

# The Woman King

***The Woman King*** is a 2022 American historical action-adventure film about the Agojie, the all-female warrior unit that protected the West African kingdom of Dahomey during the 17th to 19th centuries. Set in the 1820s, the film stars Viola Davis as a general who trains the next generation of warriors to fight their enemies. It is directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood and written by Dana Stevens, based on a story she wrote with Maria Bello. The film also stars Thuso Mbedu, Lashana Lynch, Sheila Atim, Hero Fiennes Tiffin, and John Boyega.

Bello conceived the idea for *The Woman King* in 2015 after visiting Benin, where the kingdom used to be located, and learning the history of the Agojie. She recruited Cathy Schulman to develop it into a feature film, pitching it to several studios, who turned it down due to financial concerns. After they met with TriStar Pictures in 2017, the film was greenlit in 2020. Production began in South Africa in November 2021, shut down due to the COVID-19 Omicron variant a few weeks later, and resumed in early 2022. Polly Morgan was the cinematographer. During post-production, the musical score was composed by Terence Blanchard, and editing was completed by Terilyn A. Shropshire.

*The Woman King* had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 9, 2022, and Sony Pictures Releasing released the film in theaters in the United States on September 16, 2022. Following the festival screening, the film received generally positive reviews from critics,<sup>[5][6]</sup> with praise directed towards Davis's performance and the action choreography, though it received criticism for historical distortion of slavery.<sup>[7]</sup> At the 28th Critics' Choice Awards the film received nominations for Best Costume Design, Best Acting Ensemble, Best Director, and Best Actress for Davis. Furthermore, Davis also earned Best Actress nominations at the Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild, BAFTA Film Awards, and NAACP Image Awards.

*The Woman King*



Theatrical release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<span><span>Gina Prince-Bythewood</span></span>
<b>Screenplay by</b>	<span><span>Dana Stevens</span></span>
<b>Story by</b>	<span><span>Maria Bello</span></span> <div><span><span>Dana Stevens</span></span></div>
<b>Produced by</b>	<span><span>Cathy Schulman</span></span> <div><span><span>Viola Davis</span></span><span><span>Julius Tennon</span></span><span><span>Maria Bello</span></span></div>
<b>Starring</b>	<span><span>Viola Davis</span></span> <div><span><span>Thuso Mbedu</span></span><span><span>Lashana Lynch</span></span><span><span>Sheila Atim</span></span><span><span>Hero Fiennes Tiffin</span></span><span><span>John Boyega</span></span></div>
<b>Cinematography</b>	<span><span>Polly Morgan</span></span>
<b>Edited by</b>	<span><span>Terilyn A. Shropshire</span></span>
<b>Music by</b>	<span><span>Terence Blanchard</span></span>
<b>Production companies</b>	<span><span>TriStar Pictures</span></span> <div><span><span>Entertainment One</span></span><sup>[1]</sup></div>

It was the last film to be distributed by Entertainment One in Canada before the distributor's Canadian division was shut down on June 29, 2022, along with its Spanish distribution shortly before the film's release.

## Plot

In the West African kingdom of Dahomey in 1823,<sup>[8]</sup> General Nanisca, leader of the all-female regiment of warriors, the Agojie, liberates Dahomean women who were abducted by slavers from the Oyo Empire. This provokes King Ghezo of Dahomey to prepare for an all-out war with the Oyo. Nanisca begins to train a new generation of warriors to join the Agojie to protect the kingdom. Among these warriors is Nawi, a strong-willed girl who was offered by her father to the king after refusing to marry men who would beat her. Nawi befriends Izogie, a veteran Agojie. She also reveals to Nanisca that she is adopted and shows a scar on her left shoulder, shocking Nanisca.

Portuguese slave traders led by Santo Ferreira and accompanied by the half-Dahomean Malik arrive as part of an alliance with the Oyo, led by General Oba Ade. Nawi encounters Malik while the latter is bathing, and the two become friends. Shortly after graduating from training to become a full-fledged Agojie, Nawi sneaks off to speak with Malik and learns that the Oyo are planning to attack. She reports this to Nanisca, who tells her off for her recklessness. Amidst a heated argument between the two, Nanisca reveals that in her youth, she was captured by Oba, raped, and impregnated. After giving birth to a daughter, Nanisca embedded a shark tooth in her left shoulder before giving her away. Nanisca helps Nawi extract the tooth, confirming that she is her biological daughter.

