Why The World Needs Superheroes: Using the Superhero Genre for Historical and Humanitarian Studies

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Abstract

Throughout the vast world of the education system, one area that has continued to be left out of the educational discipline is the popular culture phenomes of the times. While novels, such as *The Great Gatsby* and *To Kill a Mockingbird,* have impacted the literature and historical studies of the past new material is being produced, at a rate that leads to a continuous evolution, putting new outlooks on our issues on display. This study aims to present contextual reason and facts at the potential to use Comic Books, as well as the films they have inspired, in our everyday classroom studies. Specifically, through the stories of *Captain America* and *The X-Men*, we can create visual perspectives to the injustices of the world, without having to spoil young minds with strong graphic imagery.

Through the methods of researching History and studying Comic Book storytelling, as well as those behind the pages, we are able to present parallels between the literature and the world they were written in. While there will be no direct study with an in-class discussion, contextualization will present the defense for the reasoning behind the importance of the Comic Book stories being held to just as high a regard as the classic literature that has been used for nearly over a century. This argument is to be presented given in a classroom setting, presenting our real world past first and then presenting the comic book narratives with heighten context and understanding.

In Conclusion, our research presents stories of racial divide and war propaganda through both fictional stories based historical figures, as well as how comics impacted the call for war time efforts in the 1940s. This is only tapping the surface of potential for the use of comic book literature in the historical educational setting, as further research will continue to grow as new stories continue to unfold in our modern world that will push the narrative of our comic book heroes.

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Introduction

There is no denying the importance of novels such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Both have been used in classrooms for teaching of rhetoric and themes of social constructs, even when there are those that oppose their messages. To this date, both of these novels remain largely impactful on my studies of the world, as they are messages that I carry with me, but what if there are other stories that we can toss into the mold?

On May 12, 2002, my 6th birthday, I did not know how much of an impact going to the movie theater that day would have on the rest of my life. Never having picked a comic book, I didn't know a single thing about the character of Spider-Man, but his story encapsulated me. From that point on, Superheroes have been a touchstone of my personality. These larger-than-life heroes inspired who I am as an adult through messages of good values and purpose, but it wasn't until further in my education that they became far more.

In 2014, after watching *Captain America: The Winter Soldier,* the lens by which I watch these films began to take a different impact. With a having the knowledge about the events behind Watergate and Edward Snowden's acts of treason, the film became more of a mirror to the world. It was at this moment I began my pursuits to understanding the deeper context behind these tight wearing titans and find rich understanding of the themes that were laying right below the surface.

When I began my education at Ball State University in the fall of 2015, my ambitions were to receive my bachelor's degree in Telecommunications, then head out to Atlanta, GA to pursue a career in film production. While in the beginning, I kept my ambitions at the front of my mind, I always found myself looking back at my truest passion for film studies, the theorization and discussion of films themselves. Near the end of my education, I came to the conclusion that "I am not cut out to make films, but rather I should be looking to help teach the next generation and pass on my own knowledge." But in what way could I do that?

Eventually, it hit me. As I sat in a class on genres and the diversity of genres through comedy, I came up with the idea for my thesis: Could I not do the same thing with the Superhero Genre? For the majority of my life, I had been overwhelmed by my passion and love for the Superhero films and comic books that were released before and during my lifetime, yet I always felt like a loner thinking beyond just the explosions, but rather towards the nuanced context behind the screen. By presenting the context by which these media was formed in, we can create a further understanding of the importance Comic books and the films they've inspire have on our understanding of life.

Through research and demonstration, this ideology shall be used to create an entire theory or study on the superhero genre, even beyond just the technological advances of the films? What if we wanted to take the storylines of Captain America or Charles Xavier to model an understanding of American History and the evolution of the media? What about taking the scientific methods demonstrated on screen and separate the fiction from the factual and teach high-school students their importance?

For my thesis, I plan to prove that the Superhero genre, both the feature length films and the comics they are based on, is far more than just a multi-media empire created for profit, but

rather a tool that can be used in tandem with basic understanding of contextual studies. In order to prove my case, I will be presenting articles and demonstrations that have shown that the application of the Superhero genre has been already sought out as a tool for educating the youth of our world. As I dive deeper into the discussion, I will also present further academic research of the films and books as tools to discuss the gradual evolution of our world, through examples of ethical issues, diplomatic consequences and gender norms that are always ever changing.

Literature Review
The Application of Comics in Science Education

As stated in the introduction, my thesis is not centered on the premise that I am a pioneer in using comic books in the classroom, but rather expanding on those who have done so in the past. In a study from *Acta Eductationis Generalis,* Marta Koutníková presented findings on the application of comics in Science Education. In the article, she discusses the early stages of preschool education where young children are at the best age to explore their minds, as they are just entering society and beginning to discover themselves (Koutníková, 2017). In her evaluation of young preschoolers, Koutníková used the studies of J. Kopako. In their study, Kopako pointed out a variety of phases needed for a child's exploration[1]. This model is crucial to my proposal of expanding the use of comic books and their respective films in the field of education. These methods follow the same path of the scientific method of research that is used by many young adults in education to this day.

Further into Ms. Kournikova's' study, we find a discussion on the history of comic books and their origins. The article states: "Researchers most often agree mainly on the fact that the exact beginnings of the comics cannot be dated. Groensteen labels Rodolphe Topffer's "Stories

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[1] Appendix: TABLE 1

in engravings" of 1820 as a fundamental historical point in the search for the beginnings of the comic strip. McClaud, who deals with the much more ancient history of the comics, also acknowledges Topffer as the father of the modern comic strip. (Koutníková, 2017)"

The article further points out the importance of comics and their historical significance in increasing the number of individuals who have a capability to read. It states: "The label of "comics" can also be given to a series from the 18th century, "A Harlot's Progress" by the English painter William Hogarth. Kunzle considers a sequential pictorial presentation as a comic, beginning with the invention of printing press and maps comics from 1450 (Kunzle, 1973). The modern comics in its contemporary form is most frequently dated from the mass development of the daily press in the USA and attempts to acquire as many readers as possible (including from the ranks of immigrants who did not master the language yet understood the "comic strips", the pictures, and so also bought the newspaper). The expression "comics" is an abbreviation of "comic strip". (Koutníková, 2017)"

Once the understanding of the history of the comic has been presented, the study moves into discussing where the world stands on comic-based literature today. In the article, they discuss that "We can label comics in the words of Eisner (1985) as sequential art, or more specifically as the "deliberate juxtaposed sequence of drawn and other pictures aimed at providing information or causing an aesthetic experience." With his definition Harvey excludes from the realm of comics works working only with a pictorial form. (Koutníková, 2017)" Within this first article, I have found a basis for where I plan to push my thesis. There are already individuals in research that are advocating for the importance of comics, through their usefulness of training individuals to read and obtain valuable information, while enticing their audience through an aesthetic experience. The juxtaposition itself of pictures in comics forces the reader to

activate multimodal thought processes; this presupposes complicated cognitive work by the reader. The great potential for comics in science education and knowledge can be seen clearly (Koutníková, 2017).

Now how exactly can we take this literature and aesthetic understanding of comics and apply them into the classroom? As discussed in the article, Ms. Koutníková presents an inquiry-based teaching and comics. As stated, a focus on the thought processes of developing inquiry-based thought, the overall cultivation of thinking and support for an interest in science topics combines very well with the wide range of opportunities for working with comics. Comics bring nontraditional didactic strategies into the development of science education, which are, however, complicated in terms of their demands on the didactic concept of a content requiring a transdisciplinary approach (Koutníková, 2017). This is exactly how I plan to present my overall theory further in my study. In order to create a resourceful use of comics in the classroom, I must first present an outer world understanding to ground my teachings in before I can present the literature to the classroom.

Comics in the Classroom

As I continued in my research, I found further studies that put an emphasis on the possibilities of using comic books in the classroom for educational purposes. From the *Harvard Graduate School of Education,* Jabari Sellars, a student in the master's program in Language and Literacy, presented his thoughts on the use of comics in the classroom. In the article, Jabari opened by discussing his mother's tactics of dealing with her son's picky-eating habits, by 'conning' the young Sellars boy to eat something other than Macaroni and Cheese. In order to get Jabari to eat healthy, his mother would serve him the cheese-based foods delicacies that he would ask for, but under the surface there was more to the meal. Hidden by a thick layer of

noodles, a bay of baby spinach sat patiently to be unknowingly consumed by Jabari. Unbeknownst to the young child, he was slowly becoming a healthy eater (Sellars, 2017).

From his mother's methods of deception, Mr. Sellars formed his own study on the use of comic books in the classroom to entice young readers to study and gain knowledge. In the article, Mr. Sellars states "Motivating students with texts that resonate with their personal interests and identities will increase their investment, leading to greater exposure to words, greater vocabulary acquisition, and more frequent use of reading strategies — three cornerstones of comprehension. (Sellars, 2017)" This connects directly with Marta Koutníkovás' study of comic books in the classroom, as well as my own personal thesis on the study. While at first, young students will look at the colorful characters and the funny dialogue just as they appear, we can use that as a foundation to expand the education of our youth.

