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It's a Bird! It's a Plane! No, it's Just My I.S.: An Historical Exploration of Superheroes and American Identity

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It's a Bird! It's a Plane! No, it's Just My I.S.: An Historical Exploration of
Superheroes and American Identity

by

Caroline Grace Breul

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by

Shannon King

Department of History

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Abstract

This Independent Study traces the changing notions of what makes a superhero “super” throughout periods in American history. By doing three case studies on popular heroes in distinct eras, this study reveals that superhero comics have been growing steadily more overtly political, in ways that are increasingly subversive. I approach Wonder Woman in the 60s, Batman in the late 80s, and Captain America in the early 2000s, and tackle each moment individually. 60s Wonder Woman is not as stale as comic book enthusiasts suggest, and in fact reveals a progressive view of womanhood that contrasted sharply with the reigning view at the time. 80s Batman revived the comic book industry with its dark new take on the caped crusader, reflecting a growing fear of urban crime which placed a violent Batman as the answer. Finally, post 9/11 Captain America appears in 2002, and while using pro-American rhetoric, also re-defines what it means to be American, centering compassion over following one’s government. Each era I study shows a slow move towards centering the action in the real world, and making explicit, political commentary on the realms of gender, crime and punishment, and race.

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Acknowledgements

When working on this I.S., I was often reminded of what one of my senior mentors would always say: “Art does not exist in a vacuum.” In short, artistic products are shaped by not only their creators, but the world around them- and so are we as humans. This Independent Study may have been my idea, but it took a village to write it.

First and foremost, I’d like to express my unending gratitude for my advisor, Dr. Shannon King. I walked into your office last year never having met you, plopped down in your office, and said I wanted to write a thesis on comic books; you agreed with me without hesitation. You have supported me and my wackiness for a year and a half, and always remained a calm, humorous voice during this whole process. More importantly, you pushed me and challenged me as a historian and a writer. Don’t get me wrong- it frustrated my second-semester senior self- but I cannot thank you enough, as I truly believe this I.S. is all the better for it. Of course, I wouldn’t be left standing if it weren’t for the support and encouragement of my friends, specifically my sorority sisters. Your love and enthusiasm got me through the rough nights.

But this I.S. didn’t begin last year. It began even longer ago than that, back in Maryland when I was a child. I was raised in a family where Batman figures were mixed in with Barbie dolls without second glance, where I would eagerly watch my dad bring out his childhood comic book stash with bated breath, watching as he opened each one from its plastic envelope with care. I was raised with superheroes on the screen and in hand: it’s really not surprising I ended up here.

But after all of the scholarly research I’ve done on comic book heroes, I have to say that all of them pale in comparison with my parents: they are the real heroes. You didn’t miss a beat when I told you that this is what I wanted to study, and provided me with all of the comics and validation I needed throughout this whole process. You encouraged me and cheered me on, and never second guessed my passion or ability, and for that I cannot thank you enough. As for my little brother: I hope you still think I’m cool.

Mom, Dad, Taylor: this is for you.

Introduction

“We’ve got to be stronger than we’ve ever been—As a people. As a nation. We have to be America. Or they’ve won.” – Captain America, *Captain America* #1, 2002.

Captain America’s words echo throughout the first issue of his 2002 reboot, published in the year following 9/11. Directly addressing the tragedy, the opening sequence shows us the inside of one of the doomed planes, and then transports the reader to the remains of the Twin Towers, where a despondent Captain America searches for survivors. 9/11 still remains an indelible scar on America’s conscious, and in 2002 *Captain America* was touching a still-raw nerve. In the real world, where there were no superheroes to stop the attacks, a writer had decided that Captain America needed to be at Ground Zero. Something about Captain America and what he represented to his readers turned what was supposed to be his triumphant reboot into a deep dialogue about America in the aftermath of 9/11. While a comic book seems like one of the least likely places for such a discussion to occur, *Captain America* is not unique in this aspect. Comic books of all sorts constantly deal with social events and issues, some as openly as *Captain America*, and others in quieter, more subtle ways.

Comic books have often been condemned to the realm of “low culture,” as they were once cheap, mass-produced, and mass-consumed. While the mechanics of creation and distribution have certainly changed, comic books still remain in the weird grey area of media which is vastly influential, but still considered lowbrow. As such, they have often been set aside in the academic world: a grave mistake, in my opinion. Superheroes offer incredible points of study at any given moment in history.

I argue that comic books are historical artifacts that are deeply embedded in the time of their creation, and that the role of the superhero serves to act as a locus of

identification for the reader, which helps negotiate conflicting American cultural values in times of stress. The superhero is someone to emulate, someone who embodies not only physical strength, but strength of character: the best of both worlds. In this way, the superhero's actions in their comic book canon are significant, because they act as social prescriptions and demonstrate the "best" way to be American. But what about a hero makes them "super," and thus worthy of admiration and emulation? This simple answer is: a lot of things. What makes a superhero "super" at any given moment in time is highly variable, and often deeply reflective of the real-world events that surround them. And in the case of this project, what makes a superhero "super," isn't always in line with what one would expect. As this project will demonstrate, between the 1960s and early 2000s, American comic books have been slowly moving away from allying with mainstream ideas, and have become more overtly political and anti-establishment, espousing newer ideas of womanhood, crime and punishment, and race. And because heroes are "super" and seen as admirable, this move towards critique is viewed as *good*.

Comic and Superhero studies as areas of academic study are really only beginning to come into their own. As noted by French comic historian Jean-Paul Gabillet, American comics "do not enjoy a degree of cultural legitimation that is comparable to the other "middlebrow arts [photography, film and video]." ¹ As such, it is only recently that comics are being treated as valuable social artifacts. That is not to say that comics had been completely tossed aside before: the first academic writing on comics began in the 60s and 70s. Current cultural historians make no distinction between high-brow and low-

¹ Jean-Paul Gabillet, trans. Bart Beaty, and Nick Nguyen. *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 306.

brow culture, and have slowly welcomed the study of comic books and superheroes into the academic world. The working definition of “pop culture,” as proposed by Mukerji is “the beliefs and practices and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population.”² I agree with this definition, and posit that comic books and the superheroes they contain are some of these objects, which represent certain beliefs and understandings about society.

The current scholarship on comic books and superheroes is a small selection, but quickly growing. The field is populated by academics from all sorts of areas, from sociologists to literature scholars. As more and more superhero movies are made, psychologists and film theorists are jumping into the fray as well. There are a few excellent monographs on the culture-making aspect of comic books, such as Gabillet’s *Of Comics and Men*, as well as Matthew Pustz’s *Comic Book Culture*. Gabillet’s work is definitely more a cultural history, whereas Pustz’s book has more sociology and communication theory in it. Wright’s *Comic Book Nation* focuses on how *youth* culture was impacted by comic books, and gives a survey of the history of the comic book industry. These are all wonderful books, but all very broad in their approach to comics, giving lots of historical facts and rarely dig deeper into the *themes* being presented. My work will be far more detailed, and while I will not capture the sweeping narrative that writers like Gabillet and Pustz do, I will instead focus in on very specific moments, and mine them for historical analysis. Thematic analysis is far more prevalent in shorter

² Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3.

writing, such as chapters or articles. Books like *The Superhero Reader* compile these articles, which often have little in common with each other.³

Historical writing on superheroes tends to focus on their birth and resultant WWII activities, and not much beyond that. The heroes I am examining are all around 75 years old, and have been published almost continuously since the 40s in several titles. Clearly, there's a lot more to study! All of the eras this project addresses are essentially filling in gaps in the general scholarship on these heroes. For example, much has been written on 40s, 50s, and 70s Wonder Woman, but ignore the 60s, as the second-wave feminist movement was far more prominent in the 70s. As such, I aim to bridge that gap, and challenge the notion that Wonder Woman's canon in the 60s is not worthy of study: it is far more revelatory than one would think! Similarly, one Batman comic book completely revived DC comics in 1986, and few have thought to pursue as to *why* this one comic forever altered an entire industry. In this regard, I am expanding the body of historical work that pertains to comic books and superheroes, while also challenging some long-held assumptions as to what *eras* of comic book history are worthy of study.

Why study comic books? It's a simple question, but one loaded with history. Comic books are only recently becoming accepted as a legitimate field of study, as they were generally tossed aside as culturally worthless. It is only in recent years that the high-brow /low-brow cultural divide has begun to fade, and superheroes and their legacy are finally being studied. The three heroes I have chosen to study – Batman, Captain America

³ For further reading, see: Shirrel Rhoades's *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, Geoff Klock's *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*, Tim Hanley's *Wonder Woman Unbound*, Urricchio and Pearson's *The Many Lives of the Batman*.

and Wonder Woman- are all immensely famous figures that have existed for decades, and are still popular today.

I am blending several approaches from both cultural studies and literary theory in my analysis: I treat each comic book as a primary source and a cultural artifact which is reflective of the society it was produced in. Cultural historians have demonstrated that the differentiation between high-brow and low-brow culture is an artificial one, and thus I will treat these comics as valuable historical objects that can give insight into the greater cultural issues occurring at the time of their writing. Reading each issue symptomatically, I will interpret each narrative with respect to certain cultural ideals and social conflicts at the time of the issue's creation, as opposed to reading solely for the author's intention. For example, I will tackle Batman's most popular comic issues in the late 80s, and examine them for their portrayal of the justice system. I will foreground these portrayals in the growing crime rates across the nation, and look the comic book to understand how- through Batman- Americans were grappling with a changing notion of justice. While I give consideration to the writer's intention as well as the production behind each issue, I posit that art does not exist in a vacuum. In following the production-of-culture approach, culture is produced by "human beings who work in and are shaped by social organizations."⁴ As such, the author's intent may be important, but they ultimately are subject to greater cultural forces which affect how they create, subconsciously or not. I will similarly touch on the reception of the issues I present, as the popularity of certain issues may speak to a certain resonance with the audience. However, as poststructuralists have stated, texts are inherently multivocal and I cannot predict what each reader

⁴ Mukerji and Schudson. "Introduction", 29.

interprets and takes away from each issue. My focus is mostly on the content itself, not aimed at deciphering authorial intent or reception but rather contextualizing comics and drawing conclusions from the political and social climate they were created in. In short, I wish to create a comprehensive understanding of each period in each superhero's history, and to provide insights into how each superhero changes in response to the reality that surrounds them.

Buckle Up.

This Independent Study will drop us into three very different eras, with their own very different problems. As such, there is no "continuity" as there is in a traditional historical narrative: it starts in the 60s, jumps to the late 80s, and then ends in the early 2000s. Each superhero comes with his or her own history and style, accompanied with often outrageous storylines. And yet, despite the distance between each one, each moment in their histories is specific, and reflects a particular cultural mood, one that grows increasingly counter-hegemonic as the decades pass. These three superheroes negotiate tense aspects of American identity and culture, each era changing what it means to be "super" as a reflection of the ongoing dialogue between the world and the characters themselves. Instead of staid and stagnant, these characters are incredibly dynamic, and change with the times, despite how "classic" they may feel to readers. While heroes like Captain America may have been created to stand up for the American government during war time, by the time 2002 rolls around, he is openly criticizing the very institution that made him. And this is important: few 8-year olds want to be particle physicists and would much rather be Batman instead, as he is "super." What these 8-year olds see as super and worthy of emulation is crucial to examine. These heroes are

something to be upheld and cherished, yet what makes them admirable is constantly in flux, in ways that are increasingly political and subversive.

I aim to look at these heroes from a cultural historian's standpoint, and contextualize them within a historical framework. I have chosen three superheroes - Wonder Woman, Batman, and Captain America- to act as case studies for this independent study, and then selected a defined period to study each one in. Each selected period is one of great tension or catastrophe in American history, both socially and politically. My work will overlay the themes of the comic books of each superhero over the respective conflict going on during their publishing, and draw forth the messages encoded in each hero's actions. How do we use these superheroes to think about ourselves, and what do superheroes say we should do in times of conflict? What values are upheld by heroes in the face of a challenge? As this work will show, the answers to these challenges are often not the answers that the dominant social paradigm would give.

My first chapter deals with America's favorite Amazonian princess, the lasso-wielding Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman was intentionally created as a feminist superhero, so the great deal of literature surrounding her birth and role in WWII is unsurprising. However, most historians ignore the period of her comic book canon from 1960-1968, writing off her 60s years as "artistically dry" and deeply un-feminist. However, a close analysis of Wonder Woman in the 60s reveals a woman who quietly defies the gender roles of the 60s. She is an active, physically strong, unmarried, and educated woman, at a moment where the conversation over where women belonged in the public and private spheres raged. She may not be a perfect feminist icon, but she also presented a distinct, yet still beloved image of womanhood for her readers that stood in

great contrast to the reigning paradigm. As such, her portrayal of what is “super” ran against the mainstream image of womanhood, but still balanced it with enough conservatism to make it palatable.

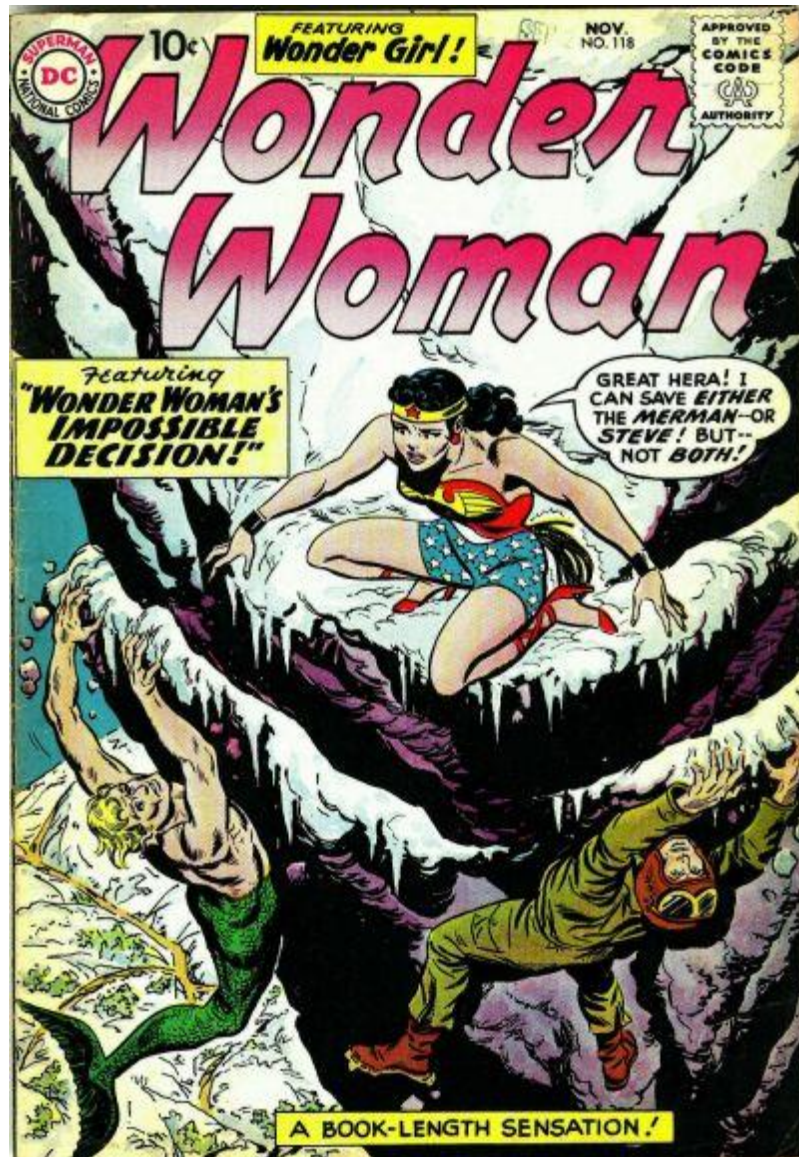
Moving forward, I will be looking at Batman’s major plotlines from 1984 to 1994, a period which saw a universal grittiness come to comic books: Batman was now truly the Dark Knight, and his stories were darker and more violent than ever before. And yet, it was this dark revival of Batman that almost single-handedly saved D.C. Comics’ business, and was massively popular. During this period, America saw a huge spike in violent crime rates in major cities, accompanied by a massive rise in the use of drugs, particularly crack cocaine. I propose that this period of stress, accompanied by Batman’s increasingly despondent, yet popular portrayals speaks to America’s shift towards a lack of faith in major peace-keeping institutions of the time, as well as a darker outlook on urban life. Batman’s violence becomes the correct answer to an impotent government, and his brutality is seen as a virtue of necessity. His “super-ness” is in response to a crisis that the government was unable to handle, a damning accusation in the midst of struggle. But aside from a few explicit allusions to reality here and there, Batman’s fight stays in Gotham, and remains rooted in the comic book landscape, despite how “realistic” Gotham feels.

I will similarly examine Captain America’s comic book canon in a post-9/11 America in his 2002 run. Captain America has always been seen as the “best” of American values and physical form, and this stands today. When placed in the context of the 9/11 attacks, Captain America’s role as a hero and an American becomes complicated. His 2002 comic book series finds a delicate balance between traditional

jingoistic nationalism and a nuanced view of the racism and imperialism that plagues American politics. *This* Captain America seems to be advocating for a different kind of action than one would assume, and re-structures a new American identity, one which believes in human kindness, and deeply distrusts its government. Though laden with symbols of the American “heartland,” *Captain America* prescribes a new way of thinking about 9/11 and what it means to be an American. This is the most overt, subversive series of them all, which directly inserts a superhero into an actual, real-life place and event and has him act in it. There are few “allusions” here, as Cap is literally *at ground zero*. His subsequent interactions are deeply critical of a real world government and a real country, at a time when a nation’s wounds were still healing. This questioning and desire to see the truth is what makes Cap “super,” in a profound, uncomfortable way.

In short, my work aims to create a deeper understanding and appreciation of comic books as artifacts of cultural note, while also pointing out their deeply political and subversive content. While comics have always been political to a certain extent, they have traditionally espoused dominant values and upheld reigning paradigms of gender, race, and notions of legality. As time has passed, this has shifted: comics remain political, but are increasingly critical of hegemonic ideas. Superheroes are more than people in costumes: they are creators of meaning to the people who consume them, and are deeply reflective of the time in which they were created.

Chapter One: Wonder Woman: *These Boots Were Made For Walkin'*



¹ Ross Andru and Mike Esposito, "Cover of Wonder Woman 118," Digital image, DC Wikia. http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Wonder_Woman_Vol_1_118.

Wonder Woman has been a staple in American culture for decades, and the Amazonian princess is constantly under revision. Though she is one of the few superheroes to survive until the present day, she has been repeatedly neglected in mass media: Lynda Carter's portrayal of Wonder Woman in the 1975 T.V. series *Wonder Woman* is her most enduring contribution to film and television. While her counterparts Batman and Superman have been repeatedly featured in movies, Paradise Island's favored child is often forgotten. Her first feature-length film appearance was in 2014's *The Lego Movie*- where she appeared as a Lego action-figure, hardly the blockbuster treatment she deserves. Wonder Woman fans all over the world wait with bated breath for her first live-action film appearance in 2016 in *Batman V.S. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, where she will be played by Gal Godot. Plans for a feature-length film focusing on Wonder Woman have been bandied about for years, but in 2017 fans will finally get to see their favorite warrior princess on the big screen.

But for now, Wonder Woman lives on in her comics, as she has been published almost continuously since her birth in 1941, the same year Captain America was created. She has also made her mark in scholarly literature, as the unusual circumstances of her creation have made her a subject for both feminist and historical analysis. Books like Jill Lepore's *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* explore Wonder Woman's creation and life, stressing her role as a feminist icon. Created by psychologist William Moulton Marston as an intentionally feminist character, he drew upon inspiration from his wife and the suffragette movement from his youth.² Marston saw the abundance of male superheroes, and wanted to create a female one to showcase what he believed to be ideal

² Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 13- 23.

womanhood for young girls.³ Wonder Woman made her debut in *All Star Comics* #8 in 1941 and became vastly popular, even becoming a part of the “Justice Society of America” in 1942.⁴ Much like Captain America, she served as a patriotic ideal during wartime, serving her country in a gender appropriate manner as a nurse.⁵

Modern scholars have noted the use of vaguely sadomasochistic imagery in her comics of this era, and argue that while a “strong woman,” she still falls prey to many conservative images of women at this time.⁶ However, the tone of Wonder Woman’s comics would change direction after Marston’s death in 1947. Without the chief helmsman at the wheel, Wonder Woman’s portrayal began to shift. She would continue to be one of the few superheroes to continually be published in the postwar era, but would come under intense scrutiny in the 50s. The fears of a conservative society would come to a head in Dr. Frederic Wertham’s 1954 magnum opus against comic books, *Seduction of the Innocent*. In this tome, Wertham rails against many of the popular superheroes of the day, and Wonder Woman did not escape his notice. He claims that not only was she a cruel bastardization of womanhood for young girls to look up to, but that she was also incredibly lesbian.⁷ Playing on many of the fears of conservative world,

³ Shirrel Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 60.

⁴ Ibid, 60.

⁵ Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 43.

⁶ Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 61.

⁷ Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, 160. Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 61.

Wertham's outrage spurred the creation and enforcement of a Comics Code Authority, a self-governed censorship board for the comics industry.

Despite the controversy Wonder Woman prevailed, and alongside Batman and Superman was one of the few superheroes to endure to the 60s.⁸ However, Wonder Woman's writing took a hit in the late 1960s. From 1960 to 1968, the commercially struggling *Wonder Woman* series revamped itself countless times – telling “impossible tales” which placed Wonder Woman, Wonder Girl, and Wonder Tot all in the same story, reusing the style and stories of the Golden Age- all of which did little for sales. After introducing several various characters to try and appeal to a younger female audience, in 1968 DC completely revamped her character.⁹ Re-christened as a very normal Diana Prince, the once-almighty Amazonian princess lost her traditional garb and renounced her powers to become an ordinary woman.¹⁰ This move was largely disappointing, both in terms of content and sales.

In this chapter I will examine *Wonder Woman* from 1960-1968, ending with the last issue before she loses her powers. Wonder Woman has always been seen as an image of “idealized womanhood,” and thus stands as a symbolic beacon for readers to flock to. She has been one of the only female superhero to be given consistent attention, and feminist Gloria Steinem has even publicly remarked that she loved Wonder Woman as a child.¹¹ However, as she and many other modern feminists and scholars have aptly noted,

⁸ Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, 183. Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 47.

⁹ Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, 185 and 250.

¹⁰ Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, 286. Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 61.

¹¹ Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, 285.

