Black Super Power:
An Analysis of DC Comics' First African-American Superhero

Douglas Dame

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Abstract:

Like all superheroes, the first Black Green Lantern (John Stewart) is endowed with unique powers, yet the very idea of power is complicated by the racial discourse that exists inside and outside his comic book series. Thus, power in his origin story is associated at times with a stereotypically fetishized black male physical power, while at other times it takes on a more socially critical dimension, indicating concerns with the superhero's power of self-definition and his power within the existing social structure. These themes, often found in African-American literature, are also woven into the conventions of superhero comics, resulting in a complicated moment of interaction between two generally distinct narrative traditions.

First there was Superman. Famously fighting for truth, justice, and the American way, the Man of Steel heralded the first age, the Golden Age, of the superhero comic with his appearance in the first issues of *Action Comics* in 1938 (Wolk 719). The boy from Krypton introduced to American popular culture a new form of mythology, where god-like beings lived among the common man and woman, serving as defenders of justice, endowed with powers befit for their righteous defense of the country and the world. They were orphaned millionaires who used their riches and wits to protect the helpless. They were unexceptional high school students who learned that with great power comes great responsibility. Some of them were mutants fighting for acceptance, others came from exotic nations, or even planets, to stand up against villains that would threaten justice. Whatever their origin story, each
A superhero served more or less the same function as that first costumed crusader: to prove that the ideals that society holds dear are worth fighting for, and to show that their stories are those of the American people.

Superheroes have long served as representations of the cultural moments that surround their inception. As Douglas Wolk explains, “superheroes are walking (or flying) metaphors for the cultural concerns of their time” (719). He cites the relationships between The Fantastic Four and the space race, The Incredible Hulk and nuclear power, even Iron Man and “the threat of Chinese and Russian technology” as evidence that superheroes engage closely with contemporary cultural anxieties (Wolk 721). The convention in superhero comics, however, is much more specific than just a thematic trend. Several comic scholars define superheroes through the way in which they interact with these anxieties, the way they define right and wrong. According to Peter Coogan, “the superhero's mission is pro-social and selfless, which means that his fight against evil must fit in with the existing, professed mores of society and must not be intended to benefit or further his own agenda” (77). Richard Reynolds goes further, arguing that “in order to be functioning superheroes they will need to conform to the ideological rules of the game... the superhero has a mission to preserve society, not to re-invent it” (77). In these definitions, a superhero is a figure who fights for that which is right, as defined by the dominant cultural norms of the society that produces him. He functions as an ideal-type role model for pro-social behavior.

For many years this was the regular cultural function of the superhero: to serve as a demonstration of the best way to act in accordance with expected social mores. Even though individuals in marginalized social positions existed as superheroes, including some women and people of color, their stories rarely addressed justice on the underlying social level. But Coogan's and Reynolds' superhero of the status quo—who was forbidden from protecting selfish interests or
attempting to upset social structures—was challenged in the 1970’s by the emergence of the racially conscious African American character. The appearance of new characters such as the black Green Lantern raised crucial questions. How would the black superhero function in a comic book universe where the drive for real social equality would conflict with the dominant ideology that the hero had always strived to protect?

In *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes*, Adilifu Nama examines this point of interaction thoroughly, looking at the span of black heroes from early one-dimensional stereotypes to modern characters in books, film, and television. In concluding his study, he finds, unsurprisingly, that “black superheroes are very complex figures,” occupying a typically pro-normative role while being influenced by civil rights and Black Power movements, but ultimately he concludes that they “embody a color-blind ethos because they do not exist to protect or save only one racial group from harm” (154). While his analysis points to the complication of dominant social mores brought about by black superheroes, his description of a “color-blind ethos” is misleading and in need of correction. Rather than representing “color-blindness,” these comic book characters demonstrate a discourse that is heavily influenced by race. Indeed, each black hero is a collection of signs and messages that show significant interaction with dominant cultural forces by way of complicated issues of identity, power, and justice.

