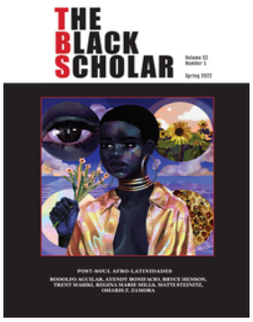

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A Post-Soul Spider-Man

The Remixed Heroics of Miles Morales

REGINA MARIE MILLS

In a 2016 interview in *Vulture*, African American crime and science fiction novelist Walter Mosley insisted, "The first Black superhero is Spider-Man."[1] According to Moseley, Spider-Man's class position, nontraditional family, and the media's unfavorable portrayal of his heroics resonate more closely with urban Black experiences than the experiences of a white boy from Queens. In many ways, Moseley argues that a Black Spider-Man could easily slip not only into Spidey's suit but also the classic, tragic story. In 2011, Spider-Man did become Black. Miles Morales, a Black Puerto Rican teenager in Brooklyn, however, was not merely a re-skin of Peter Parker's Spider-Man and his origin story. Building upon Adilifu Nama's work in *Super Black*, I argue that Miles Morales as Spider-Man is "a racially remixed superhero" who offers readers and video game players "cultural points of interests, compelling themes, and multiple meanings that were not previously present" in the original source material. Racially remixed superheroes "are more chic, politically provocative, and ideologically dynamic than the established white superheroes they were modeled after," hence, they tend to tackle political subject matter more overtly.[2] In *Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales*, remixing Spider-Man means reinterpreting the iconic phrase "With great power comes great responsibility" to move from the individualist usage that Peter Parker models to a communal one. That is, Miles Morales must grapple with the structures of racism and classism that create his need to be a vigilante in Harlem. Miles riffs on what responsibility for power entails: self-questioning and doubt, yes, but also belonging and investment in a community. Miles Morales' video game asks, "to whom is Spider-Man responsible and what does responsibility look like?" Spider-Man models the need to respond to the neighborhood that claims him.

Since his creation, Miles Morales has elicited strong reaction from fans, detractors, and scholars alike.[3] The establishment of a Spider-Man of Black Puerto Rican heritage came with the death of Peter Parker in the Ultimate universe, an imprint (ended in 2015) separate from the main Marvel universe. The Ultimate universe was not "canon," so writers could experiment without adhering to the long, convoluted timelines and backstories of Marvel's major characters. Rather than keep Amazing Spider-Man's origin story, Miles has a story of his own. Across all media, Miles has two parents, though their class position varies. In the Ultimate comics and Jason Reynolds' young adult novel, Miles' US Black father, Jefferson (Jeff) Davis, is a former criminal and his light-skinned Puerto Rican mother, Rio Morales, a schoolteacher. They struggle to pay the bills and worry about Miles losing his charter boarding school scholarship. In the movie and video games, his family is middle-class and his father flips from ex-con to cop. In the movie, Rio is a nurse and, in the game, she remains a teacher. His uncle, in all media, is a high-tech supervillain called The Prowler. As of 2016, Morales is

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Spider-Man alongside Peter Parker, after a crossover event that merged the two universes.[4] He stars in an Academy Award-winning film and is the only AfroLatino protagonist of a AAA video game, meaning his game had top writers, top programmers, and a tremendous marketing budget.[5] By all metrics, Miles Morales as Spider-Man has been a smashing transmedia success, answering a call to diversify popular media and the superhero genre to better reflect "Obama's America."[6]

