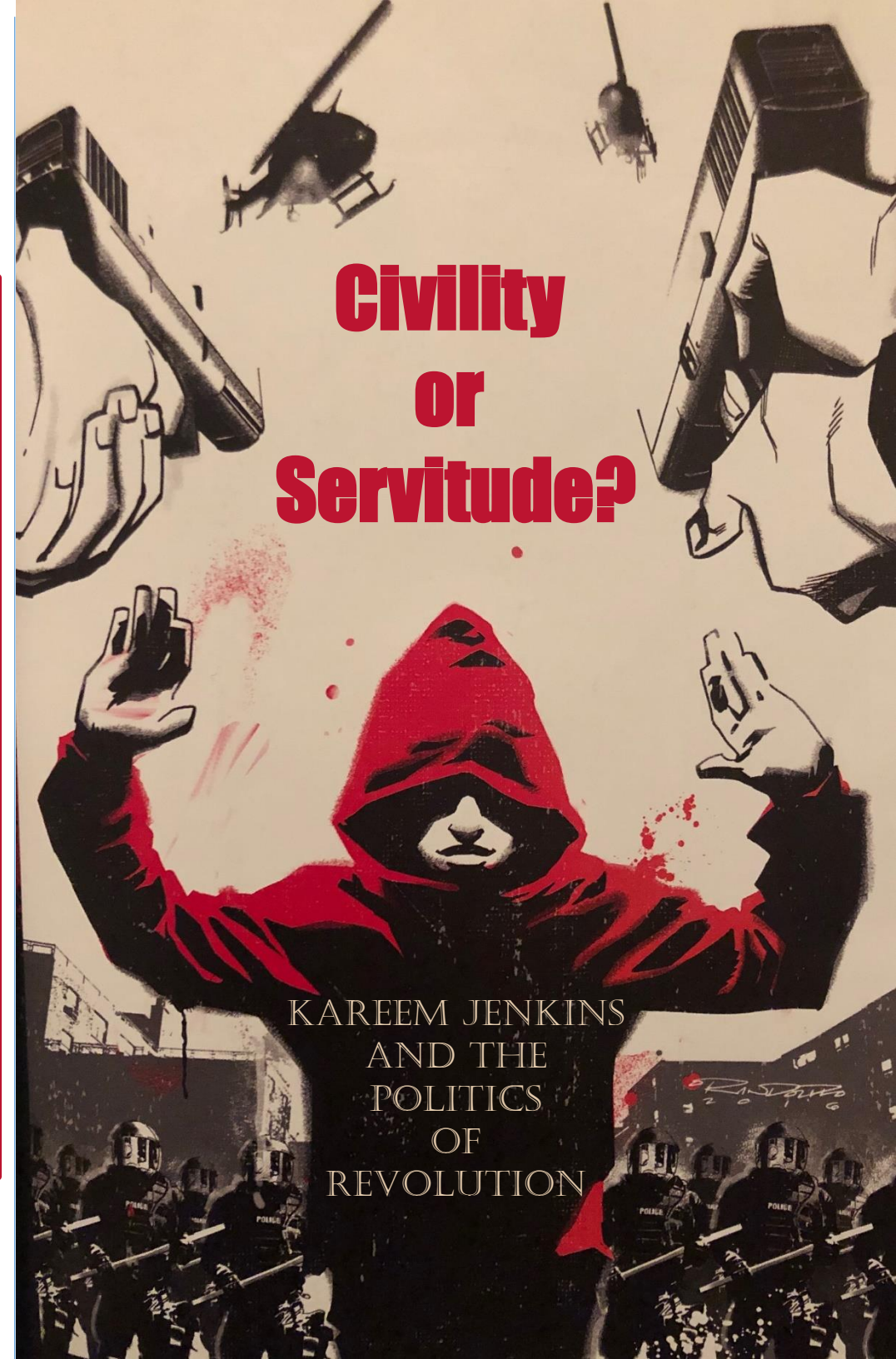


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Quick!

WHEN YOU
THINK OF
REVOLUTION,
WHAT COMES TO
MIND?