Nanisca leads the Agojie in an attack on the Oyo. The attack is successful, but Oba escapes and Nawi, Fumbe and Izogie are captured. With Nawi's advice, Fumbe escapes and reports the others' fate to Nanisca. Ghezo prepares to bestow the title of Woman King, his partner and equal in ruling Dahomey, upon Nanisca, but refuses to authorise a rescue mission for the captive Agojie. Meanwhile, Izogie is killed in an escape attempt and Malik buys Nawi to protect her. Nanisca defies orders and sets out with a group of like-minded warriors to rescue the captives. The chaos allows Nawi to escape and rejoin Nanisca. Malik frees several other slaves who drown Ferreira, and Nanisca kills Oba in single combat. The triumphant Agojie return to Dahomey, where Ghezo privately and briefly admonishes Nanisca for disobeying him, before crowning her the Woman King. After the festivities, Nanisca and Nawi privately acknowledge their familial relationship.

## Cast

- Viola Davis as General Nanisca<sup>[9]</sup>
  - Wanda Banda as Young Nanisca
- Thuso Mbedu as Nawi<sup>[10]</sup>
- Lashana Lynch as Izogie<sup>[11]</sup>

	<u>TSG Entertainment II</u> JuVee Productions Welle Entertainment
<b>Distributed by</b>	<u>Sony Pictures Releasing</u>
<b>Release dates</b>	September 9, 2022 (TIFF) September 16, 2022 (United States)
<b>Running time</b>	135 minutes
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	\$50 million <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Box office</b>	\$97.6 million <sup>[3][4]</sup>

- Sheila Atim as Amenza<sup>[12]</sup>
  - Lethabo as Young Amenza
- Hero Fiennes Tiffin as Santo Ferreira<sup>[13]</sup>
- John Boyega as King Ghezo<sup>[14]</sup>
- Jordan Bolger as Malik<sup>[15]</sup>
- Jimmy Odukoya as General Oba Ade<sup>[15]</sup>
  - Joel Mukadi as Young Oba
- Masali Baduza as Fumbe<sup>[13]</sup>
- Jayme Lawson as Shante<sup>[13]</sup>
- Adrienne Warren as Ode<sup>[12]</sup>
- Shaina West as Esi
- Chioma Umeala as Tara
- Siyamthanda Makakane as Cindra
- Siv Ngesi as the Migan<sup>[16]</sup>
- Angélique Kidjo as the Meunon<sup>[15]</sup>
- Zozibini Tunzi as Efe<sup>[17]</sup>
- Makgotso M as Iniya<sup>[18]</sup>
- Thando Dlomo as Kelu<sup>[15]</sup>
- Julian Tennon as Moru<sup>[19]</sup>

## Production

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### Development

*The Woman King* was produced by Maria Bello and Cathy Schulman, written by Dana Stevens with contributions by Gina Prince-Bythewood, and directed by Prince-Bythewood.<sup>[20]</sup> It is a co-production between TriStar Pictures and Entertainment One.<sup>[1]</sup>

In 2015, Bello went to the West African nation of Benin to learn the history of the Agojie. Convinced she had found a story worth telling, she returned to Los Angeles and recruited Schulman, then head of organization Women in Film, to help her make the film.<sup>[2]</sup> On September 19, 2015,<sup>[21][22]</sup> Bello used a moment when she was presenting actress Viola Davis with an award at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles to pitch her idea for the movie in front of the crowd, who cheered at the notion of seeing Davis in the lead role.<sup>[2][20]</sup>

Schulman first tried to set up the film at STXfilms, where she was the head of the production, but the studio was only willing to offer an unsatisfactory \$5 million.<sup>[23]</sup> After leaving STX in 2016, Schulman worked with Bello, Davis, and Julius Tennon, Davis's husband and producing partner at JuVee Productions, to take the idea elsewhere.



