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Black to the Future: A Librarian's Guide to Building an Afrofuturist Comics and Graphic Novels Collection

Kai Alexis Smith and Aisha Conner-Gaten

Introduction

"... we need to be able to unlock the hero within us."
*Naseed Gifted, creator and writer for P.B. Soldier*¹

Pop culture representations from *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *The Terminator* seem to communicate the same bleak message: Black people do not exist in the fu-

¹ Erika Hardison, "Diversity in Comics: Defining Afrofuturism, Afro-Blackness and the Black Fantastic," *Huffington Post*, last modified December 6, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/erika-hardison/diversity-in-comics-defining-afrofuturism-afro-blackness-and-the-black-fantastic_b_9074178.html.

ture.² Even those mainstream speculative fiction and science fiction works that critique racism and oppression (e.g. H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*) reproduce similarly problematic, Western imperialist themes. These science fiction classics have othered indigenous and alien peoples while reinforcing the colonial gaze.³ In response to their collective absence in these works, Black pop culture creators and fans have looked to future possibilities while drawing connections to Black bodies, minds, and spirits of the present and past. Afrofuturism, a term coined by culture critic Mark Dery in the 1990s,⁴ describes speculative fiction that addresses African American themes while integrating technological imagery and future-making. It examines current issues plaguing Black people and the oppressive and hostile pasts they survived, and produces possible "counter-futures" using technology and cultural practices from the African diaspora.⁵

As a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism is not limited by the constraints of the complex histories of the West.⁶ It builds upon the idea of imagination as resistance: Blackness being centered and integrated into technoculture while challenging pop culture's general ignorance of Black narratives.⁷ It occurs at the intersection of gender, race, economic disparity, society, science, technology, and culture. Building upon "encouraging experimentation, reimag[ing] identities and activat[ing] liberation,"⁸ Afrofuturism uses different mediums to "dis-

- 2 Ytasha L. Womack, "Evolution of a Space Cadet," in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013), 5–24. Womack posits her experiences viewing pop culture from the 1950s to Black male leads in the 1990s. The very few featured characters were either stereotypical in support of a white savior or instantly killed and tortured to move along the plot.
- 3 Joshua Yu Burnett, "The Great Change and the Great Book: Nnedi Okorafor's Postcolonial, Post-apocalyptic Africa And the Promise of Black Speculative Fiction," *Research In African Literatures* 46, no. 4 (2015): 134–35.
- 4 Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 180.
- 5 Morris, Susana M, "Black Girls Are from the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia E. Butler's Fledgling," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 3–4 (2012), 153.
- 6 Dery, 179–222.
- 7 Womack, "Evolution of a Space Cadet," 24.
- 8 Ingrid La Fleur, "Visual Aesthetics of Afrofuturism," filmed September 25, 2011 at TEDxFortGreeneSalon, Brooklyn, New York, video, 15:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7bCaSzk9Zc>.

rupt narratives of disability and as technologies in themselves, to counter narratives such as the extension of the white body into explosive images of androids and cyborgs to enhance its performance."⁹ Within the formation of these Black identities lies astro-blackness, the liberatory release and building of the Black consciousness from colonial, Eurocentric rule with an awareness of the future's endless possibilities for Black people.¹⁰

In the last fifty years, culture creators like Sun Ra, George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic, Jimi Hendrix, Afrika Bambaataa, Octavia Butler, and some even argue W.E.B. DuBois, have laid the foundation for artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat, Rivers Solomon, Tananarive Due, Outkast, and Janelle Monáe as prominent and visible promoters of Afrofuturism in mainstream media.

Given the significant lack of Black female creators in comics as well as science fiction, Octavia Butler occupies a necessary and looming shadow in the history of Afrofuturism. While the graphic novel adaptation of her Afrofuturist novel *Kindred* was published in 2017,¹¹ Butler's contributions to Afrofuturism predate the term itself. As an author, Butler "explore[d] more fantastic issues of difference, such as interplanetary travel and extraterrestrial beings in her earlier Xenogenesis trilogy and *Bloodchild and Other Short Stories*, her *Parables* eschews these fantastic future worlds in order to take up urgent concerns of 'otherness' on the more immediate horizon."¹² Moreover, Butler uses vehicles seen in many Afrofuturist works to address issues of religion, race, gender, politics, and class while centering Black characters, in particular Black women, in dynamic futures. Her unique ability to fuse mysticism as a technology of Black people avoids the ste-

- 9 Grace Gipson, "The Future Is Black and Female: Afrofuturism and Comic Books," *Black Perspectives* (blog), October 14, 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/the-future-is-black-and-female-afrofuturism-and-comic-books/>.
- 10 "Interview with Afrofuturism 2.0's Charles Jones," *Midwest Black Speculative Fiction Alliance*, April 13, 2016, <https://midwestbsfa.com/2016/04/13/interview-with-afrofuturism-2-0s-charles-jones/>. In this interview, Dr. Charles E. Jones expands upon the definition of astro-blackness including the creation of the black identity framework within a larger modern, global technoculture.
- 11 Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, ad. Damian Duffy, illus. John Jennings (New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2017).
- 12 Michael Brandon McCormack, "'Your God Is a Racist, Sexist, Homophobic, and a Misogynist ... Our God Is Change': Ishmael Reed, Octavia Butler and Afrofuturist Critiques of (Black) American Religion," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 14, no. 1, (2016): 17.

reotypical voodoo women, jungle doctors, mammies, and magical negroes seen in Black comics and graphic novels in the last century. Butler's body of work lays the foundation for what would become Afrofuturism, and with the addition of the *Kindred* graphic novel, what Afrofuturist comics and graphic novels can discuss as a critical work.

Afrofuturism and critical librarianship complement one another, as activist, author, and librarian Elaine Harger stated: "librarians that practice critical librarianship strive to communicate the ways in which libraries and librarians consciously and unconsciously support systems of oppression. Critical librarianship seeks to be transformative, empowering, and a direct challenge to power and privilege."¹³ The inclusion of Afrofuturist titles or the creation of an Afrofuturism collection is only the beginning of transformative collection development work. The presence of such materials does not ensure a positive impact on popular culture or, in itself, structurally alter the knowledge framework within which they reside.¹⁴ In addition to building and maintaining these works, information workers must develop strategies for engagement that display the importance of a shared community culture while establishing community relationships with Black people as long-term stakeholders in the collection. Too often, Black users of memory and literary collections are viewed as niche or temporary visitors with selective marketing and outreach only when "we deem their participation to be culturally congruent."¹⁵ Building and maintaining an Afrofuturist comics and graphic novels collection, coupled with an active engagement with the knowledge systems from which these titles are produced, can subvert the systems of oppression libraries are built upon.¹⁶

13 Mark Hudson, "Progressive Librarians Guild Midwinter Meeting" (Meeting minutes from the ALA Midwinter Meeting, Dallas, TX, January 21, 2012).

