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The Replacements

Borrowed and Made New



THE POWER OF THE MIND

Creation of positive
role models through
representation.

STAMP OF APPROVAL

Differing
perspectives inside
and outside the
comics.

LIVING IN THE SHADOWS

An unrelenting
relationship with
those who came
before.

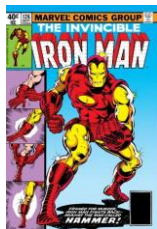
Autumn Ash

A Double-Edged Sword

Ever since their advent, comic books have been widely recognized as a medium of popular culture that is dominated by white male figures, both in their creation and the characters portrayed within them. Superhero comics in particular rely heavily on white male leads at the center of the action who are responsible for saving the world. Heroes of color are massively underrepresented and when they are introduced more issues can develop related to stereotyping and misrepresentation.

“Marvel and DC have been slow to diversify their characters and have been subject to substantial criticism for maintaining the dominance of White male characters.”
-Whitney Hunter

One unique way comic book creators introduced new black superheroes was as replacements for previous white heroes. Although after a period of time some of these characters would attain their own superhero identity, each began as a newer, but still highly similar, version of the hero who had come before.

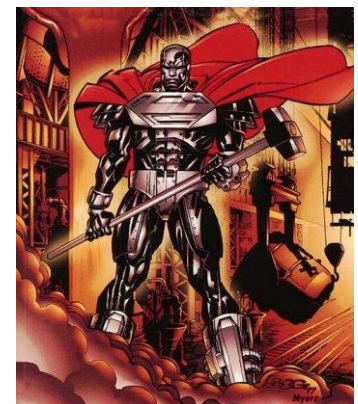


The Originals

There could also be some harmful effects associated with the legacy stereotype if it is not monitored. For example, if the new hero loses their individuality and racial identity, if readers believe their popularity stems from the previous hero, and if the previous heroes are reintroduced while the replacement is forgotten. Overall, the replacement stereotype can positively impact comic readers of all races and promote more diversity.



THE END

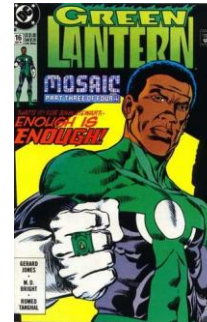


Light in the Darkness

It is clear that the legacy typology can have both positive and negative effects on readers of comics. While creators have left explicit racist caricaturizing and stereotyping of African Americans in the past, there may be areas where a new, more subtle racism is exhibited. Comics are a form of popular culture where societal ideologies are promoted and conveyed to audiences. The lack of diversity in comics has been a concern for many years and evidence only continues to gain ground. One way comic book creators attempted to increase diversity was through the replacement typology. Michael Holt/Mister Terrific, John Stewart/Green Lantern, James Rhodes/Iron Man II/War Machine, Lemar Hoskins/Bucky/Battlestar, and John Henry Irons/Man of Steel/Steel are all examples of black characters who replaced previously white superheroes. Black comic book characters are severely underrepresented or stereotypical. Unfortunately, this leaves young black readers without superheroes who reflect their personality and culture to utilize as role models. However, legacy characters are one way pivotal role models can be introduced in comics. This is accomplished by showing a connection to history and having characters who exemplify inspiring and relatable achievements. Replacement characters can also impact other types of readers, especially white readers, who often do not notice racism. Specifically, they allow for the option to explicitly give a stamp of approval by utilizing the previous hero to convey their faith in the new hero.

The legacy typology offers the opportunity for creators to improve the diversity in comics while reusing superhero identities, abilities, and ideals that have already been accepted by readers. However, the succession also opens the door for twists in what ideological views, both positive and negative, are conveyed to audiences while reading compared to those most commonly depicted. The legacy typology enables critical analysis of how black successor characters impact readers in both a beneficial and harmful manner including **representation of role models**, **the lens through which comics are often viewed**, and **the distinctive effects that stem from the replacement of a previous character**.

The Legacies



John Stewart
Green Lantern



Michael Holt
Mister Terrific



John Henry Irons
Man of Steel/Steel



James
Rhodes
Iron Man
II/War
Machine

Lemar
Hoskins
Bucky/
Battlestar



The Power of the Mind

“Superheroes reveal some of our most basic beliefs about morality and justice, our conceptions of gender and sexuality, and our attitudes towards ethnicity and nationality.”

-Jeffrey A. Brown

Superheroes have always been the comic book characters that are most popular, recognizable, and thought to closely represent the ideological values of society. Unfortunately for the black demographic of readers, comics are often characterized by an either explicit or implicit racism. However, legacy characters appear to escape the brunt of the outright white supremacy narrative (1) by being a superhero, the most lauded of comic characters, and (2) by replacing a previous white superhero with whom they share similar characteristics. Although it is unfortunate that each of them was created by white artists and they are replacing white characters, their storylines present an opportunity for positive impacts on all readers, especially young African Americans.