Producer Maria Bello in 2016

Studios who turned it down cited an unlikely chance for the film to turn a profit; others, according to Davis, wanted to cast light-skinned, well-known actresses, which they refused to do for historical accuracy and the audience's sake. Prince-Bythewood, also in 2016, was approached to write the screenplay but could not commit due to a scheduling conflict with *Silver & Black*.<sup>[23][24]</sup> In 2017, without a script or director, the producers met with TriStar's then-chief Hannah Minghella and then-senior vice president Nicole Brown. Within two years, Brown had taken over Minghella's position and made *The Woman King* one of TriStar's top priorities.<sup>[2]</sup>

In early 2018, the commercial success of the superhero movie *Black Panther*, which featured a fictionalized version of the Agojie, further motivated the crew to move forward with the project. In March 2018, Davis and Lupita Nyong'o were announced to star;<sup>[9]</sup> Nyong'o's role was ultimately played by Thuso Mbedu. Prince-Bythewood read the screenplay once it was completed and came on board to direct, and in 2020, *The Woman King* was greenlit with a \$50 million budget.<sup>[2][24]</sup>

Prince-Bythewood referenced epic films like *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *Braveheart* (1995), and *Gladiator* (2000) as influences. Her background in sports gave her a perspective on the realism of fight scenes.<sup>[2]</sup> In crafting the story, she sought for the women to be multi-faceted in both their fighting ability and their emotional reactions.<sup>[20]</sup> She worked with production designer Akin McKenzie to learn about the Agojie. Their research included books, out-of-print texts, photographs, and writings by Princeton professor Leonard Wantchekon. "The biggest eye-opener," she said, "was how much misinformation there is about these women and this culture, given that so much of their history was written from the colonizer's point of view. So it was really about separating the texts that were from that point of view, which were so disparaging and disrespectful, from the truth."<sup>[23]</sup>

For four months before the shoot, the cast performed 90 minutes a day of weight lifting with trainer Gabriela McClain, followed by three and a half hours of fight training with stunt coordinator Danny Hernandez, which included running, martial arts, and working with swords and spears. Davis was inspired by pro boxer Claressa Shields.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Filming

In November 2021, the cast and crew flew to South Africa for a five-month shoot. Prince-Bythewood prioritized department heads who were women and people of color,<sup>[2]</sup> including cinematographer Polly Morgan,<sup>[25]</sup> production designer Akin McKenzie, costume designer Gersha Phillips, hairstylist Louisa Anthony, visual effects supervisor Sara Bennett, and editor Terilyn Shropshire. Makeup was handled by a local, South African artist, Babalwa Mtshiselwa. "The thing is for women and people of color," Prince-Bythewood said, "often the résumés are not long because it's about lack of opportunity, not lack of talent. So when you're in my position, it's important to look past that résumé."<sup>[2]</sup>



Director Gina Prince-Bythewood in 2018

For a sequence in which a character is remembering a sexual assault, Prince-Bythewood referenced Christine Blasey Ford's testimony at Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination hearing and asked the actress to read the Roxane Gay book *Hunger*, a memoir about Gay's rape.<sup>[2]</sup> Filming for the first two weeks took place in the coastal province of KwaZulu-Natal for the shooting of jungle scenes. They then moved to the coastal city of Cape Town, where the majority of filming would take place.<sup>[24]</sup> In their third week in

South Africa, the COVID-19 omicron variant hit the production; Davis and Tennon were among the infected. Production shut down for a few weeks and resumed in mid-January 2022. This production halt forced them to re-rehearse a battle sequence with hundreds of performers. Prince-Bythewood called it the hardest shoot of her career.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Post-production

Editing was completed by Terilyn A. Shropshire, who worked on Prince-Bythewood's *The Old Guard* (2020).<sup>[26]</sup> The film's musical score was composed by Terence Blanchard, who worked with Prince-Bythewood on her first film *Love & Basketball* (2000) and the television shows *Shots Fired* and *Swagger*.<sup>[27][28]</sup> For the score, Blanchard enlisted the nine-voice Vox Noire ensemble, who worked with him on his opera *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, with jazz singer Dianne Reeves as his soloist. They recorded for five days with the 78-member Royal Scottish National Orchestra in Glasgow, Scotland. Additional recordings occurred in New York with Vox Noire and Colorado with Reeves. Ghanaian-American mezzo-soprano Tesia Kwarteng led the choir. Three numbers by South African composer Lebo M of chants and dances were also performed in the film. The song in the end credits, "Keep Rising," was an original piece written by Jessy Wilson, Jeremy Lutito, and Angélique Kidjo and performed by Kidjo for Warner Chappell Music in late 2020, and later sold to Sony. The soundtrack album was released on September 16, 2022, by Milan Records.<sup>[29][30]</sup>



Film score composer  
Terence Blanchard in 2014

## Release

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The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 9, 2022.<sup>[31][32]</sup> It was released in theaters on September 16, 2022, by Sony Pictures Releasing.<sup>[33][34]</sup> Sony handled distribution worldwide except in Canada and the United Kingdom, where distribution was held by Entertainment One.<sup>[1]</sup>

The film was released for VOD on November 22, 2022, followed by a Blu-ray, DVD, and 4K UHD release by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment on December 13, 2022, in the United States.<sup>[35]</sup> In the United Kingdom, it was released on DVD and Blu-ray, by Entertainment One and Universal Pictures Home Entertainment on February 13, 2023.