If your answer includes clean suits, peaceful protests, or stoic faces, you just might have read this influential comic as a child

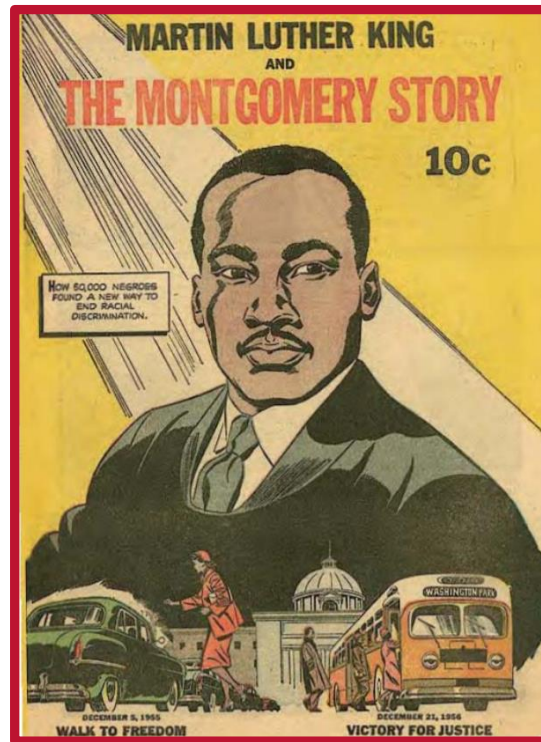


And so

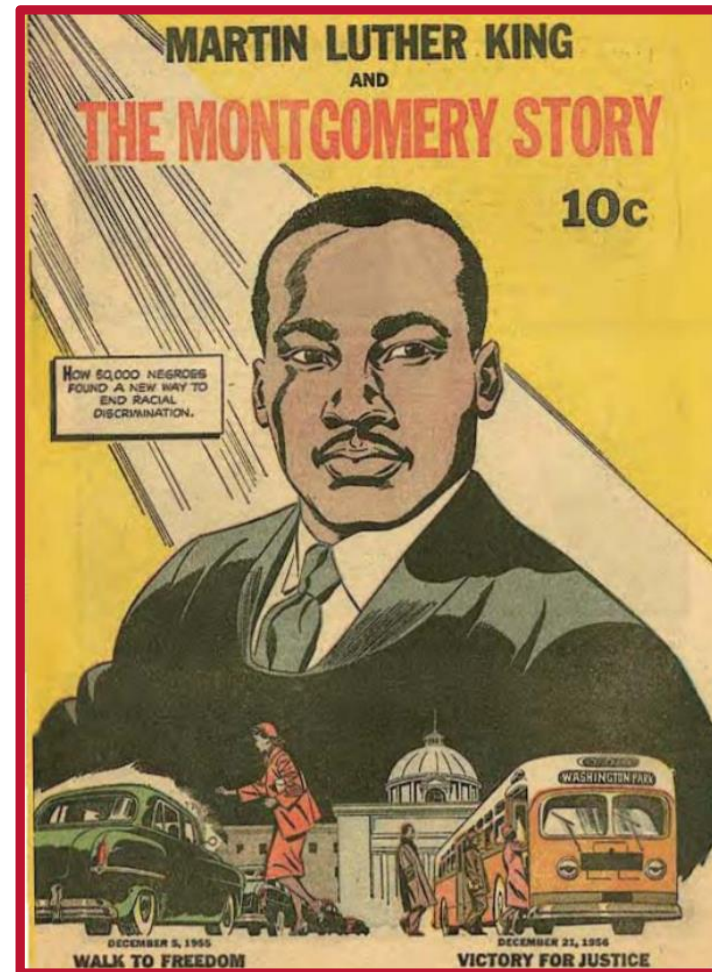
That this time around the story that comes out the gate to mixed reviews and ambitious goals is a story written by Black writers about Black issues is *terrific* news. It may seem as though Kareem Jenkins is a return to the typical pacifist protagonist who is told to ignore his anger and set an example of the “proper Black man,” but in fact this is not the case. Kareem allows his anger to motivate him, not to revenge but to compassion. He chooses not to kill, but only after considering what O and his radical allies have to say. And most importantly, this time it is not a White writer compelling the Black protagonist to hold back against the White oppressors. What previously had been a slippery slope from civility and dignity to compliance and servitude, is now a path that leads only to constructive discussion and self-reflection. Will *BLACK* become the next *Montgomery Story*? I’m sure I don’t know. But there is no doubt that from now on, any discussion about *The Montgomery Story* and its legacy is incomplete without the addition of Kareem Jenkins

