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Big Screen Heroes with Paper Voices: A Superhero Adaptation Research Essay

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A Superhero Adaptation Research Essay

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1. Introduction and Origin Story

Superheroes may have taken over your phone, tablet, and television screens through the endless adaptations that pelt us from upon high mouse-shaped ears, but their rich history goes back much further than that; they have gripped the public imagination since their creation in comic strips published in newspapers almost one-hundred years ago. But, why exactly has their effect on popular culture, and their subsequent adaptations in various forms of media been so pervasive in the last twenty-five years? What makes these stories and comic book characters, and particularly Marvel comic book characters, so interesting to modern audiences? This essay demonstrates how the adaptation of superhero characters has embedded comics in mainstream media, while also simultaneously changing comic book characters and their lore through media adaptations. Marvel comic book characters in particular have had unparalleled success through their continued adaptation from comic books into new forms of media over the years, and a few select Marvel comic book characters will make up the case study portion and research backbone of this essay.

One way in which Marvel comic book characters have excelled in terms of adaptation is through their commercial success in Hollywood films where they change their characterization as they are adapted to better suit audiences. This malleability of their characterization stems from the diverse lineup of characters present in the comic book stories and the ways in which the film genre itself deals with change. Genre and character become fluid as creators choose to alter and adapt characters to better suit the new media into which they are adapting these comic book characters and stories. Because of the malleability of comic book characters when they are adapted in new media, along with the impact adaptation has played on comic books and comic book characters, we see a sort of symbiosis between comic books and their subsequent

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adaptations begin to take place. The adaptations begin to influence the existing source material, and vice-versa. In the adaptation of Marvel comic books and characters, we can see that comics began their journey to mainstream success from even the earliest of their iterations of certain stories and characters. By examining their effect on the zeitgeist, we can begin to understand how something once niche like comic books became a central pillar of the cultural zeitgeist through their adaptations in diverse media, reshaping that media and the source comic books along the way.

The basis for this project stems from the idea that comic book superheroes are treated as valuable intellectual property, along with how they have been adapted across media, and how they have changed the status quo of the entertainment industry. How has the commercialization of this source material, that was originally aimed at targeting children with spare pocket change, changed in terms of intellectual property adaptation and building billion-dollar cinematic universes? From theme-park assets, to action figures and merchandising, to videogames, comic books as a form of popular media have leapt from page to screen to corporate enterprises. Since the sale of Marvel Comics to The Walt Disney Company in 2009, the comic book company has been progressively "milked" for their superhero intellectual property through the continued reliance of pre-existing worldbuilding and characters in Hollywood films. What started out with more mainstream superheroes in the Marvel Cinematic Universe like Thor and Captain America, has now been expanded in movie theater megaplexes to include such D-list characters as Star-Lord and Shang-Chi. Through the usage of these characters as commodified intellectual property, this research paper will examine how these intellectual properties have become such pillars in the zeitgeist across the medium of film, streaming, and video games, but as well how, in turn, comic books began to be affected as a result.

The mainstream success of superhero adaptations has led to a booming media adaptation industry in both the United States and worldwide. The films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe for instance have grossed nearly thirty billion dollars, unadjusted for inflation, over thirty-three films in its, relatively short, fifteen-year lifecycle as a shared universe. The unapparelled success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe speaks for itself as an unrivaled source of mainstream storytelling that works in unison with existing source material. The cultural implications of a sheer phenomenon like the above makes a research project such as this, that aims to study causes and effects of this symbiotic relationship, an intriguing point of scholarly note. But what about the human element within all of that skin-tight superhero spandex? Should this project matter to you? It certainly matters to me, and by highlighting why, maybe I can help you identify and understand your own relationship to the numerous comic book adaptations that seem to be a never-ending swath of media ready for audience consumption.

My rationale for this project stems from a genuine deep-rooted passion for the subject matter and, like the characters in the comic books themselves, I have my own origin story to tell. My personal love and history with superheroes starts not-unlike Peter Parker's origin story and subsequent transformation into Spider-Man. I was bitten by an ant as a child. Although slightly less radioactive than Spider-Man's spider bite, I assume anyway, anaphylactic shock is a real kicker. My parents were told that it was a miracle that I pulled through and they decided that I shouldn't spend much time outside given how prevalent ants are in Georgia. How do you fill the void of a child being unable to go outside and play? With copious amounts of television, films, reading, and toys. Comic books became my outlet for exploring my imagination and captured it like nothing else. Marvel was my brand, like a smoker's loyalty to a cigarette company, although I didn't mind switching teams and reading Batman's adventures in DC Comics. My love of the

storytelling that comic books and comic book adaptations offered helped me absorb facets of life that would have otherwise escaped me in my sheltered life.

I lived vicariously through the forms of media I devoured, and that media made me want to live out my dreams in the form of merchandise, with that merchandising principally taking the form of action figures. Action figures of the characters I loved in comic book form became my go to toy. These plastic superheroes became my friends, and fortunately for me the back of the packaging they were encased in often contained story details and names and powers. I became obsessed with learning all about these new acquaintances of mine. The Marvel action figures I often brought home from various stores often came with a comic book included, and in that, I learned of my own passion for storytelling. By constructing my own action scenes with these toys, and reading all these fascinating and outlandish details, my world grew around me. I began crafting my own narratives that I found wildly entertaining. I made them obey the rules and information that I gathered from comic books. I began seeking more knowledge from other comic books and superhero films. Each detail brought with it more opportunity for me to further my own play narratives. I would seek out character guidebooks at book fairs and browse the internet for all the latest information about these characters I loved. The love of characters brought me to my love of writing and narrative storytelling and lore.

My own plastic-laden adaptations within the confines of my childhood bedroom of these characters notwithstanding, comic book film adaptation equally informed my sensibilities and love of storytelling as a child. Through adaptation in film and video games, superhero characters began to take on a new life in my mind. I could visualize these characters in a more direct manner and through media forms that allowed me to embrace a new role…that of an audience member. As an audience member, even as a child, one of the most interesting things of note has

always been the ways in which comic book characters and stories have been changed and shaped by their adaptation in media.

Superhero comic book characters and stories are often changed through the adaptation process. Sometimes the changes are small, a slightly different origin for a character or an updated timeline to better suit a modern audience perhaps, but the changes can add up and inform the depictions of the character across new forms of media, and as well retroactively making changes to the comic book counterpart themselves when translated back. The changes have begun to be studied by those in academia and are an interesting peek into the way that adaptation can alter and inform the original work. One of the key takeaways many scholars have begun to note is that superhero comic books and their adaptations form a sort of symbiotic relationship with one another, and many scholars have undertaken research into this fascinating correlation as being unique to this genre and its characters. Ian Gordon's book *Film and Comic Books,* notes that comic books and comic book films aren't always appreciated as equals, but rather that they are unique and should be studied as separate entities that inform each other. On this, Gordon states that "as popular texts, a clear discrepancy exists between the cultural status of comic books and their filmic counterparts, one that certainly contributes to the subordination of the former at the industrial level" (66). The cultural status of comic books as being "subordinate" or lesser than their film counterparts is certainly not a new ideology, but one that can be argued as short sighted at best and remarkably limited at worst. This is because films based on existing intellectual property do "owe" at least partially some of their successes and failures to the source material.

But because of this symbiotic dynamic, comic books and comic book media adaptations deserve and warrant equal scholarly study into the ways their relationship informs each other.

Scholarly research of comic books is not a new phenomenon, but the ways in which comic books inform and change across adaptations between each other, and the symbiotic relationship they form in turn, is a newer field of study. The ways that media adaptation changes a character or storyline from the comic books, and the subtle cause-and-effect that they can have on each other, can make lasting changes on characters and lore and will be a primary point of study for this essay.

Marvel Comic book characters primarily exist in a shared universe, one that has been adapted in new media primarily through the landmark Marvel Cinematic Universe. This shared universe concept offers a unique challenge to filmmakers and fans because changes in one project, or changes and story progression that a character goes though, tend to effect other characters and storylines as the overall narrative progresses. Another point of note, for this essay, between the superhero characters and the fascinating relationship between adaptation and source material, is how changes from one form of media can often bleed over into the other retroactively. But before either the cause-or-effect of character adaptations can be examined, we must first examine how exactly these characters exist according to the scholars that have studied them.

Comic book films, and particular the films and adaptations of Marvel Comics characters, have seen quite the uptick in scholarly research researching how these characters have been adapted. Adaptation in different media forms has allowed the characters within Marvel comic books to become household names and, in turn, develop a cultural following that was once only reserved for the most famous superhero characters like Batman and Superman. Spider-Man, The Avengers, and now many more secondary and tertiary characters have been allowed to shine in the Hollywood spotlight thanks to adaptation. Marvel Comics often treats their characters as a

source of story and licensing potential, and in this way they are guilty of commercializing the characters themselves over the character's development, in a way that is somewhat unique for film adaptation. However, certain character, like Wanda Maximoff the Scarlet Witch, or the biracial Spider-Man; Miles Morales, have progressed greatly through their own adaptations in new forms of media. The ways in which Marvel Comics have been noted to treat their characters as commodities unto themselves is of great interest to scholars like Ian Gordon and more. Marvel Comics, including its film branch Marvel Studios, has developed quite a reputation for treating its characters as a commodity and using that commodity to the full potential of record-breaking profits with tremendous financial success, but has also been labeled as producing films and shows that are homogenized and bland surface-level entertainment.