Netflix in the United States received *The Woman King* 153 days after its theatrical release on February 16, 2023 as part of a first window deal with Sony Pictures and a second window deal with Disney+.<sup>[36]</sup>

It was the last film to be distributed by Entertainment One in Canada before the distributor's Canadian division was shut down on June 29, 2022, along with its Spanish distribution shortly before the film's release.<sup>[37]</sup>

## Reception

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### Box office

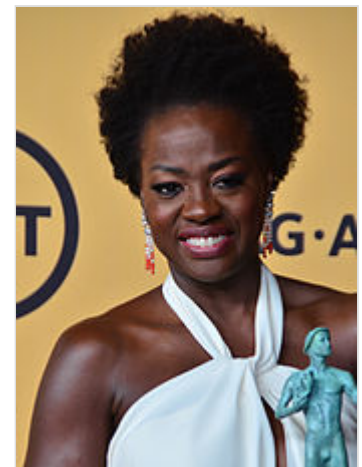


*The Woman King* grossed \$67.3 million in the United States and Canada, and \$27.1 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$94.4 million<sup>[3][4]</sup> against a projected \$190 million break-even price point.<sup>[38]</sup>

In the United States and Canada, *The Woman King* was projected to gross around \$12 million in its opening weekend, with some studios estimating it could reach as much as \$16 million.<sup>[39]</sup> The film made \$6.8 million on its first day, including \$1.7 million from Thursday night previews. It went on to over-perform and debut at \$19.05 million from 3,765 theaters, topping the box office. Of the opening-weekend audience, 60% were female, 58% were over the age of 35, and 59% were African American.<sup>[34]</sup> In its second weekend, the film made \$11.1 million (a drop of 42%), finishing behind newcomer *Don't Worry Darling*.<sup>[40]</sup> In its third weekend, the film made \$6.8 million, finishing third.<sup>[41]</sup>

## Critical response

*The Woman King* received positive reviews from critics for the cast's performance, including Viola Davis's starring role and Thuso Mbedu's breakout performance, and its action choreography, while some minor disappointment was expressed with the script.<sup>[7]</sup> On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 94% of 266 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.8/10. The website's consensus reads: "All hail Viola Davis! *The Woman King* rules."<sup>[42]</sup> On Metacritic the film has a weighted average score of 76 out of 100, based on 35 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".<sup>[43]</sup> Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film a rare average grade of "A+" on an A+ to F scale, while those at PostTrak gave the film a 95% overall positive score.



Critics praised Viola Davis for her performance.

Lovia Gyarkye of The Hollywood Reporter wrote, "A crowd-pleasing epic—think *Braveheart* with Black women."<sup>[44]</sup> Robert Daniels at RogerEbert.com said, "When *The Woman King* works, it's majestic... The magnitude and the awe this movie inspires are what epics like *Gladiator* and *Braveheart* are all about."<sup>[45]</sup> Kate Erbland of IndieWire said, "A hell of a time at the movies, a seemingly 'niche' topic with great appeal, the sort of battle-heavy feature that will likely engender plenty of hoots and hollers."<sup>[46]</sup> Film's Chris Evangelista said it was "an absolute blast. It's a film that isn't afraid to get you cheering."<sup>[47]</sup> BBC critic Caryn James wrote, "It is a splashy popcorn movie with a social conscience."<sup>[48]</sup>

