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What is behind the changing



By Peijia Zeng

Primer Character: Valerie Brown



Who is Valerie Brown?

Valerie Brown is the only African American character in the comic *Josie and the Pussycats.* She is the bass player and the songwriter in a band called the Pussycats in the story.

Why they are all called Valerie?





The original version of this character is a white girl called Pepper also known as Valerie Smith who is replaced by Valerie Brown in 1969. However, there is no official answer of why this happened.

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Closing: why should we know these

Representations of minority superheroes have always been scarce even today even today, which makes to more important to learn deeper about those rare examples. Through looking deeper of these examples, we are looking for some changes and the meaning behind the these. Only in this way, we can know what kind of real representations of minority groups we want audiences to see in the future.





Representation of Valerie Brown



The overall representation of Valerie Brown in the comic is positive, even though as a supporting character she does not have a really strong existence. In a small number of stories that she plays a center role, she has done a positive and strong contribution to get the work done with other team members.

One example is in the No 49. Issue, there are two thieves who try to steal a secret light ray formula from a doctor in the music performance that the Pussycats are in. Valerie is the first one who notices that something is strange and comes up with a strategy to get the thieves during the chase. In this story, there are many images that depict Valerie's wisdom and how well she cooperates with the white members in the band and outside the band.

Other Characters in this zine

The characters I will explore in this zine are African American superheroes, Falcon, Nick Furry, War Machine, and Storm from the *Marvel Universe*.



Like Valerie Brown, they may have started as a supporting role in their team and did not have a strong sense of existence. But after undergoing some character development, they eventually become the leaders or show a strong sense of existence in their own story setting.



For each character, they all reach some improvements on racial perspective that gradually strengthen their positions in the story. One common fact is some milestone moments were influenced by the evolving social-political themes of the time. In this zine, we will track some these changing moments on each character and see what social-political are behind these changes.

Black feminist



As Gipson states about Black feminist in 19th century, “Black women made themselves visible as they spoke about civil rights, freedom, and empowerment, while challenging the racial and gender standards and mores of their ear (Gipson, 5).” Storm, as a scarce black female character, challenged the racial and gender standards through getting rid of the old stereotype look and how powerful she can be in a white-male-dominate group.

Turning point made by the new appearance



In 1980s, Storm lost her power and changed her appearance dramatically by replacing her old look with a leather punk outfit and Mohawk hairdo. However, the leadership was not lost with the power. On the contrast, she showed her in-born confidence by effecting defeating Cyclops and took over the team. Although the new appearance came with losing power, it helped us better understand Storm as a steely leader.

War Machine's evolution



First appearance in *Iron Man* #118 (1979)

Serving as a CEO in *Iron Man* #284 (1992)



Iron Patriot #1(2014)



What is this evolution really about?

Overall representation: War Machine

As a side kick character of Iron Man, James Rhodes (War machine) has always been serving as a loyal confidant of Tony Stark/Iron man. However, the representation of James Rhodes has contained different social and political context in different eras