In *Deconstructing Popular Culture as Political*, cultural theorist Stuart Hall provides a helpful paradigm for studying the politics of race in popular culture texts such as comic books. He describes popular culture as “the ground on which the transformations are worked,” arguing that any text is inevitably concerned with “the double-stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance” (10). In *What is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture*, Hall further explores the study of black culture, explaining that “what we are talking about is the struggle over cultural hegemony, which is these days waged as much in popular culture as anywhere else” (24). He claims that black
popular culture in particular is “a contradictory space” (26). These articles point to the inevitable struggle between minority interests and dominant oppression that exists within black popular cultural texts. As a result of these competing forces, “popular culture is... where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged” (Deconstructing 16). In the case of 1970s comic books, the newly emerged black superheroes exist in direct conflict with the more traditional white superheroes that align with the normative function of the Coogan and Reynolds hero. Because the nature of their existence raises questions of racial consciousness, these African American superheroes, like the comic books worlds in which they exist, are anything but color-blind.

These complicated issues can be seen through a close reading of the debut of the black Green Lantern, known as John Stewart, published by DC Comics in 1972. Like all superheroes, the first black Green Lantern is endowed with unique powers, yet the very idea of power is complicated by the racial discourse that exists inside and outside his comic book series. Thus, power in his origin story is associated at times with a stereotypically fetishized black male physical power, while at other times it takes on a more socially critical dimension, indicating concerns with the superhero's power of self-definition and his power within the existing social structure. These themes, often found in African-American literature, are also woven into the conventions of superhero comics, resulting in a complicated moment of interaction between two generally distinct narrative traditions. As I will demonstrate in this essay, comic book motifs like the mask and the alter-ego, the hyper-masculine body and the role of justice, all take on new and complicated meanings for an African-American superhero.

“Beware my Power!”: John Stewart- The Black Green Lantern

The year was 1940, and while the Allied Powers fought to restore order to a world at war, another police force was forming on newsstands across the country. Within the DC Comics universe,
The Green Lantern Corps was established by the Guardians of the Universe for the purpose of protecting order and justice. The brainchild of author Bill Finger, the comic book world's first man to join the ranks of this elite task force was Alan Scott (Wallace 144). Like all members of the Corps, Scott was chosen by the Guardians for his strength and bravery, and granted the powers of the green light of willpower. Through a mystical weapon known as a power ring, the Green Lantern could channel solid green light into any shape he had the will to create. His gift would make him into the first Green Lantern of Earth, tasked with the protection of this sector of space in an immense universe. Over the years, the mantle of the Emerald Knight would be passed down from one man to another, every time creating a new Green Lantern with the same powers and responsibilities as his predecessors.

In the early 1970's, DC writer Dennis O'Neil would have the Guardians decide that Earth's next protector would be African-American, a man named John Stewart. While this new addition to the Corps introduced many white readers to a rare black comic book protagonist, in his origin issue it becomes clear that John Stewart's narrative is wrought with tension. This should hardly come as surprising. In the history of the superhero comic so far, African-Americans had been “almost non-existent, terribly stereotypical, [and lacked] any models worthy of emulation” (Foster ix), and the introduction of a powerful black character made for a complicated impression of the black power movement that influenced society at the time of his creation. As Marc Singer notes, “from the moment he's introduced there's a sort of tension in the way they create him. On the one hand they make him an architect... a very respectable middle class profession, but they write him like an angry radical (White Scripts n. pg). Singer points to the complicated nature of power for John Stewart as one influenced by both progressive racial politics and stereotypical images propagated by dominant cultural forces. These two elements, racial consciousness and a fetishized black masculinity, mark unique interactions between African-American literature and superhero comics.

These intersections can be analyzed by closely reading John Stewart's debut, *Green Lantern*
Co-Starring Green Arrow Vol. 12 No. 87, and tracking the trajectory of the black Green Lantern's 'power' throughout the narrative. Three types of power are revealed with this approach: the physical power of the hyper-masculine black male, the power of self-definition, and the power that a minority has within the dominant power structure. By examining these different and sometimes contradictory portraits of power, this analysis shows the complications that become inevitably involved in the creation of a racially conscious African-American superhero.