14 David James Hudson, "On 'Diversity' as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 11–3, <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i1.6>.

15 Porchia Moore, "The Danger of the 'D' Word: Museums and Diversity," *The Inclusionum* (blog), January 20, 2014, <https://inclusionum.com/2014/01/20/the-danger-of-the-d-word-museums-and-diversity/>.

16 Nina de Jesus, "Locating the Library in Institutional Oppression," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (2014), <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/locating-the-library-in-institutional-oppression/>.

Literature Review

Comics are not created in a vacuum. Through this medium, creators offer reflections of their respective cultures. For this chapter, the focus will be on American, Western culture in the United States, both mainstream and non-mainstream superhero comics and the growth of Afrofuturism in the larger medium of comic books and graphic novels.

Comics scholars Sheena C. Howard and Ronald J. Jackson II note, "[Underneath the] seemingly innocent veneer of comics pedagogy [is] [W]hite patriarchal universalism. In other words, oftentimes comics tell a story about White heroes and minority villains, White victors and minority losers, White protagonists and a minority sidekick. This sets up a dialectic that, although is quite public, leaves a concealed residue of minority inferiority."¹⁷ This vexing relationship doesn't end with minority men of color. Women superheroines are also often seen through the white male gaze and relegated to sexy or mystical stereotypes.

With the exception of some recent titles, there are few comics and characters developed to address or subvert the superhero genre's issues related to gender, inclusion, and the diversity gap. Scholars study more recent works and use them as examples to support cultural and social research, and to foster discussion in and out of the classroom.¹⁸ Afrofuturist comics and graphic novels that grapple with current transgressions and social inequalities are equally important as works that stereotype and use Black bodies and culture as comic relief. Collectively, these works present how the medium can be used negatively, through minstrelsy and hypersexualized stereotypes, but can later lay the groundwork to center Black futures through Afrofuturism. Titles mentioned in this chapter are essential to building an Afrofuturist collection and sections in this literature review are separated thematically.

17 Sheena C. Howard and Ronald J. Jackson II, "Introduction," in *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation*, eds. Sheena C. Howard and Ronald J. Jackson II (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 2.

18 Ellen Kirkpatrick and Suzanne Scott, "Representation and Diversity in Comics Studies," *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 1 (2015): 120–24; Frances Gateward and John Jennings, eds., *The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Howard and Jackson II, *Black Comics*.

Minstrelsy and Sidekicks

As Chinua Achebe said, "The whole idea of a stereotype is to simplify."¹⁹ Early comic books characters in the 1920s through the 1940s featured minstrel characters with racist features, mannerisms, and dialects. Minstrelsy in the U.S. dates back to the 1800s with white men dressed in blackface and performing exaggerated stereotypes of Black people for comedy while promoting the tenets of white supremacy (e.g. *Birth of a Nation*).²⁰ Between the 1800s and 1840s, minstrel shows became a staple in early American mass culture.²¹ The emergence of the modern comic was no exception to these negative caricatures. White illustrator Richard F. Outcault produced the first credited Black character *The Yellow Kid* in 1897.²² Like its predecessors in vaudeville and other media, *The Yellow Kid* presents Black characters as purely stereotypical comic relief. By the 1920s, the modern comic *Sunny Boy Sam*²³ in the *Pittsburgh Courier* continued Black stereotypes of exaggerated features like big lips and characters speaking in African American English or Ebonics. There was little change in the comics of 1930s and 1940s, with Black characters supporting the hubris of white characters or as comic relief. This is evident in the character Lothar, Prince of Seven Sons in *Mandrake the*

19 Jason Zasky, "Chinua Achebe: The *Failure* Interview: On 'Home and Exile' and 'Things Fall Apart,'" *Failure*, April 7, 2001, <http://failuremag.com/article/chinua-achebe>.

20 According to Dictionary.com, white supremacy is the "belief that white people are superior to those of all other races, especially the Black race, and should therefore dominate society."

21 William J. Mahar, "Black English in Early Blackface Minstrelsy: A New Interpretation of the Sources of Minstrel Show Dialect," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1985): 260.

22 Richard F. Outcault wrote *The Yellow Kid* which was published by *New York World* and later the *New York Journal* between 1895 and 1898. See: "The Yellow Kid," Ohio State University Libraries, accessed December 1, 2018, https://cartoons.osu.edu/digital_albums/yellowkid/.

23 *Sunny Boy Sam* ran in the *Pittsburgh Courier* from 1929 to 1976 and was drawn by Wilbert L. Holloway through 1969. See: Tim Jackson, *Pioneering Cartoonists of Color* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 29.

*Magician*²⁴ (who was physically strong, but not very smart), and in the minstrel archetype of the sidekick character of Ebony White in Will Eisner's *The Spirit*.²⁵

Even with the inclusion of additional Black characters in comics and graphic novels, the development and individual agency of heroes and sidekicks in mainstream superhero comics remained stagnant well into the 21st century. The rise of Black superhero characters like Black Condor, Shadowhawk, Black Mask, Freedom Beast and Black Goliath offered little consolation as all were killed in service of their white counterparts. Even the most hypermasculine Black heroes are rendered powerless in white, Western society's comics. War Machine, Captain America's sidekick and U.S. government agent, is a bonafide superhero, but is regulated to "reigning in" Black Panther's ultra-Black social and political agendas. For War Machine, any acts done as a superhero must be in support of the "American Way," even when in direct opposition to other Black people.²⁶

Blaxploitation

Capitalizing on the success of 1970s blaxploitation films²⁷ like *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, *Dolemite*, and *Shaft*, Marvel Comics created Luke Cage and Blade while DC Comics created Black Lightning. Luke Cage and Black Lightning embodied blaxploitation stereotypes such as the defiance of authority, a comic use of street slang, low V-neck shirts, afro wigs, chains, and animal-like sex appeal. (It is no coincidence these two comic series had so much in common. Tony Isabella, a white comics writer, was a contributing creator to Luke Cage's series and later

24 This syndicated newspaper comic strip ran from 1934 to 2013 and was distributed by Kings Comics Syndicated. See: "Mandrake the Magician," King Features Syndicate, accessed December 1, 2018, <http://kingfeatures.com/comics/comics-a-z/?id=Mandrake>.

25 Will Eisner's *The Spirit* was published by Eisner & Iger, Kitchen Sink Press, DC Comics, IDW Publishing and Dynamite Entertainment from 1940 to 2017. See: "The Spirit," WillEisner.com, accessed December 1, 2018, <http://www.willeisner.com/spirit/index.html>.

