



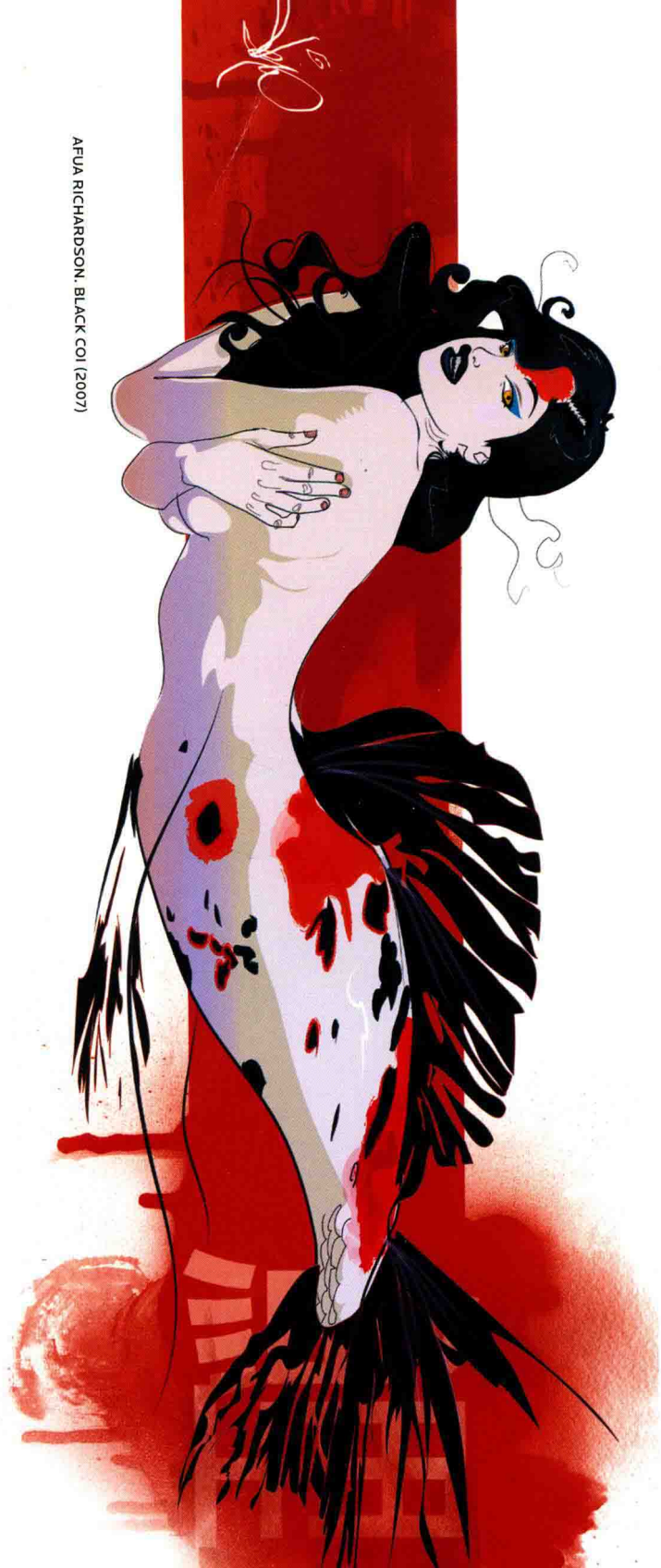
# BLACK COMIX

AFRICAN AMERICAN INDEPENDENT COMICS ART and CULTURE  
DAMIAN DUFFY and JOHN JENNINGS  
foreword by KEITH KNIGHT

BLACK  
COMIX







BLACK COMIX  
AFRICAN AMERICAN INDEPENDENT COMICS ART AND CULTURE

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**DAMIAN DUFFY & JOHN JENNINGS**