Creator Dennis O'Neil wastes no time before highlighting racial tensions in John Stewart's debut comic; 'the image of an angry, muscular, black Green Lantern clutching a defeated Hal Jordan growls from the book's cover. Thus the trajectory of John Stewart's power begins with an image of exaggerated physical strength which far surpasses that of his white counterpart. The cover is filled with signs that point to this stereotypical imagery, in the tradition of what Foster calls the ‘“Brutal Black Buck'... an evil, untrustworthy savage” (Foster III 13). Stewart shouts with his fist in the air, “They whipped the GreenLantern, now let 'em try me!,” suggesting his physical superiority to the white Jordan. To the right of the action, bright red letters declare that this “unforgettable new character... really means it when he warns 'Beware my Power!”’ This line in the Green Lantern Oath is shown to have special meaning for Stewart as an African-American. Unlike the previous white Lanterns, this superhero “really means” it when he issues a warning, suggesting that a black Green Lantern is more violent or dangerous than his predecessors.

Readers who picked up this comic in 1972 hoping for a look at stereotypical images of threatening black masculinity, however, were the victims of a bait-and-switch. When O'Neil first introduces the reader to John Stewart, the fetishized black power highlighted on the cover is tempered with the character's strong sense of racial justice. Stewart interrupts a white police officer as he accuses a couple of African-American children of not having 'games permits' to play dominoes on the street, despite that no such permit is required and the act is one of harassment (4). In the brief argument that
follows, which ends with another officer breaking up the conversation, Stewart says “I don't want [trouble]... but I'm not about to run from it either! And anyway, I kind of doubt you're man enough to give it-- even with your nightstick!” (5). The black physical superiority suggested on the cover is given context by the white authority figure. Not only is John Stewart tougher than a white policeman, he uses his power to force the corrupt cop away from harassing innocent African-American youth. Here, John Stewart shows his concern for racial justice and puts his physical power to use to challenge corrupt authority. Thus, O'Neil recreates a racially divided world and realistically places Stewart within it, showing him at odds with dominant cultural norms and ideologies.

Hal Jordan, however, seeks to contain Stewart's defiant resistance to racial norms. When O'Neil decides that the Guardians will declare Stewart “brave [and] honest” (5) enough to be the next Green Lantern, he transports Hal Jordan to the scene of Stewart's aforementioned confrontation. Upon witnessing this moment, Jordan pleads with the Guardians not to give “the finest weapon ever devised” (5) to a man with “a chip on his shoulder the size of the Rock of Gibraltar” (5). Jordan's perception of Stewart's stand-off as a “chip on his shoulder” and not a brave act of racial justice demonstrates the complicated nature of Stewart's power. His position in the power structure is so complex that an act of justice on behalf of innocent citizens is taken as a personal vendetta against society by Jordan. Furthermore, readers already familiar with Green Lantern comics might feel inclined to align themselves with Hal Jordan based on their familiarity with the hero. Presented with both Stewart's legitimate resistance to injustice and Jordan's normative skepticism, readers are given two very different opinions on the power of racial discourse. This conflict resonates with the inevitable struggle against dominant cultural forces that is always present within African-American popular culture.

Jordan reluctantly takes Stewart into his tutelage, delivering a lecture on the Green Lantern Oath. This moment further complicates the meaning of power for the superhero-in-training; “That's pretty corny,” is Stewart's reply to the Oath, “except for that part that says 'beware my power'... mmm-
hum I do dig those words” (7). Stewart's fondness for making someone 'beware his power' points to a similarity between Stewart and the black power movement of the 1970's. The term “Black Power” was describes by civil rights leader Stokely Carmichael as “the creation of power bases from which black people can work to change statewide or nationwide patterns of oppression through pressure and strength-- instead of weakness” (445). John Stewart's strong feelings toward power echo this movement, and can be seen as both a legitimate demand of racial equality and as a dangerous threat to the dominant power structure. This moment in Stewart's narrative, along with his interaction with the police officer, further complicates the image of the fetishized black man from the cover, adding to physical power an understanding of social power and one's lack thereof. Presented with superpowers, Stewart is given the opportunity to function within the dominant structure in more significant ways. As the narrative continues, his awareness of his own marginalized social role will lead him to complicate the existing conventions of the superhero.

