

Editorial Note



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ENG342

Brotherman: a Black superhero with no powers battling injustice in an all-too-real city. On the surface, this premise sounds mildly interesting, if a tad bland. However, when considered within the history of the Black comic hero, Dawud Anyabwile's 11-issue superhero story takes on new meaning. Brotherman represents a fundamental evolution of the Black hero from something intended to be read and interpreted by an almost exclusively white audience towards something through which to convey the nuanced realities of the Black experience to an audience that was intimately familiar with those realities.

Though good work had been done to portray Black characters positively within mainstream comics culture, Brotherman's independently-published success demonstrated that Black characters could no longer be treated as objects to be consumed by the white gaze. Thus began a powerful Black comics movement, aptly called the Black Age of Comics by some, which catapulted Black characters into the mainstream like never before, now girded with a firm sense of realism and truth that had been sorely lacking for too long.

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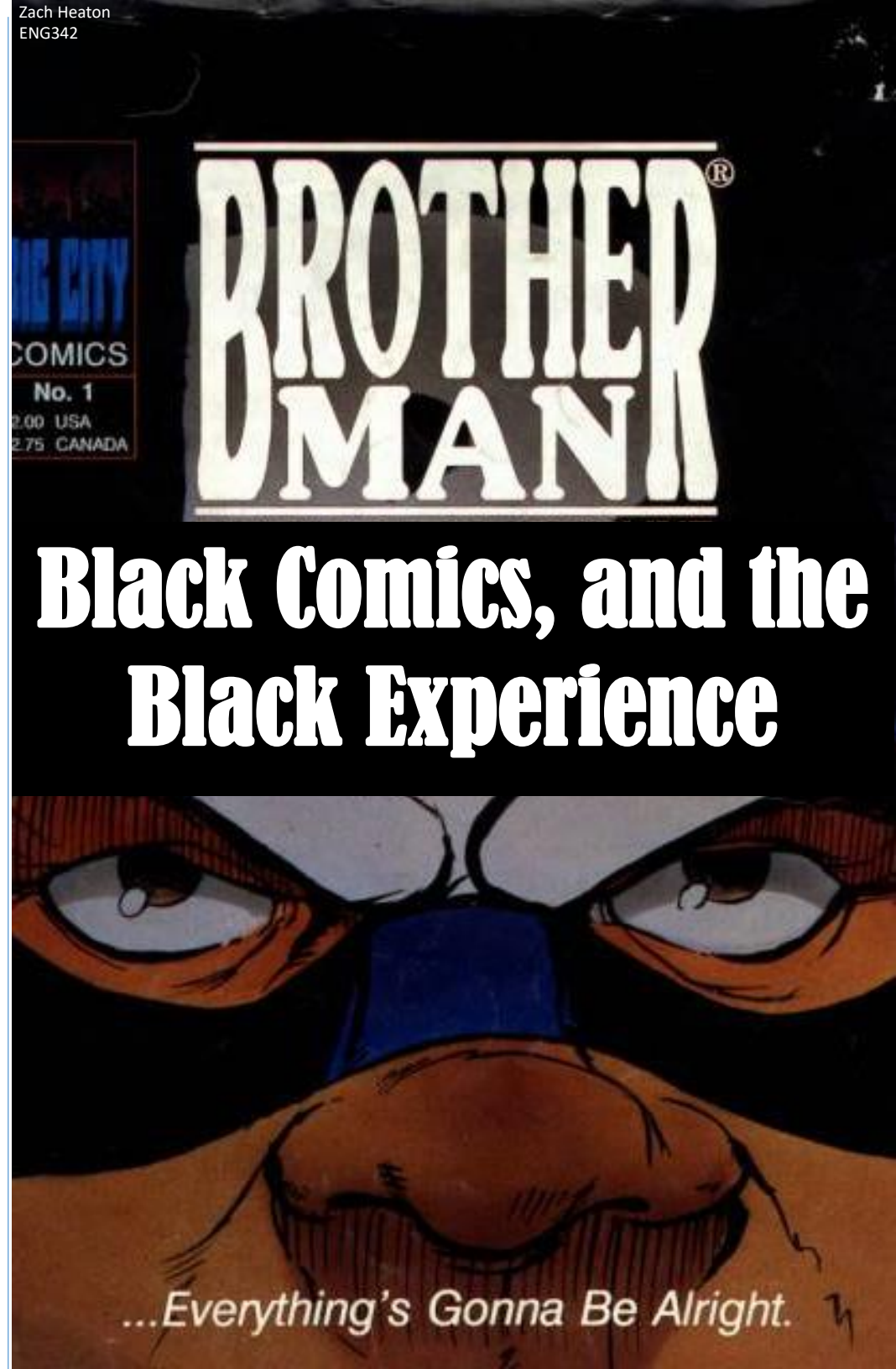
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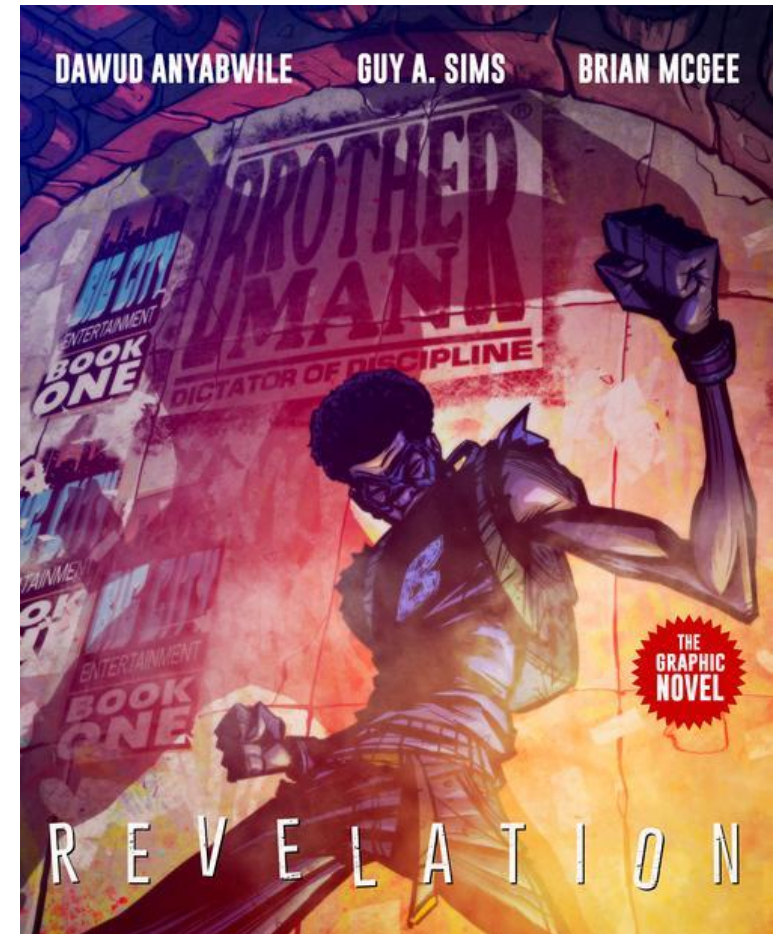