Wonder Woman's relationship with feminism and women's rights is often a troubled one. As Jill Lepore states in her book, "Feminism made Wonder Woman. And then Wonder Woman remade feminism, which hasn't been altogether good for feminism."¹²

Wonder Woman is probably the icon who has the most scholarship about her: the unique circumstances of her birth under Marston are often the subject of research. Jill Lepore's recent book *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* is a perfect example of this, as she focuses on telling Marston's story and examining the events in his life that affected the creation of Wonder Woman. Much attention is given to early Wonder Woman, as her overtly propaganda-ish message as the patriotic ideal woman is ripe for analysis. Scholarship then tends to pick up again in the 70s, when Wonder Woman's image was appropriated by the women's rights movements. However, there is a curious gap: the 60s. While the writing of the comics themselves is notably dry, most scholars tend to write 60s-era Wonder Woman off as merely a transition period. This does little justice to the era itself, which was a massive period of social unrest and growth, particularly in arenas of civil and women's rights. In this chapter I will address this gap, and reveal just how important this era of Wonder Woman's history is.

Wonder Woman #118-#177 presents an interesting snapshot in time with regards to portrayals of womanhood in the 60s. In the midst of second-wave feminism, these issues of *Wonder Woman* shows a woman who is both conventional and quietly subversive, all at once. In some regards, *Wonder Woman* still upheld certain conservative ideologies about women. On a purely superficial level, Wonder Woman's body conforms to the ideal vision of what a "woman" should look like; she was white, slim, and had

¹² Ibid, xiii.

European facial features. Beyond the body, as a woman she is thus deemed to be inherently self-sacrificing, and willing to subjugate her own needs for the needs of others. Heterosexual romance is still a central and expected part of Wonder Woman's life, and as a woman she is seen as "prone" to romantic leanings simply as a matter of biology.

However, *Wonder Woman* also presented a picture of womanhood, motherhood, and love that was very much different from the reigning paradigm. In a society that pegged women as inherently physically inferior, Wonder Woman was extraordinarily strong and agile. When women were expected to aspire to marriage and children, she was an unmarried woman, who would rather save people than "settle down," and lives instead with a similarly unmarried and yet deeply respected mother. Wonder Woman was also a warrior, who while trained in the domestic arts, was primarily a fighter. In conjunction with these "masculine" traits, she saw her "traditionally feminine" attributes such as emotion and compassion as her strengths, not her weaknesses. When average readers were being presented with a suburban housewife as the pinnacle of womanhood, Wonder Woman stands in stark contrast. In short, *Wonder Woman* presents readers with a surprisingly complex view of womanhood, which both pushes boundaries as well as firmly upholding others. As a whole, *Wonder Woman* would have presented readers- particularly children- with a notably progressive view of womanhood than provided in most other media. Wonder Woman was "super" for more than just her powers. She is "super" in her knowledge, her independence, her active role in her own life: and all at a time when women in the real world were often dissuaded from pursuing any of the above. While Wonder Woman's adventures stay in a mostly fantastic realm, and women's rights

are never explicitly addressed, the image she presents here is quietly subversive, even in the 60s.

Women's Rights in the 1960s: *No Bras Were Harmed in the Making of this Movement*

To understand the position of women in the 60s, we must first revisit the 40s and 50s. During World War II, women were encouraged to leave their homes and work to replace the masses of men that had gone overseas to fight. The world around them shifted to accommodate this necessity, with business changing hours and factories providing childcare.¹³ Of course, the encouragement for women to work was sharply curtailed by the end of the war, when the men who women had replaced returned. This return called for a “heavy demand for the old-time domestic virtues,” leading to what Barbara Berg calls a period of “redomestication.”¹⁴ Consumerism and commercially available household appliances all centered around a woman's work in the household, re-setting the “home as the central focus of their identity.”¹⁵ Apparently, women were intended to be feminine and domestic as a simple function of their biology. However, as the 50s advanced into the 60s, more and more women began to feel “disenchanted” with the role they were given.¹⁶

While women's rights movements had existed in some form or another in decades prior, the 60s gave birth to a new start. Called “second-wave feminism,” the women's

¹³ Annegret S. Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 162.

¹⁴ Ogden, *The Great American Housewife*, 162 and, Barbara Berg, *Sexism in America: Alive, Well, and Ruining Our Future* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009), 3.

¹⁵ Gayle Graham Yates, *What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

rights movement of the 1960s was to help lay the foundation for the continued movement in the 70s. Fed up with the conservative gender norms of the 1950s, women began to demand more rights, as citizens, workers, and mothers. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy called for a “Commission on the Status of Women,” intended to identify and make recommendations about the inequalities facing American women of the 60s.¹⁷ In 1963 the commission’s report brought issues with regards to the wage gap, discriminatory hiring practices, and the lack of social services and higher education opportunities into clear focus. The difficulties faced specifically by women of color were also addressed, duly noting the intersection of race and gender, though no solutions were necessarily posed.¹⁸ While legal changes were made based off of the report’s recommendation, American women as a whole still continued to face legal and cultural setbacks.

However, months before the report’s results became public, Betty Friedan published her groundbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique*. Roundly critiquing the position of the American woman as a docile housewife and mother, Friedan called out the dissonance between what was *supposed* to make women happy and the often harsh reality.¹⁹ It caused quite a stir, and provoked even more discussion about the shifting

¹⁷The White House, "Statement by the President on the Establishment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women," News release, Washington, D.C., 1961, Office of the White House Press Secretary.

¹⁸ *American Women: Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women*, report, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963, 4.

¹⁹ Of course, most of these feminist tracts – and like *Wonder Woman* – mention little, if anything at all, about race. While some feminist movements would intentionally underscore the double-difficulties that women of color faced, mainstream second wave feminism appeared to be addressed to the lily-white, middle-to-upper class suburban housewife. While women of color established their own groups and were active participants in the movement, history often forgets them, or white feminists excluded them.

roles of women in American society. One of the most public debates was about women as workers: In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson would sign the Civil Rights Act, in which title VII prohibits “race and sex discrimination in employment,” against unfavorable political odds.²⁰ The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission would then be created in 1965 to attempt to recognize instances of gender discrimination, but many women felt the EEOC did not go far enough and treated cases of gender-based discrimination like jokes. In response to these frustrations, in 1966 liberal feminist organization NOW (National Organization for Women) formed, with Betty Friedan as its president and EEOC employees, women in the legal field, and first-wave feminists in its ranks.²¹ Intentionally avoiding political party affiliation, it acted as a vocal lobby and activist group for women’s rights, particularly over equal pay. As Kathleen Berkeley puts it, “With the formation of NOW, control over the feminist agenda shifted from the federal government into an independent organization...”²² NOW worked tirelessly to push the EEOC into action and influence the White House, but ultimately became divided in the late 60s as a result of differing views on the Equal Rights Amendment Act and abortion.²³ However, NOW still remains an active force in politics today.

The more radical activist groups would disappear by the 80s, but not without making their mark. Perhaps the most singularly notable event of the 1960s was the

²⁰ Kathleen Berkeley, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 199), xix. As similarly noted on page 20, a southern pro-segregationist Senator tried to doom the bill (which was anti-racial discrimination) by adding gender into the mix. Surprisingly, it passed.

²¹ Maryann Barakso, *Governing NOW: Grassroots Activism in the National Organization for Women* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 21.

²² Berkeley, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in America*, 31.

²³ *Ibid*, 34.

radical feminist group *New York Radical Women*'s protest in front of the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968, in which roughly 100 feminist protesters dumped "feminine" items into a trash can – and no, *no bras were burned* – as well as disrupting a later ceremony with a banner. The *New York Radical Women* were a "conscious raising-group" created in 1967 by Shulamith Firestone and Pam Allen, and their style of radical feminism set the tone for the late 60s.²⁴ Intended to call out the unrealistic standards women were held to, the group used the pageant as an example of how the ideal woman in American society was "inoffensive, bland, [and] apolitical."²⁵ By far one of the most attention-grabbing events of the women's rights movement in the 60s- at one point they crowned a sheep- the cultural legacy of the supposed "burned bra" lingers on into today. As a reminder, all of this social struggle is swimming amidst various others: the war in Vietnam, the Civil Rights movement, the Cold War, and so on. And now, of course, we must add Wonder Woman into the mix: svelte, traditionally beautiful, ever loving, and able-to-bench-press-five-elephants-without-breaking-a-sweat Wonder Woman. Things are about to get complicated.

Wonder Woman #118-177

The stand-alone *Wonder Woman* series was first published in June of 1942, and would put out more than 300 issues before ending in 2011, right as DC would roll out the New 52 launch. Published under *Wonder Woman Volume 1* until 1986, *Volume 2* officially began in 1994. In 2011 DC decided to return to the original issue numbering,

²⁴ Ibid, xx.

²⁵ New York Radical Women, *No More Miss America!* (New York City: New York Radical Women, 1968).

picking up on issue 600 and ending with 614. Encompassing 69 years of near-continuous publishing, *Wonder Woman* is merely one title in a constantly-fluctuating series of titles that involve Wonder Woman in some form. The period I am studying-1960-1968- was a time of crisis for DC, as they desperately tried to re-vamp flagging sales, particularly for Wonder Woman. The majority of the series up until 1968 was written and edited by Robert Kanigher, with most of the art done by Ross Andru and Mike Esposito- all men. In 1968, DC would make the drastic decision to rid Wonder Woman of her powers, the moment which acts as the cut-off point for this study. The eight years previous to this moment are ripe with opportunities for analysis, and provide an interesting look at Wonder Woman in a time of great social and political unrest.

Bullets and Bracelets: It's Hard Out There

Wonder Woman has long been an icon of “idealized womanhood” from the very start. Of course, what constitutes an “ideal” woman at any given time is constantly in flux. Still riding on the conservatism of the 1950s, the dominant expectation for women in the 60s was that their lives would revolve around marriage and family. This did not preclude working outside of the home to support the family, or further education in post-childrearing years, as all of those were acceptable, and even at times encouraged. But even as the well-meaning JFK said to Eleanor Roosevelt on *The Prospects of Mankind*: “We want to be sure that women are used as effectively as they can to provide a better life for our people, in addition to meeting their primary responsibility, which is in the home.”²⁶ Clearly, women could indeed engage with the external world, but they were still

²⁶ John F. Kennedy, “What Status for Women?” Interview by Eleanor Roosevelt, *Prospects of Mankind*, WGBH-TV, June 1962.

supposed to perform their “ancient function of providing love and nurture...”²⁷

Contemporary ads aimed at women stressed their functions as homemakers, with one famous 1961 Kenwood ad selling an electric mixer stating, “The Chef does everything but cook. That’s what wives are for!”²⁸ Even young girls were targeted, with the Suzy Homemaker line aimed at introducing children to housekeeping tasks with miniaturized versions of appliances.²⁹

Now, enter Wonder Woman. She is an unmarried, fiercely independent yet community-oriented figure, who has the physical strength of a deity. Her physical abilities far outweigh that of any human, and she is –more often than not- rescuing men! Wonder Woman is usually the one to swoop in to save her boyfriend, Steve Trevor, who is now the damsel in distress instead of the woman. She sees no reason to dress modestly, looking at long dresses and skirts as practical impediments to physical labor.³⁰ Placing this picture of idealized womanhood against the domestic, docile image that women were supposed to espouse in the 60s seems to reveal a massive disconnect. Her physical strength is one of her more notable aspects, especially considering that working women were often “disqualified” from job openings because of strength limits. For example, in 1966 worker Lorena Weeks was barred from a promotion because the “job description” stated that the employee had to be able to lift 30 pounds on their own. When lawyer Sylvia Roberts went to trial to declare this as gender discrimination, she reminded the

²⁷ *American Women: Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women*, 4.

²⁸ Kenwood, "I'm Giving My Wife a Kenwood Chef," advertisement, 1961.

²⁹ Topper Toys, "Who Is Suzy Homemaker?" advertisement, 1966.

³⁰ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 4, no. 162 (May 1966): 135.

courtroom that Weeks had to constantly move around her 34 pound typewriter on a daily basis: clearly the “30 pound” rule was unjustified.³¹

Wonder Woman’s physical ability as a symbol of feminine strength in this light seems a timely comment, reminding readers that women could be physically strong as well. And while Wonder Woman was inherently gifted as an Amazon, she is constantly seen training to achieve her physical status, implying that a great deal of her skill is learned and practiced, as thus available to any woman. The importance of this image of an actively powerful woman cannot be understated, particularly for younger readers. The standard image of young girls or women in the media at the time was a passive one. As Barbara Harrison notes in her study of 1960s and 70s educational materials and books, “...boys are still adventuresomely, mischievously, athletically boys. They get into wonderful scrapes. They have fun. Mother and sister watch admiringly, pausing occasionally to shudder at frogs or snakes.”³²

Beyond the physical, Wonder Woman and her sisters on Paradise Island are seen as fully rounded individuals. The Greco-Roman styled paradise is replete with warriors, scientists, and artists, with many women holding more than one of those titles at once. At a time when even the Peterson Report noted that women were less likely to pursue math and science because of their gender and its perceived shortcomings, this view of idealized womanhood is all the more powerful.³³ Wonder Woman is able to complete her acts of daring because of her familiarity with science: at one point she stops a massive fire by

³¹ "Highlights 1966-1976," *National Organization for Women*, February 27, 2016.

³² Barbara Grizzuti Harrison as qtd in Barbara Berg, *Sexism in America: Alive, Well, and Ruining Our Future* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009), 24.

³³ *American Women: Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women*, 4.

using her (albeit basic) knowledge of chemistry.³⁴ Wonder Woman of course, knows how to sew, at one point declaring that “Amazon training shouldn’t consist only of feats like “moving mountains!” but these are placed alongside her accomplishments as a warrior and scientist.³⁵ There is a balance being struck here between traditional, domestic femininity and an encouragement for women to branch out.

Wonder Woman and her sister Amazons are stout warriors, but also gentle and compassionate. To some extent this gentleness is seen as inherent to womanhood, with the men under Mars’ domain seen as bloodthirsty and needlessly cruel.³⁶ While this is a stereotype and very much in line with the conservative view of women at the time, the vision of heroism that Wonder Woman presents is one where love is powerful, and *not* a weakening force. And this love is not purely romantic: it is an all-encompassing love for fellow beings, no matter the gender, relation, or even species. Wonder Woman successfully merges the supposed “weakness” of “womanly” emotion with the way of a warrior, positing that women were strong physically- *and* emotionally. When the apparent inherent softness of a woman’s feelings were a reason to keep them out of juries in the 60s, Wonder Woman loudly suggests that her emotions are a strength.³⁷ As the *real* Diana Prince states at the end of issue 167, “Love made me a Wonder Woman!”³⁸

³⁴ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 2, no. 120 (February 1961): 83.

³⁵ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 2, no. 135 (January 1963): 456.

³⁶ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 4, no. 159 (January 1966): 58.

³⁷ In 1957, a federal ruling allowed women on the juries of Federal court cases, but state and local laws varied well into the 70s. *American Women: Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women*, 46.

³⁸ Diana Prince is an army nurse who Wonder Woman helps reach her beloved in South America, in exchange for her name and position. Wonder Woman takes on Diana Prince as an alias, and occasionally interact.

Of course, while the above is radical in light of the social and legal restrictions real women of the 60s had to face, it is important to understand that while Wonder Woman was massively powerful and intelligent, she was also in some ways massively *acceptable*. Despite the fact that Wonder Woman -for all of her strength and constant incredible physical exertion- should be built like a brick wall, she is still pleasantly slim, as made obvious by her revealing outfit. She is white and traditionally beautiful, and her beauty is often what draws her suitors in. She fights with her hair down and flowing free, despite the obvious practical ramifications of that in a physical fight. Her outfit is very clearly American, making her as a proud patriot supporting her government's actions abroad, at a time where women's rights movements such as the New York Radical Women were often tied with the anti-war movement.³⁹ Even her emotions are written off as beauty, with Mer-boy once saying to a furious Wonder Girl that "You're beautiful when you're angry!"⁴⁰ Most absurdly, Wonder Woman fights in heels at all times. While Wonder Woman may be able to act with the physical strength of a thousand men, she does so in the socially accepted and venerated form of a white woman.

In fact, trouble often comes when her physical form shifts. In issue 136, Wonder Woman almost causes a massive catastrophe when the nefarious Machine-Men infect her with a virus that causes her to grow without stopping. The mere act of her breathing or walking becomes deadly to those around her, and she tries to sequester herself out of fear.⁴¹ In issue 140, Wonder Woman's body again becomes a weapon, turning into a

³⁹ Berkeley, *The Women's Liberation Movement in America*, 3.

⁴⁰ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 120 (February 1961): 61.

⁴¹ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 136 (February 1963).

“human reservoir of lightening,” who must avoid touching anything for fear of causing it to combust.⁴² As Wonder Girl, she willingly tattoos the circuit board of a time machine on her body in order to save Paradise Island from an atomic warhead in Issue 151.⁴³ Her body is her tool, but also a source of danger and trouble.

The shape of a woman’s body is notably far more complex than dangerous/not-dangerous, and carries far more social meanings. At one point, Wonder Woman, who is fed up with Steve Trevor’s inability to recognize Diana Prince’s beauty, intentionally distorts her body into extreme shapes.⁴⁴ Using a special funhouse mirror, she both becomes rotund at one point and incredibly lanky at another- both of which frighten and disgust Steve.⁴⁵ He doubts that she can fight in either shape, to which Wonder Woman sassily replies, “An Amazon is always in shape to fight crime, Steve!”⁴⁶ While this is seemingly a poke at the superficiality of men when it comes to romance, as well as implying that the Amazon spirit is more than a physical body, the rest of the series is peppered with jabs at other women’s figures. One girl in particular, Etta Candy, is constantly the source of snarky comments about her appetite and weight.⁴⁷ There is still clearly an “ideal” figure for women: one that looks like Wonder Woman’s. To some

⁴² Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 3, no. 140 (August 1963): 61.

⁴³ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 3, no. 151 (January 1965): 364.

⁴⁴ Diana Prince is Wonder Woman’s civilian alias, a human military intelligence officer. Clothed in a military uniform and wearing glasses, Steve is routinely unable to figure out that Wonder Woman and Diana Prince are one and the same.

⁴⁵ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 2, no. 130 (May 1962).

⁴⁶ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 2, no. 130 (May 1962): 344.

⁴⁷ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 2, no. 127 (January 1962): 248.

extent, Wonder Woman is what the New York Radical Women would call a “Degrading-Mindless-Boob-Girlie Symbol,” as she is a consumable icon that conforms to social beauty standards.⁴⁸

Beyond the social ramifications of Wonder Woman’s form, the fact remains that Wonder Woman often agrees to sacrifice her body- and at times thus herself- in order to save others. As mentioned above, Wonder Woman willingly turns herself into a human lightning rod, without second thought. The theme of self-sacrifice recurs throughout the entire series, with “Self-sacrificing one-self for the good of all,” called “the Amazon way!”⁴⁹ The notion of putting others first is deeply intertwined with the Amazon code, and is a conscious decision to put one’s self aside. As Wonder Woman says in a moment of struggle: “I can’t think of my own happiness! My Amazon code wouldn’t permit it!”⁵⁰ While this is indeed noble, it is important to reflect on who the Amazons are: women gifted by Aphrodite to fight the injustice of men.⁵¹ Sacrifice is then equated with a feminine virtue, as something essential to womanhood. As Jennifer Stuller notes in her essay on women superheroes, this equation is troubling: “Does it infuse what is “naturally” powerful about women into a liberating archetype? Or does it reinforce stereotypes about how women should behave as a self-sacrificing nurturers?”⁵² This is a

⁴⁸ New York Radical Women, *No More Miss America!*

⁴⁹ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 3, no. 153 (April 1965): 416.

⁵⁰ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 4, no. 158 (November 1965): 39.

⁵¹ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 4, no. 159 (January 1966).

⁵² Jennifer Stuller, “Love Will Bring You To Your Gift,” in *The Superhero Reader*, ed. Charles Hatfield, Jeet Heer, and Kent Worcester (University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 216.

double-edged sword: on one hand, the Amazon Way is seen as an effective counter to the supposedly inherently violent ways of men, and values emotion and compassion as important values. On the other hand, it creates a world where women are *expected* to sacrifice themselves, as it is seen as “inherent.” In a world where women are supposed to give up their “selves” and ambitions to raise a family and care for a home, this notion of self-sacrifice is noble, but ultimately conservative and dehumanizing. As bell hooks says:

sexist thinking obscures the fact that these women [who make everyday sacrifices for others] make a choice to serve [and] give from the space of free will and not because of biological destiny...When anyone thinks a woman who serves ‘gives ‘cause that’s what mothers or real women do,’ they deny her full humanity and thus fail to see the generosity inherent in her acts.⁵³

The lack of identity beyond sacrifice and nurturing plagued many suburban housewives of the 60s, who had been told that their happiness as women lay in their houses and husbands. In Yates’ discussion of *The Feminine Mystique*, she states that “Being told by the mass media, the women’s magazines, the business community, the functionalist social scientists, the psychiatric professionals, and the educational system that her destiny is in the home, the American woman has bought the mystique, only to find that she has no strong central core of identity, that she suffers from the “problem that has no name.”⁵⁴ It is important to note that *The Feminine Mystique* truly only addressed

⁵³ bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, 2000), 42 as qtd in Jennifer Stuller, “Love Will Bring You To Your Gift,” in *The Superhero Reader*, ed. Charles Hatfield, Jeet Heer, and Kent Worcester (University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 233.

⁵⁴ Yates, *What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement*, 39.

the problems of white, middle-to-upper-class suburban women, who often did not work. In the worlds of women who worked, were single mothers, lived in an urban environment, or who were not white, the situation was even more complex. However, it is Freidan's work that garnered the most attention and would generate the most discussion. Even women involved in radical activist work found themselves subject to men's belief that they were lesser, "expected to play conventional subordinate roles of typing, making coffee, being available sexually for the movement's men, and keeping quiet in decision making meetings."⁵⁵

Wonder Woman's place as the "idealized woman" is already complex: to one extent, she is upholding certain norms about what is "inherent" to womanhood in a conventionally beautiful body, while also performing marvelous acts of physical strength as an unmarried, educated woman. However, Wonder Woman is often seen struggling because of this self-sacrifice. She often has to put Steve Trevor or her family in danger for the greater good, and must put personal concerns on the back burner for more pressing matters. One of the larger ones is marriage: she refuses to marry Steve Trevor, because to do so would mean her retirement and the inability to help those who need her.

Wonder Woman cares deeply for Steve, who is downright manipulative in the ways he tries to get her to marry him. He and her other paramours – Mer-Man, Bird-Man, Darnell, and various others- are voracious and unstoppable in their attempts to woo and marry Wonder Woman. However, she refuses them all- a bold move. Of course, her reasoning for her rejection is not necessarily a "feminist" one, as she does not deny the union on the basis of personal reasons, but rather the fact that she doesn't think her

⁵⁵ Ibid, 6.

husband would be happy with her as a wife. In her eyes, being Wonder Woman and being a wife are fundamentally incompatible. To her, being a wife is something she describes a “full-time,” implying that the domestic duties she would have to perform would be too much for her to do anything else.⁵⁶

Marriage is often a point of contention between Steve and Wonder Woman, as he is doggedly persistent in his attempts to get her to marry him. He often resorts to either trickery or out-and-out manipulation, such as trapping her within her own golden lasso, forcing her to obey his commands.⁵⁷ In a story in issue 127 entitled “Wonder Woman’s Surprise Honeymoon,” Steve has a dream that Wonder Woman agrees to marry him. Their married life is short lived, as Wonder Woman routinely interrupts romantic moments to help others, absolutely fails at cooking dinner, and is all in all not the image of the domestic woman Steve had in mind for a wife.⁵⁸ Her desire to maintain her previous life and stay Wonder Woman as opposed to “Mrs. Steve Trevor” angers Steve, who clearly has a very set idea of marriage.⁵⁹ In issue 139, Steve, after another rejection, wishes that Wonder Woman would “forget who [she was],” so she could marry him.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 2, no. 118 (November 1960): 10.

