

The Film “*Bopha!*”

This 1993 film is based upon the play of the same name by South African playwright Percy Mtwa: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bopha!> It was first produced for Lincoln Center New York City in 1986; two TV productions and a documentary soon followed. This screen play version was written by Brian Bird and John Wierick. *Arsenio Hall* produced the film, it was directed by *Morgan Freeman*, and it stars *Danny Glover* as Micah Mangema. Like many other films about South Africa that were produced during this time, it was shot on location in Zimbabwe. But unlike the other films we have seen thus far, this one attempts to tell the story of Apartheid from the Black perspective. Percy Mtwa's "never forgive, never forget" subtext will be unsettling for some viewers – as it was intended to be. Of course this is Hollywood so there are certain liberties taken in the story line. For example, it is unlikely that all of the events portrayed in the film would have unfolded over such a short period of time.

The title *Bopha!* is a Zulu word meaning both “to detain” and “to arrest” and generally implies “resistance” to Black South Africans. The film takes us maybe a decade forward from the times of *Cry Freedom*. It tells the tale of a black South African cop named Micah Mangema (*Danny Glover*) and his family who live in the peaceful town of Moroka. Micah’s job as a police sergeant has given him responsibility, a sense of worth, and a feeling of security and comfort for his. He is proud to be on the force, and proud to keep order in the society. He loves the power that comes with the uniform, and the privilege that his position gives him. The Mangema family lives a comparatively comfortable, middleclass Black lifestyle in a “good” house and they want for little. But all of this plays out under the increasing oppressive waning days of Apartheid in the 1980s. Glover portrays the police sergeant Micah as strict and stubborn, taking charge when training his new recruits, much like a military sergeant as befits the storyline. Micah’s superior, Van Tonder (played by South African character actor *Marius Weyers*, whom you also saw in *Power of One* and will see again in *Red Dust*) values his black peers and dislikes the position that Apartheid puts them in. These two men are not really friends, but one feel that they could be under different circumstances.

Micah doesn't think that his job advances white power in the Apartheid state, but others in the racist system don't see it that way. They see him as blind to all that is going on around them. Violence begins against black policemen in neighboring towns, and Micah’s wife Rosie (played by *Alfre Woodard*) and son Zwali (*Maynard Eziashi*) are afraid that the violence will hit closer to home. The life of Micah and his family begins to unravel when he is sent to break up an illegal meeting of student protesters. Within a very short time, Micah finds that his security and comfort are illusions - this truth is forced onto him by his son, one of the student protesters. With the beginnings of protests in the area, the evil Captain de Villiers (*Malcolm McDowell*) is brought in to keep order, the tension in the town quickly escalates into violence. Micah's and his family begin to realize his horrible role in the town, but he may not fully understand this until it is too late.

The struggle with the reality that Micah and his family are forced to face provides certain dilemmas: When, and how, do you draw the line between job, duty, your livelihood and justice and freedom? Ask yourself this: would you lay down your life for your freedom? Will you ever be faced with that question? The characterization of Micah Mangema and his family asks all of these questions, and eventually answers them....