



References:

Brian Michael Bendis. (2019, November 9). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Michael_Bendis.

Entertainment, M. (2018, December 14). Is Miles Morales Finally Getting His Due As Spider-Man? Retrieved from <https://www.vulture.com/2018/12/miles-morales-of-into-the-spider-verse-the-race-problem.html>.

Ganke Lee (Earth-1610). (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Ganke_Lee_\(Earth-1610\)](https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Ganke_Lee_(Earth-1610)).

Jeff (The United States)'s review of Miles Morales: Ultimate Spider-Man: Ultimate Collection, Book 1. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1505203120>.

Jefferson Davis (Earth-1610). (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Jefferson_Davis_\(Earth-1610\)](https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Jefferson_Davis_(Earth-1610)).

Kim, M. (n.d.). Spider-Man Will Soon Battle Venom, The Villain Who Killed His Mom. Retrieved from <https://www.inverse.com/article/23331-spider-man-miles-morales-venom-grudge-match>.

Miles Morales (Earth-1610). (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Miles_Morales_\(Earth-1610\)](https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Miles_Morales_(Earth-1610)).

Owens, B. C. (2017, February 6). Racebending and Representation in Comic Books. Retrieved from <https://www.aaihs.org/racebending-and-representation-in-comic-books/>.

Polo, S. (2018, December 18). How Miles Morales' Spider-Man became an icon worthy of the Spider-Verse. Retrieved from <https://www.polygon.com/2018/12/18/18127904/miles-morales-spider-man-comics>.

Rio Morales (Earth-1610). (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Rio_Morales_\(Earth-1610\)](https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Rio_Morales_(Earth-1610)).

Sara Pichelli. (2019, November 2). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sara_Pichelli.

Spiderman Miles Morales Art Print. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.etsy.com/se-en/listing/609259464/spiderman-miles-morales-art-print>.

Ultimate Spider-Man (Miles Morales) and his uncle Prowler (Aaron Davis): Comics [Marvel]: Spiderman, Spiderman art, Marvel. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/262264378277656684/?lp=true>.

Uster, T. (2019, March 4). Whatever a Spider Can: Secrets Behind Miles Morales' Spider-Man Abilities. Retrieved from <https://www.sideshow.com/geek/whatever-a-spider-can-secrets-behind-miles-morales-spider-man-abilities/>.

Meghan Kwederis



Behind the Mask



Anyone Can Be a Hero

Inside See: What makes an authentic Spider-Man?

Age?

Attractiveness?

Resilience?

Strong Moral Code?

Intelligence?



What Makes a Superhero?

Gender?

Race?

Courage?

Hardship?

Abilities/Powers?

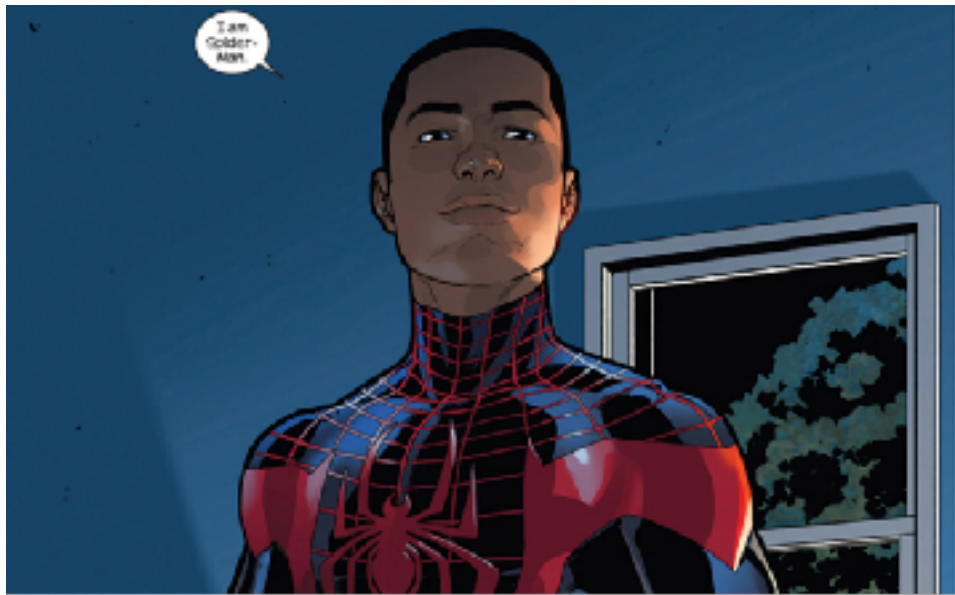
Let's take a look at Spider-Man...



