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LGBTIQX-Men

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Stan Lee's contribution to modern pop culture was nearly without comparison. His creations in the pages of Marvel Comics – the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk, Iron Man, the Daredevil and many more – have infused Western mythology.

Few writers could write the aspirational hero better than Lee, and his creations have said more about responsibility, leadership, integrity and living in service to others, than anything produced in recent years. Lee did not re-invent the wheel, but how his characters strove to do the right thing – where the 'right thing' was a universal and objective ideal, in contrast to the subjective morality of today – made the characters cultural touchstones.

The themes were at once recognisable and broadcast to a mass audience what was good about the West: The Fantastic Four faced the same problems any normal family struggled with. Iron Man was the story of unashamed masculinity and heroic capitalism. The Mighty Thor was a god but had to learn the importance of humility. The pairing of power and responsibility is related to the century's old doctrine of noblesse oblige, and leaders and thinkers throughout history have expressed similar views. Only Lee catapulted it into modern popular consciousness in Spider-Man's first appearance in the pages of Amazing Fantasy 15 in 1962, with the narration 'with great power there must also be – great responsibility!'

Lee's death at the age of 95 last week marked the end of an era in publishing characterised by relatable but complex characters, universal themes, and genuine escapism.

More than anyone else, Lee pulled superhero comic books into the mainstream. Marvel Comics under his leadership not only became the dominant comic book publisher, but also led to enhanced cultural legitimacy for the medium. He hustled for decades to bring his creations to television and film, an effort which only found significant success with the release of X-Men in 2000, which has ultimately given birth to the superhero blockbuster era.

Despite undoubtedly making many people a great deal of money, Lee's story goes to show that no good deed goes unpunished. His final years were riddled with accusations of elder abuse at the hands of his associates who hoped to profit from his work. Meanwhile, Lee was being dragged to conventions to sit for hours on end for speculative collectors hoping to inflate the value of their wares by collecting his signature. Shockingly, it was revealed earlier this year that Lee's own blood was stolen in order to mix it with ink to sign Black Panther comic books, to be paired with 'a certificate of authentication that details the item as a "Hand-Stamped Signature of Stan Lee using Stan Lee's Solvent DNA Ink".'



It was not enough that terrible people attacked Stan Lee, the person. They also allowed his legacy to be almost obliterated. As the face of Marvel Comics for decades, Lee built the superhero comics industry into a powerhouse. The X-Men, created by Lee in 1963, had within three decades become one of the hottest intellectual properties in the world. The launch of a new X-Men series in October 1991, which moved over seven million copies in that month alone, remains an industry record.

Marvel Comics is barely a husk of what it once was. Now a subsidiary of Disney, it remains one of the two large publishers only by virtue of the fact that the same sickness has overrun the entire comic book industry. Radical leftists whose only qualification for creative writing is sending out 'woke' comments on Twitter have invaded the industry, and now use it as a platform for progressive political proselytising and virtue-signalling. Social justice warriors are a destructive force in a creative industry. The storylines are heavily agenda-driven, and existing intellectual properties are persistently devalued and transformed to fit the political proclivities of the writers and artists. Major characters guilty of the crime of being white men – Iron Man, Wolverine, the Hulk, Hawkeye and others – have been replaced to increase diversity representation. Iceman was a founding member of the X-Men and a heterosexual man for decades before he was abruptly transformed into a flamboyant homosexual. Thor was incoherently written out of his own book, and was replaced by a female character. X-Men has become a hotbed of left-wing politics, under the historical revisionism of the series being an allegory for civil rights struggle and homosexuality. Only a progressive could be so cruel as to equate a homosexual with a mutated human.

Identity politics cannot coexist with a system of appointment by merit. The idea that a character should only be written by someone who shares the same physical features, and can only be appreciated by an audience who also share those features is plainly absurd but has taken root in many creative industries, perhaps none more so than in comic books.

This was illustrated in August when Marvel announced that academic Eve Ewing would write Ironheart, a new series based on the black teenage girl who replaced Iron Man. In a healthy comics industry, a writer whose only creative writing experience is in poetry would never be given a brand new series at a leading publisher. But when an online petition (that failed to reach its target of 5,000 signatures) encouraged Marvel to employ Ewing because she shared Ironheart's skin colour, that was enough.

Identity politics also cannot coexist with a system based on competency. Writers that share the politics of the editorial staff but fail to sell books will always find new work. Iceman under gay writer Sina Grace was cancelled in late 2017, only to be resurrected under the same creative team in June 2018. Kelly Thompson, whose female Hawkeye series was cancelled after 16 issues, launched a new series in August starring the same character. Chelsea Cain's feminist Mockingbird series from 2016 was cancelled by Marvel after just eight issues, only for the writer to be given another new series – which itself was cancelled after the writer only managed to hand in 4 scripts over a period of two years.

Last week we mourned the loss of Stan Lee, but for true believers, the industry limps on, infected



with an ideology that values propaganda over capitalism.

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