26 Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl, *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 179–80.

27 Blaxploitation was a cinematic movement where films were created for Black audiences featuring Black actors and themes. They were often criticized for their anti-establishment plots, stereotypical characters, and the glorification of violence.

recruited by DC Comics where he created Black Lightning, the company's first Black superhero.) The two characters are often studied for being the first two Black superheroes at DC and Marvel to have their own series, for their story lines and development out of their early stereotypes, and their recent screen interpretations on Netflix for *Luke Cage* and the CW Network for *Black Lightning*.²⁸

The backstories for Black superheroes often allude to the importance of maintaining normative whiteness and the stereotype of the "exceptional Negro." Many heroes only receive their powers through environmental disaster, state-sanctioned violence, and government experiments including Luke Cage, Isaiah Bradley (later known as Captain America), and Thunderbolt. Following their forced conversion to a superhero, some Black comic book characters perpetuate stereotypes specific to urban Black America: men are patriarchal, hyper-masculine, and continuously maintain "cool pose," a coping mechanism for the invisibility, frustration, discrimination, inequities faced by Black men.²⁹

Until the popularity of the Black Panther film in 2018, Blade was the most popular Black character in the Marvel universe, with multiple TV series and movies. Blade, like Luke Cage and Black Lightning, was created with the same stereotypes of the time. Blade was born in and grew up in a brothel, like the title character in *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*. Even Black representations across the diaspora were given stereotypical treatment. Black Panther was the first Black superhero to appear in an American comic in 1966 with his own series emerging in the late 1970s. Also created by white illustrators, Black Panther's foundation came from early comic stereotypes of Africans, rooted in slavery and the animal-

28 For examinations of Luke Cage and Black Lightning's early costuming, see Blair Davis, "Bare Chests, Silver Tiaras, and Removable Afros: The Visual Design of Black Comic Book Superheroes," in Gateward and Jennings' *The Blacker the Ink*, 193–212; for more on masculinities, stereotypes, and the parallels of blaxploitation with Black heroes, see Rob Lendrum, "The Super Black Macho, One Baaad Mutha: Black Superhero Masculinity in 1970s Mainstream Comic Books," *Extrapolation* 46, no. 3 (2005): 360–72; for more on Luke Cage's origin story and imprisonment, see Tracy L. Bealer, "'The Man Called Lucas': Luke Cage, Mass Incarceration, and the Stigma of Black Criminality," *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society* 1, no. 2 (2017): 165–85.

29 Jeffrey A. Brown, "Comic Book Masculinity and the New Black Superhero," *African American Review* 33, no. 1 (1999): 29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2901299>.

istic inferiority of Black people.³⁰ It would only be with Christopher Priest, the second Black Panther writer and first Black comic writer and editor at Marvel, that the Black Panther character begins to subvert that white supremacist history. Priest empowers the character T'Challa to embrace African culture and the diaspora, modeling Afrofuturism in comic form. This modern Black Panther questions how race and power play roles in heroic struggle and pushes against the Western expansion into Wakanda and the racist, presumed ideas of his African personhood.³¹

Black Women and Representation

Black women have always had two oppressors to battle: white supremacy and patriarchy. Lucas do Carmo Dalbeto and Ana Paula Oliveira summarize Lícia Maria de Lima Barbosa's conclusion "... a black woman has never played the role of the oppressor. As a result, in this social structure, the white man oppresses the white woman, the black man and the black woman. Black men and women are oppressed by white men and women; as a consequence, Black women are also oppressed by Black men."³² So it is no surprise that the representation of Black women in comics and graphic novels is significantly less than their white counterparts and Black men.

The earliest examples of Black women in comics were stereotypical representations of the mammy, hypersexualized seductresses, magical mystics, exoticized beauties, strong and angry Black women, or animal-like figures. Tia C.M. Tyree writes, "As supporting characters, [black women] helped to set up jokes, tell the stories for others, but seldom was the narrative about them. Considering only

30 Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 131–32.

31 Julian C. Chambliss, "An Archetype or a Token? The Challenge of the Black Panther," in *Marvel Comics into Film: Essays on Adaptations Since the 1940s*, eds. Matthew J. McEniry, Robert Moses Peaslee, and Robert G. Weiner (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016), 194–95.

32 Lucia Maria de Lima Barbosa, "Feminismo Negro: Notas Sobre O Debate Norteamericano E Brasileiro" (presentation, Seminário Fazendo Gênero, Florianópolis, SC, Brazil, August 23–26, 2010), cited in Lucas do Carmo Dalbeto and Ana Paula Oliveira, "Oh My Goddess: Anthropological Thoughts on the Representation of Marvel's Storm and the Legacy of Black Women in Comics," *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 5, no. 1 (2015), 1, <http://doi.org/10.5334/cg.bd>.

3 percent of the comic strips featured a Black female character by herself, it makes one ponder if cartoonists believe the Black female character is worthy.³³ It wasn't until the late 1930s in the *Pittsburgh Courier* that the first Black cartoonist and writer Jackie Ormes wrote the first comic strip centering a Black woman character, Torchy, in *Dixie to Harlem*. Torchy was written during Jim and Jane Crow and was the first to present a Black, independent, ambitious woman dating and participating in normative relationships. Torchy set up the scene for *Friday Foster* to follow in the 1970s. While it only ran for four years, *Friday Foster* was the first comic strip to feature a Black female lead character in the mainstream syndicated press. Later it would be adapted into a film.³⁴ Torchy also paved the way for blaxploitation representations like *Foxy Brown* and ultimately in the following decades a number of Black superheroines including Misty Knight,³⁵ Monica Rambeau,³⁶ Vixen,³⁷ Shuri,³⁸ Martha Washington,³⁹ Bumble Bee,⁴⁰ and Storm.⁴¹

33 Tia C.M. Tyree, "Contemporary Representations of Black Females in Newspaper Comic Strips," in Howard and Jackson II, *Black Comics*, 59.

34 "Friday Foster," Museum of Uncut Funk, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://museumofuncutfunk.com/2009/04/19/friday-foster/>.

35 Misty Knight is a Marvel Comics character with a bionic prosthetic arm. She is a former NYPD police officer turned private investigator. Appearances in issues of *Luke Cage: Hero for Hire*. See: http://hero.wikia.com/wiki/Misty_Knight.

36 Lieutenant Monica Rambeau also known as Spectrum, gained her powers when exposed to extra dimensional energies that allow her to manipulate the energies of the electromagnetic spectrum. She served as an Avenger and eventually a team leader. See: <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/spectrum/4005-11337/>.