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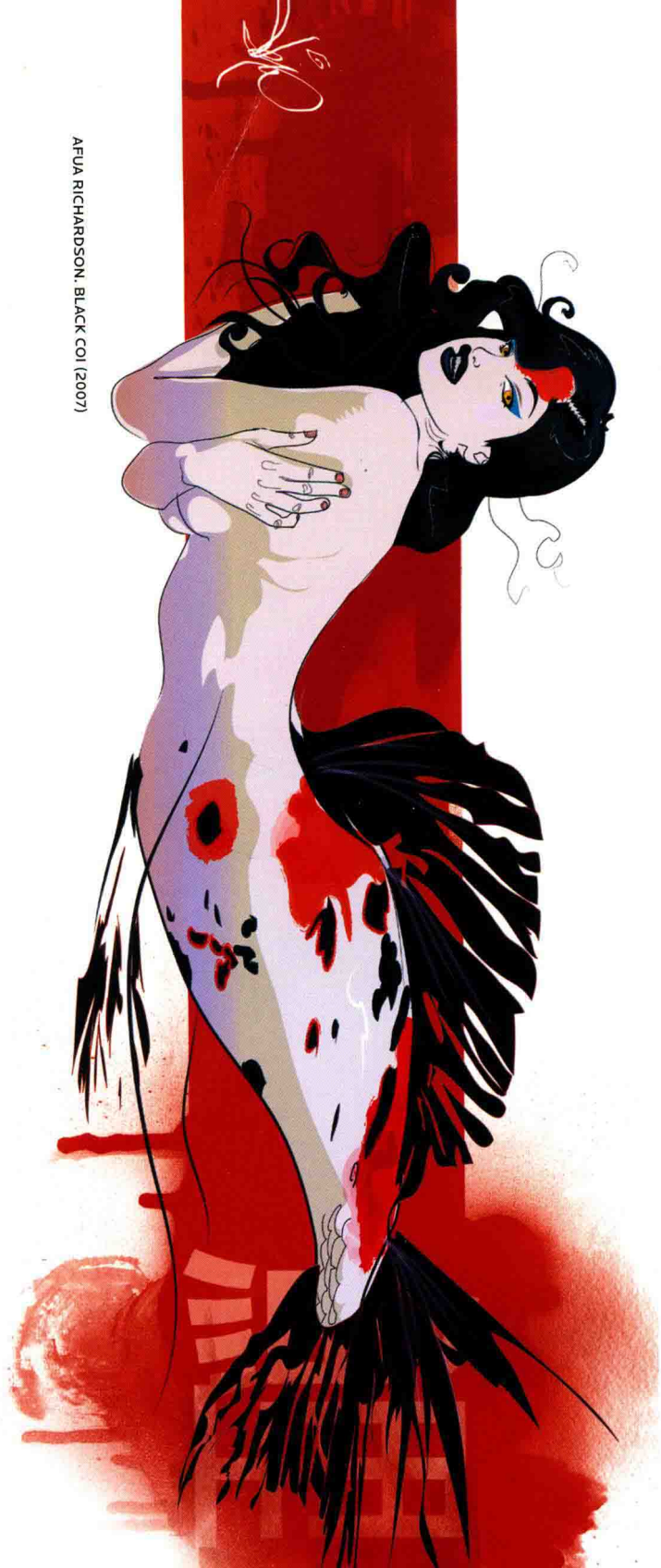
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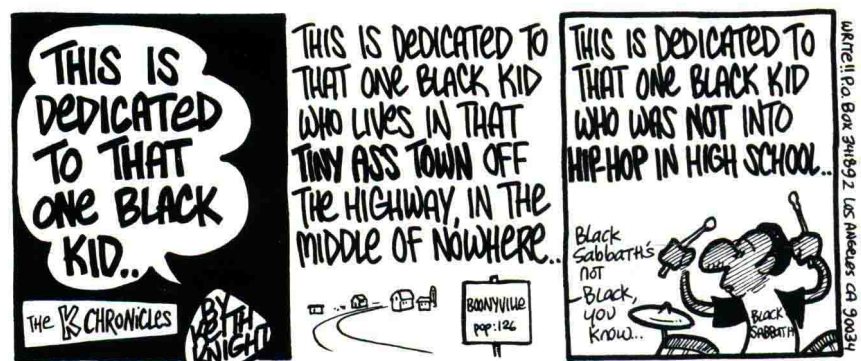
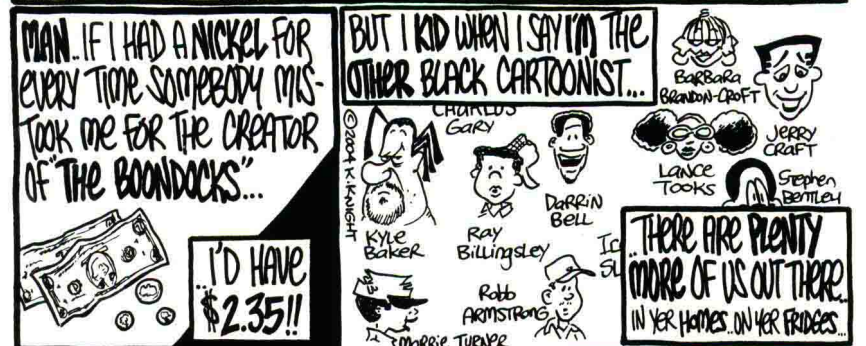
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KEITH KNIGHT. AARON MCGRUDER (2009)