Further into the article, Mr. Sellars goes on to present his own use of the comic book formatting to present a strong case of its usage through the superhero comic book series, *X-Men*. In the article, Mr. Sellars compares the comic book series with the novel, *Lord of the Flies.* He states: "Consider Lord of the Flies, a staple of reading lists in middle and high-school. After skimming the back cover, students find the novel dated, boring, and unrelated to who they are or what they like. Students wrestle with a plot that has a group of stranded British schoolboys turning their prep uniforms into loincloths. Unfamiliar with symbolism-laden allegory, and without knowing how allegories function as social critiques, most students manage only a surface-level comprehension of the text, missing the opportunity to explore the larger ideas of human capability and culpability. (Sellars, 2017)"

Is this not a common struggle that many educators face on a yearly, if not daily occurrence? High Schoolers are being taught the same information year in, and year out in

literature. If you walk down the halls of any public school, you could easily find the discussions of students talking about their experiences reading F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* only to find the same critical analysis that has been shared from generation to generation, each trying to defend its stake as one of the greatest pieces of literature ever scribed. As Mr. Seller tries to point out, perhaps we could bring in new life to analyze, works that play more into the modern interest of younger minds that too play on the questions of social normality and constructs.

In Mr. Sellars article, he would take his thoughts on the literature presentation of *Lord of the Flies* and create his own unit on the allegorical nature of pop culture, by means of the *X-Men* comics. In his defense, Mr. Sellars states: Students usually characterize mutants as individuals whose abilities and appearances often lead to their persecution. They'll note that mutants often realize they are different during puberty or adolescence; some mutants have an appearance that allows them to pass as "normal" people, while others must go to great lengths to hide their true selves. (Sellars, 2017)" From there, Mr. Sellars would come to an interesting point of discussion for his students: "who are the mutants in our society?" This leads into Mr. Sellars discussion on the vast history of the X-Men series, from their initial inception and the parallels between the leaders of the two mutant regimes, Charles Xavier and Magneto, and the social activist leaders Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X (Sellars, 2017). Later in this article, we shall be returning to this discussion, through my own personal research and findings and the ways I would present this information in the classroom.

Engaging Teenagers With Science Through Comics

Next we will discuss the findings from the *Spring Science and Business Media Dordrecht.* In May of 2013, a committee was formed, which completed a study on the effects of engaging young students in the classroom through the use of comic books. Their study began with developing the basis of claims, that being the importance of public understanding of Virus.

In preparation, their research took form of collecting data about major virus that effect the world, such as HPV, HIV and AIDs. They provided the following statistics:

"Among viruses that infect humans, human papillomavirus (HPV) is so common that half of sexually active men and women become infected at some point in their lives, and approximately 20 million Americans are currently infected with HPV; Over 33 million people worldwide currently live with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS; there were 2.6 million new HIVinfections in 2009, and one fifth of the people living with HIV in the USA do not know they are infected. Nonhuman viruses, such as foot and mouth disease virus, can also have major economic impacts. (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013)."

Their research also pinpointed the limited public understanding of the knowledge. In their findings, they discovered "national and international surveys suggest that misinformation and lack of information can have negative implications for personal health and health environmental policies across diverse socioeconomic and cultural groups (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013)" With this problem presented to them, the team pursed to create a robust education program that would counter-act this potentially lethal lack of knowledge. In conclusion, they identified that the best point of attack would be to educate the youth about the dangers of viruses and infectious diseases (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013).

Unfortunately, as they discover in preliminary research, Student achievement in science suggests that much work remains to attain national goals for education. Over 40 % of US middle and high-school students, for example, perform below basic achievement levels in science, including fundamental concepts about human biology and viruses (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013). In their studies, they linked that achievement in science is directly associated with levels of interest and attitudes towards the subject. From previous studies, it was accounted that 43% of students express no desire to take further science courses through their academic careers and are steadily declining (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013). In order to push for better understanding in the classroom, the team had to find a solution

that could both engage the students in material, yet make sure they retain it. This led to the next phase of their research: Comic Books.

From their research, the team found that "prior studies suggest that graphic stories, with their illustrated narrative, may have positive impacts on readers' engagement, memory, and conceptual learning and that these benefits are most evident among novice learners. (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013)" As with the other articles, I have already summarized, my study is bound in the same conceptual thought process. While I still fully believe that existing textbooks and academic articles are still important to the learning process, as I will demonstrate later in my thesis, comic books and their respective films are meant to gravitate and stimulate students' minds to a deeper interest in the material. The article from *Spring Science* supports this by stating "Carney and Levin found that illustrations accompanying text reinforce information in the text, provide coherence, and help establish settings in the narrative. Mayer and Gallini determined that illustrated expository text on the mechanisms of scientific devices improved conceptual recall and creative problem solving among students who had low prior knowledge of the subject (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013)."

While not going to get into much detail into the process performed by Springer Science, as much of their research pertained to younger students, this work is currently in the stages of trial with higher education students, with an emphasis on the collegiate setting. However, let's address the overall results of the team's study. Through the process of the Identity theory created around Situational Interest, the team sought to recognize both an incensement in aptitude in the classroom, along with the overall interest in the material (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013). In order to see a variety in results, they compared the difference of retention

and demonstration between the uses of an academic essay article against a comic book. Below, I

have added in their statistical graphic:

Table 2 Descriptive statistics by condition (comic/essay)

	Overall (N=873) %	Comic (N=434) %	Essay (N=439) %	Significance χ^2 (df)	
Female (percentage)	49 %	51 %	47 %	1.04 (1)	ns
Age (in years)	15.3 (.9)	15.3 (.9)	15.4 (.9)	1.59	ns
Race/ethnicity (proportion)				0.80 (3)	ns
White and Asian	75 %	76 %	74 %		
Hispanic	10 %	10 %	11 %		
Black	5 %	5 %	6 %		
Mixed/other	10 %	10 %	10 %		
Race/ethnicity by gender					
Female				2.7 (3)	ns
White and Asian	76 %	79 %	72 %		
Hispanic	10 %	9 %	11 %		
Black	6 %	5 %	7 %		
Mixed/other	8 %	7 %	10 %		
Male				1.2 (3)	ns
White and Asian	74 %	72 %	75 %		
Hispanic	10 %	11 %	10 %		
Black	5 %	5 %	5 %		
Mixed/other	11 %	12 %	9 %		
Read comic books, manga or other graphic novel in past year	42 %	47 %	53 %	2.9 (1)	ns
Socioeconomic status proxy (scale alpha=0.76)	−0.02 (0.6)	0.02 (0.6)	−0.04 (0.6)	−1.37	ns
Items for the latent class analysis of "Science Kind of Person"					
How interesting is science to you? (1–4, 4=very interesting)	2.7 (1.0)	2.7 (1.0)	2.7 (1.0)	0.33	ns
Grades (1–7, 1=mostly below C's, 7=mostly A's)	5.0 (1.8)	5.0 (1.8)	5.0 (1.9)	−0.04	ns
Science identity items (1=SD, 5=SA)					
"People in my life think of me as a science person"	2.5 (1.1)	2.5 (1.2)	2.5 (1.1)	−0.15	ns
"I have always liked science"	3.3 (1.2)	3.3 (1.2)	3.3 (1.3)	0.03	ns
"I'm just not a science person" (reverse coded)	3.0 (1.3)	3.0 (1.3)	3.0 (1.3)	0.05	ns

From their results, "the comics appealed to more youth who do not identify themselves as

"science people." The comics did not seem to act on self-identity in the same way as science

essays. When presented in the comic format, the learning materials triggered situational interest,

a first step in motivating learning. As mentioned earlier, prior research indicates that situational

interest, if supported and sustained through repeated engagement, can gradually develop into a more lasting individual interest in that topic (Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013)."

From this point in my research, we start seeing the structure for growth coming together. There is potential behind my position that comic books and their respective films are beneficial both inside and outside of the classroom, however there's still an area that needs more support. While the previous studies show that science and literature both have recognized potential for comic books education in the classroom, we still need to discuss the potential of using the genre for Historical Studies. As I have found, there are far more questions that can promote the usage of comics in the classroom much further. Are there studies that suggest that Superhero films are not just windows to the past, but also have a voice in talking about the social issues we are facing in the present? As we have seen throughout this literature review, I am not the only researcher curious about the importance of the comic book genre for academic purposes and the following areas should strengthen my position.

Superhero History: Using Comic Books to Teach U.S. History.

While my findings are to make the argument for the application of the Superhero comic book genre in the studies of History and Social Issues, has there already been research in that area? Let us take a look at a study presented in the *OAH Magazine of History.* In the article, Katherine G. Aiken discusses Issue #602 of *Captain America Reborn*, released in February 2010. In the comic, Captain America and his African American partner, The Falcon, travel to the state of Idaho to take on his evil doppelganger who has teamed up with a group of right-wing, watchdog sympathizers. As Aiken read the comic, she began to notice similarities between the villains on the page and the Conservative Tea Party Radicals forming in the early 2010s (Aiken,

2010). Eventually, the comic book special made national news, with Fox News calling out Marvel Comics, leading to an apology and the issues being pulled from the shelves.

As Historian Bradford Wright has once written, "comic books are History" (Aiken, 2010). Just as films and novels are, comic books and their respective films are primary sources of popular culture that have begun to take shape and framing from the world that they are released in. This has been a point of comic books dating as far back to the release of Superman in 1938 (Aiken, 2010). With this in mind, Katherine G. Aiken started to shape the mold of her history class in a way that used the comic book superheroes of Captain America, Wonder Woman and Spider-Man, as they are not only pieces into the window of the world they were shaped in, but have also been able to stand the test of time (Aiken, 2010). While in the magazine article, Dr. Aiken goes into discussion on Captain America, I'm going to save that section for later in the thesis, as it has major applications as to where my points of discussion will also explore, but we can still discuss her applications with Wonder Woman and Spider-Man.