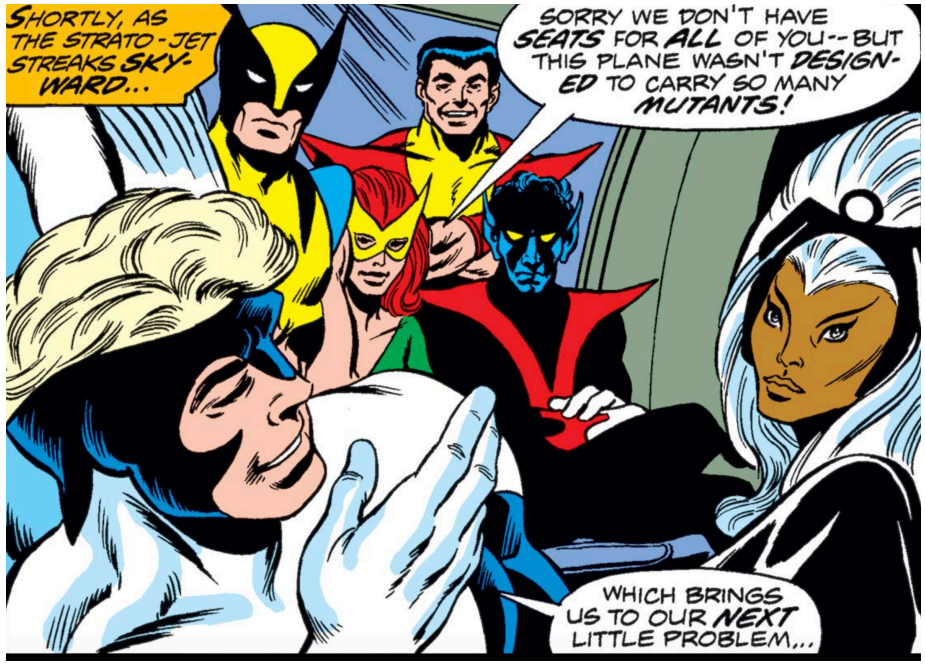




Invincible Iron Man #118(Jan 1979)

From the first short one-panel debut in *Invincible Iron Man* #118 (Jan 1979), to *Invincible Iron Man* #144(March 1981), the adventure in Vietnam establishes Rhodes' importance in the Iron Man universe and sets him apart from African American characters. The **adaptation** reveals a progress under the influence of the social and political context at that time.

Storm: Minority Superheroine

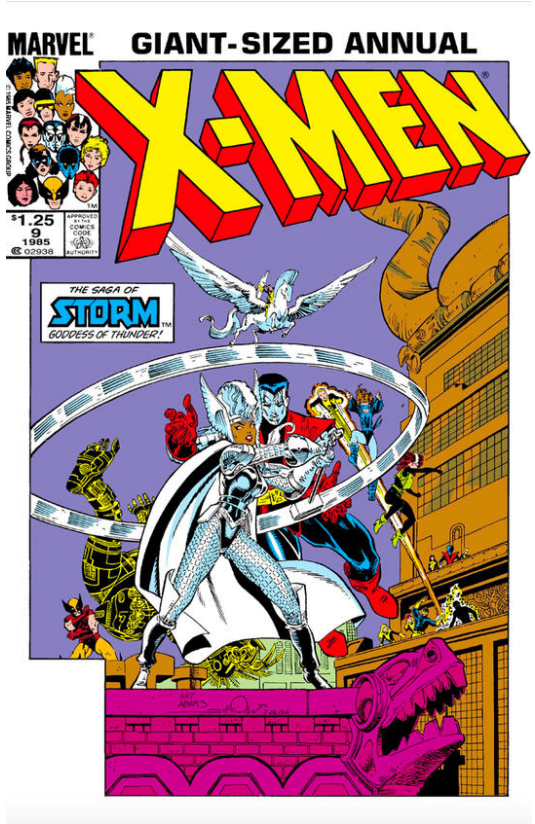


The first debut of Storm was in *In Giant-size X-Men* #1 (July, 1975). Although the leadership role Strom had in X-Men, a white-male-dominated superhero organization, was significant, the sexuality stereotype build on her was also controversial. According to Nama, "she symbolizes many of the struggles that black women and women of color in other nations face and resist" (Nama, 102).

Storm: Race & gender in comics



In Giant-size X-Men #1 (July, 1975)



In X-Men Annual #9 (December 1970)

What is behind Rhodes' the story?

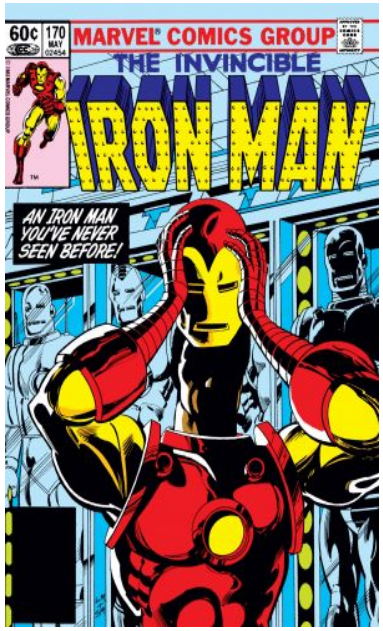
Based on Chambliss, "The progression of James Rhodes serves as a window on broader questions of race and identity in the U.S. experience. One of the few African American superhero character, Rhodes both challenged and affirmed expectations about community, identity, and responsibility linked to the African American experience"(Chambliss, 149).