⁵⁷ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 4, no. 167 (January 1967): 273.

⁵⁸ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 2, no. 127 (January 1962).

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 259.

⁶⁰ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 3, no. 139 (July 1963): 39.

In order for Wonder Woman to be a good wife to Steve, she would have to divest herself of her identity- a strong statement against marriage and what it entails. Marriage was supposed to be the cornerstone of a woman's life in the 60s, the highest goal they could achieve. Unfortunately, this led to many unhappy marriages, as "it was dangerous to admit unhappiness in marriage, since most women could not identify another area in which they might seek personal fulfillment."⁶¹ Wonder Woman's active avoidance of marriage in a world where matrimony is what is supposed to define her is incredibly subversive. Of course, this only applies to romantic marriage: Wonder Woman willingly marries other men in the name of sacrifice, such as marrying a monstrous looking man to show him that goodness is more than skin deep.⁶² Again, she openly gives herself when it comes to helping another, but refuses to for Steve, who wants her to let go of all she holds most dear. Unfortunately, this refusal to marry Steve doesn't usually come off as an open critique, but rather an extension of her natural womanly goodness, as she feels as though it is her duty to others is to remain as Wonder Woman.

Romance seems to be one of the fundamental sources of trouble in her life, with her pursuers often getting themselves into trouble- which Wonder Woman obligingly saves them from- while trying to get her attention. In a certain light, the men are more romantically inclined than any of the women are! If romance is supposed to be an inherently feminine trait, *Wonder Woman* ignores that. In fact, Wonder Woman- and Wonder Girl- are often openly inconvenienced by their paramours, and make no bones about saying so. "How do you say "No!" and make it stick?" a young girl wonders aloud,

⁶¹ Ogden, *The Great American Housewife*, 167.

⁶² Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 3, no. 155 (July 1965).

as Wonder Woman agrees heartily, after having to fend off another marriage proposal from Steve.⁶³ Throughout the series, hardly an issue goes by without Wonder Woman having to save either Steve, Mer-Man/Boy, or another suitor from their own (usually self-inflicted) doom. Steve and Mer-Man often put themselves in dangerous situations to impress Wonder Woman, or are too focused on wooing her to see the larger picture at hand. “If that isn’t just like men!...Always ready to quarrel over nothing when there’s a gigantic threat hanging over your heads!” Hippolyta declares, looking on as various incarnations of Mer-Man and Steve Trevor fight to claim Wonder Woman in the midst of the nuclear Multiple Man’s attack.⁶⁴ In contrast to stereotypes, the women seem to be the level-headed warriors with an eye for practicality, while the men are emotional and romance-obsessed. The women from Paradise Island are fighters and leaders, who see romance as secondary to duty.

This bold image of the relationship between men and women is hampered by the constant, continuing references to Wonder Woman’s inherent sympathy to the inconvenience of romance because of her “girlish heart.”⁶⁵ She is constantly described as “like any other woman,” and thus inherently disposed to romance. Often the most “terrible decision” Wonder Woman is forced to make is to choose between two men, usually between either Steve or Mer-man, though at times Birdman is thrown into the mix.⁶⁶ Her inability to decide between her suitors is treated as normal. In issue 147 after

⁶³ Ibid, 451.

⁶⁴ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 129 (April 1962): 316.

⁶⁵ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 123 (July 1961): 158.

⁶⁶ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 118 (November 1960): 28.

Wonder Girl passed her Amazon trials, Bird-Boy and Mer-Boy fight over Wonder Woman. When the teenager is unable to choose between the two because “They’re both so cute,” Aphrodite laughingly remarks, “Spoken like a woman!”⁶⁷ Despite all of Wonder Woman’s incredible feats and accomplishments, she is still a “woman,” and subject to what all “normal” women go through: namely romantic quandaries. At one point a gangster calls Wonder Woman out, saying, “Just like a woman, ain’t it? Lettin’ us get away with a million dollar robbery- so her boyfriend won’t be hurt!”⁶⁸ Of course, Wonder Woman manages to both save Steve and stop the crime, as she is able to both fulfil her romantic desires as well as uphold her duty: the model woman. This almost biology-based argument goes directly against what both liberal and radical feminists were arguing for: the notion that women are not limited by their physical form and should not be bound by stereotypes.

Romance holds a difficult place in *Wonder Woman*. In one aspect, it shows the reader that a woman that romantic relationships are not the highest goals a woman can achieve, and yet upholds the idea that heterosexual romance is deeply imbedded in a woman’s self. It is a confusing message at a time where marriage and a family were supposed to be the endgame for women, as it both confirms the dominant narrative that women are above all romantic creatures, while simultaneously showing a woman who sees some things as more important than marriage. The message that forsaking duty for love leads to destruction runs rampant throughout *Wonder Woman*- a deeply anti-romantic message. Of course, Wonder Woman always manages to either choose duty

⁶⁷ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 3, no. 147 (July 1964): 251.

⁶⁸ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 2, no. 127 (January 1962): 257.

over love or manage both, but still finds herself “soft” in the presence of a handsome face.

One of the more troubling aspects of *Wonder Woman* is brought forth in the “Return to the Golden Age” style issues, which emulate the style and content of the original war-era *Wonder Woman*. In these issues, An Amazon’s bracelets are actually “bracelets of submission,” reminders of the chains the Amazons once wore under the power of men. If the bracelets were ever to be linked, they would need to be broken by a man. Or even worse, if the bracelets were ever to be taken off, the Amazon would lose all sense of control and go on a berserker rampage. *Wonder Woman*’s bracelets are removed in these throw-back tales, and she goes on a spree of destruction, until Steve- a man- replaces her “bracelets of submission,” thus calming her into the docile, loving woman he loves.⁶⁹

The choice to revive a more sexist Golden-Age era *Wonder Woman* is a difficult one to put into context when 1960s *Wonder Woman* was presenting readers with such a forward-thinking image of womanhood. However, it is important to remember that DC was struggling with *Wonder Woman*’s sales, and may have done this in a last-ditch effort to capitalize on nostalgia in exchange for monetary returns. In another way, this may also have been a calculated “cooling” of the pseudo-feminist tones of the Silver Age comics in response to the backlash against the women’s rights movement.

But *Wonder Woman* isn’t the only woman in *Wonder Woman*, and one other character deserves mention and special analysis: *Wonder Woman*’s mother, Hippolyta. If

⁶⁹ Robert Kanigher, “*Wonder Woman*,” *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman* 4, no. 169 (April 1967): 316-317.

Wonder Woman may be said to stand as a physical representation of ideal womanhood, Hippolyta is the representation of ideal motherhood. Motherhood was seen as an expected part of a woman's life in the 60s: even women's rights group NOW listed motherhood as "a most important part of most women's lives," in their 1966 statement of purpose.⁷⁰ Of course, NOW believed that motherhood didn't preclude "serious participation in industry or the professions," and refused arguments about women based on biology. But in mainstream thought, motherhood was seen as the peak and purpose of a woman's life.

Toys aimed at young girls like the Suzy Homemaker line were all focused around domestic duties, and one ad even states that Suzy is "every little girl who wants to be just like her mother." Clearly, motherhood, domesticity and womanhood were all seen as deeply intertwined. Mothers that worked outside of the home -whether out of necessity or desire- often faced difficulty finding childcare, and were at times faced with scorn. Many of the legal changes in the 1960s regarding women's rights were centered around this fact, and tried to aid women- particularly mothers- attain higher education, eliminate sexist hiring practices, and try to close the wage gap, as noted in the 1963 Peterson Report.

In 60s thinking, motherhood was the end goal of a woman's biology, and it held a lot of weight. Mothers were placed on a "shining new pedestal," as contemporary scientific thought believed that children were most affected by their environment as fetuses and small children.⁷¹ As such, anything and everything a mother did could affect

⁷⁰ "The National Organization for Women's 1966 Statement of Purpose," *National Organization for Women*. Accessed February 27, 2016.

⁷¹ Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner*, 175.

the adult their child would become, from a future president to a dastardly draft deserter. The weight of the future was thrust firmly upon women's shoulders. In order to create good, productive citizens, mothers were supposed to devote all of their time and resources to their maintenance and proper upbringing. With this logic in mind, working mothers were looked down upon, as they were deemed "unable" to provide their children with the crucial love and support they needed, thus creating degenerate future adults. To counter this, a few studies were done on working mothers and their children and households, all of which revealed that children of working mothers were just as happy and healthy as stay-at-home mothers.⁷²

This did little to counter the cultural stigma attached to working women, despite the fact that increasing numbers of women worked by the start of the 60s. Many upper-class feminists saw a career as a chance for a woman to realize her full self, while lower-class working mothers saw wage-earning as a simply pragmatic necessity. Now, enter Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons and ruler of Paradise Island, mother to Wonder Woman herself. A fierce warrior unafraid to fight for her people as well as an artist and scientist, she is much like her daughter in her personality. She is in essence as "working mother," as she is a full-time leader, and occasional battlefield general. This is seen to have had no ill effect on Wonder Woman, who is seen as the paragon of womanly virtue. In fact, Wonder Woman looks up to Hippolyta for her ability to act in so many roles, and strives to emulate her.

⁷² Ibid, 173.

Hippolyta is a mother, but a very untraditional one: Wonder Woman has no father. While Hippolyta reveals that she once was in love, Wonder Woman was not a result of their union.⁷³ In fact, a man was not involved in Wonder Woman's creation at all: Hippolyta, desperate for a child, creates a figure out of clay and the gods breathe life into it, turning the figure into a real girl. Hippolyta is an unmarried woman, who created a child out of her own desire with her own hands. While motherhood was something all women were to aspire to, it was supposed to be *married* motherhood. Hippolyta defies this, and is in total control of her body and wants. Birth Control was still a hot-topic issue in the 60s, as it was often given only to those with medical issues, and it was only later in the decade that it was given to married women for the explicit intent of family planning. Hippolyta is the ultimate family planner, having built her child with her own hands, no man or pregnancy involved.

Still, Hippolyta is seen as a mother worthy of admiration, lavishing love on her daughter and those around her, and melds motherhood with leadership as well as warriorhood. While Hippolyta is certainly an unusual mother, she insists that her maternal instincts and practices are the same, establishing motherhood as a shared experience between all mothers, and perhaps blunting the subversion of her situation "An Amazon mother is like any other!" she cheerfully says, pulling out her scrapbooks of Wonder Woman as a child when Wonder Woman comes searching for images of her in her youth.⁷⁴

⁷³ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 132 (August 1962).

⁷⁴ Robert Kanigher, "Wonder Woman," *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 123 (July 1961): 140.

Hippolyta also balances her public role as a leader with her private role as a mother, recognizing that while their interests may sometimes conflict, she knows when to choose duty over love. She is a fighter, starting out as a soldier in the Amazonian army, and still manages to be on the front lines whenever Paradise Island is attacked.⁷⁵ She also refuses to be set aside as an actor because of her status as an older woman and mother, stating in issue 138 that she would compete in a contest the Amazons had organized, as they should not “expect [her] to retire and sit in a corner near the fireplace darning stockings or something!”⁷⁶ She defies Empty Nest Syndrome, as she clearly has a sense of identity that is rooted in neither a home nor a man.⁷⁷ While Hippolyta certainly paints motherhood as a similar experience for all mothers and plays into certain societal expectations with regards to what makes a good mother, she also shatters other expectations. In some ways, Hippolyta is the most forward-thinking character in *Wonder Woman*: a single mother with a full-time job, a famous daughter, and a refusal to be cast aside for any of the above.

Wonder Woman presented readers with a vision of what it meant to be a successful woman that was deeply different than what mainstream society espoused. At a time where “the fearful label *emasculating* was stamped on outspoken, successful, or even knowledgeable women,” *Wonder Woman* showed readers something different. Strong as a man, unmarried, intelligent, and an active agent in her own life, *Wonder*

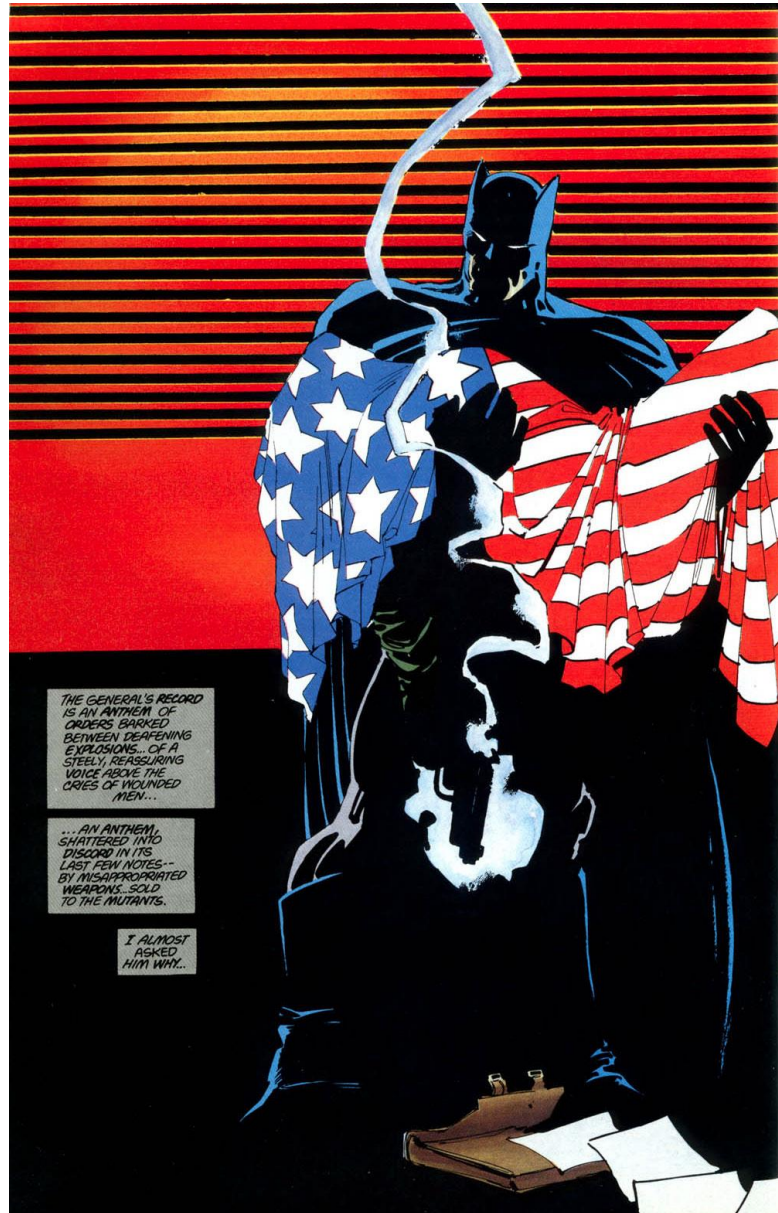
⁷⁵ Robert Kanigher, “Wonder Woman,” *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 130 (May 1962): 337.

⁷⁶ Robert Kanigher, “Wonder Woman,” *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman 2*, no. 138 (May 1963): 19.

⁷⁷ “Empty Nest Syndrome” is a term used to describe the sense of purposelessness in mothers when their children leave, as they have been raised to believe that child-rearing is their function in life. When their children leave, what are they left with? Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986*, 183.

Wonder Woman defied gender norms of her day. She certainly conformed to many stereotypes, as she was a traditionally beautiful white woman whose inherent desire was to help others, but she was also a stand-out image of a woman that deviated pretty significantly from the reigning paradigm. To be sure, Wonder Woman represented an ideal for white, middle-to-upper class women, and did little to challenge the racism or social inequalities that women in poverty or women of color faced, and thus provides a new image that is subversive in a very specific way to a specific audience. However, *Wonder Woman's* image of idealized womanhood still stands in stark contrast to the ideal that readers would have seen perpetuated in other forms of media, particularly television. As such, it is important to recognize this era in Wonder Woman's history, and not simply dismiss it out of hand. Wonder Woman was still "super" in the 60s, and while she certainly had a long way to go, she was much further than many others in her day. This quiet rebellion was just the beginning, as Batman was going to push the envelope even further in the 80s.

Chapter Two: From Camp to Cruelty: Who is the Batman?



¹ Frank Miller, Klaus Janson, and Lynn Varley, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, (New York: DC Comics, 2002), 70.

“Who is the Batman?” A question often posed by his enemies and sometimes even his friends, the identity of one of comic book history’s most famous heroes is not as easy to pin down as one would think. Bruce Wayne seems to be the obvious answer, as the multimillionaire playboy is indeed the man behind the mask...most of the time. While Wayne is generally associated with the mantle of the Bat, the title has been given up, handed down and exchanged more than once. As such, “Bruce Wayne” may be Batman, but *which one?* To understand who we consider “Batman,” we must look at his origins.

Batman as we know him today is incredibly different from the Batman of the late 1930s. Created in 1939 by Bob Kane, Bill Finger, and Jerry Robinson, Batman made his first appearance in DC Comics’ *Detective Comics #27* in May of 1939.² Batman was designed to put up competition to one of DC’s most popular characters, Superman.³ Born at the very beginning of the start of the superhero genre, Batman would be one of the most enduring comic book characters ever created. Batman survived well into the 1960s, when he was re-vamped in 1964.⁴ The Batman character would then ascend to its campy zenith in 1966 in Adam West’s television series *Batman*, which ran until 1968. Poorly written comics and stale superheroes hurt comic sales in the 1970s, and the frequent turnover in talent and administration left DC shaky. In 1976, a young woman with no background in the comics industry was made the new head publisher of DC: Jeanette

² Shirrel Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 15. As a clarification note, I will be referring to DC Comics Inc. as simply DC Comics or DC. DC has gone through numerous name changes throughout its existence, but for the sake of ease of reading, I will stick to DC.

³Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 27. Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, trans. Bart Beatty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 19.

⁴ Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 88.

Kahn.⁵ Her search for fresh talent lead her abroad, where she courted the two now-famous writers, Neil Gaiman and Alan Moore.⁶ Moore would go on to write classics like *V for Vendetta*, but more importantly, in 1986 he would write *Watchmen*. This groundbreaking graphic novel, alongside Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, would forever change comics.⁷

The Dark Knight Returns was a revolution in the comic world. It was met with thunderous popular acclaim, even meriting a review in *Rolling Stone*.⁸ Visually and thematically dark, it was an incredibly brutal new take on Batman and the notion of the superhero. Coupled with Alan Moore's groundbreaking *Watchmen*, these two works almost single handedly saved not only DC, but the superhero genre as a whole.⁹ This darker, more complex world was clearly resonating with readers. Batman's long and storied career as a pop icon has seen him leaping about in purple tights, to nearly beating criminals to death with his bare hands in a dark alley. These personas seem diametrically opposed to each other, yet they fall under the same name. Batman has managed to endure for so long because he has been many things to many people across many spans of time.

⁵ Ibid, 109.

⁶ Ibid, 112.

⁷ While *Watchmen* is in and of itself a graphic novel worthy of its own Independent Study, it is not the focus of my work. I introduce it only because of its thematic significance to the superhero genre, and how it was published around the same time as *The Dark Knight Returns*.

⁸ Gabillet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, 92. Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 267.

⁹Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* , 125. Gabillet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, 93.

His changing nature- from camp to cruelty- is reflective of the readers who hold him up as a superhero.

This chapter will address this interesting moment in comic book history, and examine the roots of the explosion in popularity that Batman saw in the late 80s and early 90s. This era is often neglected in scholarly writing, and the one book devoted entirely to Batman scholarship focuses mainly on Batman as a commodity or general icon, not necessarily from a historical perspective.¹⁰ Comic book scholars such as Gabillet and Rhoades both pinpoint Frank Miller's 1986 *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* as a turning point for Batman, DC Comics, and the comic industry as a whole, yet little scholarship has been written on this shift.¹¹ Batman of the 80s revolutionized the comic book industry, and few have stopped to look at *why*. My examination of a selection of Batman's most famous texts and arcs in the 80s reveal great depth and political awareness, and ultimately serve as excellent ways to understand how comic book readers of the 80s saw their own world.

Batman's newfound cruelty and darkness came at a time when comic books seemed too distant and in a world of their own to be taken seriously. When Miller released *The Dark Knight Returns*, he directly engaged with the political and social atmosphere surrounding readers at the time and made commentary on it, and thus made history. Gotham became a character in its own right, visually and thematically reflecting the apparent decay and danger now present in modern American cities. Beyond that, the

¹⁰ Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio, eds. *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, (New York: Routledge, 1991).

¹¹ Gabillet, "Of Comics and Men," 92 and Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 126.

crime that Batman started to face became more grounded in real life, and showed readers a “criminal underworld” that they felt they recognized, as well as peacekeeping institutions that were totally unequipped to deal with it. With the character of Gotham more dark and foreboding than it had ever been, Batman becomes necessary. Batman’s darkness was effective, curbing crime and corruption while still maintaining a core set of values. His quality of incredible violence now was “super,” when in earlier years it would have been seen as the quality of a super-*villain*. However, this tense balance of morality with brutality seemed far more potent than the real-world solutions to institutional incompetence and growing crime rates that readers faced. When the desire for a true hero was highest, the Dark Knight delivered. His stories directly simulated real-world environments, bringing the critiques he was making of reigning establishments into a more potent dimension.

Cartels and Cocaine and Crime, Oh My!

In 1986, crack cocaine was introduced to wide markets in America. Formed like a brittle and then broken into “rocks,” crack was pure, created an intense high, incredibly addictive, and most importantly it was *cheap*.¹² Originally coming from South America to Miami, it was considered a localized problem in Florida until 1986.¹³ According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), cocaine incidents increased by “110%” in 1986, and then *quadrupled* by 1987.¹⁴ What started out as a local issue quickly became a

¹² Drug Enforcement Administration, "1985-1990," 59.