This article posits Miles Morales as a "post-soul" Spider-Man, emblematic of post-Civil Rights Movement texts that imagine other ways of being Black, culturally and politically, but that also contend with the increasing marketability of blackness and, in this case, Afro-Latinidad. While Miles Morales began as a comic book character, his reach and influence have moved far beyond that realm. In fact, many people have likely encountered him only through his film or video games. While Isabel Molina-Guzmán has analyzed the casting process and fan reactions to *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse* (2017),[7] no substantial commentary has yet focused on Miles Morales' video game representations. The PlayStation (PS) 5 video game *Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales* (2020) by Insomniac Games—which sold 4.1 million copies by the end of 2020[8]—is what Samuel R. Delaney and andré m. carrington call a "paraliterary" text. carrington writes, "the paraliterary consists of a constellation of textual practices that we can distinguish from literature in terms of their ascribed intellectual value and their respective relationships to commerce."[9] Like the "remixed superhero," the paraliterary requires that we consider Miles Morales in relation to his and Peter Parker's comic origins as well as the video-game marketplace, one that has served an audience imagined to be white, male, and averse to "politics" narrowly understood. In navigating this landscape, Miles Morales adapts and samples the original Spider-Man to explore conceptions of both heroism and AfroLatinidad. Black superheroes, as Nama writes, have "frequently challenged conventional and preconceived notions concerning black racial identity by offering a futuristic and fantastic vision of blackness that transcended and potentially shattered calcified notions of blackness as a racial category and source of cultural meaning."[10] The game rejects "calcified notions of blackness," such as Moseley's claim that blackness is an urban experience of poverty and violence or that blackness is a monolingual culture. The game allows players to explore the ways in which Miles Morales' superpowers and Afro-Puerto Rican identity re-shapes Spider-Man's relation to themes of power and responsibility.

One might contest the claim that Miles Morales is a post-soul Spider-Man since he is not the creation of a Black artist. From 2011 to 2017, famous (white) writer Brian Michael Bendis wrote Miles Morales' stories and is recognized as a co-creator. During this time, Bendis

> barely makes any mention of Miles's ethnicity … we never see Miles speak in Spanish … There is no indication that Miles has ever been to Puerto Rico or that he even knows any other Puerto Rican/Latina/o kids.[11]

After he departed Marvel for rival DC Comics, Saladin Ahmed began to pen the stories in the

current Marvel run, *Miles Morales: Spider-Man* (2018–present), which has brought in more of his ethnic identity, namely through a story line paralleling a child kidnapping plot to the US's family separation border policy.[12] However, when it comes to the creation of Miles Morales, Bendis emphasizes the importance of the 2010 social media campaign urging Sony Pictures to audition Black comedian and musician Donald Glover for the role of Peter Parker/Spider-Man in what became the 2012 film, *The Amazing Spider-Man* (starring white American-British actor Andrew Garfield).[13] As Albert Fu and Ora C. McWilliams argue, that campaign was directly influenced by Marc Bernardin's 2010 article provocatively titled, "The last thing Spider-Man should be is another white guy," which Glover tweeted two days after its publication.[14] Bernardin, a Black journalist, based his argument on both colorblindness and the fact that Spider-Man's whiteness is not crucial to his character:

> In no way is Peter Parker defined by his whiteness in the same way that too many Black characters are defined by their Blackness. He's defined by the people he cares for, by his career, by his identity as a New Yorker (incidentally, one of the most diverse cities in the world)—as too many good people died to prove, a man is defined by his choices, not by the color of his skin,[15]

alluding to Martin Luther King, Jr's oft-quoted line from his "I Have a Dream" speech. While Bendis may be the writer and co-creator of Miles Morales as Spider-Man, the creation of a Black Puerto Rican Spider-Man can best be credited to a post-soul and post-racial call to diversify the superhero genre to reflect a new America.

Framing Miles Morales in the Post-Soul and Post-Race Era

In 2008, David A. Hollinger used the term "post-racial" (as well as "postethnic") to imagine a future in which "the significance of Blackness itself" is put into question. President Obama's election challenged an essentializing blackness tied to political resistance. For Hollinger, the uncertainties created by Obama's campaign and election "make it easier to contemplate a possible future in which the ethnoracial categories central to identity politics would be more matters of choice than ascription."[16] The terms post-soul and post-race have been read as calls to colorblindness (and thus colorblind racism)[17] as well as an ideal to works towards, hope towards a less restrictive, more free expression of race and culture. There has long been a tradition among Black and Latin American thinkers to focus on the commonality of humanity rather than our differences, from Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos' "la raza cósmica" [cosmic race] to Jean Toomer's conception of "the blue meridian," both of which celebrate mixedness in the US and Americas more broadly.[18] While scholars of AfroLatinidad and Latin American studies more broadly have posited that mestizaje is anti-Black,[19] post-soul scholarship rarely engages with Latinx studies conceptions of mixture. While the post-soul (and variations on the name) has numerous definitions, I draw from

Bertram Ashe's definition of post-soul's formal attributes. In addition, because of Miles Morales' status as a "mixed-race superhero," I place the post-soul in conversation with scholarship that foregrounds the use of mixture in the fantastic, namely Nama's "remixed superhero" and Juliet Hooker's "mestizo futurisms."