The Black Superhero



In 1966, well into the **Silver Age of Comics**, the folks at Marvel Comics introduced the world to the first Black superhero: **Black Panther**.

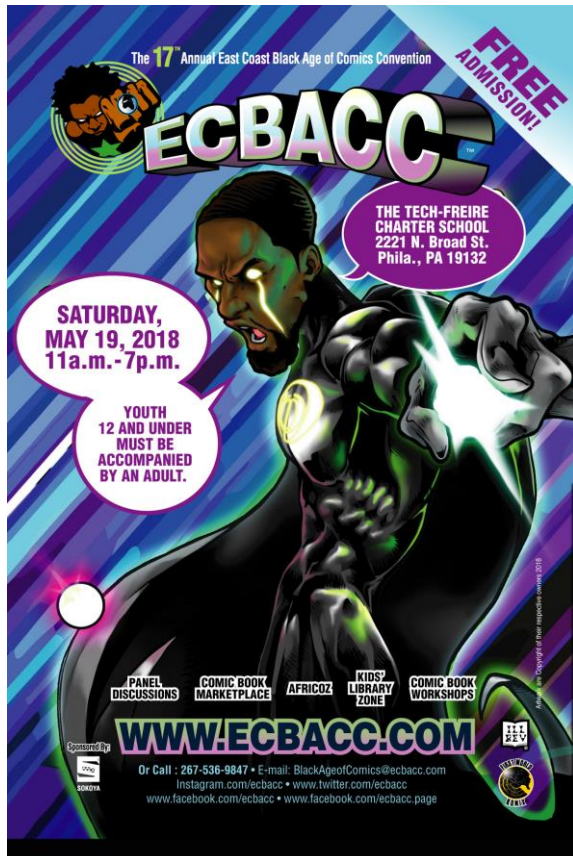
The Return of the King



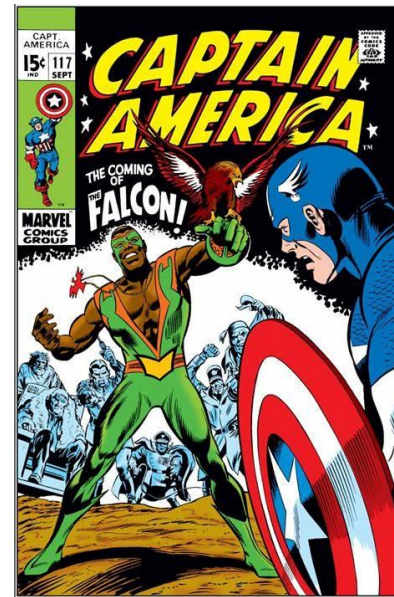
With this powerful **Black Age movement**, the comic that arguably started it all is back: after more than **two decades**, another *Brotherman* graphic novel was released in 2018.

The Speedboat of Progress

As Onli says, "The mainstream is like an aircraft carrier that can't make a move unless all systems are go, and then it slowly turns. The Black Age is like a speedboat: it's moving all over the place all the time, as is the independent movement."



Many more would soon follow...



Falcon, in 1969...

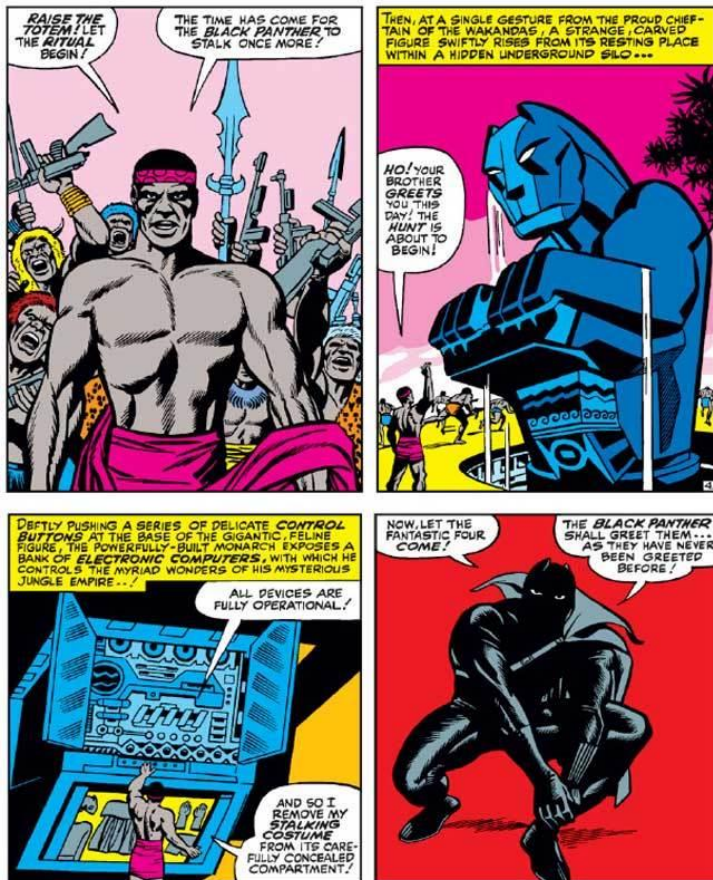


John Stewart, in 1972...

Storm, in 1975.

The Problem:

These Black heroes were often portrayed as 'exotic' and **otherworldly** in a way that their white counterparts (like the **Fantastic Four**, the premiere super-family) were not.