In 1941, with America on the brink of entering World War II, William Moulton Marston, a doctor in psychology who had invented the lie detector, debuted the Amazon Warrior Superhero, Wonder Woman (Aiken, 2010). While many ridiculed the idea of a woman being portrayed as the savior of the world at war, her story would begin to change the minds of millions. In *The American Scholar* journal, Marston explained, "It seemed to me, from a psychological angle, that the comics' worst offense was their blood-curding masculinity." It was this break in the mold that would lead Wonder Woman to receive worldwide acclaim and selling 2.5 Million Copies per issue at the peak of her success (Aiken, 2010).

However, it was just the comic books depiction of a woman leading the charge for the world to take notice, but rather the world itself was also changing. For her class discussions, Dr.

Aiken gave her class a single panel with the Wonder Woman quote "you can be as strong as any boy, if you'll work hard and train yourself in athletics the way boys do." She would then present her class with the other prominent female character of the war era, Rosie the Riveter. This led to cross examinations with the class about how these two characters both played a major emphasis on the need for both men and women to do their part in order for the United States to be victorious in their war efforts (Aiken, 2010).

Sadly, after the war was over, a change began to appear in the mighty amazon warrior. Rather than continuing the fight through other ensuing wars, Wonder Woman was pushed out of the spotlight. In terms of what was going on post-world war II with the woman's movement continuing to grow in volume, this felt like a step in the wrong direction for the powerful hero. Rather her stories began to turn towards her opening a boutique in the 1970s after losing her superpowers. There was also a change in her physique from the broader shoulder, fighter look to a more petite and womanlier look (Aiken, 2010). For a time, it looked like the hero of war was lost, until a rebirth came about in 1989 that put Wonder Woman back into fighting shape, we will touch on later on.

In the final part, Dr. Aiken discusses the impact the superhero character, Spider-Man has had for decades. In comparison to either Captain America or Wonder Woman, the thing that stood out about the web-crawler was the person behind the mask, Peter Parker. A teenager from New York City, Peter Parker wasn't athletic, confident or even stood out in a crowd. He was that kid in the cafeteria that maybe had one or two friends, but outside of that, barely anyone in the school batted an eye at him. As Dr. Gaines notes: "Spider-Man gave teenagers a hero they could identify with as the teenaged Peter Parker is not a sidekick (as Robin is to Batman or Superboy is to Superman) but rather the main character. Peter Parker suffered the teenage angst that is a

hallmark of the 1960s, and in many respects. Spider-Man's life was not that different from the lives of his reader (Aiken, 2010)."

Eventually, in 2002, Spider-Man swung onto movie theater screens all across the world, opening to the highest grossing weekend in North America at the time, eventually leading to the release of two sequels within the following decade (Aiken, 2010). Notably about the film, rather than taking place in the era the comics were created in, director Sam Raimi took the elements that made the character popular in the 1960s and revamped them for a modern audience, creating a stronger parallel for the young audience that would be going to watch the film, as well as keep a special connection to those that had been reading his comics for the past 40 years.

In conclusion, Dr. Aiken stands by the idea that superhero comic books can be a vital part of the educational process in classrooms. Dr. Aiken states: 'Carrying comic books into the classroom might seem an inadvisable move for a history instructor today. After all, the profusion of games, music, and movies on laptop computers, iPods, and cellphones in classrooms can be a serious distraction from the learning process (Aiken, 2010)." Well, in the year 2021, just think about how we utilize electronic materials now. Perhaps, there is more potential to use comic books in the classroom than even Dr. Aikens could have predicted.

Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel: The (Dis)Continuity of Gender Politics

While Aiken and Sellers work have shown tremendous demonstrations of the application of Superhero comics into the classroom, they've only touched the surface, and this is where we find the place that comic books can have a much larger impact: demonstrations through a modern lens. As of 2021, the Superhero genre has seen a strong wave of purpose, while also facing an uphill climb on the other side. Film is where the Superhero genre currently rules the

world. From 2010 to 2019, Marvel Studios has annually dominated the global box office with each new release, with their most successful feature, *Avengers: Endgame*, claiming the position as the highest grossing film of all time, as well as received acclaim from both audiences and critics alike.

In my final article for my literature review, let's return to the subject of Wonder Woman, along with her *Marvel Comics* Counterpart, Captain Marvel. As previously noted by Dr. Katherine G. Aikens, Wonder Woman was beginning to see changes happen to her physique and powers during the 1970s to late-80s (Aiken, 2010). This was noted as a very critical development, especially during an era when the women's movement was beginning to rise and symbols, such as Rosie the Riveter, were beginning to be left behind in the era they were conceived in. While a resurgence of comic books, due to the popularity of films, *Superman* and *Batman*, Wonder Woman would return back to her original form. However, why wasn't she getting to bounce to the big screen?

In 2020, Author Neal Curtis presented his opinions and studies on the characters of Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel in the modern era and their eventual jump to the silver screen in the later 2010s. By the time of their release, *Wonder Woman* and *Captain Marvel* were only the second and third female-led superhero films to have been released in theaters, coming over a decade after the release of 2003's *Catwoman* (Curtis, 2020).

By the time both films were released, The United States was entering what would become a fourth wave of feminist movement, brought about by the #MeToo call to action. The #MeToo movement was a call for women to speak up against actions of sexual misconduct in the workplace, with the first woman to come forth taking down one of the most powerful men in Hollywood ever, Harvey Weinstein (Curtis, 2020). However, as more and more allegations came

out, many began to turn against the movement feeling it was just a way for men to get into

trouble. This led to both *Wonder Woman* and *Captain Marvel* to receive polar opposite reception

from what was anticipated during a strong period of change.

From Neal Curtis' assessment, he noted: "When Wonder Woman arrived in theaters, this

culture was already in full swing. This was epitomized when the Alamo Drafthouse in Austin,

Texas, announced two women-only screenings in early June 2017. Men already agitated by the

potential feminist message of the film were outraged at what they saw to be blatant

discrimination against them. This resulted in two formal legal complaints, with the owner issuing

a letter of apology on July 18, 2017, but challenging the demands from one complainant to pay

settlement as "deterrence" to the sum of $8,892." Once *Captain Marvel* was released nearly two

years later, the films received a much stronger backlash, receiving hostile attention as soon as the

first trailer was released. The pettiness of the misogyny was contained in a tweet carrying an

image of Captain Marvel looking serious that asked: "Would it kill this bitch to smile?" (Curtis,

2020)

For an era that is trying to push a narrative about what is inappropriate and what is not,

there is far too much picking and choosing on what issues are acceptable to hit upon. When the

allegations about Harvey Weinstein's sexual misconduct hit the news, there was little to no

hesitation that the women who accused him were being nothing but honest (BBC, 2020). As

more women came forward against those who had treated them as sexual objects in the work

place, the support began to change. From a study from the *Harvard Business Review*, 455

individuals, 152 Men and 303 Women, were surveyed about the impact the #MeToo movement

had placed in the workplace. From their responses, there showed a new batch of unintended

consequences, most notably the process by which the hiring processes would be conducted and

how the shift of blame could erupt (Harvard Business Review, 2019). This divide eventually found its way into the way film-goers would perceive certain films, with *Wonder Woman* and *Captain Marvel* taking the biggest hits.

For two characters, once celebrated for their female empowering messages, the new-age wave of film fans attempted to eat them alive. While both films went on to receive glowing critical acclaim and huge success at the global box office, it begged the question of what the correct way was to depict women, in a world split on the outlook of the #MeToo movement. Even those who supported the allegations against misogyny pushed back at the films; With Wonder Woman being called out for being "too perfect" and Captain Marvel being "too stubborn" (Curtis, 2020). Are we just at a point in our society where divide will always be? Is there a common ground where film fans can support films that stand up for female empowerment, without questioning their messages? Perhaps this is a question best asked for the next generation, especially in the ways we educate them on the social outlook of the world.

Comics as a Lens to Our Past

In this section within my thesis, I plan on diving into two major discussions of comic book superheroes, the films they have inspired, and the way their narratives have changed over time due to the events of the world. These sections discuss: *Stan Lee's X-Men and the Civil Rights Movement* and *Captain America: From World War II Propaganda to Pessimistic Patriot.* In my discussions, I will both present the history of where these characters come from, and how their impact on moments in History can be used as tools for context studies.

Through this presentation, which focuses more on the reflections of life and art, rather than using standard teaching mechanics, the outlook of my findings represents a high-school lecture. In order to make the case for the superhero genres' importance in the classroom setting,

there has to be an assurance that context of the world they were molded in is understood. This is about using elements of culture that have yet to be given their voice in the classroom and give them a platform for interpretation.

Captain America: America's Guide to Punching Nazis
The Call for a Hero

In August of 1939, after amassing power throughout Germany, Adolf Hitler combined powers with Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union, through the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. Sparking a frenzy throughout Europe, Great Britain and France drafted their own agreement in the event that either the Soviets or the Germans would attack the nation of Poland. As anticipated, the German army invaded Poland, leading to Great Britain and France declaring war on the Northern Country, thereby beginning World War II (History, 2020).

In March 1941, comic book writers Jack Kirby and Joe Simon debuted the Marvel Comics, at the time known as *Timely*, superhero, *Steve Rogers* also known as *Captain America.* In his debut, Rogers was presented as a would-be army enlistee who was rejected by recruiters. In order to be able to fight the good fight, Rogers would volunteer to receive a top-secret serum that would transform him into a "super soldier." In the beginning of his story, Captain America's story was presented with very simple stories that featured inventive supervillains, such as The Hunchback of Hollywood, as well as a fictional Ivan the Terrible. At the same time, Cap would also be facing German Nazi officer, Johann Schmitt, under the alias of the Red Skull (Roach, 2021). When the first issue of *Captain America* was released, many were captivated by the cover image alone. As both Joe Simon and Jack Kirby were Jewish, they felt the image that should defy the introduction of their superhero should be that of him "Socking Hitler in the Jaw." What was the most impressive part of this imagery? The United States was still nearly nine months out from joining World War II (Ertman, 2019).