Ronald Regan, V-Day Ceremony Address at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Like what was mentioned previously, Vietnam adventure is one of the milestone moments in James Rhodes' position, which is associated with a renewed emphasis on military power and patriotic entertainment during the presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989).

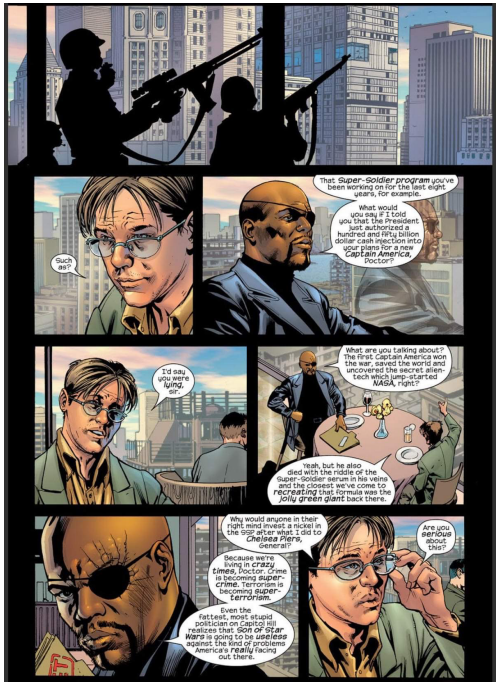
Vietnam War & Rhodes



Vietnam war has significance on defining the early image of James Rhodes. If we look into the characterizing of James Rhodes after the end of Vietnam war, we can see the racial integration elements reflected by letting James Rhodes became Iron Man's personal pilot and the closet associates and confidants as well as Stark industries' chief aviation officer (comic Vine).

Although the racial stereotype that minorities are background characters were still built, that was the first time an African American character was apart from the Africa and portrayed to communicate U.S. value- rejecting the post Vietnam retrenchment- and military history about African Americans (Chambliss, 157). Also the origin story in The Invincible Iron Man #170 (May 1983) about Rhodes in Vietnam war traced back what African American soldiers experienced and recognized the great contributions that African Americans gave for the war.

Post 9/11 & Milestone



Even though Nick Fury is not always the focus of the comics all the time, seeing him behind the scene as an intelligent head of a spy agency is a milestone moment. A lot of stereotypies built around African American superheroes are about being muscular but lacking intelligence, like Luck Cage. Nick Fury, however, broke that stereotype.

Going back to 2000s

The social and historical contexts happened while Nick Fury comics changed in the early 2000s was 9/11.



The image of Nick Fury, as the head of S.H.I.E.L.D, corresponded with Colin Powell who is the first African American general in that position and was in charge of America's relationships with foreign countries and the security of the War on Terrorism after 9/11 attack (Office of the Historian).

Narrative around the character

Comics, as one of the products of the popular culture, were used to convey the political idea of patriotism after the Vietnam War during Ronald Regan's presidency(Chambliss).



Under the influence of patriotism, the main focus of James Rhodes at that time contained a great amount of positive portrays of Vietnam veterans. One example was illustrated in *Invincible Iron Man* from # 163(October 1982)- #169 (April 1983) that Rhodes almost lost his life while aiding Stark against the machination of Obadiah Stane (Chambliss).

Falcon: Segregation or Integration?







Like other early African American superheroes, Falcon as the first African American superhero in comics in 1969, was created to meet the community's expectation that all African American characters are bound to stereotypical African origins (Chambliss, 157).

Prototype of Black Nick Fury



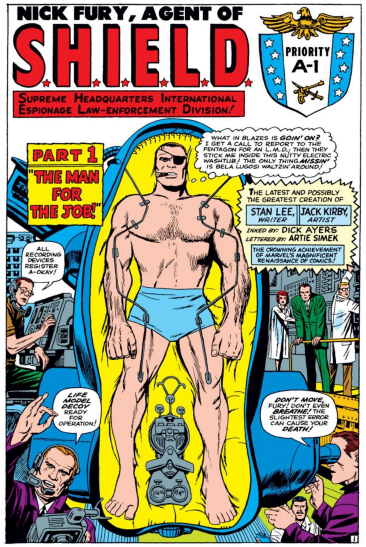


wikipedia

According to Mark Millar, author of Ultimate version Nick Fury, the reason for turning Nick Fury black is because "[he] wanted an African-American Nick Fury to be director of SHIELD because the closest thing in the real world to this job title was held by Colin Powell at the tim" (Lubin).

