SUPERMAN AS A HISTORICAL FIGURE, 1938–2022

by

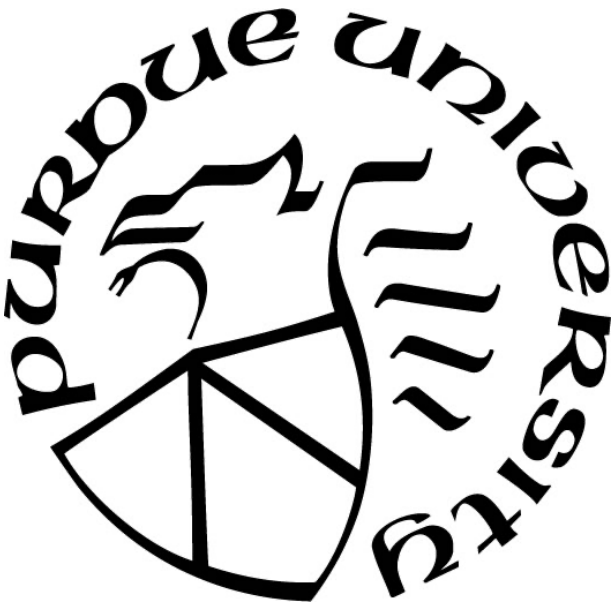
Andrew Brett Fogel

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



Department of History

West Lafayette, Indiana

December 2022

THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
STATEMENT OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Dr. Sharra L. Vostral, Chair
Department of History

Dr. John Lauritz Larson
Department of History

Dr. David C. Atkinson
Department of History

Dr. Nick Yablon
The University of Iowa
Department of History

Approved by:
Dr. Kathryn Cramer Brownell

Dedicated to the men who guided these characters and the fans

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Are you done yet?" After years of being pelted with this question, I can finally answer with those three letters: Yes. There is, however, a caveat to this long-awaited response. It will take a few more years to transform my dissertation, an institutional document, into a public-facing manuscript with potentially three more chapters to produce the final product. So, my answer is still unsatisfying to family and friends, but they (and I) are glad that I have completed this phase.

Reaching this plateau, nonetheless, would have been virtually impossible without the guidance of four historians. My adviser, Sharra Vostral, helped steer this project and its unconventional ideas on superheroes and their role in American culture into, hopefully, the beginning of a serious contribution within and beyond academia. In addition to supporting my countless fellowship proposals, she generously offered her time in reading and rereading my lengthy chapters to turn them into a cohesive narrative on the importance of Superman and his compatriots for academics of different disciplines and the public. Her constant push to go deeper and think bigger has been crucial to strengthening my arguments. Like a good editor, she directed me to make sure that my mountainous array of sources always referred to my overarching story of the public inhabiting an imaginary landscape populated by superheroes who function in this space as *real* people. Without such a sounding board and advocate, the final result, presented here, would not be nearly as good. From the beginning of my graduate studies, John Larson took an interest in my surprising topic and cultivated my geographical outlook through discussions in his office and an independent study on what we called the global frontier. He allowed me to pursue my ideas of imagination and homeland and let them flourish. His knowledge of the literature enabled me to cement my concept of Comicland in the larger conversations of literary history and race and space in America. Fellow committee member David Atkinson took me out of my comfort zone in his transnational history seminar through reading chronicles of US imperialism and statecraft that documented the messy relationships between state and nonstate actors. In the process, he opened my mind to new ways of thinking about the past and what methodology could mean. He too was another believer in me and my work and always gave thoughtful feedback on my writing let it be a fellowship application or letter to request archival access. Although under no obligation and without ever meeting me in

person, Nick Yablon of the University of Iowa donated his time to serve as my outside reader. His work on modernity and urbanization by tracing the role of ruins in American culture and society through fiction and reality showed me how historical scholarship could effectively handle abstract ideas.

Outside of my institution and dissertation committee, two comics studies specialists deserve specific acknowledgement. Pete Coogan has aided my intellectual growth through detailed reviews of my chapters, fellowship proposals, and academic job market materials, many times over. Tons of phone calls and emails over the years were spent discussing the minutiae of the genre and the real-world manifestations of superheroes. The initial idea of Comicland as a neighborhood arose out of one of these conversations as well as my hunt to find the exact reference in *Episodes* (see chapter 4). He made me watch, despite my resistance, the confusing film *Birdman* again and to see how it could serve as an allegory for Michael Keaton's post-Batman life and a meditation on the curse of superhero typecasting. Honestly, I would not have finished without his assistance—but "for Pete's sake" stop giving me references to track down. Fellow Superman expert Brad Ricca also donated his time to give feedback on several chapters. He always cheered me on even when I felt beaten down by the enormity of my undertaking. His dual biography on Superman's creators and discovery of new sources filled the gaps in my arguments.

A special thanks goes to Purdue University for supporting my research through doctoral program admittance, tuition waiver, a four-year teaching assistantship, and a Harold D. Woodman prize. Three Promise Awards and department funding enabled me to present my research at home and abroad to places such as England, Holland, South Africa, and Australia. Two Lotte Hirsch Travel Grants from the department of Jewish studies, two PGSG Professional Grants and four PGSG Travel Grants also supplemented this activity. The opportunity to share my work-in-progress at conferences has been essential to defining my arguments, articulating my spatial concepts, and expanding my scholarly network. The Purdue Research Foundation fellowship and Dean Knudsen Dissertation Research Award provided a year of funding to conduct my archival research in New York at Brooklyn College, the New York Public Library, and Macy's as well as two summers in Washington at the Library of Congress. A New England Regional Fellowship Consortium grant enabled a two-month stay in Boston to examine collections at Boston College, Harvard University, and Dartmouth College. The Massachusetts

Historical Society graciously extended my award during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am also grateful to the archivists and reference librarians at these institutions for their assistance, especially Paul Friedman for walking me through the NYPL MaRLI program. Staff at the Purdue University HSSE Library were also instrumental. Larry Mykytuik always offered a supportive ear and got a microfilm reproduction of the US Army periodical *Midpacifican* made for me from the University of Hawaii, which avoided a lengthy and costly trip. The Purdue Interlibrary Loan Office staff members Connie Richards and Will Ferrall fulfilled nearly all of my tedious requests for materials. Lastly, I must acknowledge my local librarian Ian Smith for obtaining a litany of books and DVDs on Superman while I finished my dissertation in Absentia.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NOMENCLATURE

A brief discussion on the language in this text is important. For ease of identification, this project will refer to the intellectual property owners of Superman, Batman, and Robin as DC Comics across time and occasionally the subsidiary Superman, Inc. when appropriate. The same format applies to their competitor Marvel Comics. This usage follows the method of historian Braford W. Wright and contrasts the National/DC and Timely/Atlas/Marvel approach to nomenclature by journalism scholar David Hajdu.[1] The two main superhero comic book publishers changed names over the years. Historical accuracy is important. The company Detective Comics, Inc. finally settled on DC Comics, Inc. in 1977 under President Jenette Kahn. During this approximate forty-year period, two intermediary name changes occurred: National Comics Publications, Inc. between October 1946 and January 1947 (according to various copyright records) and then National Periodical Publications, Inc. in 1961 to showcase its position as a publicly traded company (probably at the suggestion of treasurer and later co-owner Jack S. Liebowitz for financial and image reasons). According to former DC Comics employee and Batman movie producer Michael E. Uslan, "The plan for the public offering on the NYSE was the cause of the name change to National Periodical Publications from National Comics [Publications]."[2] This business decision, which removed "Comics" from the company name, showed the breadth of their operation in distributing other magazines like *Mad* and *Playboy* and was possibly a reaction to the comics scare from the previous decade. Most authors use a timeline that omits Detective Comics, Inc. as the original company name. It was *not* just National, which is used as shorthand for the entire period.[3] They base this word choice on the name National Allied Newspaper Syndicate, Inc., the predecessor company to Detective Comics, Inc.

---

[1] Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. xix; David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (New York, NY: Picador, 2009), pp. 31, 45, 130, 133, 163, 172, 177, 190, 235, 254, 261, 274, 286, 305, 327.

[2] For semiaccurate corporate timelines, names, and magazine distribution, see Brian Cronin, *Was Superman A Spy?: And Other Comic Book Legends Revealed* (New York, NY: Plume, 2009), pp. 3–4; Larry Tye, *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012), pp. 113, 125, 149, 184, 188, 211, 322; Brad Ricca, *Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—The Creators of Superman* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin Press, 2013), pp. 385–386n8, 397n11; Michael E. Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman: A Memoir* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2011), p. 112. Copyright records reveal the near-perfect dates of change.

[3] Tom De Haven, *Our Hero: Superman on Earth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 97.

initially owned by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson.[4] The actual company title timeline runs National Allied Newspaper Syndicate, Inc., Detective Comics, Inc., Superman, Inc., National Comics Publications, Inc., National Periodical Publications, Inc., DC Comics, Inc., and DC Entertainment Inc.

Terminology for the medium is another issue that deserves clarity. In addition to newspaper comic strips and comic books, I use the term *comics* generally in reference to the field of comics studies' proclivity for the word to encompass all types of sequential art. To my knowledge, Coulton Waugh was the first author to use the word *comics* as shorthand for comic books in 1947 and strangely distinguishes it from the funnies.[5] However, most scholars today delineate no separation between the two mediums.

[4] 1909–1937 Periodicals and Renewals Claimant Copyright Drawer, NATION_INC_1925 NATIONAL_ASSN_OF_B, cards 0932a–0939.
[5] See Coulton Waugh, *The Comics* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1947), pp. 14–15.

ABSTRACT

This study charts the real-world impact of Superman and how embedded the superhero is within American culture. Since debuting in 1938 as the first superhero, kids embraced Superman as a heroic symbol to emulate while adults mainly used him as comedic fodder to discuss race and ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Although Superman is a fictional character, he maintains traceable documentary footprints and should be treated as a historical figure. Through sincere and satirical play, the public brought the Man of Steel and his make-believe world to life as an immersive realm and metatopography. This project studies the reception and adaptation of Superman by the populace and the geography of Comicland, a surreal realm mirroring our own modern reality that exists both within the imagination and the material world through pageant, masquerade, and multimedia. The beauty of this fictive universe is its mutability, being a permanent yet intangible place that imprinted itself in the real world. Comics fans do not have to travel to a theme park, even though it is now part of that type of entertainment, to participate in the fantasy. Comicland is, thus, a mental and physical landscape that audiences can inhabit as their own regardless of location and serves as a portal between fantasy and reality. From Superman's inception, critics dismissed the superhero as a fad and its culture as marginal. However, multigenerational and multidecade engagement with Superman shows that the genre is mainstream and an unfading facet of Americana.

INTRODUCTION: SUPERMAN AND THE POWER OF COMICLAND

The urchin in Irkutsk may never have heard of Hamlet; the peon in Pernambuco may not know who Raskolnikov is; the widow in Jakarta may stare blankly at the mention of Don Quixote or Micawber or Jay Gatsby. But every man, woman and child on the planet knows Mickey Mouse, Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, Robin Hood … [*sic*] and Superman.
—Harlan Ellison[1]

On April 18, 1938, DC Comics unknowingly launched the American superhero industry with the inaugural issue of *Action Comics*.[2] Nearly seventy years later Michael Chabon, author of the Pulitzer Prize winning novel about the comics industry and superhero genre *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, described the moment as "Minute Zero of the superhero idea."[3] Publisher Harry Donenfeld and his trusted account Jack S. Liebowitz took a chance on including a new character named Superman for their fourth magazine, cover dated June 1938. These New York-based Jewish entrepreneurs commissioned a thirteen-page yarn from his creators Jerry

---

[1] See Harlan Ellison, "It Ain't Toontown: Did Your Mother Throw Yours Out? Too Bad, Because Funny Books Are No Longer Kid Stuff," *Playboy*, vol. 35, no. 12 (December 1988), pp. 162–165, 174, 222–224, 226, 230. The quote appears on page 165. For reprints, see Harlan Ellison, "Did *Your* Mother Throw *Yours* Out?," in *The Harlan Ellison Hornbook* (New York, NY: Penzler Books, 1990), p. 353 and Harlan Ellison, *Edgeworks: Volume Three, The Collected Ellison* (Clarkston, GA: White Wolf Publishing, 1997), p. 341. See also Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle, eds., preface to *Superman at Fifty! The Persistence of a Legend* (Cleveland, OH: Octavia Press, 1987), p. 11. The authors mention receiving a letter from Ellison (presumably before July 1987) that they quote without spaces surrounding the ellipses. To my knowledge, this is the first printed version.

Superman biographers often swipe this idea without any citation to Harlan Ellison and compare Superman to Mickey Mouse. See Roger Stern, introduction to *The Adventures of Superman*, by George Lowther (1942; Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1995), pp. xix–xxx; Jake Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2008), pp. xi, 60, interview with Keith Giffen in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 241; Bruce Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), p. 3; De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 162; Michael J. Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy: The Unauthorized but True Story of Radio & TV's Adventures of Superman* (Albany, GA: BearManor Media, 2009), p. 12; Tye, *Superman* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012), pp. xiv, 295.

[2] For the idea of unknowingly creating a new popular culture phenomenon beginning with Superman, see Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2005), pp. xv, 125, 140–141, 157, 164, 199, 340; Tye, *Superman*, p. 35; Glen Weldon, *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 26; Lauren Agostino and A.L. Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite: Truth, Justice and America's First Superhero* (n.p.: Holmes and Watson, 2014), p. 58.

It has long been mentioned that the issue appeared on newsstands in April and copyright records provide a precise date. Many writers claim that *Action Comics* no. 1 (June 1938) remained on the newsstand for six weeks or guestimate a timeframe. See, for instance, De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 28; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 30, 35. Copyright records, however, list five weeks until publication of the next issue. See 1938–1945 copyright drawer DESI–DETN, card 1654. Superman copyright court case records also mention April 18, 1938, as the date of publication. For mention of the correct date, see Weldon, *Superman*, p. 17; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 4, 16.

[3] Michael Chabon, "Secret Skin: *An essay in unitard theory*," *The New Yorker*, vol. 84, no. 4, March 10, 2008, p. 65. Also available online as Michael Chabon, "Secret Skin: *An essay in unitard theory*," The New Yorker, March 3, 2008, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/03/10/secret-skin.

Siegel and Joe Shuster, two budding Jewish cartoonists from Cleveland, Ohio. Donenfeld and Liebowitz bought the rights to Superman for 130 dollars, a rate of ten dollars per page, and liked the strange hero from the planet Krypton so much that they even placed him on the cover of their new magazine. Filled with original comic art and a wide range of characters and genres, their products *More Fun* (formerly *New Fun*), *New Adventure Comics*, *Detective Comics*, and *Action Comics* fought for the attention of consumers on the newsstand against pulp magazines and reprints of newspaper comic strips.[4] Superman, however, quickly captured the public imagination and showed the world that the comic book superhero, a genre which Siegel and Shuster unwittingly established, had the potential to initiate a new entertainment market. After realizing that they struck gold, Donenfeld and Liebowitz developed Superman, the first superhero, into much more than just a comic book character and well beyond what Siegel and Shuster envisioned.[5] With the help of Jewish salesman and future Wonder Woman publisher Max Charles Ginsburg (better known as M. C. Gaines), three Jewish employees named Allen Ducovny, Robert Maxwell [Joffe], and Mort Weisinger, and the Protestant outlier [Frederick] Whitney Ellsworth, DC Comics instituted an entire fantasy universe that all of us now inhabit. Through careful marketing and editorial supervision these men transformed the rebellious, social crusading Superman into a kid-friendly playmate and virtuous symbol of the nation. Adults, however, repurposed the Man of Steel into a marionette for their own devices. While pursuing different—and often cross—purposes, the caretakers at DC Comics and fans fashioned Comicland: an immersive realm and metatopography of the superhero that interacts with the real world. Through either admiration or parody, kids and adults have been playing with Superman since his debut. Siegel and Shuster biographers Lauren Agostino and A.L. Newberg sing the same song of collaborative effort. "Two men may have the idea, but it takes a village, or in this case, an incredible group of businessmen and artists to reach the heights that Superman has reached. It also takes the fan."[6] Writing forty-one years before the striking epigraph above, cartoonist and popular author Coulton Waugh attests to Superman's unshakable place in

---

[4] See Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 342–343. M. C. Gaines claimed that he "discovered" Superman and suggested the feature to DC Comics. See M. C. Gaines, "Narrative Illustration," *Print: A Quarterly Journal of the Graphic Arts*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Summer 1942), pp. 36, 86; Philip Brooks, "Notes on Rare Books," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 92, no. 30,962, November 1, 1942, p. 34 (*The New York Times Book Review*, Section 6); Bert Dale, "Funny Business," *Forbes*, vol. 52, no. 5, September 1, 1943, pp. 22, 27. For *Action Comics* as collection of diverse genres, see also Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, p. 12.
[5] For alternative gold and gold rush analogies, see Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. xii, 67.
[6] Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, p. 154.

American culture: "He is a national figure, perhaps the most worshipped and adored of our time."[7] This statement is still true and there are no indications of this changing. As this project will show, Superman remains to this day one of the most beloved, recognizable, and referenced fictional characters.

My dissertation chronicles the sociocultural impact, reception, and appropriation of DC Comics' leading fantastic figure from his debut in 1938 to the present through printed and projected media. This interdisciplinary study utilizes textual and audiovisual materials to reveal Superman's influence over and presence in the material world. It uncovers the public's simultaneous celebration and satire of him in daily life. From children's athletic contests at the New York World's Fair, to large balloons floating above the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, to numerous reports of boys' breaking bones or dying after trying to fly, to the marketing of children's costumes and toys, to adult cosplay and character reimagining, to sexual innuendo and political discourse, Superman became tangible in the everyday world. These manifestations of the Man of Steel brought Comicland to life, a real and imagined geography embraced by the public that is portable and increasingly more inclusive. This transmedia history of DC Comics' flagship character explores his relationship to the populace through the themes of play, consumption, race, gender, and sexuality. Tracing Superman beyond the page into pageant, masquerade, and multimedia is simply an extension of literary history and the history of amusement. By emphasizing the reception and adaptation of Superman through children's genuine admiration and adult's comical engagement, my scholarship demonstrates how embedded the superhero is within American culture.

Statement of the Problem: Sidelining Superman

Most conventional academic historians tend to overlook Superman—and his genre progeny[8]—as trivial childhood fancy as well as undervalue comics as a primary source and subject of scholarly study. This dismissive viewpoint relegates Superman and popular culture to the spheres of juvenilia and nostalgia. However, some scholars have recognized that the character offers a larger value to the historical field, but the examination generally remains scant.

---

[7] Waugh, *The Comics*, p. 256.
[8] For icon "progeny," see Martin Kemp, *Christ to Coke: How Image Becomes Icon* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 2, 227.

When Superman is discussed, the majority of analysis is based on a cursory knowledge through reading a few early comics and contemporary articles. This casual understanding leads to a simplistic attempt to connect him to a wider pattern in literature or film through the frontiersman or gangster archetypes. In the process, many historians present themselves as experts on Superman without doing the necessary archival work and end up with nothing deeper to say than their generalizations and passing remarks. There is an "it's already been said" implication and that Superman is a minor footnote to history—a source to reinforce their claims about *other* topics.[9] Superman deserves a proper and dedicated historical treatment. He should not remain just an afterthought to entertainment or American history.

This project is methodologically indebted to the reflections of renown historian Lawrence W. Levine by studying the relationship between popular culture and ordinary people. According to Levine "no cultural artifact of a people and a society is unworthy of serious study."[10] He also rightly contends that "there can be no understanding of the American people without a serious

---

[9] See Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 5–6, 233–249; Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 227–228, 299; Gordon H. Chang, ""Superman is about to visit the relocation centers" & the Limits of Wartime Liberalism," *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1993), pp. 37–59; Robert S. McElvaine, *The Depression and New Deal: A History in Documents* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 140–141; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 176–177; Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of An American Legend* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 144, 161, 171; Alan M. Wald, *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 270n71; Kenneth D. Rose, *Myth and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), pp. 83, 179–180; David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 52, 189, 199, 204; Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. viii–ix, 6, 115, 163–165, 168, 177, 283; Christopher E. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 184; Allan W. Austin, *Quaker Brotherhood: Interracial Activism and the American Friends Service Committee, 1917–1950* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. 130; Thomas Howell, *Soldiers of the Pen: The Writers' War Board in World War II* (Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019), pp. 75, 100, 181. It is worth mentioning that historians Neil Harris, Scott Reynolds Nelson, Alan M. Wald, and Christopher E. Forth misspell the last name of Superman artist Joe Shuster as Schuster. While this may be an editorial error and no fault of the authors, it, nonetheless, makes it difficult to entertain their (already limited) opinions of the character. Additionally, the essay by Harris is a revision. For the original, see Neil Harris, "Who Owns Our Myths Heroism and Copyright in an Age of Mass Culture," *Social Research*, vol. 52, no. 2 (Summer 1985), pp. 241–267.

For the original essay, see Lawrence W. Levine, "American Culture and the Great Depression," *The Yale Review*, vol. 74, no. 2 (January 1985), pp. 196–223. Levine, unfortunately, edited down the chapter. His unpublished paper, the last of the three Merle Curti Lectures he delivered at the University of Wisconsin in the spring of 1991, entitled "Man And Superman: Success, Individualism, And Institutions In Depression America," forefronts Superman and Batman and also explores them as products of their time. Thanks to Professor Susan Curtis for sharing this document with me.

[10] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, p. viii.

attempt to understand the everyday culture they were exposed to and interacted with."[11] Superman is a regenerating cultural artifact and unmistakably everyday culture. Such an approach also flips the top-down methodology of intellectual history and rotates the geographical emphasis of the history of ideas from European affairs to the American context.

Why Superman Matters

To understand Superman and his role in American life necessitates a formalized character study.[12] This stranger from the planet Krypton who adopted the "democratic" values of "small town" agrarian America is a noteworthy feature of modern culture and history. Superman is not frivolous children's entertainment. His fictive activities generated serious reactions and real-world outcomes. Superman has served as an ideological battleground over child rearing and play, domestic and international affairs, and the definition of proper literature, art, and cinema. These debates show his reach and power. The Man of Steel is not tangential but central to contemporary life. He is a window into American culture and the nation's place in the world. Historian Paul S. Hirsch makes a similar argument for investigating the comic book as an object to explore domestic and international history. "A cultural phenomenon this pervasive, and this long-lived, is important. It matters as an example of a uniquely American creation that conquered the world."[13] Like the comic book, we do not think of Superman as a site to learn about society, culture, and politics, yet his standing in America and among other nations is invaluable to understanding the public mind in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries from the Great Depression to the present. Because of Superman's multigenerational and global popularity, which crosses the boundaries of race, ethnicity, and gender, scholars and critics must take him and his historical remnants seriously. Dismissal of Superman and his genre progeny as being inconsequential to the larger patterns of the human experience is a shortsighted view of the nature of culture and modernity and neglects superheroes status as both revered and detested symbols of American culture.

---

[11] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, p. 230.
[12] For a dedicated character study on Superman that is lackluster and semiacademic, see Ian Gordon, *Superman: The Persistence of An American Icon* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017).
[13] Paul S. Hirsch, *Pulp Empire: The Secret History of Comic Book Imperialism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 272.

Studying Superman as a historical figure in everyday life is a worthy academic endeavor. The average person matures with him, regardless of the time period it seems, and maintains a personal connection that does not fade. Although a fictional character, the Man of Steel holds a unique command over modern play. Superman has been one of the few constant features of contemporary childhood and continues to enamor the global population into adulthood. This exciting and radiant figure sustains such widespread appeal because he inspires the imagination. These are this text's central arguments.

This dissertation stands apart from previous writing. In contrast to the numerous popular histories of Superman and biographical treatments of him and his Jewish creators, which continually celebrate the overdone cultural icon idea, speculate on Jewishness and Jewish identity, and tout the misguided comparison to classical mythology or folklore, this study focuses on his traceable presence in the material world and multidecade and multigenerational influence over kids and adults. Achieving this aim requires a methodology that uses the culture of the everyday world as an archive. Correcting the general lack of historical context and extensive archival work as well as the overreliance on unverifiable firsthand and secondhand oral history,[14]

---

[14] For popular and unhistorical academic literature on Superman, see Gary H. Grossman, *Superman: Serial to Cereal* (New York, NY: Popular Library, 1977); Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*; Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1998); Glenn Yeffeh, ed., *The Man from Krypton: A Closer Look at Superman* (Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2005); Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*; De Haven, *Our Hero*; Michael J. Bifulco, *The Original Superman on Television*, rev. and exp. ed. (n.p.: CreateSpace, 2011); Joseph J. Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman: Essays on the Man of Steel in Changing Times* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012); Weldon, *Superman*; Ricca, *Super Boys*; Carol L. Tilley, "'Superman Says 'Read!'" National Comics and Reading Promotion," *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 44, no. 3 (September 2013), pp. 251–263; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*; Matthew Freeman, "Up, Up and Across: Superman, the Second World War and the Historical Development of Transmedia Storytelling," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2015), pp. 215–239; Aldo J. Regalado, *Bending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero* (Jackson, MS: The University Press of Mississippi, 2015), pp. 3–5, 8–9, 11–13, 17–18, 79–80, 83–94, 96–111, 113–115, 119–120, 125, 129, 131, 134, 136, 138–143, 153–154, 156–157, 159, 161, 164–166, 168–169, 178, 182, 185, 187, 191–193, 197, 206–207, 209, 215, 217–218, 219 (photo), 225–227, 239n25; Olivia Wright, "On My World, It Means Hope," *Eastern American Studies Association*, vol. 6, no. 1 (December 2018), pp. 72–87; Phillip Bevin, *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019); John Darowski, ed., *Adapting Superman: Essays on the Transmedia Man of Steel* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2021). And for the lackluster icon theme, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*; Tye, *Superman*; Gordon, *Superman*.

Regarding a coded Jewishness to Superman and his contemporaries and superficial musings on the Jewish confluence in the comic book industry, see, for example, James K. Brower, "The Hebrew Origins of Superman," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, vol. 5, no. 3 (May/June 1979), pp. 22–26; Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 12, 100–101; Dennis Dooley, "Superman: An Immigrant Who Really Made It," *Moment*, vol. 13, no. 4 (June 1988), pp. 44–52; Michael Weiss, "Secret Identities: The real-life faces behind the masks of comic books' greatest superheroes," *The Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), no. 60, December 1, 1989, pp. 30–32; Jeff Salamon, "Up, Up, and Oy Vay!: The Further Adventures of Supermensch," *The Village Voice* (New York, NY), vol. 37, no. 31, August 4, 1992, pp. 86–88; Eric J. Greenberg, "Did Superman Have Biblical Roots?," *The Jewish Week* (Queens, NY), vol. 206, no. 41, February 9,

my approach incorporates a textual and audiovisual analysis of the popular press (including letters to the editor, cartoons, and photographs), correspondence and memoranda, legal and copyright records, poetry, radio, film and television, documentaries, stand-up and sketch comedy, and the comics themselves to provide a more clear and comprehensive picture of the Man of Steel and his place in the world.[15] It is not the final word on Superman but the first true synthesis

---

1996, pp. 41, 56; Jules Feiffer, "Jerry Siegel: The Minsk Theory of Krypton," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 146, no. 50,656, December 29, 1996, pp. 14–15 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 6); Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (New York, NY: Picador, 2000), esp. p. 585; Stephen J. Whitfield, "Declarations of Independence: American Jewish Culture in the Twentieth Century," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2002), pp. 1109–1110; J. Hoberman and Jeffrey Shandler, *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting* (New York, NY: The Jewish Museum and Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 166; Jay Schwartz, "Zap! Pow! Plotz!: Jews and the invention of the American comic book," *J.: the Jewish news weekly of Northern California*, vol. 109, no. 41, October 21, 2005, pp. 30–31; interview with J. Hoberman in *Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own*, directed by Simcha Jacobovici and Stuart Samuels, written by Simcha Jacobovici (1997; n.p.: A&E Home Video, 2005), DVD; Howard Jacobson, "Kabbalic Crusader: Up, up, and oy vey: Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, says **Howard Jacobson**, [*sic*] it's a Jewish folk hero in disguise," *The Times* (London, UK), no. 68,327, March 5, 2005, p. 5 (Ideas Review section); Simcha Weinstein, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey! How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero* (Baltimore, MD: Leviathan Press, 2006); Danny Fingeroth, *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007); Paul Gravett, "People Of The Comic Book," *The Jewish Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 4 (December 2007), pp. 48–51; Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow To Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008); Lisa Alcalay Klug, *Cool Jew: The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing LLC, 2008), pp. 22–23; Daniel S. Mariaschin, "Classic Comics and the Jewish Connection: Gateway to a Life of Reading" and Jeannie Counce "Pow! Zam! Thwak! The Jewish Pioneers of the Comic Book Industry: Holy Archetypal Hero!," *B'nai B'rith Magazine*, vol. 125, no. 4 (Winter 2011), pp. 6–7, 12–19; "Jewish Comic Book Pioneers," letters to the editor, *B'nai B'rith Magazine*, vol. 126, no. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 10, 12; John Efron, Steven Weitzman, and Matthias Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc., 2014), p. 459; Harry Brod, *Superman Is Jewish?: How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2016); Johnny E. Miles, *Superheroes and Their Ancient Jewish Parallels: A Comparative Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), esp. pp. 40–74; Roy Schwartz, *Is Superman Circumcised?: The Complete Jewish History of the World's Greatest Hero* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2021). For the generally unconvincing rebuttal—due to its polemical tone, truncated time period, and lack of archival support—to these popular histories, see Martin Lund, *Re-Constructing the Man of Steel: Superman 1938–1941, Jewish American History, and the Invention of the Jewish-Comics Connection* (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

For the mythology and folklore thesis, see Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," trans. Natalie Chilton, *Diacritics*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 14–22; Daniel Peretti, *Superman in Myth and Folklore* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017). Eco's essay was reprinted as Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," in *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 107–124. For other examples of this sophomoric treatment, see Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi, 1994); Andrew R. Bahlmann, *The Mythology of the Superhero* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016). See also the folkloric- and Jungian-themed essay, Alvin Schwartz, "The Real Secret of Superman's Identity," *Children's Literature*, vol. 5: Annual of The Modern Language Association Group on Children's Literature and The Children's Literature Association (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1976), pp. 117–129.