37 Vixen is an African superheroine that can change into any animal with the use of a magical totem. She was one of the members of the Justice League and Suicide Squad. See: <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/vixen/4005-2551/>.

38 Shuri is the most recent Queen of Wakanda and Black Panther. See: <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/shuri/4005-58997/>.

39 Martha Washington is a computer hacker superheroine in a corrupt future. See: <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/martha-washington/4005-44140/>.

40 Bumble Bee fights with Teen Titans and is affiliated with Doom Patrol and S.T.A.R. Labs. Her powers come from a scientific super suit. See: <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/bumblebee/4005-3576/>.

41 Storm is one of the most powerful mutants on Earth. Her abilities include manipulating the weather and she can control natural forces on Earth and in extraterrestrial ecosystems. See: <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/storm/4005-1444/>.

It is no coincidence that Storm, the first Black superheroine, debuted in 1975 during the women's liberation movement.⁴² With this movement came underground feminist newspapers with comics created by and featuring women, though primarily white women. The divide between white feminists and women of color was reflected in characters, or the very visible lack thereof. Even Storm's emergence relied on two common stereotypes: African mysticism and the angry Black woman. Storm's power lies in controlling the weather and often is connected to her emotions. Despite leading the X-Men, in past comics, she has been hypersexualized and transitioned into "civilization" through her friendship with Jean Grey. In other issues, Storm manages to counter some stereotypes by leading a team of all white men, but never for long. Dalbeto and Oliveira argue that Storm "has become an important representative in women's emancipation-white or Black. She occasionally has been in sexual relationships, but her core traits are not the expected docility and devotion."⁴³ According to Dalbeto and Oliveira, the character Storm is also described as having feminist ideals including "equality between the sexes, women's independence and a multidimensional approach to female characters."⁴⁴ Storm carved out a space for Black women characters in comics and graphic novels that only grows wider with Afrofuturist characters like Boza from *Concrete Park*, the Dora Milaje of *Black Panther*, Lunella Lafayette from *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, and Amba, Lilly, Sarah and Abigail of *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts*.

Vixen is one of DC's first Black superheroines, debuting in 1981. Rooted in African mysticism and exoticism, Vixen can transform into animals with a totem. The same can be said for Marvel's Shuri, who would come to be known as Black Panther.⁴⁵ However, they are part of the pendulum moving in the right direction for representation of Black superheroines. Jeffrey A. Brown notes that Shuri and Vixen engage with all manner of heroics from saving African nations to combating their own emotional turmoil.⁴⁶ They face difficulties that prove their

42 Storm's first appearance was in *Giant Size X-Men* No. 1.

43 Dalbeto and Oliveira, "Oh My Goddess," 4.

44 Dalbeto and Oliveira, 5.

45 Shuri is the younger sister of T'Challa the Black Panther. She takes over as Black Panther after T'Challa is put in a coma after battle in *Black Panther* vol. 5, #1-2, 2009.

46 Jeffrey A. Brown, *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 125-27.

abilities far beyond their stereotypically sexy outfits and provide a new version of the Black woman in pop culture.

Misty Knight and Monica Rambeau are two additional prominent African American superheroines. Knight and Rambeau both were drawn with blaxploitation actresses in mind, most likely Pam Grier.⁴⁷ While the characters are jezebel-esque, they paved the way for character diversity like the high tech harness-wielding Skyrocket; Silhouette, a paraplegic mutant; the twin sister crime fighters known as Ladyhawk; super genius Lunella Lafayette; and computer hacker Martha Washington from the comic *Give Me Liberty*. Comic scholar Adilifu Nama explains while Washington did not gain the acclaim Storm and other more well-known Black superheroines did, and despite the character's cynicism and "harsh visual scheme," Martha Washington "... embodied a truly original and reconfigured image of a Black American patriotism for the twenty first century."⁴⁸ While there has been a bit of progress in the character development of Black superheroines, they are still portrayed as pinup models and hypersexualized in most comic series.

Black + Queer

Queer representation for people of color in mainstream superhero comics has grown in the past thirty years. However, while there are more comics centering LGBTQIA+ experiences, many of those characters are white. There are even fewer comics that are written by and have Black queer people as lead characters, and queer women superheroines have even less representation than Black women in comics altogether. This gap extends to Afrofuturist comics. The sexuality of the most well-known Black superheroine, Storm, is discussed in classrooms and queer spaces.⁴⁹ Thunder from *Black Lightning* may very well be the first openly Black

47 Eric Nolen-Weathington and George Khoury, *Modern Masters Volume 18: John Romita Jr.* (Raleigh: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2008), 126.

48 Adilifu Nama, *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 105.

49 Anthony Michael D'Agostino, "Flesh-to-Flesh Contact': Marvel Comics' Rogue and the Queer Feminist Imagination," *American Literature* 90, no. 2 (2018): 251–81; Alyssa Moore, "Storm(ing) the Gates of Queer Representation: Reading Between The Panels" (Presentation, Queering Pop Culture: How Pop Culture has Influenced and been Influenced by Queer Communities, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, February 7, 2015).

lesbian character.⁵⁰ Mainstream queer writers like Gabby Riviera and Roxane Gay have also entered the comics world to expand the stories for queer characters like America Chavez of *America* and Nakia and Okoye of *Black Panther: World of Wakanda*. Additional creators who produce comics about Black queer characters include Tee Franklin and Jenn St-Onge (creators of *Bingo Love*), Melanie Gillman (*As the Crow Flies*), Michael Dante DiMartino and Irene Koh (*The Legend of Korra: Turf Wars*), Mars (creator of the webcomic *Long Exposure*), and Malik Shabazz (editor of the Afrofuturist cyberpunk anthology *Cyber/Punk/Funk*), to name a few.

As a reflection of Western culture and a democratic but unequal society, comics and graphic novels have a contentious history with African American and Black characters of the diaspora. While never completely absent from the medium, depictions of Black characters in comics and graphic novels present harmful stereotypes of big-lipped, unintelligent and easily manipulated sidekicks who only exist to support white saviors and white main characters. With the explosion of blaxploitation and the impact of the Civil Rights Movement, comics and graphic novels created space for more radical portrayals of Blackness with additional agency, but included some updated versions of problematic stereotypes of cool Black men jive talking and dealing with destructive pasts. The presence of women and queer people of color were equally scarce and difficult. Black women were sexed-up and animalistic but accounted for, while queer characters are primarily mentioned in hushed tones with the exception of a few scattered issues. While previous comics and graphic novels offer up controversial models of Black characters, the commanding presence of some characters, incorporation of technology, and ability to address issues affecting Black communities draw a direct line to Afrofuturism and its intent to empower, imagine and liberate.