On the notion of character as commodity, Ian Gordon's book makes specific note that Marvel Studios in particular has a "main strategy for negotiating these threats to its publishing interests has been an attempt to rebrand itself not as a comic book publisher, but as a licensor of characters. Thus, it becomes crucial to understand the logic behind the branding strategies that Marvel has employed especially if we want to understand the effect that rebranding will have on comics both as a business and in their reception" (69). Gordon argues that, at its core, Marvel treats its characters as a commodity, as opposed to solely the basis for comic book storytelling and literary output these days. Marvel films and comics therefore have a tendency to be labelled as theme-park attractions rather than as character driven pieces of media, but this accusation can't simply be taken at face value or handwaved away as a complete dismissal for reasons this essay will address in the later character study section. From an industry perspective however, as Gordon addresses it, it is important to view the relationship between superhero comic characters

and the films and media they are adapted within as being heavily related to each other in the terms of business and audience reception.

The relationship between commercial success in the comic book film business, and the audience relationship to superhero comic book characters and storylines, is one of unique scholarly interest as well. That is because comic books are regularly dwarfed in terms of monetary success by the hyper-successful films on which they are based. For superhero films specifically, adaptation has proven to be a financially successful endeavor over their paper predecessors, and several scholars remark upon the newfound success that adaptation has brough for comic books.

An interesting scholarly point of note to this essay is the study of how comic books and superheroes have been adapted in different media forms. The scholarly study of that particular topic is, by all accounts, still in its relative infancy. This is noted by film and comic book scholar Blair Davis, in his book on the subject *Movie Comics: Page to Screen/Screen to Page*, in which the scholar points to the need of further study on the subject and how specifically the medium of film and comic books warrant study as to how they are adapted and the role that plays on characterization in different eras. On this subject, he notes that

> although hundreds of comics characters have been adapted to film and television, few
> scholarly studies of this phenomenon exist… Despite this chronological parallel in the
> development of the two media, there has been relatively little scholarship directly
> comparing the historical interplay between them across multiple eras. (3)

The need for further study has grown in recent history, with the films of the Marvel Cinematic Universe regularly hitting the billion-dollar mark and becoming touchstones of the cultural zeitgeist. Davis argues that this is because

movies and comics have a long history as allies, with their affiliation seen across a range

of different forms. The interplay between film and comic books in particular has become

a growing area of scholarly interest, fueled by the blockbuster successes of various

adaptations of Marvel and DC Comics superhero titles such as Iron Man and Superman.

(6)

As Davis argues, the interplay between film superhero comic books and how they have

influenced each other do represent two very interesting points of scholarly study. Davis goes so

far as to paint the relationship between comic books films and the works they are adapting as

valuable examples of how Hollywood interacted with other media in the early to mid-

twentieth century. Superhero comics were a vital part of the larger media environment of

this period, and the various adaptations examined herein demonstrate the regular

interplay between comics and other media throughout these decades. (11)

Davis mentions that the regular interplay between comics and other forms of media make up the

point about comics and films being allies, and this speaks to a larger point about the greater

relationship between the two media forms. It doesn't take much but a quick Google search to see

how many writers, actors, and directors credit some form of their own style with the style of

comic books and comic book creators. Many of the modern great filmmakers, like Quentin

Tarantino for instance, have made their own positive view of comic books known. Tarantino has

used his appreciation for the superhero comic book artform to sometimes humorously examine

the greater mythology involving superheroes and made his own observations about them known.

One of the main draws for comic books as a source material for anyone, including Hollywood

studios, fans, and filmmakers is the rich tapestry of mythology and lore they offer.

When viewed as a source of mythology within popular culture, many scholars make note of seeing these characters as a form of modern mythology. The modern depiction of superheroes can spring to mind classic imagery of literary and biblical heroes, like Hercules, Odysseus, David (of Goliath fame). Scholars and authors, like Annessa Ann Babic, in Babic's anthology of essays *Comics As History, Comics As Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society, and Entertainment*, highlights the intersectional ways that comics operate as windows into both historical and mythological content from the era in which they are written. In this way, it can then be understood that comics operate in the way of a modern-day parable and this notion will be addressed in a later part of this essay. Babic also argues that the cross-disciplinary role of Marvel and DC comics on the zeitgeist cannot be understated, and the superhero comic book medium is inherently suited for that role. On this, Babic states

> the life of comics is interesting, but the stories within their pages are more complex than a tale of a hero surpassing a villain. They are political, romantic, and captivating. The stories of comics are also twofold. They work through words and pictures, both of which are needed for understanding and immersion into the fictional world of good versus evil. When examined by themselves, comics have their own history. Debates arise about mass publishers, such as DC Comics and Marvel Comics, monopolizing the market with watered-down text, a single genre within a genre, and preventing independent printers from making a mark. These debates are valid, but they are not the only discourses concerning comics. Political language within comics, their intersection with patriotism and national honor (most notably during World War II), their gender dynamics, and more shape their complex place within literature and history. (12)

Within this collection of essays, Babic highlights the way comic books have also been welcomed by academia as a source of legitimate scholarly study and a viewpoint for modern myth and political discourse. Babic goes to further state that, "the continual use of comics for the retelling of classic tales and current events demonstrates that the genre has long passed the phase of for children's eyes only" (xii). Understanding that comics have been welcomed by those in academia as a legitimate source of scholarly study, we can now begin to break down how comics have been adapted in media. To start, it is important to explore what defines film adaptation at its very core, and the ways that scholars view Marvel and other superhero comic book film adaptations overall.

2. Adaptation

In film circles, adaptation is common practice. At its heart, the practice of adaptation is best described by film scholar David Richard, in his book *Film Phenomenology and Adaptation: Sensuous Elaboration*, as a sense-based experience that is inherently shaped by audience expectation and value. On this, Richard notes that successful adaptation lies in how an audience responds and, more specifically, explains that "the spectator's sensual experience acts as a form of translation and transformation that 'fleshes out' an adaptation's source material" (34). For Richard, the role of audience, in the terms of successful adaptation of intellectual property, is a passive one, yes; but also one that involves the audience itself taking on the most important role. For audience members, transitioning characters and stories across a medium because they have a pre-established relationship with the source material is an integral role. The audience might already be familiar with a story or character, and for comic book films that is often the case, or they might see a work that has been adapted and choose to seek out more material across forms of media to continue their newfound interest in a particular franchise or character.

As far as other forms of media, merchandising, and adaptation, like toys and video games go, it has become more and more apparent that the role of audience within an adaptation is becoming increasingly important. To draw a parallel between my own former role of a child manufacturing stories with action figures, the audience often have a pre-established relationship with these stories and characters. On this similar point, Film phenology scholar David Richard makes note of the ways in which adaptation has changed to suit audiences over the years. Richard notes that

> Although film and theatrical adaptations form the bulk of adaptation…scholars are increasingly examining a dizzying range of cultural products such as comic books, videogames, toys, new media, social media and cultural practices, including GIFs and digital communication, and fan participation. But what unites these diverse forms of adaptation is us: they're beholder. It is our sensual grasp of an adaptation that becomes the grounds for making sense of them as adaptations. Further, embracing a sensual approach to adaptation recognizes not only adaptation as occurring between forms, but also the adaptation of sense modalities as they criss-cross in the embodied imagination. (204)

Richard highlights the sense of ownership that fans of these properties and characters feel and the way that sense of ownership at least tangentially gives the audience the same sense of authority and ownership as a creator, director, or writer of superheroes and comic books.

From this work, it is apparent that Richard is arguing that adaptation of a work makes the role of the audience that much harder, because it allows them to walk into a film with at least a base-level understanding of what an adaptation should entail, and therefore also have a preconceived notion as to how certain things might play out in that adaptation. The audience can

dislike, or at the very least be hesitant or resistant to changes made from the source material. The audience might even enjoy an adaptation more than the original work. In comic book adaptations specifically, the characters and lore already have a built-in fanbase, which aids in recouping financial budgets for Hollywood and corporate entities, but audience expectation can also be detrimental if the audience leaves disappointed based on their pre-conceived notions. Audience appreciation of an adapted work has led to the overwhelming success of the Marvel comic book film genre on the whole however. Many scholars have even begun the painstaking process of examining what makes this genre tick through their own research, and they have also started to isolate and understand the growing pains associated with adapting between new forms of media.

For the superhero genre specifically, adaptation has proven to be a valuable transition of media forms, and several scholars remark upon the newfound success that adaptation has brought for expanding the audience past comic books aficionados alone. Liam Burke, in the book The *Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre*, for example, dissects the intricacies in which the Marvel superhero genre has taken over Hollywood multiplexes. He states, "As traditional comic book reading is becoming an increasingly rarefied pursuit, the attendance of comic book film adaptations regularly dwarfs the sales of the comics" (132). From Burke's work, it can be extrapolated that, comic book films have punched a hole through the metaphorical wall of the zeitgeist into the mainstream. Their paper counterparts however haven't always maintained the same level of success that the films have enjoyed. What was once niche in its broad appeal has not only been grown exponentially but has allowed audiences to enjoy and appreciate characters and stories that would've otherwise missed them had they solely remained a staple of fandom and comic book stores alone. The sheer mass-market appeal that a character like, say the multicultural Spider-Man Miles Morales, now has

because he has been exposed to a much wider audience than only comic book readers cannot be understated and undervalued.

What was once niche in its broad appeal has not only grown exponentially but has allowed audiences to enjoy and appreciate characters and stories that would've otherwise missed. The expansion of the comic book film genre to include more niche superheroes is an interesting move to say the least, and there is honestly no way that some casual fans wouldn't have missed out on certain landmark tertiary characters had they remained solely a staple of the intense vibe that some comic book stores can have on the uninitiated casual fan at least. The sheer mass-market appeal that a character, like say the multicultural Spider-Man Miles Morales, now has because he has been exposed to a much wider audience than only those who read comics, cannot be understated and undervalued for its societal effect.