What's wrong with this picture?



“The frequency of characters of color in sidekick roles is a common topic...prompting fans to claim that characters of color become popular because of their White peer counterparts.”

-Whitney Hunter

The counterargument to this idea of living in the shadows is the characters are legacy characters. Therefore, they are meant to resemble the heroes who came before them. It is similar to comic book characters becoming role models for readers. The first hero is a role model for the second hero and, therefore, they resemble them in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, everything is subjective. Popularity of characters will be dependent upon the opinions of readers which are constantly changing and evolving. The legacy characters are not in a sidekick role, they are a superhero, and receive the benefits of such an esteemed position including being represented in the best light showcasing power, intelligence, perseverance; all characteristics that are important to promote to young readers of comics.

In conclusion...

Another side effect that may be associated with the replacement typology is in regard to dependency. Some readers may feel that the only reason a replacement character becomes popular is because the white superhero originally generated the popularity. This idea would lend itself to a white supremacy perspective as it is focused on how the first character benefited the second. In addition, readers may form a negative opinion about the dependency of replacement characters due to the fact that the majority of white superheroes who were replaced continue to make appearances. Superman, for example, literally resurrects in order to resume his heroism. This calls attention back to the common trope where black characters mainly occupied the sidekick role.

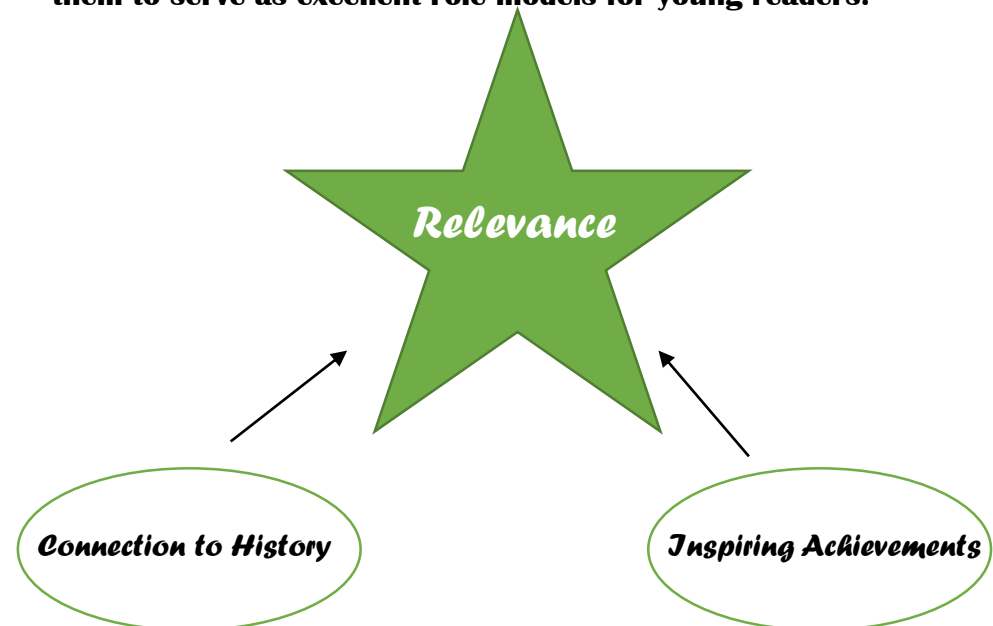


Superhero comic book characters are extremely popular and young readers of comics often look up to them as role models and reflections of the ideals they want to showcase to the world. However, Black youth often struggle to connect on a deep level with the characters due to the severe underrepresentation of black comic book heroes. Furthermore, if black characters are present, they are often stereotyped and are more harmful to the reader's self-image than helpful. Kenneth Ghee in his paper, "Will the 'Real' Black Superheroes Please Stand Up?!" offers insight on why role models are essential during development and the necessity of relevance to form connections.

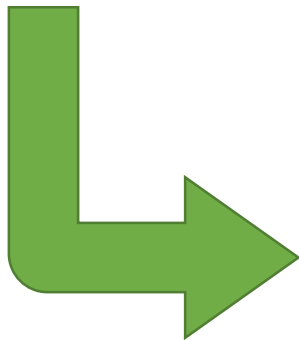
"The internalized experience or fantasy must be relevant to the fears, hopes and dreams of the reader or viewer. Without relevance, there is no reference point for grounding the message, or connecting the story, or stimulus, to personal experience for psychological identification and personal growth."