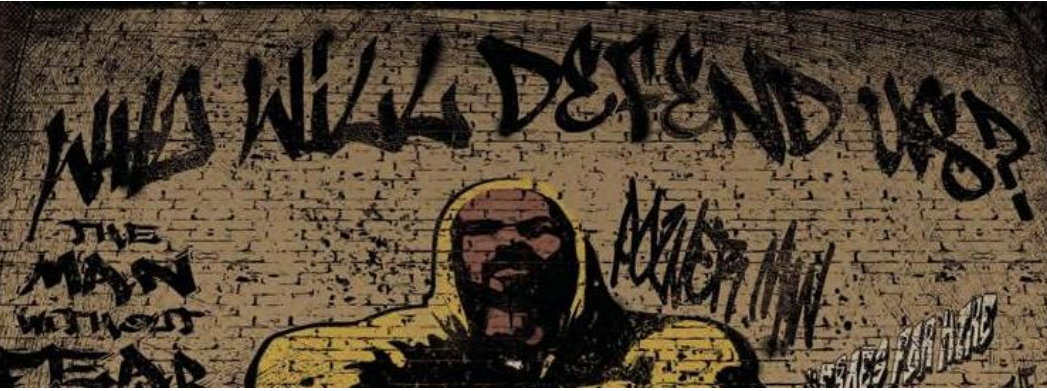


The Black Age

This movement, dubbed "**the Black Age of Comics**" by artist **Turtel Onli**, continues to gain in strength, with conventions dedicated to Black comics held every year across the country.



The Wisdom of the Brotherman



Like Brotherman before them, these new takes on the Black hero all attempt to present a **more realistic portrayal** of the Black experience. These heroes are **no longer merely an 'other'** for the white gaze; instead, they hold up **Blackness as something worthy of interpretation** independent of whiteness.

Intersectional Oppression



For female characters like **Storm**, this problem was magnified by **misogyny**, resulting in **hypersexualized** portrayals like the one above.

The White Gaze

These early Black heroes were clearly portrayed in ways that a white audience would find **unproblematic**: they remain **otherized**, **unusual** by their very nature, understandable through and in opposition to **whiteness**.

...or **new characters** intended to expand an existing character's story, like Black Panther's sister **Shuri**.





...new secret identities for historically white characters, like **Miles Morales** in *Ultimate Spider-Man*...

Enter: Dawud Anyabwile!



In 1989, **Dawud Anyabwile** attended a Black Expo in Manhattan. There, he noticed a distinct lack of comic representation. This inspired him to create, along with his two brothers Guy and Jason Sims, the character of...

Brotherman, Dictator of Discipline!