Another interesting point of note is why Hollywood has gravitated towards pre-made stories that allow a faster turnout. Marvel superhero films can seem like the easy way out, as opposed to Hollywood writers crafting entirely new worlds for audiences to become acquainted with. Several scholars, and notably Burke, also examines the various causes and effects of Hollywood's infatuation with superheroes beyond ready-made stories. Burke highlights how the need for intellectual property to make bankable projects made comic books the go-to for the Hollywood powers that be. Burke also notes how Marvel comic book adaptations took over the mainstream releases of multimillion dollar films due to their strength as a distinct genre that can be expanded upon and crafted to fit familiar narrative. Burke highlights superhero media adaptation and the inherent malleability and storytelling potential by examining the way Hollywood has decided to use commodify them. On this inherent malleability as a genre, Burke states that

the comic book movie's acceptance and propagation in the intertextual relay strengthens

the argument for it to be ratified as a genre. Thus, the time has come to not only

recognize this genre, but also position it as one of the key determinants shaping the

modern comic book film adaptation. (93)

In the preceding quote, Burke is clearly arguing for the comic book genre to be valued and

studied as its own unique film genre that warrants recognition as such. The ways in which comic

book films have begun to be examined by scholars highlights just how important the study of

them has become.

The intertext and subtext of the superhero film and streaming genre itself allows

Hollywood studios and filmmakers a rare opportunity to make the superhero narrative fit a

projects goal and intended audience, and further expand into something a bit more well-rounded

for audience approval. The Marvel comic book film genre also has one distinct advantage over

other film genres and that is how utilitarian the projects themselves can be. The utilitarian nature

of the superhero and comic book genre can best be felt in tonally distinct projects like *Batman*

(1989) which contained noir elements, and as well in streaming shows like *Wandavision* with its

sit-com setting, to culturally relevant videogames like *Spider-Man: Miles Morales* diverse

representation of its protagonist. All of these projects can be molded to have a distinct creator

driven vision that incorporates elements necessary for the adaptation of a project from its source

material.

The utilitarian nature of the genre is remarked upon by several scholars. For some, like

comic book movie scholar Blair Davis, in his book *Comic Book Movies*, the malleability of the

comic book movie genre is distinct and unique. Davis notes

even after dominating the box office for over a decade, comic book movies like comics

themselves- are… a single genre (that) is in fact composed of films representing a wide

range of other genres, from action films to westerns, supernatural films, war movies, and

science fiction. Their current popularity has been sustained in part because of the ways in

which comic book movies combine elements of different genres together. (17)

Davis argues that Marvel superheroes and their subsequent comic book adaptations operate as a

genre that can offer more creative freedom from genre constraints than other genres because it

allows creators the choice of using many different tools at their disposal. These tools include the

ability, as Davis suggests, to create worlds based on existing intellectual property apart from

some other genre restrictions. The comic book film genre, as opposed to say, films based upon

Agatha Christie mystery novels, offer a less distinct implication of what they are to the audience

apart from the source material because they offer a diverse range of characters and narrative

opportunities. On this notion, Davis even argues that "comic book movies, however, imply only

that their narratives and characters originated in comic books. The term tells us nothing about the

common settings of the films or their themes, characters, or images" (11). Comic book films

offer the benefit of relying on intellectual property with an established audience, but they do not

offer audiences a distinct genre to latch on to and can be formed to fit what corporate entities

believe audiences desire when they are adapted. This ability to homogenize genre is something

exceled at by Marvel superheroes and their subsequent comic book adaptations because of their

ability to be molded to fit a more cookie-cutter theme and tone. Marvel films and characters can

also branch out creatively when needed, allowing writers and directors the ability to make

changes to source material and branch out organically into unique perspectives that represent

changing sensibilities.

But if comic book and superhero films are so malleable as a genre how exactly have they historically been adapted into new forms of media you may be, rightfully, asking yourself? Film scholar Dru Jeffries, in his book *Comic Book Film Style: Cinema at 24 Panels Per Second*, argues that comic book films are successful not by adaptation alone but rather through their own remediation theory. He notes that "while adaptation tends to dominate how most people conceive of the comic book film, remediation is more salient to the present discussion of comic book film style, which is the comic book film's primary contribution to contemporary filmmaking practice" (23). For Jeffries, comic book films change filmmaking through remediation, which is a form of reformation of one form of media by another, and less through the adaptation process alone. Jeffries argues that comic book films changing the concept of film isn't a negative byproduct. He believes that it showcases that "comic book film style illuminates the nature of cinema as a medium ever changing, ever evolving as much as it does that of comics" (220). For Jeffries, it speaks not to the nature of comics as evolving, but rather the way in which cinema has evolved to a new welcome the superhero genre thanks to their adaptation.

The way the superhero comic book film genre has evolved not just as a genre itself, but also how it has altered the media landscape of film and streaming, stands as an interesting point in the way the comic books and new forms of media have coalesced and become connected symbiotically. Superhero comic books themselves also have been altered and influenced by changes that have occurred during their adaptation process. Liam Burke notes the way in which "comic book readers, weaned on decades of interconnected mythologies, are also open to a measure of co-creation, with popular elements introduced in one version of a transmedia franchise often spreading to others" (130). In the same way, popular elements in comic book adaptions flow from one medium to another and offer a distinct and important framework to

view their impact. To that end, a character study of two very important Marvel characters, namely the multicultural appeal of the Miles Morales Spider-Man character and the mental health iconography associated with the Wanda Maximoff Scarlet Witch character, demonstrates the way adaptation's specific changes and alterations reshapes both comic and adapted appearances, and in turn help fuel continued interest.

3. Comic Book Adaptation Character Study: Miles and Wanda.

The Miles Morales Spider-Man character provides an excellent demonstration of the way adaptation has changed the character overall. The character's early days in publication are chronicled in the book *Panthers, Hulks and Ironhearts: Marvel, Diversity and the 21st Century* by scholar Jeffrey Brown. The Miles character came to be after the

> apparent death of Spider-Man (Peter Parker) in 2011, Marvel announced a new character would assume the web-slinger's mantle. Ultimate Comics Spider-Man (2011-2013) introduced Miles Morales as the new high school-aged superhero, of African American and Puerto Rican descent, ushering in a new era for Spidey. Since the debut of Miles Morales's Spider-Man, Marvel has slowly changed the landscape of their fictional universe by replacing many of their iconic characters with younger versions who are a different gender or ethnicity (or both) than the original superheroes. (31)

As Brown argues, this new Spider-Man character developed slowly over time, changing drastically through the translation into and out of new forms of media through adaptation, eventually becoming the character that is well known today. However, as Brown notes, he wasn't always the interesting character he has since become. In his early comic appearances, which I remember reading as they released monthly, the character struggled to differentiate himself from the Peter Parker version of the character in any meaningful way other than his

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ethnicity. It was my experience that he came across as an inauthentic and bland substitute for Peter Parker in his early comic appearances. Thankfully, Miles has gone on to become an interesting superhero and Spider-Man in his own right thanks to his adapted appearances which have strengthened the character's diverse background and greatly expanded his interesting personality. Several other scholars have also made note of the way this character has changed over time and through his adaptation in media.

Scholar Regina Marie-Mills, for example, notes that the Miles Morales character has been radically changed from what his inceptual incarnation was by various forms of adapted media that have created a more authentic character. Marie-Mills argues that Miles is

> a 'post-soul' Spider-Man, emblematic of post-Civil Rights Movement texts that imagine other ways of being Black, culturally and politically, but that also contend with the increasing marketability of blackness and, in this case, Afro-Latin. While Miles Morales began as a comic book character, his reach and influence have moved far beyond that realm. In fact, many people have likely encountered him only through his film or video games…no substantial commentary has yet focused on Miles Morales' video game representations. The PlayStation (PS5) video game Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales (2020) by Insomniac Games. (42)

From Marie-Mills in the preceding quote, it becomes apparent that Miles' multicultural and ethnic identity was approached and developed more authentically in his video game appearances as opposed to his early comic appearances.

Miles's early comic appearances were not noted for their authentic depiction of his biracial identity, as several scholars have argued including Marie-Mills. Marie-Mills goes on to note that Miles wasn't always seen as the multicultural beacon of welcomed diversity that he has

become. She states, "one might contest the claim that Miles Morales is a post-soul Spider-Man since he is not the creation of a Black artist. From 2011 to 2017 famous white writer Brian Michael Bends wrote Miles Morales' stories and is recognized as a co-creator" (42). To Marie-Mills point, the Miles Morales character was originally written less authentically and more from an ultimatum to introduce a minority as the Spider-Man character in a changing political landscape. Miles might've been represented in comic book lore as a stand in for Peter Parker when that character faced his untimely demise, but he was also created with the promise of systematic change and increased diversity apparent within the Obama-centric era he was birthed into. However, the racial identity of the creator, Brian Michael Bendis, notwithstanding, the Miles Morales character has become more befitting of his biracial upbringing and post-modern iconography through his adaptation in both film and video games in ways that have made their way back into the comic books he was created in.

The Miles Morales character has had a recent explosion of mainstream adaptation success thanks to his video game appearances in addition to his feature film appearances. Scholar Marie-Mills makes further note of the characters landmark success that the character has had in the mainstream adaptation of two different forms of media appearances, with those being appearances in both video games and film. Marie-Mills explains, the character is

> in an Academy Award-winning film and is the only Afro-Latino protagonist of a AAA video game, meaning his game had top writers, top programmers, and a tremendous marketing budget. By all metrics, Miles Morales as Spider-Man has been a smashing transmedia success, answering a call to diversify popular media and the superhero genre to better reflect Obama's America. (42)

As Marie-Mills states, it can be extrapolated that as Miles's popularity in his media appearances grew, the creatives behind those appearances began to take the responsibility of depicting his racial and ethnic identity with more respect than his comic book creator ever did.