While Trey Ellis' assertion that the New Black Aesthetic/post-soul "is really an anti-aesthetic that defies definition," may be provocative, it provides little guidance for how to approach post-soul texts.[20] And while the post-soul has been, for some, an anti-movement movement, Ashe's delineation provides a helpful lens for thinking through the video game narrative and representations of Miles Morales. Spider-Man/Miles Morales embodies two of the three components of post-soul literature that Ashe describes. First is a narrative focus on a "'cultural mulatto' archetype."[21] Ellis self-identified as a "cultural mulatto," defining the term as follows:

> Just as a genetic mulatto is a black person of mixed parents who can often get along fine with his white grandparents, a cultural mulatto, educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures, can also navigate easily in the white world.[22]

Ellis' definition, while evoking a black/white binary, is relevant to Miles' Afro-Puerto Rican identity, since Latinidad is often seen as a white, or at least a not-Black, identity.[23] In fact, the "cultural mulatto" trope as deployed in the video game dovetails with Hooker's concept of "mestizo futurisms," a hemispheric American speculative tradition represented by W. E. B. Du Bois and Vasconcelos, who wrote "mixed-race utopias that sought to envision post-racist futures."[24] In this case, Insomniac's representation of Spanish Harlem celebrates the neighborhood as a multiracial utopia, where Puerto Rican culture is celebrated through the Puerto-Rican-flag-laden street fair that Miles attends near the beginning of the game or the businesses whose advertisements and names are written in Spanish or use the flags that proudly claim their migrant heritage.

In its deployment, the cultural mulatto is not solely a tragic trope but rather represents "difference as one of the rich facts of one's life, a truism that gives you more data, more power, and more flavor."[25] In many ways Miles Morales is similarly situated. His difference is one to be celebrated, to add richness to the superhero ideal. Though in the game Miles has suffered loss, as his father died in Insomniac's 2018 Peter Parker-centered game, he also clearly has a strong, multiracial support system. For example, in the beginning of the game, the player as Miles helps his mother prepare for La Nochebuena (Christmas Eve) celebrations by choosing a record from his father's collection. He can choose from Willie Colón, Miles Davis, or Otis Redding. Colón's salsa represents Abuela's music that his parents loved to dance to whenever it was played. Davis and Redding are named as his father's and uncle's favorite artists, respectively. All evoke happy memories and show an ease by which Miles and his family live in Black Latinidad. The player then watches a cutscene where Miles, his mother, his Korean American friend Ganke, and his Black Brooklynite friend Phin laugh, joke, and feast.[26] While his father's loss is

palpable in the celebration preparations, these scenes occupy what Margo Crawford, in her analysis of the Black fantastic in popular culture, identifies as "the zone where black people find a space to express love, happiness, and fantasy."[27]

The second defining characteristic of the "post-soul" according to Ashe is "the execution of an exploration of Blackness."[28] For Ashe, "Explicit post-soul blaxploration argues that Blackness is constantly in flux, and in that way the post-soul aesthetic 'responds' to the 1960's 'call' for a fixed, iron-clad Black aesthetic."[29] For Miles, blaxploration occurs not through overt questioning of his blackness (or Latinidad), either through self-doubt or community questioning, but rather by his effortless incorporation in Black and Latino spaces, representing what E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera call the "blacktino," "a designation [that] recognizes a history of cohabitation between African American and Latina/o communities … and centers cultural and political desires that might yield more solidary futures."[30] Just as his father's record collection speaks to the co-existence of US blackness and puertorriqueñidad, Miles' easy mixture of English and Spanish—whether with the mover he helps at the game's beginning or on the phone with his mother as he web-swings across the city—is never represented as unusual. Miles' blaxploration also comes forth as he navigates what being Spider-Man means to him.