Here's the thing

At the time of the civil rights movement, both Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X were unpopular among White Americans (go figure). MLK's legacy has, perhaps, been more celebrated due to his means of change being more palatable to White America. And yet, when *The Montgomery Story* was published, it was hardly the will of the people that this story become the enduring classic we now know it to be.



Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story was a comic published in 1957 that chronicled the Montgomery Bus Boycott, highlighting the success of MLK's nonviolent resistance.



Written by
Alfred
Hassler and
Sy Barry

Illustrated
by Sy Barry

But it was also...

Written
White

Yes!!!

YES

YES

YES*

(Yes)

Y

E

S

yes

So what?

In the end, does any of this matter? Afterall, Black Mask, the publisher of *BLACK*, is an independent publisher. How many people could possibly have read this comic, and of those readers how many could have been affected by this character?

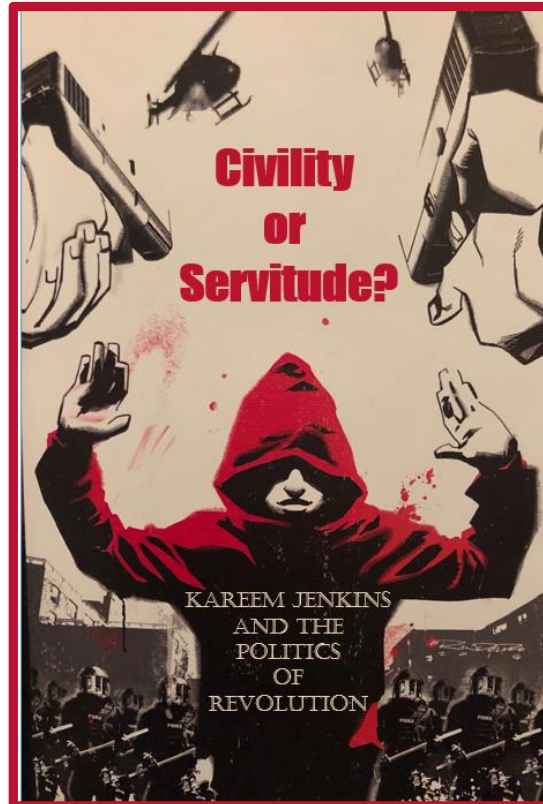
Does the history of Black protagonists pushing pacifist ideologies against radical villains really matter, and does one independent comic bucking the trend mean anything at all?

en By
people

But what's the big deal?