The character's success can be measured and felt in the way that he has been embraced in new media as a beacon of his own identity and heritage. Marie-Mills further states, that his adapted media appearances have had massive success thanks in part to this growth in identity for the character. It is equally important that the character has been made more authentic, instead of being used for specifically to highlight inclusion and diversity alone. The character has continued to grow and been remarked upon by scholars from his appearance in film as having become an equal character to that of Peter Parker as Spider-Man, but also as important, his appearances in video game adaptations have contributed to his success as a household name.

In the video game adaptation of the character, and from my own playthrough experience in Insomniac Studios' *Spider-Man: Miles Morales*, the character represents his more diverse and varied background in a way that wasn't as pronounced in his early comic book appearances. Miles patrols Harlem, while encountering various characters of many different social, ethnic, and economical backgrounds. Miles encounters burglars stealing because they can't afford basic amenities. Miles makes friends with his local bodega owner and the owner's cat. Miles chiefly uses his spider powers to help his diverse and varied community in ways that aren't always present in the Spider-Man narratives of most Peter Parker stories. Miles' mother is portrayed as a lawmaker and government body electee, while his schooling at the prestigious Brooklyn Visions Academy is made a particular point of gameplay narrative. Another fun and unique undertaking is that the character begins to relish his own sense of unique fashion that suits a multicultural teenager growing up in an urban population center. Marie-Mills notes that

the player is excited to get new gear but also knows that this new suit is a claim to self-

determination, an awareness of what it means to be a Spider-Man in Harlem. However,

his new neighbor-hood, while not hostile to the other Spider-Man, is not willing to claim

him as their own in the beginning. He must prove himself. (46)

Community takes a larger point of interest for the Miles character within the game because he

must help the community through optional missions to become respected and valued by a

community that is, rightfully, weary of him.

The videogame and film appearances of Miles Morales not only helped propel the

character into mainstream stardom but also allowed the character the to grow into a more

authentic and well-rounded character through his adaptation in various mediums. In both his

video game appearances, and his film appearances in the Spider-Verse films as the leading

character, the Miles Morales character has been allowed to far exceed and improve on his early

comic book appearances, and those changes have allowed the character to bring those positive

changes from adapted media back into the comic book world with the same level of success.

Scholar Dru Jeffries, in a work exclusively detailing the societal role of Mile Morales as

the Spider-Man of the Modern era, notes that with Miles

functioning as the superhero genre's ambassador of the diversity of 21st-century

America, it is important to consider that the representational choices used to adapt the

character to the screen shape how audiences understand non-white superheroes in both

overt and subtle ways. (195)

Miles Morales is evocative of the changing demographics of society and has been used as a

hallmark for the improved diversity of comic book demographics in both his paper and adapted

media appearances. Miles has headlined two animated films as the main character and has also been the star of his own high-profile video game. Jeffries argues that for the studio

> Sony's primary interest in making Into the Spider-Verse, as I have suggested already, was to maximize their exploitation of the Spider-Man IP while its central character was otherwise occupied under the creative auspices of the MCU. While the filmmakers were also motivated to present positive representations for young kids of color. (199)

It is Jeffries opinion that societal pressures and conflicting intellectual property rights are the reason why Miles has taken such a forefront in adapted media appearances, but that this shouldn't stop the character from being remarked on as a role model for youths of all backgrounds. The character has become a popular source of everything from Halloween costumes to other similar merchandise in America and elsewhere thanks to his quick and authentic rise to stardom as a separate character holding the Spider-Man name.

As for the *Spider-Verse* films themselves, Jeffries believes that they offer a different parable for a modern audience, as opposed to the Peter Parker version of the character. Jeffries notes the Miles Morales character in his adapted role is differentiated from the Peter Parker version with the rationale being that

> Into the Spider-Verse offers a very different moral compared to other texts in the Spider-Man franchise. Whereas Peter Parker stories tend to emphasize his Uncle Ben's adage that with great power comes great responsibility, Into the Spider-Verse offers a new refrain, offered initially by Peter Parker and later repeated by Miles at the film's conclusion: anyone can wear the mask. (204)

The sentiment that anyone could be Spider-man regardless of skin color certainly spoke to a wide audience, as the character was rather quickly embraced by fans and audience members as a

definitive version of the Spider-Man character that is unique and different, but most of all, evocative of a new era of superhero diversity in the adaptation of comics.

Dru Jeffries, however, takes issue with the notion that colorblind thinking is helpful in and of itself, and while his opinion certainly can't be argued, the success of the character in his adapted roles and acceptance by a wide ranging and diverse audience cannot be undervalued. Jeffries argues that the thought that the notion that

anyone can wear the mask is a product of this kind of colorblind thinking in which race supposedly does not matter. At face value, it asserts that superhero identities are not restricted to white characters but rather are universally accessible—a sentiment that is obviously intended to be empowering (205)

It is the opinion of this scholar that Jeffries ideological differences of opinion with the heart of the film is inconsequential to the success of the character, but also an interesting caveat in the development process as the character continues his transition from page to screen.

As for live action appearances, audiences have been clamoring for a Miles Morales appearance in live action, perhaps in the greater Marvel Cinematic Universe, and Jeffries does tend to agree that at the very least it would improve the characters role as a diverse and interesting addition to the Marvel Universe. It was widely reported that actor Donald Glover was lobbying for the role back when *The Amazing Spider-Man* films were being produced. Jeffries notes that

should Marvel elect to also emigrate Into the Spider-Verse's Miles Morales from Sony's animated world to the live-action MCU—as Marvel Comics did when it integrated the character from the Ultimate Marvel line into their main storyworld—it could be another

step toward bridging the gap between the "transgressive diversity" of superhero comics and the narrower (for now) range of possibilities of Hollywood cinema. (214)

A live-action Miles Morales adaptation might be the perfect blend of taking what has come before and improving and expanding upon it for new media appearances in the modern era. The inevitable live action adaptation of Miles Morales, now that the character has an informed and authentic background that has been further fleshed out in adapted media appearances, will only allow Miles's popularity and continued success as a character grow.

Miles is not the only character who has recently received a lot of media attention. Wanda Maximoff, The Scarlet Witch character, has also recently a boom in popularity through adaptation in media. The character started as a B-list Avenger with ties to the X-Men nearly sixty years ago in the Marvel Comics universe, but now leads film and streaming shows through her portrayal by the actress Elizabeth Olson. The comic book character, a troubled hero besieged by mental health problems and bad luck consisting of losses in her personal life, has been translated onto the screen with decent success, and opened up a troubled hero's lore to an audience that has a newfound respect for a character with a rich and dense backstory. The Scarlet Witch character appears in several billion-dollar films, mostly in the Avengers series in the larger Marvel Cinematic Universe, but has also recently been allowed to explore another storytelling medium through the use of long-form streaming shows.

The Scarlet Witch character, whose alter ego is Wanda Maximoff, was often portrayed as a stereotypical crazy female trope in the comic books, wracked by the grief of her personal losses, and otherwise at the mercy of her own emotions. The Scarlet Witch character is a character whose complete lack of agency has defined her comic book appearances, for reasons that will be addressed a bit later, but can also be argued to have contributed to the poor treatment

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of female characters in the superhero comic book industry. Noted comic fan and comic book writer Gail Simone has taken a particular interest in the treatment of female characters in superhero comic books. Scholar Karen Walsh, in the book *Geek Heroines: An Encyclopedia of Female Heroes in Popular Culture*, writes about how Simone examined a very particular trend of negative appearances of female characters in superhero comics in the late nineties. Walsh also articulates that Simone is famous in the industry for coining the term "fridging" which is quoted as meaning

> a narrative trend that murdered, maimed, or otherwise depowered female superheroes, or "superchicks," as she called them. She referred to this phenomenon as "women in refrigerators" as a nod to Green Lantern #54 where the hero finds his dead girlfriend stuffed in a refrigerator. She created a website, in conjunction with other women, titled "Women in Refrigerators" that listed all the superheroines who had been killed, raped, depowered, crippled, turned evil, maimed, contracted a disease or had other life-derailing tragedies that would interrupt their narratives. (281)

It is in this inherently negative portrayal of female characters that the comic book version of Wanda Maximoff is most often portrayed as when it comes to her mental instability, losses of loved ones, and lack of agency. Thankfully Wanda Maximoff's appearances in media adaptations have generally handled this turn better for reasons that will be explained.

For a character like the Scarlet Witch, whose role in the comics does hinge on mental instability. It is important that she not come across as unhinged, unbridled, or as a stereotype through her adaptation in media appearances. For the most part, in her adaptation in various media forms she is instead portrayed as a complex hero with a dark side. Something about a hysterically mad female doesn't have the same appeal now that it did almost six-decades ago

when she was created, and that is for the better. Thankfully her adaptations have been able to avoid negative stereotype in favor of something more unique and realistic. The Scarlet Witch character in the streaming adaptation *Wandavision*, specifically, is noted by scholar and psychiatrist Benjamin Jones as being very well developed, especially as far as female characters with mental health issues in these kinds of media projects go. Jones notes that

> this evolution in approach to the use of emotions in female characters in the MCU
> recently took its next step in *Wandavision* both used the concept of feminine emotions in
> relationship to deceiving or defeating a male character, *Wandavision* leans into the power
> of feminine emotion meant to benefit only the central character… herself. It does so
> through a relentless focus on the process of grieving, made more complicated by the fact
> that this particular griever possesses the raw power to resurrect all that she has lost. (198)

Wanda takes a very unique role in the series bearing her name, and she often does not in the comics. In the streaming series she is portrayed as being the one in charge of her own empowerment despite her deteriorating mental well-being, whereas in the comics her character is told by her father Magneto to alter reality to a world where he rules over everyone in the seminal *House of M* storyline. The adaptation improves on Wanda's role as her own individual with her own drive and goals, and leans as far from stereotype as possible to great storytelling results.