KEITH KNIGHT. THIS ONE BLACK KID (2007)



# WHAT I'VE LEARNED OVER THE YEARS

I remember when I was a black cartoonist. What do I mean by this? When I was just starting out as a professional cartoonist the only gigs I got were in February—Black History Month. I was happy to get the job, but it was like editors were thinking, “Okay, it’s Black History Month, we gotta get somebody.” So I was adamant about letting them know that I also worked the other 11 months of the year. (Of course, I waited until they paid me before I said that.) Now that I work all year round, I look forward to that extra work in February.

I’ve gotten letters from 53-year-old white men that say they are shocked that their favorite comic strip is done by a black man. I write back to tell them that some of my favorite things (*Star Wars*, Russ Meyer movies) were done by 53-year-old white men, so why should they be shocked the other way around? They never write back. And I’ve had editors at so-called “progressive” alternative weeklies say they love my strip but they can’t run it because there are no black people in their town. Black protesters have given white editors plenty of grief for running my comic strip. I appreciate them (both the editors and the protesters).

Here I am complaining whenever an editor says I can’t use the word “poo,” and I’ve met African cartoonists who had to leave their countries for fear of being killed because of the stuff they’ve drawn!

I got love in Europe before I made it in the States. James Baldwin, Jimi Hendrix, Josephine Baker and so many more knew what time it was overseas. America is just starting to catch up with the world when it comes to comics—it still fears a Black Marker: Even in today’s “post-racial” world, editors have a hard time putting more than one or two strips by African American comic artists on the same page. Cats often have better representation on the funny pages than black people.

That’s one of the reasons I called myself the Other Black Cartoonist. I’ve been mistaken for Aaron McGruder more times than I care to remember. Kyle Baker, too. It’s like people think any black cartoonist is one or the other. (I’d still pay someone \$10 to go up to McGruder and say, “Keith Knight! I love your work!”) This was also part of the moment when I first felt I had made it: a young brother came up to me at the Museum of Cartoon and Comic Art convention in New York City and said, “People keep on mistaking me for you.”

Everything I’ve accomplished as a cartoonist, Morrie Turner did 45 years ago. And he did it better. And George Herriman, Ollie Harrington, E. Simms Campbell, Jackie Ormes, Leslie Rogers—look ‘em up.

Comics are the ultimate medium. They combine the best of what books, television and film have to offer, yet all they take are paper (10¢) and pen (50¢). Cartoonists all have their own styles, their own influences, their own instruments and techniques, like jazz musicians. Also like jazz musicians, cartoonists draw because they love to do it—have to do it. Getting paid is pure gravy—they’re doing what they gotta do—but these creators gotta eat and are not paid. So go to their websites and throw some bucks their way! Make coffee at home for a day or two if you have to.

**KEITH KNIGHT**  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA







# INTRODUCTION

*Black Comix: African American Independent Comics, Art and Culture.* Nothing like simple terms. Let's start with "independent," a slippery word.

A number of the artists in this book have worked for and within large companies. Some have had art published by Marvel Comics and DC Comics. Others have worked in big-time graphic design firms and animation studios. But around all that, and through all that, they persist, undaunted in a daunting pursuit: making and selling art that is entirely their own. From the pencil, pen, marker, airbrush or computer to the page or the screen, they create: stories, drawings, words, sequence, art.

And then, of course, there's everything else: printing, publishing, posting, publicizing, pushing the art out the door, down the street, across the country, around the world to an unsuspecting and (hopefully) paying audience.

No small word, "independent."

When we refer to "comics" or "comix" (the spelling of the comics underground) we mean a medium, a means of communicating. The art in this book is not just superheroes, not just humor strips, not just any one thing, but just about everything. And a little bit closer to representation that is just.

Like the nation in general, the American comics industry of the 20th century was not a model of tolerance for racial diversity. American comics of the early 1900s put on a racist parade of minstrel show knock-offs and pidgin-talking opaque silhouettes. These white-supremacist fever dreams boiled over in the (granted, sometimes ironic) racism and misogyny of underground comics of the 1960s, like when R. Crumb's Fritz the Cat drinks with black crows on the other side of town.