Closing Note



Miles Morales, the second Spider-Man on Earth-1610, was created during a time of noticeable social change in the United States. People of color, who have always fought for representation and recognition, are beginning to gain more creative control over how they are represented in mass media, and characters like Miles Morales are becoming more prominent in popular culture. Spider-Man resonates with many different audiences because its message is that anyone can be a hero based off of their actions, strong moral code, and courage, therefore it truly can be anyone behind the mask. However, the only way to authentically and inclusively create whoever is under the mask is to have a creator that comes from the same background. The fact that audience reactions are being taken seriously, and noticeable changes are made when the material does not do what it was intended to do, gives marginalized readers a voice and an outlet where there previously was not. Not only are we witnessing a main character whose cultural background is being taken as seriously as the action he is involved in, but the background characters are given more power and social relevance because creators are paying attention to the details, stereotypes, and intricacies of social and cultural practices.



With great power comes great responsibility



Can Anybody Be Behind the Mask?

Miles Morales represents a turning point in diversity and representation in pop-culture because he appears at a time when American social culture is evolving to accept and fight for the authentic existence of characters like his. It is not enough to appear on the page - marginalized communities are finally being heard when it comes to authentically representing diverse characters and creating a space for creators of color as well as readers of color to control how they are represented in mass media.

Who is Miles Morales?

Why does Spider-Man connect with so many readers who are people of color?

How does Miles Morales as the next Spider-Man reflect modern American social culture?

How does the background of the creators affect Miles Morales' authenticity as an Afro-Latino character?

How do Miles' family and friends also call attention to racial representation in comics?

How is Miles Morales received by fans who are also marginalized members of American society?

Why Spider-Man?

A Very Brief Introduction into the Social Context of Being a Person of Color in the United States

“The first black superhero is Spider-Man. He lives in a one-parent house — it’s not even a parent, it’s an aunt. He has all of this power, but every time he uses it, it turns against him. People are afraid of him; the police are after him. The only way he can get a job is by taking pictures of himself that are used against him in public. [Newspaper chief] J. Jonah Jameson says to him, ‘Go out and take a picture that shows him with his hand in the cookie jar, that shows him stealing and being a villain.’ That’s a black hero right there. Of course, he’s actually a white guy. But black people reading Spider-Man are like, *Yeah, I get that. I identify with this character here.*”

- Walter Mosley, 2018

Being a person of color in the United States often means dealing with systemic racism, safety concerns, and much more on a daily basis



Of the side characters, Ganke is the least independently developed. His sole purpose is to be the comedic relief, cover, and trusted confidant for Miles, making him the stereotypical side-kick. He is referred to as a math and science nerd as well as an outsider, and his human abilities serve to make Miles’ superhuman abilities all the more impressive. Miles and Ganke have a very supportive friendship, however, where Miles’ family members have more of a background and storyline for themselves where they have opportunities to break from racial character stereotypes, Ganke does not often get these opportunities.

Meet Ganke Lee



Best friend

Alive

Korean-American

The first person who Miles shared his secret with

Creating Spider-Man

Spider-Man has been adapted in many ways, from live-action films to video games to novels to animated films. As the years progress, the diversity of each creative team has changed into a more overall representative demographic of writers, animators, illustrators, etc., though there is still much progress to be made.

Peter Parker's Spider-Man

Publisher: Marvel Comics

First Appearance: *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (August 1962)

Death: *Ultimate Spider-Man* #160

Created by: Stan Lee (writer-editor) & Steve Ditko (writer-artist)

Species: Human mutant

Universe: Earth-1610

Miles Morales' Spider-Man

Publisher: Marvel Comics
First Appearance: *Ultimate Fallout* #4 (August 2011)

Created by: Brian Bendis (writer) & Sara Pichelli (artist)

Species: Human mutant

Universe: Earth-1610

Meet Miles Morales



Place of Birth:

Brooklyn, New York City, New York

Age: Teenager

Race: Puerto Rican and Black (Afro-Latino)

Superhuman Abilities Origin Story:

He was bitten by an Oz-enhanced spider while visiting his uncle.