The character is portrayed as still have suffered greatly, but retaining her own autonomy in the media she is adapted in. In the context of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Wanda Maximoff loses everyone and everything she cares about in the films before the streaming series even starts. Jones describes her character journey best by stating that

> of any character we have seen on screen in the MCU, Wanda carries the most complex
> trauma. In each of her four cinematic appearances to date, we have witnessed her

experience considerable loss. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, she loses her brother, Pietro, in the final battle. In *Captain America: Civil War*, she is responsible for the incident that ultimately leads to the dissolution of The Avengers. In *Avengers: Infinity War*, she is forced to kill her partner, Vision, to protect the mind stone, only to see time reversed by Thanos so that he can be killed in front of her for a second time mere seconds later. In *Avengers: Endgame*, she returns from the blip to immediately face Thanos, the one who was responsible for so much of her trauma in the previous film. This is the weight of all that Wanda is dealing with leading into *WandaVision*…It would be enough to break anyone. (198-199)

It is this immense grief the character faces that is played out more realistically on screen than say, in the heightened and emotionally elevated comic book appearances of the character. Her portrayal by Elizabeth Olsen ensures that she never falls flat or comes across as a hysterical mess. The role of the audience is one of compassion and understanding in the series, and Wanda makes for a much more sympathetic protagonist in the context of the show, as a protagonist who, as Jones also sees it, is no damsel in distress but rather the author of her own narrative and righting her own problems. Jones notes that Wanda in the series, "takes this grief and shows us that this is not weakness, but rather raw, unbridled, intensely powerful strength. Wanda's grief is powerful enough to create worlds that otherwise would not exist" (199). Wanda is used to expand the character's limited and stereotypical role of troubled female in her adapted role in films and streaming.

Wanda's treatment in the adaptations of her comic book character in the larger role of the Marvel Cinematic Universe does speak to larger societal issues. Those social issues are certainly much improved in the adaptation, but aren't solved entirely. While Wanda must reconcile her

grief and emotions to ultimately be the hero of the storylines she is placed in within those adapted appearances, her male superhero counterparts are not subject to also controlling their own emotions in the same manner. Jones notes of this that "Wanda does in her grief speaks to a larger problem in the MCU. In comparison, none of the male characters are ever asked to control or reckon with their emotions or the fallout of the decisions they make as a result of following those feelings" (199). While the adaptations have improved her treatment as a character and avoided stereotype as best as possible, they haven't solved it entirely but rather crafted a more well-rounded character that is unique among female superhero characters for being in touch with her own mental health and struggles.

The streaming show *Wandavision* follows the Scarlet Witch character as she struggles to process grief in a touching and new for the genre manner. In the series, Wanda alters reality to give herself the life she feels she deserves, this allows her to avoid her grief over losing her partner and brother entirely. The basis for the streaming show is a play on a famous comic storyline that also allowed the character the chance to process her grief in a more stereotypical manner and without the same level of care and expertise as she had in her television show. In Valerie Guyant's breakdown of the series, she explores the disconnect between fans who are in the know about Wanda's comic treatment and those who aren't familiar. Guyant explains

> in the world of comic book movies, there are several types of viewers: those who know
> the comics so well that they are hypercritical of events that stray too far from the
> originals, those who know the comics really well and enjoy looking for where a movie or
> television show deviates or sprinkles in references, and, in the case of an extended
> "cinematic universe," those who know the movies and television shows and are only

marginally familiar with the comic source texts, if at all, and some who may watch the

occasional movie but not be very familiar with the overall storyline. (124)

For Guyant, and others like myself, who are fans with a comic book knowledge background of

the character, it is a slow build watching a show like *Wandavision* and knowing the way the

mental breakdown of the character was handled in the comics because the knowledge weighs on

the audiences' expectations of what exactly is to come. Will the character's turn be handled

respectfully? Will the character suffer from the "fridging" that her comic counterpart suffered

from? In this disconnect between hardcore and casual fans, it can become difficult to manage

audience expectations while also catering to fans of the comics. For the Scarlet Witch character

in particular, this breakdown between what a casual fan and a comic-oriented fan might gauge

from the show means understanding Wanda's struggles with mental health in the comics and the

tragic role that she eventually plays in several landmark runs of the comics.

The Scarlet Witch character, in the seminal *Avengers Disassembled* run of comics,

suffers a full mental breakdown from years of abuse being done to her that leads to the death of

some of her fellow Avengers and an eventual complete rewrite of canon comic book history.

This mental break still continues to follow the character in the comic book lore. In the comics,

the turn is very quick, and she was previously portrayed as having no mental health issues but

coping rather well with her extremely bad luck and personal misfortunes. In the context of the

comic book world, Wanda's brother is killed, her husband is killed, her children are figments of

her imagination made flesh by magic only to be ripped away from her. Comics can be cruel to

female characters, and creators like Gail Simone rightfully remark on this phenomenon.

Scarlet Witch's portrayal in the adaptations tended to expedite this transition to a darker

hero and condense her storyline into a faster version of events that lost something along the way,

not in any part responsible to her portrayal of the character because, as Guyant states

> Elizabeth Olsen's portrayal in quiet moments of love and grief elevate it beyond filler.
>
> Unfortunately, much of that will be lost on a casual observer. This series was designed
>
> for existing fans, with references and misdirects that will be picked up on by readers of
>
> the comics. (124)

The misdirects from the show tended to cause fans to, incorrectly, assume the Scarlet Witch

would play a more villainous role in the television show, however that was not the case. In the

new media adaptations Scarlet Witch is not a villain at any point, she would chiefly be best

described as an anti-hero instead. Wanda Maximoff in the comics is the daughter of the

villainous X-Men villain Magneto for instance, a role that has been entirely excised from the

adaptations in live-action media of her character. With her villainous father, her first appearance

is alongside her brother Quicksilver in Magneto's sect called the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.

Her and her brother are portrayed as X-Men adversaries who, after a change of heart, are allowed

to join the Avengers to make up for their nefarious deeds. While the adaptations might've

portrayed her with a slightly darker morality than her star-spangled counterpart Captain America,

she wasn't allowed to transition from villain, to hero, back to a conflicted villain in any of her

various adaptations in the same manner and with the same gravitas as she was over the course of

her sixty years in comic book history.

The existing fans of the character know that the Scarlet Witch character has had a long

and tough road in both comics and adaptations, and she took on a more villainous role as a result

of her mental health breakdowns. In the series, Wanda was just slightly neglectful but didn't

reach the villainous role of her character in the comics. In her latest film appearance, in the 2022 film *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, however, the character was finally able evolve into her more demonic comic counterpart and become more of a villain, as opposed to her earlier antihero role on the television show. The way in which the character had a truncated but still complete and complex character arc over a period of around eight years after her introduction in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, versus her fifty-plus years in comics, allowed the character's crescendo into her mental health related turn to happen quicker. This truncated character arc illustrates shows how the two forms of media, being comic books and their media adaptations, are different. Wanda's film to comic transition is similar but the rushed manner in which the newer media of film and streaming was able to complete her comic arc in a more straightforward manner highlights the ways in which film can adapt but still evolve comic book characters like Wanda Maximoff and Miles Morales. But why exactly are comics a medium that welcomes adaptation and symbiotic change?

The Scarlet Witch and Miles Morales are just two examples of a laundry list of characters that have changed with the adapted media appearances that they have been a part of. Miles Morales grew from a token white-created minority character into a diverse and culturally important biracial landmark, and the Spider-Man for an entire generation of youngsters and fans that have seen the character progress and embrace his unique identity from other comic book characters. The Scarlet Witch character has progressed and changed in ways that are more evocative of a shifted timeline and quickened approach that better suited the character in her adapted media appearances. Instead of the stereotypical mentally disturbed and confused woman who was subject to trauma forced upon her who finally snapped. One thing is for certain, the media adaptations of these characters have undoubtedly led to their continued success.

4) Comics: the diverse, the myth, the media empire, the fad?

How exactly did comic books take over the film-market other than through their diverse, well-rounded characters, like Wanda and Miles? Several key concepts seem to always come up when researching the issue: and those are, 1) that Marvel films often contain universally understood themes and parables that appeal to many audiences, while also showcasing changing diversity within society, 2) that they are a bankable financial Hollywood commodity and source of intellectual property that is considered a safe investment, and 3) is that through adaptation they have enjoyed great success and that their continued longevity is more than just a passing fad, but also that their continued success is a point of necessary study for both film and comic scholars.

One of the main appeals for Marvel comic adaptations is the universally understood mythology and the messages within these films, that often contains religious undertones of morality, and harken back to the storytelling structure of parables and fairy tales with their good versus evil approach to characters. For scholars and fans like myself, one of the most important speaks to comics' universal themes. In many ways, comic book stories take inspiration from biblical and mythological themes, with the primary good versus evil dynamic being such a universally understood. Comic books function as a form of modern mythology, and one that is easily understood across cultures for their simplistic and universal message of good versus bad. They can even be described as having a parable quality in their universality that theologian and scholar Joel Mayward describes as "typically used to describe an allegorical story with a moral or religious message" (283). Because of their universally understood message, and the good triumphing over evil, they comprise a modern mythology that has translated from the page to screen with unparalleled success, a success that I argue is built off of a strong value of character

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identity and a penchant towards embracing diversity in the adaptation of superheroes across media.