That racist fever in early 20th century American comics never really broke, it just receded. By the 1970s there were still only a handful of black characters in mainstream American comics, represented by a mix of blaxploitation knock-offs, background characters and minor superheroes. A number of these superheroes were even given names like Black Panther, Black Lightning and Black Goliath to remind us that they are, by the way, black.

For a long time in mainstream American comics, black people were sidekicks and comic relief and background players and hand-me-down heroes, filling in for Iron Man while he's recovering from alcoholism or Superman while he's recovering from—uh—death.

But, in the guerilla hustle and grind of independent, small press, self-published and online comics, black artists and characters can command more than the intermission between acts of corporate icon maintenance.

And what about "Black," "Art" and "Culture?" What do those words mean?

Every artist, writer and educator featured in this book has their own answer, as does every other African American independent comics artist, writer and educator that limited space would not allow us to include. This is the art and culture of self-determination, of meanings deeper than melanin content.

This is *Black Comix*. Turn the page already.

**DAMIAN DUFFY**  
CHAMPAIGN, IL





# BLACK COMIX

**THE ARTISTS  
A-Z**



## SHAWN ALLEYNE

From an early age I wanted to be involved with art (primarily comics) in some capacity and am currently striving toward that goal as a freelance artist. My studio name is PYROGLYPHICS, a stylistic name that broken down in simple terms translates to "hot images," to reflect my self-taught style.

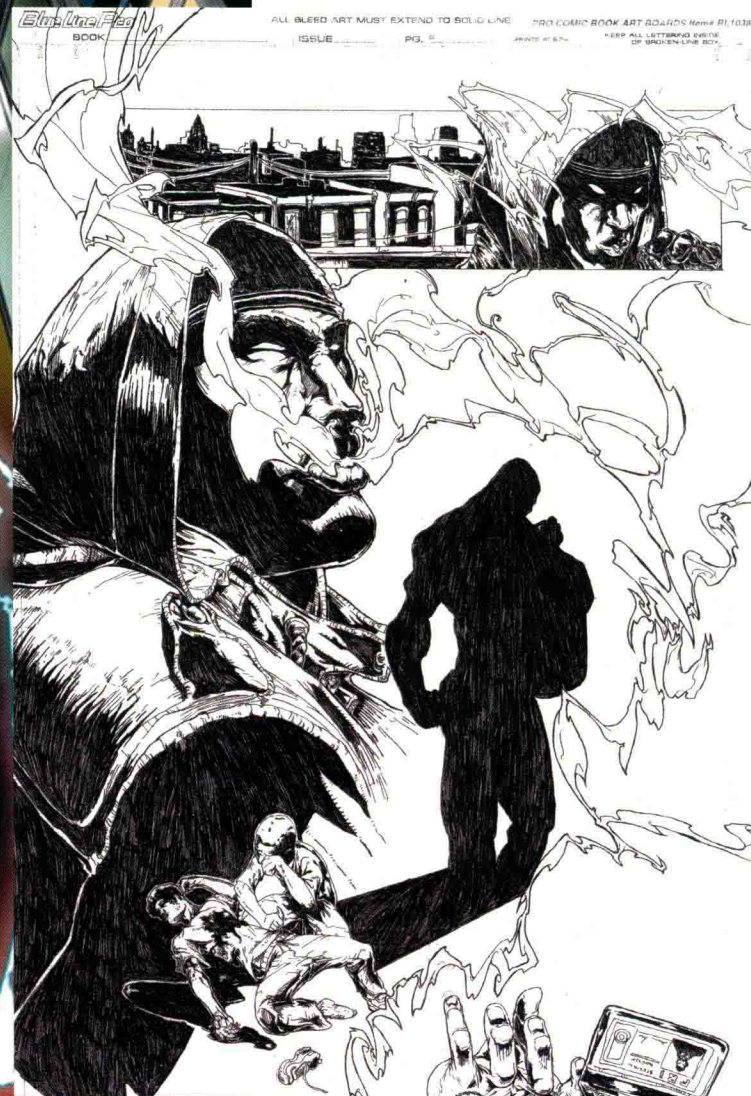
HEROES DIARY PIN-UP (2008)



STREET TEAM (2009)







A HERO'S DIARY (2009)

KNIGHTSEEKER (2009), COVER