

SUPERHERO ALUMNUS

Jefferson “Jeff” Pierce, BSE ’69, Cleveland, OH, was a Golden Flash before he became DC Comics’ Black Lightning. A Cleveland native, he enrolled at Kent State in pursuit of a teaching degree. Pierce’s athletic abilities landed him a spot in the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, where he won gold in the decathlon. After this feat, he returned to Kent State and completed a Bachelor of Science in education. Upon graduating, he became a teacher and later principal of Garfield High School in the south side of Metropolis.

Pierce instilled a sense of purpose in his students, pushing them to realize their full potential. But it became increasingly difficult to teach in a town riddled with violence and crime, so he took matters into his own hands. Born with metahuman abilities to manipulate and generate electricity, Pierce had suppressed that side of himself until the time came to use his talents to protect his students and his town. His crime-fighting alter ego, Black Lightning, served justice wherever he was needed most.

He later became one of the cofounding members of the Outsiders superhero team, and he also served as Secretary of Education under then-US President Lex Luthor. After resuming his life as a teacher/vigilante, Pierce continues to aid his fellow neighbors in the fight against criminals and villains looking to bully and take advantage of others.

BEHIND BLACK LIGHTNING:

Jefferson Pierce (aka Black Lightning) was created by Tony Isabella, who has always been a lover of comics and aspired to write them himself. While he currently resides in Medina,



Cover of *Black Lightning*, Vol. 1, Issue 6 (1978)

Ohio, he grew up on the west side of Cleveland, which was quite segregated at the time. During his teen years, he was involved in a comic book club and soon realized that his Black friends weren’t well-represented within the stories they loved.

“I always thought it was unfair that my Black friends didn’t have more characters like them. So, I told myself that if I got into comics I would try to work on, and create, characters of color,” Isabella says. “It was one of the things I wanted to do with my career.”

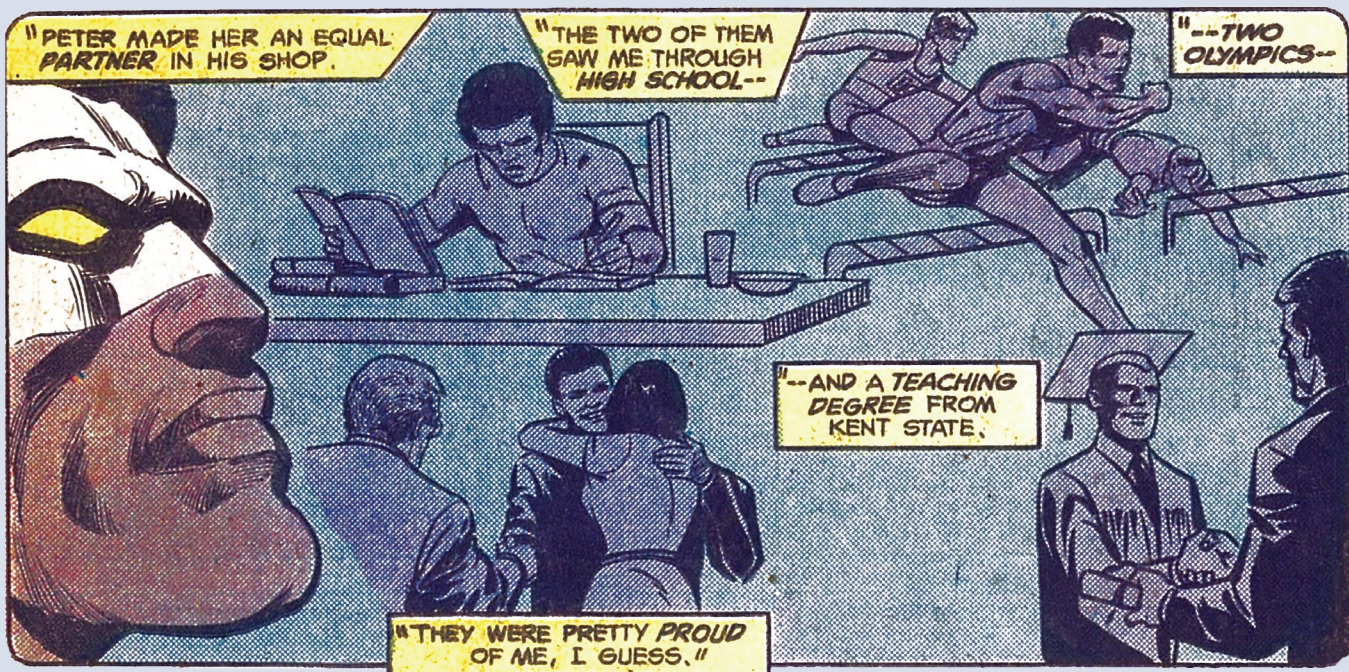
He eventually found his way to comic writing while working at *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland. His industry connections led him to an opportunity at Marvel, one of the biggest comic book publications. He got his start writing for some of Marvel’s most renowned characters including Spider-Man, Ghost Rider, Moon Knight, the Avengers, Daredevil, the Fantastic Four, Black Goliath and Luke Cage.

Isabella later moved to DC Comics where he created the character of Black Lightning, who has been an icon in Black history and pop culture since his debut in 1977. Isabella chose Kent State as his character’s alma mater because he wanted Pierce to be from Cleveland, Ohio, and he thought Kent State was an Ohio school everyone would recognize. However, his character’s lightning symbol and powers had no connection to Kent State’s Golden Flashes.

He wrote Black Lightning’s short-lived 1970s and 1990s series and returned to the character in 2017 with the publication of the limited series *Black Lightning: Cold Dead Hands*. A *Black Lightning* TV series ran for four seasons on the CW Network, from 2018-2021. Isabella and artist Trevor Von Eeden received creator credit on each episode.

While Isabella has written for characters in many comics, he says Black Lightning holds a special place in his heart. “There are very few comics I’ve written where I haven’t liked the character. But Black Lightning is always my favorite.”

Read more about Black Lightning and creator Tony Isabella at www.kent.edu/today/news/kent-states-superhero-alumnus-black-lightning.



Black Lightning, Vol. 1, Issue 6 (1978), featured the panel that revealed Jefferson Pierce was a Golden Flash.