[15] Tom De Haven implies that his elongated essay "tracks Superman's *presence* in the world" and explores him as a commodity. These threads are minimal and surface level, however. See De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 19, 23–24 as well as 18–22, 59, 94, 195 for Superman products.

and meant to be accessible to the educated layperson while retaining the essential rich detail and intricacy of historical scholarship.[16]

This project and its thesis, stated here, moves beyond the biographical and journalistic literature by showing how differently Superman functions for kids and adults, being either a symbol of heroism to emulate or a cipher to discuss race and ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. It explores the geography of Superman in the everyday world and the power that he holds over the American imagination. DC Comics' commodification of Superman and the ways that the public played with him as a "real" person created a metalandscape of the superhero fantasy, which seems everlasting. This research, therefore, makes me the historical cartographer of Comicland, a surreal world that interfaces with reality and is sustained through character retellings across media platforms and ongoing public engagement. In other words, Comicland is a record of the individual and collective encounters with Superman, who is imagined and reimagined over time.

The "Real" World and World Building

The blurriness between fantasy and reality is an important aspect of Superman's appeal. Biographers of Superman mention in passing that he is not real. Discussing the literature on the Man of Steel, journalist Larry Tye, for example, writes that none approach "him as if he were human."[17] The interesting fact is that Superman is more real or more alive than other fictional characters because he operates as a historical figure. Literature scholar Jane M. Gaines attempts to resolve this quandary by referring to Superman as "semihuman." Even though her linguistic maneuver goes unqualified, it is an effective way to interpret Superman's real-world influence and the nature of the semireal Comicland.[18]

---

[16] See Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 3–13.

[17] Larry Tye thinks that his book treats Superman as a real figure in history. Without a thesis or overarching point, the text is an exploration of Superman as a fictional character. In other words, a biography of Superman's story in the world, but it does not present him as a "real" as this project does. He explained his rationale to me by email correspondence. "Yes and no. You can answer that better than me, having read the book as a neutral/smart reader. My intent was to treat his story as real, since it is to millions of fans. But also to look behind the scenes at the creation of a fictional character. That means trying to have it both ways, and as I say, it's up to reader to know if it worked." See Tye, *Superman*, p. 302; Larry Tye, email message to author, August 30, 2022; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. xx–xxi; Gordon, *Superman*, p. 70. For the idea that to effectively write Superman stories, the author must present him as real, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 262. Tye references the *Kingdom Come* comic book series by Mark Waid and later novel of the same name by Elliot S. Maggin in support.

[18] Jane M. Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, The Voice, and The Law* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 218.

To understand DC Comics' expressions of realism and world building with Superman it helps to consider discussion on Disney. Visionary cartoonist Walt Disney understood this desire of "animating" animated characters and corporealized the dream in Disneyland and later Disney World, purified physical places that white patrons could visit by car. His parks, which are geographically designated spaces for fantasy play, are packaged within a nostalgic and futuristic utopian vision.[19] Historian Robert Sklar articulates the legacy of Disney and his cartoonists' creations in contrast to the early filmmakers' projected realms. "They could draw worlds different from any experienced world, lead audiences into uncharted realms as far as imagination or daring could carry them. Blank paper gave them a chance to reinvent the world."[20] Cultural critic Neal Gabler uses the psychological term *paracosm* to define Disney's creation, "[A]n invented universe, that he could control as he could not control reality." Further psychoanalyzing Disney, Gabler writes, "[H]e kept attempting to remake the world in the image of his own imagination, to certify his place as a force in that world and keep reality from encroaching upon it, to recapture a sense of childhood power that he either had never felt or had lost long ago."[21] Focusing on Disney's first theme park, historian Jackson Lears, however, offers a technological and immersive interpretation. Disneyland shifted from an empire built on fantasy to "simulated reality."[22] Lears and others insinuate or explicitly state that Disney was the first cartoonist to materialize his world and, thus, offer the public participation in the surreal. Journalist Richard Schickel even claimed that Disney "originated the modern multimedia corporation."[23] The material world presence of Superman challenges these opinions. Well before Disney formed the

---

[19] Regarding Walt Disney and Disneyland, see, for example, Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of American Imagination* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), esp. pp. xii–xiii, xvi–xvii, 479, 482–486, 488–489, 493–500, 532–535, 613; David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1993), pp. 254–255. Two valuable essays entitled "Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World" and "Disney's America" appear in Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996), pp. 133–157 and 159–174. More recent interpretations include Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) and Michael Barrier, *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008). Scores of articles and other texts on Disney are traceable through the endnotes of these texts listed here.

[20] Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. and updated ed. (1975; New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 198.

[21] Gabler, *Walt Disney*, p. xvi. On pages xvii and 499, Neal Gabler also suggests that Walt Disney recreated the Puritan idea of the shining "City on a Hill." Such a claim of religious reinterpretation into secular fantasy, however, lacks the necessary empirical support.

[22] Jackson Lears, "The Mouse That Roared," *The New Republic*, vol. 218, no. 24, June 15, 1998, p. 27.

[23] Richard Schickel, "Walt Disney: Ruler of the Magic Kingdom: The first multimedia empire was built on animation, but its happy toons masked the founder's darker soul," *Time*, vol. 152, no. 23, December 7, 1998, p. 124.

first wonderland in Anaheim, California, DC Comics enacted such ideas in 1940 with "Superman Day" at the New York World's Fair as well as a Superman balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and a Superman-themed experience at Macy's flagship Manhattan store for the holiday season. Superman, Inc. developed these events fifteen years before Disney materialized Mickey Mouse and friends, except for the Macy's balloons in 1934 and 1935.[24]

The way that audiences responded to the superhero fantasy and made it their own distinguishes the genre from other forms of make-believe. Outside of commercialized spaces, kids and grownups alike dressed up as the Man of Tomorrow. Adults deployed Superman in deeper ways, however. They appropriated, parodied, and claimed or reclaimed his religious affiliation and ethnoracial ancestry and even discussed his sexuality and potential virginity. Similar musings occurred for Batman and Robin[25] as well as Wonder Woman,[26] but not to the

---

[24] For agreement, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 113; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 186. For the opposing view of Mickey Mouse as more popular at the time and the acknowledgement of his greater selling merchandise, see De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 58; Tye, *Superman*, p. 124.

[25] For popular literature on Batman, see Joel Eisner, *The Official Batman Batbook* (New York, NY: Contemporary Books, 1986); Mark Cotta Vaz, *Tales of the Dark Knight: Batman's First Fifty Years, 1939–1989* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1989); Bob Kane with Tom Andrae, *Batman & Me* (Forestville, CA: Eclipse Books, 1989); James Van Hise, *Batmania II* (Las Vegas, NV: Pioneer Books, 1992); Paul Dini and Chip Kidd, *Batman: Animated* (New York, NY: HarperEntertainment, 1998); Les Daniels, *Batman: The Complete History* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1999); Chip Kidd and Geoff Spear, *Batman: Collected* (New York, NY: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2001); Scott Beatty, *Batman: The Ultimate Guide to the Dark Knight* (New York, NY: DK Publishing, 2001); Mark Cotta Vaz, *The Art of Batman Begins: Shadows of the Dark Knight* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2005); Dennis O'Neil, ed., *Batman Unauthorized: Vigilantes, Jokers, and Heroes in Gotham City* (Dallas, TX: 2008); Jim Beard, ed., *Gotham City 14 Miles: 14 Essays on Why the 1960s Batman TV Series Matters* (Edwardsville, IL: Sequart Research & Literacy Organization, 2010); Bruce Scivally, *Billion Dollar Batman: A History of the Caped Crusader on Film, Radio and Television: From 10c Comic Book to Global Icon* (Wilmette, IL: Henry Gray Publishing, 2011); Jody Duncan Jesser and Janine Pourry, *The Art and Making of the Dark Knight Trilogy* (New York, NY: Abrams, 2012); David Hughes, *Tales from Development Hell: The Greatest Movies Never Made?* (London, UK: Titan Books, 2012); Gary Collinson, *Holy Franchise, Batman!: Bringing the Caped Crusader to the Screen* (London, UK: Robert Hale Limited, 2012); Glen Weldon, *The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016).

For a limited academic discussion on Batman, see Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio, eds., *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991); Will Brooker, "Batman: One life, many faces," in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, eds. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), pp. 185–198; Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2001); Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2012); Robin S. Rosenberg, *What's the Matter With Batman?: An Unauthorized Clinical Look Under the Mask of the Caped Crusader* (Lexington, MA: Robin S. Rosenberg, 2012); Liam Burke, ed., *Fan Phenomena: Batman* (Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2013); Matt Yockey, *Batman* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2014); Roberta E. Pearson, William Uricchio, and Will Brooker, eds., *Many More Lives of the Batman* (2015; New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2018); Jeffrey A. Brown, *Batman and the Multiplicity of Identity: The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero as Cultural Nexus* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019); Joe Sutliff Sanders, *Batman: The Animated Series* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2021).

[26] For Wonder Woman and her creator, see Phyllis Chesler, *Wonder Woman* (New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1972); Karen M. Walowit, "Wonder Woman: Enigmatic Heroine of American Popular Culture" (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1974); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold*

same extent. Alongside the corporate productions, these actions by the public constitute the four chapters of this project and show how, to borrow the language of comics writer and metaphysical theorist Grant Morrison, superheroes expanded beyond their "paper universe" or "printed universe."[27] Put another way, they surpassed the media of their creation.[28] My concept of Comicland, which sits alongside the established idea of comic book "universes," better characterizes the real-world manifestations of comics' imaginative production. Although Harlan Ellison situates Superman in the company of famous characters of literature like Hamlet, Mickey Mouse, Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, and Robin Hood, no literary protagonist, funny animal, detective, jungle lord, or folklore hero can lay claim to the kind of engagement the public has exhibited with the superhero. Referring to Mickey Mouse, popular author and comics writer

---

War Era, rev. ed. (1988; New York, NY: Basic Books, 2017), pp. 62, 66; Les Daniels, *Wonder Woman: The Complete History* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2000); Marguerite Lamb, "Who Was Wonder Woman?," *Bostonia*, no. 3 (Fall 2001), pp. 12–17; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 205–211; Mitra C. Emad, "Reading Wonder Woman's Body: Mythologies of Gender and Nation," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 39, no. 6 (December 2006), pp. 954–984; Ken Alder, *The Lie Detectors: The History of an American Obsession* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2007), esp. pp. xiii, 181–183, 190–195; Robert Greenberger, *Wonder Woman: Amazon, Hero, Icon* (New York, NY: Universe, 2010); Geoffrey C. Bunn, *The Truth Machine: A Social History of the Lie Detector* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 158, 172, 184–185 on Wonder Woman as well as pages 117–124, 126, 128–133, 135–137, 139, 146–147, 149, 150–151, 154–161, 182–186, 230n22 on her creator; Joseph J. Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Wonder Woman: Essays on the Amazon Princess in Changing Times* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014); Tim Hanley, *Wonder Woman Unbound: The Curious History of the World's Most Famous Heroine* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2014); Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters, *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), pp. x, 1–9, 90, 111, 170–171; Noah Berlatsky, *Wonder Woman: Bondage and Feminism in the Marston/Peter Comics, 1941–1948* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Emily Westkaemper, *Selling Women's History: Packaging Feminism in Twentieth-Century American Popular Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), pp. 116–124, 166, 194–195; Joan Ormrod, *Wonder Woman: The Female Body and Popular Culture* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2020).

For heroines more generally, see Lillian S. Robinson, *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004); Silke Andris and Ursula Frederick, eds., *Women Willing to Fight: The Fighting Woman in Film* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Jennifer K. Stuller, *Ink-stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Jeffrey A. Brown, *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2011); Maja Bajac-Carter, Norma Jones, and Bob Batchelor, eds., *Heroines of Comic Books and Literature: Portrayals in Popular Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Jeffrey A. Brown, *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine In Popular Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2015); Carolyn Cocca, *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2016); Keira V. Williams, *Amazons in America: Matriarchs, Utopians, and Wonder Women in U.S. Popular Culture* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2019); Carolyn Cocca, *Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel: Militarism and Feminism in Comics and Film* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

[27] Grant Morrison, *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us About Being Human* (New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2012), pp. 119, 156, 220, 368, and 416. Morrison uses the similar term "printed universe" on page 218.

[28] For agreement on the characters surpassing the media of their creation, see Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890–1945* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), p. 156; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 6–7, 9.

Gerard Jones rightly states that talking animals have become "company mascots" whereas superheroes have "been successfully reinvented" time and time again.[29]

Cinema upheld the superiority of Superman over the Disneyesque funny animal in the public imaginary. The 1986 film *Stand by Me*, a story about an adolescent group of boys coming of age during the 1950s that departed from the nostalgic rosy view of the era, highlighted the division between superheroes and anthropomorphic characters with realism as the crux of the matter. While dangerously walking on train tracks, two of the boys debate who would win in a fight: Mighty Mouse v. Superman. They, nevertheless, conclude that Superman is supreme because he is not a cartoon animal. It is worth noting that the superpowered mouse is a derivative of both Mickey Mouse and Superman.

> Vern Tessio: You think Mighty Mouse could beat up Superman?
>
> Teddy Duchamp: What are you cracked?!
>
> Vern Tessio: Why not?! I saw the other day he was carrying five elephants in one hand!
>
> Teddy Duchamp: Boy, you don't know nothin'. Mighty Mouse is a cartoon. Superman is a real guy. No way a cartoon could beat up a real guy.
>
> Vern Tessio: Yeah, maybe you're right. It would be a good fight, though![30]

Comicland and the Theme Park

Adults generally outgrow cartoon characters, but superheroes have retained a unique allure that never quite fades. This appreciation moved into the world of adolescent and adult play through mechanized amusement, both real and imagined. Even though there is currently no dedicated superhero theme park, thrilling rides bear their names. For example, the Dark Knight was the first superhero to have a rollercoaster at Six Flags, which opened in 1992. Superman

---

[29] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 339.

[30] *Stand by Me*, directed by Rob Reiner, written by Steven King, Raynold Gideon, and Bruce A. Evans (1986; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2018), DVD.

Analyzing the dialogue from the film, historian Jeffrey K. Johnson posits that at this historical juncture Superman reaches verisimilitude. "This humorous scene not only showcases youth culture in 1950s, but also emphasizes that by the 1950s Superman had stopped being fantastical and had become just another 'real guy.'" See Jeffrey K. Johnson, *Super-History: Comic Book Superheroes and American Society, 1938 to the Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), p. 69. However, children viewed Superman as a real person since his debut and he remained as such until the 1960s. As chapter two of this project illustrates, youngsters imagined that Superman's cape possessed magical qualities.

followed in 1997.[31] Interestingly, *Action Comics* no. 210 (November 1955) toyed with the idea of an amusement park constructed solely around the Kryptonian hero entitled "Superman Land."[32] Published on September 27, 1955, per the US copyright filing, this story line is likely a response to the July 17, 1955, opening of Disneyland.[33] Sixteen years later, the concept nearly became a reality. With the approval of the civic authorities, the town of Metropolis, Illinois, entered in an agreement with DC Comics to utilize the likeness of Superman for tourism purposes. A publicity event on January 21, 1972, dubbed "Superman Day"—not to be confused with the July 1940 affair of the same name—initiated the proceedings.[34] The final phase of the Superman project was to be "the possible development of a Superman Land" theme park. A 1973 comic book entitled *The Amazing World of Superman* reported this information.[35] The following year, *Limited Collectors' Edition* no. 31 (October–November 1974) featured four pages of sketches by cartoonist Neal Adams for the renamed the "Amazing World of Superman" park.[36] Superman biographer Glen Weldon notes that DC Comics investigated the idea of the Amazing World of Superman theme park in the 1970s to compete with Disney World.

> DC Comics, sensing an opportunity—and noting with interest the success of the newly opened Disney World—commissioned Neal Adams to come up with some concept sketches for a vast theme park to be called the Amazing World of

---

[31] For Batman rollercoasters, see Lisa Gubernick, "'We're bigger, faster, closer,'" *Forbes*, vol. 149, no. 11, May 25, 1992, p. 232; James R. Norman and Nikhil Hutheesing, "Hang on to your hats—and wallets," *Forbes*, vol. 152, no. 12, November 22, 1993, p. 90; Taiia Smart Young, "Park 'n' Ride!," *Essence*, vol. 29, no. 3 (July 1998), p. 122.

For Superman rollercoasters and Six Flags, see "Cool Summer Rides: Joyriders' Paradise: For thrill seekers, 20 new roller coasters to hie for," *Time*, vol. 149, no. 21, May 26, 1997, p. 100; Anne-Marie O'Neill, "On A Roll: Flipping, flying and (almost) losing it on the 10 scariest roller coasters in America," *People*, vol. 48, no. 1, July 7, 1997, p. 101; "The Big Picture: *Off* **We Go!**," *Life*, vol. 21, no. 2 (February 1998), p. 14; Leigh Gallagher, "Streetwalker: Hold on," *Forbes*, vol. 164, no. 2, July 26, 1999, p. 266; Morgan Murphy, "Forbes Life: Hell on Wheels," *Forbes*, vol. 165, no. 1, January 10, 2000, p. 238; Nicole Lee, "Six Flags' Superman Receives Industry Praise," *Atlanta Daily World*, vol. 74, no. 51, April 11–17, 2002, p. 5; Tracy Ward, "Rollercoasters: The ultimate in summer fun," *Afro-American Red Star*, July 28, 2007, p. C3.

For secondary source mentions of superhero rollercoasters, see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 333; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 220, 244; Tye, *Superman*, p. 258; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 273.

[32] See "Superman in Superman Land," *Action Comics* no. 210 (November 1955). For the reprint of the Superman Land story, see *The Amazing World of Superman*, Metropolis Edition (1973), pp. 2–13. Available at https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Action-Comics-1938/Issue-210; https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/The-Amazing-World-of-Superman-Metropolis-Edition/Full.

[33] See 1955–1970 copyright drawer ACR–ACTION_R, card 1252.

[34] Pat Nussman, "Superman finds roots as local town's hero," *Daily Egyptian* (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale), vol. 53, no. 72, January 21, 1972, p. 1. See also John Houghton, "Opinion: Say, that's a super idea," *Daily Egyptian* (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale), vol. 53, no. 94, February 23, 1972, p. 4.

[35] See "Metropolis, Illinois: Story of an American City," *The Amazing World of Superman*, Metropolis Edition (1973), pp. 42–45.

[36] For the Superman amusement park conceptual drawings by Neal Adams, see *Limited Collectors' Edition* no. 31 (October–November 1974), pp. 40–43. Available at https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Limited-Collectors-Edition/Issue-31.

> Superman (or, informally, Supermanland) built on the outskirts of Metropolis. The design was loosely based on a 1955 *Action Comics* story called "Superman in Superman Land" and featured several elements from that tale, including a "Voyage to Krypton" ride and a Disney-like "Main Street" of Smallville.
>
> Attendees would enter the park through the legs of a giant Superman statue. A Bizarro playground would be filled with backward or upside-down swing sets, jungle gyms, slides, and games. Visitors would stroll through a full-size Bottle City of Kandor and marvel at the Rainbow Falls of Krypton, a Hall of Science, and the capital city of Kryptonopolis itself. Towering over the entire park would be the Fortress of Solitude, complete with Giant Golden Key—and a restaurant overlooking the park.[37]

The project allegedly collapsed due to the oil crisis and the delayed interstate highway. That is the narrative spun by DC Comics editor Julius Schwartz and Metropolis organizer Bob Westerfield in the May 1979 issue of *The Atlantic*.[38] An article in the *Chicago Tribune* from April 14, 1974, reiterated these claims.[39] Yet, such explanations for abandoning the idea are unconvincing. Logistical and fiscal issues with the local and state authorities probably played a role in ending the proposed project. Additionally, Metropolis Recreation, Inc. did not secure the required 150,000 dollars to purchase the Superman license from DC Comics. (The whole Superman boosterism is said to be the brainchild of Westerfield, a Metropolis resident and ascribed huckster.)[40] It is also unclear whether real plans from DC Comics existed beyond just a sketch. Though the theme park never reached fruition, the town of Metropolis adopted Superman, and in the process enacted Comicland without DC Comics financial backing. They unveiled a statue on November 7, 1986, and Jim Hambrick dedicated a museum to the Man of Steel on March 10, 1993. Geographically speaking, in addition to the creation of Superman Square, where the statue stands, they wittily renamed a street Lois Lane. Not all residents, however, embraced

---

[37] Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 158–159 as well as pages 172 and 228.

[38] See Richard Manning, "Metropolis: Supertown," *The Atlantic*, vol. 243, no. 5 (May 1979), p. 20; interview with Julius Schwartz in Daniels, *Superman*, p. 135.

[39] Anne Keegan, "Claim to fame fizzles: Did Superman fail Metropolis?," *Chicago Tribune*, Final Edition, yr. 127, no. 104, April 14, 1974, p. 2.

[40] Nussman, "Superman finds roots as local town's hero," *Daily Egyptian* (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale), January 21, 1972, p. 1; "The Cities: Fame Comes to Metropolis," *Newsweek*, vol. 79, no. 11, March 13, 1972, p. 62; Donald Yabush, "Bonanza Seen in Interstate: Town Boosts Superman Image," *Chicago Tribune*, 4-Star Sports Final Edition, yr. 146, no. 271, September 27, 1972, p. 2; Manning, "Metropolis: Supertown," *The Atlantic* (May 1979), pp. 16–21; Dick Dougherty, "My Way: Superman hangs cape in Metropolis," *North Hills News Record* (Zelienople, PA), yr. 22, no. 8, March 29, 1983, p. 4; Rick Pearson, "It's a bird, it's a plane, it's . . . who cares?," *Chicago Tribune*, Multiple Final Editions, yr. 146, no. 260, September 16, 1992, p. 16. See also Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 246. Bob Westerfield told *Newsweek* and later *The Atlantic* that the licensing fee cost only $50,000, which the town secured. He claimed that editor Carmine Infantino provided the figure. Yet, the monetary amount seems very low and contradicts later reporting.

the civic investment and economic strategy in the fictional character as a tourism tactic. City officials took the announcement of the Man of Steel's impending comic book death in the January 1993 issue of *Superman* as an opportunity to alter its image to gambling. "City fathers plan to topple the 8-foot statue of Superman from its pedestal in the town square because Metropolis is pinning its economic hopes on riverboat gambling and wants to lose the Superman image," a United Press International article explained in the *New York Post* on September 17, 1992.[41] Nevertheless, the plan for gambling failed, and the town erected a new fifteen-foot bronze statue on June 5, 1993, to replace the dilapidated seven-foot version.[42]

Comics aficionados repeatedly compare the superhero world with Disney Imagineering. Toronto reporter Henry Mietkiewicz wrote that Superman artist "[Joe] Shuster is almost the Walt Disney of comics."[43] Grant Morrison interestingly blends these fantasies by referring to the early Batman and Robin universe as "a Disneyland of crime."[44] Superman biographer Tom De Haven describes the Kryptonian bottle city of Kandor as a place "way better than Disneyland."[45] (In the comics, Superman would shrink down to explore the miniature world of Kandor that he kept in the Fortress of Solitude. He hoped to undo the work of the sinister extraterrestrial android Brainiac by restoring the city and its inhabitants to normal size.)

The superhero theme park concept has become reality but may not be the right format for the genre. In 2018, Warner Communications, the parent company of DC Comics, constructed Warner Bros. World in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The park includes immersive versions of Superman's Metropolis and Batman's Gotham City with rollercoasters and other attractions. The choice of location outside the US, the playground and birthplace of superheroes, is odd. Even more strange is the park itself. Although geared toward children, the sets and costumed actors makes the fantasy feel too silly and less imaginative. Disney matched Warner Bros. World with Avengers Campus at Disneyland. It would not be surprising if Disney, who now owns Marvel, has more ambitious plans to create a larger Marvel-land or World of Marvel to mirror

---

[41] Pearson, "It's a bird, it's a plane, it's . . . who cares?," *Chicago Tribune*, September 16, 1992, pp. 1, 16; UPI, "Metropolis giving Superman the boot," *New York Post*, Late City Final Edition, vol. 191, no. 261, September 17, 1992, p. 9.
[42] Michael T. Kuciak, "Superman to die after 50 years of heroic battles," *Daily Egyptian* (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale), vol. 78, no. 65, November 19, 1992, p. 8; Associated Press, "Metropolis turns Man of Steel into three tons of bronze," *Chicago Tribune*, Evening Update Edition, yr. 148, no. 158, June 7, 1993, p. 2. See also Weldon, *Superman*, p. 228.
[43] Henry Mietkiewicz, "On the Trail of Superman," *The Sunday Star* (Toronto, CAN), April 26, 1992, p. A11.
[44] Morrison, *Supergods*, p. 75.
[45] De Haven, *Superman*, p. 119.

the "Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge" experience appearing at both Disney World and Disneyland. Such a space would most likely include a virtual New York and possibly the imaginary, technofuturistic African nation state of Wakanda. The idea of actual New Yorkers traveling to Florida or California to inhabit an artificial version of their home city is comical but possible. The Orientalist-informed paradox of a technologically advanced yet agrarian African landscape is equally alluring; unfortunately, such racist concepts seem to continually hold sway over the Western imagination.[46] Marvel may have had such grandiose theme park ideas but were limited by budget and technology in 1999. Universal Studios Florida features "The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man," which is a mechanical and virtual ride, "The Incredible Hulk Coaster," and "Doctor Doom's Fearfall." Beyond these amusements, fantasy immersion into the physical world is equally apparent with fantasy genres. "The Wizarding World of Harry Potter," present at both the Florida and California Universal Studios' parks, may provide Disney with another template to copy. Nonetheless, it does not matter if any more superhero amusements materialize because the superhero universe exists in the mind but imprints itself upon the landscape through play. It is both an imaginary and material space that is geographically unfixed. The historical absence of a dedicated place in the form of a theme park was actually an advantage because it caused the constant reiteration of Comicland. With each activity, many of which are cataloged throughout this dissertation, the public rebuilt the fantasy. The lack of a theme park forced fans of all ages to use their imaginations and construct the world around them.[47] Unlike the single authored British fantasy novels such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia* with their fully established worlds, superhero lore developed over time collectively through the work of countless writers, artists, editors, actors, and directors.[48] Such ambiguity helped the public imagine and materialize Comicland.

---

[46] For literature on American amusement parks, see, for example, John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978); Judith A. Volpe, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Nasaw, *Going Out*.
[47] For a brief mention of the relationship between character and world building, see Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 10–11.
[48] For agreement, see Tye, *Superman*, pp. 41, 225, 228–229.

Historical Conversation

This research is positioned at the crossroads of appeals for historical studies on fictional characters, cultural history, and environmental history. The seminal works influencing my project include the articles "The Real Lives of Fake People" by Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen and "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" by Frederick Jackson Turner as well as the books *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* by Warren I. Susman, *The Great Frontier* by Walter Prescott Webb, and *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* by Alfred W. Crosby. This seemingly unrelated arrangement of historical literature forms the intellectual basis for investigating the materializations of Superman and the imaginary world of Comicland.