Collection Development

Acquisitions

For academic institutions, collecting Afrofuturist comics and graphic novels for circulation requires a critical look at the existing and future curriculum as the

50 Briana Lawrence, "I Am Already Here: Anissa Pierce and Black Lightning's Queer Representation," *Black Girl Nerds*, January 25, 2018, <https://blackgirlnerds.com/anissa-pierce-queer-representation/>.

collection will need to support course learning outcomes and academic engagement. Public institutions may have more flexibility since they need only consult the mission of the library and programs offered in support of literacy to draft the collection's scope. Afrofuturism is interdisciplinary in nature and can be used in both the humanities and sciences. In addition to the core features of Afrofuturism mentioned previously, when building an Afrofuturism collection, librarians should determine additional selection limiters such as collaborative or single author works, and how the nationality, gender, race, and ethnicity of the creator impacts the scope of the collection.

Most difficult of all may be determining whether a particular title or character can even be considered Afrofuturist. For example, *The Boondocks* comments on everyday realities of many Black people in the United States as well as concepts of gentrification, respectability politics, aging, and family in a white, Western culture. This is a perfect candidate for any comics or graphic novel collection, but it does not explicitly position and re-imagine Black futures or employ technology as a resource for Black liberation. Very often, it is the combination of features that make a work Afrofuturist in nature. Even more nebulous are those superhero comics and graphic novels that center Black characters and only have some elements of Afrofuturism but not others. For example, many Afrofuturist collections include Icon, an alien who crash-landed in the Antebellum South and overtakes the body of a Black slave to later become a hero. However, Icon does not explicitly fight for Black liberation, does not envision any dynamic Black future for him or others, and only begins his superhero journey when convinced by his Black, female sidekick, Rocket.⁵¹ Icon is often considered Afrofuturist at its core, but many have critiqued its intent and message. The knowledge needed to select Afrofuturist works can be challenging, even for those well versed in comics history. Consider these questions when selecting a title for an Afrofuturist collection:

- Does this title feature characters that are Black, African American, or from the African diaspora? Are these characters central to the story arc? Do they have explicit agency, function, and development?
- Does this title address issues surrounding Black pride, Black empowerment, or imagining Black futures?

51 Nama, *Super Black*, 96–98.

- Do the characters use or integrate technology as a tool or resource for Black liberation?
- Does this title address issues of race, gender, sexuality, economic inequality, or discrimination?
- Does this title relay a narrative about Black people and blackness in our collective future?

As a part of a larger academic collection, Afrofuturist comics and graphic novels collection development policy should provide pathways for both acquisitions and donations from invested users and local organizations and artists. In terms of practical workflows, librarians can work with the acquisitions or collection management departments to create a line of purchasing with vendors, major distributors like Diamond Books, independent artists and online stores like Indyplanet, or local comic shops.⁵² While comic specialty stores can provide reader's advisory and intimate subject expertise about the larger medium, considering the visibility of Afrofuturist comics as a whole, a critical eye must be kept on suggested purchases. Comic book store staff may have skewed views on specific types of comics, particularly if they are collectors themselves.⁵³ If the comic store staff or owner is unfamiliar with Afrofuturism as a concept, focus conversations on themes and character types as a more effective selector tool. Online sources are also a good way to build a collection while staying on top of new titles and news in the industry. Selectors can subscribe to *Black Girl Nerds*⁵⁴ and Black Nerd Problems,⁵⁵ two sites that review and discuss Afrofuturist comics and graphic novels.

52 Keith R. A. Decandido, "Picture This: Graphic Novels in Libraries," *Library Journal* 115, no. 5 (1990), 52.

53 Kristin Fletcher-Spear and Merideth Jenson-Benjamin, "Purchasing Options," in *Library Collections for Teens: Manga and Graphic Novels* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2011), 101.

54 See: <https://blackgirlnerds.com/>.

55 See: <http://blacknerdproblems.com/>.

Financial Support

With the advent of popular culture as scholarship and the increased adoption of comic books and graphic novels in coursework, comics collections have become normalized in many libraries.⁵⁶ Many institutions collect comics with their general library funds, especially selectors working with interdisciplinary topics like sociology, women's and gender studies, English, and art. Institutions with robust donor relationships and endowments may create comics collections curated and held apart from the general collection. Examples of this include the Underground Comix Collection⁵⁷ at Iowa State, and the Dark Horse Collection⁵⁸ at Portland State University which includes comic books, trades, and ephemera like t-shirts directly from the publisher. In addition to institutional support, avenues like the American Library Association's Games & Gaming Roundtable and the Graphic Novels & Comics Member Initiative Group offer annual grants in the areas of graphic novel growth and innovation.⁵⁹

Characters, Artists, and Publishers

As a collector's medium with a supportive and industrious fandom, comics and graphic novels have many publicly available and collaborative databases providing cover imagery, synopses, and basic issue information about characters. Afrofuturist comics and graphic novels occupy a small percentage of these resources but can be explored using the character name or creator names including illustrators, pencilers, and writers. Both DC and Marvel have wiki-based resources that can be searched for more mainstream Afrofuturist heroes like Black Panther, Black Lightning, and Storm.⁶⁰ To navigate World of Black Heroes, Queer Cartoonists Database, and Cartoonists of Color Database, collectors should develop a list of

56 For a survey of public libraries collecting graphic novels, see: Edward Schneider, "A Survey of Graphic Novel Collection and Use in American Public Libraries," *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* 9, no. 3 (2014), 68–79.

57 See "Underground Comix Collection Finding Aid," <http://findingaids.lib.iastate.edu/spcl/manuscripts/MS636.html>.

58 See: <https://library.pdx.edu/research/dark-horse-comics/>.

59 See: <http://www.ala.org/rt/gamert/will-eisner-graphic-novel-grants-libraries>.

60 See: http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/DC_Comics_Database and http://marvel.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page.