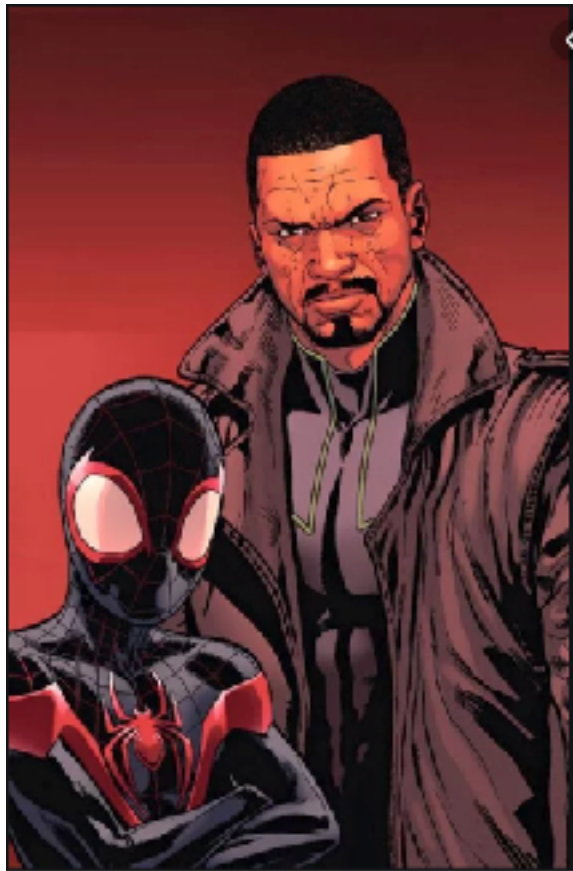
Abilities: Camouflage, increased agility, wall-crawling, superhuman strength, venom strike/blast, Spider-Sense, etc.

Spider-Man Origin Story: “Struck with grief at not helping Peter Parker before his demise, he decided to follow in his footsteps and continue Peter’s legacy [despite wanting to live a normal life]” (Marvel Fandom).



Aaron Davis is a very influential character throughout the series, and his criminal activity as well as complex relationships with his nephew as well as his brother are a more stereotypical depiction of Black men in mass media. Black men in media are often vilified and authors subliminally message readers to be afraid of them or think negatively of them. One of the ways he is depicted is dressed like a gangster, making it very obvious that he is linked to violent crimes, and gives off the message that he should be feared. Jefferson and Aaron Davis juxtapose each other by both serving as mentors to Miles, and their role as Black, male role models to a young, Black teenager has a major affect on his development, and makes some extremely important commentary on Black, male representation. 19

Meet Aaron Davis



Uncle

Alive

Black

Estranged from brother

Career-criminal

Is the reason that Miles was bit by the spider and gained superhuman abilities

How Was Miles Morales Received by Fans?

“Instead of creating new — or promoting already existing — diverse characters, they are instead placing them in as successors to big-name heroes. Each of these diverse characters are deserving of the mantle, are well written, well liked, and are capable of standing on their own in the market. The argument is: why isn’t Marvel and DC creating these characters to become their own heroes? Or do they have little faith in diverse characters succeeding without the name-brand to back them up?”

- J.S. Almeida, Medium, 2015

“When I ask Miles acolyte Anthony Otero how he felt when he first learned that there would be a Spider-Man who, like him, is African-American and Puerto Rican, he waxes nostalgic: “It made me feel phenomenal,” he recalls. That was then, this is now. “I still love the character, don’t get me wrong,” he says, “but it’s the way he’s written that I’m not a fan of.””

- Anthony Otero, The Vulture, 2018

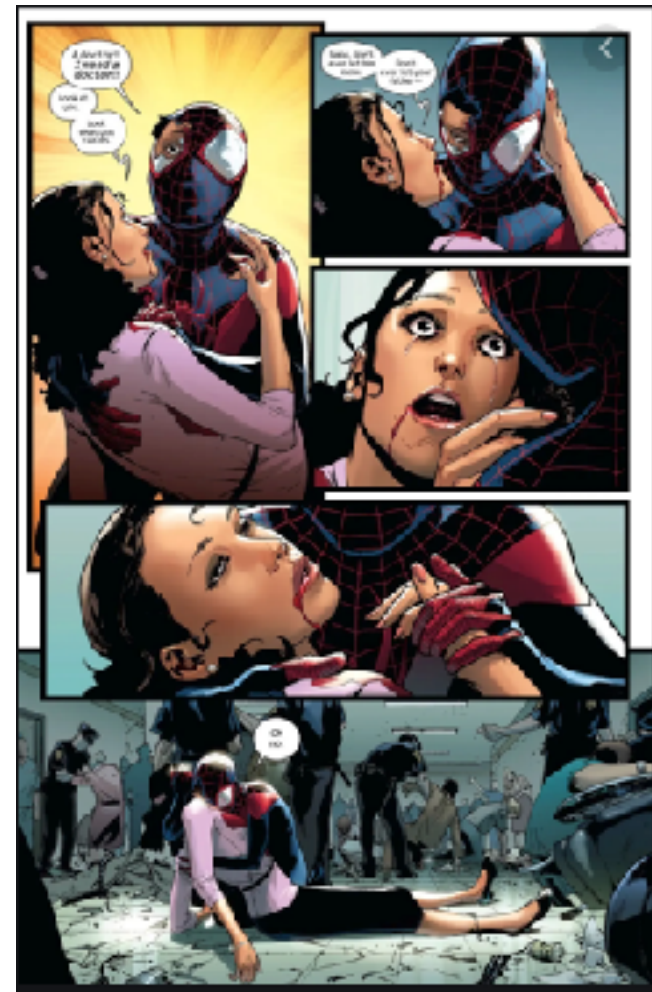


Excerpt from *Spider-Man No. 2*. Art by Sara Pichelli and Justin Fongson. Photo: Marvel Entertainment

“[H]eads up white writers: don’t write characters of color whose take is ‘I don’t want to be defined by my race.’” A subsequent tweet followed, reading, “Even if that is a feeling that some/many PoC have, think for a fucking second about the power dynamics involved in you doing that.”