In September of 1940, over a year before the Pearl Harbor attack, Congress passed the first peacetime draft in U.S. History. This law, called the Selective Training and Service Act, required men between the ages of 21 through 35 to register with their local draft boards, which would then lead them to be placed in the Western Hemisphere or in an overseas U.S. territory. On December 20, 1941, nearly two weeks after the Pearl Harbor attack, Congress amended the law to require all men from the ages of 20 through 44 eligible for military service, while also requiring all men 18 through 64 to register with their local draft board (Glass, 2017) Thus began the United States of America's push into World War II, and the need for a staple of the American way.

After the United States entered the war, both Simon and Kirby went off to join the fight. Joe Simon served with the U.S. Coast Guard back on the home front, while Jack Kirby was sent overseas. Kirby was assigned to Company F of the 11th Infantry Regiment. On August 23, 1944, Kirby landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy, two-and-a-half months after D-Day (Ertman, 2019). Just as with Simon and Kirby, the man most prominently known for the success of Marvel Comics was also facing the warfront, Stan Lee. Just a few months after the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Stan Lee entered the U.S. Army and served in the Signal Corps, repairing telegraph poles and other various communications equipment. Eventually, Lee was transferred to the Training Film Division, where he began crafting training videos and manuals for the devices but was also able to continue his "cartooning". It was at this time; Steve Rogers was finding his own purpose in the fight (Ertman, 2019).

Back on the Home front, Captain America, along with other comic book icons at the time, such as Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, saw an increase in the sale of their stories. This was mainly due to the cheapness and portability to entertain young children, but

their stories began to grow more important. While the stories were mostly popular towards younger demographics, Young Adults began to take a strong interest in the characters, most in part due to their patriotic stories of heroism and acts of triumph over evil. This led to a large increase in the desire for young men to join the cause and go and "Sock Hitler in the Jaw" themselves. Even on the Warfront, Captain America was creating a boost in moral as American troops were one of the primary consumers of the comics at the time. It was at this moment Captain America had grown out of just his comic book roots and become one of biggest pieces of War Propaganda at the time (Ertman, 2019).

As many saw the advantage of Captain America boosting the call for war support, one of the many items the Star-Spangled Hero would promote were the sales of Victory Bonds. These bonds would help supply the troops on the front line with ammunition, food or any other resources they would require continuing on with the fight against the Axis Powers (National D-Day Memorial Foundation, 2020). It was at this time that Captain America villain, Red Skull, would be promoted to the role of his arch enemy. Just as the first image of Captain America "socking Hitler in the jaw" was a cry for American Patriotism, the continuous thwarting of Red Skull and his underground experiments for the German Army kept the fans clamoring for more.

Captain America and the Sentinels of Liberty

For the young boys and girls of WWII, Steve Rogers was the manifestation of whatever member of their families who had been sent overseas. By reading about his actions, young readers were able to visualize the importance of what their loved ones are doing for the fight against the Axis Powers, as well as keeping the hope alive that they have not died in combat. However, it also created a sense that they were not doing enough to help the cause (McNamara, 2015).

With the growing success of the Captain America audience and his prominence in War Propaganda, the push for patriotism found itself being directly marketed to the youth of America. While many were already so enamored by the Red, White and Blue superhero's actions, many in the industry sought out a way to convince the youth of America to also exemplify these morals. This led to one of the earliest examples of comic books 'mail-in promotions', The Sentinels of Liberty.

With the use of Captain America's young sidekick, Bucky Barnes, being the heart of the organization, The Sentinels of Liberty became the first official established Fan Club of Captain America. In nearly every issue of *Captain America,* there was an advertisement for the fan club. From a study at the University of Texas, it was reported that "twenty percent of schoolboys between the ages of fourteen and fifteen had jobs and that forty percent between the ages of sixteen and seventeen did as well (McNamara, 2015)." With the money they had been saved up, young readers would send in money with comics "mail-in" strips. After a few weeks, they would receive a commemorative badge and certificate, formally welcoming them to The Sentinels of Liberty.

Now, I will admit; the usage of comic books in the academic setting is not a perfect science, but rather a fulfilling way to engage the young minds with the material. In the previous section about Captain America, I presented the argument of how the comic book genre was an influential part of the efforts, but in this section, we're going to mix it up. So now let's take a look at how life was imitated on the colorful pages and can be a useful tool to help spark any classroom discussion.

The Science in the Literature

After the attacks on Pearl Harbor and the United States formal entrance into World War II, The Axis Powers officially declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941. With the United States far on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, Japan would continue their expansion into

China, eventually taking command of Guam, Wake Island and Hong Kong (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020).

In June of 1942, The United States made their first successful push against the Japanese Army by claiming victory at the Battle of Midway. Over the next three years, the United States would continue their successful campaign by reclaiming the Philippines and victory in Okinawa. However, the push to take in-land China was still too much to handle, with the Japanese Army holding strong. In order to successfully defeat the Japanese once and for all, President Truman and other leaders of the Allied Powers planned to attack the heart of Japan in what would forever by known as one of the most important events in World History. They called this: The Manhattan Project (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020).

With the world at war and with growing interest in the war effort increasing, the stories began to replicate the events of the world. However, the writers were certainly not afraid to explore these areas with a bit of embellishment. In *Captain America #1*, after multiple rejections for duty due to medical conditions, Steve Rogers volunteered to take part in an experiment that would hopefully get him on the front lines of battle. Project "Rebirth, based loosely on the Manhattan Project Task forces, was led by U.S. Army General Chester Phillips and headed by scientist Dr. Josef Reinstein. Reinstein had developed a "Super Soldier" serum that would create a nearly perfect human being with peak strength, agility, stamina and intelligence. With the experiment a success, but Reinstein unwilling to recreate his formula in fear of it falling into the wrong hands, Steve Rogers dawned his Red, White and Blue suit and became the hero, Captain America (Simon & Kirby, 1941).

With the project team going under the name, The Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD), the operation formed the Manhattan Engineer District in 1942, based right

in New York City. With U.S. Army Colonel Leslie R. Groves appointed to lead the project, Enrico Fermi and Leo Szilard continued their research on isotope separations, successfully enriching uranium to produce Uranium-235. At the same time, scientists, including Glenn Seaborg, were producing samplings of pure plutonium for the Canadian Government. On December 28, 1942, President Roosevelt combined the two teams together into the Manhattan Project, setting up facilities in New Mexico, Tennessee and Washington (Manhattan Project, 2017).

On July 26, 1945, at The Potsdam Conference, the United States delivered an ultimatum to Japan: Surrender under the terms outlined or face "prompt and utter destruction". With Japan unwilling to accept the terms, the United States saw no other choice. On August 6th, 1945, "Little Boy" was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, causing unprecedented destruction and death over an area of five square miles. Three days later, with still no surrender declared, "Fat Man" was dropped over Nagasaki. The two bombs combined killed more than 100,000 people and leveled two Japanese cities to the ground (Manhattan Project, 2017).

In the 2008 comic book film, *Iron Man*, Marvel Studios subtly tweaked history a touch more in regards to the Manhattan Project. While retrospectively everything about the Manhattan Project remained the same, with the end result being highlighted for dramatic effect, the major addition was that of the fictional Howard Stark (Favreau, 2008). A weapons specialist, Howard Stark was also a prominent part of Project Rebirth, providing Dr. Reinstein with the equipment necessary to dose Steve Rogers with "Vita-Rays" to work in tangent with the "Super Soldier" serum to transform him into Captain America (Johnston, 2011). While these factoids were not present in the comic books during their original releases, they became important pieces of the 2010s Cinematic Franchise, the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. We'll return to the discussion on these films later on in this thesis.

<u>Heroes on the Big Screen: 1940s Superhero Serials.</u>

In the past two sections, it can be seen easily that I have reflected facts and knowledge about the History of World War II that many teenagers are learning along with the history of a fictional comic book superhero. This is where the core of my thesis begins to take shape. In December 2021, the 70th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor and the United States entering World War II will take place. Throughout all of the United States, many educators will be creating slideshows and having their students read textbooks about the history of the war and the absolute importance these events have made on the world that followed, but what history will be left behind? The comic books.

As we saw in the literature review section, comic books are starting to see some adaptability in the classroom setting for education purposes, but are they truly being used to their full potential? In their findings Jabari Sellers stated, "Motivating students with texts that resonate with their personal interests and identities will increase their investment, leading to greater exposure to words, greater vocabulary acquisition, and more frequent use of reading strategies — three cornerstones of comprehension (Sellars, 2017)." Now while I fully believe that the history of the comics can be a vital resource in the study of history in education, I plan on going one step further: Using the films that have been inspired by the comics.

While in recent history, films based on comic book superheroes have dominated the box office, such as the 2019 blockbuster *Avengers: Endgame,* superhero films have a long history dating far back to even before the United States entered World War II (Singer M. , 2015). In early 1941, *Adventures of Captain Marvel* was released. Based on the comic books stories, *Adventures of Captain Marvel,* told the story of 10-year-old Billy Batson, who after discovering a magical wizard in a cave in Thailand, and is granted the power of the Mythological Greek

Gods. With the utterance of the word, SHAZAM, Billy Batson was transformed into the muscular adult superhero, Captain Marvel (Witney & English, 1941).

