

Marvel Comics is *the world outside your window*, it should be treated as such. Here's how Bendis explained it to *The New York Times*: *"There's a lot going on in the world that just isn't touched upon in mainstream superhero fiction. I thought this was a grand opportunity for us to open the doors a little bit."* Another contributing factor was the experience of a Black childhood friend of Bendis's, who told him that the other kids would only let him be Spider-Man when they played because the suit covered all of his skin. It's thanks to that suit that Spider-Man can be anyone under the mask.

## MILES MORALES AND RACISM

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The new web-slinger was met with a surge of racism from people who didn't agree with his existence. Miles Morales was Black, more specifically half African American and half Puerto Rican. That combination set several people off around the Internet. Social media was rife with comments suggesting that the color of Miles' skin was a problem and an insult to Spider-Man's identity. His debut became a hot political and current-events topic.

Websites like *I'm Not Racist, But...* and *Inside Pulse* compiled some of the comments:

*"Look not trying to sound racist but was reading the US today and now marvel is*

*going with a half black half mexican spiderman what the fuck is going on. We are starting to become the minority in this country."*

*"New ultimate spiderman... He is black...I am not racist but I am not pleased."*

*"Wait.... does he talk all ghetto? lol."*

*"Half black, Half Latino spiderman...Not to be racist, but that doesn't sound right."*

*"owwww shuit! They replaced Parker with a black guy?! Not being racist but that's not just Spider-Man."*

*"It's an agenda and reeks of cultural Marxism. What Marvel did was kill off a piece of American cultural identity and replaced it with something mediocre."*

*"What utter total garbage. Progressive comics?!?! Please? What a joke. These people can't come up with any original thought. They need to steal and feed off established success because they are incapable of anything successful on their own. Total bunk."*

Miles had to fight racism from the moment he was introduced to the world. His current status as a global icon does not erase a past full of reactions as racist as they are ignorant: hate based purely on skin color.

Comments in the news also smacked of prejudice. *"Who is going to believe a black man in a mask is out for the good of man kind?"* But this extended beyond people hiding behind social media's anonymity. It was also expressed by pundits. For example, American political commentator Glenn Beck, a conservative with close ties to the Republican party, called the comic book stupid and blamed Michelle Obama for it. His radio show was the nation's third most listened to in 2009. Jim Treacher, a then columnist for the conservative news site *The Daily Caller*, tweeted, *"I think it's great that the new Spider-Man is black. I just hope he doesn't blame all his problems on Peter Parker."*

The letter pages of *Ultimate Comics: Spider-Man* (2011) also elicited negative reactions, with some complaining about Peter Parker's death, saying, *"You killed off one of your greatest characters of all time for the sole reason of diversity"* or declaring that the changes would push them to read DC comics instead and that they wouldn't be purchasing Marvel comics anymore.

Sara Pichelli also spoke to *USA Today*, stating that *"Maybe sooner or later a black or gay — or both — hero will be considered something absolutely normal."* The Italian artist's statement was taken very literally by some groups, who were quick to also reveal their homophobia when discussing Miles Morales.

But at the same time, this was all a sign of how important it was to give Black characters starring

roles. Miles was a representation of the real world: both the people in it and those who hate them for the mere fact of their existence. Talking about Miles Morales' history means talking about racism, too, which is why I felt it was necessary to include some of the very first reactions to the character's debut. From day one, there was this backlash that unfortunately continues to this day, not only against Spider-Man, but against characters in other mediums like film or video games.

But these types of reactions exist in contrast to all the positive ones. Journalist David Betancourt wrote the following for *The Washington Post*:

*"Black superheroes, of course, have made their mark on the comic book industry — including not only Black Panther but also Storm and Spawn, for example — but this is different. This is Marvel taking the mantle of their flagship character — one of the most important comic-book characters in history — and placing the characters in the hands of a kid who reflects a more accurate portrayal of the diversity of where we are in the world right now."*

Axel Alonso, who was editor-in-chief at Marvel in 2011, said the following when introducing Miles Morales:

*"When the opportunity arose to create a new Spider-Man, we knew it had to be a character that represents the diversity — in background and experience — of the twenty-first century. Miles is a character who not only follows in the tradition of relatable characters like Peter Parker, but also shows why he's a new, unique kind of Spider-Man — and worthy of that name."*

And there was even room in the letter pages for gratitude, as in this comment from reader Elliot Ruben Serrano in Miles' first issue:

*"As a young Hispanic male who grew up reading comics, I always related to Peter Parker the most, despite the idea that he was a white kid from Queens, New York. But I always imagined a day when I could be the kid under the mask. And now, today's generation of young readers will get to live in a world where ANYONE can be Spider-Man. This is when the 'House of Ideas' really does live up to its name. Thank you for that and all that you do."*