Afrofuturist character names or have some familiarity with cartoonists known for creating work with Afrofuturist themes. Founded online in 2010 by Ryan Fraser, World of Black Heroes provides elementary information about Black heroes and villains in comics and graphic novels. As a user-driven platform, lists of characters are not extensive, but the site is inclusive of African American characters as well as those of sub-Saharan African descent, indigenous Australian populations, and "dark-skinned" world populations.⁶¹ While cartoonists do not necessarily specialize by genre, a search in the Queer Cartoonists Database and Cartoonists of Color Database can be used to learn more about new queer Afrofuturist cartoonists of color mentioned elsewhere by refining a search by ethnicity/nationality and gender.⁶²

When seeking Afrofuturist publishers, Milestone Media (and its legacy imprint Milestone Comics) is one of few Black-owned companies with established Afrofuturist characters and series. While there have been few comics since the 2000s, creators Denys Cowan, Derek T. Dingle, and Reginald Hudlin decided to revitalize the company with additional adaptations of past characters, like Static Shock, as well as an expansion into toys and media.⁶³ Smaller companies like PBS Media and director Naseed Gifted produce Afrofuturist works including *P.B. Soldier*, a sci-fi series in a 13 "episode" arc.⁶⁴ Other companies with Afrofuturist works include Top Cow Studios and the *Genius* comics, Image Comic's *Tribe* series, Onli Studios and Dark Horse's *Give Me Liberty*, and *Concrete Park* series. There are also a number of independent creators that have used Kickstarter to raise funds for their graphic novels including Dr. Rebecca Hall's *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts* and Malik Shabazz's *Cyber/Punk/Funk* anthology. Coupled with the checklist, selectors can also look to the Glyph Awards⁶⁵ to find new titles in Afrofuturist Black comics and graphic novels, with past winners like *Ajala: A Series of Adventures*. Emerging imprints, with

61 "About," World of Black Superheroes, accessed December 2, 2018, <http://worldofblackheroes.com/about/>.

62 See: <http://queercartoonists.com/> and <http://cartoonistsofcolor.com/>.

63 Albert Ching, "Hudlin & Cowan on 'Milestone 2.0': 'We're Not in the Nostalgia Business,'" Milestone Media, accessed December 2, 2018, <http://milestone.media/hudlin-cowan-on-milestone-2-0/>.

64 "Comics," PBS Media, accessed December 2, 2018, <http://pbsmediastudios.com/comics/>.

65 Learn about the latest Glyph Award recipients on the East Coast Black of Ages Convention website: <https://ecbacc.com/about/latest-updates/>.

creators of color at the helm, continue to grow with titles like *Megascop*, curated by John Jennings,⁶⁶ and *Catalyst Prime* by editorial directors David Steward II and Carl Reed.⁶⁷ Again, selectors should use the checklist to critically evaluate the character arcs and plots to further reveal whether a title is Afrofuturist in nature.

While some of the beginnings of Afrofuturist themes in comics originate from major publishers and primarily white and Jewish creators like Jack Kirby, contemporary works strive to give voice to more artists of color. Key artists to consider when researching and selecting Afrofuturist comics include Dwayne McDuffie, Christopher Priest, Jamal Y. Igle, Reynaldo Anderson, David Walker, Afua Richardson, John Jennings, Nnedi Okorafor, and Felicia Henderson. Historically, Black artists have always been creating works that, while not Afrofuturist in name, offer reflections into Black culture and the trials of existing in a white world. Look for titles that feature characters that are Black, African American, or from the African diaspora that are central to the story arc, particularly if they have explicit agency; titles that address issues surrounding Black pride, Black empowerment, or imagining Black futures; the use of technology by Black characters as a tool for Black liberation; works that address issues of race, gender, sexuality, economic inequality, and/or discrimination; and narratives about Black people and blackness in a collective future.

Programs

Afrofuturist comics are great ways to engage students in theme-based learning. For community colleges that straddle public and academic library spaces, librarians can encourage students to gather regularly for discussion groups around multiple themes, such as Afrofuturist character's abilities and mental health, comic books made into movies, Afrofuturism and Africa, etc.⁶⁸ This kind of program

66 See: <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/comics/article/78090-abrams-to-launch-megascop-graphic-imprint.html>.

67 See: <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/78178-lion-forge-is-a-new-kind-of-comics-publisher.html>.

68 Bethany Herman, Ray Pun, Kai Alexis Smith, Jennifer Crisp, "Truth, Justice, and the Academic Library Way: Comics in Academic Libraries" (presentation, Comic Conference for Educators and Librarians, July 2018).

has been successfully led by a librarian at Houston Community College where students engage in discussion about titles they've read.

For most libraries, exhibits remain an essential method for engaging users with comics.⁶⁹ Afrofuturist titles support diverse exhibit options while centering the Black characters, creators, artists, and companies, and these exhibits can provide a framework for those unfamiliar with the genre. For example, with the popularity of *Black Panther*, libraries may create an exhibit showcasing not only the comics, but also the animation and film adaptation, feature the different series' creators over the years, and suggested themes like colonialism and political leadership. For academic libraries, a Black Panther exhibit could include quotes or works from a campus scholar or comic book aficionado and explore the hypermasculinity and Black bodies in comics. Depending on the scope, an exhibit may also be contrasted with other comic works in the Marvel Universe as a commentary on the representation and development of Black characters and the anti-colonial politics that occurred in the latter twentieth-century.⁷⁰

Social Media

Depending on the platform, libraries can plan posts around specific hashtags (e.g. #followfridays, #TBT⁷¹) featuring a specific character, page, or storyline featured in an Afrofuturist comic and graphic novel.⁷² Institutions with substantial comic collections and successful social campaigns include Ohio State University Libraries' Cartoon Library Twitter account (@CartoonLibrary) and Michigan State University Libraries' Comic Art and Graphic Novel Facebook page and podcast.⁷³ Populating questions, quizzes, and polls for followers of these channels provide an outlet not only for the promotion of the collection, but also inspires a partici-

69 Bryan D. Fagan and Jody Condit Fagan, *Comic Book Collections for Libraries* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 93–94.

70 Adilifu Nama, "Brave Black Worlds: Black Superheroes as Science Fiction Ciphers," *African Identities* 7, no. 2 (2009), 133.

71 #TBT is the Twitter hashtag abbreviation for Throwback Thursday.

72 Fagan and Fagan, *Comic Book Collections for Libraries*, 100.

73 See the Ohio State University Cartoon Library Twitter: <https://twitter.com/cartoonlibrary?lang=en> and the Michigan State University Comic Art and Graphic Novel Podcast: <https://www.facebook.com/msucomicscast/>.

patory culture for the library. Most importantly, like most successful social media campaigns, library accounts must take advantage of socially relevant and timely events that interest their followers. For Afrofuturist comics and graphic novels, outreach to the community via social media can include real-time interactions with Black Twitter,⁷⁴ the pop culture and cultural hub for many African Americans that enjoy tweeting. Twitter includes a number of “blerd” (Black nerd) users who regularly write, consume, and create Afrofuturist works and are invested in the larger comic book genre and Afrofuturist authors and comic illustrators.⁷⁵ While this engagement may go beyond a campus or local community, initiating a conversation with a well-known or respected figure of an online community like Twitter generally results in new followers and retweets,⁷⁶ and over time, promotes the collection itself.

