxophonist and songwriter at the Berklee College of Music in Boston in the mid-90s. She released her first full-length album, *Koori Woman Blues*, in 2014 and continues to busk a few times a week as she finds this helps her to maintain and develop her feel as a musician. In addition to her musical talent, Marlene has been a longtime broadcaster on Koori Radio with her renowned blues show, 'Marloo's Blues.'

Born in the southwest town of Cunnamulla, Marlene's traditional people on her Father's side are Guguyelandji, and Woppaburra on her Mother's side. She grew up with the destructive constraints of the Aboriginal Protection Act and already bore the scars of discrimination and institutionalized racism when, as a teenager, she met Denis Walker and joined the Black Panther Party. As an Aboriginal woman activist, Marlene has been outspoken, engaging in political struggle through her music and art.

Denis Walker

Co-founder of the Australian Black Panther Party, current Aboriginal Sovereignty rights activist.

Sammy Watson

Co-founder of the Australian Black Panther Party

Lionel Fogarty

Activist and poet

Kathleen Cleaver

Original USA Black Panther and BPP's first Communications Secretary; formerly married to Eldridge Cleaver; currently teaches at Emory University School of Law

Zainab Abbas

Former British Black Panther



The Filmmaker

Rachel Perkins' Australian Aboriginal heritage (Arnernte/Kalkadoon) has informed her entire filmmaking career. In 1992, she founded Australia's premier Indigenous production company, Blackfella Films, and has contributed extensively to the development of Indigenous filmmakers in Australia and, more broadly, to the Australian film and television industry.

Rachel has directed three feature films and the acclaimed telemovie MABO, which screened on Australian television in 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of the historic High Court decision challenging land ownership granted under the theory of terra nullius, (that allegedly unoccupied territory was not owned by anyone, so the first nation to discover it is entitled to take it over, as "finders keepers"). Rachel also directed two episodes of the landmark television drama series REDFERN NOW, the first Australian drama series written, directed and produced by Indigenous Australians. In 2014 she wrote, directed and co-produced the award-winning seven-hour documentary series FIRST AUSTRALIANS.

She has co-curated film festivals featuring works by Indigenous filmmakers, served on the Council of the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS), the NSW Film and Television Office (now Screen NSW), the Australia Film Commission, Screen Australia, and was a founding member of the National Indigenous Television Service (NITV). A friend of Marlene Cummins for two decades, even she did not know Marlene's secrets prior to filming BLACK PANTHER WOMAN.



Black Panther Party

Founded in 1966 in Oakland, California, the BPP advocated for Black Power as a response to police brutality and widespread discrimination against Black people and communities. In contrast to King's non-violent approach, the Panthers advocated for armed self-defense. They gained fame for shadowing police patrols to document abuse.

Less well known were the Panther's community initiatives, including free breakfast for children and medical clinics. The Party's famed 10 Point Plan called for self-determination, full employment, decent housing, education that told the truth about Black peoples, exemption from military service (because they objected to killing other people of color to serve white capitalist interests, and because this was during the war in Vietnam, where minorities were overrepresented on the front lines because the well-connected could get deferments or stateside postings), an end to economic oppression through capitalism, an end to police brutality and murder of Black men, freedom for incarcerated Black men, and fulfillment of the Constitutional mandate that Blacks be tried by a juries of actual peers (i.e., juries comprised of Blacks). They summarized these demands as wanting "land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace."

The BPP would also eventually include gender equity in their platform, but actions didn't always live up to ideals. Some women did rise to leadership positions, and some men helped prepare meals for children. However, some Black Panther women also experienced gender-based discrimination from male peers and several have since reported that they were subjected to physical and sexual violence, especially if they dared to criticize men.

Despite its shortcomings, the U.S. Black Panthers inspired others worldwide. In Australia, Denis Walker and Sammy Watson co-founded the Australian Black Panthers in 1971. Never large, the Party nonetheless drew attention to mistreatment of minorities and sparked the creation of legal and medical services, housing projects, and the National Black Theater. Like the U.S. Black Panther Party, which was disrupted by covert FBI surveillance and infiltration, the Australian BPP was monitored by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). Within a few years, outside pressure and internal conflicts led to the dissolution of the organization.



Aboriginal Protection Act

The actions of the Australian Black Panthers were a response to the ongoing legacies of the 1869 Aboriginal Protection Act. The Act regulated nearly all aspects of the lives of Australia's Indigenous people, including where they could live and work, who they could associate with and marry, and what types of jobs they could hold. The Aborigines had no right to vote or own land. Like America's approach to native tribes, white Australians forced the Aborigines onto reserves and then denied the reserves adequate resources. The misnamed Board for the Protection of Aborigines also forcibly removed people of mixed descent from the community and compelled their assimilation into white society. Many Aborigines resisted these efforts to annihilate their culture and won some legal battles. By the 1970s, advocates had won some legal equity battles, but social discrimination remained entrenched.



DISCUSSION PROMPTS

General

If you were going to tell a friend about this film, what would you say?

Summarize the main message(s) of this film in a single sentence or tweet. How does your summary compare to what others in the room wrote? What do you think accounts for the similarities or differences?