¹³ *Ibid*, 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 60.

nationwide issue plaguing most major American cities: by 1987, crack was available in all but 4 states in America.¹⁵

The crack market was an efficient one. Stemming from organized crime cartels running mostly out of Colombia, the process of getting crack from South America to the U.S. was tightly run by cartels, and brutally violent. The Medellin cartel, famous for its incredible violence, began to fall in the early nineties after Colombian law enforcement killed leader Pablo Escobar in 1993.¹⁶ The Cali mafia lurked in the background, as they preferred integrating into their communities and running their mafia like a business, making them that much harder to root out.¹⁷

The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act and its 1988 amendment allocated funds for “Crack teams” and set harsher punitive measures for offenders, all as a part of Reagan’s “War on Drugs.” Beyond the public health threat that widespread drug use created, the link to crime was tangible to the public. The DEA and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) estimates that 32% of all homicides in this era in New York City were crack related.¹⁸ The crime that the cartels brought to American cities was often noted, New York Times author Peter Kerr calling it a “tug-of-war.”¹⁹ Murder rates began to rise sharply in New York City, peaking nationwide in 1991.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid, 60.

¹⁶ Drug Enforcement Administration, "1990-1994," 77.

¹⁷ Ibid, 78.

¹⁸ Drug Enforcement Administration, "1985-1990," 60.

¹⁹ Peter Kerr, "Cocaine Glut Pulls New York Market Into Drug Rings' Tug-Of-War," *New York Times*, August 24, 1988. The rise in crime was also noted in another 1988 article: David E. Pitt, "Crime Rates Rise in New York City," *New York Times*, September 17, 1988.

²⁰ Alexia Cooper, Erica L. Smith, Ron Malega, and Kyle Harbacek, *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008*, ed. Morgan Young and Jill Thomas (November 2011), 2.

However, law enforcement seemed unable to deal with the task at hand. Police corruption was considered to be a major issue, particularly with regards to drugs. As one reporter put it: “each passing week seems to bring another new drug-related charge against some local police officer...”²¹ The possibility for drug-dealing or taking payoffs seemed too easy for some cops, and from Miami to New York City “dirty cops” were not surprising to the public at large. Relationships between police officers and the communities they worked in were often tense, particularly between white officers and people of color, due to racial profiling and multiple instances of police brutality.

While no two scholars can agree as to why crime began to fall in the 90s, the numbers slowly began to decrease, and America started to quietly notice. The *New York Times* reported in 1993 that crime rates fell across the board in New York and America, even if only a little.²² New York City became the paradigm for this shift, as in 1994 new mayor Rudy Giuliani brought in a new police commissioner, William Bratton. Bratton, facing massive budget cuts, managed to at least superficially turn NYPD around. Bratton pushed for community policing, in which police officers are more visible and socially involved in the communities they work in, aiming to better relationships between the department and community.²³ He and Giuliani made public attempts to root out corruption in the department, as well as tackle police brutality head-on.²⁴ Most

²¹ Jon Nordheimer, "Police Corruption Plaguing Florida," *New York Times*, August 3, 1986.

²² Peter Marks, "Crime Down in '92 in New York and Nationwide," *New York Times*, October 3, 1993.

²³ "Community Policing, Bratton Style," *New York Times*, January 31, 1994.

²⁴ One NYT opinion piece addresses police brutality: "Tough Cops, Not Brutal Cops," *New York Times*, May 5, 1994. Another reporter addresses the promise to root out NYPD corruption: Alison Mitchell, "CORRUPTION IN UNIFORM: THE MAYOR; GIULIANI PROMISES FIGHT TO ROOT OUT POLICE CORRUPTION," *New York Times*, July 8, 1994.

controversial were Giuliani and Bratton's endorsements of "broken windows" policing tactics, which some people felt got "results," while others felt were inherently discriminatory.

To be sure, crime decreased in NYC pretty drastically- as it did all over America. No one can quite pinpoint *why* crime fell across America in the early 90s. People living during the crime drop didn't even quite understand it, as seen in a 1994 Clifford Krauss article in which several people come up with various different explanations for the reduction.²⁵ At any rate, everyone seemed to come up with their own rationalization for the drop and crime and how the trend should continue: including Batman. In a world primed to accept the city as dangerous and the government as inept, his apparent ability to make real change against insurmountable odds appeared more necessary than ever.

Putting the "Goth" in Gotham

Anyone who picked up *The Dark Knight Returns* in 1986 would have been shocked at what they found. Emerging from a canon that had grown stale, the new world that Batman inhabited spoke to his audience because it had a sense of *realism* to it.²⁶ Gone were the picture-perfect cities plagued by the common street thief of yesteryear, as Miller's re-awakening of the Batman franchise placed Batman in a city that was recognizable to the readers. By the time the mid-80s rolled around, a tanking economy and growing drug use had begun to take its toll on the American city, and this did not escape public notice. Miller's new image of Gotham was a despairing one: *The Dark*

²⁵ Clifford Krauss, "Urban Crime Rates Falling This Year," *New York Times*, November 8, 1994.

²⁶ Most comic book readers in the late 80s and early 90s were male, in their late teens or early twenties, according to Patrick Parson. Patrick Parsons, "Batman and His Audience: A Dialectic of Culture," in *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 81.

Knight Returns is nothing short of an abysmal picture of urban life. When asked about his setting, Miller explained: “What kind of world would be scary enough for Batman? And I looked out my window.”²⁷ In this way, Gotham itself becomes just as much as a character as Batman is himself, and firmly grounds the action in a reality that the readers felt they shared. Gotham is in fact an old nickname for New York City, the city that tended to be the focus of anti-crime efforts in the early 90s.²⁸ The connection had always been there, but this new visual depiction brought it new meaning.

The Dark Knight Returns opens on 80s Gotham during a heat wave, as Bruce Wayne/Batman decides to come out of retirement. The city is dirty and rotting, crowded with strung-out addicts and end-of-days street corner preachers. Smoke pours out over the city skyline, rendered in dirty greys and glum blues. As crime began to increase with the flow of crack into America’s major cities, news media picked up on this change and began to report on it. “If it bleeds, it leads,” is a longstanding statement, and the often sensationalized depiction of crime as well as the seeming “randomness” of drug-related crimes struck fear into the heart of the public and lead to a growing perception that crime was *everywhere*.²⁹ As such, readers of *The Dark Knight Returns* would already be primed to accept a picture of a world that was changing, and for the worse. As mass media and cable TV became more and more accessible to the public, the threat of violence in cities

²⁷ Frank Miller, interview by Tasha Robins, “Frank Miller,” The A.V. Club, December 5, 2001.

²⁸The story goes that “Gotham” was the name of a purported English village which pretended to act unstable to keep King John away. Author Washington Irving would then use it to describe New York City and its “crazy” occupants in the 1807 “Salmagundi Papers,” and thus the Gotham- NYC connection was born. Carmen Nigro, “So, Why Do We Call It Gotham, Anyway?” *New York Public Library*. January 25, 2011.

²⁹ Daniel Romer, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, and Sean Aday, “Television News and the Cultivation of Fear of Crime,” *Journal of Communication* 53, no. 1 (2003).

seemed omnipresent. While I would posit that cities have always been presented as more “dangerous” than rural or suburban areas for several intersecting reasons, the perceived increase in crime due to drugs and more media coverage added a new level of fear to readers’ understanding of cities.

This vision of Gotham stuck, as it reflected a world that the readers could see themselves, one that could justify a Batman. *Year One*’s Gotham is very similar to the city of *The Dark Knight Returns*: it is grimy, seedy, and crime ridden. Both Gordon and Wayne view it with disdain, Gordon calling it “No place to raise a family.”³⁰ Gotham is rotting, both physically and morally. At one point Batman is being hunted by the police, and he takes refuge in a crumbling, empty building, and it is one of *many*. *The Killing Joke*, published in 1988 happens mostly *outside* of Gotham, on its outskirts in an abandoned carnival ground. It is this decaying city that has created monsters like the Joker. In fact, the Joker speaks to his madness as a coping mechanism: “When the world is full of care and every headline screams despair...I go Loo-oo-oony...”³¹ In the Joker’s mind, the external reality of life in Gotham is too horrid to sanely exist in, as “every headline screams despair, when all is rape, starvation, war and life is vile...”³² The modern world as the Joker sees it is not a viable one, and thus the Joker sees no reason to try and live in it rationally. In short, cities like Gotham birth monsters.

Tim Burton’s 1989 movie *Batman* brought the comic book vision of Gotham to the big screen and visually presents a similar space. With soaring skylines, bare, rusty

³⁰ Frank Miller, *Batman: Year One*, (New York: DC Comics, 2005), 2.

³¹ Alan Moore, *The Killing Joke*, (New York: DC Comics, 2008), 24.

³² *Ibid*, 24.

girders everywhere, and dirty brick facades, this vision of a “modern” city is anything but uplifting, and visually very similar to both *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Year One*’s Gotham. And much like in *Year One*, this Gotham is crumbling. The final chase scene in the film happens in Gotham’s cathedral, which is completely abandoned. Churches traditionally represent morality, a sense of order and peace. That Gotham has left its church to rot speaks volumes about not only the infrastructure of the city, but of its heart as well.

In *KnightSaga*, the moral depravity of the city is laid bare, both by Batman and Jean-Paul Valley, Batman’s temporary replacement. Gotham is described as “A place of poverty and crime and hopelessness,” “A city without a soul,” “a place long since cursed by a flood from heaven, and forsaken by true light.”³³ There is a large homeless population, consisting of out-of-work architects, an abandoned disabled veteran, and immigrants, all failed by their city.³⁴ The old Gotham Courthouse is condemned, a crumbling reminder of justice’s failures in Gotham as a whole.³⁵ Crime is even seen to be a natural outgrowth of urban living, as Valley states that “the city births these monsters.”³⁶

In short, the city is seen as morally bankrupt and dangerous, which not only reflects a reality that readers understood and felt drawn to, but also justifies the presence of a Batman. The utter bleakness of Gotham tied into a growing and media-encouraged

³³ In order: Chuck Dixon, "Detective Comics Featuring Batman," *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest* 2, no. 670 (January 1994): 185. Alan Grant, "Showcase '94: Azrael," *Batman Knightfall: KnightsEnd* 3, no. 10 (September 1994): 356. Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 500 (September 1994): 603.

³⁴ Dixon, *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest*, 356.

³⁵ Doug Moench, "Showcase '93: Two-Face," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 7 (July 1993): 365.

³⁶ Chuck Dixon, "Detective Comics Featuring Batman," *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest* 2, no. 674 (May 1994): 539.

sentiment that cities were unsafe places. This is not a necessarily *false* perception, as statistics –which can only be taken so far- show that most of the violent crime occurred in “cities with a population of 100,000 or more,” centering the city as the place of crime.³⁷

Continuing on this, Batman in the late 80s began to depict a world of crime that readers would have been familiar with. To be sure, “crime” is a vague term, and can refer to a number of things from mugging to murder. Crime in *The Dark Knight Returns* is mostly gang-based, as the main group Batman faces off against are the almost-alien Mutants, who simply wreak havoc. There are also two classic villains, Two-Face and the Joker, both who represent the sort of traditional comic-book extensions of violence, personifying spontaneous acts of evil in one body.

In *Year One*, this understanding of crime expands beyond gangs and moves to explore an even more realistic depiction of urban crime: most notably including drugs. By this point in American culture, drug abuse is already a hot topic. The Anti-Drug Abuse act of 1986 has already gone into effect, and grassroots anti-drug programs like the Red Ribbon Campaign had been around since 1985.³⁸ By 1987, the time of *Year One*'s publishing, drug-related crimes were skyrocketing, and drug-related hospital visits spiked. Instead of veering off into a fantastical world as many comics do, Frank Miller decided to tap into the world around him. As such, *Year One*'s crime ranges from prostitution to large-scale drug dealing. But beyond street-level crime, Flass, one of Gotham PD's top members, is apprehended while taking money to cover up a cocaine shipment, and it is implied that this is not the first time he has done this. Crime is seen to

³⁷ Cooper, Smith, Malega, and Harbacek, *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008*, 29.

³⁸ Drug Enforcement Administration, "1985-1990," 65.

go beyond the local drug dealer, and is fueled by larger structures. The highly publicized death of DEA operative Enrique Camarena in 1985 made public the scale and organization behind the massive drug running operation that brought narcotics to America, particularly in cartel form.³⁹ As such, Miller's portrayal of drugs as an organized business would not seem outlandish.

In fact, "true crime" in Gotham seems to be in the corruption of Gotham's government. Favoritism, cover-ups, embezzlement, drug-running, patronage systems: all of these are foundational aspects of Gotham PD and the Mayor's office. As Gordon notes, Batman's actions have made an enemy of "every criminal in Gotham—and nearly every elected official."⁴⁰ *Year One* has no loony Joker or dramatic villain to fight, instead focusing on the "reality" of the city. Similarly, Tim Burton's *Batman* plays with this growing sense of "real" crime. While mostly dealing with old-school gangsters and singular villains such as the Joker, *Batman* also touches on the public's belief that crime was being fostered-if not at least ignored- by those in power. Dirty cop Max Eckhardt is always letting criminals slide, consciously looking away from their actions.

KnightSaga, the final series in the canon I analyze, is the most direct in its allegory to real-world crime. The main villain in the *KnightSaga* arc is Bane, the man who "breaks the Bat." Bane is not so much "born" as he is "created," a victim of his experiences at the hands of a South American dictatorship on Pena Dura, a prison island.⁴¹ He gains his super-strength from a drug called Venom, which was being created

³⁹ Ibid, 63.

⁴⁰ Miller, *Batman: Year One*, 52.

⁴¹ Chuck Dixon, "Batman: The Vengeance of Bane," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no.1, (January 1993): 9.

for military use to create super-soldiers.⁴² He is a fearful villain, one that is very telling about the anxieties that readers held at the time. To begin, he comes out of an anonymous, generalized South American dictatorship, representing the general American distrust of that region in the 80s and 90s, due to both the much-publicized flow of cocaine and South America's notorious dictatorships. The xenophobia associated with Bane is subtle, but definitely present. He occasionally exclaims things in Spanish, and his mask even resembles that of a *luchador*. He intends to physically and spiritually invade and conquer Gotham, and bring with him a reign of terror. But beyond this xenophobia, Bane represents something more literal: the drug trade. "Drug wars" and the "cocaine epidemic" are often what the rise in crime in the late 80s to early 90s is attributed to, for better or worse. Bane is literally fueled by Venom -a drug- and comes from South America, the area where most people perceived mass amounts of drugs as coming from. He comes into Gotham and completely upsets the crime world and starts a spree of violence, which is exactly what the public perceived drugs as doing. And Bane doesn't simply want to take over Gotham and let it be, he wants to *kill*.⁴³ His violence is unmatched, and he is the spectre of the 80s and early 90s, the embodiment of public anxiety. And he will be the one to break Batman. Batman, the symbol of law and order and usually representative of the police department, is unable to deal with Bane, much like how police forces were perceived to be unable to deal with the new spikes in crime.

Crime starts in 1986 very much in comic-book land: strange-looking creature-humans with spikes coming out of their heads calling themselves the Mutants. As the full

⁴² Ibid, 33.

⁴³ Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 492 (May 1993): 104.

force of the crime wave and the effects of widespread drug use become more apparent to readers, “realistic crime” becomes the subject of Batman’s attack. *KnightSaga* is in a way looking *back* at the preceding period of the late 80s and 1991, succinctly embodying what readers saw as the source of the crime wave in Bane, the personification of the crack epidemic. Bane/drug-related crime is what breaks Batman, and what Gotham PD could not handle.

So now the scene has been set: Gotham and the crime Batman fights is directly related to the world of the reader. Crime was rampant, cities were crumbling, drugs were everywhere, and who was going to stop it? In the comic book world, the answer is obviously Batman. Batman becomes such a powerful icon of justice in this period because in the real world, the institutions that *were* supposed to be handling these new challenges were perceived to be corrupt and ineffective. This is the final justification for a Batman, who acts as a form of wish fulfillment for the reader, as his actions are seen as an effective way to make change.

The depiction of those in power is certainly telling of a rooted distrust in both the police department and the larger government at hand. *The Dark Knight Returns* shows how the progression of time in Gotham has fundamentally weakened its infrastructure, and classes the aging Commissioner Gordon and Batman as a class of heroes from a different age, at a loss in a world of modern crime. The new police Commissioner Yindel is restrained by a strict notion of the law that classifies Batman as a criminal, and it is clear that without Gordon at the helm, Batman’s relationship with the police is at an end. The politicians in *The Dark Knight Returns* are seen as useless and unable to stop any of the calamities in Gotham, always trying to foist off the responsibility of making an actual

decision to avoid displeasing constituents.⁴⁴The president is a wizened man who speaks in charmingly po-dunk accent, an obvious caricature of Reagan. His charmingly benign manner is politically useful, but he fails to stop a Soviet warhead from exploding over Gotham, and instead enlists Superman to quietly try and fix things.⁴⁵ A top general is found to be selling military grade arms to the Mutants, revealing that not only is the government useless, it is corrupt.⁴⁶

Gotham's government and police department are similarly poisoned in *Year One*, which recounts the story of how Gordon made his way into Gotham P.D. While the then-newbie Gordon is the proverbial "good cop" trying to reform from the inside, the department as a whole is riddled with corruption and violence. Flass is on the take in a drug ring, the Vice department takes bribes, and most of the cops have the propensity to shoot first and ask questions later, in the most brutal of ways.⁴⁷ Flass brutally beats a young black boy for pulling out what he thinks is a knife, only to reveal it to be a comb. When Gordon confronts him on this, he simply replies with "I'm only human."⁴⁸ Wayne himself gets shot by a cop for no reason, as the cop simply states that "he was going to [move]."⁴⁹ In short, police brutality is more common than not in Gotham PD. The police are not something to look up to, and instead of working to stem the tide of crime are in

⁴⁴ Frank Miller, Klaus Janson, and Lynn Varley, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, (New York: DC Comics, 2002), 59, 108.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 119.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 70.

⁴⁷ Miller, *Batman: Year One*, 34, 11.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 14.

fact perpetrating it and punishing those who fight it, such as Batman and Gordon. Gordon works hard to change the department, but he can only go so far in the context of the law. In the absence of any true law-keeping institution, Batman becomes necessary.

Corrupt cops would not be out of place for a reader in the 80s or 90s, particularly in a city such as Miami or New York. The Dowd case, made famous in 1992, revealed a group of NYPD officers who were either drug dealers or on the take in the late 80s, who were not truly punished until the early 90s. And this was not an outlier of a case. Police corruption, particularly in NYPD, was notorious, and communities often had rough relationships with their police departments, particularly communities of color. While this element is ignored in the mostly-white world of Batman, the distrust of cops was tangible. In an effort to address this distrust, NYC tried to tackle its police corruption problem head-on with the establishment of the Mollen Commission, an initiative aimed at investigating the allegations of widespread misconduct in the department. In 1994, the Commission announced its findings to the public, stating that their investigations showed NYPD to be in horrid shape, revealing multiple instances of corruption and cover-ups.⁵⁰ Clearly, Gotham was drawing from real life.

Police department aside, Gotham's government is seen as no better. In a particularly dramatic scene, Batman attacks the Mayor's dinner party, where the old, rich, white elite of Gotham are chatting over dinner. Batman cuts the lights at the party, telling the attendees that their "feast" on Gotham's "wealth and spirit" are over.⁵¹ He then proceeds to hogtie the Mayor and steal his Rolls Royce, declaring war on the corrupt. Of

⁵⁰ Mitchell, "CORRUPTION IN UNIFORM," and Selwyn Raab, "NEW YORK'S POLICE ALLOW CORRUPTION, MOLLEN PANEL SAYS," *New York Times*, December 29, 1993.

⁵¹ Miller, *Batman: Year One*, 38.

course, Bruce Wayne himself is a rich white elite: only he is seen as deeply moral, and uses his wealth for the common good by funding his actions as Batman. By the end of *Year One*, nothing has dramatically changed. The government and police department are still corrupt, and both Gordon and Batman will have to fight another day.

In *The Killing Joke*, Gotham PD is unable to deal with the violence that the Joker represents, and thus Batman becomes a necessary force for peacekeeping. While a pre-Commissioner Gordon Gotham PD is seen in *Year One* to be corrupt and broken, *The Killing Joke*'s policing institutions are capable, just not as capable as Batman. It is the police who are unable to keep the Joker in prison; it is Gordon who is captured and whom Batman must rescue, and it is Gordon's daughter who he and his cops are unable to protect. In the eyes of the comic, Batman is the only solution to the Joker, the only one who can meet him on equal footing.

The police in Burton's *Batman* are both corrupt and inept, as seen in police officer's Eckhardt's willingness to work with mobs. But even beyond dirty cops, Gotham PD seems entirely ineffective. They are often seen in shots doing what they aren't supposed to be doing, whether it is drinking a cup of coffee while leaning on their car, or even playing cards in a smoky bar. Batman must then become the "police force," as Gotham's is either unwilling or unable to make meaningful change in Gotham's crime. This ties into a growing dissatisfaction with the police, as the public constantly perceived the crime rate as increasing, and saw no end in sight.

KnightSaga reveals a much more complex view of Gotham's PD and government. The police force in *KnightSaga* are not corrupt or misguided, simply *overwhelmed* by the amount of crime running through Gotham, whether or not Batman was there to help

them. As even Batman notes, “the police...they never had a chance.”⁵² Batman routinely beats them to crime scenes, and even Gordon admits that they are drowning in crime.⁵³ The government is similarly not *corrupt* per say, but rather ill-intended. Gotham’s Mayor Krol was elected to office on a “Law and Order” platform, but ran unopposed.⁵⁴ He is part of what Gordon sees as a larger “machine,” exploiting social events for political gain.⁵⁵ In *KnightSaga*, after Bane breaks Batman’s back, Bruce Wayne is forced to step down and passes on the mantle of Batman to Jean-Paul Valley, a well-meaning ex-assassin-who happens to have a mean streak a mile wide. Gotham’s mayor finds Jean-Paul Valley’s incredibly violent version of Batman to be just what the city needs, as Valley’s extreme violence almost halves the crime rate. On the surface level, this seems like a good thing, and something that readers would have responded positively to, as the decrease in crime was the aim of most city governments at the time. However, the comic makes it clear that Valley’s Batman is not a *good* Batman. But what makes a “good” Batman?

In the light of such a dismal world and useless governments, Batman becomes necessary in the world of the comic book, and wish fulfillment to readers. But this era of Batman was noted not only for its realistic depictions of the city and crime, but its realism with regards to its violence, particularly the violence Batman doled out. In this light, why do readers accept Batman as a force for good, and revile when they see

⁵² Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 491 (April 1993): 78.

⁵³ Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 492 (May 1993): 90 and Alan Grant, "Batman: Shadow of the Bat: The God of Fear," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 16 (September 1993): 510.

⁵⁴ Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 491 (April 1993): 79.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 79.

characters like Jean-Paul take on the mantle? This is because despite all of his fierceness and violence, Batman believes in the sanctity of life, as best embodied in his vow to never kill.