The role of mythology within superhero stories, Marvel or otherwise, has been remarked on in the mainstream work of one prolific filmmaker. Noted Filmmaker and comic book fan Quentin Tarantino, made a point of arguing some of the intricacies of mythology within superheroes in comics in his 2004 film *Kill Bill Vol. 2* Tarantino, having written the film himself, has a main character relate comics to mythology specifically. The titular "Bill" states that

> I'm quite keen on comic books. Especially the ones about superheroes. I find the whole mythology surrounding superheroes fascinating. Take my favorite superhero, Superman. Not a great comic book, not particularly well-drawn, but the mythology. The mythology is not only great, it's unique. Now, a staple of the superhero mythology is, there's the superhero and there's the alter ego.

In the preceding quote, Tarantino is noting that the dichotomy between hero and identity has mythological undertones that make comics a valuable source of study by both scholars and philosophers because of their parable-like qualities. We all wish we could be the hero, but we are stuck as the alter ego in our role as mortals. The Superman character in particular is evocative of the era in which he was written and has specific religious undertones that will be discussed. Tarantino and Mayward are both unanimously recognizing the concept that both comic books, and comic book films contain a moral message about mythology and identity that pervades the genre and offers real-world parallels and messaging under the simplistic surface of good and evil. The parable-like quality of comic books and comic book adaptations has certainly led to them being understood by a larger audience than their original market of the comic book aficionado subculture, but it has also been remarked upon by many in academia to harken back

to the days in which comic books were sought after by people who were seen as outcasts, and from this developed an early reputation for appealing to a specific kind of fan.

For the Superman character specifically, he was created by two Jewish-American men and can be considered to evoke the stereotypical perfect image of the altruistic and all-American hero, with ties to religious iconography of the savior figure. Many of the most popular and well-known superheroes for instance were also predominantly written and drawn by members of the same specific religious group. It certainly seems to be a far-fetched notion to not relate a slight correlation, at least, with how their portrayal of the heroic figure could share at least some mythological roots with their religious background. From the earliest days of their creation, comic book creators often helped perpetuate the mythological qualities of through their own interesting religious background.

Nearly all of the modern DC and Marvel superheroes created in the nineteen-forties through the nineteen-sixties owe their mythological sensibilities to the large proportion of Jewish writers, artists, and editors who helped create the mythology and characters that are still perpetually showcased in modern media adaptations. Characters like Spider-Man, Batman, Superman, The Joker, Captain America, The Avengers, The Fantastic Four, and the X-Men, were all almost single-handedly created by Jewish creatives like Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Bob Kane, Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster, Bill Finger, and Joe Simon. These Jewish writers helped create the pillars of the modern comic book superhero roster. Because comic books were shepherded by men who, while not diverse racially, were at least religious minorities in the era and place in which they were written, it is important to understand that comic book media's penchant for inclusive and diverse characters have continued to grow and be remarked upon by many in academia.

To understand how Jewish and social sensibilities of the era impacted the creation of comic book superheroes and highlights societal change, scholar Jeffrey Kripal, in his work *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal*, for instance

> the men who created the Superman were Jews, as were most of the movers and shakers in the early comic-book industry. And key superheroes, like Captain America, were explicitly and consciously created to fight Hitler and that further Kripal notes that the concept of the Superman is an ancient religious trope, not a political, American, or even especially Western one. (73)

Kripal views Superman as a reaction to the era in which he was written, which makes sense given the religious background of his creators and political turmoil and atrocities of World War II. It is important to view Miles Morales and Wanda Maximoff as equally important and evocative of the era they have been written in because they are also evocative of the audience they have found success within, and the creators who have shaped them. From Kripal's stance, the role of the creator, but also religion and political upheaval, in comics can't be understated, because they shape the heroes that, in turn, shape popular culture through their adaptation in different forms of media. Thanks to the role of the audience and creator, superhero comic book subculture has developed into one of inclusion and diversity as the times have changed.

Mythology aside, the ability for the creator to shape the hero into something unique and evocative of their own religious and social upbringing lends itself to another fascinating facet of changing superhero media, and that is diversity. Through adaptation superheroes like Miles Morales have sprung from a need for more diverse and social, racial, and political identity-driven superheroes. Several scholars have noted the tremendous ways in which that diversity has been a tradition that started in the comic books and has made its way over through adaptation in media.

As Jeffrey Brown notes in his book, *Panthers, Hulks and Ironhearts: Marvel, Diversity and the 21st Century*, diversity in comics has been a longstanding tradition that made them a very inclusive and welcoming medium. Brown, further, goes on to argue that the changing social norms have always been apparent in comic books. On this, he states, "The popularity of Marvel's iconic roster of heroes and the changing ways they are represented in comics, movies, and television programs have made them important markers of social change and controversy" (2). Marvel heroes, like Miles Morales and Wanda Maximoff, are portrayed differently in media adaptations, often for the better in terms of representation, diversity, and identity. For Brown, and myself, it is clear that a changing and more inclusive society have informed the new ways Marvel characters are represented in media adaptations.

Diversity and identity in Marvel comics isn't a new tradition however, and that has been noted by scholars like Brown. Brown argues that comic books have only gotten more inclusive as time has progressed, with a diverse range of characters. Marvel characters in particular are the basis of Brown's work and he takes a deep dive into the specific ways in which diverse and identity driven characterizations of minority characters have progressed in Marvel comics over the years. He argues

> Marvel superheroes have interacted with issues of cultural diversity ever since Stan Lee and Jack Kirby redefined comic book relevance in the 1960s. Marvel introduced the Black Panther, the first mainstream black superhero...The Chinese Shang-Chi, a.k.a. the Master of Kung Fu, was created at Marvel in 1973…Marvel debuted White Tiger (Hector Ayala), the first Latino superhero, in 1975…And in 1992, Marvel outed the mutant hero Northstar, a member of Alpha Flight, as the first openly gay superhero. The historical and continuing significance of these and other characters will be addressed throughout this

book. But the most common way that Marvel superheroes have engaged with diversity

and discrimination has been through the metaphor of mutants. (5)

From the above quote, Brown argues that Marvel has been on the cusp of showcasing social

changes through diversity for a while at least. Something apparent, to at least some degree, is

that more diversity amongst characters has been a major draw within the Marvel Universe for

years, and that the continued trend to highlight diversity continues to grow with adaptation in

different forms of media as time goes on. The Miles Morales character would certainly not exist

without other well-received and financially profitable black and Latino characters in comic

books that came before him. Marvel characters like the X-Men heroine Storm, along with the

street-level Luke Cage, and vampire hunter Blade, allowed Marvel editorial, along with a

changing social structure in the wave of post-Obama era diversity trends, the chance to craft a

diverse character that people developed a genuine interest in apart and including his racial

identity.

On the point of politics informing diversity in Marvel comics with their superheroes,

scholar Ramzi Fawaz, in his book *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination
of American Comics*, argues that comic books are an accessible and interesting source of political

intrigue for society because they are closely associated with identity politics and are often on the

leading forefront of cultural change. Fawaz examines the death of Captain America and

Superman in the comics, both a major comic book character, to examine deeper cultural

meanings from both. On this topic, Fawaz states

In the deaths of Superman and Captain America we can identify a figure that has

propelled the American superhero into the new millennium, a marvelous corpse that

unravels the national fantasies that attach to its previously vital skin, pointing us toward

unsettled national identities, irreconcilable histories of state and corporate violence, and

the visual politics that struggle to articulate them. (271)

For Fawaz, the death of these characters relates to changing social climates, values, and political

eras because they evoke a sense of general unrest and unease. Fawaz views the role of comic

book superheroes and their subsequent adaptations as inherently reactionary, and he goes so far

as to note that comics can be evocative of the status quo of the world at large, both socially and

politically. Thus, for Fawaz, comic book heroes "came to describe a form of material existence

in which one's relationship to the world and its countless others was constantly subjected to

questioning, transformation, and reorganization" (11). Fawaz is of the opinion that comic book

films reflect the real-world, and that art imitates life. A character like Miles Morales and Wanda

Maximoff can exist through adaptation because the society that helped to birth them has birthed

changing norms that welcome those characters.

The changing society that Fawaz mentions is closely aligned with politics as well as

diversity. A changing political landscape, aligning with a more varied and diverse population,

has an equal effect on the output of art, like comic books. When combined with the later point

Fawaz makes on this notion that

the expanding visual horizon of the superhero comic book, the emergence of a

participatory reading public, and the alignment of comic book content with the egalitarian

ideals of left-wing political projects constructed the parameters of comic book

cosmopolitics. (23)

It becomes clear that scholars like Fawaz find an interesting point of study lies in how politics

shape comic books superheroes, and as well as how they can evoke changing political identities.

Thanks to scholars like Fawaz, it becomes more readily apparent that the superhero characters

that are evocative of diversity and politics in superhero comics and their adaptations are successful because the forms of media allow growth of character and audience in a realistic and diverse setting, especially when adapted in Hollywood.

The Marvel characters themselves have become a Hollywood commodity thanks to their broad appeal, including the previously mentioned broad appeal of their mythological roots, identity politics, and step towards more diversity. Their continued usage as a source of intellectual property warrants examination of why Hollywood has become so infatuated with superheroes overall. Through adaptation and their usage as intellectual properties, these characters and films have maintained, and even grew their audience, to far exceed their paper origins. The popularity disparity between comics and the mass-market appeal of the media they have been adapted in has also been noted by several scholars.