One of the most notable tropes seen in the modern superhero is the alter-ego and mask. This convention has dominated superhero narratives since Clark Kent first emerged from a telephone booth as the Man of Steel. Richard Reynolds describes the necessity for the alter-ego through the example of Superman: the effort of keeping an alter-ego a secret forces the superhero to follow “a certain set of restraints which are peculiar to him and him alone” (15). In other words, the maintenance of a secret identity makes life difficult for a person with nigh-infinite superpowers. For African-American superheros, the alter-ego and the mask are further complicated by the traditions that W.E.B. Dubois first described as double-consciousness or twoness. He refers to ways in which society forces an alternative identity onto African-Americans, demanding that they identify themselves the way that dominant culture chooses to identify them. A black hero already wears a mask just by being black, one which aligns with the images the dominant society expects of them. On top of this, a black hero must don another mask, which Dubois referred to as the “veil” (44). This mask belongs to the superhero
identity, one that has power in a structure where the alter-ego would have none. Clearly, the mask becomes a complicated symbol for the African-American superhero.

John Stewart's narrative, however, engages directly with this power of self-definition. When Jordan hands him his costume, Stewart replies “only one thing... I won't wear any mask! This black man lets it all hang out! I've got nothing to hide!” (7) By flatly refusing to wear a mask and making his pride in self readily apparent, Stewart offers a complicated, if liberating view of black identity. By taking control of just how many identities society requires of him, Stewart is making a complicated statement about racial identity in the United States. On one level that Stewart is symbolically casting off his mask of blackness, letting it “all hang out” as a representation of a decision to be one's true self in spite of the masks that dominant cultural forces attempt to apply. On another level, Stewart could be denying the traditions of the former Green Lanterns in a statement of rebellion against dominant norms. However the moment is interpreted, it is clear that Stewart is complicating the notion of the mask as it applies to the African-American superhero.

That complexity of the black Green Lantern's power within society continues to develop when the action of the narrative begins to pick up speed. John Stewart is tasked with protecting Senator Clutcher: a racist politician whose electoral strategy includes engendering fear of a racial uprising. Stewart claims that the senator “figures on climbing to the White House on the backs of my people,” by playing to racist sentiments among the electorate to earn their trust (9). When an oil tanker spins out of control as a crowd gathers to meet the senator, Hal Jordan uses his power ring to create a protective cage around bystanders while his black counterpart generates a fork-like claw to catch the truck as it screeches toward Clutcher (8). Stewart's claw punctures a hole in the tanker, “showering the spectators... including Senator Jeremiah Clutcher!” (8). The black Green Lantern approaches the Senator, whose face is covered with oil, and asks “haven't I seen you picking cotton somewhere?” (9). It is in this moment that Jordan reprimands Stewart for being “stupid and irresponsible,” and explains
you think he's a racist... tough! Nobody appointed you judge! You need a lesson... as of now I'm assigning you to guard Senator Clutcher!” (9). For a brief moment, Stewart demonstrates a strong sense of racial consciousness and resistance to dominant forces, represented by Senator Clutcher; he manages to save the man's life by stopping the tanker, showing a sense of right and wrong that transcends his own awareness of the Senator's blatant bigotry, and chooses only to splash him with oil as a racially-minded jab that remains harmless. Stewart is depicted as angry at Clutcher, but his actions make it clear that the African-American superhero is willing to protect everyone, even a racist white senator, to fulfill his duties as a hero. Even in doing this, Stewart remains distinct from the conventional superhero as described by Coogan and Reynolds; while he protects Clutcher as a pro-social act, he does make a racially conscious point by scaring the senator, and more importantly highlights racial implications by literally painting him black. While Hal Jordan attempt to turn a blind eye to Clutcher's bigotry, John Stewart makes issues of race plainly visible in a non-violent manner, demonstrating the complications that come along with being a superhero who must protect those in danger as well as an oppressed minority.

This subversive action on the part of Stewart complicates his sense of power within the dominant structure by demonstrating his awareness of the inequality present in the system. Clutcher, however, is not the only representation of dominant forces in the narrative, and Hal Jordan quickly complicates the issue further by 'pulling rank' and commanding Stewart to defend the senator who would willingly perpetuate the racial injustice that Stewart tries to resist. In this way, the trajectory of Stewart's power moves from the fetishized black male stereotype, to a racially conscious power that can resist an oppressive system, to a type of power that is kept in check by dominant cultural forces.