An "Other" Spider-Man

While many assume that young, white men are at the center of "gamer" identity, Passmore et al. demonstrate that "a greater proportion of people of color play games, identify as gamers, and own a gaming system than their White non-Hispanic counterparts."[31] Despite this fact,

> characters of color are vastly underrepresented in commercial games; rates of main and secondary characters of color in games released by AAA studios are as low as 1% for Hispanic/Latinx and 0% for Native American main characters in some studies.[32]

Miles reaches new heights for Black Latino representation. This status means that Miles Morales, through hostility or celebration, is often "othered" as Spider-Man. While "the other" usually acts as a negative term, Isiah Lavender III's conception of "Otherhood," which combines "personhood (identity) and neighborhood (environment)," offers a lens for us to consider how characters (and people) are connected to their individual sense of self and to place.[33] As Lavender contends: "This move [otherhood] gives us a way of thinking about how the genre plays with race, making of it something other than a simple reflection of historic and current social conditions."[34] While arguments by some readers, fans, and scholars try to dissect how authentically AfroLatino Miles is, in his video game, he does not struggle to exist as Black and Puerto Rican; he just is. His love of hip-hop, exemplified by the instruments in his room and a side quest in which he collects city sounds to recreate an album that his dad and uncle made before their estrangement, coexists alongside the coqui and Puerto Rican flag décor in his bedroom.[35] Instead of wondering about his ethno-racial belonging, he must navigate how to enter the fold as Spider-Man

in his own right while also dealing with the loss of his father and his old neighborhood. The video game imagines an "other" space where he is the norm.

In the game, Miles must find his place after moving from Brooklyn to Spanish Harlem. Still grieving his father's death in the 2018 Spider-Man game, Miles and Rio move into Abuela's old apartment. Rio is running for City Council. Peter Parker is going out of town, so Miles is going to be the city's only Spider-Man for a few weeks. Miles' game takes place in a mostly Black and brown environment. The game has no white character (other than the barely present Peter Parker and the CEO villain) to which an imagined white gamer is supposed to "relate." By existing in a space where blackness and brownness is the norm rather than the exception, the game creates an "other" space. Spanish Harlem becomes a mestizo futurist place that "dare[s] to imagine a world not dominated or defined by whiteness."[36] Here, Miles worries more about being accepted by his neighborhood, rather than trying to be accepted by white people.

Whiteness is not entirely separate from the game's concerns though. As Jorge J. Santos, Jr. notes, in trying to fill the shoes of his white Spider-Man predecessor, there is an unspoken assumption that whiteness is the model we all must aspire to.[37] In this way, Morales takes on the cultural mulatto archetype—he must show his ability to combine the culture of Harlem and the standards set by Peter Parker, the "real" Spider-Man. One way that he adapts to his role as Spider-Man is through his Spider-suit. When Miles receives his first Spider-suit from Peter (one that appears to have been an earlier prototype), he literally tries to step into Peter Parker's shoes, to be a substitute, not his own hero. In the mid-game, Miles designs, alongside Ganke, his own Spider-suit as a statement of self-discovery. The suit's blackness is a surface call to his Black Latino identity (it is Black like him) but also what Crawford would call "the substance of surface" or "radical superficiality."[38] While seemingly a superficial change, the surface reflects a deeper exploration of his identity and values. As Crawford writes, "it is easy to feel the exhilaration of putting on new clothes that make one move through the world with a new sense of style and self-determination."[39] The player is excited to get new gear but also knows that this new suit is a claim to self-determination, an awareness of what it means to be a Spider-Man in Spanish Harlem. However, his new neighborhood, while not hostile to the "other" Spider-Man, is not willing to claim him as their own in the beginning. He must prove himself.