Comic book sales are regularly dwarfed, and even imply a somewhat niche market, when compared to the uber successful films upon which they are based. Film and comic scholar Shawna Kidman notes in the work *Comic Books Incorporated* that the disparity between the two forms of media can be traced back to the 90's comic sales implosion. On this Kidman mentions that

> As a result of a boom in the direct market, the 1980s saw a steady increase in comic book sales. In April 1993, numbers reached an all-time high and annual revenue was on its way to $850 million. But then, once again, the market crashed; sales were down by half the following April. Retail shops were hit hardest, with thousands closing their doors. (180)

Comic books were losing steam in the direct sales market, which might explain the reason some comic companies, like Marvel, began to approach their own characters as more of a commodity in terms of licensing and adaptation as opposed to trying to revitalize a market that never

recovered from the collapse of the industry. This is equally apparent because in the late nineties Marvel faced bankruptcy and began selling off the film rights of their characters to avoid going under, and because of this several media conglomerates operated Marvel character's film appearances before the creation of their in-house film branch that now maintains the Marvel Cinematic Universe output. The adaptation of Marvel characters in media kept their names in the popular culture zeitgeist when they were faltering. Further, Marvel's commodification of their characters allowed them to license and commercialize their characters in a time when less people were reading comics, therefore allowing the characters to continue to grow in popularity through adapted media appearances while simultaneously losing comic readers.

Hollywood isn't called show-busines for nothing either. Film executives have always tried to maximize box-office returns while also minimizing the risk of failure. Intellectual property allows Hollywood studios the chance to minimize financial risk because audiences are already familiar with a given property, therefore ensuring name recognition for audience members at the least. For Marvel films and similar comic book films, this has been noted by several scholars, like Kidman, who argues that the nature of Hollywood film adaptation of comic books came about because Hollywood desired a less risky product with at least some built in name recognition and bran appeal. Kidman believes that is due to a mixture of "narrative speculation; a kind of lore developed in Hollywood about the viability of these films. Brand awareness was high and there was an influential built-in audience, but these projects required big budgets" (182). Hollywood desired the cross-market appeal of these big budget entries that made the astounding budgets a little more bearable, and in the early part of the 2000's, Hollywood began to see dollar signs in a particular brand of superhero, the Marvel Comics characters who's rights were sold off to them for pennies on the dollar when Marvel faced bankruptcy.

The early two-thousands saw the release of numerous films based on Marvel Comics characters, beginning back in two-thousand and one with the big budget release of *X-Men* to solid reviews and box office success. In the wake of the two-thousand and one Fox film X-Men, Kidman again makes note that the film industry began to scramble more and more comic book films into active production, noting that they "were moving into production at studios all over town" (184). The release of that film spawned numerous other companies who had snatched up character rights from Marvel to put numerous other superhero films based on Marvel characters into production. The in-house film production office Marvel Studios on the other hand had retained a handful of Avengers characters like Iron Man, Captain America, and Thor and decided to utilize them in house to craft a cinematic universe. On this cinematic universe, Kidman argues that

> after Marvel Studios launched the Marvel Cinematic Universe with Iron Man in 2008, comic book film mania reached a fever pitch that, at the time of publication, has yet to diminish. Over the next decade, thirty-three films adapted from Marvel comic books hit theaters, bringing in over $20 billion at the box office. (185)

As Kidman suggests, the unparalleled results of the success that was the Marvel Cinematic Universe ushered in a new era of connected storytelling, characters, and shared universe that was already familiar to comic book readers but also soon became an inherent draw to the films upon which they were based.

The films that make up the superhero comic book films that are known and beloved do share certain ostentatious facets that lend some correct criticism as them being homogenous to one another, but they certainly have fans and positive factors within the industry that allow their continued persistence at multiplexes. Kidman makes note of this by arguing that comic book

films have taken root in the Hollywood system because of a few key aspects that are noted in the

work as

> a few major categories: 1) the influence of prominent industry insiders who happen to be
>
> comic book fans, 2) an intensification of interest in presold films, 3) the rise of CGI
>
> technology, 4) the increasing importance of international markets, and 5) a social-cultural
>
> psychic need. (185)

Kidman's list of core aspects for the success of superhero adaptations in Hollywood is one that

this essay not only agrees with, but argues is factually correct and can be proven through

scholarly examination. Fans within the industry like Quentin Tarantino are inspired by

superheroes and are inspired by them in their own works. Hollywood executives value the ability

to minimize financial risks in their adapted projects, leading to the adaptation of Marvel comics

characters. Hollywood uses the surefire bet of box-office returns to market the Marvel comics

film overseas, and with a large budget fit for the special effects heavy film. All of these points by

Kidman gel to make sure Marvel comic book characters are always in the public eye, which in

turn helps fill the social and diversity needs of the culture and era these films are written in. By

examining these various sources not as isolated in a vacuum, but rather together as a important

piece of framework that has helped fuel the success of Marvel comic characters it becomes clear

that comic book films have multiple things working for their continued success and longevity as

a genre. Marvel comic book films also continue to dwarf their paper source material.

The fact that comic books are often remarked upon as being influential to those that make

films has certainly been reported on far and wide, and yet comic themselves are still seen as

somewhat niche in terms of broad audience appeal, although legitimate, as Kidman notes

for many decades, comic books and comic book audiences seemed to occupy a subcultural space relegated to the margins of modern entertainment. Audiences were always declining, sales were volatile, and media adaptations were underwhelming…Although some onlookers may still see comic books in this light, as a kind of cultural underdog, this representation was always something of a red herring. Today, the medium's role as a powerful commercial force is practically irrefutable… A variety of factors—artistic, aesthetic, narrative, and technological—have contributed both to comic books' legitimation within more refined taste communities and their simultaneous rise in mainstream popularity. But the medium's underlying strength springs from a much deeper and older place than these factors, or the standard cultural narratives that promulgate them, reveal. Socially and structurally, comic book culture is hegemonic. This is clear in the context of the medium's history, particularly that of its industrial and infrastructural features, which show that the form's incorporation into contemporary conglomerate multimedia is neither new nor coincidental. The medium and the industry that has supported its survival have long been deeply intertwined with entrenched media systems, and have benefited immensely from significant state and corporate support…Comic books were never without power; the culture around them emanated from a place of economic, political, and social strength. There was, perhaps, a legitimacy or popularity problem of sorts for a time, as the medium temporarily faded from prominence. But this is no longer the case. Comic books—as a cultural form if not as a material product—are quite popular today; they reach a genuinely mass audience of billions of people worldwide. (230)

Kidman's work in particular makes specific note of the ways in which the comic book superhero genre not only survived its darkest era in terms of a crashing market but adapted to thrive in a new form of media, taking over the Hollywood system and being seen as legitimized art in both form and content. Comic books allowed creators the freedom to experiment socially or politically with changes that, I believe are being felt in the various adaptations of works like *Wandavision* and the *Spider-Verse* films. Mainstream audiences know of Wanda Maximoff as a household name and bona-fide superheroine, and further they know Miles Morales as a culturally important and relevant character that reflects the changing demographics of modern society.

The cross-media appeal of comic book characters cannot be undersold, and as Hollywood continues to commodify the Marvel comic characters, their continued study across adapted media will deserve further study. Kidman remarks on this notion as well, by stating

comic books are more respected today than at any time in their history and seem about as popular as ever. Comic book stories and characters dominate the summer box office, they fill up the fall television schedule, they pervade streaming platforms, and they consume entire aisles of the toy store. Comic properties account for five of the ten most profitable film franchises of all time, including the top slot, for the Marvel Cinematic Universe. (2)

For Kidman and other scholars, Marvel superheroes specifically and their subsequent adaptation across media and merchandise makes a unique and interesting case-study in and of itself. Thanks to comic book superheroes being adapted and pervading the cinema landscape, comic books are living on in a new and interesting forms of media and merchandise that make up a larger and larger market share of both financial reception and mainstream appeal. Part of that appeal tends to lie in how universally understood the messages and characters in comic books and comic book adaptations tend to be.

As previously stated in the earlier section on adaptation, the role of audience in adapted works, and the pre-established relationship that audience members may have on the source material, is the basis of scholar David Richard's work in *Film Phenomenology and Adaptation*. Richard argues that the audiences own experience with the source material can impact their experience with the adaptation. As an audience member myself, my experience in adapted works of comic books has usually been one of great interest and, I have found, an enhanced experience overall. I generally know the storyline they are following, the role of certain characters, and the all-too-often post credit cameos have my fellow filmgoers asking me for help identifying characters and their soon-to-be roles in upcoming Marvel projects.

The audience of superhero adaptations has grown so large that many who see them don't even have the comic book context that some especially diehard fans, like myself, might have, and yet that doesn't seem to limit experience at all. Film scholar and comic fan Scott Bukatman notes this growing correlation of disconnect between comic fans and comic book movie fans in the quote that argues that general audience fans

> are far more likely to be familiar with Tobey Maguire's Spider-Man than they are with Steve Ditko's (comic Spider-Man stories), and the Fantastic Four are more likely understood as the stars of two terrible movies than as the center of one of the great comics of the 1960s. The superhero film has displaced the superhero comic in the world of mass culture; comics, in fact, have become something of a niche market. (118)

Superhero comic book, are in this way, less important than their film counterparts not because less eyes are laid upon them, but rather because the changing media adaptations allow a unique relationship to foster between adaptation and audience that is ever present, but always in flux in the culture, they are viewed in.

If comics are to be viewed as culturally relevant in the terms of diversity, politics, and as cultural touchstones, then they should by that measure continue to be studied as such. Scholars Paul Williams and James Lyons argue of the necessity of comics to be seen, and more importantly studied, as a legitimate form of cultural importance in their book *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*. The pair notes that as comics have been seen as more culturally relevant with a mass audience appeal, they should not be undervalued as an artform either, no matter if they are dwindling in readership. Williams and Lyons note that

> if comics are not often considered "culture" in the way some members of the population
>
> consider ballet and legitimate theater to be "culture," the current position they occupy in
>
> hierarchies of taste place comics as both high art and mass medium. This transformation
>
> is of course complexly related to the industrial, cultural, and academic institutions that
>
> have reshaped comics' production and reception. (xi)

When viewed in the terms of mass media, as Williams and Lyons suggest, then not only should comic books continued to be studied as cultural markers, but their adaptations should be as well because they are equally as important cultural touchstones as any film or media adaptation. Likewise, the pair argue that superhero adaptations are evocative of the era in which they were made and written, which becomes plainly obvious when the superhero characters are studied for the ways in which they have changed thanks to the role of adaptation and audience.