In *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman's sense of justice is just as fierce as his use of violence. Readers would have been well aware of the perceived growing threat of drug use and related violence, and in this way Batman's actions in *The Dark Knight Returns* merely match the brutality of the world that both Batman and the reader lived in. The "law" as it stood seems dreadfully impotent, while Batman is a symbol of unbending, virile resistance in the face of obstacles coming from all angles. While traditional Batman used to be a large proponent of working directly alongside the police department, this new Gotham seems to have shown him- and the readers- that only extra-legal action will actively effect any change. Batman verbalizes this, noting that men like him and Superman "have to be criminals," as he believes the law does not help him, but rather hinders him and must be surpassed.⁵⁶

This tied into the growing sentiment that the justice system as it stood was unequipped to deal with the crime wave that was mounting. Batman's response is perceived to be an effective one, but it is also an extralegal one. In any other situation, Batman's motivations and vigilante actions would be out of control. Objectively speaking, he flouts the law to deal his own justice. If readers did not believe Batman to be good, the notion of him as a vigilante would be terrifying. However, his absolute refusal to kill and belief in the power of the human spirit is *his* version of law and order. He routinely saves children, and even personally funds Harvey Dent/Two-Face's

⁵⁶ Miller, *Batman, The Dark Knight Returns*, 135.

rehabilitation, still desperately believing that he can change.⁵⁷ His sense of law and order goes beyond what is “legal.” The fact that the audience sympathizes-or is at least expected to- with a vigilante speaks greatly to the public’s desire to see someone **do** something about the state of crime. In the face of what Metropolis’ Lana Lang calls “social impotence,” Batman shows people that they can “resist.”⁵⁸

One fantastic example of the law-versus-vigilante argument is in the final confrontation between Batman and Superman. Both are superheroes who are fighting for what they believe to be the greater good, so why should they come into conflict? The simple fact is that Superman is willing to be a pawn for the American government, while Batman plays by his own rules. As the government is seen as hindering the cause of justice, Superman is already playing for the wrong team. Superman is seen as a lackey, while Batman is the one who understands that “trusting your government,” isn’t always right. This highlights the public’s frustration with their public institutions, and desire for something new and decisive.

Year One continues this trend, upholding Batman as the prime example of violent compassion. If anything, the point is made more intensely, as Batman’s actions are paralleled to a young James Gordon’s. While Gordon reforms Gotham PD from the inside, Batman has the freedom from the burden of the law that allows him to go further. True, legal reform is slow. Violent, scandalous acts of vigilantism appear to be much more effective. And because the reader knows that Batman is capital-g-Good, they can not only sanction his actions, but cheer him on. Once again, Batman’s innate sense of

⁵⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 66.

goodness, coupled with his brutally effective vigilantism makes him the apparent solution to the world around him.

The Killing Joke complicates this notion of the violent-but-good Batman.

Batman's response to this darkness and his own personal tragedy is a response to uphold the status quo and fight to maintain order, even though it is through extra-legal means.

Batman has a certain amount of sympathy for the Joker, but he also asserts that the Joker's actions are wrong. Both men were faced with incredible tragedy and went two different ways, and that is the fundamental difference between them. And yet despite their differences, they are tied to each other. One of the repeated lines in *The Killing Joke* highlights this fatalistic connection: "I've been thinking lately. About you and me. About what's going to happen to us, in the end. We're going to kill each other, aren't we There is a common darkness between them, one that is uncomfortable given the fact that the readers are supposed to be rooting for Batman. Batman may use technically illegal methods, but he does so with the intent to serve justice, where others may use them to do harm. *The Killing Joke's* Batman is a supplement to law and order as opposed to a regulating force, and he tries to respect it when he can. He is firmly associated *with* the police, as when Batman goes after the Joker on the fairgrounds, a battered Gordon begs him to "[bring] him in by the book..." as "we need to show him that our way works!"⁵⁹ Batman's "way" is part of Gordon's "way," the way of peace and justice. Batman's fundamental desire to avoid killing, and his belief in redemption makes him the better man. Even when confronted with the enormity of the Joker's dastardly deeds, Batman offers him a chance at rehabilitation, much as he offers Two-Face help in *The Dark*

⁵⁹ Moore, *The Killing Joke*, 37.

Knight Returns. Batman knows nothing of the Joker's past, and the Joker knows nothing about Batman's, and yet Batman offers out his hand, literally saying, "I've been there too."⁶⁰ Batman has conquered his demons at this point, and truly wants to help: he is Good.

But despite Batman's goodness and strict belief in the "way" of justice, at the end of the comic Batman fails to bring the cycle of violence to an end. If Batman *does* kill the Joker, he will end the cycle, but will have violated his sacred code against killing. If he doesn't kill the Joker, he will simply go back to Arkham Asylum, break out, and start the cycle again. There is no closure, no superhero finish, no emotional catharsis for the reader. No one knows if Batman will—having been pushed far enough—finally break his code and kill the Joker. Where *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Year One* end on an optimistic note, *The Killing Joke* offers no such comforts. The audience is left in an awkward position, as not even Batman can make this world right. For once, our caped crusader has failed. And to readers, there seemed to be no end in sight.

Burton's 1989 *Batman* keeps in tune with previous incarnations of Batman: he directly approaches the criminals, and uses fear and intimidation to get what he wants. However, Burton's Batman is very different in one respect: he *is* a killer. Whereas every other Batman has been almost singularly defined by his code against killing, this Batman *tells* the Joker that he is going to kill him. There is none of the reluctance, the desire to end the endless struggle between him and the Joker that we see in *The Killing Joke*—Batman wants him dead, plain and simple. While this is sort of justified in the narrative—Jack Napier was the man who killed his parents— it is still a striking difference from most

⁶⁰ Ibid, 44.

previous portrayals of Batman. This is an angry Batman, whose personal feelings deeply affect how he deals with his enemies. The Joker *does* die, but it is by accident, not by Batman's hand. But despite this, Batman is still a hero, and *Batman* was a wild commercial success. This Batman's darker leanings, even while framed in a conventional Hollywood narrative, were a sharp departure from what die-hards would consider "Batman." Placing this in historical context, this movie premiered a little under two years before violent crime would reach its all-time peak in 1991, and in 1989 the rates were already well on their way there. In this light, Batman's willingness to do anything to end the reign of crime is seen as worthy, as desirable, as *super*. It is drastic, but when faced with impotent governments and police forces, it is needed.

The final piece of my analysis, *KnightSaga*, is nothing less than a long-ranging redefinition of and recommitment to what Batman really stands for.⁶¹ The Batman we see in the beginning of *Knightfall*, the first volume of three, is on the verge of a breakdown. He is ill, having taken "more damage than any man can endure," often times saying that he feels so bad he "want[s] to die."⁶² However, he sees his commitment to Gotham as more important than his pain. But once Bane symbolically breaks his back, Bruce Wayne is then confined to a wheelchair, his superhero days behind him.

Wayne decides to pass the mantle of Batman down to Jean-Paul Valley, a former assassin for the crusading Order of St. Dumas. Having turned away from his past, Valley is excited to be given the mantle. However, it quickly becomes apparent to all those who

⁶¹ For ease of reading, I will only refer to Bruce Wayne as Batman, even though many others wear the mantle. When referring to the others who adopt the position, I will refer to them by name: Dick Grayson (Nightwing, ex-Robin) and Jean-Paul Valley (Azrael).

⁶² Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 497 (July 1993): 317 and 334.

surround him that his way is not the way of the Bat. In Robin's words, "He's into it, all right. He's quick and tough and scary. But somehow he's scary in all the wrong ways."⁶³ Valley is brutally violent, more so than Batman ever was. He upgrades the Batsuit to have literal claws, and by *KnightsEnd* the bat suit resembles more of a demon than anything else. Valley takes the "vigilante" aspect of Batman and ramps it up, dancing on the line with the law, declaring "I don't need proof. I don't need a badge. I don't need to respect your rights."⁶⁴ While this is the advantage of vigilantism that has previously made Batman so successful, Valley takes it too far, and in an evil direction. As Robin states, "Being good enough isn't enough if you're not *good*."⁶⁵ Batman was always good. As Bane exclaims, that even as "a figure of terror in a city of terror," Batman refuses to "break the sixth commandment," to kill.⁶⁶ Batman's devotion was to life, always "choo[sing] the saving of lives over the apprehension of killers."⁶⁷ Life and justice are what Batman pursues. However, Valley is more interested in a sort of vengeance. For him, the ends justify the means, and his violence *does* create an impact. As Mayor Krol notes, crime drops 42% under Valley's reign of terror.⁶⁸ The "by-the-book" cops can't come close to creating the change that Valley does, and yet Valley is deeply *wrong*. He is *not* Batman, and *KnightSaga* makes that very clear.

⁶³ Chuck Dixon, "Detective Comics Featuring Batman," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no.665, (August 1993): 432.

⁶⁴ Chuck Dixon, "Detective Comics Featuring Batman," *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest* 2, no.674, (May 1994): 549.

⁶⁵ Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest* 2, no. 508 (June 1994): 566.

⁶⁶ Chuck Dixon, "Batman: The Vengeance of Bane," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no.1, (January 1993): 57.

⁶⁷ Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall* 1, no. 491 (April 1993): 78.

⁶⁸ Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall: KnightsEnd* 3, no. 510 (August 1994): 213.

What separates Valley from Batman, and why is this important? After all, both are extra-legal vigilantes who supplant existing justice institutions with violence to create change. Simply put, Valley kills and Batman does not. Valley is more than willing to let both guilty and innocent die in his quest for justice, from a hypnotized student under the Scarecrow's control to letting the serial killer Abattoir die.⁶⁹ He sees his enemies as "trash" who "deserve to die," acting as judge and jury all in one, not so differently from Two-Face.⁷⁰ This absolute lack of compassion strikes readers as inherently *not* Batman. Valley sees himself as a holy crusader, while Batman sees himself as subservient to the people of Gotham.⁷¹ Valley is the response to crime that is guttural and instinctual, the fighting of "fire with fire," which casts judgment on the supposedly unredeemable, the response that makes change. But it is not what Batman stands for, and thus *not* how the readers believe crime and the crime wave of the 90s should be treated. Batman's newfound violence in the 80s and 90s served a purpose, but was "super" because it was tempered with compassion. Beyond a meditation on the essence of the Batman, *KnightSaga* is an exploration of how a community deals with its violence.

When Grayson and Wayne return, the change is palpable. This Batman is wiser and older, who has seen what Valley has done and recommitted to his value of the preservation of human life. He intends to fight for "justice," and "stake[s] his own life on the result."⁷² Valley's Batman of "metal and fire...a guise for punishment and

⁶⁹ Doug Moench, "Batman," *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest 2*, no. 508 (June 1994): 580.

⁷⁰ Chuck Dixon, "Detective Comics Featuring Batman," *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest 2*, no. 675, (June 1994): 628.

⁷¹ Alan Grant, "Batman: Shadow of the Bat," *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest 2*, no. 28 (June 1994): 597.

⁷² Alan Grant, "Batman: Shadow of the Bat," *Batman Knightfall: KnightsEnd 3*, no. 30 (August 1994): 226.

retribution,” is not the right answer to crime. Batman uses his violence and darkness to “fight fire with fire...but only to a point.” “I will not become my enemy,” he states. “And I will not be burned.”⁷³ Even when Batman takes down Valley, he does so with calm and understanding, literally flooding Valley with light, forcing him to stop and realize what he’s done.⁷⁴

The end of the *KnightSaga* was published 1994, as major cities began to see a general drop in urban crime. New York is perhaps the most well-known example of how policing in the real world changed in response to the crime wave, and is interesting when brought into comparison to *KnightSaga*. The brutality and corruption of the world around the readers- from the police to the criminals themselves- called for a response, and in the beginning (*The Dark Knight Returns* and *Year One*) the response was violent and dark. Jean-Paul Valley is the representation of that sort of response, brought to an extreme. Readers wanted effective change, but there was also the desire for effective *compassionate* change, which makes Batman the perfect role model.

While scholars go back and forth on what created the drop-off in crime in the early 90s, the media seemed to have the answers. In Levitt’s study on the factors affecting the decreasing crime rates, he examines the rationalizations that media outlets gave for the unprecedented decline, and ranked them by frequency of mention, and highlights the disparity between what major newspapers pinpointed as the cause and what he argues are the true causes. While tallying up mentions of a word or phrase removes

⁷³ Doug Moench, “Batman,” *Batman Knightfall: KnightsEnd* 3, no. 509 (July 1995): 26.

⁷⁴ Dennis O’Neill, “Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight,” *Batman Knightfall: KnightsEnd* 3, no. 63 (August 1994): 294-295.

them from context, it provides an interesting look at what information viewers- and thus possibly readers- would have been receiving. The most mentioned and most visible explanation was a change in police tactics, followed by increased incarceration and a changing drug market.⁷⁵ Police departments across America did grow larger, diversified to an extent, generally received more funding, and saw an increase in the use of technology both in and out of the field.⁷⁶ These changes were more visible, and perhaps why the media picked up on them so intensely. Community policing was highlighted, and brutality and police corruption was visibly addressed, such as in cities like NYC. *KnightSaga*'s emphasis on compassion and selective violence as traits of a true superhero seem to tie into these perceived changes.

Of course, these changes often were a part of "broken windows" theory policing. Authored by George Kelling and James Wilson, this theory in essence states that if police crackdown on minor crimes, larger crimes will be prevented.⁷⁷ However more and more experts are stepping forward with evidence that Broken Windows may not have been as crucial to the decrease in crime as Giuliani states, and in fact unfairly targeted communities of color.⁷⁸ However, its stringent appearance seemed to quell the fears of white America. As such, *KnightSaga* appears to be a conscious re-thinking over just *how*

⁷⁵ Steven D. Levitt, "Understanding Why Crime Fell in the 1990s: Four Factors That Explain the Decline and Six That Do Not," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004): 164.

⁷⁶ Brian A. Reaves and Matthew J. Hickman, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Police Departments in Large Cities, 1990-2000*, (May 2002), 1.

⁷⁷ C.R. Sridhar, "Broken Windows and Zero Tolerance: Policing Urban Crimes," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 19 (May 2006): 1842.

⁷⁸ Both Sridhar's article and editorials like Wes Allison's question the notion that Giuliani's approach to policing was effective, and bring up the racially-targeted practices he supported. Wes Allison, "How Much Credit Does Giuliani Deserve for Fighting Crime?" *PolitiFact*. September 1, 2007.

strict readers wanted their “justice” to be, drawing a definitive line between Batman and Jean-Paul. There is a sense that Batman’s violence walks a fine line but is inherently moral, thus allowing for his extra-legal tactics.

KnightSaga brings to a conclusion an 8 year period in which Batman as the world knew him was completely reinvented, and was met with thunderous acclaim. Beginning dark and troubled in *The Dark Knight Returns*, progressing to existential doubt in *The Killing Joke*, and ending tired but firm in his morals in *KnightSaga*, Batman goes through a fundamental rebirth. The Batman comics of the late 80s and early 90s resonated with readers by creating a world they knew with problems they wanted answers to. This new Gotham struck a chord with readers, who saw its structural and moral decay reflected in their perceptions of their own cities. Gotham may not have been as complex as New York City was in real life, but it reflected a particular superficial understanding of urban life. Similarly, governments and police departments couldn’t be trusted in the real world or the comic books, but *Batman* could be. While this new rendition of the caped crusader was notably more violent, readers were able to accept this dark Batman as “super” because they still believed him to be moral, as compassion still sat at the core of his actions. As Miller states, this dark Batman was born from a dark world, and provided a just answer in a landscape littered with injustice. His rebirth as the Dark Knight came at a historically opportune moment, and would forever change the way the world viewed Batman. This new Batman was part of a new growth of superheroes, who wouldn’t shy away from political criticism, and be unafraid to make unpopular statements. However, few can match *Captain America Volume 4* for controversy.

Chapter Three: God Bless America?

*“The nice thing about Captain America is that I don’t really have to tell you too much about him. Everyone knows ol’ Cap. He’s the personification of the old-fashioned virtues that have made America what it is today- and no cracks, hear?” – Stan Lee, *Captain America: Sentinel of Liberty*¹*



¹ Stan Lee, *Captain America: Sentinel of Liberty* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 7.

² Chuck Austen, ed. Joe Quesada, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 13 (July 2003).

In a simpler world, my introduction to Captain America would merely be this quote and a picture of me in front of the American flag with my thumbs up. However, the enquiring mind knows that there is more than meets the eye to America's favorite star-spangled superhero, despite how enthusiastic Lee may be about Cap's simplicity of character. To say Captain America is as simple as Lee implies is dangerous. "Captain America" is a bold title, and one that comes with many theoretical responsibilities. Cap physically garbs himself in the colors and symbols of America, fights off international threats, and otherwise acts as a supposed proxy for the ever elusive "American Spirit." To claim that Captain America needs no explanation is to simply ignore the vast intricacies and conflicts that plague this supposedly monolithic "American Spirit." What does it even mean to be American? This question has no one answer, as American identity has always been a constantly fluctuating mosaic from day one. Who and what does Cap represent? Apparently to Stan Lee, this should be obvious to his readers. While I think Captain America needs perhaps a little more explanation than the vague "old-fashioned virtues" of Lee's writing, to dismiss Lee's point of view would be a mistake. What made Captain America "super" is obviously very defined to Lee, who wrote this introduction to *Captain America: Sentinel of Liberty* in 1979. However, to understand Captain America's changing relevancy, we have to go back to the beginning.

Created in 1941 to compete with another star-spangled hero, Captain America was born amidst international political turmoil.³ WWII was well underway, and though America had yet to get involved, everyday Americans were well aware of what was

³ Shirrel Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 33.

happening abroad. Pictured giving Hitler a good punch to the face, Captain America's first cover in 1940 was anything less than subtle. Captain America's creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby were both children of Jewish immigrants, and intentionally used Cap as "our way of lashing out at the Nazi menace."⁴ It is perhaps notable to state that this cover premiered a full year before America was involved in the conflict. As Shirrel Rhoades states in *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, "Superheroes declared war on Germany and Japan long before the U.S. Government did."⁵ From the very beginning, Captain America had obvious political implications. During WWII his adventures and stance resonated with the public at large, who eagerly bought up Cap's issues. Joe Simon states that Captain America embodied "the American people's sentiments' with regard to the Nazis, and thus was popular."⁶

Captain America's wartime popularity was unsurpassed, and his simplistic patriotism spoke to his readers. However, he struggled to gain traction in the post-war era, and eventually his run ended.⁷ Flash forward to the 50s, where Americans again faced an external menace: the Communists. Seeing this as the perfect time for Captain America to reemerge and come to the American public's aid, Marvel re-launches Cap, only to be met with dismal failure.⁸ Comic book historian Bradford Wright posits that

⁴ Joe Simon, interview by Dan Whitehead, *Kapow! A Talk with Joe Simon*, Simon Comics, as quoted in Shirrel Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 33.

⁵ Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, 37.

⁶ Joe Simon, interview by Dan Whitehead, *Kapow! A Talk with Joe Simon*, Simon Comics, as quoted in Shirrel Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 33.

⁷ Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

Marvel's failure rests on the fact that the American public was no longer willing to swallow such simplistic and over-the-top solutions to a crisis like the Cold War, as it would not be won "as quickly and easily."⁹

So once again, Captain America was put on ice. But Cap would find new life in the Marvel renaissance of the 60s: Stan Lee and Jack Kirby revive Captain America, this time painting him as more complex than his 40s counterpart.¹⁰ This origin story is the one most modern readers are familiar with: frozen in a block of ice but still alive, the famous super-soldier is thawed and must adjust to modern life. This time, Cap would manage to stick around, clear to the Vietnam conflict. In stark contrast to his earlier incarnations, this Captain America would pointedly remain *out* of the war. Stan Lee was aware of how torn America and his readers were on this subject, and did not want to divide his audience.¹¹

Captain America continued to be relatively popular into the 70s, introducing one of the first major African-American superheroes, Sam Wilson, as Falcon in 1969.¹² The 1970s would find Captain America a champion not for militaristic patriotism, but for socially liberal causes, redefining what it meant to be "Captain America."¹³ However, Cap soon becomes disillusioned with America, and loses his faith in his country,

⁹ Ibid, 123.

¹⁰ Ibid, 215.

¹¹ Ibid, 223.

¹² Ibid, 237.

¹³ Ibid, 244.

reflecting the national mood.¹⁴ As Wright so aptly states, “As a sworn champion of patriotic values, Captain America had to determine what those values now meant.”¹⁵

This questioning generally continued into the present, and Wright’s quote fits incredibly well with the topic of this chapter. Captain America remains a pop culture icon well into the present, with the famous 2005 comic book arc *Captain America: Winter Soldier* loosely adapted into the blockbuster film sequel of the same name. However, my focus in this chapter is on his 2002-2004 revival, which was not nearly as popular. Set immediately after the 9/11 attacks, this title directly engages the American identity in the wake of a crisis that called into question what it meant to be American. What does an American look like? How should an American act? In a post-9/11 American society, how America defined itself with regards to race, religion, and the “American dream” was thrown into flux as people looked to point fingers for the attacks. While this conversation was carried out through almost every form of media, and is still ongoing today, it is important to look to the man who claims to represent the best of America. And who better to deal with that than Captain America himself?

Tackling Captain America as a post 9/11 hero means delving into the greater conversation about contemporary representations of the 9/11 attacks, particularly in comic book form. Much has been made of the general response to 9/11 in the comic world, but most work focuses on graphic novels, or on superheroes such as Spiderman.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid, 245.

¹⁵ Ibid, 244.

¹⁶ Cathy Schlund-Vials, "Crisis of Memory: Memorializing 9/11 in the Comic Book Universe" in *Modern Language Studies* 41, no. 1 (2011): 12-25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41445147> and Lynda Goldstein, "Graphic/Narrative/History: Defining the Essential Experience(s) of 9/11" in *Comics as History, Comics as Literature*, edited by Annessa Ann Babic, (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 123-139.

Literature on the attacks articulates how comic books/graphic novels negotiated and represented 9/11 as a feature of America's consciousness, but not necessarily through Captain America. The most specific article about Post-9/11 Captain America is Jason Dittmer's article *Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics*. His final analysis of *Captain America* is that it both confirms the dominant American post-9/11 narrative while also challenging it, a claim I wish to engage, and push further.¹⁷

Post 9/11 *Volume 4* Captain America walks a fine line, using the decisive rhetoric of the post -9/11 Bush administration to justify his actions, while quietly calling out the corruption and secrecy of the government he works for. Providing a more complex view of what engenders global terrorism than most news stations do, *Volume 4* presents a superhero who still believes in his country- but not his government. In a historical moment where torture scandals and war plagued America, Captain America represents a new, frustrated superhero: one who works for the highest good, not just his government. Cap's new rethinking of what it means to be an American is simultaneously tied to the founding myth that posits America as a bastion of freedom as well as a deep seated sense of morality that transcends national borders. Cap's version of what it meant to be "super" was rooted in compassion, as well as a profound distrust in the government. Published in June of 2002, the first issue of *Volume 4* directly engages with the uglier side of 9/11 less than a year after the attacks. Captain America was probing a fresh wound, at times bringing up things that a nation in mourning probably wanted to ignore. This final case

¹⁷Jason Dittmer, "Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics" in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 3 (2005): 626-43.

study shows us an almost total reversal of the traditional comic book hero: instead of firm in his belief in his government and nation, this Captain America is a hero who is angry with the very institution he nearly died to uphold. This series places Cap directly into a real world event, in a real space at a real time. Little is imagined here, as Cap directly engages with American history to make his challenges toward his government and society that much more direct.