Haitian American writer Evan Narcisse worked as a narrative consultant on the game and said he wanted to represent Miles' journey to become "woven into the fabric of Harlem," rather than a hero on the margins.[40] While the PS5 game explores Miles' own discomfort as the "other" Spider-Man, the game moves him towards feeling included and protected by the people of Harlem, for whom he becomes their "friendly neighborhood Spider-Man." The creative team developed the game around the theme of "adaptation."[41] While at a narrative level this occurs through the story of finding belonging in Harlem, at the level of game mechanics, *Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales* is an adaptation of the 2018 PS4

game. The swinging and fighting mechanics as well as the quick-time events (where the player has to press buttons in a particular rhythm to continue the game's story) come directly from the Peter Parker-centered game. However, Miles' game remixes these mechanics, most noticeably through the introduction of his special brand of powers, bioelectricity ("venom power") and invisibility. In addition, as a remixed superhero, *how* Miles responds to wrongdoing reflects the realities of Spanish Harlem's history with the police. In one side quest, Miles wants to investigate a kidnapping that is cordoned off as a crime scene. However, aware that he is a vigilante and a Black Puerto Rican one at that, he knows he cannot just stroll up to the evidence; the player must distract the officers and use Miles' invisibility to complete the investigation. Rather than partner with police, Ganke makes Miles the Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man (FNSM) app through which New Yorkers can request his services—which can be helping solve crimes or finding a lost cat—rather than call the police. This starkly contrasts to Peter Parker's method of tracking crimes in the 2018 game, which was to repair and then tap into the surveillance towers installed by mega-corporation Oscorp and used by the NYPD.[42] Thus, the game adapts both the mechanics and story to recognize Miles' unique powers and his experiences as a racialized teenager in New York City.

The driving conflict of the game, at first glance, is a gentrification narrative at superheroic scale, represented by energy company Roxxon's imposing, newly built skyscraper in Spanish Harlem. However, the interpersonal conflict is even richer, navigating family relationships as well as his commitment to the neighborhood. How can he rebuild a relationship with his Uncle Aaron—a criminal unwilling to reform? What should he do when his best friend becomes so obsessed with revenge for her brother that she has lost sight of what matters: the people of Harlem? These questions reflect those inherent in the term community, as Juan Flores writes in his deconstruction of the Spanish *comunidad*: "*común* stands for the community *in* itself, while *unidad* refers to the community *for* itself, the way that it thinks, conceives of, imagines itself."[43] The antagonists reflect the game's concern with belonging and navigate competing ideas of communal good within communities. While the main antagonist is the CEO of Roxxon, he is almost tangential to the story. Rather than try to humanize him or explain his motives, the game focuses on the battle between Phin and Miles Morales as Spider-Man. A Black girl genius, Phin is Miles' childhood best friend who leads a group trying to stop Roxxon's environmentally racist new energy source. She is a vigilante like Miles, concerned with helping those who Roxxon sees as disposable, but her means cast her as a villain.[44] However, her desire to avenge her brother's death (caused by Roxxon) makes her cause sympathetic. Miles wants to stop Roxxon, too, but he wants to do so by finding damning evidence from the company and fomenting media outrage.

The conflict can explore AfroLatinidad not merely through its relationship to whiteness but rather through his questioning of what family and community looks like, what it is meant to do, and what people of color should be fighting for in the present day. The game asks us to put Rio Morales' openly

anti-Roxxon election campaign and community organizing in conversation with the two different forms of vigilantism represented by Phin and Miles. While Phin's approach represents a militant Black activism, Miles' politics are presented as softer and less conflict-driven. For example, after completing all the requests on the FNSM app, some Harlemites make him a new golden Spider-suit and leave it in front of a Black Lives Matter mural.[45] By claiming an alignment with Black Lives Matter, the game suggests that Miles' vigilantism is another aspect of civil disobedience. But it also points to how commercialized and media-dependent BLM itself has become.[46] In the end, militancy, the media, and community organizing have a place in resolving the game's crisis. Rio and Ganke evacuate Spanish Harlem. Phin's technology helps Miles fly above the city to release a destructive amount of energy absorbed from Roxxon's experimental source, though it kills her in the process.[47] Having seen the destruction wrought by Roxxon, the CEO is jailed, and Rio Morales is elected to City Council.

