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Super Black: American Pop Culture And Black Superheroes



Synopsis

Super Black places the appearance of black superheroes alongside broad and sweeping cultural trends in American politics and pop culture, which reveals how black superheroes are not disposable pop products, but rather a fascinating racial phenomenon through which futuristic expressions and fantastic visions of black racial identity and symbolic political meaning are presented. Adilifu Nama sees the value and finds new avenues for exploring racial identity in black superheroes who are often dismissed as sidekicks, imitators of established white heroes, or are accused of having no role outside of blaxploitation film contexts. Nama examines seminal black comic book superheroes such as Black Panther, Black Lightning, Storm, Luke Cage, Blade, the Falcon, Nubia, and others, some of whom also appear on the small and large screens, as well as how the imaginary black superhero has come to life in the image of President Barack Obama. Super Black explores how black superheroes are a powerful source of racial meaning, narrative, and imagination in American society that express a myriad of racial assumptions, political perspectives, and fantastic (re)imaginings of black identity. The book also demonstrates how these figures overtly represent or implicitly signify social discourse and accepted wisdom concerning notions of racial reciprocity, equality, forgiveness, and ultimately, racial justice.

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Customer Reviews

Adilifu Nama's book is a needed contribution to the important topic of diversity in pop culture. Any discussion of superheroes is going to start with comic books, so appropriately, there is a detailed description of major black comic superheroes: DC's Green Arrow, John Stewart/Green Lantern and Black Lightning; Marvel's Black Panther (T'Challa) from his debut in Fantastic Four to versions by Jack Kirby, Christopher Priest and Reginald Hudlin, as well as an analysis of the revampings of Luke Cage; "sidekick" characters such as Falcon in Captain America and Jim Rhodes in Ironman, plus the lesser-known Cloak and Dagger. The book also examines other black characters including Black Goliath, John Henry Irons, Steel, Icon, Nubia (Wonder Woman's black twin sister), X-Men's Storm, Frank Miller's Martha Washington, and Brother Voodoo, as well as titles like Truth: Red, White & Black and The Crew. Superheroes also crop up in film and television, so the book moves on to discuss blaxploitation films and various representations of Muhammad Ali and President Obama. Depictions of several black superheroes are described, including Eartha Kitt's Catwoman, Avery Brooks's Hawk, and M.A.N.T.I.S. There are long critical analyses of films like Spawn and Blade, and brief mentions of parodies The Meteor Man and Blankman, as well as Unbreakable, Spiderman 3, Hancock and Transformers. Well-researched, balanced, and convincingly argued, this book features copious notes, references, and lots of illustrations featuring the comic book panels under discussion - mainly black and white but several in color (especially of covers) as well. The book is arranged by theme rather than by publisher or date, which makes it engaging to read but a little harder for research, thankfully there is a thorough index.

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