September 11th, 2001

September 11th, 2001 forever changed American history, and left a very visible scar on both the landscape and mentality of America's population. Early in the morning of the 11th, four planes were hijacked in midair by 19 members of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda, an extremist Islamist group based out of Afghanistan. Two planes crashed into the Twin Towers in New York City, which subsequently collapsed in view of the world on live television. One plane crashed into a portion of the Pentagon in Virginia, while the last plane crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania- not its intended target. Almost 3,000 people died in the attacks, which sent the shocked American people into deep mourning. The American government was quick to isolate Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin-Laden as the perpetrators, and made multiple statements to that effect before the end of the 11th.

In the following months, America would officially begin the "War on Terror," mere weeks after the attacks, starting with "Operation Enduring Freedom." Thus began the war in Afghanistan, and later the 2003 offensive against Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq. Political rhetoric in the immediate aftermath of the attacks was polarizing and swift: this was not merely a terrorist attack, but an attack on what

President Bush called “our way of life.”¹⁸ This was a new age of war, the age of terror. The Bush Administration made it very clear that their response to the attacks would not merely pursue Al-Qaeda, but would “...not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”¹⁹ While a great deal of foreign policy was obviously shifted in response to the attacks, so was domestic policy. The Department of Homeland Security was formed out many previously extant agencies, which were combined and streamlined with one goal in mind: preventing terrorism. New agencies were created under its control, such as the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to help oversee new protocol for airplane safety.

Changes to immigration laws and personal surveillance laws were swift and thorough. The 2001 Patriot Act included provisions for more thorough data collection by various government agencies in the name of anti-terrorism, sections on border security, and anti-money laundering missions. All of these provisions were intended to prevent another terror attack on American soil by any and all means necessary. While political scientists and politicians can and will measure the legal impact of these attacks and how they would shape policy for the years to come, to ignore the media of the era would be misguided. Knowing that the Bush administration was going to need public support for the massive financial and military undertaking for the War on Terror, Senior Adviser to the President Karl Rove met with top entertainment moguls to help shape the vision of

¹⁸ George Bush, "Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks," (speech, The Oval Office, Washington D.C., September 11, 2001).

¹⁹ George Bush, "Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress," (speech, United States Capitol, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001).

the war that Americans would be seeing on the small screen.²⁰ Torture appeared on vastly popular shows like *24* with increasing frequency, only this time it was the protagonists doing the torturing.²¹ In 2003, the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal was reported on by Amnesty International, and even further in 2004 with the leaked Taguba report and a CBS TV special. Suddenly, America was forced to confront its media and its tactics.

Similarly, images of terrorists in mass media were cut and paste: Arabic Muslims. Once the other and now the enemy, American Muslims- or anyone who fit the perpetuated *image* of a Muslim- were facing hate crimes on an unprecedented level. To ignore the impact of visual media on its audience would be dangerous. As such, I have chosen the iconic character Captain America as my focus of study of the post 9/11 landscape. The lens through which he sees the world is purported to be a truly *American* one, and he has looked at America through countless conflicts. What was Cap seeing now?

Captain America: Volume 4

Captain America: Volume 4 consists of 32 issues spanning 2002-2004, and involve a number of individual plot lines that deal with various aspects of Captain America's identity, at times tracing his development back to his stasis in ice in the middle of WWII. As with many serial comics, writers, editors, and artists were in rotation throughout the 32-issue run. There were a total of five writers, (John Ney Rieber, Chuck

²⁰ Brigitte L. Nacos, "Muslims in America and the Post-9/11 Terrorism Debates: Media and Public Opinion," in *Covering Bin Laden: Global Media and the World's Most Wanted Man*, ed. Susan Jeffords and Fahed Al-Sumait, (University of Illinois Press), 223.

²¹ Robert Thompson, qtd in Mark McGuire, "The Good Guys Are Doing Bad Things This Season," *Times Union* (Albany, NY), January 14th, 2003, as cited in Brigitte L. Nacos, "Muslims in America and the Post-9/11 Terrorism Debates: Media and Public Opinion," in *Covering Bin Laden: Global Media and the World's Most Wanted Man*, ed. Susan Jeffords and Fahed Al-Sumait, (University of Illinois Press), 223.

Austen, Dave Gibbons, Robert Morales, and Robert Kirkman) and five editors (Joe Quesada, Stuart Moore, Nick Lowe, Axel Alonso, and Tom Brevoort).²² It is perhaps notable that Joe Quesada, the Editor-in-Chief for all of Marvel, seems to have taken a personal interest in this comic: an illustrator who was inspired to take comics seriously as an artistic medium after being introduced to Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*.²³ As mentioned before, the impact of Miller's work on comic history cannot be underestimated.

In comparison to Batman's revival in the 80s, *this* series was not a commercial success, and is often left by the wayside in favor of more enduring plots, such as *The Winter Soldier* (2005). The quick shifts between writers often lead to a disjointed tone across the series, starting with the deeply symbolic and patriotic first few issues, but by the final three lapsing into beat-'em-up heroics against the cheesy "Serpent Society." Commercial success aside, the entire series shows Captain America deeply questioning his origins and his loyalty to his government, placed explicitly in a post-9/11 context. In a moment in time when bodies are still being pulled from the rubble in New York City, the scars of the attacks that Cap was prodding were still fresh.

Captain America: Volume 4

Steve Rogers was a young, sickly man who grew up in Brooklyn during the beginning of America's involvement in WWII. Desperate to fight for his country, Rogers

²² I am aware that I am only listing the writers and editors here, when in fact there are countless other colorists, cover artists, letterers, and inkers who worked on these comics. Their work is imperative to comics as a visual medium, and I do not wish to downplay their contribution in any way. For the purposes of my analysis, which is primarily narrative-based, I am focusing on the writers and editors instead.

²³ Brian Glaser, "Q+A Joe Quesada," *School of Visual Arts Journal* 19, no. 2 (2011).

continually applies for service, only to be rejected because of his poor health. However, Rogers is taken in for a secret government program and given the Super Soldier Serum, and turned into the perfect American weapon. Taking on the name Captain America, Rogers bravely fights against various Nazi henchman before being accidentally lost at sea and frozen in a block of ice, to be rediscovered and awoken decades later. Captain America is intended to be the physical embodiment of the perfect American in both form and action, as the ever-enthusiastic Stan Lee implies in the opening quote. As such, he is an able-bodied, physically fit, attractive white man. With blonde hair and blue eyes, he fits every stereotype of the “all-American boy.” His newfound body, given to him by the military, is a weapon, but his spirit, which existed before the serum, is what makes him “super.” Cap never backs down, is seen to have a moral compass that always points north, and much like Batman, and refuses to kill. This is the man that the reader is intended to trust. His word is good, because *he* is good.

Of course, as times changed and the conversation about what it meant to be American shifted, race entered the equation. While *this* Captain America is white, in issue 28, he meets a Captain America from an alternate timeline, Isiah Bradley, who is Black. In Bradley’s timeline he is president of the United States, the successor to a woman: the daughter of an Iranian historian who Cap saves earlier in the series.²⁴ As such, the idea that “anyone” can be Cap is brought up, but briefly all the same. However, the majority of *Volume 4* shows the audience the vision of Captain America one has come to expect: white. His body was always imbued with symbolic meaning as the body of America: his costume literally containing the stars and stripes of the American flag. He

²⁴ Robert Morales, ed. Axel Alonso, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 28 (August 2004).

traditionally acts as the “voice” for the innocent American, regardless of race or creed, as a good American should.

Of course, history tells us that not all “Americans” are as good as Cap. In the minds of some, “American” was a title that belonged only to some, regardless of legal standing. White supremacists, nativists, fundamentalist Christians, and plain old racists had a very set image of what an American looked and acted like: just like Captain America, a white Christian. Everyone else was an “Other,” for racial reasons, for religious reasons, or often both. In the years following 9/11, Arab Muslims- or those *perceived* to be Arab Muslims- faced hate and state scrutiny on an unprecedented level. In the *week* following the attacks, advocacy group South Asian Leaders for Tomorrow reported 645 bias-related incidents in one week alone, most of them not even targeted at actual Muslims.²⁵

White America’s racism and fundamental misunderstanding of Islam and geography came out in deadly ways. Sikh gas station owner Balbir Singh Bodhi was shot and killed by Frank Roque, who was apprehended only after shooting at a Lebanese clerk in a different store, and firing into the home of an Afghan family.²⁶ While being arrested, Roque reportedly shouted things like “I’m a patriot,” and “I stand for America all the way.”²⁷ In a similar move, Mark Stroman, and admitted white supremacists, killed Waqr

²⁵ Debasish Mishra, comp. *American Backlash: Terrorists Bring War Home in More Ways Than One.*, Report, ed. Deepa Iyer (Washington D.C.: South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow, 2001, 2001) as cited in Sangay Mishra, "Religion and Race: South Asians in the Post-9/11 United States," in *Faith and Race in American Political Life*, ed. Robin Dale Jacobson and Nancy D. Wadsworth (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 231-48.

²⁶ Tamar Lewin, "Sikh Owner of Gas Station Is Fatally Shot In Rampage," *The New York Times*, September 17, 2001.

²⁷ "The First 9/11 Backlash Fatality: The Murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi," Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, August 30, 2011.

Hasan, a Pakistani man, wounded Rase Bhuiyan, a Bangladeshi man, and killed Vasudev Patel, an Indian man: all in the name of vengeance, despite the fact that none of the above men were from any country involved with the attacks.²⁸ The FBI noted a “1600% increase” in hate cries against Arab/Muslims from 2000-2001, from 28 to 401.²⁹ Sikhs particularly faced backlash due to their turbans, despite being completely unrelated to Islam. Clearly, Americans had a very certain idea about what a terrorist “looked like,” and a great deal of that ties into the perpetuated images of terrorists in the media.

Volume 4 addresses this notion of what a “terrorist” looks like in the pages of the very first issue. Set in the day after the attack, the audience sees an emotionally distraught Cap tirelessly working through the rubble to try and find survivors, giving up only when on the brink of collapse. Walking home, he spots a young man of what Cap perceives to be Middle Eastern descent. Cap, ever wary of the worst in people, cautions the boy to stay off the streets. The young man brushes Cap off, telling him “My name’s Amir, not Osama. And my father was born on this street...”³⁰ In the next few pages, a bereaved white man attempts to attack Samir, telling him that “You’re going to pay,” referencing the attacks.³¹ Clearly, Samir’s “American-ness” has nothing to do with legal citizenship or how long someone has been in the country: Samir’s perceived race signifies him as an outsider to white Americans.

²⁸ Bill Mears, "Texas Man Executed for Post-9/11 Murder," CNN, July 20, 2011.

²⁹ Ilir Disha, James C. Cavendish, and Ryan D. King, "Historical Events and Spaces of Hate: Hate Crimes against Arabs and Muslims in Post-9/11 America," *Social Problems* 58, no. 1 (2011): 26.

³⁰ John Ney Rieber, ed. Stuart Moore, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 1 (June 2002).

³¹ *Ibid.*

The attacker's knife symbolically breaks on Cap's infamous shield, emblazoned with a star.³² For the first time in the present of the comic, vivid color appears on the page: in red, white, and blue. The American identity that Cap espouses isn't one of exclusion. Prophetically standing bathed in a yellow glow, Cap gently tells the attacker that "We've got to be stronger than we've ever been—as a people. As a nation...Or they've won."³³ In the ongoing aftermath of 9/11 and continuing hate crimes against those perceived to be Arabic or Muslim, this is a powerful statement. Samir and then man then begin to talk to each other about their grief, and reach a common understanding. While this is an entirely idyllic version of how issues like these should be solved, it speaks to the idea of trying to *understand* someone that has always been deemed "the other." Examining media depicting Arabs or Muslims post 9/11, studies show that while the immediate effect was to portray them in nuanced, humanistic ways, by the first anniversary, the stereotypes had come back full force.³⁴ As such, Captain America's statement about an inclusive American identity here is all the more bold in comparison.

In light of the consistent misunderstanding of foreign policy and Islam – most notably Fundamentalist Christian leader Pat Robertson calling Allah a "moon god,"- it is clear that misinformation coupled with racism created a deadly cocktail for Americans who are perceived to be Arabic or Muslim. Making even more blatant the changing notion of American identity, the next major event Cap faces is a terrorist attack on the aptly named, all-white Midwestern Centreville, USA. The first panel depicting

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Nacos, "Muslims in America and the Post-9/11 Terrorism Debates: Media and Public Opinion," 15.

Centreville is from the roof of a church, looking down on the town with the steeple's cross in the center of the frame.³⁵ This one snapshot contains every old notion of American identity: white, middle class, Christian. This town/identity is symbolically attacked by Al-Tariq, an Islamist terrorist. Going into Centreville, Cap declares Al-Tariq's actions an "act of war," not merely an attack.³⁶ While Cap is still devoted to ending this incursion, his tone begins to shift slightly, as Cap engages in combat with Al-Tariq, who sends child soldiers after him. The children are all missing various limbs, having lost them to old American mines left in fields.³⁷ While Cap fends them off as gently as he can, all the while maintaining that only a monster would use child soldiers, one of the children symbolically chips off a piece of Cap's armor, revealing his growing sense of conflict. Continuing along this line, Al-Tariq reveals that Centreville was not chosen at random: it's central industry is a bomb factory. But only bomb "components," as one of the worker says to his shocked wife, as though it were enough to distance him from the reality of his occupation.³⁸ Al-Tariq forces Cap to confront the racial/ethnic Othering that America foreign policy presents, stating that "When innocent Americans die, it's an atrocity. But when we die- we are "collateral damage."³⁹ Captain -"free and prosperous and good" -America is suddenly beginning to be forced to understand America's role in the devastation in countries abroad.

³⁵ John Ney Rieber, ed. Stuart Moore, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 1 (June 2002).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John Ney Rieber, ed. Stuart Moore, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 3 (August 2002).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Cap is forced to confront Al-Tariq *again*, despite having supposedly seen him die in Centreville. Al-Tariq is using a special “dog tag,” that transfers consciousness to another body upon death: the spirit of hate and terror symbolically knows no physical bounds.⁴⁰ The nameless man offers to end his reign of terror if Cap can do one thing: name the country that he is from. Cap wittily replies that he is “from hell,” turning him into an inhuman Other, not able to confront the fact that the circumstances of Tariq’s life may have influenced his actions.⁴¹ In a drawn-out fight, the man briefly tells his story of growing up in a war-torn homeland, where guerillas killed his father and mother with “American bullets. American weapons.”⁴² Implying that he is from a Middle Eastern country caught in the crossfire of the Cold War, he again asks Cap to name where. Throughout the entire fight, Captain America is unable to name the country: there are simply too many to choose from. This edges on serious criticism, implying that America has interfered with so many countries with the same results, having “played that game in too many places.”⁴³ Of course, this criticism is blunted by circumstance: Captain America was theoretically on ice during the Cold War, and he claims that “My people never knew,” claiming a divide between the morally questionable American government and the true “American spirit,” which resides in “the people.”⁴⁴ Captain naturally regains the upper hand in the fight, claiming that Al-Tariq “Is no better than the warlords that created

⁴⁰ John Ney Rieber, ed. Stuart Moore, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 6 (December 2002).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

[him],” putting him in line with what he calls “monsters,” equating him with Genghis Khan, Caligula, and Hitler.⁴⁵ While historians worth their salt will question Cap’s apparently nebulous grip on historical comparisons, this is an example of how terrorism was portrayed: as a part of the continuing, inevitable recurrence of evil, devoid of context.

Volume 4 even goes on to explore issues of Native American identity, in what is essentially an occupied nation. It opens with SHIELD agent Inali Redpath in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C, mulling on Lincoln’s words about “a new nation,” conceived in liberty, even though several native nations were in fact already present.⁴⁶ The promise of “liberty” seems restricted to the “White Anglo-Saxon Protestant man,” and Redpath is determined to “destroy [the] government and return this country to its rightful owners...”⁴⁷

One of the points of contention between Redpath and Rogers, who were once good friends, is that Captain America believes in the American people, but “lives a higher ideal than the country whose name he shares...”⁴⁸ Redpath believes *Captain America* is a good man, but he also sees the fundamental difference between the way Cap acts and the way the average American does. Cap deeply believes in the “American Dream,” but he is the only one who lives it, thus rendering it functionally useless. Redpath deeply admires Cap, but sees the dissonances between the man and the country he supposedly represents, explicitly revealing the crisis of identity that Cap is now going through. Redpath also

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶John Ney Rieber, ed. Joe Quesada, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 7 (February 2003).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ John Ney Rieber, ed. Nick Lowe, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 8 (March 2003).

levels another challenge at Captain America during one of their earlier missions, questioning Cap as to who deserves his protection. Cap firmly replies by stating that “The better American is the man who does what his heart tells him is right- for the betterment of all mankind- not just other Americas.”⁴⁹ There is a tension between the notions of protecting American interests – thus Cap specifies the better “*American*” man- but also the idea that Cap fights for *people*, no matter the nation they belong to. This complicates his role in the anti-terrorist proceedings, as he begins to understand that other people from supposed “enemy” nations are similarly in need of protection. Thus, Captain America makes explicit his notion of true “super” American identity: one that is centered around human goodness, not national borders.

Continuing on this path, Captain America- a literal political and physical weapon created by his government- begins to truly question his orders and the people giving them. As the series progresses, Cap begins to understand that while he loves and trust the nebulous idea that is “America,” he does not love and trust his *government*. Tangent to this in the real world are scandals like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo bay, the former first reported on in 2003. By the time the last issue of *Volume 4* is published in December of 2004, the Taguba Report had been leaked and reported on for almost six months, and the Abu Ghraib scandal was laid bare for Americans and the rest of the world to see. Containing damning evidence of what senior military officials gently called “mistreatment” or “abuse,” General Taguba’s investigation revealed a longstanding

⁴⁹ Ibid.

practice of sexual, verbal, physical, and mental abuse at the captured Iraqi prison.⁵⁰ While many tried to write off these actions as the actions of a few depraved individuals, both Taguba's report and various other leaked internal memos revealed that not only was the military in Iraq deeply disorganized and poorly lead, but that upper officials were entirely aware of the torture going on at Abu Ghraib. Often called "enhanced interrogation techniques," such practices were deemed allowable in the so-called "Torture Memos," in which legal advisor John Yoo states that legally, prisoners abroad did not merit the same treatment or legal standing as prisoners in America.⁵¹ The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave was suddenly branded as a proponent of torture in the eyes of the world.

The government in *Volume 4* is similarly seen to be morally ambiguous. In issue 21, Captain America is asked to serve on a war tribunal for the case of an Iranian-born historian Fernand Hedayat, who is accused of terrorism. It soon becomes clear that the government doesn't want Cap's actual advice or judgment, but rather they want him to lend his image to their campaign. Cap visits the Camp Hasmat in Guantanamo Bay to see for himself in issue 22, where he views the mostly-Muslim prison population being intimidated during prayer.⁵² This issue was released in February of 2004, right around the time details about the horrors at Abu Ghraib were coming to the nation's attention. While no torture is ever depicted, the disdain for and Other-ing of the prisoners done by the military officials in charge of the prison Cap visits was not an outrageous depiction. Hedayat is of course, entirely innocent, having been targeted because of his nationality:

⁵⁰ Antonio M. Taguba, *Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade*, report no. DODDOA-000248, 2004, 2.

⁵¹ John Yoo and Robert J. Delahunty, *Application of Treaties and Laws to Al Qaeda and Taliban Detainees*, internal memo draft, 2002, 1.

⁵² Robert Morales, ed. Joe Quesada, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 22 (March 2004).

he had lived in America since he was 17. He came under suspicion after helping to set up a legal fund to help defend Arab-Americans accused of terrorism in the post-9/11 paranoia, a reality which many Arab-Americans faced regardless of their citizenship status or national origins.⁵³ Cap's relationship with his government only worsens, as he realizes he is now a liability for wanting to know the truth, and not just the politically expedient one. At one point in *Volume 4*, it is revealed that Cap was intentionally frozen by his own government, as Cap's view of himself as "a protector of the world- and not just our United States," has made him a liability. Knowing that he would attempt to prevent the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, the American government of 1945 decides to delicately remove him.⁵⁴ Suddenly, the enemies are no longer who Cap expected them to be.

The changing face of warfare is constantly referred to throughout *Volume 4*, Cap once stating that "Why is nothing clear or simple anymore? Good guys. Bad guys. Right and wrong."⁵⁵ Cap's new understanding of his government and its actions has complicated his view of not only his role, but his nation, echoing the growing sense of distrust among Americans in the years that followed 9/11. In 2003, the 9/11 Commission chairman Thomas Kean would go so far as to publicly state that the attacks were entirely preventable.⁵⁶ Theories as to the American government's involvement in the attacks abound even today, with the catchphrase "9/11 was an inside job," said as even

⁵³ Robert Morales, ed. Axel Alonso, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 25 (June 2004).

⁵⁴ Chuck Austen, ed. Joe Quesada, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 13 (July 2003), Chuck Austen, ed. Joe Quesada, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 14 (August 2003).

⁵⁵ Chuck Austen, ed. Joe Quesada, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 14 (August 2003).

⁵⁶ Joel Roberts, "9/11 Chair: Attack Was Preventable," CBS News, December 17, 2003.

something of a joke. While *Volume 4* certainly doesn't deal with those theories or ever question the nature of the attackers, it is distinctly distrustful of those in power and their actions.

However, it is important to place these seemingly pointed criticisms of the American government in context. While *Volume 4* seems to be presenting a somewhat nuanced understanding of race and American wrongdoings, it also generally maintains American superiority, particularly towards the beginning of the series. It uses similarly divisive, "us v. them" rhetoric used immediately post 9/11 to frame the attacks and subsequent actions, and while often leaning towards criticism of U.S. foreign policy, it often falls *just* short of the mark, and maintains the ever-present myth of American Exceptionalism.

Couched in polarizing language, Cap's statements towards his enemies mirror those of President Bush immediately following the attacks, which positioned America as the "brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world."⁵⁷ This remark was part of Bush's comforting speech made to tend to the wounds of a bleeding nation- but one that is also dangerously simplistic. According to Bush's speeches, Al-Qaeda attacked America because "they hate our freedoms," or "because we are freedom's home and defender."⁵⁸ America is seen as an inherently good country, one that Bush calls "peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger."⁵⁹ According to the narrative Bush lays out in

⁵⁷ Bush, "Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks."