Challenging the conventional view of historical scholarship, intellectual historian Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen affirms the importance of exploring the interaction between fictional characters and the human world. She calls upon scholars to continue the investigation and references the study of Wonder Woman by historian Jill Lepore as a model for future work. Such praise for Lepore's monograph *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* in achieving this aim is problematic, however. To see her text in this way requires an inventive reading against the grain because it is mainly a biography of Wonder Woman's eccentric creator Dr. William Moulton Marston, a disgraced psychology professor, and his nontraditional family. Lepore's relationship with Wonder Woman is secondary. There is some treatment on public reception in the form of criticism by anticomics advocates and the (perceived) reclamation of the character by women's liberation activists such as Gloria Steinman, but these threads and sources are well established in the popular histories of comics. Another issue is that discussion of Wonder Woman cosplay, which would illustrate the public's fascination and identification with the Amazonian warrior, is missing. Lepore's objective to historically contextualize the star-spangled heroine is commendable but her explanation falls flat. The book's unconvincing thesis situates Wonder Woman as a product of the suffragist and birth control movements and an intended symbol of female empowerment. For comics scholars, industry insiders, and folks immersed in the literature, this remains a wild and unaccepted interpretation. The two persona of the character in her initial iteration do not present the level of empowerment that Lepore maintains. Alter ego Diana Prince is a lowly secretary and subordinate to the male character Captain Steve Trevor, the workplace superior and love interest who she fawns over. (Comic book writer Gardner Fox even

placed Wonder Woman in the position of secretary for the superhero team the Justice Society of America and, to Dr. Marston's dismay, gave her virtually no presence in the stories except as an occasional patriotic cheerleader.) The heroic persona of Wonder Woman similarly shows gender oppression. She and other women depicted in the comic are often bound by men. This is not a metaphor for breaking free of patriarchal chains and homage to political cartoons about the fight for women's suffrage as Lepore contends but rather a coded depiction of S&M practices, a fact that one US soldier recognized in a piece of fan mail to Dr. Marston from September 1943. The enlarged single image in her book of Wonder Woman breaking chains with the capitalized words "PREJUDICE," "PRUDERY," and "MAN'S SUPERIORITY" is not enough evidence to support the thesis. It appeared in Marston's article for the Winter 1943–1944 issue of *The American Scholar* and again on a Boston University Law School biographical card memorializing and celebrating 1918 graduate Elizabeth Holloway as the inspiration for Wonder Woman circa 1993. Lepore suggests to the reader that the unsigned artwork was by Harry G. Peter, but there is no evidence to prove who drew it or how much input the journal had in the drawing. Moreover, the key word was "prudery." Wonder Woman was, in fact, an outlet for the discredited professor's idiosyncratic psychological theories on emotions, love, and blood pressure as well as his sexual fetishes and concealed polyamorous home life with his wife and former undergraduate research assistant. (Lepore even insinuates a foursome with another woman, who occasionally lived with them, but wife Elizabeth Holloway described her husband's connection to Marjorie W. Huntley as "mental love." This background of the character and her caretakers—apart from the controversial and questionable inclusion of Huntley as a lover—is common knowledge for fans.) Lepore downplays the backstory of abuse of academic power and the seduction of a student. And considering this troubling history, Dr. Marston was not "playing with feminism" as Lepore argues but playing with sexuality.

Yet, the book's big reveal is that Wonder Woman is secretly based on Margaret Sanger. Jill Lepore reaches this speculative conclusion because Olive Byrne, Dr. Marston's live-in mistress and mother of two of his four children, was Sanger's niece. Lepore hinges this theory on the idea that Byrne and Elizabeth Holloway secretly composed Wonder Woman stories and Dr. Marston essentially took credit for their labor. But there is no conclusive evidence for these assertions. Reading between the lines, she seems to argue without any analysis that Byrne covertly encoded Sanger into the character. Dr. Marston, the actual author, based Wonder

Woman on his lover, which is evident in Byrne's fashion choice of bracelets that Marston transferred to Wonder Woman as bullet deflectors. Another issue is Lepore's speculation that Byrne and Holloway were lovers after Dr. Marston's death in 1947 because they stayed together. The basis of this claim is a single letter on February 2, 1959, from Sanger, who was concerned about the sleeping arrangements at her house in Tucson, Arizona, while she was away. However, in the same chapter, Lepore shares oral history that the pair kept separate bedrooms in their New York City apartment. The epilogue chapter hints to a view of lesbianism but their final domestic arrangement in Tampa, Florida, goes unstated. These unfounded hypotheses function more like armchair history and imitate the conspiracy literature about the death of Superman actor George Reeves.

Jill Lepore's thesis is further flawed because a twenty-year gap ensued between women's suffrage and the creation of Wonder Woman. Superman develops within four or five years after the stock market crash of 1929 and his persona and actions reflect the socioeconomic struggles and political unrest of the era. Wonder Woman is not a direct response to suffragism and birth control advocacy but to the success of Superman. She is actually a commodity crafted by disgraced academic unable to earn money under the pretense of women's liberation.

Unlike *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, my research illustrates the "intense identification," as Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen brilliantly labels the process, that the public maintains with the superhero in modern life. As such, it focuses on the relationship between the characters and the consumers rather than the lives of the creators.[49] Centering reception is one of my methodological interventions to the field of comics studies.

---

[49] See Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, "The Real Lives of Fake People," *Modern American History*, vol. 1, no. 3 (November 2018), pp. 437–442; Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2015) and my critique, softened by the journal, Andrew Fogel, review of *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, by Jill Lepore, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 49, no. 3 (June 2016), pp. 685–688. Pages 241–242 discuss the piece of soldier fan mail, page 240 claims that Marston was "playing with feminism," and page 294 supplies the Margaret Sanger reveal. For the vacillating lesbianism assertion and sleeping arrangements question, see pages 273–274, 276, and 296–297. There is another problem with Lepore's book not addressed in the main text because it did not follow the paragraph flow but is worth mentioning here. Her alleged disinterest in the comics medium raises questions about the purpose behind writing the text. Clearly, the book that she wanted to write was on Margaret Sanger and the birth control movement, not Wonder Woman.

For the image of Wonder Woman breaking free of man's bondage, see William Moulton Marston, "Why 100,000 Americans Read Comics," *The American Scholar*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Winter 1943–1944), p. 35; Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, p. 85; undated biographical card circa 1993, box 2, folder 9, WMM1. The alphanumeric WMM1 is an abbreviation for the Papers of William Moulton Marston, 1899–2002, MC 920, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. For the S&M related correspondence, see Staff Sergeant John D. Jacobs to Charles Moulton, letter, September 9, 1943, WWl; M. C. Gaines to Dr. William Moulton Marston, letter, September 14, 1943, WWl. The abbreviation WWl is an abbreviation for the Wonder Woman

This effort to chronicle the superhero as a historical figure bridges mythic history with analytical history. Distinguished cultural historian Warren I. Susman interprets culture—the expressions of a civilization—as a tension between myth and history. Susman assails the ahistorical tradition of mythic history, which was common during the nineteenth century and continued by the religiously minded. Christianity, in turn, informs the utopian vision in America and the greater Western world. According to Susman, mythic history is treating Jesus of the New Testament as a historical figure (with a presentist agenda) or treating him as the subject of a psychological character analysis. Writings of the Social Gospel movement and *The Man Nobody Knows* by advertising expert Bruce Barton, for instance, have made myth perform historically by placing Jesus in history, albeit according to their ideological bent.[50] The process Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen advocates differs from this religiously rooted type of history because the superhero merges the mythical and the historical. Although superheroes are fictional, they maintain traceable documentary footprints and are not worshipped deities but creators and fans sometimes blur that line. Unlike religious texts or theological framings, superheroes and their handlers can be shown in both favorable and unfavorable lights without ontological consequences. This intellectual freedom of criticism is not possible in religious mythic history.

Exploring fictional characters as historical figures and their fantasy worlds requires an additional approach. Such analysis necessitates implementing the myth and symbol practice of early American studies and its intellectual ancestors and descendants.[51] This valuable method of symbol decrypting and literary analysis to evaluate the American past has unfortunately fallen out of favor with many contemporary historians due to its uncomfortable association with a white Protestant male worldview and a legacy of omitting or denigrating minorities. While acknowledging the exclusionary dimension of earlier scholarship, my work embraces the spatial

---

letters, 1941–1945, MSS1619B, Dibner Library, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, District of Columbia. The 1959 letter does not exist in the two William Mouton Marston collections at the Schlesinger Library. Byrne Marston or Nancy M. Wycoff and Peggy M. Van Cleave might not have donated everything. Otherwise, Jill Lepore confused oral history with correspondence in this hard to keep track of tale.

[50] Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 7–16, 23, 129–130, 276, 292. For an alternate interpretation of Bruce Barton as expressing the tension between progress (business) and nostalgia (religion), see Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 204–205. Levine argues on page 204 that businesspeople were not confident "in their standards and vocation but … defensive and needed the ideals of Christ to justify [the message of conspicuous consumption] and sell themselves to the American people."

[51] Henry Nash Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?," *American Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2, part 2 (Summer 1957), pp. 197–208. See also the classic text of American studies, Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, reiss. ed. (1950; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

methodologies and conceptual topographies of three pathbreaking environmental historians. Frederick Jackson Turner, arguably the founder of twentieth century American history, employs a geographical interpretation to distinguish America from Europe. He rejects the East Coast historians' Darwinian-infused "Teutonic germ theory" of imported democracy, specifically his mentor Herbert Baxter Adams and his claim of westward biological destiny that is now recognized as pseudoscience. Turner, by contrast, favors geographical determinism. In his view, American political institutions are not evolved versions of organisms that originated in the primitive villages of the German Black Forest, were carried to Anglo-Saxon England, and were later transported across the ocean by the Pilgrims. He rejects the theory of America as a tributary of European-born democracy: an unbroken chain through Anglo-Germanic migration across the English Channel and then the Atlantic Ocean. According to Turner, "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." Turner and his influential "frontier thesis" of homegrown agrarian democracy also represents a transitional moment between the mythical and the historical, mentioned above.[52] Reflecting on Turner, Warren I. Sussman writes: "He took a major American myth and made from it effective history."[53] Following in the footsteps of Turner, Walter Prescott Webb expands the geography of the frontier to encompass "all the new lands discovered at the opening of the sixteenth century." His imperial concept of the "Great Frontier" includes North America, South America, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Webb creatively backdates Turner's "frontier thesis" by two centuries, expands its borders, and reverses the methodology by cataloging the impact of the frontier on Europe, especially in fiction by visionary novelists like

---

[52] Herbert B. Adams, "The Germanic Origin of New England Towns," Harvard Historical Society, May 9, 1881, in *The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, vol. 1 (1883), pp. 3–38; Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, Forty-First Annual Meeting, December 14, 1893 (Madison, WI: Democrat Printing Company, State Printer, 1894), pp. 79–112. Turner's frontier hypothesis is reprinted in Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), pp. 1–38.

For a background on Frederick Jackson Turner and the idea that his "frontier thesis" is borrowed from other thinkers and that it acted as sort of antimodernist reaction to technological progress, aka the "Communications Revolution," and the first Depression in 1893 as well as immigration and urbanization, see Lee Benson, "The Historical Background of Turner's Frontier Essay," *Agricultural History*, vol. 25, no. 2 (April 1951), pp. 59–82. For the best summary of Turner in historical context, see Richard Hofstadter, "Turner and the Frontier Myth," *The American Scholar*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1949), pp. 433–443. See also William Appleman Williams, "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 24, no. 4 (November 1955), pp. 379–395.

His proclamation of the closing of the frontier and celebration of the Midwest and its white Protestant population was prescient given the Populist revolt against the creditor Northeast a short time later. The rhetoric of rustic life as quintessentially American may have helped to inspire agrarian protest in the form of Populism.

[53] Susman, *Culture as History*, pp. 17–18.

Jules Verne. Shifting the gaze across the Atlantic, Webb ingeniously views the New World as Europe's frontier. According to Webb, the two geographies of the Great Frontier and the "Metropolis"—the urban landscape of Western Europe—are entwined.[54] Equally important is Alfred W. Crosby's notion of "Neo-Europes." Clearly influenced by Webb, Crosby preserves the tradition of spatial analysis and European imperialism but through a biological history. Europeans imprinted their agricultural, horticultural, and livestock production ecosystems and economic practices in the distant homelands of the Great Frontier that Crosby calls Neo-Europes. In a roundabout way, Crosby bridges the essence of the methods of Adams and Turner: science and geography.[55] These scholars contributed to the ways that the nation imagines the frontier and paved the way for my scholarship, which takes environmental history out of the west. Just as Turner and his disciples have rethought the meaning of landscape and took the myth of the frontier and its male hero and turned it into history, this project seeks to do the same for the American superhero and their invented spaces.

The Rise of Comicland and the Fourth Space

The intersection of these ideas and fields enables my contribution of a real and imagined geography called Comicland. The mythical cityscapes of Superman's Metropolis and Batman's Gotham City as well as Clark Kent's pastoral Smallville form its landscape. According to Warren I. Susman, the Janus-faced visions of country and city during the 1930s shows a "search for some transcendent identification with a mythic America."[56] Lawrence W. Levine echoes this view. "Depression Americans, living through one of the greatest crises in their history, were prone to look back upon the past, and particularly the folk past, a symbol of a simpler, cleaner, less problem-ridden time when individuals still commanded their own destinies and shaped their own universe to a greater extent than was any longer possible."[57] In another essay, Levine also acknowledges the pattern as prevalent in the 1920s, which he describes as a tension between

[54] Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Frontier* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1951), esp. pp. xiii, 6–7, 30–31 and images on pages 10, 349–350, and 411. Webb may have developed this masterpiece from a brief comment by Frederick Jackson Turner that the US at first acted as Europe's frontier. Richard Hofstadter later mentions the same idea in his critique of the "frontier thesis." See Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," p. 82; Hofstadter, "Turner and the Frontier Myth," p. 442.
[55] Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*, 2nd ed. (1986; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), esp. pp. 2–3, 6–7, 94, 298, 305–306.
[56] Susman, *Culture as History*, pp. 205–206.
[57] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, p. 274. See also pages 276–277. Lawrence W. Levine sees this dueling vision in the works of composers, directors, painters, and photographers but does not analyze his examples.

technological progress and nostalgia for a preindustrial Anglo-Saxon culture. "The compulsion to peer forward was paralleled by an urge to look backward to a more pristine, more comfortable, more familiar time." He uses similar phrasing, "The central paradox of American history, then, has been … an urge towards the inevitable future combined with a longing for the irretrievable past."[58] Understanding this dynamic of the time, the men at DC Comics constructed a world that audiences could inhabit as their own regardless of residence. Batman writer Bill Finger, who is less known to the public due to his byline exclusion and attempted erasure by fellow Jewish cocreator Bob Kane,[59] explained to author Jim Steranko his rationale for naming the symbolic landscape for New York as Gotham City. "We didn't call it New York because we wanted anybody in any city to identify with it. Of course, Gotham is another name for New York."[60] Despite this explanation, the realm of Batman began as New York for almost two years until it was changed to the fictional Gotham City initially in *Detective Comics* no. 48 (February 1941) and shortly after in *Batman* no. 4 (Winter 1941). Copyright records reveal that the monthly magazine sold on newsstands on December 27, 1940, whereas the quarterly magazine debuted on January 15, 1941.[61]

Mutability is a central feature of the superhero fantasy. Comicland is a place contained within the imagination and projected onto the page, the tube, the silver screen, and material reality. Besides multimedia depictions, action figures, toys, costumes, and branded merchandise

---

[58] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 190–191. See also pages 205, 274, and 276 for another rehashing. The essay on pages 189–205 traces this dialectic of progress and nostalgia. While the thesis is sound most of the evidence and argumentation is unconvincing and tangential.
See also Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 189–230, 256–260.

[59] For the shady side of Bob Kane including ghost writers and artists, see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 140–141, 149–154, 246–247, 305–307, 332. For Bill Finger, see Daniels, *Batman*, pp. 17–18, 21–25, 28–31, 37–40, 42, 55–56, 58, 65–69, 85, 102; Marc Tyler Nobleman, *Bill the Boy Wonder: The Secret Co-Creator of Batman* (Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2012); "The True Story of Batman and Robin!," *Real Fact Comics* no. 5 (November–December 1946) in Marc Nobleman, "Insulting Bill Finger early (1946) and posthumously (1976)," Noblemania, October 15, 2015, https://www.noblemania.com/2015/10/insulting-bill-finger-early-1946-and.html; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 114–115.

[60] Leslie A. Fiedler, *Olaf Stapledon: A Man Divided* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 64; interview with Bill Finger in Jim Steranko, *The Steranko History of Comics*, vol. 1 (Reading, PA: Supergraphics Publications, 1970), p. 45. See also Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 140–141, 149–155, 306–307.

For an underdeveloped treatment of Gotham City as imagined cartography, see William Uricchio, "The Batman's Gotham City™: Story, Ideology, Performance," in *Comics and the City: Urban Space in Print, Picture and Sequence*, eds. Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling (New York, NY: Continuum, 2010), pp. 119–132.

[61] For references to New York or Manhattan, see *Detective Comics* no. 31 (September 1939) and *Detective Comics* no. 33 (November 1939) in DC Comics, *The Batman Archives*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 1990), pp. 45, 68.

For the shift to Gotham City, see *Batman* no. 4 (Winter 1941), in DC Comics, *Batman: The Dark Knight Archives*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 1992), p. 176; *Detective Comics* no. 48 (February 1941), in DC Comics, *Batman Archives*, vol. 1, p. 266; 1938–1945 copyright drawer DESI–DETN, cards 1661d and 1658a.

bring the world to life. It is even carved into objects and the physical landscape with statues and memorials. The beauty of this fictive world is that one does not have to physically travel to get there. Unlike a theme park, it is a permanent yet portable place imprinted in the real world. Comicland ultimately became a portal between fantasy and reality. With each media incarnation, public event, and artistic creation it becomes more real. Ever since Comicland emerged as a celebration of Superman and his fantastic compeers, the real world slowly moved into this expanding space of make-believe while the realm of fantasy simultaneously entered our world. It is, in other words, a bidirectional process. This landscape of the imagination manifested through media, festival, and play by kids and adults.

The etymology of "Comicland" predates the creation of Superman. (I thought that I had coined the phrase but discovered several earlier uses that lacked definition.) The term traces back to at least 1920 as newspaper advertisements and articles used this word to label the imaginary world of newspaper comic strips.[62] Comicland was a generalized expression used to describe the varied worlds of comic strips, regardless of how vastly different and unrelated they were. The

---

[62] For "Comicland" and its variants—with or without a space or hyphen between the words—see "Table of Contents of The Sunday Times: Comic Section," *Buffalo Evening Times* (Buffalo, NY), Five o'Clock Edition, January 2, 1920, p. 13; "Table Of Contents Of Today's Sunday Times: Boys' And Girls' Section," *The Buffalo Sunday Times* (Buffalo, NY), yr. 40, no. 17, January 4, 1920, p. 37; "Features!! Thirty to Forty Per Cent. More Reading Matter For Every Member of the Family," *The Chilliwack Progress* (Chilliwack, CAN), yr. 31, no. 12, June 30, 1921, p. 3; "Here And There In Comic Land," *Little Rock Daily News* (Little Rock, AK), Home Edition, vol. 41, no. 295, August 20, 1921, p. 3; "Comic Land Funny Folks Will Come To Life Today In Better Movie Matinee," *The Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, CA), vol. 65, no. 145, May 24, 1924, p. 11; Local Laf Editor, "How to Write 'Local Lafs,'" *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA), Home Edition, vol. 101, no. 44, August 13, 1924, p. 24; "About The Shops Every Week By Elizabeth Anne," *The Chillicothe Constitution* (Chillicothe, MO), vol. 32, June 22, 1926, p. 1; "Newspaper Will Have 30 Comics," *Blue Island Sun-Standard* (Blue Island, IL), vol. 51, no. 46, November 15, 1928, p. 7; "Thrush," *The Clinton Eye* (Clinton, MO), vol. 44, no. 15, January 11, 1929, p. 5; "Kayo and Moon Play Hosts To Birthday Party Guests," *The Knoxville Sunday Journal* (Knoxville, TN), vol. 11, no. 13, March 10, 1935, p. 2-D; "Romance of Jacob and Rachel Includes a Moral for Popeye," *The Knoxville Sunday Journal* (Knoxville, TN), vol. 6, no. 25, June 9, 1935, p. 8-C; "Stars Of Comic-Land Appearing Daily in The Evening News," *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, PA), Extra Edition, no. 5,716, July 23, 1935, p. 11.

For the same advertisement and later variant, see *Blue Island Sun-Standard* (Blue Island, IL), vol. 51, no. 46, November 15, 1928, p. 4; *Decatur Evening Herald* (Decatur, IL), yr. 47, November 16, 1928, p. 8; *Dixon Evening Telegraph* (Dixon, IL), yr. 78, no. 270, November 16, 1928, p. 9; *Sterling Daily Gazette* (Sterling, IL), yr. 74, no. 116, November 16, 1928, p. 11; *The Daily Journal-Gazette and Commercial-Star* (Matoon, IL), yr. 54, no. 194, November 16, 1928, p. 5; *The Decatur Daily Review* (Decatur, IL), yr. 49, no. 321, November 16, 1928, p. 34; *Hamilton Evening Journal* (Fort Hamilton, IN), vol. 42, no. 283, November 17, 1928, p. 4; *The Morning Herald* (Hagerstown, MD), vol. 34, no. 10, January 11, 1930, p. 16. And for another repeating advertisement titled "A New Funny.....," [*sic*] see *The Victoria Advocate* (Victoria, TX), Afternoon Edition, vol. 40, no. 56, August 2, 1937, p. 6; *The Victoria Advocate* (Victoria, TX), Afternoon Edition, vol. 40, no. 57, August 3, 1937, p. 6; *The Victoria Advocate* (Victoria, TX), Afternoon Edition, vol. 40, no. 58, August 4, 1937, p. 6; *The Victoria Advocate* (Victoria, TX), Afternoon Edition, vol. 40, no. 59, August 5, 1937, p. 6; *The Victoria Advocate* (Victoria, TX), Afternoon Edition, vol. 40, no. 60, August 6, 1937, p. 6; *The Victoria Advocate* (Victoria, TX), Afternoon Edition, vol. 40, no. 61, August 8, 1937, p. 4.

language continued to be used over the next three decades and soon encompassed the newly emerged comic book, which M. C. Gaines helped to establish.[63] To advertise his presence on their funnies pages, *The Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger* proclaimed in 1939 that Superman "is the most exciting figure in comicland."[64] Superman's architects Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster deploy this catchphrase to describe the artificial world of comics on the splash page for the inaugural issue of *Funnyman* (January 1948), their failed follow-up character to the Man of Steel. Siegel and Shuster announce in the comic book that Funnyman was "Comicland's newest and greatest arrival."[65] It is also worth noting that American studies scholar Reuel Denney employs the term "Pogoland" in 1957 to characterize the cartoonish environment of Walt Kelly's comic strip *Pogo*. Denney taps into the idea of using the suffix "land" but does not include any other strips with his phrasing.[66] Literature critic and comics scholar Jeet Heer, nevertheless, prefers "Comicsland" and utilizes the term to describe the newspaper comic strip, specifically the

---

[63] The comic book was at first a coupon-procured mail away item intended to boost newspaper circulation in 1911 and then a premium giveaway acting as a reward for purchasing another commodity starting in 1933. Before permanently graduating to original material, these test runs encompassed already published newspaper comic strips.

See M. C. G., *The* HISTORY *and* DEVELOPMENT of *The Monthly* **Comic Magazine**, pamphlet, November 1, 1941, pp. 1–6, in box 18, folder 3, LB; "The Comics and Their Audience," *The Publishers' Weekly*, vol. 141, no. 16, April 18, 1942, p. 1477; Bert Dale, "Funny Business," *Forbes*, vol. 52, no. 5, September 1, 1943, p. 22; M. C. Gaines, "Narrative Illustration: The Story Of The Comics," *Print: A Quarterly Journal of the Graphic Arts*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Summer 1942), p. 36; M. C. Gaines, "Good Triumphs Over Evil! *More About the Comics*," *Print: A Quarterly Journal of the Graphic Arts*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1943), p. 19; Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 335–342. The initials LB is an abbreviation for The Papers of Dr. Lauretta Bender, Accession Number 90-012, Brooklyn College Library Archives, Brooklyn, New York.

[64] *The Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger*, December 10, 1939, p. 16 (Sunday Novel Section).

[65] See image in *Funnyman* no. 1 (January 1948) and Thomas Andrae and Mel Gordon, *Siegel and Shuster's Funnyman: The First Jewish Superhero From the Creators of Superman* (Port Townsend, WA Feral House, 2010), p. 3.

For primary sources on Funnyman, see Jerry Siegel to Jack S. Liebowitz, letter, October 16, 1942, p. 1, in Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, p. 109; Helen M. Staunton, "Syndicates: Low Heads Offerings Of Canadian Service: Notes," *Editor & Publisher*, vol. 80, no. 53, December 27, 1947, p. 40; Walter Winchell, "*In New York*," *Sunday Mirror* (New York, NY), Final Edition, vol. 17, no. 21, May 23, 1948, p. 10; Carle Hodge, "Syndicates: Bell to Sell Shuster and Siegel's Funnyman," *Editor & Publisher*, vol. 81, no. 30, July 17, 1948, p. 56; "Adventure and Humor in New Comic 'Funnyman,'" *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), yr. 98, no. 281, October 7, 1948, p. A–2; "New Comic Combines Humor and Adventure," *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), yr. 98, no. 282, October 8, 1948, p. A–1; "'Funnyman' Is a New Comic That's Funny," *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), yr. 98, no. 283, October 9, 1948, p. A–1; Barnard Rubin, "Broadway Beat," *Daily Worker* (New York, NY), 1-Star Edition, vol. 25, no. 220, November 3, 1948, p. 12; "The Talk of The Town: Vulnerable," *The New Yorker*, vol. 24, no. 44, December 25, 1948, pp. 13–15. For other mentions of Funnyman, see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 111, 243–244, 247, 249–251; Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, p. 113; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 78–79; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 77–79, 116, 122–123; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 226–227, 232; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 145, 148. And for Funnyman as out-of-step with the emerging Cold War culture, see Paul Hirsch, "Funnyman: The Tragic Adventures of a Crime-Fighting Comedian," *The Lowbrow Reader*, no. 9 (Summer 2014), pp. 28–34.

[66] See Reuel Denney, *The Astonished Muse* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 176–179, 181–182. The essay entitled "Children of Thoth" is reprinted as Reuel Denney, "The Revolt Against Naturalism in the Funnies," in *The Funnies: An American Idiom*, eds. David Manning White and Robert H. Abel (New York, NY: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), pp. 55–72.

Slumberland of the character Little Nemo created by Winsor McCay. Unfortunately, Heer's word choice has no historical precedent. Moreover, he offers no qualification or geospatial analysis for the language, effectively using it only as a catchy title.[67]

My methodology and contribution adopts the term *Comicland* from these early textual references and uses it as way to frame an analytical discussion of superheroes and their intimate relationship to consumers. More than a name, it's a place. This project reinterprets Comicland as a portable lived space, not solely mental. Because of its richness, my concept can be applied to other fields and fantasy worlds such as *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Trek*, and *Harry Potter*. For instance, European historian Michael Saler cites similar activities by fantasy enthusiasts who reenact scenes or dress up like fictional characters from the *Sherlock Holmes* and *Lord of the Rings* novels.[68] He uses three case studies for his overall argument of "modern enchantment": Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's mystery fiction centered in Victorian London, H. P. Lovecraft's horror fiction set in a fantastical New England, and J. R. R. Tolkien's fantasy fiction placed within the

---

[67] See Jeet Heer, "Little Nemo in Comicsland," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 82, no. 2 (Spring 2006), pp. 104–121.

[68] Michael Saler, "Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes': Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890–1940," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 43, no. 6 (September 2003), pp. 599–622; Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and The Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 28, 30–32, 110.