Why
Colin Powell?

Different faces of **Nick Furry**

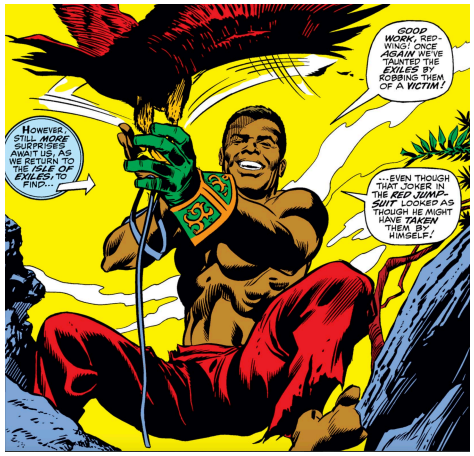


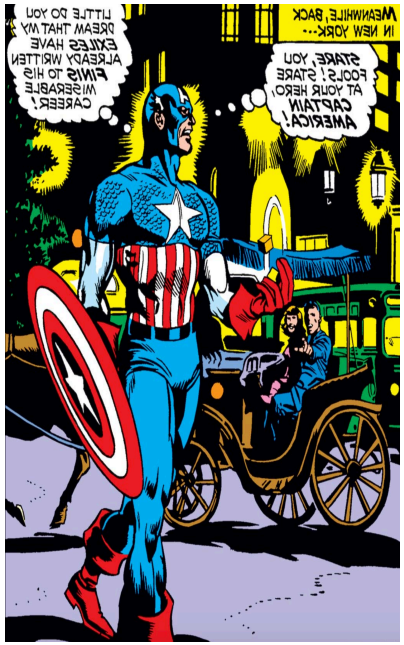


Iron Man Incredible Hulk Nick Fury #1(2008)

Like Valerie Brown, there was also a change in the racial makeup of Nick Fury. The most famous version of Nick fury is the Black version that first came up in *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up* #5 in 2001.

Expectation built on Falcon in 1960s

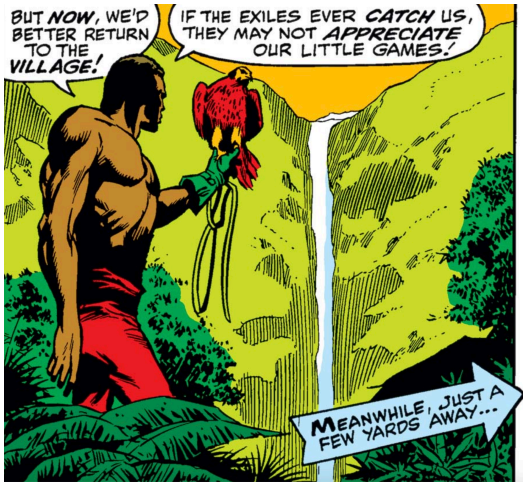




During his first appearance in Captain America (1969) #117, the representation of the Falcon perfectly fitted the white mainstream expectation of what a black character should look like by visually presenting a shirtless black character with animals in a wildlife setting. The visual representation not only fit the expectation of the white mainstream but also emphasized the supremacy of the white character.

Falcon's evolution

1960s



2000s





Post-civil right movement



In the 2004 fourteen issue of *Captain America and the Falcon,* Falcon started to become multi-dimensional through some expression about his identity. One example mentioned by Nama Adilifu is in "Avengers Disassembled", Falcon reminds Cap that the crimes he has committed on behalf of national security will likely be judged more harshly than any committed by Captain America because he's a black man (Nama Adilifu, 99). This example can be considered as the new narrative built on Falcon about how he articulates the controversy of being a black superhero in a post-civil rights America and how African American people have experienced America's legal system (Nama, 99).