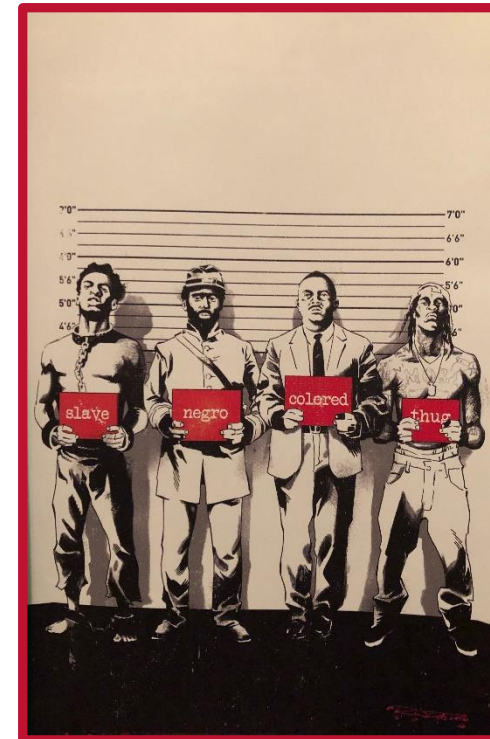
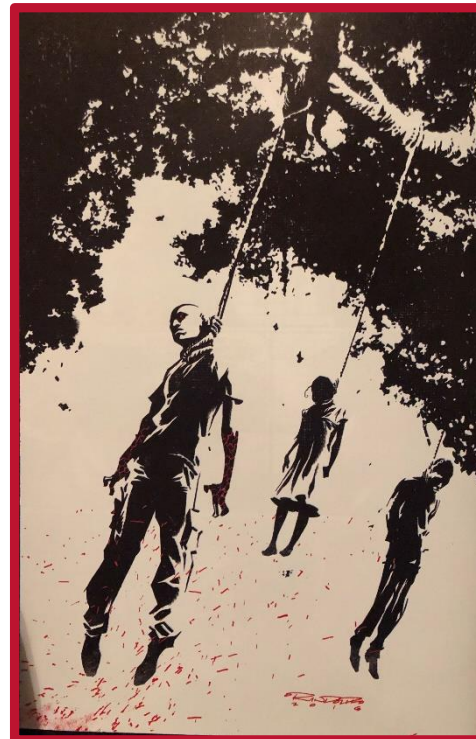
After all, it *is* more or less just a historical account of the bus boycott, why should it matter who wrote it?

And what does this have to do with that dude from the first page?



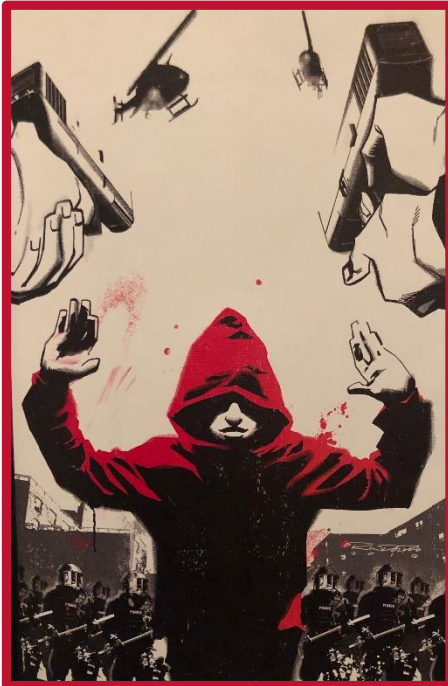
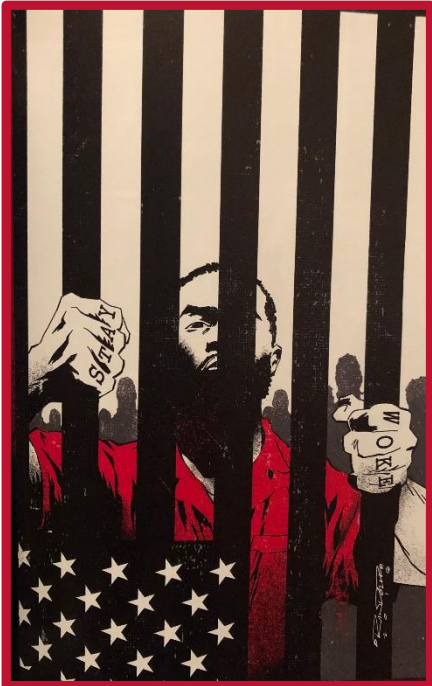
Violence in *BLACK*

The covers to each issue of *BLACK* tell the history of violence against Black people in America, leaving a presence that can be felt throughout the story as it fuels the actions of every character. Most remarkably, it fuels Kareem through anger, an emotion that is often downplayed or discouraged among other pacifist protagonists



Kareem & Violence

That Magneto and Killmonger embrace violence and revenge is the most obvious way that Kareem sets himself apart from the Malcolm X side of the spectrum. By standing up to O and his army, Kareem makes it clear that he believes killing their oppressors would make them just as bad. However, this doesn't mean Kareem is completely removed from violence. One need look no further than the covers to each issue to see that *BLACK* is very concerned with violence.