Jamie Broadnax of Black Girl Nerds called Viola Davis's performance a career best.<sup>[7][49]</sup> Gyarkye said, "The Oscar-winning actress, known for digging into her characters' psyches, accesses an impressive level of emotional depth and nuance as Nanisca."<sup>[44]</sup> The Wrap's Martin Tsai wrote, "Davis truly gets to flex the full range of her acting chops. A performance of this caliber is rare in what's essentially an action flick."<sup>[50]</sup> Chris Bumbray of JoBlo wrote, "Her raw intensity is backed up by a newly jacked physique that makes her an imposing action heroine, and she performs exceptionally well in the numerous action scenes."<sup>[51]</sup> Other cast members that were praised included Lashana Lynch (Evangelista at Film and Reuben Baron at Looper.com called her the film's standout)<sup>[47][52]</sup> and Thuso Mbedu, who was called a "breakout star" by several critics;<sup>[45][47][52]</sup> Tim Grierson at Screen International said she "nearly steals the show" with an "exceptional supporting performance".<sup>[8]</sup>

James said representation of history and culture "leans toward fantasy in its heroic moments, but is rooted in [the] truth about war, brutality, and freedom."<sup>[48]</sup> Gyarkye said it "begins as portraiture and then surrenders to melodrama when faced with the challenges of translating history for the screen and constructing a coherent geopolitical thread."<sup>[44]</sup> Reuben Baron of *Looper.com* wrote, "*The Woman King* is an 8/10 for entertainment value, and 4/10 for how it deals with history." On the aspect of spectacle, critics said they wanted more action movies like *The Woman King*.<sup>[52]</sup> Erbland said, "If this is what a Hollywood-ized and -sized blockbuster looks like in 2022, bring it on. Bring them all on."<sup>[46]</sup> Evangelista concluded in his review, "Maybe one day we'll get to a point where such a movie doesn't feel groundbreaking, but here we are."<sup>[47]</sup>

*The Africa Report* describes the response from Benin (where the movie is set) as mixed, with on the one hand some Beninese reactions pointing out the historical errors and the liberties taken in the representation of the Benin culture by replacing elements such as song and dance with South African substitutes, while on the other hand some responding positively to the depiction of Benin historical events in a big Hollywood production.<sup>[53]</sup>

## Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>AARP Movies for Grownups Awards</u>	<u>January 28, 2023</u>	<u>Best Picture/Best Movie for Grownups</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	[54] [55]
		<u>Best Director</u>	<u>Gina Prince-Bythewood</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Ensemble</u>	The cast of <i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Screenwriter</u>	<u>Dana Stevens</u>	Nominated	
<u>African-American Film Critics Association Awards</u>	<u>December 8, 2022</u>	<u>Top 10 Films of the Year</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Won	[56]
<u>Alliance of Women Film Journalists</u>	<u>January 5, 2023</u>	<u>Best Picture</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	[57]
		<u>Best Director</u>	<u>Gina Prince-Bythewood</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Woman Director</u>		Won	
		<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Most Daring Performance</u>		Nominated	
		<u>Woman Film Industry Achievement</u>		Won	
		<u>Best Woman Breakthrough Performance</u>	<u>Thuso Mbedu</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	<u>Dana Stevens</u> and <u>Maria Bello</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Woman Screenwriter</u>		Nominated	
		<u>Best Cinematography</u>	<u>Polly Morgan</u>	Won	
		<u>Best Editing</u>	<u>Terilyn A. Shropshire</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Ensemble Casting Director</u>	<u>Aisha Coley</u>	Nominated	
<u>American Cinema Editors Awards</u>	<u>March 5, 2023</u>	<u>Best Edited Feature Film – Dramatic</u>	<u>Terilyn A. Shropshire</u>	Nominated	[58]
<u>American Film Institute Awards</u>	<u>December 9, 2022</u>	<u>Top 10 Films of the Year</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Won <sup>[a]</sup>	[59]