In the final moments of the narrative, however, Stewart's power is complicated even further by the events that unfold around an assassination attempt on Senator Clutcher. The state of Stewart's power is being contained and controlled by Hal Jordan, until shots ring out and Jordan commands
Stewart to go after the black gunman. “Not me!,” shouts Stewart, “you go chase him... I'm leaving!” While Jordan goes off muttering “I'll tend to Stewart... shove the power ring down his throat...after I nail the gunman!” (11), Stewart's power is being shown as something much more than hyper-masculine physical prowess. His refusal to chase the assassin was based on skilled detective work that led him to the real crime, representing a practical, intelligent power that Jordan does not seem to possess in this moment. Like the cover page and the confrontation with the cop, O'Neil is depicting Stewart as 'better' in some ways than his white counterpart, only now that superiority comes from intelligence and skill rather than raw physical power and fetishized imagery. The real assassin, a white gunman, is attempting to shoot a white police officer when Stewart pushes the cop out of the line of fire and bends the barrel of the gun (11-12). “Thanks fella! You... saved my hide!,” says the officer to Stewart, reminding the reader of the cop from the beginning of the narrative and demonstrating Stewart's willingness to protect all people in spite of a society that often fails to protect him. While John Stewart's attitude might appear, in Nama's words, “color-blind,” because he is willing to protect a racist figure of power, his constant engagement with questions of racial justice should prevent readers from reaching that definition. Even if he is color-blind in his protection of potential victims of violence, his narrative is still deeply embedded with racial tension.

In the final moments of the story, Jordan appears angry with Stewart for having refused an order. The white Green Lantern calls his partner “a disgrace to your uniform [and] your ring” (12), suggesting that he might try to force Stewart out of the Corps for his indiscretions, stripping him of his powers. Stewart, however, resists Jordan's accusations, and explains to his predecessor that “while pistol-pete was blasting the Senator with blanks, the real killing was supposed to take place in the parking lot! That way, it looks like the blacks are on a rampage... and Clutcher is everybody's hero!” (13) The shooting is revealed to be the work of Clutcher himself, and Stewart is the only one of the two superheroes present who could see the truth. This moment defines Stewart as a more effective hero than
Jordan, who may have been blinded by his bigotry when he went after Clutcher's African-American accomplice.

Stewart's power is complicated throughout the narrative, but as the last panel approaches, it stands as something that has been transformed from stereotypical images of angry, black male power, to complex resistance to imposed identities and dominant power structures. Given the events of the comic, it may appear that John Stewart is a truly progressive African-American superhero— one whose power is not defined by physical strength alone, but through racial consciousness, practical skill, and a strong sense of right and wrong within an oppressive system. While these elements are present in Stewart's characterization, the last moment in his debut serves to contain and undercut the power that Stewart has taken for himself. “I'll admit John... your style turned me off” (13), says Hal Jordan to a relaxing John Stewart. This may seem harmless enough, but Stewart's power is being repackaged by Jordan as “style” instead of substance. To some extent, this nomenclature reduces the power of self-definition, power to do good in an oppressive system, and even physical power present in Stewart to something much more suited to the dominant power structure. To give Stewart too much 'power' is to allow him means of addressing the problems he sees in society. By calling it 'style,' Jordan serves the hegemonic function of redefining and containing that which might give Stewart the power to change dominant ideologies.

Drawing a discreet conclusion from the complicated notions of power, resistance, and containment present in *Green Lantern Co-Starring Green Arrow Vol. 12 No. 87* is a fool's errand. Instead of trying to label Stewart as an overall positive or negative character in terms of racial progress, one should look at his debut issue and attempt to take in all of the complexities and complications that inevitably surround a racially conscious African-American superhero. Nama says himself, “if ever there was an origin narrative that was overdetermined by race, this is truly the one” (19). From the cover to the last panel, John Stewart's story is one inextricably bound to questions of race, justice, equality, and
power, but rather than claim that he marks a step forward or backward for progress, it is more important to note the incredibly racially conscious moments of resistance and containment that all but make up his entire debut narrative.

**Epilogue: Still Subordinate to Superman**

One might expect to see that African-American superheroes after John Stewart would continue to build on the notions of resistance presented in DC's first major black superhero and advance the cause of racial equality within the superhero comic genre. While black superheroes certainly developed beyond their one-dimensional token roles in early comics, each successive narrative remains packed with complex points of interaction. In some cases, these newer heroes fail to represent a sense of racial justice, even after John Stewart paved the way with his ethical, intelligent, and racially conscious use of power. Created by Tony Isabella in 1977, Black Lightning, also known as Jefferson Pierce, is a perfect example of the lack of progress represented by some characters years after the black Green Lantern.