Community Connections

While both independent and mainstream publishers offer more glossy productions of astro-blackness, local artists and comic fans often congregate in local and national spaces that support their particular fandom and forms of expression. Just as they offer a lens to examine society, Afrofuturist comics collections can offer an opportunity for both individual creativity and collective civic engagement. Local zine fests, campus makerspaces and more established venues like the New York Public Library Schomburg Center’s Black Comic Book Festival,⁷⁷ East Coast Black Age of Comics Convention,⁷⁸ and Afropunk Fest are prime places to find and engage with creators and readers who already share an appreciation for the medium. While libraries should continue outreach beyond their walls, institutions can also ally with communities engaging with Afrofuturist materials by offering their buildings, staff, and marketing as resources. For example, San

74 Donovan X. Ramsey, “The Truth about Black Twitter,” *The Atlantic*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/04/the-truth-about-black-twitter/390120/>.

75 See Appendix A for suggested Afrofuturist artists and contributor Twitter accounts and hashtags to follow.

76 A retweet is when someone reposts an original post from a timeline.

77 See: <https://www.nypl.org/node/381901>.

78 See: <https://ecbacc.com/>.

Francisco Public Library hosts the Black Comix Arts Festival in collaboration with local community and city organizations.⁷⁹ Partnerships with organizations and independent artists further promotes the library’s collection with interested stakeholders, provides a platform for minority presses, and builds strong relationships among community members.

Conclusion

At its core, Afrofuturism provides the space, time, and agency to empower Black life and critique the colonial powers and Western culture that so often smothers these beautiful visions.⁸⁰ Representations of Afrofuturism in comics draw upon both the problematic (minstrelsy, hypermasculinity, oversexualization, etc.) and liberating (centering of Black characters, amplifying Black creators, etc.) nature of the medium to critically engage readers. As librarians build Afrofuturist collections, the selection of materials requires flexible funding options for partnerships with vendors and independent artists, policies that outline the collection’s scope and purpose, and further reflections on the concept of Afrofuturism as a selector tool. Given the increasing audience for comics and graphic novels, outreach and marketing for an Afrofuturist collection can integrate social media, programming, and guerilla approaches to user outreach and community engagement. For those unfamiliar with Afrofuturism as a comic and graphic novel theme, core titles offer a sampling of the wide variety of styles and topics available while concentrating on the Black experience in the United States and abroad.⁸¹ Collectively, Afrofuturist works provide a lens for the Black imagination and artistry while addressing key social, political, and racial issues in American life.

79 See: <http://sfmlkday.org/bcafccon/#about>.

80 Elizabeth Hamilton, “Afrofuturism and the Technologies of Survival,” *African Arts* 50, no. 4 (2017), 18, Project Muse, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/677241>.

81 See Appendix B for recommended Afrofuturist titles.

Appendix A: Recommended Afrofuturist Authors, Series, and Comic Illustrators on Twitter

- John Ira Jennings (@JJennings): Two-time Eisner Award winner and author
- Dr. Sheena Howard (@DrSheenaHoward): Eisner Award winning author of *Encyclopedia of Black Comics*
- East Coast Black Age of Comics Convention (@ecbacc): Community-based non-profit and event based out of Philadelphia, PA
- Black Sun Comics (@blacksuncomics): Afrofuturist comic creators
- Afro Futures UK (@AfroFutures_UK): Artist collective based out of London
- Onyx Con (@ONYXCONtruth): Convention based in Atlanta, GA showcasing arts of the African diaspora
- Stacey A. Robinson (@ProfSARobinson): *Black Kirby* collaborator and graphic novel artist
- Reynaldo Anderson (@Hardcore888): Co-editor of *Afro-futurism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*
- Black Girl Nerds (@BlackGirlNerds): Pop culture online publication from the lens of nerdy Black women
- Black Nerd Problems (@BlkNrdProblems): Website focused on nerd culture from and by people of color
- Ytasha Womack (@ytashawomack): Director, comic artist, and author of *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci Fi & Fantasy Culture*
- Tananarive Due (@TananariveDue): Award-winning Speculative Fiction Author and Black Horror scholar
- Dr. Nnedi Okorafor (@Nnedi): Award-winning Sci-fi author and Black Panther comic writer

Follow these hashtags: #afrofuturism, #blackcomics, #blackart, #AfroComicCon, #blackscifi, and #comics.

Appendix B: Select Afrofuturist Comics and Graphic Novels Recommended Titles

- *Action Comics* #521 (DC Comics), 1981
- *Ajala: A Series of Adventures* (Xmoor Studios), Books 1–4, 2013–2015
- *All-New Captain America* (Marvel), Vols. 1–6, 2014–2015
- *Bayou* by Jeremy Love (Zuda Comics/ DC Comics), Vols. 1–2, 2009–2011
- Bishop (Marvel)
 - *Uncanny X-Men* #282, 1991
 - *Bishop: Xavier's Security Enforcers*, #1–3, 1998
 - *Gambit and Bishop: Sons of the Atom*, #1–6, 2001
 - *Bishop: The Last X-Man*, 1999–2001
 - *House of M: Mutopia X*, 2006
 - *Time's Arrow: The Past (X-Men & Spider-Man, Book 1)*, 1998
 - *Time's Arrow: The Present (X-Men & Spider-Man, Book 2)*, 1998
 - *Time's Arrow: The Future (X-Men & Spider-Man, Book 3)*, 1998
- *Black*, Vol. 1 (Black Mask Comics), 2016
- *Black AF: America's Sweetheart* (Black Mask Comics), 2018
- *Blackjack* (Dark Angel Publishing)
 - *Blackjack: Second Bite of the Cobra*, 1996
 - *Blackjack: Blood and Honor*, 2000
 - *Blackjack: Pinups & Prose*, 2000
- *Black Kirby Presents: In Search of the Motherbox Connection* by John Jennings (Cedar Grove Publishing), 2015
- Black Lightning (DC Comics)
 - *The Comic Reader* #139, 1977
 - *DC Universe Presents: Black Lightning and Blue Devil* #13–17, 2012–2013
 - *Black Lightning*, Vol. 1, 2016
 - *Black Lightning*, Vol. 2, 2018
- Black Panther (Marvel)
 - *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet* Book 1–3, 2016–2017
 - *Black Panther and the Crew: We are the Street*, 2017
 - *Black Panther: World of Wakanda* #1–6, 2016–2017
- Blade (Marvel)
 - *Ghost Rider* #28, 1992
 - *Blade: The Vampire Hunter* #1–10, 1994–1995
 - *Blade*, Vol. 1, 1994–1995