<u>Austin Film Critics Association</u>	<u>January 10, 2023</u>	Best Actress	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	[60]
		Best Stunt Coordinator	Daniel Hernandez	Nominated	
<u>BET Awards</u>	<u>June 25, 2023</u>	Best Movie	<i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	[61]
		Best Actress	Viola Davis	Nominated	
<u>Black Reel Awards</u>	<u>February 6, 2023</u>	Outstanding Motion Picture	<i>The Woman King</i> (Maria Bello, Viola Davis, Cathy Schulman and Julius Tennon, producers)	Won	[62] [63]
		Outstanding Director	<u>Gina Prince-Bythewood</u>	Won	
		Outstanding Actress	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
		Outstanding Supporting Actress	<u>Thuso Mbedu</u>	Nominated	
		Outstanding Breakthrough Performance, Female		Won	
			<u>Sheila Atim</u>	Nominated	
		Outstanding Ensemble Casting Director	Aisha Coley	Won	
		Outstanding Cinematography	<u>Polly Morgan</u>	Nominated	
		Outstanding Editing	<u>Terilyn A. Shropshire</u>	Won	
		Outstanding Production Design	Akin Mckenzie	Nominated	
		Outstanding Costume Design	Gersha Phillips	Nominated	
		Outstanding Soundtrack	<i>The Woman King (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)</i>	Nominated	
		Outstanding Score	<u>Terence Blanchard</u>	Won	
		Outstanding Original Song	Jessy Wilson, Angélique Kidjo and Jeremy Lutito for "Keep Rising"	Nominated	
<u>British Academy Film Awards</u>	<u>February 19, 2023</u>	Best Actress in a Leading Role	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	[64]
		Best Direction	<u>Gina Prince-Bythewood</u>	Nominated	
		Rising Star	<u>Sheila Atim</u>	Nominated	
<u>Critics' Choice Awards</u>	<u>January 15, 2023</u>	Best Director	<u>Gina Prince-Bythewood</u>	Nominated	[65]
		Best Actress	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
		Best Acting Ensemble	The cast of <i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	
		Best Costume Design	Gersha Phillips	Nominated	
<u>Dallas–Fort Worth Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 19, 2022</u>	Best Picture	<i>The Woman King</i>	10th Place	[66]
		Best Actress	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
<u>Dorian Awards</u>	<u>February 23, 2023</u>	Film Performance of the Year		Nominated	[67]
<u>Golden Globe Awards</u>	<u>January 10, 2023</u>	Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Drama		Nominated	[68]

<u>Grammy Awards</u>	<u>February 5, 2023</u>	<u>Best Song Written for Visual Media</u>	<u>Angélique Kidjo, Jeremy Lutito and Jessy Wilson</u> for "Keep Rising"	Nominated	[69]
<u>Hollywood Critics Association Creative Arts Awards</u>	<u>February 24, 2023</u>	<u>Best Casting Director</u>	<u>Aisha Coley</u>	Nominated	[70] [71]
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	<u>Gersha Phillips</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Stunts</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	
<u>Hollywood Music in Media Awards</u>	<u>November 16, 2022</u>	<u>Best Original Score in a Feature Film</u>	<u>Terence Blanchard</u>	Won	[72]
<u>Houston Film Critics Society</u>	<u>February 18, 2023</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	[73]
		<u>Best Stunt Coordination Team</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	[74]
<u>ICG Publicists Awards</u>	<u>March 10, 2023</u>	<u>Maxwell Weinberg Publicists Showmanship Motion Picture Award</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	[75] [76]
<u>NAACP Image Awards</u>	<u>February 25, 2023</u>	<u>Outstanding Motion Picture</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	[77]
		<u>Outstanding Directing in a Motion Picture</u>	<u>Gina Prince-Bythewood</u>	Won	
		<u>Outstanding Actress in a Motion Picture</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Won	
		<u>Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture</u>	<u>John Boyega</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture</u>	<u>Lashana Lynch</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Ensemble Cast in a Motion Picture</u>	The cast of <i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Writing in a Motion Picture</u>	<u>Dana Stevens</u> and <u>Maria Bello</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Costume Design</u>	<u>Gersha Phillips, Carly Nicodemo, Lieze Van Tonder, Lynn Paulsen and Tova Harrison</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Soundtrack/Compilation Album</u>	<i>The Woman King (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)</i>	Nominated	
<u>National Board of Review Awards</u>	<u>December 8, 2022</u>	<u>Top Ten Films</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Won <sup>[a]</sup>	[78]
<u>Palm Springs International Film Festival</u>	<u>January 13, 2023</u>	<u>Chairman's Award</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Won	[79]
<u>People's Choice Awards</u>	<u>December 6, 2022</u>	<u>Action Movie of 2022</u>	<i>The Woman King</i>	Nominated	[80]
		<u>Female Movie Star of 2022</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Action Movie Star of 2022</u>		Nominated	