Well...

It matters because *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* is just one of many comics about a Black hero that was written by White men

And...

Coincidentally, these stories often have the Black hero condemning violence, discouraging anger, and even occasionally arguing for blame on “both sides” of the racial divide

Which Brings us to...

Kareem Jenkins

Kareem Jenkins is the protagonist of *BLACK*, a graphic novel written in 2016 by Kwanza Osajyefo and illustrated by Jamal Igle (both of which are Black)

In a world where only Black people develop superpowers, Kareem Jenkins turns out to be one of the most powerful supers of them all

The victim of a police shooting by a White officer, Kareem discovers his powers after recovering from the bullet wounds. Upon realizing that the bullets didn't kill him, Kareem escapes the police, only to be found by Juncture



Shifting Opinions

Looking through reviews of this comic, one will find that sentiments like these are not rare. Looking around today, one need not look far to see that people are becoming much more open to radical activism or at least radical ideas than once before. The fact that #KillmongerWasRight trended on twitter after the release of *Black Panther* proves this. Compare that to what Omer Rosen of the Huffington Post had to say about Magneto less than a decade before the release of *Black Panther*:

“Magneto views his kind as a superior race. He is capable of a methodical man-hunt, sadistic killing, and, eventually, a calm equilibrium in violence—a state described as optimal for exercising his powers”

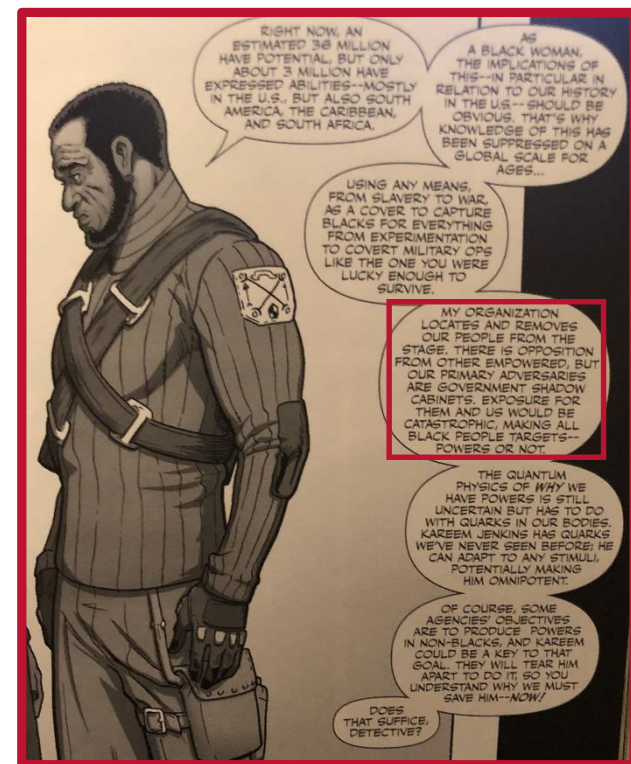
Kareem's impact

Anderegg, it is worth mentioning, is White. But his criticism of *BLACK* serves as a reminder that there is still a lot of support for the MLK characters of old. However, while some took issue with the radical undertones of the comic, others felt it didn't go far enough. One reader on Goodreads said this:

"Black also sets up the classic opposition in liberation movements between reform and revolution. Should we take a series of small steps to ultimately achieve liberation and equality? Or should we instead implement a sudden revolution to overturn and remake the status quo? Black makes answering these questions too easy by making the revolutionaries immediately seem misguided, naive, and irrational. The book offers its readers a stacked deck and, thus, makes the only "reasonable choice" for Black liberation seem to be slow, steady reform. Black makes the choice between reform and revolution seem obvious, when it is anything but"

Juncture

Juncture is a calculating man seeking to keep himself and all super powered people hidden, believing that if the world knew that Black people had special abilities, they would be perceived as a threat and exterminated



We might identify him as the "MLK type," choosing to stay diplomatic in the war for equality. But Juncture's son, O, disagrees with Juncture, representing a classic conflict... 9

The MLK type vs. t

If Martin Luther King Jr. is seen as the non-violent demonstrator who believes in convincing White people that they need not fear the Black race...