Miles' actions allow him to be claimed by Spanish Harlem, embracing the mantle of the "other" Spider-Man. This moment of acceptance at the end of the game is represented by an act of mutual protection. Several residents of Harlem see Spider-Man unconscious, without his mask after the explosion. When reporters rush to the scene, the Spanish Harlem residents form a human curtain, keeping the media from him while he recovers. When the reporters ask who is behind the mask, they refuse to say. Instead, a Black Harlemite replies, "That guy? He's our Spider-Man." Spider-Man's acceptance is not an individual claim, but a communal one. In addition, rather than name him as the rightful Spider-Man, as "the" Spider-Man, he is "ours"—a hero who understands the needs of Spanish Harlem and has proven his commitment. Once the neighborhood claims him, he can see himself as the neighborhood's Spider-Man, responsible to the Black and brown world the game has built. In the post-game, his black-and-red mask is added alongside Peter Parker's Spider-Man to the El Barrio mural next to his family's apartment.

The game's conclusion speaks to Miles' responsibility to Spanish Harlem as a hero and a Black Latino, though without explicitly using the language of race. When Peter Parker returns, Miles tells him that he knows "Roxxon did this [act of environmental racism] uptown because they saw us as disposable. Me. Rick. Phin. All of Harlem." Miles posits that, "part of our [Spider-Man's] job's making sure they can't get away with it." Peter, returning to an oath that he made Miles take light-heartedly before leaving town, takes on a serious tone, suggesting this purpose should be added to the Spider-Man oath. Here, we see Miles Morales shaping the Spider-Man identity, telling the player and Peter Parker what the work of Miles Morales as Spider-Man should and will be. The original oath made Miles "promise to do everything in [his] power to protect this city." Miles proposes that Spider-Man's commitment should be to those most vulnerable to exploitation and harm, rather than to a colorblind heroism.

Unlike Moseley predicted, the Black Puerto Rican Spider-Man offered to today's comic book readers and video game players is not defined by tragedy; rather, he offers us interrogations of community and belonging

that the white Peter Parker does not. Miles Morales is the poster boy for diversity and inclusion, successfully increasing AfroLatino representation and visibility. As a remixed superhero, Miles provides space to discuss AfroLatinx relationships to New York City. However, his character is far from radical; for instance, the limits of a marketable Afro-Latinidad elides the history of Puerto Rican colonization that informs Afro-Puerto Rican identity.[48] Miles is unapologetically Black Puerto Rican, acting as Ellis' cultural mulatto who navigates the blacktino space with ease. Despite the limitations that marketability places on video games, Insomniac's paraliterary text still tackles topics many games avoid, namely the relationship between superheroes and police. Re-casting Spider-Man/Miles Morales as a hero for a Harlem beset by systemic racism expands and deepens the hero's famous phrase on power and responsibility. At the same time, the game's choice to talk about race without actually using the words "race" or "systemic racism" allows players who want to ignore those questions to do so.[49] For better or worse, when a post-Obama world called for a hero, Miles Morales answered.

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Notes

1. Abraham Riesman, "Novelist Walter Mosley Talks Luke Cage, Colorism, and Why Spider-Man Was the 'First Black Superhero,'" *Vulture*, October 13, 2016, https://www.vulture.com/2016/10/walter-mosley-on-why-spider-man-is-Black.html.

2. Adilifu Nama, *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 92.

3. Brian Montes, "The Paradox of Miles Morales: Social Gatekeeping and the Browning of America's Spider-Man," in *Graphic Borders: Latino Comic Books Past, Present & Future*, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama and Cristopher González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 269–79.

4. The original Miles artist was Italian-born and -based Sara Pichelli and currently the artist is Spanish-born Javier Garrón.

5. The multi-billion-dollar AAA game industry produces the most-expensive, well-advertised, and highest-selling mainstream video games. Note that other AfroLatino characters exist in multi-player online games, like *Overwatch*, but their stories are not integral to the story or gameplay.