⁵⁸ Bush, "Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress," and Bush, "Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks."

⁵⁹ Bush, "Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks."

his series of speeches, America was the innocent, attacked by vile enemies of true goodness.

At first, Captain America is entirely gung-ho with similar rhetoric. The first issue of *Volume 4* is replete with phrases such as “enemy of freedom,” “monster[s],” Al-Tariq comes out and says “I am hate,” in issue 3, making it very clear to the reader what he is intended to represent- what Cap calls “blind hate, burning in a stranger’s eyes”- much like the eyes of the stranger who tried to attack Samir.⁶⁰ The 9/11 attacks are immediately framed as an act of war, both in *Volume 4* and by Bush in the speeches in the days following the attacks. And not merely a war, but an “existential battle between terrorist evildoers and an attacked nation.”⁶¹ In the wake of such a devastatingly horrific and inhumane attack, it seems as though Bush and Captain America are right. Such a hateful act seemed monstrous, and the language used immediately afterwards reflects that.

However, the American rationalization for the attacks contrasts with the reasons given by Al-Qaeda, as explained in Osama Bin-Laden’s 2002 “Letter to America.” While it is replete with religious explanations for the attacks, anti-Semitism, and uplifts Islam as the one true religion, there is almost an equal number of political reasons related to America’s foreign policy. Bin Laden names the support of Israel, the anti-Muslim attacks in Somalia, the Indian oppression of Muslim communities in Kashmir, sanctions against Iraq, and so on.⁶² Much like Al-Tariq states in the first few issues, Laden claims that all Americans are complicit, as “the American people are the ones who pay the taxes which

⁶⁰John Ney Rieber, ed. Stuart Moore, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 2 (July 2002). John Ney Rieber, ed. Stuart Moore, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 3 (August 2002).

⁶¹ Nacos, “Muslims in America and the Post-9/11 Terrorism Debates: Media and Public Opinion,” 222.

⁶² Osama bin Laden, “Letter to the American People,” *The Guardian*, November 24, 2002.

fund the planes that bomb us in Afghanistan...” and that “the freedom and democracy that you call to is for yourselves and for the white race only...”⁶³ This is clearly a more nuanced reason to fight than just “they hate our freedoms,” a nuance that *Vol 4* edges into.

Cap at first seems an almost Bush-like figure in the first few issues, but his rhetoric begins to change slowly as both time progresses – and writers change. What doesn’t change across writers is Cap’s steadily increasing distrust in his own government, a theme which is only expanded on. While Cap certainly begins to understand a more realistic view of America’s actions abroad and may disavow his government, he still ultimately upholds what Roberta Coles calls America’s “chosen nation myth,” which is that America’s duty is to “spread freedom around the world.”⁶⁴ Much like Bush describes the War on Terror as a “responsibility to history,” to “rid the world of evil,” Cap still sees the “true” America as the world’s police.⁶⁵ However, there is a key difference in the way Cap *uses* the myth. Cap’s sense of America’s machinations are driven from a moral center, not a power hungry one. He wants to end human suffering, no matter the nation, and is fundamentally uninterested in the politics that the American myth is often used to justify. Cap’s constant point of reference is WWII, what is often referred to as the “last good war,” implying that it was fought for good reasons. In this series, Cap was conveniently frozen for Vietnam and Korea, which have a much larger haze of moral ambiguity surrounding them. Cap would have never have stood for the atrocities

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Roberta L. Coles, “Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s’ War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined,” *Sociology of Religion* 63, no.4 (2002), 403, as quoted in Joseph B. Tamney, “American Views of Islam Post 9/11,” *Islamic Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004), 605.

⁶⁵ Bush, “Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks.”

committed or political maneuvering; explaining why he was put on ice for Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁶⁶ Cap's idealized American identity is race-less, gender-less, and to some extent extends beyond the American borders: it is an identity of what he perceives as compassion.

"Today- It matters that you're here. It's going to make a difference."⁶⁷

By issue 32, *Volume 4* has shown readers alternate timelines, Nazis using time travel to retrieve dinosaurs, and most frighteningly, that Captain America himself is struggling with the government. It's impossible to say why exactly this series failed commercially, or why most of its plotlines were totally disregarded in future canon. Were people unwilling to hear the quiet criticism from Captain America implicit in this series, particularly in a time of national stress? Or did patchy, uneven writing simply make the series less interesting? I think both play a part in the series' failure: readers didn't need their hero telling them that what their country stood for was wrong, and neither did they want constant tonal shifts. Although marred with frequent changes in writers and plotlines, *Volume 4* provides one way of understanding the emotional and political aftermath of 9/11's effect on America. Pushing even Captain America to the edge, the attacks fundamentally altered America, in ways that we are still understanding today. The dialogue about race and American identity that Cap engages in these 32 issues is still going on, and exist in various forms.

⁶⁶ Austen, ed. Quesada, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 13 and Austen, ed. Quesada, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 14.

⁶⁷ Rieber, ed. Moore, *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 1.

This was a unique moment, when a fictional character was injected into a real-world tragedy to help readers to process and consider the ramifications. *Volume 4* exists in a liminal space in American history, mere months after an event that permanently changed the world. *Volume 4* is too close to 9/11 to be offering hindsight, and not far enough to truly make harsh criticisms of a people still in mourning. And yet, *Volume 4* dares to offer not blind patriotism, but conflicted faith in the face of a nation that is not as pure as it purports. Showing us a Captain America who both fights with his government while still upholding it, Cap's American "super-ness" is something that isn't tied to a singular government, but rather a moral understanding of what it means to be a good person. Governments do not define a nation, *people* define a nation. While perhaps overly simplistic and a touch sentimental, this message is a deeply powerful one when placed in its context. At a time where faith in the American government was notably high, Cap calls it all into question. What makes him "super" is his willingness to critique, his desire to see the *truth*.

Volume 4 presents no solid conclusions about why the events happened as they did or what to do next, merely an understanding: 9/11 was a deeply complex event in which nearly every facet defies simplistic explanation. The attacks brought America's ugliest and best sides out at once, forcing perceptions of race and American identity out to the forefront. While most of this forefront was podiums in front of cameras, articles in newspapers, and popular cable television -sometimes- just sometimes- that forefront just happens to be a comic book. *Captain America Volume 4* took a real-life tragedy and put a traditional American hero in the midst of it, refusing to shy away into escapist, simplistic fantasies, but rather using the medium to openly and overtly interrogate the

circumstances of the 9/11 attacks, as well as the nation surrounding them. At a time when most Americans wanted to believe in their government, Cap – their champion- explicitly points the finger at them.

Conclusion

If I had to sum up the soul of this entire project in one sentence, I would tell people that comics are important, and not just the really old ones. While Golden Age-Era comic books may be valuable in both their monetary worth, the academic world would be doing themselves a disservice by ignoring comics and superheroes that have come out more recently. The quick, serial nature of comic books allow them to be ever-changing and relevant; they may be silly and outlandish at times, but even the most whimsical of plotlines has something to say. Allow me a brief tangent: Take my most recent, non-IS related comic book haul, for instance. In one fell swoop, I purchased five major titles across various publishers, and lo and behold: *not a single main character was a man*. Even more so, many of the main characters were people of color. There were openly queer characters! As someone who has been reading comics since she was a little girl, this was a first. While this diversification is still small and was a *long* time coming, it is only the beginning.

Take the new Ms. Marvel, for example. Ms. Marvel is a storied character in the Marvel franchise, and in 2014, she was reborn again, this time as young Pakistani-American teenager Kamala Khan. Kamala is openly Muslim, and her comics often address the racism and discrimination she faces on a daily basis, while also dealing with her newfound abilities. This is and was an incredible moment, in which a young Muslim woman of color was the focus of her own series, and addressed real issues. Better yet? *Ms. Marvel was massively successful*. It was headed by two Muslim women, writer G Willow Wilson and editor Sana Amanat, and continues into the present.

That's nice, I'm sure you're thinking, but what does this have to do with this project? In short, it has everything to do with this project and what it is about. In 2014, Kamala Khan helped redefine what it meant to be “super.” In a society where young, Muslim women of color face innumerable difficulties and stereotypes, this series said: *Kamala is super just as she is.* She is everything a stereotypical superhero is not, and yet she is still a hero and seen as worthy of admiration and acceptance. She is a woman, she is juggling two identities, she is Muslim, and she is a *superhero*. This version of Ms. Marvel was a huge gamble, as she was everything American society looks down upon, and placed on a pedestal as a superhero. She is the continuing outgrowth of the discussion on race and national identity forged in *Captain America Volume 4*, while making more explicit the gender struggles *Wonder Woman* treated. Only this time, it's a woman of color telling her own story, a narrative that most media ignores in favor of easy stereotypes.

At the end of the day, superheroes and the comics they live in are important because they reflect what readers and writers think is “super” at a given moment in time. To be “super” is to be celebrated, to be venerated as the “best of the best.” For a long time, “super” meant upholding your government, conforming to gender roles, and serving the status quo, as seen in early *Wonder Woman* and *Captain America*. Comics were morale boosters, ways of attacking an enemy with words. Looking at the circumstances of their production in WWII, the reasons for this notion of “super” begin to appear.

But even in the 60s, what was “super” begins to change, as we see with *Wonder Woman*. While she conformed to certain ideas of white American womanhood, she also pushed the envelope on others, and presented readers with a physically strong, educated,

independent, unmarried woman: a veritable unicorn in the mass media of the 60s. This all comes along against a backdrop of incredible social and political unrest: the Civil Rights movement is making waves, Anti-War groups are protesting, and slowly but surely, women's rights movements are coalescing and forming. Wonder Woman of the 60s may not have thrown her bra in a trashcan on the pages of her comic book, but she certainly wasn't going to retire her tiara and bracelets in exchange for a kitchen and a ring on her finger. And yet, she is still *super*, despite this apparent deviance.

Batman will bring comics into a new dimension by bringing a sense of realism and far more direct political commentary. In the turbulent 80s and 90s, Batman revives an industry with a single comic, which sparked a new wave of interest in superheroes, as well as a marked stylistic change in the genre. With rising crime rates, a new drug market, and a perceived impotence in law-making institutions, 80s Batman becomes a loci for reflection and discussion as to what a modern superhero needs to be "super." The caped crusader becomes violent and tormented by his own demons, flouting the legal system in ways that were more brutal than ever. His dark version of justice fit well in the dark new vision of Gotham, and answered a desire for change that readers may have felt. This new, hyper-violent, anti-establishment version of what it meant to be "super" was new, and aimed directly at the world of the reader.

Of course, both Batman and Wonder Woman are important for what they *do* mention as much as they are for what they *don't* mention. Race and race relations are conveniently omitted from the periods I studied, and the landscape of their worlds tended to be lily-white. Captain America would openly discuss race, both in the 60s and 70s, and the period I studied- the early 2000s. Whereas the original Captain America would be a

staunch patriot and support his government's endeavors abroad, later versions of Cap showed a far more conflicted man. His 2002 run directly addressed the circumstances of the 9/11 attacks in a way that was critical, and discussed the anti-Muslim sentiments and racism that plagued American society openly. This series is based fully in reality, placing Captain America in real national catastrophe. Cap did all of this at a time when the wound of 9/11 was still fresh, starting barely a year after the attacks had occurred. The "simplicity" of a bygone era was shattered, as this superhero was hurt, confused, and desperately trying to do the right thing. This new version of what it meant to be "super" was deeply rooted in compassion, but was also anti-government in explicit ways.

Reining this discussion back in, I realize that this study is comprised of only three brief, separate moments in three different characters' lives. As such, I cannot make any broad, sweeping statement about every superhero that has ever graced the cover of a comic book or movie screen. This study is, by that token, incomplete. This project is therefore only a mere *taste* of what the nearly century-old world of superheroes holds to offer. But what a taste! Superheroes have long been dismissed as lowbrow, simple stuff, engaging in a world that was too fantastical to have any bearing on our own. After looking at these three chapters, I hope it is clear that such a statement is not the case. Each superhero addressed in these pages is in deep conversation with the real world around it, both explicitly and implicitly. I can only hope that this study is only a small part of what will be a growing body of academic attempts to understand the historical dialogue that comics engage in.

Looking around today, comics are only becoming more popular. With the rise of digital downloads and the massive renewed interest in superheroes on the big and small

screens, superheroes and comic books are everywhere! The push for diversification and representation is continuing stronger than ever, with fresh faces finally manning the creative controls. The political overtones in comics are going to continue ever onward, and readers are going to find themselves confronting tough subjects in the guise of a comic book. These comics will undoubtedly leave future culture historians as wealth of artifacts for analysis and discussion. And to those future scholars, I say: look back, but also look forward. Tiny revolutions are playing out on the pages of a comic book every day.

Annotated Bibliography

Monographs

Barakso, Maryann. *Governing NOW: Grassroots Activism in the National Organization for Women*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Maryann Barakso is a professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and has written widely on political organization, particularly when it comes to women. Her book on NOW closely analyzes the structures and strategies used by the members of NOW from its birth in 1966 to the late 90s. While my work only focused on NOW's formation and work in the late 60s, Barakso gives an excellent idea of what mindset NOW's founders had, and how competing visions for the group created a massive internal division towards the late 60s and early 70s. The writing was generally clear, although for someone who wasn't entirely familiar with political science theory, some of the ideas were a bit obscure to me. While this isn't a purely historical work, her analysis helped further my knowledge of the various strains of political organization that NOW was comprised of, as well as the women's rights movement at large.

Berg, Barbara J. *Sexism in America: Alive, Well, and Ruining Our Future*. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009.

Barbara Berg is a teacher and author all in one, and has written several popular books as well as appeared on various television programs. She has taught at a variety of institutions, such as Yale Medical School and Sarah Lawrence College. Her wide-reaching book tackles sexism in America through the years, from the 60s to almost-present day. It is well written and deeply engaging, as Berg is openly angered by the struggles women have faced, and her book reflects that. It is well cited, and makes use of both published studies as well as personal interviews with women from various time decades which brings a personal edge to her subject. It is an excellent, interesting work that addresses both the legal and social impacts of sexism in America, and had fantastic details that gave my work with Wonder Woman greater nuance.

Berkeley, Kathleen C. *The Women's Liberation Movement in America*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.

This introductory book is a part of Greenwood Press' series "Guides to Historic Events of the Twentieth Century," and was written by history professor Kathleen Berkeley, who worked at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. While this is a basic text, it is also incredibly helpful. With timelines, biographies, glossaries, and a body divided by era, this book is surprisingly detailed while also being very easy to understand. It provided excellent background for the 60s, and was excellent to keep nearby for reference as I wrote.

Gabilliet, Jean-Paul. *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*. Translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010.

Jean-Paul Gabilliet is an American Studies professor at the University of Bordeaux, and a comic art enthusiast. This history is incredibly comprehensive, giving first a chronological history of the comic industry, and then going into specifics such as censorship. Gabilliet also focuses on the “consecration” of comics by mainstream society, discussing the difficulties comics face to be considered “legitimate”. The work itself is an excellent resource, though at times the translation feels a bit clunky, hindering the clarity of the prose. All in all, however, it is a well-researched and well assembled piece of scholarship.

Lepore, Jill. *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

Jill Lepore is a professor of American History at Harvard, as well as an incredibly popular writer in both academic and non-academic circles. This book was incredibly well-received by the public, and is a work of accessible and interesting scholarship. She focuses on Wonder Woman’s creator, William Moulton Marston, and the events in his life that helped form the amazon heroine. While this book is focused almost entirely on Marston’s life and early Wonder Woman, Lepore also manages to place Wonder Woman as an icon in context of the feminist movement over the years. As such, it was an excellent resource for understanding how Wonder Woman’s official relationship with feminist movements has changed throughout the years.

Ogden, Annegret S. *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986.

This book is part of another series from Greenwood Press, this time focusing on Women’s Studies. Ogden, a librarian for UC Berkeley, gives a large summary of the role of women as housewives from the birth of America until the 80s, the time of its publishing. This piece is perhaps a bit older, but is still incredibly engaging: Ogden tackles more than just the factual descriptions of gender roles in various periods, and uses diverse resources to try and understand what she calls “the emotional side of the housewife’s life.” As such, I found this book not only well-organized and easy to read, but multi-faceted and surprisingly nuanced for a historical survey.

Pearson, Roberta E., and William Uricchio, eds. *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

This book is perhaps the only scholarly book devoted entirely to the caped crusader, and is a smorgasbord of topics and scholarly approaches. From interviews with creators, ethnographies, and queer readings, the book is vastly diverse. Edited by Uricchio and Pearson, two communications professors, the book was clearly a labor of love. It has little in it pertaining to history, but was useful in certain regards to understanding the demographics of Batman's readership, as a few chapters touched on it and even gave statistics. It is not the "definitive" book on Batman, but it is certainly useful in very specific ways.

Pustz, Matthew. *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

Pustz is a professor of American studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and specializes in American Pop Culture. This book gives an overall view of how and why comic book readership has changed, starting from a mostly child-based audience and slowly morphing into a more adult one. He traces these changes from the beginning of comics up to the 90s, and thus cannot comment on the change in readership due to new technologies and distribution methods. However, for my purposes, Pustz's work was clearly written and gave me a wonderful background on the history of American comic book readership.

Rhoades, Shirrel. *A Complete History of American Comic Books*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

Shirrel Rhoades was a professor of Publishing at NYU, a publisher by trade, and the former Vice President of Marvel. His book is an excellent, comprehensive look at the comics industry from beginning to the early 2000s, written from an insider's point of view. Rhoades structures the book very simply, as it is meant to be read by anyone interested by the comics industry. It at times may appear almost childish in layout, but it is easy to read and full of key information on the industry behind the creative endeavors of the major comic book companies. It is an excellent source on the mechanics of the industry from a top-level insider, and thus provided a background history for many of my chapters.

Wright, Bradford W. *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Wright is an associate professor with the University of Maryland University College European Division, and a great lover of both comic books and culture. This is one of the most important books for this IS, as it gives a long-ranging, detailed account of how society shaped comics at various periods of time, and vice versa. He looks at the connection specifically between youth culture and comic books, but also gives a broader sense of how the industry has shifted and responded to mass culture as well. It is easy as well as fun to read, and it bursting at the seams with details. At times the level of detail almost felt overwhelming,

but the quality of this book cannot be understated. Even the great Stan Lee loves this book, and he practically wrote it.

Yates, Gayle Graham. *What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.

At the time this book was published, Gayle Graham Yates was a professor of Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota- a department she founded. She still teaches American Studies at UM, and keeps her focus on women. This book breaks down the various strains of feminist thought into three categories based on their beliefs, practices, and end goal: feminism, women's liberation, and androgynous feminism. Her work does an excellent job of parsing out the finer differences in belief between various groups inside the movement. This helped me to better understand the nuance within feminist thought, as many histories tend to lump them all together. She brings out the complexity of this era, but is of course limited by the fact that she published this book in 1975, when these movements were still raging. In some ways this means she was closer to the "action," but also lacks a long-ranging view that time and distance can provide. All in all however, this is a thoughtful, well written source.

Chapter in an Edited Volume

Goldstein, Lynda. "Graphic/Narrative/History: Defining the Essential Experience(s) of 9/11." In *Comics as History, Comics as Literature*, edited by Annessa Ann Babic, 123-139. Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014. Shirrel Rhoades

Dr. Lynda Goldstein is a professor of English at Penn State Wilkes-Barre, with most of her focus lying in cultural studies and media. In this chapter, Goldstein dissects the representation of 9/11 in several graphic novels. Her argument is that each novel serves as a way to tie the reader in to some "essential experience" of 9/11, each story bringing the reader into a personal, factual, or emotional reality of the attacks that can only be reached through reconstruction and recollection. Goldstein also highlights the importance of the visual aspects of the graphic novel with regards to the iconicity of certain images of 9/11. While she does not make reference to Captain America himself, her ideas can easily be applied to Captain America's run as a post 9/11 hero. It is a clear and well-written article, and ties in the visual aspects of comic books to their significance.

Mishra, Sangay. "Religion and Race: South Asians in the Post-9/11 United States." In *Faith and Race in American Political Life*, edited by Robin Dale Jacobson and Nancy D. Wadsworth, 231-48. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. <http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/j.ctt6wrkw4.13>.

Sangay Mishra is a professor of Political Science at Drew University, and has written extensively on the South Asian experience in post-9/11 America. This article was an excellent piece on the increased suspicion and violence South

Asians were subject to after 9/11, due to the misconception that they were Middle Eastern and looked like “terrorists.” This goes to the heart of how damaging misperceptions of race can be, and Mishra tightly focuses on the South Asian experience in this regard. He provides evidence for a narrative that is often ignored by major media, and gives voice to the physical and legal damages many South Asians faced in the 9/11 backlash.

Mukerji, Chandra, and Michael Schudson. "Introduction." In *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, 1-61. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Chandra Mukerji is a professor of Communication Studies at UC San Diego, but has a background in Sociology. Her fellow author Michael Schudson is a professor of Journalism at Columbia, but similarly has a background in Sociology. This introductory chapter introduces the reader to the basic theories that dominate the cultural studies field today, from the purely historical to the deeply anthropological. While serving as a brief overview of the pieces included in the book itself, it acts as a primer for any cultural historian. As the chapter is theory-based, the reading can be a bit dense, unless the reader is well-versed in theory from multiple backgrounds. However, it gives the reader a sense of just how diverse the approaches in cultural studies are, and provides them with a veritable buffet to choose from.

Nacos, Brigitte L. "Muslims in America and the Post-9/11 Terrorism Debates: Media and Public Opinion." In *Covering Bin Laden: Global Media and the World's Most Wanted Man*, edited by Susan Jeffords and Fahed Al-Sumait, 211-34. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015. <http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/10.5406/j.ctt6wr60n.14>.

Nacos is a well-published professor of Political Science at Columbia, with a focus on terrorism. This article is a brief, but comprehensive view of how Muslim identity was represented and discussed in post-9/11 America. She tackles this from legal standpoints and cites various speeches and laws, but also takes a deep look at popular media. She reveals how torture became more prevalent on popular TV shows like *24* after the attacks, and how the enemies were almost always two-dimensional stereotypes of what a “Muslim terrorist” should look and act like. She expertly reveals the deadly link between these depictions and American military actions abroad, emphasizing the ramifications of a “single story.” As such, this article helped me compare *Volume 4*’s depiction of Muslims in America, and show just how different Cap’s narrative was.

Parsons, Patrick. "Batman and His Audience: A Dialectic of Culture." In *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, edited by Roberta E. Pearson, 66-89. New York: Routledge, 1991.

This chapter, written by Penn State Communications professor Patrick Parsons, is a breakdown of how Batman has been consumed over his lifetime, looking at reader demographics. While his data is limited, Parsons still manages to provide a

good picture of how comic readership has changed over the years, and gives an idea of what Batman's readership would have looked like in the 80s. This was one of the few sources I could find that could give me this estimation, so in that respect it was incredibly useful. However, I was more focused on the themes presented in the comic books, so I was limited in how I used this piece.