MLK

(Above from left to right: Professor Xavier—*X-Men*, Cyborg—*Teen Titans*, Juncture—*BLACK*, T'Challa—*Black Panther*)

Kareem's impact

Though undoubtedly creating an interesting new type of character that capitalized on changing opinions in the public, the impression that Kareem and *BLACK* as a whole has left on people has been mixed at best. Robert Anderegg of Comiccrusaders.com, for one, had this to say:

"I am not sure whether this comic is being produced to unite people or divide them, but the internet outrage seems to point toward the latter, and that's a real shame. By solidifying the "us versus them" argument, I think the writer is more aligned with Magneto than Professor X, if you know what I mean"

10 But where does th

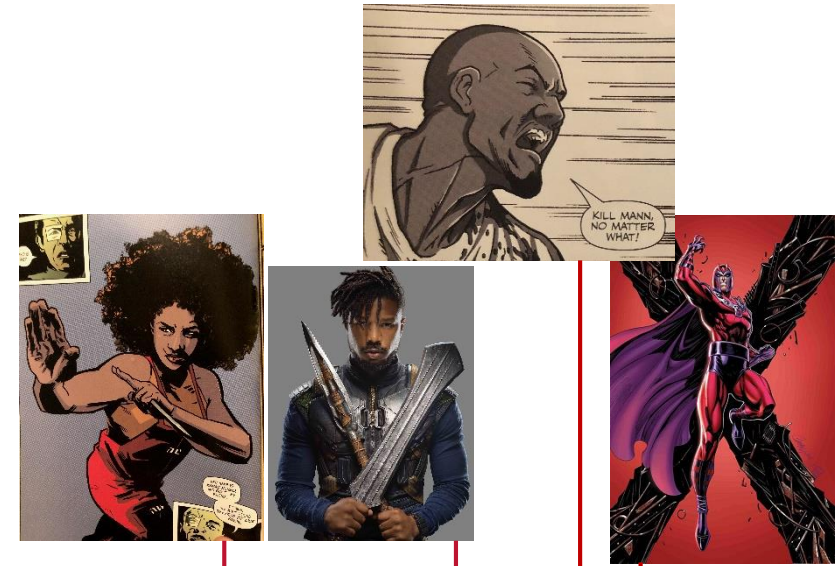
An emerging trend

This discussion of the proper way to progress political movements has been gathering steam in recent years, most notably with Marvel's *Black Panther* film. Though T'Challa and Killmonger fulfill the roles of MLK and Malcolm X, respectively, T'Challa moves over by the end of the film to being a mediator, like Kareem.

Like T'Challa, Kareem believes in the importance of remaining peaceful and not using the advantages given to them as a way of enacting bloody revenge. However, Kareem takes things a bit further by supporting even the most dangerous of his kind, something that T'Challa never quite endorses in the film.

he Malcolm X type

...then Malcolm X is the radical activist who believes the fight for equality is a war that must be fought with all options, including violence



Malcolm X

(Above from left to right: Kamau Kogo—*Bitch Planet*, Killmonger—*Black Panther*, O—*BLACK*, Magneto—*X-men*)

at leave Kareem?

Kareem Jenkins is unique in that he is a character created out of a time and place where people are, more than ever, questioning how best to enact change. It is no coincidence that this story was released amidst the rise of Black victims being killed by police on camera



Likewise, it is no coincidence that Kareem be placed in the ideological center of his universe, smackdab in between Juncture's desire to shun the dangerous members of his race, and O's desire to let loose the wrath of his fellow supers on the world.

The Mediator

As the chart pointed out earlier, characters have filled the roles of MLK and Malcolm X for decades. But the role that Kareem plays, that of the mediator, is new and exciting because it allows for an open discussion about the merits of each side



Kareem acknowledges Juncture's desire to keep their people safe, while balancing O's understanding that being visible and using their talents to their advantage could help the cause