Unlike his predecessor, who exhibits significant resistance to dominant cultural forces, Pierce is defined by the predominantly African-American neighborhood he lives in and protects, as well as by the stereotypically influenced Black Lightning persona that he adopts to fight crime in that area. Both of these elements show a degree of acceptance of racial inequality as a normative function for an African-American superhero- an idea highly opposed by John Stewart's combative attitude toward racism. The fact that Jefferson Pierce is relegated to protecting only Metropolis' Suicide Slum, as well as the ways he takes advantage of racial stereotypes, point to a character that is much more willing to operate within an oppressive social system.

Black Lightning's first major flaw as a racially progressive character is his willingness to accept the position in the Suicide Slums that he is relegated to by dominant cultural forces. When
Pierce comes face-to-face with Superman, the black superhero explains that society needs him to protect the Suicide Slum, claiming that “they see you coming and they just crawl right back into the gutters until you pass. It takes someone like me to fight them; someone who fights them where they're strongest. In the gutters” (No. 5 12). Rather than take a resistant stance and encourage Superman to break with the dominant ideology and work with him to protect the Suicide Slum, he accepts the premise that only a black hero could protect the inner city, adopting a position that does not attempt to upset established norms. The situation created is one in which Black Lightning is not powerless, but one where his powers are only as effective as dominant cultural ideologies will allow them to be.

Unlike John Stewart, who engages in resisting Hal Jordan's rules as a way of defining his own power and identity, Pierce accepts his position within the dominant power structure. Superman, representing dominant ideologies in 1977, allows Black Lightning to have and use power within Metropolis. Pierce's self-definition is negated, and he takes on the role that society relegates to him.

This brings into question the amount of self-determination that Pierce exhibits in creating his own identity. One aspect of John Stewart's power came from his power of self-definition: he took control of his identity and refused to wear the Green Lantern mask. In contrast, Jefferson Pierce not only chooses to wear a mask, but goes one step further by crafting a superhero identity that is heavily defined by stereotypical black imagery. In this way, Pierce's narrative engages with stereotypes, like John Stewart's, but never depicts the hero as challenging stereotypes, only taking advantage of the alternative identity that they provide. Peter Coogan emphasizes the role of the costume in helping traditional superheroes (as opposed to the pulp heroes that came before them) as a way to “emblematize the character's identity” (79); the superhero's costume acts as an at-a-glance indicator of exactly who that hero is and what he does. The red and the blue in Clark Kent's spandex mark him as representation of the American dream, just as Batman's cowl suggests the value of darkness and fear in his character's origin and methodology. For Black Lightning, a mask with a built in afro symbolizes his
acceptance of the black stereotypes and that he chooses to embrace rather than challenge.

Throughout his narrative, John Stewart moves away from stereotypical imagery, from the fetishized black male on the cover to a complicated racially conscious figure. Black Lightning actually moves toward those racial stereotypes, taking them on as a mantle instead of attempting to prove them wrong. This act of utilizing his own double-consciousness, combined with his relegation to the Suicide Slum, demonstrate a step backwards from the progress made by John Stewart in 1972. This is not to say that progress has not been made on the whole for African-American characters, but instead serves to demonstrate that progress often comes along in between moments of regression. By being both the defender and victim of an unjust society, each African-American superhero is inevitably complex, and while some characters will offer moments of strong resistance to dominant cultural forces, others, sometimes years later, will show an acceptance of those same forces. The struggle for equality in the United States has been long and hard-fought, and that same struggle continues in the pages of superhero comic books. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described in his famous letter from Birmingham Jail, “time itself is neutral,” meaning that “[progress] comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes and ally of the forces of social stagnation” (83). To assume that time will inevitably bring progress is to do a grave disservice to the fight for social equality; it is crucial to understand this neutrality of time, and to recognize that any form of popular culture is vulnerable to a backward movement away from progress. Within the DC Comics' universe, progress has been made, but not without significant setbacks. Black superheroes have come to play an important role, but even as their powers become 'super,' so have the powers inside and outside their texts that strive to contain them.
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