While in the modern era, superhero films are some of the highest regarded pieces of entertainment with monstrous budgets, this wasn't always the case. When *Adventures of Captain Marvel* was released, the story was presented in a series of serials. These serials were presented as episodic stories that put our main characters in different situations that plague either a small town or potentially the world. In a retrospective by *Screen Crush,* the serials were praised for the stories that they could tell for their budget, while also staying as authentic as possible to its comic book roots. However, in 1944, one set of serials came out that would turn a blind eye to the stories that came before.

In 1944, *Captain America* was released on movie screens all over the country. After the success of the comics, it became near certain that the character would be just as successful with film fans, but many were not expecting what would be released. While *Adventures of Captain Marvel* was praised for its' keeping of the essences of the comic book stories, *Captain America* found itself stepping in another direction. The films' biggest difference from the comics was that of nearly changing every aspect of the character of Captain America's alter ego, Steve Rogers. However, the film did create a great discussion of sorts. Rather than punching Nazis in the face, *Captain America* completely avoids the topic of World War II. Instead, it followed a near similar model to that of *Adventures of Captain Marvel* but did not see the same sort of response from audiences. This leads to my biggest question: What do you do with piece of World War II propaganda after the war is over?

Leaving the War Behind

Six years after the German Army invaded Poland, World War II was reaching its final act. After the firebombing of Dresden, the German Army's defensive front was starting to

weaken, with limited resources to advance onward continuing to dwindle. For the German Army, it was the suicide of their leader, Adolf Hitler, on April 30, 1945, that was the final nail in the coffin. Quickly appointed Hitler's successor, Grand Admiral Karl Donitz willingly entered peace negotiations.

On May 8th, 1945, World War II in Europe came to an end. As news passed over the countries, crowds of people took to the streets to celebrate, embracing the day as V-E Day (Victory in Europe). On September 2nd, 1945, the Japanese Army formally submitted documents of surrender that were signed aboard the U.S.S. Missouri. This date is now remembered as V-J Day (Victory over Japan).

After the end of the war, *Captain America* comics began to fade away. With no more Nazis in the world to "sock in the jaw", the world began to wonder if it truly needed war propaganda to spark the hope of patriotism. A hero to millions, but without a path, Marvel Comics made an interesting choice in how to handle and honor this prominent patriotic symbol.

In 1954, with the fear of the Soviet Union beginning to show potential for a third World War, Marvel took this as the opportunity to reboot Captain America in a new light. After five-years of hiatus, *Captain America #76* was released rebranding the Star-Spangled Man as the "Commie Smasher" (Moss, 2014). While *Captain America* comics were a huge success during World War II, that same momentum didn't follow Rogers into the 1950s. After a 10-month run, *Captain America* comics were discontinued, leaving the hero suspended in animation (Moss, 2014).

With no more *Captain America* storylines, Marvel began to focus on the more uncanny characters in their lineup in order to bring them all together in a big comic book spectacle, *The Avengers*. It wasn't until 1964 that Captain America resurfaced. In *The Avengers #4¸* the

superhero team comprised of Iron Man, Thor, Ant-Man, The Wasp and The Incredible Hulk

discovered Captain America frozen in ice deep in the Pacific Ocean (Lee & Kirby, The Avengers

#4, 1964). While Captain America was back on the page, his relevance in the mainstream

mindset would not reach near the same volumes as he had in the 1940s for almost 50 years.

Through this understanding Captain America's involvement in World War II, we find the

beginnings of applications of his study. In history classes, educators would be able to present

true World History through the standard practices, while also bringing in the comics to

stimulate the retention of the material. This retention could be through either the

demonstrations of comics playing a major impact on wartime support efforts or the connection

with the same material they are seeing in their popular culture today. These are lessons that

don't end at the Treaty of Versailles; they're generational themes that will continue to find their

way back into our social construct.

Stan Lee's X-Men and the Civil Rights Movement

On January 1st, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

With this act, the proclamation declared "that all persons held as slave" within the rebellious

states "are, and henceforward shall be free (National Archives, 2019)." While, without question,

one of the most important movements in history, The Emancipation Proclamation was still

limited in its powers. Firstly, and most notably overlooked, the declaration did not end slavery

throughout the nation, but only in the areas of the nation that has seceded from the United

States. This meant in the states that remained loyal to the Union, slavery was allowed, states

that were supposedly fighting to end the segregation.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery in the nation, it captured

the hearts and imagination of millions of Americans and fundamentally transformed the

character of the war. After January 1, 1863, every advance of federal troops expanded the

domain of freedom. Moreover, the Proclamation announced the acceptance of black men into

the Union Army and Navy, enabling the liberated to become liberators. By the end of the war,

almost 200,000 Black soldiers and sailors had fought for the Union and freedom (National

Archives, 2019).

Those Who Fought for the Hopeless

On May 19th, 1925, Malcolm Little was born in Omaha, Nebraska to a Baptist preachers'

family. Within his first year of life, Little's family moved to Lansing, Michigan after multiple

threats from the Klu Klux Klan were cast upon his father's church. Sadly, even after moving

hundreds of miles northwest, racism followed the Little family to their new home. In 1931,

Malcom's father was murdered by the Black Legionaries, a white supremacist group located in

the state of Michigan. When brought to the police, authorities did nothing about the murder,

claiming that the incident was an accident (History, 2021).

In the mid-1920s, Max Eisenhardt was born to a middle-class German Jewish family. His

father, Jakob Eisenhardt, was a decorated World War I veteran, but sadly many still looked

down upon them. Rather, the Germans took it upon themselves to look towards the words of

another decorated World War I veteran, Adolf Hitler (Marvel, 2021). With his power, Adolf

Hitler enacted the Nuremburg Laws on September 15, 1935. Just as the Jim Crow Laws did in

the United States for African Americans, these laws villainized the Jewish Race, forbidding any

forms of interaction with those of Jewish blood (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,

2019).

After being denied the benefits from his father's life insurance, Malcolm's mother was incapable of supporting her family, resorting to feeding her children dandelion greens that she pulled from the sidewalk outside of their home. After neighbors reported the potential children endangerment, Malcolm's mother was committed to an insane asylum in 1939 (Mamiya, 2021). From just 13 years of devastating life experiences and bouncing from multiple foster homes, Malcolm Little only saw the world in one way and that he would do whatever it takes to survive and rise above adversity by any means necessary (Mamiya, 2021).

On the night of November 9th 1939, on the orders of their leader, the Nazi Army ransacked Jewish homes, hospitals and schools with sledgehammers. Throughout teachings of history, this night is forever known as the Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass). While Max and his family were able to flee to Poland, there unfortunately captured during the German Army invasion and were forced to the Ghetto in Warsaw. Surrounded by walls more than 10 feet high and topped with barbed wire, the Ghettos were created to keep those of Jewish blood and their ideologies separated from the rest of Warsaw (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2019).

In his teenage years, Malcolm both excelled in the classroom and found himself in the back of cop cars. While dreaming of going onto college and continuing his education, Malcolm's interest in the formal education began to dwindle after an educator suggested that he pursue a career in carpentry due to the color of his skin (Mamiya, 2021). After this discussion, Malcolm fell deeper into his rebellious antics of petty crime and, leading to his expulsion from school after just the seventh grade as well as his first stint in a juvenile home.

After spending one year in the home, Malcolm was released. During the summer, he traveled to the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston to visit his half-sister, Ella Collins. Being as this was the furthest south Malcolm had been since he was an infant, this was a shocking experience. Even though Malcolm had experienced racism in African American communities, this was his first time witnessing it to its truest extent (PBS, 2021). These are the foundations of the man he would become: Malcolm X

Eventually, Max and his family were able to escape the Ghetto, only to be betrayed and captured again. Rather than returning to them the Ghetto, the Gestapo lined up the Eisenhardt family to be executed by firing squad. When the bullets were fired, Max closed his eyes and waited for what was coming. When Max opened his eyes, he found himself buried alive in a mass grave and pulled together the strength to pull himself out of the dirt. There was no explanation for his survival, but it was not long after that he was discovered and sent to Auschwitz (Claremont, 1987).

During his time at Auschwitz, Max spent every single night thinking about the murder of his family and everyday working as a Sonderkommando. Even through all the heartache and beatings he indulged, Max found hope in the form of a Magda, a Romanian woman that he had met during his time in Poland. With Magda by his side, Max would escape from the Auschwitz camp during the October 7, 1944 Revolt, ultimately laying low until the end of the War (Claremont, 1987).

Following the end of the war, Max and Magda moved to the city of Vinnitsa, where Max adopted the named "Magnus". They eventually would have a daughter named Anya, and live peacefully for nearly a decade, until one unfortunate night. During while working at a lumber

mill, Magnus manifested the ability to move the metal around him. These mysterious powers frightened the other workers and lead to an angry mob burning down his home, killing Anya in the process. Magnus returned to the mill the following day and used his new found powers to kill every single person on site. Fearing her husband, Magda left Magnus, leaving him to journey on his own to Israel and adopt a new identity as "Erik Lehnsherr" (Claremont, 1987) (Kelly, 1998). These were the foundations of the Marvel Comics supervillain, *Magneto.*

Let No Man Pull You so Low as to Hate Him.

On January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia. Born to a pastor and a school teacher, Martin grew up in the "Sweet Auburn" neighborhood of the city, home to some of the most prominent and prosperous African Americans in the country (History, 2021). Despite being located in the Southern Area of the nation, many African American ran schools and churches were able to thrive and feel safe from what was being experienced in other areas city.