-Kenneth Ghee

The legacy characters all possess qualities which would allow them to serve as excellent role models for young readers:



Relevance to black youth is first established through the characters' connection to the history and struggles of the African American race. Michael Holt/Mister Terrific deals with intense tragedy when his older brother, Jeffrey, whom he looked up to dies unexpectedly. Furthermore, after finding happiness with his wife, Paula, she and their unborn baby are killed in a horrific car crash. While at his lowest point, he decides he can have an impact on the world around him and becomes Mister Terrific in the hopes of making the world a fairer place for all.



The Creators

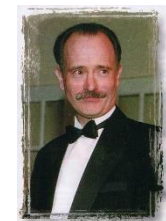


Mister Terrific

Green Lantern



War Machine



Steel

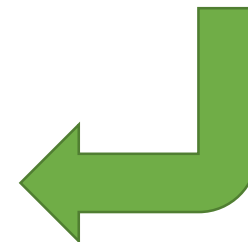
Battlestar

Since the legacy characters were all created by white artists and designed to replace white superheroes, there is a risk of losing relevancy. Ghee identifies this point as when a superhero is no longer working for his own agenda and is not connected to his culture and racial identity. This can then have a domino effect and create other impacts on readers. Most importantly, the characters will no longer have the potential to be excellent role models for growth.

“[T]he Black superhero’s cultural relevance and explicit identification and connection with Black culture are critical to healthy self and cultural (or racial) identity development as potential iconic role models...for youth empowerment and positive growth.”

-Kenneth Ghee

See for yourself...



John Henry Irons/Steel also suffered tragedy as his parents were murdered when he was still very young. However, his connection to African American history goes back even further. His namesake reflects history both through his real name and his alias. John Henry was an African American folk hero who competed against a steam powered rock drilling machine to see which could steel-drive a section of tunnel the fastest. John Henry won the contest, but unfortunately died directly afterward. John Henry Irons/Steel has a mechanical suit of steel and possesses a kinetic hammer as a weapon that further reflects the folktale. The connection between the two symbolizes the struggle of African Americans against exploited labor, promotes endurance, and encourages racial solidarity. Young black readers of comics will undoubtedly see a connection and relate more deeply to Steel as a character.

The other way these particular legacy characters create relevance is through their **inspiring achievements**. Regardless of fighting evil and saving the world, these characters are remarkable in their everyday abilities and successes. Mister Terrific is known as the third smartest man in the world, an Olympic decathlete, easily masters new skills, and is a successful businessman. Steel is also recognized as having a genius level intellect alongside engineering and computer skills. Green Lantern, War Machine, and Battlestar are all intelligent, but their characters are more focused on their mastery of skills such as flying and combat. All of these legacy characters, excluding Battlestar, do not have powers. Instead their superhuman abilities stem from their intelligence and capabilities to design and manipulate technology in order to help them save the world. Mister Terrific has his T-spheres and mask, War Machine and Steel have their metal armor and weapons, and Green Lantern has the power ring. These characters are positive role models, showcasing to kids what they can achieve in life through hard work and perseverance.



Entire Outfit

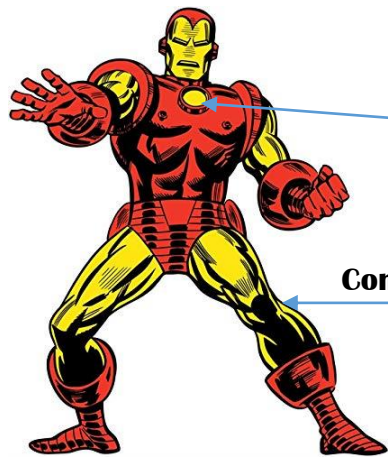


The costumes of the legacy characters do not serve to further their characterization as anything other than replacements to those who came before. It is clear that there is significant influence from predecessors in their design. Since they are replacements, it does make sense that they would adopt practically an identical wardrobe and possess similar powers and abilities. In addition, costuming them in similar outfits helps avoid the stereotype in other comics where the hero is not recognizable as one because he/she does not possess any of the hallmark wardrobe characteristics. However, there can also be harmful effects.



"[T]he character is represented as Black in color only while operating in an all White cultural context and worldview."

-Kenneth Ghee



Arc Reactor

Complete Body Armor



"I loved comic books...they would have these things in them about the international geophysical year and about astronomy and about the universe, and I would read that, and that would be the most interesting part."

-John H. Hall Jr., chemist



THAT KIND OF INTELLIGENCE DOESN'T APPEAR OVER-NIGHT. ADD IN THE FACT THAT SUCCESSFUL BRAIN TRANSPLANTS AREN'T POSSIBLE GIVEN CURRENT 21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGY...