- J.A. Micheline, Twitter

“As a person of color, as a Latinx person, I know that being called the whatever-race superhero — we don’t see it as a negative thing because you’re kind of taking this prominent position,” - Alexis Sanchez, 2018



Jefferson Davis serves as a mostly positive representation of a present, sensitive and supportive father, which differs from how Black men are usually represented in mass media. He is strongly against superheroes because of his past, which strains his relationship with Miles because he cannot confide in his father about being Spider-Man. His want of a moral and stable life for his son has both positive and negative effects.

Meet Jefferson Davis



Father

Alive

Black

As a result of his past life engaging in criminal activity with his brother, Jefferson strives to instill sensible morals in Miles as well as teach the differences between right and wrong and lead him down the “correct” path in life.

How Does the Background of the Creators Affect Miles Morales' Cultural Authenticity?

Brian Bendis
Writer & Artist
Caucasian
American
Age: Mid-50s



Sara Pichelli
Artist
Caucasian
Italian
Age: Mid-30s

Risking Authenticity

The costs of creating a character whose experience you don't truly understand are steep: You miss nuances in vernacular, cuisine, relationship dynamics, and so many other key details that are hugely important to the authenticity and proper representation of a character.

If comic book mega-companies like Marvel or D.C. really wanted to create diverse and inclusive characters, they must first start with who they choose to create them. If anyone is going to be telling the story of a person of color, it should be a person of color who understands the nuances and real-life effects of the past trauma and abuse of living in the United States as a person of color, as well as the current trauma of living in this current social climate.



From Ultimate Comics Spider-Man #1. | Brian Michael Bendis, Sara Pichelli/Marvel Comics

Under the authorial direction of Brian Bendis, Rio Morales was depicted as socially filling all of the roles of a present and supportive mother. However, culturally, she was not authentically represented as a Puerto Rican woman due to missed details like misused vernacular and cuisine that is more representative of a White American family.

Rio Morales is depicted as a warm and loving mother who is a strong role model for her son, and wants the best life possible for him. As such, she emphasizes his education, and the importance of family and service. Her death caused Miles to give up being Spider-Man for over a year.

Meet Rio Morales



Mother

Deceased

Puerto Rican

In favor of the new Spider-Man and superheroes

Dedicated to service

Hoped for a bright future for Miles

Failing to Truly Represent People of Color

Excerpts from “Racebending and Representation in Comic Books”, written by Bryan Cooper Owens, and published by the African American Intellectual History Society in 2017

“*Racebending* refers to the practice in comic books (and other media) of taking an established character and rebooting them as another ethnicity.”

“Comic book audiences have shown a predilection for familiar heroes, the ones that they grew up with. The repercussions of this for new superheroes of color are that they are often relegated to side characters or simply forgotten. Superheroes of color have failed to capture a wide enough audience that generates enough sales to justify their existence.”

“For many comic book fans, the default whiteness of their favorite characters is integral to their being. The arguments from comic book fandom are often couched in notions of authenticity. By this logic, changing the race of a comic book character invalidates their authenticity. This argument is steeped in notions of white supremacy.”

Seeing Change

The most notable change in creative leadership was the recent change from Brian Bendis and Sara Pichelli as author and illustrator of the Spider-Man comic series to Saladin Ahmed as the author and Javier Garron as the artist, which was announced in September 2018.

“[There is] cautious optimism about Ahmed’s new comics run with Miles. The writer is a vocal and insightful analyst of issues relating to race and says he wants to bring those ideas into his work on the series. “At some point, Miles should be written by an Afro-Latino writer,” Ahmed tells me. “I try to know my limitations. But, in plain language, there will be a bit more to that stuff and his Puerto Rican side, and I think my Miles will definitely be cognizant and embracing of his blackness.” The first issue is out and it features Miles speaking Spanish and briefly commiserating with his mom about the detention of immigrant children. It’s not a ton, but it’s a start.”

- Abraham Riesman, The Vulture, 2018

Aaron Davis



Ganke Lee

How do Miles’ family and friends exist in this series as people of color, side characters, and people who greatly affect Miles’ actions and experiences?

Rio Morales



Jefferson Davis