In 1932, Charles Xavier was born in Westchester, New York to the Dr. Brian Xavier and Sharon Xavier. Due to his father's nuclear research success, the Xavier family lived in a mansion out on the country side. Sadly, during Charles' youth, Brian was killed in an accident surrounding his work, leading to his mother remarrying Kurt Marko. Upon his first meeting with Marko and his son Cain, Charles learned that the two were only wanting the Xavier money, and did not care for Sharon or her son. By learning this, Charles inadvertently discovered that he had the ability to read others minds (Lee, X-Men #12, 1965).

While in contrast to Malcolm Little, Martin Luther King Jr.'s childhood had a stronger foundation of family morals and stability, but that still did not shield him from the prejudice and racist mindset of the country. During his childhood, Martin was told by his closest friend at the

time, a Caucasian boy, that his mother would not allow him to play with Martin anymore and that he would be attending the areas' segregated school (Carson, 2021). However, it wasn't until the death of his grandmother that Martin truly felt the unfairness of the world. As they were very close, Martin took the death of his grandmother very personally, since he had been at a parade without his parents' permission while she was back at home suffering from the fatal heart attack (Carson, 2021). Not long after, at only the age of 12-years-old, he attempted suicide by jumping from a second story window, but was saved by his father (Carson, 2021).

After the wedding, Kurt and Cain moved into the Xavier Mansion, where he pushed aside Sharon, leaving her filled with neglect and leading to alcoholism. This would lead Sharon into the deep depression that she had been fighting after the death of Brian, leaving her son to the mercy of Kurt, who would beat both Charles and Cain. Eventually, Sharon's depression would lead her deeper and deeper into her lost mind, where should would eventually commit suicide (Lee, X-Men #12, 1965).

Soon after the death of Sharon, Cain is expelled from school and returns to the Xavier Mansion, where he ultimately reveals Kurt's motives for wealth to Charles. In his proclamation, Cain reveals that Kurt had been responsible for the accident that had killed Brian, as he was jealous of the wealth and success of the Xavier family. While Charles attempts to rationalize with Cain, after spending time understanding his pain through his telepathic abilities, Cain becomes violent and storms to Kurt's laboratory, where he retrieves chemicals to throw at Charles. Mixing together after crashing on the walls and floor, the chemicals set the house ablaze. Grabbing the boys and pulling them out of the house, Kurt saves their lives, but succumbs to the chemicals toxic fumes. In his final moment, Kurt apologizes to Charles, and

begs him to believe is was an honest accident (Lee, X-Men #12, 1965).

In 1944, King was admitted to Morehouse College in Atlanta, under a special wartime program intended to boost enrollment by admitting promising high-school students. The summer before his enrollment, King spent the summer away from home on a tobacco farm in Connecticut, where he experienced his first significant moments of race relations outside of the South. When he returned home, he reported "Negroes and white go to the same church. I never thought that persons of my race could eat anywhere. (Carson, 2021)"

During the majority of his time at Morehouse, King focused his studies on medicine and law, but turned his focus towards the ministry in his senior, at the request of his father. It was during this time that he met Benjamin Mays, a social gospel activist whose progressive ideology and strong vocal presence had left an impact on King's father. During their studies, Mays convinced Martin of theology that the African American community held complacency in the face of oppression, and that Black churches could push towards social action by criticism of their focus on the hereafter, rather than the here and now (Carson, 2021). These were the foundations of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream.

With his family gone, Charles focused his life on his academics, using his powers and natural genius to exceed in the classroom. By the age of 16, Charles graduates from Bard College with high honors, and earns himself a spot at Pembroke College, University of Oxford. From his studies, Charlies earns a Ph.D. in Genetics, Biophysics, Psychology and Anthropology, all elements he uses to gain more knowledge of his powers, as well superhuman strength Cain would acquire. Eventually, Charles would discover that there were far more individuals with powers, just as special as his own, than he would have imagined and wanted to do what he

could to give them the ability to grow in their strength and understanding. With his remaining

money, Charles would rebuild his family mansion and turn it into a boarding home for gifted

students such as himself, The Mutants (Lee, X-Men #1, 1963). These are the foundations of P

Professor X.

The Movement of Heroes

"Three hundred years of humiliation, abuse and deprivation cannot be expected to find voice in a whisper." – MLK

Four Individuals from four different backgrounds; Two of flesh and bone, two of words

and ink; but all find themselves fighting for the same purpose. However, each are fighting on

their own different level, for their own personal stance. For centuries, Racism, Prejudice and

Hate have shrouded potential for peace all over the world, as many would rather push away

what makes us different, rather than what brings us together.

In 1868, The 14th Amendment to the American Constitution gave Black people equal

protection under the law, with the 15th Amendment granting Black American Men the right to

vote in 1870. Despite the progress, many white Americans, especially those in the Southern

States, had issues with those who were once slaves having the same rights as themselves (Civil

Rights Movement, 2021).

Before the turn of the century, "Jim Crow" laws were enacted in the South to

marginalize Black people, keeping them apart from white people, and eradicating the gains they

had made during Reconstruction. Black people were denied access to the same public services

as white people, as well as the ability to live in many of the same towns and attend the same

school. Interracial marriages were made illegal and their new found ability to vote was stalled

due to their inability to pass new literacy tests (Civil Rights Movement, 2021). While these laws

were not adopted in the Northern States, Black people in these areas were still not excluded from racial discriminations, with voting laws eventually finding their way in all parts of the country.

Nearly a half a century later, when the United States began to take its strides into entering World War II, the quiet fire that had been building within those who stood finally found themselves pushed over the limits. As the need for more individuals to join the home front effort for resources drove women into the workforce, Black Americans were casted aside. This grew aggression, especially when many had put their lives at risk to fight on the battlefields for a country that doesn't see them as equals. Surprisingly, one voice pushed for the rights of the Black American voice; the sitting president of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt. On June 25, 1941, President Roosevelt would issue an executive order into law, opening these wartime jobs for all Americans, regardless of race, creed and color. However, this would only just be a nudge towards the Civil Rights Movement (Civil Rights Movement, 2021). At the center of this movement, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.

From different backgrounds, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr both experienced racial tensions through very different perspective. While most history lessons will paint the two as ideological polar opposites on what should be done about segregation, there is far more to the reality that is overlooked. In an interview on *NPR,* Black Power Scholar, Peniel Joseph took the time to discuss some of the similarities in the mindsets of these two outspoken individuals. In his discussion, he focuses heavily on the violent vs. non-violent separation scholars place on the two and how these two points push their narratives right towards the center (Gross, 2020).

Within Jackson's argument, he presents insight on Malcolm X's famous quote "Justice, by any means necessary." Through Malcolm's words, he expressed the plight and suffering that nearly every Black person in the world has experienced since the dawn of time and how they have just been forced to stand by and let it happen. With the uprising of the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm's call for a revolution is not about striking first, but rather not being afraid to stand their ground and fight back for their lives. These words were also the resonation from his father's death, and how those in power are not going to be there for us when the world pushes them into the dirt (Gross, 2020).

On the discussion for Martin Luther King Jr., the discussion is not as much about his own interpretation as why non-violent demonstration should be the only path, but rather that is should be the first step. Through his demonstrations, Martin Luther King Jr. knew that violence could find its way into his movements and knew his followers would still be prepared for if that was to come to arms, but these were never on his instructions. There was no movement for revenge, only for change and inclusion; for peace. (Gross, 2020)

Two different views on how their goal must be achieved, but the end result of peace and desegregation was always the end result. In a follow up interview Jackson presented for *LiveScience,* they presented the perfect representation for the differences. "I say Malcolm is Black America's prosecuting attorney. He's prosecuting white America for a series of crimes against Black humanity that date back to racial slavery. Dr. King is Black America's defense attorney — but he's very interesting: He defends both sides of the color line." (Gordon, 2021) Two voices, both fighting for the lives of the Black Community, no matter what is takes.

"Bigotry and racism are among the deadliest social ills plaguing the world today," – Stan Lee

When looking at the key figures of the Civil Rights Movement and the way that their personalities play against one another, it leads one to wonder what this discussion has anything to do with Marvel Comics. In the 1960s, African Americans had far more things to worry about than the latest issues of *The Avengers.* However, that doesn't mean the stories, and those writing them, weren't looking to put their own voices into the discussion.

In September of 1963, Marvel Comics creator, Stan Lee released the very first issue of what would become one of their most beloved properties, *The X-Men*. Based around the characters with heightened human abilities known as Mutants, *The X-Men* storylines told of their struggles with the characters personal identities and powers, as well as the conflicts they faced from non-mutants. At the center of this conflict were two individuals who both sought out what would be best for their Mutant Brothers, but rarely saw eye to eye on how to achieve this goal; Charles Xavier and Magneto (Lee, X-Men #1, 1963).

In April of 2014, Brian Hiatt of *Rolling Stones* talked with Stan Lee about the process and inspiration that came to him when creating *The X-Men.* In the interview, Lee discussed many crucial points about crafting the team, including the first criticism he received with their original name:

"He liked the idea, but I wanted to call the book *The Mutants*, and he said, nobody knows what a mutant is, you gotta come up with another name. So I figured, well, they're men and women with extra powers, and their leader is Professor Xavier, why don't I call them the X-Men? I brought that name to my publisher, he said, that's great! And as I walked out of the office, I thought, 'If nobody would know what a mutant is, how is anybody gonna know what an X-Men is?' But I had my name, and I wasn't gonna fight it. That was how it started"

With an identify in place, Lee went on to write the first story that not only introduced the hero team, but also their most formidable foes; The Brotherhood of Mutants, led by Magneto (Hiatt, 2018).