For the Baker Street Irregulars cosplay at their annual dinner-meeting and more, see unnamed sender to unnamed recipient, undated invitation for the 2nd event on January 6, 1936, box 3, folder 13, WMM2; Julian Wolff to Rex Stout, undated invitation for the 115th event on January 10, 1969, box 53, folder 9; Julian Wolff to unnamed recipient, invitation for the 116th event on January 9, 1970, November 6, 1969, box 53, folder 9; unnamed sender to Rex Stout, undated invitation for the 113th event on January 6, 1967, box 53, folder 10; Julian Wolff to Rex Stout, undated invitation for the 114th event on January 5, 1968, box 53, folder 10; unnamed sender to unnamed recipient, undated invitation for the 114th event on January 5, 1968, box 53, folder 10; Julian Wolff to Rex Stout, letter, September 9, 1968, box 53, folder 10; Julian Wolff to Rex Stout, letter, November 22, 1971, box 53, folder 11; Julian Wolff to unnamed recipient, invitation for [the 118th event on] January 7, 1972, box 53, folder 11; unnamed sender to unnamed recipient, undated compilation of The Brothers Three of Moriarty toasts in 1972, box 53, folder 11; unnamed sender to unnamed recipient, undated invitation for the 21st annual "Silver Blaze" on September 15, 1972, box 53, folder 11; Julian Wolff to unnamed recipient, invitation for [the 119th event on] January 5, 1973, box 53, folder 11; Harvey Officer, "The Road To Baker Street," poem, January 1942, box 53, folder 12; unnamed sender to unnamed recipient, undated invitation for the 112th event on January 7, 1966, honoring Rex Stout, box 53, folder 12; Julian Wolff to Rex Stout, letter, December 3, 1969, box 53, folder 13; unnamed sender to unnamed recipient, undated invitation for the 19th annual "Silver Blaze" on September 18, 1970, box 53, folder 13; Julian Wolff to Rex Stout, letter, December 12, 1970, box 53, folder 13; Julian Wolff to Rex Stout, letter, December 21, 1970, box 53, folder 13; Julian Wolff to unnamed recipient, invitation for [the 117th event on] January 8, 1971, box 53, folder 13; Dorothy and Herbert Brean to unnamed recipient, undated letter, box 53, folder 13; unnamed sender to unnamed recipient, invitation for William Gillette's play *Sherlock Holmes* on January 9, 1975, box 54, folder 1; Julian Wolff to unnamed recipient, invitation for [the 121st event on] January 10, 1975, box 54, folder 1; Peter E. Blau to Rex Stout, letter, November 21, 1973, box 54, folder 2; Julian Wolff to unnamed recipient, invitation for [the 120th event on] January 4, 1974, box 54, folder 2; Julian Lolff [*sic*] to Rex Stout, telegram, December 1, 1971, box 63, folder 11. The alphanumeric WMM2 is an abbreviation for the Papers of William Moulton Marston, 1852–1975, MC 948, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. All other materials in the Rex Stout papers, MS.1986.096, John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

realm of Middle Earth. Although conceptually intriguing, his monograph on Anglo-American literary fantasy is scattered, empirically lacking, and riddled with too many terms to describe fans' psychology including "prolonged immersion," "willing activation of pretense," "immersive state of mind," "cross-dwelling," and Tolkien's preferred "Secondary world." Moreover, Saler's inclusion of W. E. B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" to theorize part of the book's architecture seems out of place and its usage is insensitive to the psychic struggle of black people.[69] With many more concrete examples, popular author Jennifer Keishin Armstrong explores the lived community of the *Seinfeld* sitcom and its fans with the humorous geographic-like term "Seinfeldia."[70] Comicland even echoes journalist James Thurber's terminology of "Soapland" to characterize the small-town world depicted in 1930s radio soap operas.[71] It can also move beyond fiction to sports by clarifying journalist Robert Lipsyte's hazy notion of "SportsWorld," a landscape that he defines as a "sweaty Oz" absent from geography books as well as "an emotional Disneyland."[72] Lipsyte also compares SportsWorld to an unexplored continent and uses the undefined geographic metaphor of a "mental map" to hypothesize the impact of teams traveling across the continent on the imagination of fans. Unfortunately, these ascribed connections lack definition and development.[73] Though the mathematical-themed novel *Flatland* from the late nineteenth century may come to mind, Comicland is not a geometric discourse.[74] Rather, my analysis provides an academic depth to the undefined concept of

---

[69] Saler, *As If*, pp. 13–14, 59, 159–164, 179–195, 205n16.
[70] Jennifer Keishin Armstrong, *Seinfeldia: How a Show About Nothing Changed Everything* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016).
[71] James Thurber, *The Beast in Me and Other Animals: A New Collection of Pieces and Drawings about Human Beings and Less Alarming Creatures* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948), pp. 190–260. The term "Soapland" is first mentioned on page 208. The discussion of Soapland originally appeared in *The New Yorker* as five separate articles with a printed pagination error on the last entry. See James Thurber, "Onward And Upward With The Arts: Soapland I–O Pioneers!," *The New Yorker*, vol. 24, no. 12, May 15, 1948, pp. 30–32, 34–38; James Thurber, "Onward And Upward With The Arts: Soapland II–Ivorytown, Rinsoville, Anacinburg, and Crisco Corners," *The New Yorker*, vol. 24, no. 14, May 29, 1948, pp. 34–38, 40, 42, 44, 46–47; James Thurber, "Onward And Upward With The Arts: Soapland III–Sculptors In Ivory," *The New Yorker*, vol. 24, no. 16, June 12, 1948, pp. 48, 50–58; James Thurber, "Onward And Upward With The Arts: Soapland IV–The Invisible People," *The New Yorker*, vol. 24, no. 19, July 3, 1948, pp. 40, 42–48; James Thurber, "Onward And Upward With The Arts: Soapland V–The Listening Women," *The New Yorker*, vol. 24, no. 22, July 24, 1948, pp. 63–66, 59–60. See also the abbreviated version reprinted in Warren Susman, *Culture and Commitment, 1929–1945* (New York, NY: George Braziller, 1973), pp. 151–169.
[72] Robert Lipsyte, *SportsWorld: An American Dreamland* (1975; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), pp. xix, xxii, xxiv. For another unclear reference to Oz, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 12.
[73] Lipsyte, *SportsWorld*, pp. xvi, 20.
[74] See Edwin Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance in Many Dimensions* (London, U.K.: Seely & Co, 1884); *Flatland*, directed by Eric Martin, written by John Hubley (1965; Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 2004), DVD; *Flatland: The Movie*, directed by Dano Johnson and Jeffrey Travis, written by Seth Caplan, Dano

"Wonderland" and underdeveloped concept of "Fantasyland" evoked by popular authors Steven Johnson and Kurt Andersen, respectively, and traces the fusion between fantasy and reality with the superhero in a similar way that Neal Gabler looks at entertainment and reality in his book *Life the Movie*.[75] Besides being more comprehensive and better developed, my concept of Comicland challenges Paul S. Hirsch's idea of the "pulp empire." The comic book medium's current domination of popular culture through television, movies, and streaming does not make it a "cultural empire" or a phantom of its former glory and ubiquity. Despite coming close during the postwar panic, the industry never died, and its leading characters did not fade away. Hirsch's overarching viewpoint is inaccurate. Superheroes are not having a paper afterlife and we are not currently living within an updated version of the pulp empire. To put it concisely, superheroes and their culture never left the public eye.[76] Moreover, the transferability of Comicland helps to resolve the astute evaluation by cultural theorist Bart Beaty that "Comics Studies [*sic*] has so far failed to develop analytic and theoretical innovations that could be exported to cognate fields. Rather, it continues to rely on terminologies and theories handed down from other disciplines." My approach combines his call to define the medium's unique components of narrative and world building (both communal in practice and fictional in nature).[77]

Spatiality informs my metageographical construct, which is more conceptual than theoretical. Comicland is the embodiment of what I term the "fourth space." It is an extension of the "fourth wall," a concept attributed to French philosopher and critic Denis Diderot. Advocating realism in European theater during the eighteenth century, Diderot writes: "Whether

---

Johnson, and Jeffrey Travis (Austin, TX: Flat World Productions, 2007), DVD; *Flatland*, directed by Ladd Ehlinger Jr., written by Tom Whalen (Flatland Productions, 2007), DVD.

Adaptations and animations of *Flatland* include: Norton Juster, *The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics* (New York, NY: Random House, 1963); *The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics*, directed by Chuck Jones and Maurice Noble, written by Norton Juster (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1965), in *The Glass Bottom Boat*, directed by Frank Tashlin, written by Everett Freeman (1966; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD; *What The Bleep Do We Know!?*, directed by William Arntz, Betsy Chasse, and Mark Vicente, written by William Arntz, Matthew Hoffman, Betsy Chasse, and Mark Vicente (Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD; *Inside Out*, directed by Pete Docter, written by Pete Docter and Ronnie del Carmen (Burbank, CA: Distributed by Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2015), DVD.

Flatland most likely inspired the short story "Death of a Parallelogram" by Jerry Siegel mentioned in *The Torch* on May 17, 1934. See Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 35; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 100, 340n32.

[75] Steven Johnson, *Wonderland: How Play Made The Modern World* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2016); Kurt Andersen, *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire: A 500-year History* (New York, NY: Random House, 2017); Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

[76] Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, pp. 3, 7, 9, 14, 29–30, 268–269, 272–273, 275–276. Lauren Agostino and A.L. Newberg also use the word empire without qualification. See Agostino and Newberg *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. xii, 47, 71, 139.

[77] Bart Beaty, "Introduction," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Spring 2011), p. 108.

you write or act, think no more of the audience than if it had never existed. Imagine a huge wall across the front of the stage, separating you from the audience, and behave exactly as if the curtain had never risen."[78] The fourth wall is otherwise known as the invisible barrier between performer and observer. My idea of the fourth space becomes clear by blending the notion of the fourth wall discussed in theater, film, and television studies with the three spaces of the home, the workplace or the academy, and the social in-between "thirdspace" as defined in critical geography studies. "Breaking the fourth wall" by directly addressing the audience is not a one-way interaction available to only directors, actors, literary figures, or drawn characters. With the superhero phenomenon, the public broke the fourth wall from the other side and in the process created a new fourth space by engaging with the fantasy, becoming the characters themselves, and even altering the intended representations. In other words, the fourth space is where metaplay transpires. Breaking the fourth wall thereby opens the fourth space. My spatial interpretation of this contact zone where fantasy and reality meet utilizes a more physical and historical approach. I, thus, seek to separate the highly theorized thirdspace from the more abstract ideas that should constitute the semireal fourth space epitomized by Comicland.[79]

Drawing America

Geography and its depiction have always been central to the art form of comics. Urban space defined the early comic strips because they were conceived in New York.[80] Several of the turn-of-the-century strips depicted Manhattan in very focused portraits of alleyways and nonspecific streets or neighborhoods rather than presenting the city as a living entity through natural landmarks and edifices. This localized picture is unsurprising since many of the iconic art

---

[78] Denis Diderot, "On Dramatic Poetry," in *European Theories of the Drama: An Anthology of Dramatic Theory and Criticism from Aristotle to the Present Day, in a Series of Selected Texts, with Commentaries, Biographies, and Bibliographies*, ed. and trans. Barrett H. Clark (Cincinnati, OH: Stewart & Kidd Company, 1918), p. 299.

[79] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (1974; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2016); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004), p. 55; Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1996).

For the invisible fourth wall, see Elizabeth Bell, *Theories of Performance* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), pp. 38–39, 203; Michael Mangan, *The Drama, Theatre & Performance Companion* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 152, 172, 233, 246–247, 280; Tom Brown, *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). See also mention of the "fourth wall" and the audience as "spiritual acoustics" in Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (1936; New York, NY: Theater Arts Books, 1977), pp. 68, 85–86, 192.

[80] Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 10, 157.

deco structures that define the New York skyline like the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building did not rise until the 1930s. The notion of setting in the early strips did not act as a character in the same way that it does for the later adventure strips. Assessing the early comics in 1947, Coulton Waugh attests that the setting matched the overall readership: the city and its residents. He observes, "The whole atmosphere of the comic sections before 1900 was one of toughness, of the harsh life of bums and thugs."[81]

Yet, the urban world of comics soon ceded to the powerful allure of the frontier rendered as both suburban and rural. The multitude of twentieth-century comic strips, which centered around couples and kids, celebrated a generic vision of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant small-town life and did not pinpoint an exact geography but rather a mythical Midwest. An early example is *Gasoline Alley* and a later incarnation of this design is *Peanuts*.[82] This new spatial direction, which departed from the urban ghetto narratives, highlighted the spaces inside or around the home. It is no surprise that the domestic sphere emphasis increased with white migration to the suburban frontier during the Cold War.[83] *The Times Literary Supplement* of London, England, first suggested in 1954 that these familial white utopias served as an imagined urban (and suburban) Midwest.[84] In 1958, literature scholar Kenneth E. Eble similarly designates the Midwest as "comic strip land."[85] A decade earlier, Coulton Waugh acknowledges the suburban shift in the geography of comic strips and attributes it to expanding newspaper

---

[81] Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 1, 15, 18, 37, 52, 80, 118–120, 184, 352. The quote appears on page 18.

[82] Blake Scott Ball, *Charlie Brown's America: The Popular Politics of Peanuts* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 29, 70, 86, 116, 120, 123, 136, 140–141, 187, 200n17.

[83] Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985); May, *Homeward Bound*; Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2004).

[84] "The Comic Strip in American Life: A British View," *The Times Literary Supplement* (London, UK), yr. 53, no. 2,746, September 17, 1954, p. lxxii; David Manning White and Robert H. Abel, "Introduction," in White and Abel, eds., *The Funnies*, p. 25.

For a fleeting but poignant breakdown of the three styles of comic strips in the early twentieth century with the family as the second phase, see "Comics: Funny Strips: Cartoon-Drawing Is Big Business; Effects on Children Debated," *Literary Digest*, vol. 122, no. 2, December 12, 1936, p. 19.

[85] Kenneth E. Eble, "Our Serious Comics," *The American Scholar*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Winter 1958–1959), p. 69. Reprinted as Kenneth E. Eble, "Our Serious Comics," in White and Abel, *The Funnies*, pp. 99–109.

For the less frequent "comic strip land," see "Meet the Folks, Folks!," *The North Adams Transcript* (North Adams, MA), vol. 31, no. 213, February 9, 1927, p. 10. This image and corresponding text repeats in other newspapers such as *Decatur Herald* (Decatur, IL), yr. 47, February 11, 1927, p. 24 and *Decatur Evening Herald* (Decatur, IL), Home Edition, yr. 47, February 12, 1927, p. 12. See also "Know Your Telegraph," *Harrisburg Telegraph* (Harrisburg, PA), Final Home Edition, vol. 105, no. 248, October 19, 1935, p. 1.

syndication.[86] Residency, socioeconomic power, and newspaper distribution influenced comic strip locales. Lawrence W. Levine, on the other hand, more accurately interprets the prevalence of these homegrown comic strip vistas to the cultural shift toward nostalgia for an Anglo-Saxon past in the face of rising immigration and urbanization.

> *The Gumps* and *Gasoline Alley*, which first appeared in 1917 and 1919 respectively, were typical of an entire genre of family-centered comic strips which constituted one of the most popular forms of mass culture in the nineteen twenties. The characters inhabiting these strips were distinguished primarily by their lack of distinction: decent, plain-looking, dependable, unexciting, independent but community-orientated people who were destinated to live out their lives among neighbours just like themselves. Their very normality, the strips seemed to be saying, made them worth celebrating and emulating. Their virtues were those of the old America and when they strayed from these (for as normal people they had foibles) they were brought to account sharply.[87]

Basically, the comic strip offered a canvas for the nation's two main demographic groups to project their opposing ideas of *America*. This visual tug of war over the representation of the country overlooked one population. The funny pages virtually ignored rural residents except in fantasies like the anthropomorphic *Pogo* by Walt Kelly and satirical *Li'l Abner* by Al Capp, which caricatured such folk as hillbillies. The *Esquire* cartoon series *The Mountain Boys* by Paul Webb is drawn in the same vein as *Li'l Abner*. Another strip imagining the South is *Barney Google* by Billy DeBeck. It transitioned into *Snuffy Smith* when the character of the same name stole the show.[88] Even though the strips were not geographically representative or designed for rural residents, certain fictional characters, according to Waugh, expressed an American identity familiar to everyone. "For streamlined city-dwellers and smooth suburbanites are very apt to mistake their surroundings for Average America. They are not. There are little Mary Mixups

---

[86] Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 9, 32, 63, 69, 74, 95–96, 105–106, 110–111, 119, 184, 191, 200, 309, 352. For the syndication idea, see pages 80–81, 192, and 352–353.
[87] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, p. 203.
[88] Coulton Waugh writes on page 192 of his book *The Comics* that the syndicated comics section entered rural newspapers later. For Al Capp's *Li'l Abner*, Billy DeBeck's *Barney Google* and *Snuffy Smith*, and other cartoons about an imagined South, see Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 50–56, 200–207; M. Thomas Inge, *Comics as Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), pp. 69–78; M. Thomas Inge, "Sut, Scarlet, and Their Comic Cousins: The South in the Comic Strip," *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 19, no. 2 (October 1996), pp. 153–166; Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 3, 8–9, 76, 101, 103–140, 148, 152, 154–155, 161, 163–164, 166, 181–184, 188, 190, 192, 195, 205, 250n33, 250n35–36, 251n41, 251–252n49, 256n37; M. Thomas Inge, "Li'l Abner, Snuffy, Pogo, and Friends: The South in the American Comic Strip," *Southern Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 2 (Winter 2011), pp. 6–74; M. Thomas Inge, "Li'l Abner Snuffy and Friends: The Appalachian South in the American Comic Strip," in *Comics and the U.S. South*, eds. Brannon Costello and Qiana J. Whitted (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), pp. 3–28.

everywhere in the small towns and on the farms."[89] Reading between the lines of his work, historian Ian Gordon likewise acknowledges that the early strips did not accurately reflect the constituency of the nation or depict the geographical diversity of American life.[90] Regardless of accuracy or inclusivity, every one of these make-believe worlds is—borrowing the literary concept of historian John L. Thomas—an "alternative America."[91]

The superhero formula also embraced place by stressing an urban environment, but in a novel way. It is true that the newspaper adventure strips of the 1920s and 1930s introduced a new dimension of imagined geography, but it was based on the frontier, either terrestrial or celestial. The jungle of *Tarzan*, the interplanetary worlds of *Flash Gordon*, or the futuristic environment of *Buck Rogers* offered abstract and unreal landscapes. (Lawrence W. Levine makes two blunders when he overlooks these heroic strips in favor of the family focused ones and misses their obvious frontier connection. Levine is off-base when he writes, "A striking feature of the comic strips of the nineteen twenties was their almost total lack of heroic figures.")[92] The superhero genre, by contrast, refracted the human world into an identifiable landscape that readers could imagine themselves inhabiting. Yet, the result was a contemporary urban fantasy instead of the small town or mythical frontier, be it in Africa, outer space, or the utopian future. The geographical concept, in turn, reached new heights with Superman and Batman. Metropolis and Gotham City became the first defined cities in comics and repositioned the perceived location of Comicland back to the East Coast but now as an imaginary cityscape. Marvel Comics modernized DC Comics' design in the 1960s by placing their superheroes in New York and later other American cities, warping the threshold separating fantasy from reality.

The Active Audience

Reception and the connection between creator and consumer are also key parts of my study. Such questions generated a debate among popular culture scholars in 1974. Contrary to sociologist Herbert J. Gans' division between the "*lived* culture" of the creator and the "*vicarious*

---

[89] Waugh, *The Comics*, p. 184.
[90] Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, p. 8.
[91] John L. Thomas, *Alternative America*: *Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983).
[92] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, p. 203.

culture" of the consumer, the former theory is now applicable to both groups.[93] He also deploys this rigid scaffolding with the terms "*creator*" and "*user*" to differentiate the two groups. According to Gans, "Creators make culture their work, whereas users do not, and can rarely have as much interest or ego-involvement in a cultural product as the person who created it. For creators, culture is often the organizing principle of their lives, whereas users are more likely to treat it as a tool for information or enjoyment."[94] However, a trio of scholars, who were writing at the same time, correctly assert that the audience is not passive but active. "Most people … envision popular culture as a consumer item created by professionals for a passive audience. This static definition does not at all conform to most historical experience and even eliminates a good deal of contemporary culture from consideration."[95] Lawrence W. Levine contributes to this interdisciplinary conversation in the 1990s when he too rejects the passive theory.[96] Although Levine has limited sources to prove his interpretation of reception in his important essay justifying the study of popular culture, the findings are sound and his methodology dovetails nicely into my work on Comicland, especially chapter 3 on adult's superhero cosplay and wordplay. Regarding superheroes, kids and adults affirm his statement on the relationship between author and audience: "What people can do and *do* do is to refashion the objects created for them to fit their own values, needs, and expectations."[97] In short, Levine acknowledges the agency of everyday people who interact with cultural materials, especially through reinterpretation.[98] After dissemination to the public, the creator is no longer, in a sense, the owner. "Whatever rationale was on the producers' minds these images, once released, became the property of the viewers who could do with them what they willed, make of them what their lives and experiences prepared them to make of them."[99] Levine repeatedly deploys the word "participants" to explain this process that is happening with popular culture during the 1930s and 1940s.[100] But even more insightful, he identifies the audience as collaborators. "Thus both the

---

[93] Herbert J. Gans, *Popular and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), p. 14.
[94] Gans, *Popular and High Culture*, pp. 11, 25 as well as 163n10.
[95] David Burner, Robert D. Marcus, and Jorj Tilson, eds., *America Through the Looking Glass: A Historical Reader in Popular Culture*, vol. 1 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), p. 3.
[96] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 295, 303, 307.
[97] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, p. 295.
[98] See Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 299, 302, 304, 296.
[99] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 311–312.
[100] See Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 312–314.

performer and the audience have a role to play in determining the meaning and nature of the production and become collaborators with the creator."[101]

The development of an organized comics fandom community in the postwar period continued the practices of Depression era Americans and enabled enthusiasts to become part of the culture and affect production.[102] As Comicland shows, fans are now part of the story and steer its creation. A decade before scholars started pondering the relationship between producer and consumer regarding popular culture, baby boomer fans began influencing comics creators through letters and fanzines. The comics fanzine graduated to prozine and these enthusiasts then entered the industry as creators by the mid-1960s.[103] DC Comics referred to their new employees in the early 1970s as "Junior Woodchucks."[104] Comicdom, the comics version of fandom, also grew through for-profit conventions and legitimized its economic power through collector culture. Gatherings between fans and professionals and Robert M. Overstreet's annual magazine *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* fixed prices and demonstrated not only the influence but the commercialization of fandom. Comics scholar Peter Coogan describes this transition from fan to professional as moving "from love to money."[105] The social and economic dimensions of Comicland demonstrates its power.

Envisioning Comicland

Three groups battled for control of Comicland and presented competing visions. The Jewish creators constructed an imaginary and politicized mirror world[106] of New York City

---

[101] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, p. 304.
[102] For fandom culture as well as collaboration between producer and consumer in regard to comic books, see Matthew Pustz, *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers* (Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi Press, 1999); Jeffrey A. Brown, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics and Their Fans* (Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi Press, 2001), esp. pp. 58–92, 191, 199, 201; Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002); Rob Salkowitz, *Comic-Con and the Business of Pop Culture* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2012).
[103] See Peter M. Coogan, "From Love to Money: The First Decade of Comics Fandom," *International Journal of Comic Art*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 50–67; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 142, 194; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 10, 13, 140–187, 191, 198, 201–204, 208–209, 213; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 126–130, 134–136.
[104] Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*, pp. 111, 117, 243. See also Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 323; Tye, *Superman*, p. 168.
[105] See Coogan, "From Love to Money," *International Journal of Comic Art*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 50–67. See also Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson, MS: The University Press of Mississippi, 2010), p. 264.
[106] For the earliest known reference to describing comic strips as mirrors, see Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 15, 18, 67, 95, 103, 221, 240, 353. For additional support of the reflection thesis, see Inge, *Comics as Culture*, p. xxi; Judith O'Sullivan, *The Great American Comic Strip: One Hundred Years of Cartoon Art* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and

where justice prevailed. They erected a blueprint for a better and more just version of our world where superheroes righted wrongs and promoted fair play. In other words, an unsymmetrical counterpoint to the real world. Their idea of Comicland was a Jewish homeland contained within the imagination to resolve personal frustrations and group marginalization. The world they created, nevertheless, conformed to the exclusionary practices of the time. Their original design reinforced the unstated racial hierarchy in America that is structured upon whiteness.[107] Theirs was an America without the unwritten status of second-class citizenship because the cartoonists imagined themselves as white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) men, the idealized religioracial identity and "proper" representation of whiteness. Unsurprisingly, the alter egos of DC Comics' three major figures articulate an English ancestry: Superman is Clark Kent, Batman is Bruce Wayne, and Robin is Dick Grayson. This exclusionary architecture reflects the fact that white European minorities were pressured to mimic Anglo-Saxonness in hopes of assimilating or aspiring to an elite status.[108] In America, whiteness meant performing Anglo-Saxonness. This was not codified in law but an implicit norm and expected practice until the civil rights era.

Company, 1990), p. 9. For the aptly named "mirror universe," see José Alaniz, *Death, Disability, and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), p. 8. Ian Gordon, however, dislikes the popular mirror metaphor for two reasons. Gordon's first gripe is disciplinary, the metaphor is supposedly a sociological approach toward studying comics. Attached to this critique is the fact that many of the early strips centered on children and depicted a geographical narrowness with the city as representative of the nation. Gordon's second complaint with the reflection thesis is that it discounts the impact of comics on the audience. Reacting to the early literature on comic strips and comic books, his "work presents a historical narrative of comic art's role in shaping American society." This aim remains unachieved, however. See Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 7–9 and 10 for the quote. Jeffrey K. Johnson tries to replicate Gordon's methodology with his "mirror and molder" thesis. Johnson's text only vaguely shows a reflection of American society and culture and gives no evidence of shaping the national climate. See Johnson, *Super-History*, pp. 2, 34, 153, 163, 168, 189 for "mirror and molder" as well as similar language on pages 4, 21, 36, 56, 61, 63–65, 67, 69, 71, 73, 84, 93, 98, 110, 116, 118, 123, 125, 131, 134, 139, 141, 144, 150, 154, 169–170, 175, 177–178, 184, and 186–188.

Although I do not agree, film historian Robert Sklar rejects the mirror metaphor in favor of the window for assessing cinema. See Robert Sklar, "Windows on a Made-Up World: American Movies and the Cultural Past," *American Film*, vol. 1, no. 9 (July–August 1976), pp. 60–64. Reprinted in David Manning White and John Pendleton, eds., *Popular Culture: Mirror of American Life* (Del Mar, CA: Publisher's Inc., 1977), pp. 100–105.

[107] For an underdeveloped discussion of superheroes and whiteness, see Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 9, 110, 122, 131, 138–139, 141, 187.

[108] For the origin of the WASP acronym, see E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America* (New York, NY: Random House, 1964), p. 9 passim. On page 66, Baltzell aptly refers to the WASP as the ideal citizen and main proprietor of power and leadership through the 1960s. The text is about the Republican Party's closed caste system in America and its unwillingness, or inability, to incorporate white ethnics—who were minorities at the time—into its ranks, specifically Jewish people but also Catholics. According to Baltzell, the Grand Old Party (GOP) is traditionally dominated by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants—the racial and religious composition of the establishment culture.

Aldo J. Regalado correctly identifies that Batman creator Bob Kane concealed his Jewish identity and became his WASP character but overlooks the WASP identity of Superman's alter ego Clark Kent because his alien origins—a metaphor for the American immigrant—somehow challenged the traditional idea of white manhood in

Comicland expressed a Jewish version of Protestant literary utopianism epitomized by Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*. John L. Thomas refers to Bellamy's technofuturistic fantasy as an "alternative America."[109] Along the same lines, the superhero creators continued the Progressive Era tradition of socioeconomic and political criticism. In this new radical fantasy space that aligned with New Deal liberalism, the Jewish cartoonists' mighty avatars of Clark Kent/Superman, Bruce Wayne/Batman, and Dick Grayson/Robin resolved the injustices that they could not in the real world.[110] Superman cocreator Jerry Siegel retroactively defined the purpose of his character in an undated press release written after May 12, 1951, which is virtually unknown to the public and comics experts. "I conceived SUPERMAN as a champion of the underdog, a battler for fairness and justice, and invested him with all his invincible powers so that, miracle-worker that he is, he would use his fantastic God-like powers to see to it that justice WOULD triumph in this world … [*sic*] that the individual's right to happiness, security and prosperity would not be trampled by ruthless forces willing to stop at nothing for power or profit. I created this fictional savior of the oppressed and downtrodden back in the depression days of the '30s, because I had compassion for the 'little man', [*sic*] and longed to see someone, even if only a fictional creation, free him from his bondage and misery."[111] He wrote a similar letter on the seventeenth of May to President Harry Truman with the same

---

literature and culture. Regalado does not illustrate how Superman acted as inclusionary figure, and often articulates the opposite view. He states that Superman's ethnicity is ambiguous and misses the key point about literary and real-life passing as a way to circumvent the fact of Anglo-Saxon identity as a guarantor for primary citizenship in America. See Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 8–9, 18, 79–80, 88, 98–99, 108–110, 125–127, 131, 134, 138–140, 142, 187, 197.