"S" Symbol

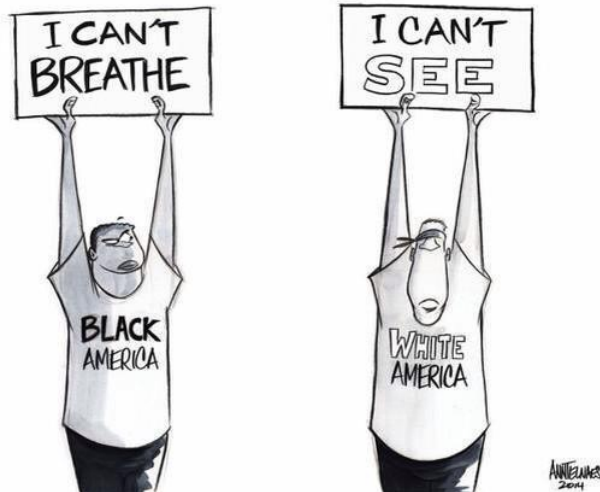
Red Cape



The inclusion of characters like these in comics that showcase positive attributes of African Americans such as intelligence, hard work, and success in business can impact readers of all races positively. White readers can only benefit from exposure to truthful depictions of other races as it is an opportunity to educate them on diversity in an accurate way. However, portrayals of characters with relevance to history and exhibition of realistic achievements are especially important for black youth readers who are underrepresented in an accurate manner in the media. According to Ghee, when readers can find themselves reflected in the material, they are more likely to imitate and model the behavior of the role model. As exemplified by John's quote above, comics can have a huge influence on the lives of children and that is why accurate representations of diversity such as these legacy characters are pivotal.

Stamp of Approval

Legacy characters offer a unique opportunity to examine the perspectives of people, both inside and outside the comic, related to an African American character replacing a white one. In Whitney Hunter's, "Negotiating New Racism: 'It's not Racist or Sexist. It's Just the Way It Is,'" the topic of changing a superhero's race is discussed thoroughly. Her findings indicate that racism in comics is often unnoticed and/or ignored by whites. In addition, white readers frequently utilize a white racial lens that reinforces the power hierarchy with whites as superior to blacks.



The legacy characters, excluding Mister Terrific, largely maintain the costuming of the original heroes along with possessing the similar powers.



"Fair Play" Motto



Lantern Symbol

Power Ring



Living in the Shadows

There are a unique set of elements and effects that stem from replacement characters which in the end could be considered more harmful than helpful to black audiences. Most importantly, legacy characters are indelibly tied to the heroes who came before them in several ways. Their **attributes and costuming** are strikingly related to the previous hero meaning there is a loss of individuality. In essence, they are designed as a slightly upgraded reflection of the previous incarnation which can result in a loss of relevancy for black readers. The act of following a hero also brings forth discussions of **dependency**. Some may feel that legacy characters only gain popularity due to the character who came before. Finally, the previous characters are commonly known to return after a short period of time. Their return may promote the **ideology that legacy characters are destined to remain in the shadows** and ultimately fulfill the sidekick typology normally reserved for black comic characters.

"Each embodies distinctive visual elements: colorful costumes, memorable masks and/or capes, unique symbols and adornments."

-Blair Davis, on how white superheroes have imagery to further their characterization

"Many fans want nothing to change and crave consistency by keeping characters White and male."

-Whitney Hunter

Although comics have progressed from the utilization of racist caricatures that were prevalent in the past, Hunt argues that a new racism abounds which is much more subtle at communicating the message of white dominance in comic culture. Today, comics are still largely considered an arena of popular culture dominated by white males. However, the demographics are continuing to change with a rise in both female and minority readers. Therefore, in recent years there has been an increase in discussions surrounding the unequal representation of minority groups. Hunter's study found that a large portion of fans would defend the racist nature of comics, especially older ones, based on a variety of reasons including that it is simply the way things were in the past or minority characters are not profitable for business. While this particular paper was based upon opinions relating to changing the race of comic characters when casting them in movies, the principle can still apply to the replacement of a white superhero in the comic itself. This is evidenced by the commonality of original characters returning to their role which is the case for Superman, Iron Man, and periodically Mister Terrific.

However...



The white hero's resurrection or return from absence as is the case for Iron Man, results in them being able to meet with the new incarnation of their heroism. Terry Sloane, the original Mister Terrific, upon encountering his successor declared him worthy of the mantle and was proud that Michael Holt had taken on the responsibility. There was similar positivity in the cases of Superman and Iron Man; both original heroes remained close friends with their counterparts and continued to save the world alongside them in their new heroic identities of Steel and War Machine. Hal Jordan, the Green Lantern who John Stewart was the backup for, was skeptical at first but when Stewart successfully displayed his skills Jordan gave his stamp of approval.



While right now the dichotomy between the perspectives of readers of comics and characters within the comics may seem vast, the future looks bright. The acceptance and pride of the previous hero in the legacy should influence the perspectives of readers. In fact, Jeffrey Brown in his chapter of *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation* states that Mister Terrific, Steel, and War Machine are some fan favorites.