<u>Satellite Awards</u>	<u>March 3, 2023</u>	<u>Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Drama</u>		Nominated	[81] [82]
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	<u>Gersha Phillips</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Editing</u>	<u>Terilyn A. Shropshire</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Original Score</u>	<u>Terence Blanchard</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Sound</u>	<u>Becky Sullivan, Kevin O'Connell, Tony Lamberti and Derek Mansvelt</u>	Nominated	
<u>Screen Actors Guild Award</u>	<u>February 26, 2023</u>	<u>Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	[83]
		<u>Outstanding Performance by a Stunt Ensemble in a Motion Picture</u>	<u>The stunt performers and coordinators of <i>The Woman King</i></u>	Nominated	
<u>St. Louis Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 11, 2022</u>	<u>Best Action Film</u>	<u><i>The Woman King</i></u>	Nominated	[84]
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	<u>Gersha Phillips</u>	Nominated	
<u>Washington D.C. Area Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 12, 2022</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	[85]

## Controversy

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### Portrayal of Dahomey slave traders

*Los Angeles Times* reported that online critics complained that "the movie seemingly uplifts the women without fully acknowledging that the Dahomey tribe sold other Africans into slavery", while others defended the film.<sup>[86]</sup> *The Conversation* said "the film has drawn controversy from many angles". Before the film's release, online commentators commented on the perceived savagery of the Dahomey kingdom, particularly spotlighting rituals that involved human sacrifices. This narrative of criticism was broadened by the voices of American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS), who vehemently called for a boycott of the film, arguing it glorified a kingdom responsible for brutalizing their ancestors. Adding to the chorus of disapproval were specialists in 19th-century Dahomey history, who raised flags over inaccuracies in the film's representation of the slave trade. Moreover, a segment of the social media populace, advocating for the portrayal of more positive black stories, questioned the decision to focus on Dahomey. They suggested that other historical narratives, such as those exemplified by figures like Toussaint L'Ouverture, would have been more appropriate and uplifting subjects for cinematic exploration.<sup>[87]</sup>

*The Mary Sue* wrote, "The major reason for the controversy surrounding *The Woman King* is that it is allegedly historically inaccurate. Now, some individuals touting this claim may not actually care about the accuracy and are just using this as an excuse to boycott a film about Black women's empowerment. However, some historians have weighed in on the issue, too, which raised some valid concerns. One point that has sparked controversy is *The Woman King's* historically inaccurate depiction of the kingdom of Dahomey's attitude towards slavery."<sup>[88]</sup>

On social media, the hashtag #BoycottWomanKing was trending for days. *The Wrap* said "Critics don't have an issue with Davis playing a strong Black leader in "The Woman King," but are alarmed that the history of the Dahomey tribe, who sold other Africans into slavery, has been whitewashed."<sup>[89]</sup> Viola Davis responded to a calls for a boycott of the movie by arguing that "Most of the story is fictionalized. It has to be," while Tennon stated that "We have to entertain people. [...] If people want to learn more, they can investigate more."<sup>[86]</sup>

## Historical accuracy

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*The Woman King* is set in the kingdom of Dahomey (in now Southern Benin Republic)<sup>[90]</sup> in the year 1823.<sup>[8]</sup> The kingdom existed from around 1600 through 1904, and the Agojie existed for most of that time.<sup>[91]</sup>

## Characters

The movie features multiple fictional characters, including, among others, the Agojie general Nanisca, played by Viola Davis. *History vs. Hollywood* speculated her name was inspired by an Agojie teenage recruit of the same name who was written about by a French naval officer in 1889. Another notable fictional character is the Portuguese-speaking Santo Ferreira who is played by Hero Fiennes Tiffin.

## Role in slavery

The movie correctly depicts the status of Dahomey as a nation that sold enslaved captives to European slave traders. However, a fictional embellishment to this narrative is that Nanisca confronts Ghezo about the immorality of selling Dahomey slaves to the Portuguese and suggests trading in palm oil production instead.<sup>[44]</sup> Nanisca being fictional, the confrontation did not take place, although the king's exploration of alternatives to the slave trade did. *Smithsonian* wrote, "Though Ghezo did at one point explore palm oil production as an alternative source of revenue, it proved far less lucrative, and the king soon resumed Dahomey's participation in the slave trade."<sup>[92]</sup>

## Notes

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- a. This award does not have a single winner, but recognizes multiple films.

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## Further reading

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- The warriors of this West African kingdom were formidable—and female (<https://web.archive.org/web/20220914191524/https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/the-true-story-of-the-women-warriors-of-dahomey>) at *National Geographic*, September 14, 2022

## External links

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- Official website (<https://www.thewomanking.movie/>) 
  - Official screenplay (<https://deadline.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Woman-King-Read-The-Screenplay.pdf>)
  - *The Woman King* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8093700/>) at IMDb
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