[109] Thomas, *Alternative America*.

[110] For the early Superman as a New Dealer, see Thomas Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah: The Prehistory of the Superman in Science Fiction Literature," *Discourse: Berkeley Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, vol. 2 (Summer 1980), pp. 84–111. Reprinted as Thomas Andrae, "The History and Historicity of Superman," in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, ed. Donald Lazere (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 124–138.

See also Leslie A. Fiedler, *Unfinished Business* (New York, NY: Stein and Day, 1972), p. 49; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, p. 134; McElvaine, *The Depression and New Deal*, pp. 140–141; Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. 22–26, 59; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 174; Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, p. 30; De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 89; Johnson, *Super-History*, esp. pp. 3, 7, 11, 16–17, 71, 139; Tye, *Superman*, pp. x, 45–46; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 48, 91; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 111; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 9 and the contestation of Superman as a popular front hero on pages 106–107; Gordon, *Superman*, p. 18; Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, p. 25.

[111] Jerry Siegel, "Superman Expose," undated press release (circa after May 12, 1951), in box 19, folder 3, LB. See also "Nick Kenny Speaking," *Daily Mirror* (New York), Complete Sports plus 2-Star to 4-Star Final Editions, vol. 27, no. 277, May 12, 1951, p. 22; "Nick Kenny Speaking," *Daily Mirror* (New York), Airborne Edition, vol. 27, no. 277, May 12, 1951, p. 16.

pronouncement.[112] Rather than evoke the Declaration of Independence again, Siegel acknowledged, in his notorious October 1975 press release, the influence of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's fireside chats on his own political outlook.[113] It is useful here to consider the childhood experiences of Superman's creators. Poverty forced artist Joe Shuster to peddle newspapers and hawk ice cream bars in the summer. The Shuster family skipped meals and lived without heat one winter. Siegel later recalled that he and his cocreator had to sell milk bottles to afford to see movies. Personal struggles and entertainment inspired them.[114] Brad Ricca postulates that Superman's early outlaw nature expressed Siegel's personal view of law enforcement as inadequate. The police did not catch the thieves who robbed his father's store or make any arrests, possibly never even pursing the case because of corruption allegations in the press as Ricca claims.[115] Even though the stickup induced a fatal heart attack for Michael Siegel, petty larceny without any viable leads on the criminals did not warrant intensive use of Cleveland, Ohio, police resources during the Great Depression. Superheroes' corrective actions can be described as violence from below, a possible inversion to violence from above enacted by totalitarian governments of the era. Vigilantism inaccurately describes their early behavior. Comics scholars need to stop using this simplistic explanation.[116] According to Lawrence W.

---

[112] Jerry Siegel to President Harry Truman, letter, May 17, 1951, box 119, folder 12, CWT. The initialism CWT is an abbreviation for the Charles W. Tobey, papers, ML-3, Rauner Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire. He mailed copies to Senators Estes Kefauver, Charles W. Tobey, and Joseph McCarthy. I do not know why it is not in the Harry S. Truman Library, and this might require another visit in the future. Even though he did not supply a folder and the archivists reprocessed the collection, which required a visit to get the correct citation, I attribute this discovery to William Howard Moore, *The Kefauver Committee and the Politics of Crime, 1950–1952* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1974), p. 200.

For Jerry Siegel's postwar and postlawsuit monetary woes, see also Virginia Sheward, "'Blackball' Spells Hunger Strike for Plump Father of Superman," *Newsday*, Final Edition, vol. 12, no. 74, November 30, 1951, p. 7; "Syndicates: Ex-Author Of 'Superman' Hits 'Blackball,'" *Editor & Publisher*, vol. 84, no. 50, December 8, 1951, p. 52.

[113] Jerry Siegel, "For Immediate Release: Superman's Originator Puts 'Curse' On Superman Movie," October 1975, p. 8. Mike Carton, "Jerry Siegel's 1975 Press Release," accessed May 28, 2012, http://homepage.mac.com/mikecatron/Download/FileSharing67.html. Access to the facsimile pdf is no longer possible since the webpage is gone. Brad Ricca tries to link Jerry Siegel's diatribe to the Old Testament—Deut. 28:23—and thus reinforce his Jewishness. See Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 277. See also Lund, *Re-Constructing the Man of Steel*, p. 79.

[114] John Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y! The Rise of Superman, Inc.," *The Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 213, no. 51, June 21, 1941, p. 70; interview with Jerry Siegel in Daniels, *Superman*, p. 35. For reprints, see John Kobler, "The Miracle of Superman: Explaining the Popularity of the Comic Strip," *The Decatur Herald* (Decatur, IL), June 24, 1941, p. 4; John Kobler, "Superman," *The Winnipeg Tribune* (Winnipeg, CAN), vol. 52, no. 220, September 13, 1941, p. 3.

[115] Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 159–160, 300, 303–304, 393n25. For debate on the spelling of the first name of Siegel's father as Mitchell, Michel, or Michael, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 76; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 6, 298–299.

[116] For the simplistic idea of vigilantism, see, for example, Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 184, 211, 251, 289 for Batman; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 4, 160; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 34, 49; Johnson, *Super-History*, p. 15; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 55, 218, 229–230. For analysis of more contemporary comic books and nuance between due process

Levine, Superman, very much like the gangster portrayed in 1930s cinema, reflects the larger feeling of public unrest against the failed institutions and bureaucracies in Depression America.[117] Although not a gangster in any shape or form, he does embody the socioeconomic and political frustrations of American citizens at the time. The phrase populist champion is a better description than vigilante or gangster. Like cinema or literature, comics served as a protest art for European immigrants and first-generation Americans against inequality and corruption in society. Despite legal classification as white, newcomers still experienced discrimination and second-class citizenship. They used the medium as a platform to articulate their worldview while making a living.[118] Historian Aldo J. Regalado writes, "Depression-era comic books … largely depicted their protagonists as effective and optimistic agents of change who stood a chance of transforming the world for the better."[119] Gerard Jones similarly asserts that the cartoonists "wanted to see their fantasies out in the world" and actively "made a new reality."[120] This is only partly true, however. The cartoonists wanted change but did not at first envision a physical dimension to Comicland nor realize that it would interact with the real world. Nevertheless, they did end up constructing a new normal that is still active today. The prevalence of Comicland is their legacy.

In contrast, Superman's Jewish overseers—copyright holder Harry Donenfeld and his head of operations Jack S. Liebowitz—desired a more family-friendly fantasy that they could commercialize and build a world around. Unfortunately, their design for Comicland still reinforced the notion of whiteness in America as a quality inherent to Anglo-Saxons. (Although southern and eastern Europeans arrived in America as white, they still had to demonstrate their societal worth by shedding their "foreignness" and assimilating into the Protestant way of life, a

---

and extralegal action, see Bradford W. Reyns and Billy Henson, "Superhero Justice: The Depiction of Crime and Justice in Modern-Age Comic Books and Graphic Novels," in *Popular Culture, Crime, and Social Control*, vol. 14, ed. Mathieu Deflem (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2010), esp. pp. 49–51, 56, 58, 60–62; Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl, *Comic Book Crime: Truth Justice and the American Way* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 112–113, 115–116, 119, 121, 128–129, 139. For other criminology perspectives, see Graeme Newman, "Batman and Justice: The True Story," *Humanity & Society*, vol. 17, no. 3 (August 1993), pp. 297–320; Scott Vollum and Cary D. Adkinson, "The Portrayal of Crime and Justice in the Comic Book Superhero Mythos," *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2003), pp. 96–108. The latter article is reprinted without changes as Scott Vollum and Cary D. Adkinson, "Portrayals of Crime and Justice in Superhero Mythos," in *Crime and Media Studies: Diversity of Method, Medium, and Communication*, ed. Franklin T. Wilson (San Diego, CA: Cognella, Inc., 2015), pp. 269–279.

[117] Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 227–228. Coulton Waugh presents a similar take on the link between the gangster Al Capone and the creation of the comic strip G-man Dick Tracy. See Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 217–218.

[118] For general agreement, see Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 111, 194.

[119] Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 193.

[120] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 340.

process that ultimately served to reinforce the binary color line of white and nonwhite. In other words, whiteness originally meant Anglo-Saxonness as there was no non-Anglo-Saxon form of approved whiteness. Legal determination of white racial identity for Europeans did not change their reception as lesser in society.)[121] Rising editorial control by Whitney Ellsworth in the 1940s (and continued by Mort Weisinger in the next two decades) at the direction of DC Comics management suppressed the creators' leftist immigrant outlook and everyday depiction of urban violence and corruption.[122] Jerry Siegel vented to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* on June 18, 1941, about the unrelenting corporate oversight. "We have to be careful about what Superman says and

---

[121] See, for example, Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 4–10. Guglielmo focuses on the Italian immigrant experience in America and corrects the conventional historiography that southern and eastern Europeans acquired whiteness. He shows that Italians arrived white according to the 1790 naturalization law (or free white persons citizenship clause) but were lesser than the Anglo-Saxon or Nordic race and experienced discrimination. Guglielmo acknowledges the pecking order of white peoples but does not articulate the notion of "proper" whiteness equaling Anglo-Saxonness.

[122] For the shift from creative freedom to editorial oversight, see Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 213, no. 51, June 21, 1941, p. 74; Jerry Siegel, letter, *Detective Comics* no. 512 (March 1982); interview with Joe Shuster in Tom Andrae, Geoffr[e]y Blum, and Gary Coddington, "Of Supermen and Kids With Dreams," *Nemo: The Classic Comics Library*, no. 2, edited by Rick Marschall (August 1983), p. 18; Jerry Siegel, "Creation of a Superhero," November 7, 1978, chap. 3, p. 9; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, p. 136; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 75, 181–185, 190, 260; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 177; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 49–51, 57, 83, 125, 239; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 48–49; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 114, 197, 206; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 19–21, 99–100, 102–105; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 14, 32, 35–42, 44–48, 60–62, 65–68, 82–86, 89, 93–94, 100–102, 104–105, 111, 135–138, 141, 144, 147–148. For a general mention, see Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 207. This reality is evident in the early correspondence between Superman's cocreators, who initially resided in Cleveland, and DC Comics management in New York City. Whitney Ellsworth actually started the editorial process back in May 1936 with their Superman precursor Slam Bradley and his oversight expanded to the 1950s television show. For Ellsworth transitioning to the supervision of Superman on television, see, for example, Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 122; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 92.

Jerry Siegel's disorganized memoir "Creation of a Superhero" is viewable with official filing papers from the Office of Copyright in box 3, folder Siegel Memoir, Larry Tye Papers, 2008–2013, MS#1642, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York or without the filing paperwork online at https://www.dropbox.com/s/k3rb8by5oupsjhz/Creation%20of%20a%20Superhero%20by%20 Jerry%20Siegel.pdf?dl=0.

For an introduction to the *Nemo* article, essay, and reprints, see Thomas Andrae, "Of Supermen and Kids with Dreams: An Interview with Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster," in *Comic Book Price Guide*, 18th Edition, 1988–1989, by Robert M. Overstreet (New York, NY: House of Collectibles, 1988), pp. A-78–A-98; Thomas Andrae, "Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster: Of Supermen and Kids with Dreams," in *Creators of the Superheroes* (Neshannock, PA: Hermes Press, 2011), pp. 10–55.

For the in-house editorial code for comics, see Exhibit No. 21, "Editorial Policy For Superman D–C Publications," in *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, US Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., April 22, 1954, S. 190, p. 139. It is also printed in *Juvenile Delinquency*, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., Committee Report (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), pp. 150–151. And for secondary sources on the in-house editorial code for comics and later television, see Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, p. 182, Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 241, 278, 285; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 99, 177–178, 218; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 47, 49, 125, 148–149, 151, 239, 247, 262; Johnson, *Super-History*, p. 79. Although it was most likely Whitney Ellsworth, Gerard Jones claims without evidence that publisher Jack S. Liebowitz crafted the code and Michael J Hayde and Larry Tye continue the notion.

does. Everything we turn out is gone over and checked and double-checked by an editorial board."[123] Herbert J. Gans smartly terms this group the "*decision makers*."[124]

The publishers' version of Comicland has an inauguration date. The company imprinted a logo on its comic book covers identifying them as "A DC Publication" and it later shifted to "A Superman–DC Publication."[125] Besides being a marketing and branding device to separate DC Comics from the implied inferior competition that supposedly maintained no standards of quality, this marking indicated the origin of their version of Comicland. It is much more than Jill Lepore's assessment of it being "a stamp of quality, a mark of the endorsement of the [company's editorial advisory] board."[126] The first occurrences of this stamp appeared on *Action Comics* no. 23 (April 1940), the magazine exhibiting Superman, and *Detective Comics* no. 38 (April 1940), the magazine showcasing Batman. It is interesting that the month the copyright holders launched Comicland coincided with the debut of the Dark Knight's new teenage sidekick Robin. Ultimately, DC Comics used the characters Superman, Batman, and Robin to establish Comicland as a commodity and their brand. Ian Gordon rightly contends that DC Comics employed Superman as a product and "business symbol" rather than just a character.[127] It is then no surprise that the following month presented an advertisement for the first Superman Playsuit and their association with Macy's, which later expanded during the holiday season through a giant balloon and an in-store event. July that year brought Superman to life at the New York World's Fair. These real-life events of 1940 covered in chapter 1 solidified Comicland. The letters "DC" in the logo presented a dual message, nevertheless. On the literal level, it was initialism for the company's name, an extension of their flagship magazine *Detective Comics*. On the symbolic level, the letters implied Donenfeld Comics. The daughter of company founder Harry Donenfeld alluded to this inside joke in an interview with Larry Tye. Naming the company

---

[123] J. A. Wadovick, "Superman 'Dads' Learn Hard Way: Post Story Tells of Comic Creators' Bad Luck," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Final Edition, yr. 100, no. 169, June 18, 1941, p. 9.
[124] Gans, *Popular and High Culture*, p. 14.
[125] See also Marston, "Why 100,000 Americans Read Comics," *The American Scholar*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Winter 1943–1944), p. 41; Waugh, *The Comics*, p. 261; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 133, 136; Chris Ryall and Scott Tipton, *Comic Books 101: The History, Methods and Madness* (Cincinnati, OH: Impact, 2009), p. 16; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 67; Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, pp. 186, 342. In February 1966, DC Comics updated their brand identity with a new black-and-white checkered background behind the logo. It lasted on issues until July 1967. See Weldon, *Superman*, p. 136.
[126] Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, p. 186.
[127] Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 133–134. See also Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 3–4, 29, 157.

Detective Comics instead of Donenfeld Comics avoided any visible or overt Jewish associations, she contended.[128]

In opposition to the squeaky-clean prescription by the publishers, casual and devout fans put forth a more playful and envelope-pushing design for Comicland. As the intellectual property owners expanded the comic book superhero into other entertainment forms, they lost control as the public fought over the meaning of the fantastic figures and their worlds.[129] Comics fandom—expressed most visibly through fanzines and gatherings—eroded publisher power. The growing fan community effectively forced editors to appease their fervent base. This is most apparent by the eventual change in distribution from the consignment system through newsstands and drugstores with stories catered to a general audience to the direct market system through independent comics stores with elaborate multi-issue stories geared to fandom.[130] But even before this shrinking of the comic book marketplace and audience, everyday admirers and satirists hijacked the superhero by applying adult themes to this supposedly childish fantasy. Grownups transformed this pretend space intended for children into a realm of play for themselves. Additionally, most fans re-envisioned the caste-like system of Comicland from a world composed of almost exclusively WASP men into a more diverse landscape. The rise of fandom, cosplay, and comics conventions helped to crystallize the fictional universe into a pop-up neighborhood and an accepting community. Over time the public around the globe concretized Comicland into an inclusive district and a culture that was consumed and constantly reimagined throughout the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries.

This dissertation is not the story of the Jewish creators' vision of Comicland and its racial architecture and reception—that is another project—but what the Jewish proprietors of DC Comics and ordinary people did with the superhero fantasy. The Jewish creators designed Comicland as an imaginary homeland, but the public rezoned it into a livable neighborhood. My concept brings a depth and coherence to Benjamin Looker's underdefined thesis of America as a collection of neighborhoods rather than states. Through an American studies approach, Looker explores the differing representations of the neighborhood as a real and imagined urban

---

[128] Interview with Sonia "Peachy" Donenfeld in Tye, *Superman*, pp. 79–80.
[129] Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 13–14.
[130] Coogan, "From Love to Money," *International Journal of Comic Art*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 62–63.
For the change in distribution and audience, see Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. 260–261; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 36, 210, 219, 224, 261, 267, 294; Johnson, *Super-History*, pp. 129–130; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 208; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 34, 164.

landscape as well as the battles over the construction and meaning of the neighborhood in twentieth-century America. Comicland, in contrast, provides the American public with a single imaginary neighborhood to dwell as citizens.[131] The concept also speaks to the work of political scientist Benedict Anderson, who insightfully locates the origins of nationhood through "print-capitalism." The same can be said for public engagement with comics culture by scaling down the categorization of "imagined communities" from nation to neighborhood.[132] Marvel Comics alterative design of superheroes inhabiting and protecting New York City neighborhoods instead of the mythic ones crafted by DC Comics accelerated the shift in power from creator and publisher to fan and deepened their connection to Comicland. In between this transition from mythic landscape to the local and the succession of Marvel as the majority landowner, DC created the industry and materialized Superman and Comicland through contests, events, and products.

To recap, this project traces the engagement with Comicland by the intellectual property owners, kids, and adults since 1938 through commercialized events, play, parody, and appropriation. Together, DC Comics and the public imprinted Comicland into everyday life. Comicland existed first in the mind but quickly corporealized into the physical world, where it took on a life of its own. Let us now map the expanding neighborhood of Comicland.

Road Map of Comicland

Divided into four chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion, this dissertation explores how the public responded to Comicland and rebuilt it into a neighborhood. The story is arranged thematically to illustrate the impact of DC Comics' three leading male superheroes on kids and adults. The important themes of consumption, realism, politics, race, gender, and sexuality are thoroughly surveyed, scaffolded, and organized into chapters and subheadings. Regarding chronology, the narrative emphasizes a vast time period from the late 1930s to the recent past as it follows the established threads to their current ends. Though each chapter focuses on specific concepts, the ideas migrate and the chronology overlaps as well. The story of Comicland, as I imagine it, is a map that can be read from multiple directions while still retaining

[131] See Benjamin Looker, *A Nation of Neighborhoods: Imagining Cities, Communities, and Democracy in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).
[132] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (1983; New York, NY: Verso, 2016), esp. pp. 32–46, 207–208.

its guiding purpose. This design echoes, in a way, the organizational approach of mass media theorist and alarmist Marshall McLuhan in *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* by assembling portraits of the superhero and its influence over time and across media. Since Comicland is an ongoing concept and lived experience for the individual and the community, "there is no need for" this text "to be read in any special order."[133] The chapter synopses are charted below.

This story of Comicland moves in three overlapping phases, all of which compete for control. The first mode operates under the purview of the intellectual property owners, who deploy Superman for profit and use him to establish Comicland as a commercialized place for children. However, once Superman appears across multimedia, children inhabit and alter the world given to them. They re-create Superman and Comicland with their imaginative play, believing the fantasy to be theirs. The third phase occurs when adults annex Comicland from the corporate owners and kids to express their imagination and worldview. The current moment in the sequence is the return of power to the conglomerates Warner Bros. Discovery and Disney. The corporate overseers repossessed the fantasy as big business through television, movies, and streaming platforms where they project new stories to mainly a teenage and adult audience. This, in turn, will provide the public with more material to alter in the future, furthering the cycle.

The introduction chapter presented here provides a rationale for studying the superhero as a historical figure. It supports Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen's argument of the need for scholarship on fictional characters equal to that of real actors. My methodological intervention merges a diverse array of fields to explore the real and imagined geography of Comicland. Being both mental and physical, Comicland is actually a fourth space. This precise terminology seeks to expand the three spatial concepts used in history and critical geography studies to include metatopography and its related play, both serious and satirical.

Chapter 1 examines the bond between children and Superman through "Superman Day" at the 1940 New York World's Fair and Macy's Superman productions including his Thanksgiving Day Parade balloons ending in the 1980s and in-store Christmas events that were promoted to white boys and girls. These spectacles mark DC Comics ownership of Superman and the behind-the-scenes workings of their marketing and publicity machine. Such events

[133] Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (1951; Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2002), p. vii.

alongside the development of products like the Superman Playsuit, the Superman Movie Viewer, and the Superbabe doll commercialized Comicland for children. Another dimension to the chapter is the relationship between Superman and Santa Claus and the messiness of realism. This public display of Superman signals his transformation from fictional character to "real" person. DC Comics made the Man of Steel central to American culture through holiday celebration and toys and ensured that the superhero could not be deemed marginal entertainment.

Chapter 2 records boys' harmful and fatal costumed attempts to leap or fly like Superman and surveys the corresponding discourse by educators, journalists, psychoanalysts, and parents. It follows American children's imitative behavior, which pediatric experts call "superhero play," from Superman's debut to the recent past. Confusion between fantasy and reality began with Superman's depiction in the comics but worsened with his portrayal on television by live actor George Reeves. DC Comics debated licensing a Superman cape and entire playsuit in 1954 to promote the character and television program and launched the merchandise only after approval from one of New York City's leading child psychiatrists. Superman's ubiquity induced parental backlash because of a perceived delegitimization of their authority and an inability to secure their children's attention and compliance. The adults behind the superhero transmitted ideas of heroism to children through entertainment, which they believed to be benign.

Chapter 3 continues the analysis of superhero play but for grownups in the form of cosplay, wordplay, and symbol seizure. Almost immediately after Superman's debut, his caretakers as well as ordinary adults and teenagers began pretending to be the Man of Steel outside of Halloween. The success of the campy 1966 Batman television show induced imitation of the Dynamic Duo, which spotlighted the dominance of DC Comics' properties over the public imagination. Superhero costuming and banter, which mainly parodied the narrative design of the characters, occurred on television sitcoms and variety shows as well as in advertisements and photographs. Gender-switching portrayals of Superman on television and in newspaper comic strips contested the masculinity of superheroes. Comedians also lampooned and sexualized superheroes on television and in their stand-up routines. Challenging the established mode of mockery, a few entertainers openly embraced the fantasy because their affinity for superheroes clearly did not fade after childhood. Through puppets and animated cartoons, adults repackaged the characters to kids, presumably in jest and celebration. At this stage, Superman and Batman and Robin were no longer just for children.

The final chapter tracks both the resistance to and embrace of the expansion of the neighborhood of Comicland through the medium of film. Public debate over the value of the superhero movie genre and its artistic merit (or supposed lack thereof) demonstrates the ubiquity and longevity of the fantasy. Although the entertainment platform may change, these characters are here to stay. The superhero fantasy endures because of a deep connection first established during the formative years and is reactivated through watching television shows and movies. The entrance of Marvel Comics into the cineplex in the twenty-first century and their monetary dominance of the box office through good storytelling and casting top and emerging actors normalizes superheroes to a new degree and breaks the curse of superhero typecasting. Because of these corporate designs, Comicland is now the center of popular culture and mainstream for both kids and adults.

The conclusion chapter defines the geography of Comicland as larger than the comic book superhero universe itself and distinguishes it from other forms of immersive entertainment. Comicland is where the public interfaces with the superhero fantasy. It exists in a myriad of places because it is an unfixed landscape, which is a benefit rather than a limitation. Even though DC established the metaspace with Superman, the meteoric rise of Marvel movies in the post–9/11 world illustrates a sea change in power and fan engagement with Comicland. Marvel has supplanted DC as the most desirable property owner in the neighborhood. But no matter the landlord, we all live in Comicland.

My methodological approach to the topic of following the evidence trail to its ends and allowing the sources to dictate the story illuminated these patterns and revealed the creation of Comicland and its everchanging world. This discovery of a living fictional cartography expands the established understanding of American popular culture as well as the scope of the superhero and its relationship to the masses. Comicland corroborates Lawrence W. Levine's interpretation of representational reality in popular culture as not escapism but social commentary and a coping mechanism that becomes real—in this case through play.[134]

The contours of Comicland's metalandscape is greater than theme parks and comics conventions. It is a space without a geographic center that is reified through multimedia and public engagement. My work attempts to widen the parameters of what constitutes valuable scholarship in the discipline of history. Superheroes and their fantasy worlds speak to larger

[134] See Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, pp. 298, 312–313.

issues of everyday life and demand inquiry alongside the acceptable modes of popular culture study like film and theater. Superheroes may be silly to some but their impact on American society is serious, and historians must take heed. It is now time to explore the neighborhood of Comicland and its distinctive *reality*.

CHAPTER 1: COMMERCIALIZING COMICLAND

In 1940, just two years after debuting, Superman came out of the comics page and into the real world, where he began to take over the Big Apple and popular culture more broadly. DC Comics licensed an official Superman Playsuit for children and partnered with Macy's to market and sell the item. In mid-May, the department store announced the novel product in a single newspaper comic strip advertisement and started their burgeoning relationship with the character. Two months later, the 1939–1940 "World of Tomorrow" fairground in Queens, New York—now Flushing Meadows Corona Park—celebrated the "Man of Tomorrow" in a special day for children. "Superman Day," a brilliant marketing stunt by the DC Comics subsidiary Superman, Inc., embraced spectatorship and participation as equal components of Comicland. Athletic events for children preceded a sideshow style pageant with a real-life Superman. The event ultimately acted as a repackaged version of field day: a mini Olympics for elementary school children occurring at the end of the academic year in the school yard or a nearby park.[1] That same year, Superman's connection to the nation forever deepened with the help of Macy's through a massive balloon for its Thanksgiving Day Parade, as well as an elaborate window display and an immersive experience at its flagship store during the holiday season.[2] *The Publishers' Weekly* later described these events that DC Comics orchestrated as "phenomenal publicity" for Superman.[3] Three products and four attractions geared to children served as the crucial designs for DC Comics' creation of Comicland and corporealization of the Man of Steel in the physical world. Allen Ducovny and Robert Maxwell, the media wizards behind marketing Superman, were the two fundamental players in establishing Comicland as a place beyond the pages of comic books and the funnies. As historian Warren I. Susman argues, "[I]n the United States we seldom take our festival life seriously."[4] Studying the Man of Steel and his reception is one way to shed light on festival in American culture. This chapter analyzes Superman's impact on children through first, his playsuit and other products sold and advertised by Macy's; second,

[1] For secondary source mentions of Superman Day, see Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, p. 133; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 4; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 59–60; Tye, *Superman*, p. 51; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 44–45; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 170F–H, 187–189, 194; Gordon, *Superman*, p. 102.
[2] For secondary source mentions of Superman and Macy's, see Daniels, *Superman*, pp. 162–163; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, p. 133; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 58–59; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 51, 115, 123–126; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 45; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 170H, 187, 194, 320; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 4, 102.
[3] "The Comics and Their Audience," *The Publishers' Weekly*, vol. 141, no. 16, April 18, 1942, p. 1478.
[4] Susman, *Culture as History*, p. 216.

his special day at the 1940 New York World's Fair; third, his appearances as a balloon in festivals such as the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade; and fourth, his in-person events with a costumed actor. Through these activities DC Comics associated Superman with national culture and national celebration as well as commercialism. In the process, they built the fourth space of Comicland in New York City.

Discussions of children as historical actors and economic agents as well as the inclusion of their voices are scant in the literature of American history, and this chapter could increase their visibility through engagement with Superman.[5] A great deal of scholarship tends to attribute economic power and agency only to teenagers with the rise of rock and roll and its cultural rebellion.[6] Diverging from this limited outlook, historian Bradford W. Wright suggests that comic book consumption functioned as an expression of youth culture that preceded the musical revolution and Hollywood's courtship of the teenager.[7] By emphasizing this economic activity in the postwar period, Wright, nevertheless, undervalues the monetary power of American youth during the Depression and the Second World War. In the early twentieth century, preteens and teens expressed market power through their patronage of movies and similar forms of urban amusement.[8] Historian Gary Cross places comic books alongside the other forms of popular culture at the time. The generational rebellion away from Victorian patriarchy and white Protestant gentility created what he calls "the cool." Cross writes that the greatest generation and the silent generation "replaced it with the cool. Rooted in a new commercial culture of the comic book, Saturday-matinee crime and science-fiction movies, and the hot music and dance scene, the cool emerged when my father was a child and teenager, almost twenty years before rock and

---

[5] See the disconnected collection of essays, Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

See also Richard A. Reiman, *The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), esp. pp. 184–190; David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985); Brian Sutton-Smith, *Toys as Culture* (New York, NY: Gardner Press, Inc., 1986); Nasaw, *Going Out*; Gary Cross, *Kid's Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); Gary Cross, *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[6] See Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us To Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1983); Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986); Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996).