In a word, what's your initial reaction to this film?

Describe a moment in the film that you found particularly moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling?

Was there anything in the film that “spoke truth” to you?

If you could ask Marlene a question, what would you want to know?

Reviewing Core Content

What did you learn from the film about the Black Panthers and their philosophy on equality, justice, and civil rights? What were they demanding?

How did the Black Panther women explain their silence about violence committed by Black Panther men?

Why didn't Black Panther women see feminists as allies?

Black Panther Party Ideology

Marlene and the other Australian Panthers were inspired by the U.S. Panther message of Black Power. What does that phrase mean to you?

Consider the elements of the Panthers' Ten Point Plan. The desire for economic and physical security, freedom, and justice are common to most people. So what made the Black Panthers' demands "radical"? Why were they perceived as a threat and to whom?

The film shows footage of H Rap Brown saying, "There is no in between. You're either free or you're a slave. There's no such thing as second class." Do you agree with this either/or approach to economic status? Is it impossible for Black people to be truly free in a capitalist economic system?

Sammy Watson explains that he and other Black Panthers viewed community elders as too "middle of the road" and always looking to negotiate. In contrast, the Black Panthers were about action. In your experience, is this just a common generational split or does it indicate a deep difference in ideology?

King argued that the power of non violence as a strategy comes from its "opportunity to work to secure moral ends through moral means." Kathleen Cleaver (paraphrasing Stokely Carmichael) explains that the Black Panthers rejected that argument because: "You have to believe that there's a conscience in your oppressor for non-violence to work." What experiences led the Panthers to conclude that white people had no conscience? What were the benefits and drawbacks of their "if-someone-hits-me-I'm-going-to-hit-back" strategy?

Comparing Then and Now

Marlene recalls that they were under constant police surveillance and, in turn, they shadowed the police:

"We used some terminology that the Panthers used to. The pig patrol. You go out and watch them what they do. You show them that you're watching them."

Sammy Watson added,

"we would record the identity of the cops, the registration numbers of the vehicles, the numbers of arrests, the charges, the way in which the cops treat our people, etc. And then we'd go to courts the next morning and we'd talk to our mob, see if they were okay."

How does this approach compare to the way movements like Black Lives Matter relate to police today? How has surveillance – on all sides – changed?

Marlene notes that media paid less attention to

"the welfare programs that the Panthers inspired, like the Aboriginal medical services, the legal services, and the breakfast program for the kids."

Why would mainstream media prefer images of men with guns or confrontations with police to Black Panthers providing breakfast to children? How do such choices about coverage influence the way the general public thinks/thought about the

Black Panthers? What choices do you see media make today about how they cover protests against police brutality (and other forms of injustice) against Black and Brown people?

What do you think of Denis Walker's argument about guns?:

"The Black Panther Party says that everyone has a right to defend themselves against an aggressive enemy. And it is inhuman, it's denying a person's human rights if you give a gun to one man and don't give it to another one. If one person in this community is going to have a gun and the police have guns and the army has guns then I believe everyone should be allowed to have guns."

Do you see gun ownership is a human rights issue? Do you think this approach should be applied today? Why or why not?

Kathleen Cleaver explains that the fear of the Black Panthers was based in racism and guilt:

"You hold people down, you brutalize them. You abuse them. What would they do if they were free to retaliate as they wanted to?...And so when you have an organization of young black men and women who wear black leather jackets and berets and carry guns that fear becomes activated. And the implication is, and that's what the FBI and the police would play on, you're going to kill white people. You know as if people were going to go out looking for targets."

She also is clear that they were not looking for targets, but rather were standing up “to challenge this type of ridiculous levels of violence, challenge this racism, and defend our community.” What role do you think fear plays in police violence and race relations today?

Feminism

Like men, Black Panther women took part in street protests, carried guns, and some rose to positions of leadership. Would you consider them to be feminist role models?

Kathleen Cleaver and the other Black Panther women saw a disconnect between their struggle to be liberated from racism and the Women’s Liberation movement’s push to be liberated from male domination. What made it seem like they had to choose between allegiance to women’s causes and allegiance to men who were waging war against racism?

Zainab Abbas explained that Black Panther women didn’t engage in public criticism of sexism because “We certainly weren’t going to divide our movement on the basis of gender. That would have been ridiculous. We were already in a mass minority. Why would you divide your forces?” Was it reasonable for feminist women to expect that, in pursuit of justice and equality, Black Panther women would critique Black Panther men?

Marlene recalls that feminists “*said men were oppressing us. It’s not like we didn’t know that.*” Why might women involved in women’s liberation struggles have assumed that Black Panther women were somehow unaware of their own oppression? Why might Black Panther women have experienced the feminists’ concerns as patronizing or racist?

Marlene notes that “*Aboriginal women did not define themselves by their physical appearances but rather by their values, roles as the guardians of children, the earth and each other.*” How did this tradition help Marlene survive, despite the challenges she faced? What lessons could today’s women learn from these Aboriginal values?



Abuse

Marlene says that she has been told that it’s best to keep quiet. Best for whom? Who is served by women’s silence about gender-based violence?

