
Marvel's Mixed Race "Ultimate Spider-Man", Huffington Post, 2011

By, Marcia Dawkins, Visiting Scholar, Brown University

As a kid from Queens, NY it's not hard to understand why Spider-Man has always been my favorite superhero. Aside from a shared geographical location Spider-Man reflected many of the qualities of urban youth. He came from a working class background. He lived with extended family. He was open-minded. Sometimes unsure of himself, he struggled to make sense of the bustling world around him and his place in it.

And now there's a new chapter to the story. Today we meet Miles Morales, a younger multiracial and multiethnic Spidey. Morales, of mixed black and Latino descent, is described by TIME Magazine as a gangly teen "that fights crime and hurls spiderwebs, just like Peter Parker used to do." The similarities between Morales and Parker don't stop there. They share alliterative names and Miles was bitten by a powerful spider too. I guess that makes them both multiracial spider-men.

"What you have is a Spider-Man for the 21st century who's reflective of our culture and diversity. We think that readers will fall in love with Miles Morales the same way they fell in love with Peter Parker," says Marvel's editor in chief, Axel Alonso. In the Ultimate line, launched in 2000 to deliver updated stories, Spider-Man was recreated and his supporting cast was re-imagined. "It's certainly long overdue," said Ultimate Spider-Man writer Brian Michael Bendis, continuing that the racial representation of superheroes is still "crazy lopsided."

Even though Morales may remind us of the Spider-Man we're used to in the more traditional Marvel universe, there are definite differences. In addition to racial and ethnic differences we're told there will also be important personality differences as well. Miles also develops different physical capabilities as a result of being bitten. One commentator wondered jokingly whether "the spidey-sense will kick in to combat racial profiling?"

As a story in which diverse characters live to varying degrees in and between races, cultures, languages and worlds, Ultimate Spider-Man will foreground interracial relationships and multiracial identities as sites of tension -- between civilization and savagery, fantasy and reality, tragic history and hopeful future. And, because it is science fiction Ultimate Spider-Man might just be able to take these tensions in different direction, where forms and stories can be blurred to settle an argument that has so far been impossible to resolve in reality: What do mediated representations of mixed race and mixed ethnic characters mean for today's audiences?

The social significance of multiracial and multiethnic identities extends far beyond present day politics and post-racial popular culture. Like all racial and ethnic identities, mixed race and ethnic identities are used to create communities of common interest, claim rights, market products and make powerful cultural arguments. So, the ways Miles Morales is presented in "Ultimate Spider-Man" reflects how writers and fans view and interpret multiracial and multiethnic identities today. Some will undoubtedly see Morales as part of an often violent and tragic past filled with colonization and migration. Others will see a multiracial and multiethnic Spider-Man that carries the promise of a better, more harmonious future (like Neo in the Matrix). I see an opportunity cross new boundaries and settle old debates. From there the adventure of our Ultimate Spider-Man Miles Morales finds itself. And now the adventure finds us too.

[Link to Article](#)