[7] Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, esp. pp. xvi, 28, 87, 152, 179–181, 200, 217–218, 229–230, 251, 273, 275, 284.

[8] Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, pp. 19, 140. See also pages 129–131 for the cultural impact of Hollywood with an unannounced visit by stars Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglass Fairbanks to a Chicago school to sell liberty bonds during World War I.

roll."[9] Although accurately identifying the 1930s and 1940s as the origin point of youth culture in America, comic books are underexplored in his text. Wright, by contrast, describes the impact of comic books on youth culture. "In a national culture forged by adults for adults, how refreshing it must have been for young people to discover a source of entertainment that spoke directly to them as independent consumers."[10] Wright correctly articulates the marketing strategy. "Comic book publishers bypassed parents and aimed their products directly at the tastes of children and adolescents."[11] Most recently, historian Paul S. Hirsch duplicates this view. "The comic book combined elements of existing mass culture—pulps, comic strips, and films—into something new: a medium with wide appeal and enormous popularity that became associated almost immediately with young consumers."[12] Author Coulton Waugh expresses a similar sentiment back in 1947. Children regarded comic books as "*their books*" because they differed in size and color from the newspaper comic strips. Comic books, Waugh writes, appear "in bright, gay colors, not like the silly, gray newspapers the grown-ups read."[13] The colorful superhero created a culture for children around entertainment and consumption. Until the arrival of Superman, children's culture was not yet so commercialized. DC Comics' management took this escalating entertainment to a new level by marketing Superman and his reality beyond just print culture. The elaborate events and toys like the Superman Playsuit, Superman Movie Viewer, and less successful Superbabe doll covered in this chapter built the foundation of Comicland.

Macy's and the Superman Playsuit

On May 16, 1940, Macy's began promoting Superman and his merchandise. The department store believed it was worth their time and resources to pursue the Superman angle in its promotions and advertising. This partnership is clear in a comic strip advertisement from the New York *Daily News* that occupied half the page. In the black and white comic, Superman admires Macy's from a Manhattan rooftop. He then leaps from the nearby building and crashes right through a Macy's fifth floor window, leaving a pile of broken bricks and glass in his wake.

---

[9] Cross, *Men to Boys*, pp. 16–17, 98. The quote appeared on page 98.
[10] See Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. 26–29. The quote appeared on pages 28–29. See also page 200.
[11] Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, p. 27.
[12] Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, p. 23.
[13] Waugh, *The Comics*, p. 334. See also Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1994), p. 188.

On par with his bulldozing in the comics, Superman makes his own doorway to Macy's Toyland. With the text crossing three panels, Superman states:

> Well! Well! The world's largest store! I'll leap to the fifth floor to see the toys. Here I go… [*sic*] right into Macy's.

The narrative advertisement also featured a Superman Playsuit. A blonde-haired white boy shouted in excitement, "Boy, this Superman suit is swell!" One dollar and nineteen cents bought young fans a T-shirt with the Superman logo, a cape, and a pair of pants. This represented the first iteration of the Superman costume for children. The cheaper version costing ninety-eight cents contained a sleeveless T-shirt along with the other garments. It is worth noting that the T-shirt appears to be identical to the one worn by children at Superman Day, which is discussed in the next subheading. The manufacturer did not produce Superman's traditional tights and boots for this playsuit as it probably proved too costly. However, to give the illusion, the manufacturer superimposed an image of Superman's trunks as well as his legs and boots on the pants. This unique choice made the pants peculiar to look at. The intention behind the design suggests that adults believed that children desired to have the strength of Superman and physically resemble him. (Chapter 2 returns to this idea of children identifying with Superman and explores the corresponding academic debate.) The May 16, 1940, message to children read:

> Boys and girls! Now, for the first time, you can look like Superman—the Man of Steel! Wear his blue broadcloth shirt and red broadcloth cape, and his navy cotton twill pants. The whole suit is only 98c! Sizes 4, 6, 8, and 10. (You can have the same suit, with sleeves, for 1.19.) Macy's World's Fair of Toys, Fifth Floor.

Purchase also included the Supermen of America fan club button and a card to decipher the secret messages presented in the *Superman* comic book.[14] It bears mentioning that the choice of the *Daily News* was strange because the paper did not carry the *Superman* dailies and begs the question of why DC Comics did not also promote these versions of the playsuit in their magazines. Macy's and other stores advertised the Superman Playsuit in various newspapers in the spring and during the Halloween season of 1940.[15] *The New Yorker* gossip column "The Talk of The Town" briefly mentioned the product and a slew of other Superman merchandise on the

---

[14] See the advertisement "Superman Pays A Visit To Macy's," *Daily News* (New York, NY), All Editions, vol. 21, no. 280, May 16, 1940, p. 21. See also Tye, *Superman*, p. 124. Larry Tye mentions the costume without a citation.
[15] See the advertisements in *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), vol. 207, no. 7, May 24, 1940, p. 13; *Buffalo Evening News* (Buffalo, NY), vol. 120, no. 41, May 28, 1940, p. 7; *The Boston Globe*, vol. 137, no. 149, May 28, 1940, p. 9; *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), vol. 207, no. 13, May 31, 1940, p. 11; *Daily News* (New York, NY), All Editions, vol. 22, no. 104, October 24, 1940, p. 9.

fourteenth of December.[16] The second version debuting in 1941, which Macy's also advertised, wisely discarded the odd-looking pants for plain ones.[17] Discussion of the playsuits from the 1940s to the 1960s and the imitation of Superman by children will be further discussed in chapter 3.

DC Comics' decision to license the manufacturing of a costume for children was their first act in the commercialization of Comicland and part of their larger marketing strategy that they realized with the aid of Macy's. Another example of their relationship is evident by the fact that the department store staff supported Comicland by wearing the Superman fan club button. Back in June 1940, Macy's internal monthly magazine called *Sparks*, a sort of gossip column meets yearbook preserved in the company's private archives in New York, revealed the depth of the promotion of Superman as well as the popular perception of him among adults as kiddie fare. Twenty-eight-year-old Macy's employee Walt Egan "wondered why all the people in the subway were smiling at him. He was embarrassed to find he'd forgotten to remove a Superman kiddie button from his lapel."[18]

"Superman Day" at the 1940 New York World's Fair

Superman Day began at 9 a.m. at the Field of Special Events and was the second puzzle piece in the corporate creation of Comicland. Even though originally scheduled for the twenty-sixth of June, it took place on July 3, 1940.[19] Adults registered children who wished to take part in the field day style games. A series of three contests supervised by the Public Schools Athletic

---

[16] "The Talk of The Town: Santa's Helper," *The New Yorker*, vol. 16, no. 44, December 14, 1940, p. 20. For a reprint, see "New Yorker Tells About Superman," *Newsday* (Nassau County, NY), vol. 1, no. 76, December 17, 1940, p. 9.

[17] *Sunday News* (New York, NY), Manhattan 2-Star to 4-Star Final Editions, vol. 21, no. 27, October 26, 1941, p. 29; *The Boston Globe*, vol. 140, no. 80, September 18, 1941, p. 24.

[18] John Luts, "Fifth Floor Newsreel," *Sparks* (June 1940), p. 22. Thanks to Macy's for allowing me to conduct research in their private archives (as of late) in the Long Island City neighborhood of Queens, New York. Special thanks to company archivist Lauren Marchisotto, who helped me navigate the mostly uncatalogued holdings. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has closed the archive, and it is unknown when it will reopen with a dedicated archivist.

[19] See Howard Tooley, "Special Day Information," memorandum, May 25, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF; Howard Tooley to Allen Ducovny, letter, May 25, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF; June 26 Wednesday entry, "Calendar of Special Days," issued by Special Activities Department, June 1, 1940, box 747, folder 2 P4.0 Special Events Schedule – Calendar of Special Days (1940), NYWF; June 26 Wednesday and July 3 Wednesday entries, "Calendar of Special Days," issued by Special Activities Department, June 1, 1940, box 2111, folder 5 Special Events & Days: Calendar, NYWF. For the date change to July 3, 1940, see Howard Tooley, memorandum, June 10, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF. The initialism NYWF is an abbreviation for the New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records, MssCol 2233, New York Public Library, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York, New York.

League (PSAL) would determine the winners who will be crowned the elite Super-Boy and Super-Girl. At 10:00 a.m. the preliminary heats for the athletic events took place. A strange coalition of celebrities judged the activities including Superman actor Ray Middleton, vocalist Lucy Monroe, exotic zookeeper Frank Buck, Broadway producer Morris Gest, and strongman Charles Atlas.[20] This lineup differed slightly from the original announcement in several New York City newspapers. *The Sun*, *New York World-Telegram*, and *Daily Mirror* listed Olympic swimmers Eleanor Holm and Buster Crabbe, the stars of the hit show at the fair entitled Aquacade, as judges to pick the Super-Boy and Super-Girl.[21] It is worth noting that Crabbe played Flash Gordon in 1936, making it a shrewd choice to associate him with Superman Day. *The New York Times* and *New York Herald*, in contrast, recorded the correct lineup.[22] Gest and Atlas appeared to be last minute replacements for Holm and Crabbe, who were on the original schedule. The public and archival record provided no explanation for this change.[23] At 11:15 a.m. the Superman radio show held a live broadcast in the Assembly Hall. Next came the thirty-minute Superman parade and float at 12:15 p.m. The float, which featured Middleton dressed as the Man of Steel, began its journey at the Theme Center in the Court of Power. Archival records of the fair curated by the New York Public Library explained that the parade traveled "around the Perisphere towards the City Hall Square side into the Court of Communications down Park Row to the Long Island Ramp, turn at Coty Building into Main Street and back into the Court of Communications returning to the Perisphere, City Building side, into the Court of Power and then to the Plaza of Light disbanding at Empire State Bridge." It appears that Superman, Inc. planned to have all participants dressed in the playsuit for the parade. The official schedule proclaimed, "All Super-boys in superman [*sic*] costumes will march with a special band of prize

---

[20] See G. Walsh, "The World's Fair of 1940 in New York: Program of Events," Wednesday, July 3, 1940 calendar entry, pp. 1, 10, box 2110, folder 2 Program of Events, 1940, 4 of 5, NYWF; "Program Of Events For Superman Day At The New York World's Fair," undated memorandum, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF; Allen Ducovny to Howard Tooley, letter, June 6, 1940, p. 2, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF.

[21] "Fair Exceeds Weekday Top: Breaks Noontime Record as Children Have Fun: Preparations For Fourth: Parades, Music and Fireworks for Independence Show," *The Sun* (New York, NY), 7th Sporting Final Edition, vol. 107, no. 260, July 3, 1940, p. 13; "Stars of Aquacade To Pick Super-Boy And Super-Girl: White Way Cuts Its Prices for Children's Day," *New York World-Telegram*, 7th Sports Edition, vol. 73, no. 3, July 3, 1940, p. 26; "Sharp Cut to Be Made Today in Fair's Staff," *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), Fight Edition and Complete Sports Edition, vol. 17, no. 9, July 3, 1940, p. 11.

[22] Milton Bracker, "Turnstiles at Fair Click Record Tune," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 89, no. 30,112, July 4, 1940, p. 13; "Children Boost Fair to Record Week-Day Mark: Flock In at Special 10-Cent Rate; Exposition Ready for a Big Fourth of July," *New York Herald Tribune*, Late City Edition, vol. 100, no. 34,199, July 4, 1940, p. 7.

[23] G. Walsh, "The World's Fair of 1940 in New York: Program of Events," Wednesday, July 3, 1940, calendar entry, p. 10, box 2110, folder 2 Program of Events, 1940, 4 of 5, NYWF.

winning [*sic*] Junior Drum and Bugle Corps and Boy Scouts from the Boy Scout Camp." The fair supplied a group pass for the band director and fifty musicians.[24]

The four-minute-long video of Superman Day originally discovered by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster biographer Brad Ricca, available for viewing on YouTube, visualized the description of the parade in the archives and popular press. The video portrayed Ray Middleton on an angular-shaped pedestal in the art deco style standing like a statue and holding a rope for balance and safety while the crowd of kids and adults followed the float on foot.[25] Archival records explained that the fifty-member Boys Drum and Bugle Corps and an unlisted number of Boy Scout flag carriers marched behind the Superman float. The parade created a ritualistic or almost religious worship of Superman in the style of Mardi Gras. At the same time, the spectacle exalted Superman as a celebrity, making him almost human and literally placing him above ordinary people. Ricca agrees, "Everyone was acting as if he were real." According to the description in the archives, "[T]he parade will consist of floats, elephants from Frank Buck and Firestone Exhibit, clowns from Jimmy Lynch's Show, Bordens, and RCA, and George McManus, creator of 'Jiggs', [*sic*] comic strip character." The fair apparently combined the less popular Jiggs Day with the more popular Superman Day and carnivalized them into a single parade. This fusion explains the footage showing DC Comics publisher Harry Donenfeld riding a pygmy elephant just before the parade procession.[26] *The Sun* announced on July 3, 1940, that "Super Day" was the first "devoted to the children" and reversed the sophisticated and serious elements of the fair. "For almost two months they have been using the place as a laboratory of learning. Today was their chance to have some real fun there, and the chances are they will. Every kid loves a parade and so this afternoon a monster march, made up of elephants, monkeys, giraffes, clowns, midget racing automobiles, colorful, floats and hundreds of youngsters was to wind its way throughout

---

[24] G. Walsh, "The World's Fair of 1940 in New York: Program of Events," Wednesday, July 3, 1940, calendar entry, pp. 1–2, 10, box 2110, folder 2 Program of Events, 1940, 4 of 5, NYWF; "Program Of Events For Superman Day At The New York World's Fair," undated memorandum, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF; Edward B. Blaum to Allen Ducovny, letter, June 26, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF.
[25] See The Retronaut, "1939: Superman Day at New York World's Fair," July 15, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhYzI1J1fNI and LunaTech 3D, "Superman Day at the 1940 Worlds Fair - July 3rd, 1940," December 28, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBsCjnA6K54&ab_channel=LunaTech3D. The latter video is longer.
[26] G. Walsh, "The World's Fair of 1940 in New York: Program of Events," Wednesday, July 3, 1940, calendar entry, p. 10, box 2110, folder 2 Program of Events, 1940, 4 of 5, NYWF. For Jiggs Day, see "Fair Prepares For Celebration Of July Fourth," *New York Journal and American*, 7th Sport Baseball Sports Complete Edition, no. 19,191, July 3, 1940, p. 1B. The article failed to mention Superman Day. See also Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 186.

the grounds."[27] That very same day the *New York World-Telegram* repeated the emphasis on physical over mental toughness. "The super-children need not be good spellers or particularly proficient in arithmetic, but they have to be fleet of foot and good at sports."[28]

The athletic events for children were undoubtedly secondary to the visual grandeur of the parade and the marketing extravaganza of the entire day. Commercialism was not just part of but foundational to DC Comics' design of Comicland. Selling Superman as a person as well as products of the character was the key factor in creating Comicland and opened the door for the competing versions enacted by children and adults covered in the next two chapters. The act of world building at the fair, however temporary, was a way to develop the Superman brand. Among the pavilions for countries, DC Comics manifested the neighborhood of Comicland. The Man of Steel's grand march through the fairgrounds signaled his domination of the imagination and the physical world. In this way, Superman's caretakers enacted the fourth space of Comicland as a playground for children in Queens. DC Comics management and employees, who became residents of Comicland themselves, wore the Superman fan club button over a small rectangular red, white, and blue ribbon to celebrate the Fourth of July, occurring the next day.[29] To make the affair about the character's brand, Superman, Inc. gave away 10,000 Superman balloons with 150 containing coupons for an undisclosed Superman prize.[30] Rejected Macy's artwork for Superman Day by Lou Zimmerman posted on the website Superman Through The Ages! suggested that the prize was a Superman comic book.[31] Superman Day footage depicted virtually all the contestants wearing white T-shirts with the Superman emblem, which were either another giveaway besides the balloons or included in the admission price. The girls displayed the same Superman logo on their clothing making it a sticker. It was clearly too large to be a button and there is no visual evidence of it being a patch secured by safety pins as Brad Ricca suggests. Superman Day footage showed a young boy wearing the original playsuit at the

---

[27] "Fair Exceeds Weekday Top," *The Sun*, July 3, 1940, p. 13.
[28] "Stars of Aquacade To Pick Super-Boy And Super-Girl," *New York World-Telegram*, July 3, 1940, p. 26.
[29] For an image of the Superman button, see Daniels, *Superman*, p. 43.
[30] G. Walsh, "The World's Fair of 1940 in New York: Program of Events," Wednesday, July 3, 1940, calendar entry, p. 10, box 2110, folder 2 Program of Events, 1940, 4 of 5, NYWF. Popular authors Glen Weldon and Brad Ricca mention the advertising of the Superman Day balloons but do not provide a citation. See Weldon, *Superman*, p. 45; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 187 and 368n6. They are most likely referencing Randy Duncan, "Superman Day at the *World of Tomorrow*: WORLD'S FAIR SPECIAL EVENTS," Superman Through The Ages!, http://superman.nu/fos/supermanday/schedule.php. Randy Duncan told me that he did some research in New York (but cannot recall where) and presented his findings at a conference. The Superman website must have obtained it firsthand or secondhand from an attendee.
[31] "Superman Day," Superman Through The Ages!, http://superman.nu/fos/supermanday/#poster.

fair. His decision is analogous to sports fans donning the jersey of their favorite team or player at the game. Half of Superman Day was a children's sporting event.

The Superman parade divided the day's festivities and served as the central feature. Immediately following the traveling carnival, the Superman radio show broadcast again at 12:45 p.m. Transcriptions or audio from the radio broadcasts were not preserved in the collected records of the fair. Additionally, the episodes of the radio series accessible online do not have more than one installment for July 3, 1940, which suggested either an unpreserved special episode or a rebroadcast of the 11:15 a.m. show. A letter from the New York World's Fair Special Events Director Howard Tooley to Allen Ducovny on May 25, 1940, seemed to indicate the latter: "[Y]ou can repeat your radio show in the afternoon in the Hall of Special Events." Acting as a filler, the Jiggs Day luncheon transpired at 1:15 p.m. Superman Day events resumed at 2:30 p.m. with the qualifying athletic events for the finalists held at the Field of Special Events. Bodybuilder Charles Atlas served as the guest of honor. Afterwards a general assembly for Superman Day took place in front of American Jubilee at 4:30 p.m. To prevent any gaps in fun, a half hour earlier featured another Jiggs Day activity with creator George McManus at Winter Wonderland. While the archival records failed to indicate the nature of the general assembly, it is reasonable to infer that the Boy Scouts performed again before the announcement of the Superman Day winners and the presentation of awards at 5 p.m.[32] The *New York World-Telegram* specified the Boy Scouts' participation in other parades that day and a report to the US House of Representatives listed them as performing a color ceremony at Superman Day. Unfortunately, the brief mention in the report to the Committee on Education does not indicate if the color ceremony and the parade march were the same.[33] Although not in the final schedule, a memorandum dated July 2, 1940, revealed the planning of several "superman" stunts for Superman Day. These included a ski jump by Al Shaffer, the mechanical feat of a car

[32] See G. Walsh, "The World's Fair of 1940 in New York: Program of Events," Wednesday, July 3, 1940, calendar entry, pp. 2–4, 10, box 2110, folder 2 Program of Events, 1940, 4 of 5, NYWF; "Program Of Events For Superman Day At The New York World's Fair," undated memorandum, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF; Howard Tooley to Allen Ducovny, letter, May 25, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF.
[33] See "Stars of Aquacade To Pick Super-Boy And Super-Girl," *New York World-Telegram*, July 3, 1940, p. 26; James E. West, *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America, 1940*, US Congress, House, Committee on Education, 77th Cong., 1st sess., March 28, 1941, H.doc. 17, p. 60.

withstanding an impact of 500,000 pounds, a diver from the big Whale and Octopus show, and a little person from Morris Gest's fair attraction performing a "Superman job."[34]

Superman Day represented a larger shift in the fair from the lofty ideals of intellectualism and internationalism to amusement. Financial losses for the 1939 fair generated a rebranding to a "super country fair" in 1940. This readjustment is evident in fair posters. Illustrations from 1939 celebrated the exciting idea of the future and prominently featured the Trylon and Perisphere to usher in the "World of Tomorrow." In contrast, the four archived posters from 1940 emphasized the fair as a site for fun by families, couples, and singles, as well as the message of patriotism through consumerism. Under the caption "GO by all means" the image depicted a family of five speeding to the fair. The father and son pedaled bicycles, the daughter rode a scooter, and the mother propelled a carriage with their youngest child inside. Another poster portrayed white people of all ages joyously walking at the fair. To convey a sense of urgency, a woman commanded onlookers to buy tickets in a different illustration. The last archived poster, in the words of Warren I. Susman, "featured a rosy-cheeked, middle-aged middle-American signifying his great pleasure … with a caption that read 'Makes you proud of your country.'"[35] Susman also summarizes the overall shift. "The 1940 emphasis on a folksy, comfortable Fair clearly suggested an event intended to entertain and amuse as opposed to one which challenged the mind."[36] Brad Ricca comments on the underside of the fair: "For though the fair as a whole brought in heads of state, masterpieces of art, and futuristic technologies, people tend to forget that there were also midgets, strippers, and sideshows. The fair was high culture (the best of the world) met down with the low (peanuts and popcorn)."[37] Events like Superman Day and the fair's underside through the midway challenged the original intentions of the social elites, who conceived of the world's fairs as a way to control the popular culture of the so-called "uncivilized hordes" relocating to America from Europe. This shift in the programming for the

---

[34] Frank D. Shean to Joseph Upchurch, memorandum, July 2, 1940, box 1757, folder 6 Special Days, NYWF. For a barely readable carbon copy, see Frank D. Shean to Joseph Upchurch, memorandum, July 2, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF.

[35] See the 1939 posters "New York World's Fair: 1939" and "New York World's Fair: The World Of Tomorrow 1939" as well as the 1940 posters "GO by all means," "For Peace And Freedom: World's Fair of 1940," "Buy now and save on WORLD'S FAIR TICKETS," and "Makes you proud of your country," box 2401, folder 1 Posters, NYWF; box 2405, folder 2 Posters, NYWF; box 2406, folder 1 Posters, NYWF; Susman, *Culture as History*, p. 226.

[36] Susman, *Culture as History*, p. 227.

[37] Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 187. For images of the midway, scantiness, and amusements, see box 2144, folder 9 View & Picture Books, NYWF; *U.S. Camera*, vol. 1, no. 5 World's Fair Issue (August 1939), box 2409, NYWF.

1940 fair reflected the growing influence of lower- and middle-class white people over American culture.[38]

Superman Day was not racially segregated, which is pleasantly surprising given the unwritten practice in the North before 1954 with the landmark US Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of separate as unequal. Close examination of the footage at quarter speed playback revealed several black girls competing alongside white girls in the races. One black girl placed second or third in the twenty-five-yard dash. The unsteady and often unfocused movie also showed a black woman at the award ceremony and possibly a black man and a black boy among the large crowd during the Superman procession. Nevertheless, most adult and child attendees to this second manifestation of Comicland were white people.

Although the advertising materials and language for the 1940 fair emphasized populism through, as Warren I. Susman explains, a "for the people" message, white manhood defined citizenship and whiteness as the racial makeup of the typical fairgoer.[39] The racial dimensions of previous domestic and international expositions through their ethnic villages as anthropological exhibits to gaze upon "inferior" peoples—fashioned and displayed under the umbrella of "science" and "progress"—possibly warned minorities from attending the 1939 and 1940 fairs in New York in larger numbers. As historian Cheryl R. Ganz illustrates, the highly contested Negro Day—both inside and outside the black community—at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair did not resolve the racist specters of earlier expositions. Ganz shows that black people did attend the Chicago fair but faced discrimination.[40] The 1940 fair in New York also held a Negro Week, but there is no significant scholarship on it.[41]

---

[38] See Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. p. 236.
[39] See Susman, *Culture as History*, pp. 211–229.
[40] John P. Burris, *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions, 1851–1893* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2001); Cheryl R. Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), esp. chap. 6.
[41] See box 1, folders 1–11, New York World's Fair "Negro Week" Records, Sc Mg 42, New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York, New York. See also box 69, folder 19, NYWF; box 122, folders 8–9, NYWF; box 160, folder 7, NYWF; box 175, folders 7–8, NYWF; box 516, folders 4–7, NYWF; box 531, folder 11, NYWF; box 627, folder 18, NYWF; box 631, folders 8–14, NYWF; box 710, folders 3–6, NYWF; box 761, folder 9, NYWF; box 1039, folder 3, NYWF; box 1069, folders 19–22, NYWF; box 1267, folder 29, NYWF; box 1747, folders 4–5, NYWF; box 1960, folder 12, NYWF.

For fleeting secondary source mentions of Negro Week, see Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 186–187; Joel Dinnerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture Between the World Wars* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), pp. 287–289; Wall, *Inventing the "American Way,"*

Newspaper coverage and video footage illuminated the gendered dimension of Superman Day. The main contest for boys ages eight to fourteen consisted of a fifty-yard dash and fifty-yard obstacle race. Girls ages eight to eleven, however, ran only a twenty-five-yard dash and competed in a rope skipping contest. Boys and girls participated equally in what appeared to be a potato sack race and another race to grab an indiscernible object placed at the center of the field. This may be the obstacle race referenced in the western New York newspaper *The Evening Leader* almost two weeks before the event.[42] These physical events emulate the exceptionalism and the fitness for society ethos as well as signal the similar messaging of Superman as the ideal American body, a repackaged version of the mighty frontiersman in the urban world.

Superman Day captured the attention of both the national and international press. A New Jersey and Ottawa newspaper proclaimed in late June that "Flushing Meadows will belong to juvenile America on July 3, the date set aside for the celebration of Superman Day at the New York World's Fair."[43] On June 28, 1940, *Life* editor John Thorne requested information from the Fair's division of Special Events on the upcoming Superman Day, but the magazine never published a word on the event.[44] On July 1, 1940, *Time* offered a tangential reference to the upcoming Superman Day in an article on child star Philippa Duke Schuyler, who also had a day at the Fair.[45] The *New York Post* first notified its readers of Superman Day the day before the event. "Superman, America's No. 1 comic strip hero who is followed by thousands of Post readers, will appear 'in person' at the World's Fair tomorrow as the principal feature of a children's day program. Boys and girls of school age will be admitted for 10 cents." The paper also provided inaccurate information of a tour for the two winners and the novelty of Superman Day. "In athletic contests, America's Super-Boy and Super-Girl will be chosen. The winners probably will be given a coast-to-coast tour next month. Selection of the winners will follow a parade, led by Superman himself. Superman is the only imaginary character to be granted

---

p. 76; Diane Kiesel, *She Can Bring Us Home: Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, Civil Rights Pioneer* (n.p.: Potomac Books, 2015), p. 102.

[42] See "Note Superman Day At Fair On July 3," *The Evening Leader* (Corning, NY), vol. 83, no. 146, June 21, 1940, p. 14.

[43] "World's Fair Host To 'Superman' July 3," *The Daily Home News* (New Brunswick, NJ), Late City Edition, June 20, 1940, p. 17; "Superman Has Day At New York Fair," *The Ottawa Journal* (Ottawa, CAN), vol. 55, no. 171, June 29, 1940, p. 12.

[44] Howard Tooley to John Thorne, letter, June 28, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF.

[45] "Music: Philippa's Day at the Fair," *Time*, vol. 36, no. 1, July 1, 1940, p. 48.

recognition by the fair this year."[46] No such tour transpired for the winners and the fair also recognized the newspaper comic strip character Jiggs and his creator George McManus. Even though activities were organized around the humorous character from *Bringing Up Father*, he did not garner the same level of publicity as Superman. *The Sun* also dedicated a tiny reference to Superman Day and the contests on July 3, 1940.[47]

What transpired at Superman Day attracted even greater media attention. The popular press recounted the festivities with its "contest to determine America's Super-Boy and Super-Girl" and showcased the two white winners: eleven-year-old Maureen Reynolds and fifteen-year-old William Aronis. *The New York Times* reported that thirty boys and girls qualified for the titles and the contest results generated controversy among parents. One mother complained that the competition was unfair because of the age difference and reportedly stormed off following the announcement of Aronis as the Super-Boy. Aronis was two years older than her thirteen-year-old son and towered over the other contestants. Articles listed his height as either five feet six or five feet eight. The latter measurement is confirmed in a photo of Aronis standing two inches short of the five-foot-ten judge Charles Atlas. The *New York Herald* offered greater detail on the controversy. Aronis, a weightlifter who weighed 150 pounds, exceeded the age requirement by one year. This revelation came after the judges selected him and the bronze trophy was already in his hand, so the decision stood.[48] The affair summoned so much publicity and pomp and circumstance that Fair chairman Harvey D. Gibson presented Reynolds and Aronis their prizes.[49] Superman, Inc. brought only two trophies for the crowned Super-Boy and

---

[46] "Superman 'In Person' At Fair Tomorrow," *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 139, no. 194, July 2, 1940, p. 10.