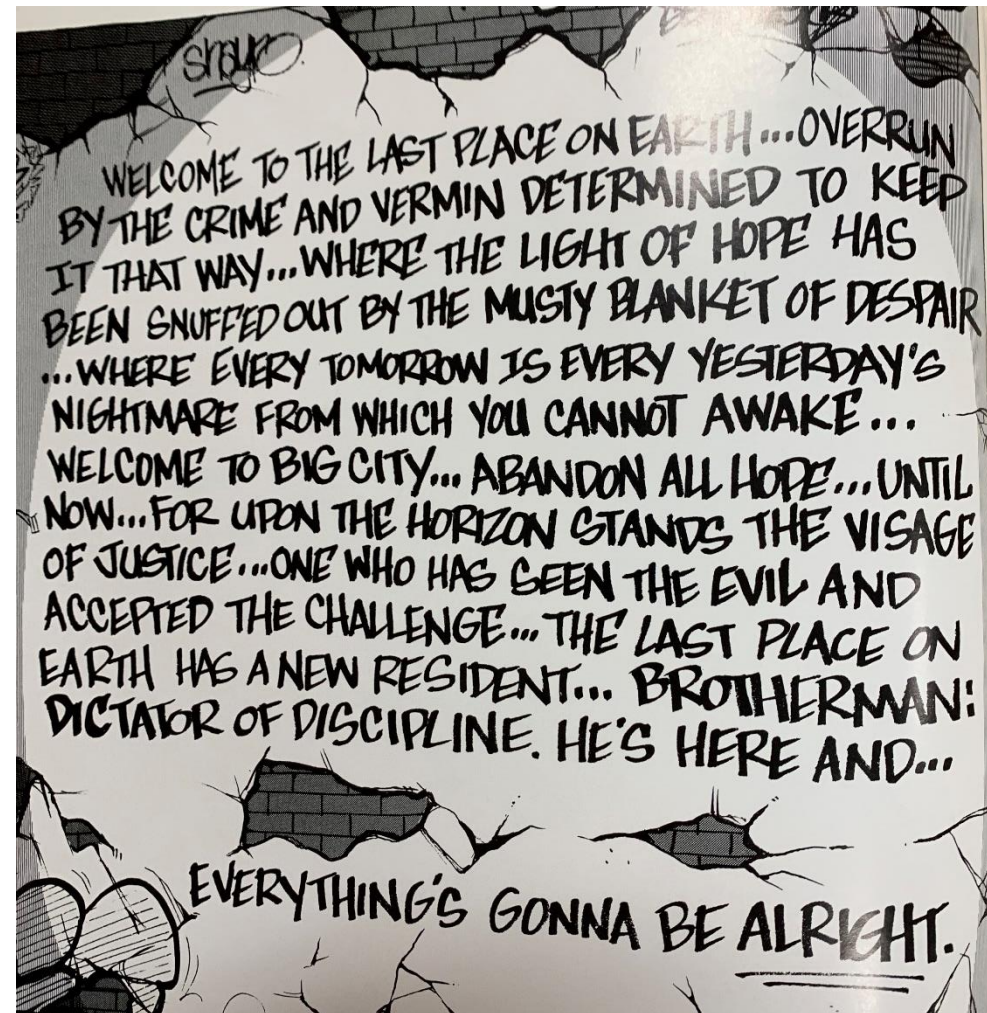
Black Comics, Culture, and *Brotherman*

The **Black comics movement** of the 21st century is far more wide-reaching than an indie comic like *Brotherman*. Today, Black heroes are much more present within **mainstream comics culture**, whether they're classic characters hit with a new coat of paint, like **Luke Cage**...



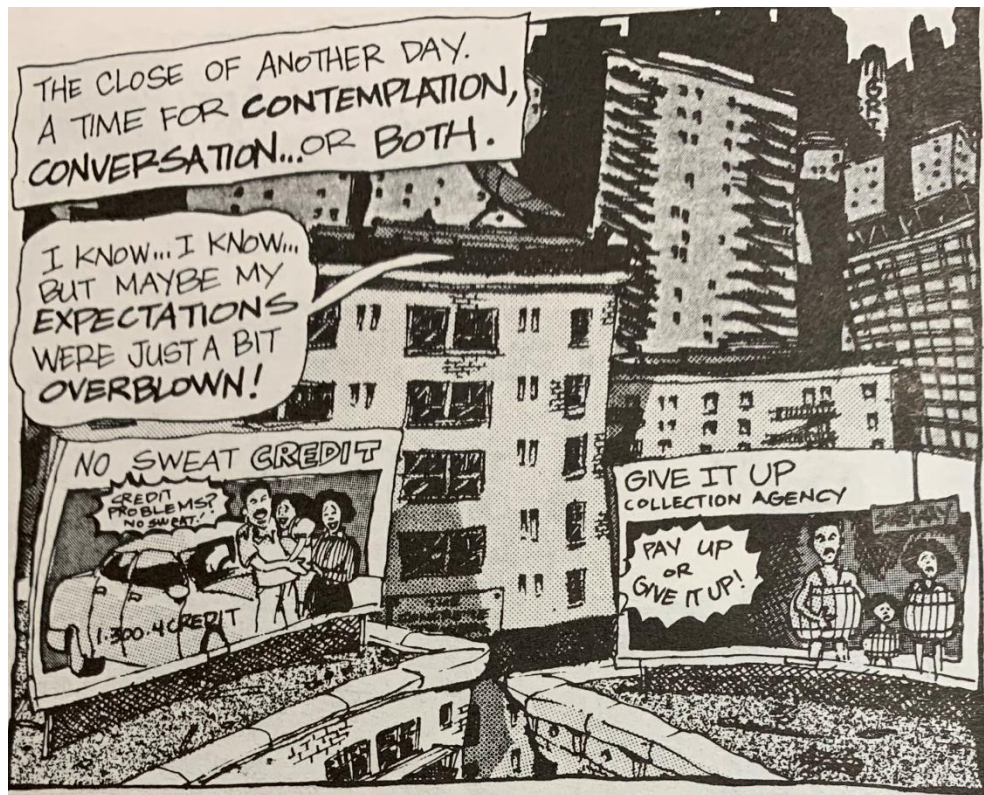
The Indie Darling

Despite being independently published and only running for 11 issues, *Brotherman* became a **smash hit** within the Black comics community, and would go on to influence that community **decades** after it ended.



