Washington Post fulminates against *Black Panther's* white supremacist supporters

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A recent article published in the *Washington Post* ("How white nationalists are trying to co-opt 'Black Panther'") reveals that certain extreme right-wing elements have gravitated toward the superhero film *Black Panther*, released last month by Marvel Studios, a subsidiary of Walt Disney Studios.

The *Post* reports: "White nationalists have embraced 'Black Panther' … to push their argument online that nation-states should be organized by ethnic groups." The newspaper is dismayed by the finding, but acknowledges, "Rather than use 'Black Panther' as evidence of Hollywood's liberalism, the alt-right has suggested the world's largest entertainment company, Disney, is quietly supporting its beliefs."

In the month since its release, *Black Panther* has earned more than $1 billion at the global box office, while garnering near-universal praise from critics.

Set in the fictional African kingdom of Wakanda, the film's protagonist, King T'Challa/Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman), utilizes his nation's vast mineral wealth and technology to shield it from the outside world while donning a suit that gives him superhuman abilities. *Black Panther* is a vacuous and crass work.

The American bourgeois media and entertainment tastemakers, however, have promoted Ryan Coogler's film as a historic cultural phenomenon due to its predominantly black cast and crew. *Black Panther*, we are told, is a groundbreaking and "progressive" work; the portrayal of a slew of wealthy black protagonists, and not dwelling on "black pain and black suffering and black poverty" (*New York Times*), is said to provide millions in America and worldwide with a culturally uplifting message.

The recent *Washington Post* article cites research conducted by New York-based Data & Society, which monitored social media to record the reactions of the extreme right to the film. Far from rejecting Black Panther's "pro-black" message, white nationalists and advocates of segregation have flocked to the film in support of its depiction of a feudal African monarchy whose rulers have sealed the borders of Wakanda and denied access to all outsiders.

The results of the study seem to have shocked the *Post* authors as well as various commentators. The newspaper notes that white nationalists "claimed the superhero opposed immigration, diversity and democracy while favoring 'ethno-nationalism,'" and that "instead of avoiding a cultural phenomenon that conflicts with their ideology, they [white nationalists] have sought to subvert and transform it in hopes of recruiting followers and normalizing their views on white supremacy."

The *Post*, which, along with the *New York Times,* has published rapturous tributes to the film, asserts that such a view represents "a profound mischaracterization of the movie's main themes." Researcher Kinjal Dave, who co-authored the study, resorts to sophistry to differentiate between "good" anti-immigrant sentiment and the "bad" white nationalist variety, stating: "Wakandans are isolationist because they don't want to become refugees … The far-right is isolationist because they don't want to accept refugees."

The March 14 *Post* article, however, is a confirmation of the argument made by the *World Socialist Web Site* that *Black Panther's* ethno-centric, racialist outlook was deeply reactionary. As we noted in our review of Coogler's film, "The use of race as the basis for evaluating a film, or any other creative work, is artistically bankrupt and politically reactionary. The pedigree for such conceptions can be found in the theory and practice of Aryan art, which flourished under the Nazis."

In the midst of the hype that accompanied the film's release, the WSWS noted that the "premise that in today's world a black superhero represents some kind of social or moral breakthrough is itself absurd. The United States, after all, elected Barack Obama as its head of state twice and has seen a highly privileged section of African-Americans—no less reactionary than their white counterparts—in some of the highest offices of the state."

In addition, we added, "The presence of blacks at the head of capitalist states, from the US to South Africa, has done nothing to improve the lot of the masses of working and poor people, black or white." In its own way, *Black Panther* has confirmed the rotten character of such politics, which are the specialty of the Democratic Party in the US.

The latest findings on the alt-right explode the pretensions of various pseudo-left outfits, such as the International Socialist Organization, which heaped praise on *Black Panther*, largely based upon its racialist content.

A February 23 review of the film in the ISO's *Socialist Worker*, for example, asserted that "the movie matters … because of its representation of blackness and Black characters as the main characters in their own story. It was also the best representation of women in a superhero film." Krystal Kara, the article's author, goes on: "Being represented in a Hollywood movie may not translate directly into revolution, but it plays a role in building confidence—and this can create fertile ground for starting a movement."

Indeed, but a "movement" for what and "confidence" for whom? It goes without saying that no one at *Socialist Worker, Jacobin* or any other pseudo-left publication has attempted to respond to the damning *Washington Post* report.

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