The role of audience in media adaptation of superheroes is not a new point of study, as several of the scholars in this essay quoted before have argued, and the role of audience and its relationship with the society within its creation cannot be understated as well. This is similar to the point that author Bradford Wright makes, in his book *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, that comic books and superheroes weren't always

seen fondly by society. Comic books and superheroes, including Marvel characters, in their infancy "were an easy target for those who attributed juvenile delinquency to products of youth culture" after all they were "the most visible, least censored, and most popular expression of youth entertainment" and "were also the most bewildering and alien medium to adult sensibilities" (88). Comic books faced censorship and wide-spread disapproval in the previous century by credible individuals. It certainly isn't a new idea that youth enjoy superhero comic books, and in turn comic book films, but that shouldn't limit their scholarly appeal and cultural relevance. Comic books slowly inched their way into being accepted as legitimate art forms, and though their adaptation we can now see that changing social values are still being portrayed through their subsequent media adaptations. While it took time for comics to fully transition from the stigma associated with them, they were eventually welcomed by academic circles as being evocative of societal changes and have continuously been studied for the subtext that superheroes can represent in subsequent media adaptations.

The relationship between comic book creators, audience, and their subsequent adaptations in different mediums make up the brunt of scholar Duncan McLean's essay "HBO's Watchmen and Generic Revision in a Genre of Adaptation" which states that not only can the influence of comic books on comic book movies not be understated, but that the source material deserves some of the credit of the adapted work. Mclean points to the 2017 Oscar-nominated superhero film *Logan* as his case study, noting that

Logan's meditation on the violence that is simply implied in more romanticized superhero movies complicates the heroics, exposing the superhero myth as inadequate before ultimately choosing to reaffirm that myth in one final act of sacrificial heroism. It is a persuasive application of a widely accepted framework for understanding generic

revision. However, it does not acknowledge the significant conceptual influence the film

draws from Mark Miller and Steve McNiven's eight-issue, comic-book storyline,

Wolverine: Old Man Logan, from 2008–2009. (196)

Comic book adaptations, from McLean's point of view, can be best described as being derivative

from the works they are based upon, but that does not come from a negative opinion on comic

books or adapted film. The preceding quote rather argues that superhero fair warrants the same

scholarly examination of subtest that any work based on pre-existing material warrants. McLean

also argues that Hollywood's need for adaptations can be traced back much further to a

continued reliance on adaptation can also be understood as a product of the superhero

movie having emerged in the post–Star Wars, high-concept era. Since the late nineteen-

seventies, the Hollywood studios have demonstrated a strong preference for presold

commodities with proven audiences rather than original narratives. Where other, earlier

genres that started with a reliance on adaptation moved into the creation of original genre

narratives for the screen, the era in which the superhero movie has emerged, with its

preference for adaptation, and the thousands of available properties already existing in

the comic-book space, has meant that there has been no incentive for the genre to push

into original narrative. The evolution seen as the screen genre has solidified its place in

the market has been in a willingness to adapt lesser-known, comparatively obscure titles,

rather than remaining dependent on the proven tentpoles of Batman, Spider-Man,

Superman, and the X-Men. (198)

For McLean, comic book films are evocative of the ways in which Hollywood has commodified

storytelling, which when combined with Marvel commodifying their characters, has made a

partnership that values the rampant search for IP in the modern blockbuster age. As comic book

films evolved from a need for filmmakers to find proven material with a built in fanbase during a changing filmmaking landscape, McLean argues that comic books provided a necessary form of intellectual property with which to grow into an entirely new era of filmmaking.

McLean goes on to further note that a common

> criticism of the superhero film across its first decade and a half in particular was the sameness of these films, resulting, in part, from an abundance of origin stories. Numerous films sought to introduce their established comic-book characters to a broader market by going back and charting the story of how they came to be a superhero, thus only presenting audiences with the hero they came to see in the final act of the film. (205)

McLean's words can be understood to tackle one of the most interesting criticisms of the comic book film genre, which is that they are all the same. This common critique is not new however, with many film scholars arguing similarly that many "blockbuster" films are derivative, but with comic book films being the new kids on the block, they are made an easy target. But to those that see comic book films as all being the same, or not being real long-lasting "cinema", it would be easy to remember that musicals and westerns once ruled the American box office before superhero fair and the commercial blockbuster.

5. Closing Thoughts

Adaptation is necessary for survival in the animal kingdom, and the same can be said for adaptation helping to fuel the survival of myths and storytelling. Human beings have passed down stories for eons, and storytelling itself is thought to fulfill the evolutionary advantage of passing down wisdom to the next generation. For comic book superheroes, adaptation has made a positive impact. It ensures these characters and stories survival and retelling in new media. It can likewise offer significant positive change to stories and characters that would've been lost to

time or left in the dust ages ago. Miles Morales is now an authentic, and wholly original in terms of cultural identity, as opposed to his Spider-costumed predecessor. Wanda Maximoff has been welcomed by fans of the MCU for her natural progression into a complex character struggling with grief and mental illness. Neither of those character possessed either of those in their original forms of media, rather they were both adapted with positive changes that improved their characterization overall. As mutant leader Professor Charles Xavier, portrayed by Sir Patrick Stewart, says in the 2000 Comic book film *X-Men* regarding the evolution through adaptation

> it is the key to our evolution. It has enabled us to evolve from a single-celled organism
> into the dominant species on the planet. This process is slow, normally taking thousands
> and thousands of years. But every few hundred millennia, evolution leaps forward.

As Xavier suggests for the comic book mutant kind, thanks to evolution through adaptation, comic books and comic book characters, like Miles Morales and Wanda Maximoff, will live on through their adaptation in new forms of media.

For something to evolve in the animal kingdom, it must adapt to its surroundings, and the reflective nature of Hollywood blockbusters are inherently a reactionary medium that flinches at the slightest falter, and so far superhero films falter less often than some other genre films. What makes money at the box office will always have similar projects follow suit, it is a business first and foremost. The Hollywood superhero adaptation game will continue because they make money when nothing else can survive the woes of movie theater multiplexes. Of the top ten films at the domestic box office, roughly half are recently released films that are adapted from superhero comic books. Society craves these characters and stories in new forms of media that is currently being satiated through various forms of adapted media, and principally that of films.

Right now, especially in a post Covid landscape, comic book films are still making money in an uncertain time. In 2021, the film *Spider-Man: No Way Home* ushered in nearly two-billion dollars in box office receipts and re-opened blockbusters post pandemic. This was an unparalleled success of the newly revitalized blockbuster film and theatrical experience post-virus. Many film pundits expected movie theaters to go extinct in the streaming landscape, especially after the virus instituted lock-downs and shorting of theater stocks on Wall Street, and yet they still stand, thanks in part to comic book films bringing in the masses to buy outrageously priced popcorn and matinee tickets. If anyone values the theatrical experience, it shouldn't matter what is bringing in people to see films as long as the theatrical experience continues to survive a little longer. It has also allowed new audiences to find characters and stories that they would've otherwise missed altogether.

The way that film, as a medium, brings audiences together cannot be understated, and superhero comic books and the films have brought masses of audiences together. Film clubs and comic book shops similarly offer a solace for the artistically minded individual to debate and ponder characters, to wonder and be awe-struck by timeless stories of good and evil, and to escape the reality we all too often find ourselves in. Film circles and comic book fiends have much in common that helps these adaptations in media continue to flourish. The escapism provided by the media we consume offers the freedom to examine a work for its artistic merit and compare notes with fellow fans. Opinionated fandoms allow adaptations a chance to react and change to new media forms and audiences. Comic books and comic book films go hand in hand because they offer the chance to improve each other, and to change with the times, by allowing creators the chance to update stories and characters for a new audience. Comic book films have a built-in audience and that allows Hollywood the financial freedom to take risks

adapting them, which in turn changes the status quo of the stories and characters themselves. The comic book medium can then take changes that work and slowly transition them back to the paper page and hopefully attract a broader film-going audience that is more familiar with the characters adapted appearances. The cycle between the two forms of media is complex and beneficial to both.

Comic books and comic book films form a sort of symbiosis in today's never-ending cycle of Hollywood blockbuster. For many in academia, the specific ways in which comic books have begun to shape the new media forms has become a point of great interest, warranting deep-rooted scholarly study of how exactly comic book films differ from source material and vice-versa. Through this research paper however, it has been shown that the far more interesting prospect is how adaptation has reinvented comic books stories and characters, and how those changes have crossed forms of media for the benefit and mainstream success of characters and stories that were once seen as niche or inauthentic.

Comic book character lore continue to grow and be changed through their adaptation in subsequent media. In this research paper scholarly research of the adaptation of comic book media has been undertaken, and the mainstream success of the genre and characters in subsequent media adaptations has been examined. Something once thought to be niche like comic book superhero character, have become pillars of the cultural zeitgeist spurred on by their adaptations in media. From this research we can see that as comic book adaptations developed as a genre they began to influence the source material in return. The commercialization of comic books as source material has ushered in a new era of fans and created a modern mythology of billion-dollar cinematic universes. The intellectual properties warrant and deserve to be studied as they continue to grow and change from their inception, and thanks to the scholarly effort from

authors like those examined in this essay, we will never have to wonder what happened to the

paper heroes of yesteryear.

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