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Luke Cage

Late in September, a hero punched his way to TV and laptop screens across the nation. This hero was the bulletproof black man in a hoodie Luke Cage in the show Luke Cage. Although he appeared in the Marvel Netflix show Jessica Jones last November his character was played differently by actor Mike Colter, he mentions why interview with IGN "You're not always the same person around everyone you know ... you might not necessarily behave the same way around your mom that you would with your wife or your boss". The thing that makes Luke Cage so enjoyable not only as a character but as a show is that it defies the stereotypes that usually portray black men and women as well as Luke not being the stereotypical superhero.

The character Luke Cage was conceived in the height of the Blaxploitation genre in 1972. He was the brainchild of Archie Goodwin, John Romita, Sr. and George Tuska. His first appearance was in Luke Cage, Hero for Hire #1 in June of 1972. Making him the first black comic book hero headlining his own series in comics

In the comics Luke Cage or when he was going by his real name of Carl Lucas was born and raised in Harlem, Carl spent his youth along with his friend Willis Stryker in a gang called the Bloods. When Reva Connors, Stryker's girlfriend, breaks up with him because she fears his

violent line of work, she seeks comfort with Carl. In his mind this persuades Stryker that Lucas is responsible for the breakup, so he plants heroin in Carl's apartment and then tips off the police. Carl is arrested and sent to prison where contact with his family is scarce. While in Seagate Prison which is located off the coast of Georgia, Carl becomes the favorite target/punching bag of a racist parole officer, Billy Bob Rackham. His brutality and hostility to Carl eventually cause Rackham to receive a demotion when a new warden catches him in the act causing Rackham to hate Carl more. Meanwhile the prison physician Dr. Noah Burstein, who came to the prison to carry out secret medical research and recruited Carl as a volunteer for it. He was secretly working on experimental cell regeneration based on a variant of the Super-Soldier process which gave Captain America his powers. Burstein submerged Carl in an electrical field conducted by some organic chemical compound. Carl was left unattended, but Rackham snuck in and misused the experiment's controls, hoping to maim or kill Carl in revenge for his earlier demotion. The tampering did not have the intended effects of the experiment or Rackham's goal it instead an explosion happened and it gave Carl super human strength along unbreakable skin thus increasing his durability to superhuman heights. With his new found powers and everyone presuming he died in the explosion he escaped from prison and fought his way back to New York where he changed his name to Luke Cage and became a superhero for hire going by the name Power Man. The Netflix version of the character has a similar origin story but there are a few differences.

In the Netflix version of Luke Cage, the character's origin remains mostly the same except for some key changes. The first was that the story was modernized for current times and he was from Georgia, not New York, the next change was that Stryker was not only his best

friend but his step brother born from affair from his pastor father and a church member. This changed the dynamic and history between the two. They were never in a gang together and Stryker did not frame him over the break up with Reva Connors who he never dated and also has a different origin, but he was framed because of Stryker's jealousy of Luke being the "true" son and always seen as perfect, so Stryker framed him for a murder he did not commit. Another change as mentioned before was Reva Connors who's origin was changed to be Dr. Burstein's assistant and the prison therapist. After she and Luke fall in love and escape the prison only for her to die before the start of the series. The next change is not to the character's origin but to his attire. In the comics Luke Cage wears a bright yellow disco shirt, bell bottom pants, has an afro and wears a tiara but along with modernization of the story there was a modernization of the wardrobe while he doesn't have a superhero costume in this incarnation but his wardrobe consists of worn jeans, Carhartt utility jackets, and hoodies, he also sports a bald head. The character's origin plays a large part but is not the only reason why Luke Cage as a show defies the normal stereotypes that black people portray in media.