- *Brotherhood of the Fringe* by N. Steven Harris (SN Works), 2014
- Brotherman (Big City Comics)
 - *Brotherman: Dictator of Discipline*, 2008
 - *Brotherman: Revelation*, 2016
- Cloak and Dagger (Marvel)
 - *Spectacular Spider-Man* #64, 1982
 - *Cloak and Dagger* #1-4, 1984
 - *Marvel Graphic Novel #4: The New Mutants*, 1985
 - *Runaways*, 2003
- *Concrete Park* (Dark Horse Comics), Vols. 1-2, 2014, 2015
- *Cyber/Punk/Funk! anthology (unknown)*, 2018
- *Deathlok* (Marvel)
 - *Deathlok*, Vol. 2, 1991
 - *Deathlok*, Vol. 3, 1999
 - *Deathlok*, Vol. 4, 2014
 - *Deathlok: Control. Alt. Delete.*, 2015
 - *Deathlok: Man Versus Machine*, 2015
- *Dominique Laveau Voodoo Child* (Vertigo), #1-7
- *Drums* #1 Complete Mini Series, Vol. 1 (Image Comics), 2011
- Dr. Voodoo (Marvel)
 - *Strange Tales* #169-173, 1973-1974
 - *Doctor Voodoo: Avenger of the Supernatural* #1-5, 2009-2010
- *Genius*, Vol. 1 (Image Comics), 2015
- *Jaycen Wise: Field Guide* (Brainstorm Multimedia), Unknown
- *Hoodoo* by Mary Fleener (3-D Zone), 1988
- *Hardware*, Vol. 1 (Milestone Media/DC Comics), 1993-1997
 - Issues 1-50
- The Horsemen (Griot Enterprises / The Blaxis / Cedar Grove Books)
 - *The Horsemen: Divine Intervention*, 2014
 - *The Horsemen: The Book of Olorun*, 2015
 - *The Horsemen: Mark of the Cloven: Vol. 01-Heirs to the Throne*, 2015
- Icon (Milestone/DC)
 - *Icon: A Hero's Welcome*, 2009
 - *Icon*, Vol. 2: *The Mothership Connection*, 2010
- *Incognegro: A Graphic Mystery* (Berger Books), 2018

- *Kid Code Channel Zero* (Rosarium Publishing), 2014
- *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, adapted from Octavia Butler and by John Jennings (Abrams ComicArts), 2017
- *Kwezi 1-3* by Loyiso Mkize (David Philip Publishers), 2016
- Luke Cage (Marvel)
 - *Essential Luke Cage Power Man*, Vol. 1, 2005
 - *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire*, #1-16
 - *Power Man* #17-27
 - *Essential Luke Cage/Power Man*, Vol. 2, 2006
 - *Power Man* #28-49
 - *Annual* #1
 - *Power Man & Iron Fist* #50-57
 - *New Avengers: Luke Cage* #1-3
- *Malcolm-10* by Turtel Onil (self-published), 1992
- Martha Washington (Dark Horse)
 - *Give Me Liberty*, 2017
 - *Martha Washington Goes to War*, 1995
 - *Happy Birthday, Martha Washington*, 1995
 - *Martha Washington, Stranded in Space*, 1995
 - *Martha Washington Dies*, 2007
 - *The Life and Times of Martha Washington in the Twenty-First Century*, 2017
- Miles Morales (Marvel)
 - *Ultimate Fallout* #4, 2011
 - *Ultimate Comics Spider-Man*, Vol. 1, 2012
 - *Ultimate Comics Spider-Man*, Vol. 2, 2012
 - *Ultimate Comics Spider-Man: Death of Spider-Man Fallout*, 2012
 - *Miles Morales: Ultimate Spider-Man Ultimate Collection Book 1*, 2015
 - *Miles Morales: Ultimate Spider-Man Ultimate Collection Book 2*, 2015
 - *Miles Morales: Ultimate Spider-Man Ultimate Collection Book 3*, 2015
- Misty Knight (Marvel)
 - *Marvel Premiere* #20, 1975
 - *Daredevil Dark Night* #6, 2013
- Monica Rambeau aka Captain America / Spectrum (Marvel)
 - *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #16, 1982
 - *Avengers: Unplugged* #5, 1996
 - *Avengers: Infinity* #1-4, 2000
 - *Maximum Security* #2-3, 2001
 - *Thor*, Vol. 2 #30, 2001
 - *Avengers Annual*, 2001
 - *Marvel Divas*, 2009
 - *Nextwave: Agents of H.A.T.E.: The Complete Collection*, 2015
 - *Marvel Divas* #1-4, 2010

- *Heralds* #1–5, 2012
- *Marvel NOW!*, 2013
- *Mighty Avengers Vol. 2 #1 as Spectrum*, 2013
- *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* #1–12 (Marvel), 2016
- *New Avengers* by Brian Michael Bendis (Marvel), 2017
- *Nighthawk: Hate Makes Hate* (Marvel), 2017
- *NOG: The Protector of the Pyramids* by Turtel Onli (Onil Studios), 1981
- Storm
 - *Giant-Size-X-Men* #1, 1975
 - *Uncanny X-Men* #102, 1976
 - *Storm, Volume 1: Make it Rain*, 2015
 - *Storm Volume 2: Bring the Thunder*, 2015
 - *X-Men: Storm*, 2013
 - *Astonishing X-Men: Storm*, 2007
- *Sustah-Girl: The Queen of the Black Age* #1 by Turtel Onli (Onil Studios), Unknown
- Vixen (DC Comics)
 - *Suicide Squad*, Vol. 1, #11, 1988
 - *Vixen: Return of the Lion*, 2009
 - *Justice League of America: Vixen Rebirth* #1, 2017
- *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts*, Dr. Rebecca Hall (unknown), 2018
- *Weird Fantasy* #18 "Judgment Day" (EC), 1953
- *WildC.A.Ts*, Vol. 1 (Wildstorm/Image), 1992–1998

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Challenging "Stereotypes and Fixity": African American Comic Books in the Academic Archive

Brian Flota

Introduction

In the three months following its release, Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* film earned \$1.333 billion globally.¹ Furthermore, in less than a month, it became the highest-grossing film directed by an African American. Renewed interest in the character, stemming from actor Chadwick Boseman's appearance as Black Panther in *Captain America: Civil War* was aided by Marvel Comics' recruitment of Ta-Nehisi Coates and Roxane Gay to write and revitalize the franchise within its original medium: comic books.² One reason the success of the *Black Panther*

1 Thanks to Cindy Jackson, Library Specialist for Comic Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University, for her research assistance. Lizzie Plaugic, "Black Panther Had the Biggest February Debut of All Time," *The Verge*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/2/19/17027768/black-panther-box-office-record-february-debut-ryan-coogler>.

2 Anthony and Joe Russo, directors, *Captain America: Civil War* (Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2016), DVD.