[47] "Today At The Fair: Tomorrow's Program," *The Sun* (New York, NY), 7th Edition, vol. 107, no. 259, July 2, 1940, p. 17.

[48] See, in chronological order, "Sharp Cut to Be Made Today in Fair's Staff," *Daily Mirror*, July 3, 1940, p. 11; "Program for Today at the World's Fair," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 89, no. 30,111, July 3, 1940, p. 14; Bracker, "Turnstiles at Fair Click Record Tune," *The New York Times*, July 4, 1940, p. 13; "Children Boost Fair to Record Week-Day Mark," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 4, 1940, p. 7; "Fair Drops 200, To Ease Strain Of Slow Gate," *Daily News* (New York, NY), Multiple Editions, vol. 2, no. 8, July 4, 1940, p. 20; "'Supergirl' and 'Superboy' at the World's Fair," *Sunday Worker* (New York, NY), vol. 5, no. 27, July 7, 1940, p. 5; *The Morning Herald* (Gloversville, NY), vol. 44, no. 87, July 8, 1940, p. 5; "'Supergirl' and 'Superboy' at the World's Fair," *The Ithaca Journal* (Ithaca, NY), vol. 125, no. 161, July 9, 1940, p. 8; "'Supergirl' and 'Superboy' at the World's Fair," *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln, NE), July 8, 1940, p. 10; "Super-Girl and Super-Boy," *Waxahachie Daily Light* (Waxahachie, TX), vol. 39, no. 89, July 16, 1940, p. 1; "Winners at Superman Day," *The Amarillo Globe Times* (Amarillo, TX), vol. 17, no. 112, July 17, 1940, p. 9; "Super-Boy Meets Super-Girl," *The Evening Leader* (Corning, NY), vol. 73, no. 172, July 22, 1940, p. 5.

[49] Olive Richard, "Don't Laugh At The Comics," *The Family Circle*, vol. 17, no. 17, October 25, 1940, p. 11; "Super-Boy and Girl Display Medals," *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 139, no. 196, July 4, 1940, p. 3. The magazine and photocopies can be viewed in WW and box 1, folder 3, WMM1. The abbreviation WW is an

Super-Girl and planned to send the competition winners their medals that Friday. Approximately two weeks before the event, a newspaper article from *The Evening Leader* in Corning, New York, publicized the scheduled contests and prizes. "Prominent personalities will decide upon the winners who will receive handsome gold trophies." According to the article, "Gold, silver and bronze medals will be awarded to the winners of the boys events, while the lucky girls will receive charms fashioned from the same medals."[50] The gendered aspect is also apparent with the more decorative medal design for girls. Reporting on the outcome of Superman Day two weeks after the event, *The Amarillo Globe Times* of Texas noted, "One thousand boys and girls competed in athletic contests for the 80 gold, silver, and bronze medals that were awarded by Superman."[51] On July 4, 1940, the *New York Herald*, whose reporter probably witnessed the festivities first hand, recorded only 800 contestants, however.[52] These numbers would mean that between about 2.19 and 2.74 percent of the 36,541 attendees participated in the games while the rest remained spectators. A larger takeaway is that Aronis disproves the common impression of boys outgrowing superheroes after completing the preteen stage of development.

Clearly, the event and prizes were planned in advance, yet Superman, Inc. failed to bring all the awards to the fair site. Thirteen-year-old Elinor Bearman of Brooklyn, New York, a second-place winner in one of the girl's competitions, was unhappy with the distribution of prizes. Bearman wrote a postcard to the fair after failing to receive her silver medal by Monday, July 8, 1940. She expected to receive her medal on Superman Day but went home empty handed. The document not filtered through adult eyes is a rare glimpse into teenage culture from the era and their connection to Superman.

> I was one of the contestants who ran in the Superman Day races. I came in second place and was to receive a "silver meddle" [*sic*] the following Friday July 3. Today is Monday July 8 and I still did not receive my meddle. [*sic*] My name is Elinor Bearman [of] 1995 East 7th Street Between S. & T. Bklyn, New York. Please tell me the date I am to receive the meddel. [*sic*] Thank you.[53]

---

abbreviation for the Wonder Woman: selected continuities, magazines, Wonder Woman newspaper strip King Features, MSS1618B, Dibner Library, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, District of Columbia.

[50] "Note Superman Day At Fair On July 3," *The Evening Leader*, June 21, 1940, p. 14.

[51] "Winners at Superman Day," *The Amarillo Globe Times*, July 17, 1940, p. 9.

[52] "Children Boost Fair to Record Week-Day Mark," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 4, 1940, p. 7.

[53] Elinor Bearman to New York World's Fair, postcard, July 8, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF. See also the 1930 and 1940 US Census records, which revealed her age and confirms her address. The 1940 Census misspelled her name as Eleanor Berman. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, New York, Kings County, 2nd Assembly District, Borough of Brooklyn, Supervisor's District No. 32, Enumeration District No. 24-

Howard Tooley responded to Ms. Bearman on the seventeenth. In his letter, Tooley explained that Superman, Inc. informed him that they sent the medal—presumably through the mail—on Friday, July 5, 1940. Tooley stated that she should have received the medal but if not, she should contact Allen Ducovny of Superman, Inc. He even gave her Ducovny's direct line.[54] Bearman alongside the other girls who participated in the races disputes the prevailing view that Superman was just boys' culture.

Allen Ducovny virtually orchestrated the entire affair with Howard Tooley. The planning began on May 25, 1940. They devised a tentative outline with the radio show broadcast on site, a parade with clowns and animals, children in Superman costumes, and a strong man performance. Following their phone conversation, Tooley also requested material on the Superman strip, which he most likely received shortly after.

Almost two weeks passed, and the planning for Superman Day was well underway. On June 6, 1940, Allen Ducovny began boasting about the promotional activity of Superman, Inc. in ensuring its success. "If Superman Day at the World's Fair on July 3rd doesn't prove to be the biggest juvenile event in the history of the New York Fair, it won't be our fault. We certainly are spending a great deal of time, effort and money to make it a big thing." Ducovny relayed to Howard Tooley that they promoted Superman Day in the upcoming 100,000 copy release of *Action Comics* ready for distribution to the metropolitan area that contained an application blank cutout to participate in the races and contests. Ducovny also explained that they secured the cooperation of the department stores Macy's and Gimble's and several others in the advertising and "distribution of application blanks." A Macy's advertisement appearing in three of the nine major New York City newspapers is proof of the arrangement. Tiny print under the capitalized Superman Day read: "Boys and girls: get entry blanks for athletic events, etc. Macy's 5th Floor." Although already given verbal permission, Robert Maxwell requested written confirmation from Tooley to use the Trylon and Perisphere insignias on the Superman Day contestant applications that he called the "Superman Day Athletic Blank." A complementary admission from Macy's Toyland, shared with me by a collector, featured Superman hovering above the Trylon and Perisphere. Nevertheless, the diversification of sites to obtain an application to Superman Day was not enough for one thirteen-year-old boy from the Bronx. Joel Chalek wrote a postcard to

---

1909, Sheet 7A; Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, New York, Kings County, Borough of Brooklyn, Supervisor's District No. 47, Enumeration District No. 24-352A, Sheet 16B. Available on ancestrylibrary.com.

[54] Howard Tooley to Elinor Bearman, letter, July 17, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF.

the fair requesting two applications and confirmation of the date and location. "Will you please send me 2 applications for Superman Day at the Fair, July 3, 1940? Also mention the time and place." Besides Eleanor Bearman's disgruntled postcard, this is the only other preserved record from the perspective of teenagers regarding Superman Day. Correspondence revealed that Superman, Inc. was "spending a good deal of money in making up an elaborate Superman float." They also secured "a juvenile brass band to march in the parade. Every effort is being made to line up big names to appear in person as judges." Ducovny desired to advertise Superman Day on bulletin boards in the New York City Parks, which required a direct request from the World's Fair and Ducovny accordingly asked for Tooley's assistance on June 6, 1940. "So, if you will call, or drop a line to Mr. Jenkins, Superintendent of Parks, relative to that request I am certain it will be granted. We will furnish the cards." This was a smart idea given that, in addition to playing in the street, children frequent park playgrounds. Yet, it remains unknown if Ducovny obtained permission from the Parks Department. The promotion of Superman Day supposedly entailed announcements following each Superman radio show broadcast.[55] The preserved radio broadcasts, nonetheless, contain no such messages. It is possible that the commercial component escaped preservation. The physical creation of the Superman Day float as well as the paper trail, which reveals the planning and vision of Ducovny, illustrates DC Comics' intent in manifesting Superman as a real person and Comicland as a vehicle to sell merchandise and build their brand.

Because of its attendance record, Superman Day was a tremendous success in the eyes of the fair. Howard Tooley wrote a celebratory letter to Allen Ducovny on July 17, 1940, that described Superman as a religious figure for children. "Superman Day is now history. I have been wanting to write you and tell you how we thrilled at the boys and girls who came to worship at the shrine of their hero – Superman." While Ducovny projected 50,000 to 75,000

[55] See in chronological order, Howard Tooley to Allen Ducovny, letter, May 25, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF; Robert Maxwell to Howard Tooley, letter, May 28, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF; Allen Ducovny to Howard Tooley, letter, June 6, 1940, pp. 1–2, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF; Joel Chalek to New York World's Fair Administration Building, postcard, received June 30, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF. For the Macy's "Superman Day" advertisement, see *The Sun* (New York, NY), 7th Edition, vol. 107, no. 248, June 19, 1940, p. 4; *New York Journal and American*, 7th Sport Baseball Sports Complete Edition, no. 19, 177, June 19, 1940, p. 8; *New York World-Telegram*, 7th Sports Edition, vol. 72, no. 302, June 21, 1940, p. 7. Thanks to Shaun Clancy for sharing the blue and white image "MACY'S TOYLAND At Children's World Invites you to SUPERMAN DAY" with me. See also the 1930 and 1940 US Census records, which revealed Joel Chalek's age and confirmed his 1940 address. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, New York, Bronx County, Borough of the Bronx, Supervisor's District No. 25, Enumeration District No. 3-22, Sheet 15A; Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, New York, Bronx County, Borough of the Bronx, Supervisor's District No. 24, Enumeration District No. 3-557, Sheet 12A. Available on ancestrylibrary.com.

Superman fans attending Superman Day, the fair's internal records tabulated 36,541 children's ticket purchases for the event. Following the standard children's ticket rate of ten cents Superman Day generated $3,654.10 in sales. However, 486 children attended with a season pass and since that ticket price is unstated there is no simple way to adjust the final monetary projection with this factor in mind.[56] Varying statistics for the entire day's attendees appeared in the press. According to *The New York Times*, the final tally for July 3, 1940, numbered 98,643—the highest attendance rate for a nonholiday up to that date. The standard adult ticket price constituted fifty cents and the remaining 62,102 attendees were most likely adults, which would equal another $6,210.20 for that day. *PM New York Daily* listed an additional ten attendees while *The Sun* rounded down the number to 98,600. The *Daily News* registered a slightly decreased figure of 98,200. The *New York World-Telegram* tallied 59,800 paid admissions at the gate by 1 p.m. *The New York Times* made a typographical error regarding Superman Day. They reported that only 3,000 people watched the final announcement of the official Super-Boy and Super-Girl. The statistical records from the fair's Revenue Control Department, nonetheless, suggest the article was off by a factor of ten.[57] Even preceding Superman Day, the hype for the event was apparent in the press. According to one newspaper article from western New York, "A contest to select a Super-Boy and Super-Girl is expected to attract thousands of children between the ages of eight and fourteen." Afterwards, Superman Day received minor press coverage. It almost faded away into the forgotten stream of other attractions.[58] Superman's caretakers, however, embraced Superman Day as a cultural achievement. They marshaled the substantial attendance numbers of as a key feature in their publicity arsenal. John Kobler's 1941 exposé on Superman, Inc. in *The Saturday Evening Post* reported on the event occurring the year before. "Superman Day at the World's Fair cracked all attendance records for any single children's event, drawing

---

[56] Howard Tooley to Allen Ducovny, letter, July 17, 1940, box 748, folder 15 Superman Day (1940), NYWF.
[57] Bracker, "Turnstiles at Fair Click Record Tune," *The New York Times*, July 4, 1940, p. 13; "Best Weekday for Fair," *PM New York Daily*, vol. 1, no. 13, July 4, 1940, p. 11; "Fair Expects Busy Week End. Still Bigger Attendance Is Hope as Sun Shines. Record Is Broken Twice. Increased Attendance Results in Additions to Show Program," *The Sun* (New York, NY), Complete Edition, vol. 107, no. 262, July 6, 1940, p. 6; "Fair Drops 200 To Ease Strain Of Slow Gate," *Daily News* (New York, NY), 2-Star and 3-Star Final Edition, vol. 2, no. 8, July 4, 1940, p. 20; "Stars of Aquacade To Pick Super-Boy And Super-Girl," *New York World-Telegram*, July 3, 1940, p. 26.
[58] For vague mentions of Superman Day, see Richard, "Don't Laugh At The Comics," *The Family Circle*, October 25, 1940, pp. 11, 22; Sidney M. Shalett, "Epitaph For The World's Fair," *Harpers Magazine*, vol. 182 (December 1940), p. 24; "Superman Picture Is Coming To The Strand," *The Newmarket Era* (Ontario, CAN), yr. 90, no. 46, December 17, 1941, p. 2; "Schine Theaters Book 'Superman,'" *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), yr. 110, January 5, 1942, p. 11; "'Superman' To Be Shown at Ryan's," *The Adirondack Record-Elizabethtown Post* (Au Sable Forks, NY), vol. 34, no. 2, January 8, 1942, p. 4.

36,000 of them at ten cents a head." Harry Donenfeld and Jack S. Liebowitz, who were prominently featured in the article, or someone else at DC Comics clearly shared the numbers with Kobler as a celebration of their success in marketing Superman and manifesting Comicland.[59]

Although children were on summer recess, Superman Day may not have drawn the crowd Allen Ducovny expected if they scheduled the event on the weekend, and not the day before Independence Day.[60] The date shift from the twenty-sixth of June to the third of July may have been intentional to connect Superman to the nation's civic holiday. Within two years, DC Comics' inextricably linked Superman to the American flag in comic book cover art and occasional patriotic or military-positive stories. A few years later, the *Adventures of Superman* television show opening displayed Superman holding the flag.[61] In the 1980 movie *Superman II*, the Metropolis Marvel returned the flag and ceiling dome to the top of the White House after being separated from the building by General Zod.[62]

DC Comics relationship to national celebration began with the first iteration of the New York World's Fair. They created a special comic book for both the 1939 and 1940 Fairs. Securing the rights to the name and copyrighted images of the Trylon and Perisphere proved time consuming. Correspondence between Detective Comics editor Vincent A. Sullivan and the fair staff illustrated the lengthy and pricey process. It cost $250 plus a 5 percent royalty to the Fair Corporation for the use of its name. In contrast, no mention of a financial relationship with Superman, Inc. regarding how profits would be shared or the cost to present Superman Day at the fair exist in the records. The fair staff received a dummy book of *New York World's Fair Comics* on April 15, 1939, and returned the item two days later. DC Comics sent them the comic book exactly two weeks before the copyright registration date of April 29, 1939. The fair requested official copies of the published comic book, which they received on May 6, 1939, to showcase in their Merchandise Display Room. If the 1939 Fair emphasized fun, it is reasonable

---

[59] Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, p. 15.
[60] "Note Superman Day At Fair On July 3," *The Evening Leader*, June 21, 1940, p. 14.
[61] For the Superman's symbolic link to the American flag in concept, comics, television, and movies, see Grossman, *Superman*, p. 8; Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, pp. 33, 89; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, p. 145; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 28; Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman*, pp. 17, 185, 189n49, 226; Tye, *Superman*, p. 220; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 56, 95, 219, 277; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 139; Gordon, *Superman*, p. 141; Bevin, *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*, p. 99. For the implication, see Yeffeth, ed., *The Man From Krypton*, p. 209.
[62] *Superman II*, Two-Disc Special Edition, directed by Richard Lester, written by Mario Puzo, David Newman, and Leslie Newman (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Video, 2006), DVD.

to suspect that DC Comics would have considered an event preceding Superman Day. The following year required only a single letter and the signing of a new contract for the rebranded magazine entitled *World's Fair Comics*.[63] An article in the fanzine *Alter Ego* explained that "DC Comics and editor Vin Sullivan had a parting of the ways over profits of the giant-sized 1939 *World's Fair Comics*, which had apparently been a brainstorm of Sullivan's. In January 1940, DC's general manager Jack [S.] Liebowitz rehired [Whitney] Ellsworth as editorial director."[64] Interestingly, the letter exchange and internal memoranda on the licensing arrangement for *New York World's Fair Comics* in 1939 identified Vincent A. Sullivan, Inc. and not Detective Comics, Inc. or its subsidiary Superman, Inc. Author Gerard Jones purports that Wonder Woman publisher M. C. Gaines assembled the comic book for the World's Fair. The archival evidence, however, invalidates his oral-history-based claim.[65] Video footage showed that Gaines, a key player at the company who sold himself in the press and promotional materials as the "discoverer"

---

[63] See, in chronological order, Edward E. Warner to Dr. Monaghan, memorandum, September 16, 1938, box 870, folder 3 PR1.12 Book, C–E (1939), NYWF; Vincent A. Sullivan to Edward E. Warner, letter, September 20, 1938, box 870, folder 3 PR1.12 Book, C–E (1939), NYWF; Edward E. Warner to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, September 22, 1938, box 870, folder 3 PR1.12 Book, C–E (1939), NYWF; Vincent A. Sullivan to Edward E. Warner, letter, October 3, 1938, box 870, folder 3 PR1.12 Book, C–E (1939), NYWF; unsigned memorandum, October 5, 1938, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; Edward E. Warner to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, October 6, 1938, box 870, folder 3 PR1.12 Book, C–E (1939), NYWF; J. T. Noonan to Dr. Monaghan, memorandum, October 13, 1938, box 870, folder 19 PR1.12 Book, S–Z (1939), NYWF; Vincent J. Coletti to the Director of Exhibits and Concessions through the Director of Concessions, memorandum, October 14, 1938, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; J. T. Noonan to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, November 2, 1938, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; J. T. Noonan to Edward E. Warner, memorandum, November 2, 1938, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; J. T. Noonan to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, November 15, 1938, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; Vincent A. Sullivan to Edward E. Warner, letter, November 23, 1938, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; J. T. Noonan to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, March 22, 1939, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; J. T. Noonan to Vincent A. Sullivan, two letters, April 14, 1939, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; J. T. Noonan to A. C. Layton Newsom, memorandum, April 14, 1939, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; A. C. Layton Newsom to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, April 15, 1939, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; A. C. Layton Newsom to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, April 17, 1939, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; J. T. Noonan to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, April 26, 1939, box 825, folder 3 PR1.11 Insignia Stu–Sz, NYWF; Vincent A. Sullivan to A. C. Layton Newsom, letter, May 3, 1939, box 897, folder 8 PR1.3 Merchandise Exhibit, A–E (1939), NYWF; A. C. Layton Newsom to Vincent A. Sullivan, letter, May 6, 1939, box 897, folder 8 PR1.3 Merchandise Exhibit, A–E (1939), NYWF; A. C. Layton Newsom to Detective Comics, Inc., letter, April 1, 1940, box 805, folder 4 PR1.11 Insignia C–E (1940), NYWF.

For the two comic books, see DC Comics, *DC Comics Rarities*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 2004), pp. 11–109 and 111–209. And for copyright registration [AA 320172] at the Library of Congress, see 1938–1945 copyright drawer DESI–DETN, card 1665 and 1938–1945 copyright drawer SULLIVAN C–SUMMER Q, card 0610.

[64] Will Murray, "The Driving Force That Really Made DC Great: Whitney Ellsworth And The Rise Of National/DC Comics," *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 98 (December 2010), p. 8.

[65] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 147.

of Superman,[66] naturally attended the event. Buried in an endnote, Brad Ricca writes, "There is a telling photo of Gaines at Superman Day at the World's Fair, blowing up a balloon, cigarette in hand, in plaid blazer with a sun hat. He was certainly part of the success of the character and was celebrating as such."[67] Even Jerry Siegel was visibly happy standing next to manager Jack S. Liebowitz. No matter how contentious their relationship on paper they celebrated the sensation of Superman Day together. Siegel brought several family members including his mother, sister, and brother and made the trip part of his honeymoon with Bella Liftshitz according to Superman biographer Larry Tye.[68] With no images of Superman cocreator Joe Shuster, we can assume that he did the filming.[69] *The Saturday Evening Post* article by John Kobler mentioned that he bought a camera with his Superman money.[70]

The commercialization of Superman and Comicland expanded beyond the fairgrounds. White balloons with an image of Superman, most likely the same ones used at the fair, were available for purchase by the public later that summer. The Oak Rubber Co., who obtained the license from Superman, Inc. to manufacture the product, projected a large return on their investment. According to an August 17, 1940, article in *The Billboard*, "[T]he Superman Balloon seems sure to be one of the biggest money-makers of the season, the firm reported."[71] Furthering the publicity, the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, radio station KQV dropped four thousand balloons from an airplane at school yards to celebrate the premiere of the radio show on their station in

---

[66] See, for example, Gaines, "Narrative Illustration," *Print: A Quarterly Journal of the Graphic Arts*, (Summer 1942), p. 86; "Comment," *America*, vol. 67, no. 18, August 8, 1942, p. 479; "Comic Type Magazine Tells Picture Stories From Bible," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Home Edition, yr. 101, no. 239, August 29, 1942, p. 8; M. C. Gaines, "The Bible In 'Comics': Bringing Ancient Jewish Heroes to Modern Youngsters," *The Jewish Criterion* (Pittsburgh, PA), vol. 100, no. 20, September 18, 1942, p. 20; M. C. Gaines, "The Bible In 'Comics': Bringing Ancient Jewish Heroes to Modern Youngsters," *The Jewish Advocate* (Boston, MA), vol. 90, no. 10, September 25, 1942, p. 10; Philip Brooks, "Notes on Rare Books," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 92, no. 30,962, November 1, 1942, p. 34 (*The New York Times Book Review*, Section 6); M. C. Gaines, "The Bible in 'Comics': Bringing Ancient Jewish Heroes to Modern Youngsters," *The Jewish Exponent* (Philadelphia, PA), vol. 3, no. 23, January 1, 1943, p. 9. See also M. C. Gaines to Mr. Independent Wholesaler, undated, box 11, folder 1-52 This Is Our Enemy, WWB. The initials WWB is an abbreviation for the Writers' War Board Records, MSS46722, Library of Congress, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Washington, District of Columbia.
[67] Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 361n47.
[68] Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 186; Tye, *Superman*, p. 48.
[69] Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 364n3.
[70] Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, p. 76. For secondary source mention, see Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, p. 64.
[71] G. Walsh, "The World's Fair of 1940 in New York: Program of Events," Wednesday, July 3, 1940, calendar entry, p. 10, box 2110, folder 2 Program of Events, 1940, 4 of 5, NYWF; "Fair Lays Off Another 200," *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 139, no. 195, July 3, 1940, p. 8; "Stars of Aquacade To Pick Super-Boy And Super-Girl," *New York World-Telegram*, July 3, 1940, p. 26; "Fair Exceeds Weekday Top," *The Sun*, July 3, 1940, p. 13. For the balloons as a purchasable item after the fair as well as the T-shirt, see "Superman Balloons," *The Billboard*, vol. 52, no. 33, August 17, 1940, p. 64.

October, *Radio Daily* reported. Presumably, this was the same product manufactured by the Oak Rubber Co.[72] Alignment with Macy's took the presentation of Superman as a balloon to a new level, however.

Macy's 1940 Superman Balloon

The economic relationship between Superman and Macy's continued after Superman Day. And with the help of the department store, Superman's caretakers created the third expression of Comicland through a balloon. The Superman youth craze in the 1940s reached a new height through aerial celebration. DC Comics further developed their brand and cultural influence through the largest balloon in the 1940 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade that took place on November 21, 1940. The caricatured appearance of Superman contrasted the more whimsical treatments given to the other balloons. With a disproportionate emphasis on his chest, the Superman balloon induced an odd effect when situated against the others. Puppeteer Tony Sarg's cartoonish design for Superman's body and face seemed to reject the idea that he is a "person." It resembled a doll, possibly modeled after the wooden Superman toy—another example of advertising to children—sold in 1939 and 1940. This direction away from realism, however, did not phase the youngsters, who were mesmerized. Paradoxically, the unrealistic looking Superman made Comicland real.

The Superman balloon generated significant media attention. Newspaper reports indicated that it took "9,000 cubic feet of helium" from Amarillo, Texas, to inflate Superman at a cost of $1,000. The balloon was seventy-five feet tall with a twenty-three-foot-wide chest and had an eight-and-a-half-foot diameter head. Some reports misstated a height of eighty or eighty-five feet. Its additional dimensions constituted a depth of fourteen feet and entire width of forty-four feet, a figure that included his arms. The Goodyear Company, which was known for manufacturing tires, produced all the balloons. Newspapers described the composition of the Superman balloon as "rubberized fabric" and that it shipped "in a box whose dimensions will measure not more than three feet square."[73] *The New York Times* compared the Man of Steel to a

[72] "Promotion: Balloon Barrage," *Radio Daily*, vol. 13, no. 3, October 3, 1940, p. 3. For secondary source mention, see Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 42.
[73] See, in chronological order, "A Bigger Cavalcade: Thanksgiving Parade Runs From A to Z," *Sparks* (November 1940), p. 9; "Thanksgiving Parade Dinner To Be Held by Macy's," *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 61, no. 89, November 4, 1940, p. 20; "Macy's Parade To Feature Superman," *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 61, no. 99, November 19, 1940,

genie emerging from a bottle on November 19, 1940. Helium, however, woke this supernatural giant from his storage box slumber. "Superman, the largest balloon to be used in a Macy parade, has some of the characteristics of a real genie. Arriving from the Goodyear Company in Akron, Ohio, in a three-foot square box, he will be brought to life by Texas helium until he reaches a height of eighty feeet, [*sic*] with a chest expansion of twenty-three feet."[74] *Women's Wear Daily* similarly covered the upcoming spectacle on November 4, 1940, and indicated that Superman was the main attraction. "A feature of the parade this year will be a 75-foot high [*sic*] balloon

---

p. 23; "80-Foot Superman In Macy's Parade," *Daily News* (New York, NY), All Editions, vol. 22, no. 126, November 19, 1940, p. 38; advertisement in *Brooklyn Eagle*, vol. 100, no. 322, November 20, 1940, p. 3; advertisement in *New York Herald Tribune*, Late City Edition, vol. 100, no. 34,338, November 20, 1940, p. 7; advertisement in *New York Journal and American*, 7th Sport Racing Sports Complete Edition, no. 19,330, November 20, 1940, p. 5; advertisement in *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 140, no. 4, November 20, 1940, p. 5; advertisement in *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), Complete Sports Edition, vol. 17, no. 129, November 20, 1940, p. 11; advertisement in *Daily News* (New York, NY), All Editions, vol. 22, no. 127, November 20, 1940, p. 5; advertisement in *New York World-Telegram*, 7th Sports Edition, vol. 73, no. 121, November 20, 1940, p. 5; "32 States Mark Thanksgiving Day Tomorrow: New York One of Them; Parades To Be Held and Poor Will Receive Feasts," *New York Herald Tribune*, Late City Edition, vol. 100, no. 34,338, November 20, 1940, p. 9; "Thanksgiving Feasts Assured To City's Needy: New York Will Be Host to Thousands Today; Cloudy Weather Is Predicted," *New York Herald Tribune*, Late City Edition, vol. 100, no. 34,339, November 21, 1940, p. 29; "Crowds View Macy, Bamberger Parades," *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 61, no. 101, November 22, 1940, p. 5; "Macy's Parade Of Jolly Giants Seen by Million," *New York Herald Tribune*, Late City Edition, vol. 100, no. 34,340, November 22, 1940, p. 34; "Million Acclaim Macy's Gala Parade," *New York Journal and American*, 7th Sport Racing Sports Complete Edition, no. 19,331, November 22, 1940, p. 19; Jane Franklin, "Towering Uncle Sam Leads Macy's Storybook Army," *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), Complete Sports plus 1-Star and 2-Star Final Edition, vol. 17, no. 131, November 22, 1940, p. 4; Jane Franklin, "Giant Uncle Sam Leads Macy Parade," *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), 3-Star Final Edition, vol. 17, no. 131, November 22, 1940, p. 8; "Macy's Stages Super-Parade," *Sparks* (December 1940), p. 9; "Superman Needs "Shot" to Finish Macy's Parade: Jolt of Helium Keeps Him on His Feet to the End," *New York World-Telegram*, 7th Sports Edition, vol. 73, no. 122, November 22, 1940, p. 17; "The Talk of The Town: Santa's Helper," *The New Yorker*, December 14, 1940, p. 20. See also the Goodyear advertisement and balloon description in *Time*, vol. 50, no. 20, November 17, 1947, p. 34.