In media, black people usually portray certain stereotypes. The first being that they use vulgar profanity the most out of any other race in media. While in Luke Cage there is a good degree of cursing Luke himself does curse and even has a swear jar for when people curse around him. He uses terms like dang it and his signature catchphrase "sweet Christmas" when the situation and other people would usually find it appropriate to curse. He especially detests the word nigga so much so that when held up at gunpoint and the young, black gunman asks "What're you doing here, nigga?" Luke replies, "Young man, I've had a long day. I'm tired. But I'm not tired enough to ever let nobody call me that word. You see a nigga standing in front of

you?” This shows the pain and hatred that he has attached to this word. The same word that Mark Anthony Neal stated is “not simply as a word entrenched in racist discourse, but as the basis for a hybrid black identity – one that speaks the complexity of people of African descent who live in the United States” (Neal). The next stereotype that is defied is the magical Negro stereotype that is “a stock character that often appears as a lower class, the uneducated black person who possesses supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into competent, successful, and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation” (Hughey 554). While Luke’s strength and powers are beyond what is natural for a human he does not use to specifically help white men change their lives around he doesn’t even do it for black men. He tries to only use his powers when it is needed, he’d rather live a normal life but his exception to using his powers is to protect people he cares about and the people of Harlem. The next and final one isn’t really defying a stereotype but being more than it and adding depth to it. This is the stereotype of being the criminal/ drug lord black man stereotype. While Cornell Stokes aka Cottonmouth is a villain who is a criminal but is also a successful entrepreneur who has several successful businesses one being his night club Harlem’s Paradise. While he is a villain he does have rules and a code he abides by much more like an Italian mob boss. His goal is to just make Harlem succeed. These are not the only stereotypes that Luke Cage has to deal with and overcome there is also the stereotypes of superheroes we have in media.

Superhero’s even though they personify the perfect humans they still fall ill to stereotypes. The first being the Boy Scout stereotype which is the perfect goody two shoes

never done anything bad in their life. While Luke is a good guy he is not perfect or innocent, he's just a man. He even states this himself "I ain't guilty. But I ain't innocent either" in episode two. This just shows just how much of a regular person he is. The second stereotype is that they battle for truth and justice. When Luke is fighting he is fighting for only those cares about especially at the start of the series where Luke is just fighting for vengeance and revenge for the murder of a close friend. The third and final stereotype are that superheroes need a mask. Luke doesn't use a mask because he doesn't want to hide who he is. He is confident enough to not hide who he is, this does give him a bit of arrogance since he is bulletproof. As the character, Misty Knight said "You may be bulletproof but Harlem is not" in regards to Cottonmouth turning Harlem into a battleground in his war on Luke. Even though praised for overcoming stereotypes the show is not without its critics.

Some critics have been very vocal about the show. Some have stated that the show is too black. This can stem from the heavy influence of Blaxploitation which is an ethnic subgenre of the exploitation film, which started in the early 1970s. Blaxploitation films were originally made specifically for an urban black audience, but the genre's audience appeal soon broadened across racial and ethnic lines. It can also be seen from the racial issues the show touches upon and the music choices. Critics have taken to social media saying things like "Lack of white people in Luke Cage makes me uncomfortable. This show is racist, how is this on Netflix???" Users on Twitter have condemned the superhero series, arguing that its mostly black cast that is based in a black Harlem is "reverse racism." This isn't the only thing criticized, some people have heavily scrutinized the second half of the season. It was criticized for its slow pacing and the conflicts being dragged out. Not all critics disliked the show the review aggregator

website Rotten Tomatoes reported a 96% approval rating with an average rating of 8.2/10 based on 50 reviews. The website's critical consensus reads, "An immersive, socially conscious narrative and a confident, charismatic lead performance make Marvel's Luke Cage a stellar sampling of the new Marvel/Netflix universe." But even though citizen the show has still changed the landscape of media and how others view not only just black media but also superhero media.

Luke Cage for all good and bad that has been talked about it has changed the landscape of media. The characters origin story is unique and gave the character two accomplishments the first being the black superhero headlining their own comic series and the second being marks the first time that a black superhero has headlined his own TV series. It not only defied the stereotypes of black people in media by switching up each one or adding depth to them it also it defies the stereotypes of superheroes. But every show is not without its faults and this show has its own. But all in all this show telling the life of a bulletproof black man in a hoodie was needed.

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