As analyzed in their respective discussions, much like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, both Charles Xavier and Magneto were introduced to the world in very different ways during their youth. One of a silver spoon, while the other had to constantly do whatever he could to survive, the world of man was not perfect to either of them. However, the difference between the two were the potential for hope they both saw.

As Brian and Stan continued their interview, they discussed further the inspiration Lee had behind his characters and the fan perception that followed. Even before Lee wrote the first story for *The X-Men,* he felt an unconscious feeling that these characters' arcs were far more relevant to the times than he had ever connected with before:

"Oh, I was just gonna say, but my favorite villain was Magneto. And I loved the idea of the X-Men being good mutants, and then we'd get a bunch of bad mutants, and we'd make it seem as if the bad mutants had a point there. The human race hated them and feared them and shunned them and was trying to get rid of them, so why should they take it laying down? Why didn't they fight back?
Whereas Professor Xavier said, we've gotta all learn to live together, no matter how different we are. And I felt that represented some schools of thought that exist among the human race now. And it was fun to toy with that concept. And basically, the main idea was to show that bigotry is really a terrible thing, and we should all get along with each other no matter how different we are. That was the main objective. If you needed an objective for a superhero story. (Hiatt, 2018)"

As the 60s continued, Stan Lee pushed the metaphor connecting Professor X with Dr. King's desire for humanitarian harmony, while also presenting further insight into Magneto and Malcolm X's more extremist attitudes toward the defense of his people. In November 1965, Stan Lee introduced a new type of villain that went after both the X-Men and The Brotherhood of Mutants called The Sentinels. Created by the non-mutant government scientist, Bolivar Trask, these robots were created with the single task of hunting down and killing every single mutant in the world. A direct reflection of the world, The Sentinels were created to mirror the actions of police brutality aimed directly at the marginalized African American communities by way of keeping them in their place (Ciampaglia, 2021).

Even outside of the stories of the *X-Men*¸ Stan Lee was also not afraid to just be straight

forward with his personal opinions on what was going on in the world. This led to Stan's most

valuable weapon against bigotry and racial discrimination: The Bullpen Bulletins.

In December of 1965, Stan Lee debuted a new addition to his monthly issues that he

called "The Bullpen Bulletins." On these pages, Stan allowed his writing staff and artists to

connect with their audience on a more personal level and defining Marvel's mission to the

greater good. Two years later, Stan would eventually begin adding his own insight onto the

pages that he dubbed "Stan's Soapbox." (Beard, 2019)

With a name paying homage to those before him, *Stan's Soapbox* was inspired by how

corner orators and barkers would stand on wooden boxes, as a mean to garner the attention of

the town folk around them and amplify their voices over the crowd. In these write ups, Stan

used his platform as a way to talk directly to his fans and be far more open than any of this

"bullpen" members were willing to push towards. Rather than just pulling his readers into

discussions about past issues or questions about their characters, Lee wanted to discuss his

views on humanitarianism and the hardships going on in the world. While he understood that

his younger fans would more than likely just brush off the "soapbox", he felt that the older

audiences would read this and take his message to heart (Beard, 2019).

In 1970, after criticism towards the "soapbox" came back from fans who felt the stories

didn't have to always be presented with themes or morals and humanitarian insight, Stan

argued back in the best way he could:

> "It seems to me," he wrote, "that a story without a message, however subliminal, is like a man without a soul." He went on to conclude that "None of us live in a vacuum" and that no one "remained untouched by the everyday events about us."

Through Stan's vision, Marvel Comics has been and always will be a reflection of the world that they encompass. Even after Stan stepped back from writing the "soapbox" himself in the 1980s, his team continued to show his empathy towards the world's issues. It was the love for his characters and the messages that fans took from his stories that kept Stan Lee going for nearly 80 years, until his death in 2018 (Ciampaglia, 2021).

On November 12, 2018, at the age of 95 years old, Stan Lee passed away peacefully in his sleep. The news of his death inspired waves of emotions and tributes for the storytelling all across the world. Stan Lee's message to the world was powerful, to say the least, and inspired many individuals all over the world to find their voice and strength. With the *X-Men* and the creation of the first African Superhero, Black Panther, Stan Lee fought back against those who told him that these stories will never make an impact and will be forgotten over time (Kandell & Webster, 2018). However, Stan never backed down from his cause and for that, we could never thank him enough. *Excelsior!*

In our foundations of education, we are taught that our minds should be free to voice opinions that are pushed beyond our normal social constructs, yet we are often so willing to leave voices behind. As a pioneer of our current pop culture, Stan Lee's voice should be held to the same degree as that of Martin Luther King Jr. for his contributions to the Civil Rights Movement and his continuing insight on the world. While history of our world must always be placed at the top of the education pedestal, the value of man's desire to make the world a better place for their fellow human cannot be displaced.

How the Past Inspires the Present: Superhero Films on Screen
In these final arguments, which will be discussing the production history, storylines and reception of the films based on Marvel Comics, we shall be diving into the potential for the

applications for the films in the classroom setting. Just at their published sources, films based on Marvel Comics hold the potential to teach new generations themes that we see in both the past and present; Racial Tension, Outbreaks of War and how their stories change with the ever-changing world.

Bringing the tension to the Big Screen: X-Men

In 1984, Marvel Comics writers and Editors, Gerry Conway and Roy Thomas, wrote a screenplay for a feature film based on *The X-Men*. With the rights to the film being owned by *Orion Pictures*, at the time, development of the film never made it past the first steps of production, due to the studio's recent strings of box office failures. For the following five years, Stan Lee and Chris Claremont, a Marvel Comics writer, entered multiple discussions to bring their extraordinary heroes to the big screen, facing multiple failures along the way due to studio rights being passed along or director changes. Eventually, after the success of their animated television series based on the characters, 20th Century Fox received the rights to *X-Men* franchise and immediately began pre-production (Lee, et al., 2000).

By December 1996, Bryan Singer, fresh off his Oscar-nominated film, *The Usual Suspects,* was hired to direct the film naturally titled, *X-Men*. By the following summer, Ed Solomon was hired on to pen the screenplay, after his success on bringing another comic book entity to the big screen, *Men in Black*. In their collaboration, Singer and Solomon dove back into the roots of the *X-Men* origins, utilizing Stan's original inspirations to set the stand for the dichotomy of two rival mutant teams; Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. While the emphasis on Stan Lee's vision was praised by the team at 20th Century Fox, the overall treatment was rejected due to an overload of characters and storylines. With the assistance of

Tom DeSanto, Singer developed a new treatment with David Hayter taking over screenwriting

duties. (Hughes, 2003).

On July 12, 2000, *X-Men* was released to a positive reception from both critics and

moviegoers. In their review of the film, Kenneth Turan of *The New York Times* praised the film

for its character development and narrative themes, however was more critical of the how

much the film attempts to pack into the under 2-hour runtime:

""X-Men" squeezes an awful lot--maybe too much--into a brisk 95 minutes. There are ten mutants, each

with a different superpower to introduce, a plot to unfold, jokes to make, visuals complex enough to employ more

than a dozen effects houses to display and enough action to keep sixty stunt people occupied. So much is happening

you feel the immediate need of a sequel just as a reward for absorbing it all (Turan, 2000)."

When watching the film, while Turan makes valid arguments for some of the film's

overindulgences of story, it is the themes that ring strong from beginning to end. In the opening

scene of the film, we are thrown right into the origin story of the film's main villain, Magneto.

Just as millions of other lives had, young Magneto and his family are corralled towards the gas

chambers at Auschwitz. For the opening of a superhero film, which come from the colorful and

bright imagery, this scene is directed to show the pain and reality that was endured during the

Holocaust (Singer B. , 2000).

What is important to note when pushing for the applications of the Superhero genre

into the education is that we're not ignoring the history that has been taught for multiple

generations, only implementing a visual stimulus for cognitive retention. With the facts of what

happened at Auschwitz, educators and their students can draw parallels between the events

that took place in the 1940s and the events that are being shown on screen. The parallels can

also be drawn by bringing in the source material and origins of the films into the discussion as well. Let's look over another moment in the film near the mid-point.

After taking one of Charles Xavier's students' hostage at a train station, Magneto and The Brotherhood of Mutants find themselves surrounded by the police. With his powers, Magneto throws the barricading polices out of their way, and takes control of the guns that were just pointed back at himself. By means of preventing Magneto from killing any of the officers, Charles takes control of the mind of Sabretooth, a member of The Brotherhood. While Charles does wrap Sabretooth's large, clawed hand and Magneto's neck, he only wishes to rationalize with his foe and is unwilling to kill him as a means to save the officers (Singer B. , 2000).

When paired with their respective histories, the knowledge of Stan Lee's inspiration and how the moment is portrayed, classes will be able to draw parallels between this interaction and the dichotomy of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Even by the date of this publication, this moment resonates through, not only the past, by also the present day of 2021. As The Mutants fight for what they call "peace", police officers stand by their own codes, especially when they are shrouded by their own fear towards their superhero adversaries. Throughout the following two decades, subsequent films in the *X-Men* film franchise continued to portray the racial struggle between mutant and man, with particular installments taking place in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 2011, *X-Men*: *First Class*, a soft-reboot of the franchise, took audiences back to 1962 and told the origin stories of Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr. At the high of tension between the Soviet Union and the United States of America, Charles and Erik form a team of mutants to

fight to combat against another legion of mutants to seek to gain off a potential war between the two opposing countries (Vaughn, 2011). While on the surface the film portrays a James Bond-esque adventure, underneath lies a much more complex story dealing with the growing tensions of racial division during the time.