6. Brian Truitt, "Half-Black, Half-Hispanic Spider-Man Revealed," *USA Today*, August 1, 2011, https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/comics/2011-08-01-black-spider-man_n.htm. Truitt's subtitle reads, "We have an African-American president, so why not an African-American Spider-Man, too?"

7. Isabel Molina-Guzmán, "*Into the Spider-Verse* and the Commodified (Re)Imagining of Afro-Rican Visibility," in *Mixed-Race Superheroes*, ed. Sika A. Dagbovie-Mullins and Eric L. Berlatsky (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 220–42.

8. Six months after its release, it remained in the top 10 in sales, despite being a PS exclusive: Jai Barnachia, "Spider-Man: Miles Morales Is Outselling the Biggest PlayStation Exclusives," *Tech Times*, April 16, 2021, https://www.techtimes.com/articles/259187/20210416/spider-man-miles-morales.htm

9. andré m. carrington, *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 6.

10. Nama, *Super Black*, 5–6.

11. Montes, "The Paradox of Miles Morales," 274; Jorge J. Santos, Jr., "Talented Tensions and Revisions: The Narrative Double Consciousness of Miles Morales," in Dagbovie-Mullins and Berlatsky, *Mixed-Race Superheroes*, 180, 189; Adilifu Nama and Maya Haddad, "Mapping the *Blatino* Badlands and Borderlands of American Pop Culture," in *Graphic Borders: Latino Comic Books Past, Present & Future*, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama and Cristopher González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 258.

12. That storyline occurs in the trade paperback collection, *Straight Out of Brooklyn*. Ahmed, in addition to being identifiable as a person of color through his name and skin color, identifies as biracial (Middle Eastern/North African and white).

13. Ora C. McWilliams, "Who Is Afraid of a Black Spider(-Man)?" *Transformative Works and Cultures* 13 (December 11, 2012), https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0455. Note also that the creation of a comic character is rarely a one-person event. Marvel editors-in-chief Axel Alonso (2011–2017) and Joe Quesada (2000–2011) are named by Bendis as important supporters of creating a Spider-Man who "really represented the racial diversity of New York City": witherspoonc, "Multiracial Spider-Man Creator Finds Critics Comical," *The Grio*, August 6, 2011, https://thegrio.com/2011/08/06/man-behind-mixed-race-spider-man/.

14. Albert S. Fu, "Fear of a Black Spider-Man: Racebending and the Colour-Line in Superhero (Re)Casting," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 6, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 269–283, https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2014.994647; McWilliams, "Who Is Afraid."

15. Marc Bernardin, "The Last Thing Spider-Man Should Be Is Another White Guy," *Gizmodo*, May 28, 2010, https://io9.gizmodo.com/the-last-thing-spider-man-should-be-is-another-white-gu-5549613.

16. David A. Hollinger, "Obama, the Instability of Color Lines, and the Promise of a Postethnic Future," *Callaloo* 31, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 1033–1037.

17. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 5th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

18. See José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Didier T. Jaén (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1997); see Dean D. Shackelford "Blue Meridian," in *Masterplots II: African American Literature, Revised Edition* (Salem Press, 2008), 1–5, for analysis of Toomer's poem. A similar argument is made in Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

19. Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal, "Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845–1959," *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (1998): 21–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X9802500302 and Tatiana Flores, "'Latinidad Is Cancelled': Confronting an Anti-Black Construct," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 3, no. 3 (2021): 58–79, https://doi.org/10.1525/lavc.2021.3.3.58.

20. Trey Ellis, "Response to NBA Critiques," *Callaloo*, no. 38 (1989): 251; Paul C. Taylor begins from the fact that post-blackness "seems, in fact, to be a placeholder, an abbreviated, perhaps elliptical invocation of unexcavated theoretical resources": Paul C. Taylor, "Post-Black, Old Black," *African American Review* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 625–640.

21. Bertram D. Ashe, "Theorizing the Post-Soul Aesthetic: An Introduction," *African American Review* 41, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 609–623, https://doi.org/10.2307/25426980.