Stuller, Jennifer. "Love Will Bring You To Your Gift". In *The Superhero Reader*, edited by Charles Hatfield, Jeet Heer, and Kent Worcester, 216- 236. University Press of Mississippi, 2013.

Jennifer Stuller is a "pop culture critic" and author, who primarily writes on women in movies and television, particularly women superheroes. This article, while not specifically about Wonder Woman by herself, helps trace a change in how women heroes were presented, specifying how compassion and caring have become a source of strength, as opposed to stereotypical weakness. This is crucial in my analysis of Wonder Woman, as she too draws her greatness from love and self-sacrifice, as opposed to the hard-hearted "lone-wolf" masculine hero.

Tamney, Joseph B. "American Views of Islam Post 9/11." *Islamic Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004): 599-630. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837376>.

Joseph Tamney was a sociology professor with Ball State University who specialized in the sociology of religion, particularly in Asia. This article was a complex discussion of how American political groups viewed Islam in the wake of 9/11, breaking down the various divisions and how they spread their message. While it was dense at times, it gives an excellent, and mostly easy to understand explanation of how the American political world construed Islam, and identifies fundamental religious misunderstanding and a deep belief in America's "chosen nation myth" as a beacon of freedom as reasons for America's deep antipathy towards Islam.

Journal Articles

Dittmer, Jason. 2005. "Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95 (3): 626-43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3693960>.

Dr. Jason Dittmer is a professor of geography at the University College of London, and has done previous work with Captain America. Dittmer's article is a fascinating and well-written dissection of Captain America's role as the embodiment of American ideals in the wake of 9/11. He reveals how post 9/11 Captain America was at times simplistic, furthering the stark Us v. Them dichotomy favored by nationalist rhetoric, while also managing to present a nuanced view on American imperialism. All in all, this article utilizes the art as well as the text to define Captain America as a potent symbol of American identity. While occasionally deeply entrenched in political geography theory, it was mostly easy to understand, and well argued. It was this article that inspired

me to pursue Captain America in this historical moment, and I found that while I agreed with Dittmer's thesis, I believed it could go even further.

Disha, Ilir, James C. Cavendish, and Ryan D. King. "Historical Events and Spaces of Hate: Hate Crimes against Arabs and Muslims in Post-9/11 America." *Social Problems* 58, no. 1 (2011): 21-46.

The three authors of this article are all professors at various colleges, specializing in Criminal Justice and Sociology, and bring a variety of backgrounds to this article. That said, the article is sociology heavy, and takes a very methodical approach to collecting and analyzing data, and at times was very deep in theory that I had little to no experience with. However, they are very clear writers, and I was able to understand their premises and conclusions with little struggle. They focus on where and when hate crimes committed against Muslims- or at least *perceived* Muslims- changed post 9/11, and reflected the fact that hate crimes *did* rise quite substantially after the attacks. They place their findings in context, however, and point out that the beliefs behind these hate crimes had existed in America long before 9/11, and that the attacks acted as a spark.

Levitt, Steven D. "Understanding Why Crime Fell in the 1990s: Four Factors That Explain the Decline and Six That Do Not." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004): 163-90.

Levitt is an economist, most well-known for his controversial claim that the crime decline in the 80s and 90s was linked to abortion, an idea which became famous in *Freakonomics*. While I am in little position to evaluate that statement, I used his general argument as to what social factors actually precipitated the drop in crime as an example of the various ideas that surround this mysterious decrease. He claims that a growing economy, changing demographics, better policing strategies, and gun control laws had little to nothing to do with the drop, whereas abortion, more police, a changing drug market, and increased incarceration rates did. The debate on what caused the sharp decline in crime still rages today, and this article is merely one famous suggestion put forth.

Romer, Daniel, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, and Sean Aday. "Television News and the Cultivation of Fear of Crime." *Journal of Communication* 53, no. 1 (2003): 88-104. http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~digger/305/crime_cultivation_theory.pdf.

Dan Romer and Kathleen Hall Jamieson are professors of Public Policy and Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, and Sean Aday is a professor of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University, all with a focus on the mechanics of media and communication. This article discusses how television news impacts perceptions of crime, revealing that increased exposure to crime reports on TV creates a fear of crime in viewers. While the

methodology behind this study was not “historical”, it provided an interesting view as to how readers of Batman in the 80s may have received their knowledge of crime, and then how they would have interpreted it with regards to the world around them.

Schlund-Vials, Cathy J. 2011. “Crisis of Memory: Memorializing 9/11 in the Comic Book Universe.” *Modern Language Studies* 41 (1): 12–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41445147>.

Cathy Schlund-Vials is an English and Asian/Asian-American Studies professor at the University of Connecticut. Schlund-Vials tackles the large amount of comics published immediately after 9/11, and how they began to create a narrative of the attacks. Her article does an excellent job of relating the comic form to its meaning and significance, reading the panels like frames of a film. She makes insightful comments on the similarities between traditional superhero conventions and post-9/11 political rhetoric, and well as how the immediateness of the comic book business made them an important cultural ground for memorializing the attacks. She does not speak extensively on Captain America, but deals with more comic book canon than the work of Lynda Goldstein, who touches only on graphic novels.

Sridhar, C. R. "Broken Windows and Zero Tolerance: Policing Urban Crimes." *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 19 (May 2006): 1841-843. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418196?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

C R Sridhar is a recurring author for *Economic and Political Weekly*, and writes on a wide variety of topics. This brief, but easy to understand article gives a quick breakdown of the history and theory behind “Broken Windows” tactics, as well as a summary of the analysis done to show that this theory may not be as effective as its supporters say. He concludes by discussing how Broken Windows targets “social deviance,” whose apparent “markers” are often determined by race and assumption. While this article was a general survey, it provided a succinct explanation of the case *against* Broken Windows, which often gets ignored.

Newspapers

"Community Policing, Bratton Style." *New York Times*, January 31, 1994. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/31/opinion/community-policing-bratton-style.html>.

Kerr, Peter. "Cocaine Glut Pulls New York Market Into Drug Rings' Tug-Of-War." *New York Times*, August 24, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/24/nyregion/cocaine-glut-pulls-new-york-market-into-drug-rings-tug-of-war.html>.

- Krauss, Clifford. "Urban Crime Rates Falling This Year." *New York Times*, November 8, 1994. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/08/us/urban-crime-rates-falling-this-year.html>.
- Lewin, Tamar. "Sikh Owner Of Gas Station Is Fatally Shot In Rampage." *The New York Times*, September 17, 2001, U.S. sec. Accessed February 2, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/17/us/sikh-owner-of-gas-station-is-fatally-shot-in-rampage.html>.
- Marks, Peter. "Crime Down in '92 in New York and Nationwide." *New York Times*, October 3, 1993. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/03/nyregion/crime-down-in-92-in-new-york-and-nationwide.html>.
- Mears, Bill. "Texas Man Executed for Post-9/11 Murder." CNN. July 20, 2011. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/CRIME/07/20/texas.execution/>.
- Mitchell, Alison. "CORRUPTION IN UNIFORM: THE MAYOR; GIULIANI PROMISES FIGHT TO ROOT OUT POLICE CORRUPTION." *New York Times*, July 8, 1994. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/08/nyregion/corruption-uniform-mayor-giuliani-promises-fight-root-police-corruption.html>.
- Nordheimer, Jon. "Police Corruption Plaguing Florida." *New York Times*, August 3, 1986. <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/08/03/us/police-corruption-plaguing-florida.html>.
- Pitt, David E. "Crime Rates Rise in New York City." *New York Times*, September 17, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/17/nyregion/crime-rates-rise-in-new-york-city.html>.
- Raab, Selwyn. "NEW YORK'S POLICE ALLOW CORRUPTION, MOLLEN PANEL SAYS." *New York Times*, December 29, 1993. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/29/nyregion/new-york-s-police-allow-corruption-mollen-panel-says.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm&pagewanted=print>.
- Roberts, Joel. "9/11 Chair: Attack Was Preventable." *CBS News*, December 17, 2003. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/9-11-chair-attack-was-preventable/>.
- "Tough Cops, Not Brutal Cops." *New York Times*, May 5, 1994. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/05/opinion/tough-cops-not-brutal-cops.html>.

I used newspaper articles as a whole not only for facts as they would have been contemporarily presented, but also for their tone and mindset. While they only present snapshots, they were mostly taken from *The New York Times*, an incredibly popular newspaper, and thus would have been consumed by everyday readers. The NY Times proved to be a wonderful resource, as not only does

Gotham correlate with NYC, their archive is open to the public. However, I used newspaper articles for my Captain America chapter as well, as the 9/11 attacks and subsequent fallout were *highly* publicized and captured by the media.

Government Documents

American Women: Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. Report. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963.

This lengthy report, authored by the vast Commission on the Status of Women, tackles several aspects of the social and legal difficulties women faced in the 60s, and provides data and recommendations as to what could be done to improve the “status of women.” While a few recommendations from the report were put into effect, the majority of them were never realized. This is an excellent primary source for the 60s, as it represents a well-intentioned, but ultimately useless attempt to try and remedy women’s issues from *within* the government. External pressures from separate groups would be the ones to push for change, and this document is an excellent example of *why*.

Bush, George W. "Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress." Speech, United States Capitol, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001. http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf.

Bush, George W. "Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks." Speech, The Oval Office, Washington D.C., September 11, 2001. http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf.

Bush, George W. "National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Service." Speech, The National Cathedral, Washington D.C., September 14, 2001. http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf.

Bush’s speeches acted as wonderful primary sources, as it would be his rhetoric and words that would –to a certain extent- shape the American public’s understanding of the attacks, as well as the justification for the American response. The speeches speak to an incredible sense of shock and grief, but also simplify the situation to a level where America becomes duty-bound to eliminate terrorism *everywhere*. At any rate, they capture the pain and hurt of a nation in the wake of tragedy, even if briefly.

Cooper, Alexia, Erica L. Smith, Ron Malega, and Kyle Harbacek. *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008*. Edited by Morgan Young and Jill Thomas. NCJ 236018. November 2011. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/htus8008.pdf>.

This is one of two Bureau of Justice Statistics reports I use in this project, as they provide a good idea of how crime rates played out over the 80s and 90s. Of course, these statistics have to be taken with a grain of salt. Many crimes go unreported, and so the crime rates in this report may not be entirely accurate. However, they serve to paint a general picture of the violent crime trends in the era I am looking at Batman in, and reveal a massive spike, then sharp decrease in homicide in 1991. While other crimes generally followed this trend, murder is a crime that usually ends up sensationalized in the media and creates the most fear, thus adding to the perception that the world of the 80s and 90s was deeply unsafe.

Drug Enforcement Administration. "1990-1994."
<http://www.dea.gov/about/history.shtml>.

Drug Enforcement Administration. "1985-1990."
<http://www.dea.gov/about/history.shtml>.

These PDFs are available on the DEA's website, and are part of a series on the institution's history. While clearly skewed towards painting the DEA in a positive light, these summaries provided a clear and succinct picture of the drug market in America in the 80s and 90s. There was little nuance, but the overall picture presented was useful for reference and background understanding.

Reaves, Brian A., and Matthew J. Hickman. *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Police Departments in Large Cities, 1990-2000*. Report no. NCJ 175703. 2002.

This report, sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, gives a breakdown of the various elements of a police department (demographic composition, technology use, size, etc.) across major cities, and places them against crime rates. As with the aforementioned BJS report, numbers are tricky business, but are good for indicating general trends. The changes made in the 90s – diversification, new technology, more training, more officers- seemed to have an effect on crime rates: but correlation does not equal causation. At any rate, these changes *did* happen, and were visible to the everyday man. As such, this may account for way many media outlets pegged changes in policing as the impetus behind the drop in crime.

Taguba, Antonio M. *Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade*. Report no. DODDOA-000248. 2004.

The Taguba report was a commissioned inquest into the status of Abu Ghraib, done by senior military leader Antonio Taguba. The report, which was leaked and then published, details recurring instances of torture and abuse at the American-run prison. Taguba pinpointed general mismanagement and an unorganized command

structure, and made recommendations as to how to restore order. This report was part of the multiple leaked sources related to the torture of foreign combatants, climaxing in the release and subsequent broadcast of the infamous Abu Ghraib photos. The scandal which surrounded them and the subsequent revelations of torture and abuse at various American-run prison camps shook the “innocent victim” narrative that the Bush administration had built surrounding the attacks, and shamed the American government in front of the world. This is the narrative that Cap questions in *Volume 4*, and thus acts as an excellent piece of real-world evidence that support Cap’s insinuations, despite the fact that many Americans didn’t want to hear them.

The White House. "Statement by the President on the Establishment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women." News release, Washington, D.C., 1961. Office of the White House Press Secretary.

This statement lays out the foundation for a wide-reaching panel which would formally investigate the status of women, and then make legal recommendations. This seemed promising, as it was a top-level attempt to address the issues facing American women at the beginning of the decade. Its vision of the problems women faced are interesting in comparison to the issues listed by autonomous women’s groups, such as NOW. When the two are compared, the government’s mindset facing women still comes off as conservative, as they are still deemed the natural center of a home and are limited as such.

Yoo, John, and Robert J. Delahunty. *Application of Treaties and Laws to Al Qaeda and Taliban Detainees*. Internal Memo Draft. 2002.

This memo was leaked in 2004, and details the legal justification for the intentional mistreatment of prisoners abroad, as they were not considered lawful combatants. This, coupled with the Taguba Report and the Abu Ghraib photos, painted a grim picture of “American Values” abroad, as well as at home.

Interviews

Glaser, Brian. "Q+A Joe Quesada." *School of Visual Arts Journal* 19, no. 2 (2011). <http://journal.sva.edu/issues/2011fall/qagiacchimo.html>

[This interview was from Quesada’s alma mater, and dealt with his successes in the comic book industry. Quesada is primarily an artist, but he branched out and was eventually appointed Editor-in-Chief, then Chief Creative Officer of Marvel. His work thus influenced *Captain America Volume 4*, and understanding his approach to comics is interesting. Most notable was the influence of *The Dark Knight Returns* on his career, as the maturity and darkness of the plotline made Quesada finally believe that comics were a serious medium.](#)

Kennedy, John F. "What Status for Women?" Interview by Eleanor Roosevelt. *Prospects of Mankind*. WGBH-TV. June 1962.

This interview was broadcast as a part of a television series *Prospects of Mankind*, hosted by Eleanor Roosevelt. It dealt with a variety of national issues, and various big names often appeared on screen. This episode addresses the status of women, particularly the things Kennedy was attempting to do to better it. Most interesting is Kennedy's display of support for women, while simultaneously boxing women in as inherent nurturers and keepers of the home. With men like him at the helm, it becomes easier to see why legal progress in this era was slow, if at all possible.

Miller, Frank. "Frank Miller." Interview by Tasha Robinson. The A.V. Club. December 5, 2001. <http://www.avclub.com/article/frank-miller-13748>.

This interview with Frank Miller -the man who essentially saved Batman- gives readers a peek inside his head and his mindset when it comes to approaching superheroes. Miller is prolific, so this interview addresses more of his newer works, but also touches on his success with *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Year One*. While I do not necessarily rely on author's intent when decoding the meaning of a piece, Miller speaks to the fact that this darker Batman was intentionally political and born out of Miller's perceptions of the world around him. This, when tied to the comic and the real-world events surrounding it, supports the idea that this new Batman reflected a shift in perception of crime and cities among Americans, at least to some degree.

Advertisements

Kenwood. "I'm Giving My Wife a Kenwood Chef." Advertisement. 1961.

Topper Toys, "Who Is Suzy Homemaker?" advertisement, 1966.

These advertisements were wonderful pieces of visual evidence that, in essence, spoke for themselves. Advertisements often reflect dominant social mores in an attempt to make a profit, and so analyzing the messages they present is fascinating. These are only two of many of what modern viewers would consider "sexist" ads in the 50s and 60s, and provide an interesting insight into not only the consumerism of the era, but the gender expectations as well.

General Works

Allison, Wes. "How Much Credit Does Giuliani Deserve for Fighting Crime?" PolitiFact. September 1, 2007. <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2007/sep/01/how-much-credit-giuliani-due-fighting-crime/>.

Wes Allison is a researcher for PolitiFact.com, a website that researches and then verifies/refutes certain political myths and claims. He is not a scholar, and this

article functions more as a think-piece than anything else. I consulted it in conjunction with another scholarly article to address the growing understanding that “broken windows” policies may not have changed much, despite the perception. The gap between the perception and the reality is curious, particularly as many other outlets- scholarly and popular alike- felt crime dropping and attribute it to Giuliani’s policies, from “broken windows” and beyond. The later reconsidering of this moment in time is worthy of discussion, but it extends beyond the scope of this project.

Bin Laden, Osama. "Letter to the American People." *The Guardian*, November 24, 2002. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>.

This letter is an incredible artifact that functions in sharp contrast to several other primary sources from the 9/11 period. This letter from Osama bin Laden was released online and quickly translated, and then circulated widely. It is a direct, point-by-point rationale for the 9/11 attacks from the leader himself. When compared to the American government’s espoused understanding of the reasons behind the attack, the gap between the two suddenly appears. Bin Laden paints his goals as religious and political, while the Bush administration explained the conflict as an existential one between easily defined “good” and “evil.”

"Highlights 1966-1976." *National Organization for Women*. Accessed February 27, 2016. <http://now.org/about/history/highlights/>.

This is a simple timeline of NOW’s legal and social achievements, and is an excellent and easy to understand source for reference. It also gave me an idea of NOW’s larger aims and successes, which were primarily legal as opposed to social. The timeline does not go into excessive detail, but does provide an excellent general picture. It of course, paints NOW in a good light and skims over the many internal difficulties and breaks the organization faced, so it is limited in that respect.

New York Radical Women. *No More Miss America!* New York City: New York Radical Women, 1968. http://www.redstockings.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65&Itemid=103.

The New York Radical Women were a feminist collective that aimed to “raise consciousness” among the American public about the restrictions women faced, both legal and social. Most known for their dramatic Miss America protest, the “10 Points” was one of the documents they espoused during the protest, and outlines their issues with the pageant. It is emotional and to-the-point, and gets to the heart of the matter of their agenda. Describing a mix of racism, blind patriotism, and stifling beauty standards, their protest rallied against the gender norms that they perceived the pageant to be upholding. Much like the NOW

statement of purpose, it is an excellent source to determine what groups of feminists isolated as feminist issues, as well as their response to them.

Nigro, Carmen. "So, Why Do We Call It Gotham, Anyway?" *New York Public Library*. January 25, 2011. <http://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/01/25/so-why-do-we-call-it-gotham-anyway>.

This is a quick, easy to read article from the New York Public Library's history department about the origins of the name "Gotham" and its ties to NYC. It is brief, but easy to read and chock-full of information. The NYPL is a trustworthy source, so though this is not a traditionally scholarly source, it serves its purpose and provides a small bit of nuance for the Batman chapter.

"The First 9/11 Backlash Fatality: The Murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi." Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund. August 30, 2011. Accessed February 02, 2016. <http://saldef.org/issues/balbir-singh-sodhi/#.VrEiPLrJD8>.

This is an article about the killing of Balbir Singh Sodhi, who was murdered due to the perception that he was Muslim because of his turban, when he is actually Sikh. This site tries to go beyond the bare facts and produce a rounded picture of Sodhi as a person. It's a good piece for understanding the very real and tangible implications of reactionary actions post-9/11, which brought the notion of race and perceptions of race in America to the forefront.

"The National Organization for Women's 1966 Statement of Purpose." *National Organization for Women*. Accessed February 27, 2016. <http://now.org/about/history/statement-of-purpose/>.

This is the text of the original statement of purpose from NOW's founding, and reflects their desires and aims in that moment in the 60s. As such, it is an excellent primary source, as this organization was created in response to discrimination and legal frustration. The text outlines their grievances, and offers a glimpse into one manner in which feminists attempted to create meaningful change, as well as what exactly they were fighting *against*. The organization is and was well-known, and so represents a viewpoint that was probably not considered an "outlier."

Comics: Wonder Woman

DC Comics, comp. *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman*. Vol. 2. New York: DC Comics, 2008.

DC Comics, comp. *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman*. Vol. 3. New York: DC Comics, 2009.

DC Comics, comp. *Showcase Presents: Wonder Woman*. Vol. 4. New York: DC Comics, 2011.

The comics I analyzed with regards to Wonder Woman were a collection of reprints which were bound into several volumes, spanning issues #118 to #177. There are no overlapping plots, and each issue comprises one or more individual “episodes,” as was typical of the era.

Comics: Batman

Miller, Frank, Klaus Janson, and Lynn Varley. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. New York: DC Comics, 2002. (Originally published in 1986)

Miller, Frank. *Batman: Year One*. New York: DC Comics, 2005. (Originally published in 1986, after *The Dark Knight Returns*)

Moore, Alan. *The Killing Joke*. New York: DC Comics, 2008. (Originally published in 1988)

These are all various re-prints of the 80s originals, thus the publication date noted here does not reflect the original. I’ve listed them in order of original publication date, from 1986 onward. All of the above comics are “one-shots” or limited series, and do not necessarily exist as a part of an ongoing title and were published separately.

Moench, Doug, Chuck Dixon, and Alan Grant. *Batman Knightfall*. Vol. 1. New York: DC Comics, 2012. (Originally published in 1993)

Dixon, Chuck, Doug Moench, Alan Grant, and Jo Duffy. *Batman Knightfall: KnightQuest*. Vol. 2. New York: DC Comics, 2012. (Originally published 1994)

Moench, Doug, Alan Grant, Chuck Dixon, Jo Duffy, and Denny O’Neil. *Batman Knightfall: KnightsEnd*. Vol. 3. New York: DC Comics, 2012. (Originally published from 1994-1995)

As a note, the *Knightfall* arc crossed over multiple titles and spanned roughly 2 years. In 2012, the pertinent issues were compiled and reprinted in three volumes, which I used in my analysis.

Comics: Captain America

Lee, Stan. *Captain America: Sentinel of Liberty*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Rieber, John Ney. Edited by Stuart Moore. *Captain America Volume 4*, no. 1-32 (June 2002).

Captain America Volume 4 is readily available for purchase online, and is a relatively short arc. It is comprised of several different “arcs,” but most of these arcs are multi-issue. Not a terribly popular installment, many of the plot points presented in this series have been disregarded in future canon.

Films

Batman. Directed by Tim Burton. Performed by Michael Keaton, Jack Nicholson, Kim Basinger, Billy Dee Williams, and Jack Palance. United States: Warner Bros., 1989.

This film brought the darker version of Batman into the popular conscious, and was a smash success box-office wise. It set a visual and tonal precedent for the subsequent Batman movies, and took the comic book vision of Batman to the big screen.