

RUTH E. CARTER

Afrofuturism in Costume Design

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Dolomite Is My Name (2019)

Rudy Ray Moore, played by Eddie Murphy
Moore's career was well documented, allowing Carter access to great source material. In creating the costumes for Eddie Murphy, she was able to draw Moore's original clothing while adapting it to the needs of Murphy.



Amistad (1997)

Cinque (front), played by Djimon Hounsou, with captured African costumes in the background
Joseph Cinqué, leader of the Mende rebellion on La Amistad, often appears dressed in this golden yellow cotton shirt. The vibrant color places focus on Cinqué, the hero character, and separates him from the somber tones used in most other costumes in the film.



Malcolm X (1992)

Malcolm X, played by Denzel Washington
In describing the costumes for *Malcolm X*, Carter explained, "each stage in his life deserved a different color palette since his mindset was different in all the stages of his life. When he is Malcolm Little and Detroit Red, the color palette is playful with the zoot suits. When he is incarcerated, the palette is a blue like he is being cleansed. When he emerges as Malcolm X, there are black, white, and grey notes for his clean, strict, and unwavering devotion to the nation of Islam." This dark suit was worn during the time that Malcolm X was fully immersed in the nation of Islam.



Malcolm X (1992)

Shorty, played by Spike Lee
The zoot suit was an extreme variation on the full cut "drape suit" of the 1930s. Young men (and occasionally women) in cities across America purchased oversized suits and had them tailored in the zoot suit style: full, balloon-like pleated trousers that were pegged and a jacket with exaggerated, padded shoulders. The look was usually completed with a porkpie hat or a fedora, a long watch chain, thin belt, and matching shoes. No one person can claim the invention of the zoot suit as they were worn by working-class Mexican American, Filipino American, Japanese American, and Black American communities and were rooted in youth culture.



Black Panther (2018)

T'Challa, played by Chadwick Boseman
Carter often discusses the importance of detail in film costume. For the Black Panther suit, her focus was on the texture which she wanted to use to visually connect him with Africa. Carter decided to use a repeating triangular pattern as the triangle represents the sacred geometry of Africa. Carter found that, "when we printed the suit fabric, we did this triangle all over it, and it really did make it have this richer, more storied look. So now he's not only a superhero, he's also an African king."



Black Panther (2018)

Queen Ramonda, played by Angela Bassett
Isicholo, a South African woman's traditional marriage hat, was the inspiration for Queen Ramonda's crown and is paired with a dramatic shoulder mantle. Carter worked with the Austrian designer, Julia Koerner, to create the pieces using 3-D printing, integrating technology into the fabrication of the costumes.



Do the Right Thing (1989)

Mookie, played by Spike Lee
For Mookie's look, Carter worked closely with Spike Lee. He picked out the bowling shirt and Carter customized it with an embroidered logo for Sal's Famous Pizzeria. The shoes, Nike Air Trainer III Medicine Ball sneakers, were brought to set by Lee, who had by 1989 already directed several commercials for Nike.



Do the Right Thing (1989)

Radio Raheem, played by Bill Nunn
Radio Raheem's gold LOVE and HATE rings, produced at the Fulton Street Mall in downtown Brooklyn, are a reference to the 1955 film *The Night of the Hunter*. In the film, the actor Robert Mitchum tells a story of the struggle between love and hate illustrated by his tattooed knuckles. In *Do the Right Thing*, Radio Raheem tells a similar story to Mookie with his custom rings. The scene takes place with Public Enemy's song, "Fight the Power" blaring in the background.

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Selma (2014)

Addie Mae Collins, Carol Denise McNair, Carole Rosamond Robertson, Cynthia Dionne Wesley, and Sarah Collins Rudolph, played by Mikeria Howard, Trinity Simone, Ebony Billups, Nadej K. Bailey, and Jordan Rice

The explosion in the opening scene is the infamous 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, which occurred in Birmingham, Alabama on September 15, 1963. The four girls killed in the bombing were Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley, all 14 and Denise McNair, 11; a fifth girl, Sarah Collins Rudolph, 12, survived. In his eulogy, Dr. King called the attack "one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity," and their murders had the unintended effect of strengthening national support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Carter expresses the girls' innocence through her choice of taffeta and cotton dresses with abundant bows, ruffles, flowers, and other delicate embellishments.



Coming 2 America (2021)

Semmi, played by Arsenio Hall

Coming 2 America is a sequel to the 1988 comedy-classic, *Coming to America*. Written by Kenya Barris, Barry W. Blaustein, and David Sheffield and directed by Craig Brewer, the sequel revisits Prince Akeem, played by Eddie Murphy more thirty years later. Set primarily at Akeem's palace in Zamunda, the film features more than 800 costumes many of which were created by African and African American designers at Carter's bequest. Carter's challenge was to update the look of the new film while honoring the original costumes designed by Deborah Nadoolman Landis. Of this process she stated, "we know a lot more than we did 30 years ago about Africa and needed to be a little more sophisticated in Zamunda. I came up with a Zamundan story, while sharing the beauty and pageantry the first film offered."



Coming 2 America (2021)

Mary Junson, played by Leslie Jones