Marlene says, “*I think it’s time black women in this country come out with the truth of their abuses. Without necessarily witch-hunting. Without necessarily demonizing black men either.*” How do we speak out against gender-based violence without demonizing black men? What does that look (or sound) like in real life?

According to Marlene, while they were a couple Denis was seduced by white women who believed that sleeping with a black man demonstrated their support for the cause. Why is that belief misguided?

Marlene provides several explanations for not reporting the rape and other abuse she suffered:

“Our men were already demonized by the media. If we’d pointed the finger at one man they would say it was all black men.”

“What are we going to go to the police [who were our enemy] if they abuse us?”

“...at the time it was important that we see the general issue of the political justice against Aboriginal people in this country. I felt it was more important than my feelings...”

She says that it was “symptomatic of racism” that Black women were making this enormous sacrifice for the cause but that their suffering in silence was the “backbone of the struggle that never gets looked at.” How did both racism and sexism create a no-win situation for Black Panther women who had to choose between their cause or their dignity? What do women gain by women like Marlene speaking out now?

Sammy Watson acknowledges, “*Too many times I saw women used and abused sexually by senior Aboriginal men because they had the opportunity to and no one, no one lifted a finger...*” What might he have done to be an ally rather than just a bystander? What unique role can men play in stopping violence against women?

Marlene connects thirty years of secrets and denial to her addictions. What’s the link?

Identity

Lionel Fogarty remembered, “*It stimulated our minds to reach out to an international understanding of what Black is.*” What did he mean? What experiences did Blacks around the world share that led them to a possibility of shared identity?

Marlene identifies as an artist who is also an activist. What do artists contribute to political movements that leaders like Denis (who articulate political views in speeches and writing) can’t?

As she prepares to travel to the Panther Women gathering in the U.S., Marlene says, “*I’m going to meet these women who’ve never met me but we are connected.*” How does living through similar, intense, experiences serve as a connection, even to total strangers? What experiences have you had that connect you to people you’ve never met?

On several occasions, Marlene notes her lack of formal education, and to some degree, it seems to undermine her self-confidence, especially compared to Black Panther women in the U.S. who are professors. In your experience, how does education influence our sense of self? How is Marlene’s experience of education a reflection of the racism and sexism that surrounded her?

Marlene declares, “*I tell you, I’m still a Black Panther woman. I still fight an uncompromising battle for truth and injustice on my people to this day.*” How is her telling her story now a continuation of the liberation that the Black Panthers were fighting for?

Marlene admires Black Panther women who are academics, even as she says, “I’m just . . . I’m an Aboriginal woman. This is how we do it. My history is oral.” What role has oral storytelling played in your life and the life of your community? What stories do you have to tell?

Filmmaking Choices

What major questions was the filmmaker trying to answer and how do you know? What were the filmmaker’s answers? Did you agree with those answers? Why or Why not?

How does the film’s portrayal compare to other media images or things you’ve learned about the Black Panthers?

What emotions did the film evoke? What filmmaking techniques contributed to that reaction?

If you could ask the filmmaker one question, what would you want to know?

Wrap-Up

Complete this sentence: I think Marlene’s story is important (or interesting or inspiring) because . . .

Is there one thing you learned from this film that you wish everybody knew? What do you think would change if everyone knew it?

Fill in the blanks: One thing I learned from this screening is _____.

Now that I know, I will _____.

RESOURCES

THE FILM

Black Panther Woman

<http://blackfellafilms.com.au/project/blackpantherwoman/>

AfroPop: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange

www.AfroPoP.tv

www.facebook.com/AfroPoPTV

@AfroPoPTV

www.blackpublicmedia.org

Marlene Cummins

www.marlenecummins.com – The site includes information about Marlene’s life, music, radio show, art, and performance schedule.

BLACK PANTHERS – AUSTRALIA

Black History Studies

www.blackhistorystudies.com/resources/resources/australian-black-panther-party/ - A small initiative out of the UK provides this summary of the history of the Black Panthers in Australia.

“Seizing the Time: Australian Aborigines and the Influence of the Black Panther Party”

www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40027217.pdf - A 2005 academic article by Kathy Lothian describes the Party’s legacy of vital social welfare programs.

BLACK PANTHERS – GENERAL

Marxists Internet Archive

www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/ - Though it doesn’t deal with women’s specific roles, this site provides a useful history of the Black Panther Party in the U.S., including links to key documents, such as the Ten Point Plan.

Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution

www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/the-black-panthers-vanguard-of-the-revolution/ - The website for Stanley Nelson’s recent documentary includes several resources that facilitate comparisons between the Panthers and current organizations, such as Black Lives Matter. A Discussion Guide provides links to additional resources and background information.

“The Panthers’ Revolutionary Feminism”

www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/movies/the-panthers-revolutionary-feminism.html - In this 2015 article, Prof. —Salamishah Tillet provides a brief overview of the debates about gender equity issues in the Black Panthers.



SEASON 10

TEN DAYS IN AFRICA
BETWEEN TWO SHORES
BLACK PANTHER WOMAN
FATAL ASSISTANCE
AFROPOP SHORTS

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