22. Trey Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic," *Callaloo*, no. 38 (1989): 233–243.

23. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

24. Hooker, *Theorizing Race*, 18.

25. Lisa Jones, *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair* (New York: Anchor Press, 1994), 33.

26. Phin turns out to be a semi-villainous vigilante character, as discussed later.

27. Margo Natalie Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First-Century Aesthetics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 198.

28. Ashe, "Theorizing," 613.

29. Ibid., 615.

30. E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, "Introduction: Ethnoracial Intimacies in Blacktino Queer Performance" in *Blacktino Queer Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

31. Cale J. Passmore, Max V. Birk, and Regan L. Mandryk, "The Privilege of Immersion: Racial and Ethnic Experiences, Perceptions, and Beliefs in Digital Gaming," *Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (2018): 383.

32. Ibid.; In fact, making the player virtually inhabit a Black Puerto Rican character is a rarity, as shown in David R. Dietrich, "Avatars of Whiteness: Racial Expression in Video Game Characters," *Sociological Inquiry* 83, no. 1 (February 2013): 82–105, https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12001.

33. Isiah Lavender III, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 7.

34. Ibid., 20.

35. The game's interaction with Nuyorican hip-hop aesthetics is worth further discussion: see Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

36. Hooker, *Theorizing Race*, 118.

37. Santos, Jr., "Talented Tensions," 186

38. Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness*, 211; 216.

39. Ibid., 201.

40. Narcisse adds, "To know that you're a part of the fabric of that society that you're growing up in, that you're not outside on the fringes like we get told so often as marginalized people. That you're actually part of the fabric of that city makes you feel connected to it in a deep way. Especially when that connection is a counter-narrative to prevailing, societal attitudes about Black people specifically": Jacob Wolf, "Miles Morales Becomes His Own Spider-Man in His New Game," *ESPN*, November 6, 2020, https://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/30256318/miles-morales-becomes-own-spider-man-new-game.

41. Ibid.

42. For more on how the game navigates Miles' relationship to the police, see Mike Sholars, "*Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales*: The Kotaku Review," *Kotaku* (blog), November 6, 2020, https://kotaku.com/marvel-s-spider-man-miles-morales-the-kotaku-review-1845581003.

43. Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*, 193.

44. While Phin reflects what Phillip Lamarr Cunningham identifies as Marvel's history of having "a litany of black villains who carry heavy weaponry," she is also one of the only Black teenaged girls I've seen in this position of anti-villain. Phillip Lamarr Cunningham, "The Absence of Black Supervillains in Mainstream Comics," *Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics* 1, no. 1 (June 10, 2010): 55, https://doi.org/10.1080/21504851003798330; Cunningham only discusses Black male villains, providing no analysis of Black women supervillains, such as Amanda Waller, Nightshade, Calypso, or Fatality. For an analysis of Black superheroines, see Jeffrey A. Brown, "Panthers and Vixens: Black Superheroines, Sexuality, and Stereotypes in Contemporary Comic Books," in *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation*, ed. Sheena C. Howard and Ronald L. Jackson (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

45. Sholars, "Marvel's Spider-Man." Sholars believes "this is the first acknowledgement of BLM in a video game ever." A screenshot of the selfie Miles takes with the mural can be viewed in Sholars' article.

46. Consider recent critiques and callouts of BLM by Samira Rice and others, particularly

around profiteering. See John Eligon, "Black Lives Matter Has Grown More Powerful, and More Divided," *New York Times*, June 4, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/04/us/black-lives-matter.html and Imani Perry, "Stop Hustling Black Death," *The Cut*, May 24, 2021, https://www.thecut.com/article/samaria-rice-profile.html.

47. Though Phin's sacrificing of her life fits into problematic stereotypes that see Black women's lives as secondary to those around them.

48. While the game has a picture of Miles' abuela, who recently moved back to the island, "at a protest back in the day," there is otherwise no discussion of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the diaspora.

49. Future scholarship should consider the "market aesthetics" of Miles Morales. See Elena Machado Sáez, *Market Aesthetics: The Purchase of the Past in Caribbean Diasporic Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

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