Just as in the comics, *First Class* portrayed the vastly different environments that Charles and Erik lived through during their lives. While Erik was doing whatever he could to survive during the Holocaust, Charles was at home in a large mansion protected from the outside world. While Charles was completing his studies at Oxford in order to become a voice for the mutant race, Erik sought revenge against those who hurt him and painted him as the villain from birth. Just as Stan Lee had, director Matthew Vaughn tapped into the histories and dichotomy between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X in order to add to the separation between our two leads (Vaughn, 2011).

In classrooms, *First Class* can be used to analyze multiple areas of history and the separation of politics and race. After teaching students about the buildup of tensions during the Cold War and the war at home for Racial Desegregation, the incorporation of the *X-Men* comics and the films the inspired into the discussion will promote further discussions into how these events effected media, both during and after the events transpired. As shown by Jabari Sellars' study in the Harvard *Graduate School of Education,* there are educators already pushing for the call for comic books to be used in the classroom, after they have experienced success through their students heightened understanding for themes and reality (Sellars, 2017). This is only the beginning of the theory, and there will always be new ways to push the material further.

How the World hasn't changed: Captain America

In April 1997, Marvel entered negotiations with film producers, Mark Gordon and Gary Levinsohn to bring the superhero, Captain America, to the big screen (Fleming, 1997). This would have become the third feature film to bring the World War II hero to the big screen, after the 1944 serials and the 1990 film, the latter of which received an overwhelmingly negative reception from critics and audiences. By 2000, Marvel had teamed with Artisan Entertainment to begin production of the film, but a lawsuit over the rights of the character quickly killed all the momentum of getting the film produced (Amdur, 2003) Once the lawsuit was settled in 2003, Marvel, once again, entered negotiations with film studios to bring Captain America to the big screen, with Warner Bros. being the frontrunner to acquire the rights. However, producer David Maisel suggested that, rather than selling the film rights, Marvel self-produce the film themselves (Masters, 2016).

After acquiring a $525 million investment to produce ten feature films, Captain America remained at the top of their priority. By April of 2006, screenwriter David Self was hired to pen the feature for Marvel Studios, with Joe Johnson in negotiations with the studio to direct. Sadly, in November of 2007, the film put on hold, once again, after the Writers Guild of America went on strike. However, in January of 2008, Marvel quickly reached an agree with the Writers Guild of America that bring writers back onto the project, leading to David Self being replaced by Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely (Kit & Fernandez, 2008). This change in writing staff, with the official hiring of Joe Johnston, led to the film changing from a modern day setting to taking the hero back to World War II.

On July 22, 2011, *Captain America: The First Avenger* was released as the fifth installment of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe.* In the film, the origin story of Captain America is

put on display, as we watch scrawny Steve Rogers transformed into the super solider and take

on Nazi scientist, Johann Schmidt (Johnston, 2011). Upon its release, *The First Avenger* received

positive reception from critics and audiences, with acclaim aimed towards the production

design and themes of the 1940s. In his review for the film, critics Roger Ebert acclaimed the

themes ripped directly from the comic books and the atmosphere of the war:

> "I enjoyed the movie. I appreciated the 1940s period settings and costumes, which were a break with the usual generic cityscapes. I admired the way that director Joe Johnston propelled the narrative. I got a sense of a broad story, rather than the impression of a series of sensational set pieces. If Marvel is wise, it will take this and *Iron Man* as its templates (Ebert, 2011)"

Just as Roger Ebert expressed, the setting and the aesthetic of the 1940s brings such a

unique touch to the film, and goes brings the ideals of the past into the modern day big screen.

From the first frame of Steve Rogers on screen, the Boy Scout nature that was in the original

comics resonates through his desire and call to action that feels lifted, not only from the

comics, but from history itself. As discussed in the history of the *Captain America* comic books,

the original stories hit the stands at a time when the war effort was calling for young American

Men to perform their civil duty and fight for the freedoms of their country (National D-Day

Memorial Foundation, 2020). What is beautiful about Steve Rogers' arc throughout his film is

that while he understands that the Nazis are the bad guys, he sees the war effort not just about

killing the enemy but about "stopping the bullies of the world."

In bringing *The First Avenger* into the academic setting, the most crucial point of the film

to emphasis is when Steve Rogers is denied his opportunity to fight in the war, even after

gaining his superhero abilities, but instead become a promotional piece for the war. Through

this sequence, we watch Captain America touring with the USO to promote war bonds for the

soldiers overseas risking their lives for the cause. With the nation falling in love with him,

Captain America would also become the subject of film serials and war propaganda posters, with comic books being sent overseas featuring the super solider "socking Hitler in the jaw."

While *X-Men* was showing parallels between Charles Xavier and Martin Luther King Jr., *The First Avenger* became a near direct reflection of what was actually going on in the world during the 1940s. While the film is a fictitious story of superheroes and villains, Captain America was still a crucial piece of the warfront effort in our own reality. Comics were actually sent across the pond to reinforce our troops of their purpose for fighting the good fight, while at home Captain America was inspiring those who couldn't fight to do their part and join the home front efforts.

In the films' climax, with bombs heading straight for the United States, Steve sacrifices himself for the greater good of humanity, taking control of the planes and plunging them into the Arctic Ocean. Lost at Sea, the world mourns for their fallen hero as they celebrate the end of the war. However, unbeknownst to the world, this would not be the end of Captain America's journey. Just as with the comics, with the end of World War II, Captain America was not killed in action, but rather just "put on ice" until the day the world needed him once more. Even if that day would have to wait 70 years.

In 2014, after Captain America returned to the world in *The Avengers*, Marvel Studios released the second installment of the *Captain America Trilogy*, *The Winter Soldier.* In the film, Steve Rogers has become a member of the secret government agency, "S.H.I.E.L.D". On a mission to rescue hostages, Steve finds his second-in-command, Natasha Romanoff, performing a secret task for the organization's leader, Nick Fury, without his knowing. After confronting Fury, Steve finds himself placed in the center of a government conspiracy operation to put guns

on the enemies of the United States, even before they have done anything worth their extreme (Russo & Russo, 2014).

While in his origins, and *The First Avenger*, Captain America was used as an example for what patriotism should be, *The Winter Soldier* presents the question: "What is Patriotism?" While this sound contradictory, let's look at what has happened to and in the United State that has changed what is patriotism since World War II.

Firstly, and by all means the most important, The United States had experienced the events of 9/11. The first major attack on the soil of the United States since the attack on Pearl Harbor, 9/11 is, still to this date, the deadliest terrorist attack in human history. This changed the mindset of millions in the world, with conspiracy theories to still be crafted about the extent of who was actually behind the attacks, many of which believe the United States government was behind it themselves (Graff, 2020). Secondly, in 2013, less than a year before this film's release, NSA Contractor Edward Snowden released insider information that the government has been collecting the telephone records of nearly every single American with a telephone (BBC, 2014). In both of these cases, the world began to question whether the actions of our governments truly are for our best interests, or to insight fear for our actions. This leads us back to *The Winter Soldier.*

While *X-Men* and *The First Avenger* could be brought into discussions of history and those who changed the world for the better, *The Winter Soldier* presents the argument for discussions of humanitarianism. While watching *The Winter Soldier*, the narrative presents the arguments of trust and responsibility, while also stripping apart an American symbol away from its original purpose. This can be connected to the current trend of individuals kneeling during

the national anthem as they don't see the just the symbol of patriotism, but rather a piece of the criminal actions that millions stood idly by and allowed (Branch, 2020). It's these teachings and usage of comic book stories and films that can present the strong purpose for the advantages and for the comic book superhero genre in the classroom settings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is far more to comic books than just what is on the page. When presented with the historical context by which it was crated, these stories present a lens into the reality of war, or the class divide that still plagues our society to this day. Educators have long pushed for their relevance in the classrooms, and I stand there is even more to unravel in that realm. Whether or not the impact, I hope, this study makes on the world is substantial, if I can change the mind of at least one young student, I find it hard to deny that the potential is there.

While there is no perfect answer to the reasoning for bring comic books into the classroom, this highlights purposeful advantages to their stories. Popular Culture, while mostly used for commercial profiteering and monetization, is a part of who we are as humans. While Egyptians had calligraphy and tapestries that presented their stories, films and books are our windows into who we are as human beings and the stories that shaped our being. Do we wish to let our own culture fade into obscurity, but continue to study the past? Eventually our stories will become the past, and should be celebrated for what they were.

When looking through the history of Captain America and The X-Men, it becomes clear that there is far more substance to the material than we can see on the surface and that is all because of Stan Lee. Through his platform, Stan Lee chose to write stories that put the issues of

the world on display and lead a call to action for change. He inspired a world at war to do whatever they could for the freedom of the human spirit, rather than turn a blind eye to the darkness. These stories must be become a piece of not only our history and our present, but as tools to reframe the future and the young minds that will be our leaders one day.

Do I believe that comics can outweigh use of classic novels and textbooks in? Absolutely not. However, what is going is to make a longer impact on the world than the films and comics that are have grown into cultural experiences that ring through people of different races, genders and social classes? We're here to change the future, and what better way to do that than to reframe what defies our pasts, presents and our being. In the words of Stan Lee:

"Every day, there's a new development. There's no limit to the things that are happening. "

Excelsior.

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APPENDIX

Setting a problem: a suitably presented question, the answer to which is found by exploring and experimenting.

- Suggesting an action: children suggest an action for carrying out the given activity.
- Aids: must be prepared in advance.
- Expressing a supposition: expectations are expressed, in our case simple children's hypotheses.
- Realization: includes several actions; each child can choose his/her own.
- Observation: children must be shown what to focus on.
- Record of observation: in a symbolic form.
- Conclusion: to find out whether the correct answer to the question was found.

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