With *Brotherman*, Anyabwile wanted to create a comic **by, about, and for** Black people, which would present the **Black experience** more accurately than the Black heroes that came before.

Bright Lights, Big City



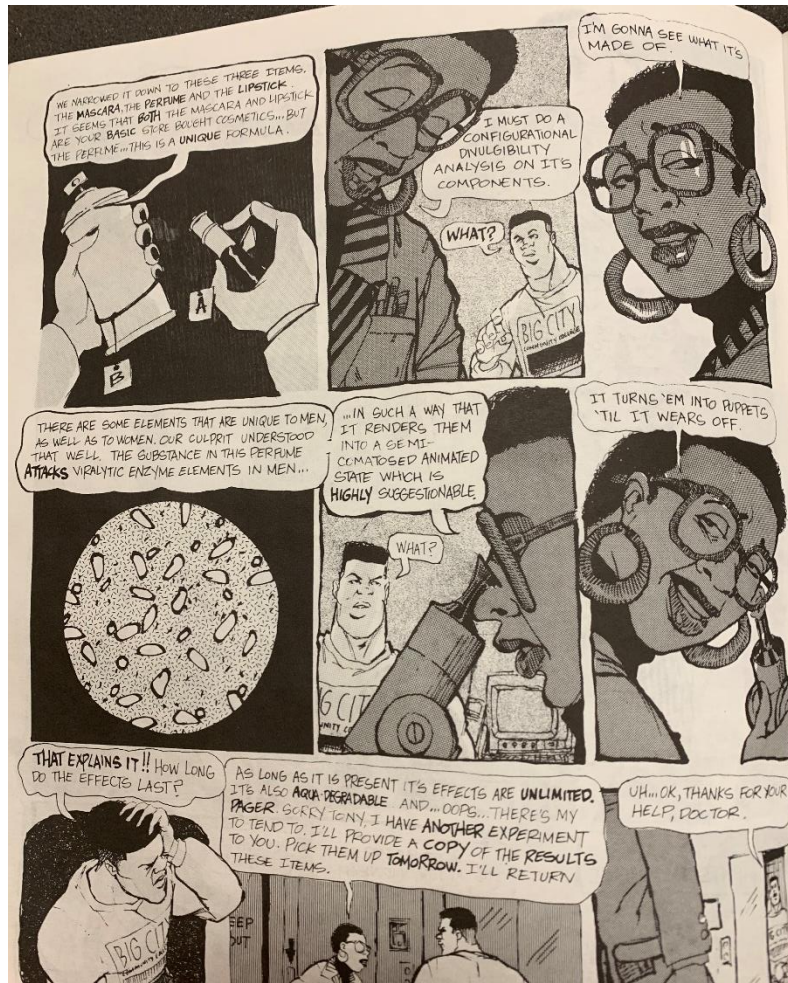
To this end, Anyabwile set his story in a sprawling metropolis known as **Big City**, a place far more familiar for residents of New York or Chicago than Wakanda or the X-Mansion.



All of these moves proved enormously effective. Over the course of its 11-issue run, *Brotherman* would develop into

A Cultural Phenomenon!

No Room for Hypocrisy



While critiquing these **systemic problems**, *Brotherman* manages to avoid falling prey to them: for instance, the vast majority of female characters are both **highly competent** and **non-sexualized**.

The Man Behind the Mask

Tony Valor, *Brotherman*'s secret identity, has **no special powers**. He's not the king of a hidden African nation, or an Omega-level mutant. He's just a **lawyer** who cares enough about justice to dress up in spandex and fight crime.



Fictional World, Real Problems



By setting the story in a familiar world with relatable characters, Anyabwile was able to more easily tackle real-world issues, like police brutality...

...and the everyday misogyny of the "professional" workplace.