For a reprint of the 1940 Superman balloon over Broadway image, see "Thanksgiving's In The Air," *The Austin Statesman* (Austin, TX), Evening Home Edition, vol. 101, no. 85, November 19, 1971, p. 48.

For mentions and images of official and unofficial wooden dolls and related discussions of toys and other Superman products, see Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, pp. 15, 76; Grossman, *Superman*, p. 30; Tom Andrae, Geoffr[e]y Blum, and Gary Coddington, "Of Supermen and Kids With Dreams," *Nemo: The Classic Comics Library*, p. 6; Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, pp. 33, 141, 144, 179; Daniels, *Superman*, pp. 11, 41, 47–51, 53, 56, 61–63, 99, 136–137; Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, p. 14; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Culture*, pp. 133, 135, 137, 153, 202n17; Yeffeth, ed., *The Man From Krypton*, pp. 90–91, 202; Eury, ed., *The Krypton Companion*, pp. 5, 82, 106, 113, 122, 145, 153, 155, 230, 232; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 10–11, 16, 43, 80, 95, 102, 159; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. x, 101, 110, 192, 211, 213, 218–219, 223–224, 226, 229, 246, 258, 261, 268, 290, 296; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 14–15, 28, 40–41, 222, 316; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 19, 22–23, 59, 94–95, 147, 189–190; Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman*, pp. 117, 178; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 38, 54, 88, 114, 123–126, 150, 211, 213, 251, 266, 288; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 1–2, 12, 30, 34, 67, 141, 152, 164, 171, 198, 211, 220–221, 237, 245, 274, 300–301, 329; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 189, 198, 312, 386n8; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 3–4, 9, 13–14, 21–23, 77, 86, 100, 106–107, 143–144, 146–147, 154, 158, 161–172, 175.

[74] "Superman To Strut Over Macy Parade: Genie Emerging From Arabian Nights Bottle Also to Be Seen in Event Thursday," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 90, no. 30,250, November 19, 1940, p. 30.

representing the comic character Superman."[75] Macy's newspaper advertisements for the parade specifically included Superman and his dimensions.[76] *Women's Wear Daily* quoted William H. Howard, Macy's executive vice president and publicity manager, two days before the parade. He proclaimed that "more than a million open-mouthed spectators" will marvel at the Superman balloon.[77]

Several New York newspapers discussed the impact of the Superman balloon. In the December 1940 issue, *Sparks* reported that he was "the star of the Parade." Macy's in-house magazine additionally noted Superman's appeal among the children in the crowd by the audible response. With "an imperturbable calm, Superman caused so many screams of delight from the children that it was obvious he was their favorite guy."[78] *The New York Times* also described Superman's sonic effect. "Waves of murmured astonishment, screams and squeals of delight washed down the long lines from 106th Street and Central Park West to Thirty-fourth Street and Eighth Avenue, as Superman came over the horizon."[79] *Women's Wear Daily* reinforced this observation. "Superman, an 80-foot balloon, took the eye of the youngsters."[80] The *New York Herald Tribune* similarly recorded the excitement. "As always, there was one helium filled figure which dominated the parade and inspired the greatest expectancy and excitement among the juvenile onlookers. This year it was Superman, a muscular, puffy-chested giant out of the comic strips."[81] The *New York Journal and American* echoed these sentiments stating that Superman "was as much responsible for the success of the show as anyone."[82] The *Daily Mirror* proclaimed Superman as the parade's "glamor boy."[83] As the *New York World-Telegram* indicated, Superman stole the show. He "captivated the million or more children and adults who watched the spectacle."[84]

---

[75] "Thanksgiving Parade Dinner To Be Held by Macy's," *Women's Wear Daily*, November 4, 1940, p. 20.
[76] For advertisements, see *New York Herald Tribune*, November 20, 1940, p. 7; *New York Journal and American*, 7th Sport Racing Sports Complete Edition, no. 19,330, November 20, 1940, p. 5; *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 140, no. 4, November 20, 1940, p. 5; *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), Complete Sports Edition, vol. 17, no. 129, November 20, 1940, p. 11; *Daily News*, Multiple Editions, vol. 22, no. 127, November 20, 1940, p. 5.
[77] "Macy's Parade To Feature Superman," *Women's Wear Daily*, November 19, 1940, p. 23.
[78] "Macy's Stages Super-Parade," *Sparks* (December 1940), p. 9.
[79] "Superman Struts In Macy Parade: His 23-Foot Chest and 8-Foot Smirk Delight the Throngs Lining Sidewalks," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 90, no. 30,253, November 22, 1940, p. 18.
[80] "Crowds View Macy, Bamberger Parades," *Women's Wear Daily*, November 22, 1940, p. 5.
[81] "Macy's Parade Of Jolly Giants Seen by Million," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 22, 1940, p. 34.
[82] "Million Acclaim Macy's Gala Parade," *New York Journal and American*, November 22, 1940, p. 19.
[83] Franklin, "Towering Uncle Sam Leads Macy's Storybook Army," *Daily Mirror*, November 22, 1940, p. 4; Franklin, "Giant Uncle Sam Leads Macy Parade," *Daily Mirror*, November 22, 1940, p. 8.
[84] "Superman Needs "Shot" to Finish Macy's Parade," *New York World-Telegram*, November 22, 1940, p. 17.

The Superman balloon suffered balance issues, however. New York newspapers used this flaw to comedically tear down his narrative design of being invincible. *The New York Times* wrote that "Superman's head wabbled as if he were punch drunk, and helium gas leaked out of his left foot, but he was in there punching—in a manner of speaking—all the time."[85] The *Brooklyn Eagle* reported on the situation. "The parade went off with precision and without mishap, albeit Superman, for all his distinction as the tallest and bulkiest monster in the line of march, found it a bit trying at times to maintain his equilibrium and had to take on more helium at Broadway and 53[r]d Street. The 80-foot balloon, sharing the honors as newcomers with the 75-foot Laffo, was the only gas-filled marcher to undergo the ignominy of emergency inflation, but nevertheless fulfilled his destiny by inspiring wide-eyed stares and deep-rooted awe among the youthful watchers."[86] The *New York Journal and American* joked that Superman went "soft" and required "a 'shot' of helium to perk him up again." Fathers, tired of being asked by their children if they were as strong as Superman, secretly enjoyed his deflation, the paper imagined.[87] The *New York World-Telegram* continued the ribbing by calling Superman human after all. Referencing the need for a jolt of helium, "Superman did not quite live up to his name, however." The paper commented on the poor design of the balloon. "His head sagged and his legs failed him. A transfusion of gas pepped him up enough to enable him to continue, and at Times Square (above) he again was quite husky. A few blocks farther down the street he wilted again, but managed to finish the march." Superman even struggled to remain upright at the finish line outside Macy's.[88] With a judgmental undertone, the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote, "[T]he four other balloons in the parade finished in their first wind."[89] This rotund Superman had a small red cape that was not visible from the front. A larger size would have probably further threatened the balance of the balloon and safety of the handlers. Despite suffering inflation issues to which the press jeered, Superman still bewitched the children of New York. One had to be there in person to witness the Superman balloon and experience Comicland. Once televised in 1947, the Thanksgiving Day Parade was no longer a hometown event for New York City. It became a ritualized national celebration and expression of American civic religion. Just like at Superman

[85] "Superman Struts In Macy Parade," *The New York Times*, November 22, 1940, p. 18.
[86] "Giant Heroes of Parade Thrill 1,000,000 Watchers," *Brooklyn Eagle*, vol. 100, no. 324, November 22, 1940, p. 7.
[87] "Million Acclaim Macy's Gala Parade," *New York Journal and American*, November 22, 1940, p. 19.
[88] "Superman Needs "Shot" to Finish Macy's Parade," *New York World-Telegram*, November 22, 1940, p. 17.
[89] "Macy's Parade Of Jolly Giants Seen by Million," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 22, 1940, p. 34.

Day, the public worshiped the character but as a balloon. Religious analogy aside, the parade ensured his status as a national celebrity.

Superman soared across the sky for the first time in the seventeenth iteration of the annual pageant. The Man of Steel did not leap over skyscrapers, as presented in the comics, but floated among them during the parade.[90] He did not fly per se but rather marched down the concrete jungle. In this demonstration of aerial pageantry, Superman (as well as the other balloons) almost dwarfed the city's brick and steel towers in size and significance. The parade placed modernity on display by accentuating sprawling urban architecture as well as ideas about vertical space and the sky. Through floats on the ground and balloons in the sky, Macy's engaged with the fourth space along the Z-axis. Spatiality was central to the parade as a bi-level extravaganza. This was also true for Superman. The character's gravity-defying powers added an extra layer to the symbolism of the sky as a space of hope and joy commonly expressed through the Christian theological construct of heaven. He also embodies the secular idea of progress as upward motion epitomized through the cliché phrase "the sky's the limit." Superman encapsulated these religious and cultural messages and then materialized them with his balloon. *Sparks* interestingly acknowledged the spatial dimension of the parade as a logistical matter and wished that Superman was a real person, so he could diminish the problems caused by the elevated subway. An article in the November 1940 issue jested that Superman's powers could have aided Macy's in negotiating the issues of transporting and marching the balloons. "Too bad we couldn't have put him in the Parade years ago; he might have lifted up the El for the balloons and saved Macy's a lot of trouble."[91] This is one of the earliest applications of Comicland through humor, a pattern explored more deeply in chapter 3.

In addition to the international fanfare surrounding the first solo transatlantic flight (from New York to Paris) in 1927 by Charles A. Lindbergh, Macy's fostered an allure of the sky. It is no coincidence that balloons first appeared in the parade the following year. This historical moment indicates a consciousness toward or fixation with the sky, which, as mentioned above, symbolizes hope and progress for many people. These sentiments match the excess of 1920s culture in New York and the apparently deliberate decision to make World War I, known for its

---

[90] An article for the 1966 parade only broached this idea of Superman and urban space. See The Associated Press, "Prayer, Joy, Charity, and Grief Mark Holiday: Turkey Is Served 63 in Prison's Death Row," *Chicago Tribune*, Final Edition, vol. 120, no. 329, November 25, 1966, p. 9.

[91] "A Bigger Cavalcade: Thanksgiving Parade Runs From A to Z," *Sparks* (November 1940), p. 9. This aside originally appeared in parenthesis.

introduction of aerial combat, a distant memory. Balloons, which elicit childlike joy and evoke the same kind of aerial wonderment, converged with the growing parade culture of floats. Besides this hypothesis of human investment in the sky as a symbolic space tied to emotion and imagination, there is does not appear to be a definitive cause or reason for why balloons remain key features of parades. Public connection to the balloons in the Thanksgiving Day Parade constitute the early building blocks for what historian Vanessa R. Schwartz calls the Jet Age aesthetic of the 1950s, a culture of motion that circulated on the ground below.[92] Interest in Superman clearly grows out of this new fascination with inhabiting the skies at the dawn of the twentieth century and then reinforces it. He is an aviator without the need of an airplane. Superman embodies the ultimate idea of freedom, which humans associate with flight.

In addition to celebrating childlike wonder and the holiday season as well as expressing national pride, the parade was a giant advertisement for Macy's and department store consumerism. Historian William Leach explains that the Straus family, Jewish entrepreneurs who made the company an American institution, transformed the earlier carnival custom of "ragamuffin parades" in New York into a festival for consumption. "They kept the carnival aspect of the older ragamuffin tradition but took complete managerial control over who or what marched, thereby preventing the parade from becoming spontaneous or democratic." After World War I, pre-Christmas parades spearheaded by businessmen "began to displace an even older form of Thanksgiving parading linked with scarcity and poverty." Leach argues that the Thanksgiving Day Parade epitomized their new policy favoring visual publicity. "It testified to the Strauses' passion for display and theatrical spectacle as well as to their commitment to what they called 'institutional publicity'—for there was nothing like this parade to get the store inside the imaginative center of New York's community life." He further notes that the minutes of company board meetings in 1924 indicate that the parade was the brainchild of executives. A testament to their ingenuity, the parade is simultaneously a "city ritual" and national pastime.[93]. Macy's brilliantly attached its name and brand to America's two civic national holidays: Thanksgiving with a parade (1924) and July Fourth with a fireworks extravaganza (1976). Macy's remains the center of public celebration. No other company can claim such a feat of

---

[92] Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Jet Age Aesthetic: The Glamour of Media in Motion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).
[93] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1993), pp. 331–338.

advertising and positive association with festive enactment. Macy's and its Herald Square location that opened in 1902 and expanded in 1924 to its current size is a New York cultural landmark. Unlike Sears and their invention of the mail away catalog, Macy's glamorized the in-person shopping experience and offered consumers low prices. Like the movie palace or movie temple, the department store operated, in the words of historian Susan Porter Benson, as a "palace of consumption," mimicking the religious symbolism through ornate architecture.[94] The parade takes consumers on a magical journey around their kingdom of Manhattan that concludes at the palace.

Macy's pattern of dovetailing their brand with the image of America and New York was also favored by Superman's owners, fellow Jewish businessmen. As such, the company arranged for the creation of the Superman balloon back in May of 1940. DC Comics treasurer Jack S. Liebowitz wrote to Jerry Siegel, who was living in Cleveland, Ohio, at the time, about the event and had to convince him to travel to New York for the parade. In his letter, Liebowitz stated, "Incidentally, Macy's is building for their Thanksgiving Day Parade a figure of Superman 4-1/2 stories high and it will cost approximately $15,000. I think that this will induce you to come into town for the parade."[95] This correspondence was before Superman Day and Siegel's implied reluctance signals an irritability at DC Comics management, who were exerting their control of the character. No written records indicate if Siegel or his partner Joe Shuster made the trip for the parade. Video footage, however, partially answers this question. Looking out of a Manhattan window and facing Central Park, a minute-long movie clip captured the Superman balloon going by as well as Siegel's wife Bella. Therefore, we know that at least Siegel attended. This rare material on the parade is part of the footage that DC Comics former owner Time Warner bought from eBay that author Brad Ricca mentions in an endnote.[96] A man named Jerry Siegel placed a classified advertisement in *The New York Times* on August 29, 1958, providing a $200 reward for the return of a twenty-two-pound package of film addressed to him.[97] It is likely that this was

---

[94] Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), esp. p. 81.
[95] Jack S. Liebowitz to Jerry Siegel, letter, May 2, 1940, p. 2, in *DC Comics v. Pacific Pictures Corporation*, Case No. CV 10-3633 ODW (RZx) (C.D. Cal. 9th), Docket 493, Exhibit 9, vol. 2, filed September 21, 2012, p. ER-286. See also Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, p. 48.
[96] See LunaTech 3D, "Superman Balloon in the 1940 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade," December 28, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJxBRFpWDHI&ab_channel=LunaTech3D; Tye, *Superman*, p. 115; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 363–364n3.
[97] "Lost And Found," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 107, no. 36,742, August 29, 1958, p. 44. See also Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 364n12.

Superman's writer and the same footage that surfaced years later because the Siegel family was not in possession of this visual material.

After his 1940 debut, Superman did not return to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade as a balloon the following year. While appearing only once in that decade, Superman astounded local children and created a long-lasting memory. This is true for Jon Altschuler, who lived on West Seventy-Seventh Street. He testified to *The New Yorker* in the December 12, 1977, issue that he had a front row seat to the parade. "When I was a kid, we'd go to sleep early the night before Thanksgiving, then get up at four in the morning and come downstairs to look at the balloons. They used to let us hold the net over Superman." He grew up nearby the uptown location where Goodyear employees inflated the balloons for Macy's. However, Altschuler had a case of mistaken memory, or the reporter made an error in transcribing the quote. The article's calculation of time and language insinuated that Altschuler first witnessed the Superman balloon in 1941 and on more than one occasion.[98] *The New York Times* correctly stated on November 21, 1941, that the parade repurposed the Superman balloon into a football player with a large letter "M" on his chest, presumably indicating Macy's. According to the article, "[A] seventy-five-foot-high football player … looked suspiciously like the Superman of 1940 repainted."[99] The following year, Macy's suspended the parade and donated the Superman balloon along with the rest to the war effort. Company president Jack I. Straus displayed his patriotism through a gift in the form of rubber. "Together they will add 650 pounds to the rubber scrap pile," *The New York Times* reported on November 14, 1942.[100] The Superman balloon returned in 1966 and is discussed at the end of the chapter to maintain thematic and chronological consistency.

Superman and Santa Claus

Superman broadened his relationship with Macy's to inside the store for the 1940 holiday season. Just like Santa Claus, an actor played Superman at Macy's Toyland. (More on this in the

[98] "The Talk of The Town: Inflation," *The New Yorker*, vol. 42, no. 39, December 12, 1977, p. 41. I calculated the earliest year as 1941 from the article date, statement of age [forty-one], and length of residency [thirty-six years] indicated by the article.
[99] "Santa Still No. 1 to Small Fry Among Throng at Toyland Parade," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 91, no. 30,617, November 21, 1941, p. 12 and image. A photograph in one of the binders for Macy's balloons verified the repurposing of the Superman balloon.
[100] "Mayor Plays Role Of Dragon Slayer," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 92, no. 30,975, November 14, 1942, p. 17. See also "Macy's Cancels Thanksgiving Annual Parade: Balloon Dragon Is 'Slain' by Mayor as Rubber Monsters Join Scrap Pile," *New York Herald Tribune*, Late City Edition, vol. 102, no. 35,062, November 14, 1942, p. 13.

next subheading.) In the December 1940 issue, *Sparks* even compared the two fantastical figures as equals in the minds of children. "And then the Parade was over, while the crowds went home to devour turkey and the children to dream of — Superman or Santa Claus? We wouldn't know. Maybe we'll be able to tell you later, however, for both Superman and Santa are holding forth in Macy's from now to Christmas."[101] Journalist John Kobler concluded on June 21, 1941, that the realism of Superman is equal to Santa Claus. The creators of Superman, he wrote in *The Saturday Evening Post*, "have assumed a solemn obligation to instill faith, wherever possible, in the physical reality of Superman. They have done this in the same spirit in which old-fashioned parents encourage belief in Santa Claus. Indeed, [Jerry] Siegel and [Joe] Shuster are expected by many of their friends of believing in Superman themselves." Superman editor Mort Weisinger plagiarized the quote five years later.[102] An advertisement on December 10, 1941, in *The Atlanta Constitution* for the Superman watch included Santa Claus and used the language of "dependability" to link the two figures. Santa Claus said, "Superman and I are just like that this Christmas."[103] This comparison extended into the 1950s. A reporter for *The Burlington Free Press* of Vermont proclaimed on August 28, 1956, that Superman actor George Reeves was "playing a kind of year-round Santa Claus role." This statement reflected the words of Reeves: "Kids kind of class Superman with Santa Claus as somebody to believe in."[104]

Several authors tangentially discuss the relationship between the fictional characters. Scottish comic book writer Mark Millar writes, "I grew up thinking that Kal-El of Kryptonopolis was as real as Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, and was crushed at age seven to discover that he wasn't part of America's rich history but merely the most famous fictional character of all time."[105] His conclusion reverberates the assessment of Ralph Ellison used as the epigraph for the introduction chapter. Superman and Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster biographers enhance the comparison. According to Jake Rossen, DC Comics "attempt[ed] to perpetuate the notion the hero was an alien Santa Claus, as real as a child's imagination allowed him to be."[106] Larry Tye links the two figures by uniform. "His tights and cape, in radiant primary colors, make Superman

---

[101] "Macy's Stages Super-Parade," *Sparks* (December 1940), p. 9.
[102] Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, p. 14; Mort Weisinger, "Here Comes Superman!," *Coronet*, vol. 20, no. 3 (July 1946), p. 25.
[103] See the Superman watch advertisement in *The Atlanta Constitution*, vol. 74, no. 179, December 10, 1941, p. 27.
[104] Fred Ashcraft, "'Superman' Likes His Job But Keeps Tongue in Cheek," *The Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, VT), vol. 129, no. 206, August 28, 1956, p. 9.
[105] Mark Millar foreword in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. v.
[106] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 19.

as instantly recognizable as Santa Claus—and as comforting. That familiarity helped his handlers move him from the printed page to the airwaves, then from the small screen to the big."[107] Brad Ricca explains that unlike St. Nick, Superman is enjoyed the entire year. "Superman's presence in our imagination is like that of Santa Claus, only not limited to a single holiday or season."[108]

Superman, nevertheless, eclipsed Santa Claus both in the parade and in person during the 1940s. The Superman balloon was taller than the Santa Claus balloon for the 1940 parade, which indicated his dominant position in popular culture. The *New York Herald Tribune* repeatedly deployed the word "overshadow" to accentuate the height difference.[109] The *New York Post* published an image of Superman floating over Times Square and similarly affirmed his preeminence over the nationalistic figure Uncle Sam, whose balloon looked more like a real person. The article declared that the "Biggest balloon in the R. H. Macy & Co., Inc., Thanksgiving parade was Superman, who topped Uncle Sam, second largest, by about 20 feet."[110] In contrast, another New York newspaper presented Superman and Santa Claus as equals. The *Daily Mirror* printed a picture with the Superman balloon just ahead of Santa Claus in the procession and wrote, "Superman and Santa pass thousands of gay observers."[111] Before the Macy's 1940 Thanksgiving Day Parade, the Tatterman Brothers Marionette Company began performing a Superman puppet show at Higbee's Department Store in Cleveland, Ohio.[112] Video footage filmed by Jerry Siegel or Joe Shuster of the holiday season show depicted Superman interacting with Santa Claus. Unfortunately, the plot is unknown because there is no corresponding audio for the clip available on YouTube.[113] On December 26, 1940, the *Plain Dealer* of Cleveland, Ohio, shared a story of one child obsessed with seeing the Superman show. "A friend of mine a few days before Christmas, heard a screaming child who was being dragged across Public Square wailing: 'But I don't WANT [*sic*] to see Santa Claus—I want to see

---

[107] Tye, *Superman*, p. xiv.
[108] Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 329.
[109] "32 States Mark Thanksgiving Day Tomorrow," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 20, 1940, p. 9; "Thanksgiving Feasts Assured To City's Needy," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 21, 1940, p. 29.
[110] "Superman (And We Mean Super) Sees Times Sq.," *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 140, no. 5, November 22, 1940, p. 4.
[111] "…For [*sic*] Fun and Freedom," *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), Complete Sports Edition, vol. 17, no. 131, November 22, 1940, p. 23.
[112] "Two Papas No Superfluity for Superman," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, yr. 99, no. 322, November 17, 1940, p. 6–A. For secondary source mention, see Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 194–195.
[113] LunaTech 3D, "1940 Superman Marionette Show at Higbee's," December 28, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ao3TTqBoLjE&ab_channel=LunaTech3D.

Superman.'"[114] As these examples and others to follow show, Comicland surfaced outside of New York.

Miller & Rhoads department store based in Virginia also embraced the Superman mania. "Superman has arrived," a *Richmond Times-Dispatch* advertisement announced on November 16, 1940. A capeless Superman leapt over the shopping center and the text read:

> At last—he's here! SUPERMAN in person is here at M&R's Toyland waiting to see you! Come in and see him do his magnificent feats of strength, show his superhuman powers. Be sure to come—he's a sight you'll never forget![115]

It remains unclear if Miller & Rhoads obtained permission from DC Comics to have a live actor appear in costume and print the image of Superman.

Superman's holiday season prominence constituted an economic threat. He acted a source of tension for department stores and most likely the actors who played Santa Claus. Davidson's, a retail store based in Atlanta, Georgia, and owned by Macy's, tried to counteract the power of cartoon and fantasy characters by presumptuously proclaiming the superiority of Santa Claus. The advertisement directed to children on November 21, 1940, read:

> Three guesses who's coming. He's fatter than Wimpy … jollier than Mickey Mouse … stronger than Popeye … braver than the Lone Ranger … even greater than the Superman. Yes, sir, he's the guy with the long white whiskers—the real honest-to-goodness for true Santa Claus and he's coming to Davidson's tomorrow. Grab your hat, grab your mother, grab the neighborhood kids and come to the Capitol Theatre tomorrow morning for Davidson's annual Santa Claus party.[116]

Superman and Santa Claus shared the 1940 holiday season spotlight in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The annual Santa Claus parade included comic strip characters that year. According to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, "Santa Claus is coming to town Saturday on the Toonerville Trolley with Powerful Katrinka and Superman as bodyguards to protect him from the mischievous Katzenjammer Kids." The Gardner Displays Company brought Comicland to life just days before the Macy's parade. "Comic strip characters will step off the printed page and onto huge floats," the article announced on the eighteenth of November. The local paper also indicated four days later that a nine-foot-tall Superman installation and corresponding float as features of the parade. It took almost three months for the crew of thirty men to build the floats

---

[114] Eleanor Clarage, "Main Street Meditations," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, yr. 99, no. 361, December 26, 1940, p. 7.
[115] See advertisement in *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), yr. 90, no. 321, November 16, 1940, p. 22.
[116] See advertisement for Davidson's in *The Atlanta Constitution*, Thanksgiving Edition, vol. 73, no. 161, November 21, 1940, p. 3A. Ellipses appeared in the original text.

and a cost of $5,700 for the sponsors to produce the spectacle. On the twenty-second of November journalist Charles F. Danver wrote, "The [total] value of the balloons and floats, which are owned by the producing company, is around $10,000."[117]

This unique relationship between the leading make-believe character and Kris Kringle entered the comics and the tradition of Christmas presents. In a 1942 *Superman* newspaper comic strip sequence, the Man of Steel rescues Santa Claus from a Nazi detention camp. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels declares over a radio broadcast to America, England, and Australia that the Axis powers kidnapped Santa Claus and eliminated Christmas.[118] Deeming this a newsworthy event, *Time* averred, "**Superman** set out on a swim to Germany, to right the wrong of a generation and ultimately end the cruelest comic-strip continuity yet: the Nazis had kidnapped **Santa Claus**."[119] [*sic*] *The Atlanta Constitution* even mentioned the surreal story line in an article unrelated to Superman or comics on the twelfth of December.[120] This coverage by the press demonstrates the impact of Superman in everyday life. To complicate the connection between these two figures even further, children expected Santa Claus to deliver Superman merchandise to them. Letters to Santa published in the press during the winter of 1941 indicated a desire for the Krypto-Raygun and Superman sweater.[121] From the early 1940s to the late 1960s, youngsters requested the Superman Playsuit from St. Nick.[122] Boys outnumbered girls in pleas.

---

[117] See "Santa Coming With Pageant In Downtown Area Sunday: Will Arrive on Toonerville Trolley With Powerful Katrinka and Superman as Bodyguards," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, vol. 14, no. 94, November 18, 1940, p. 5; "Christmas Parade to Bring Santa Claus Here Tomorrow: Youngsters (And Oldsters) Should Get Out Early For Event Will Be Bigger and Better Than Ever," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, vol. 14, no. 98, November 22, 1940, p. 6; Charles F. Danver, "Pittsburghesque: The Santa Parade," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, vol. 14, no. 98, November 22, 1940, p. 10. See also "Gala Parade To Greet Santa In Pittsburgh: Huge Inflated Replicas Of Comic Characters Will Lead Procession," *Bradford Evening Star and Bradford Daily Record* (Bradford, PA), vol. 32, no. 251, November 22, 1940, p. 3.

[118] See "Santa Claus Kidnapped," in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Dailies, 1942–1944* (San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2016), pp. 92–99.

[119] "People: Fine Arts," *Time*, vol. 40, no. 23, December 7, 1942, p. 73.

[120] "Christmas Lights for Display Purpose Banned by City, WPB," *The Atlanta Constitution*, vol. 75, no. 181, December 12, 1942, p. 2.

[121] For the Superman Krypto-Raygun, see Bobby Lee Hawk, "Letters to Santa Claus," *Cumberland Evening Times* (Cumberland, MD), vol. 74, no. 339, December 8, 1941, p. 7; Clarence Lee, "Letters To Santa," *The Evening Standard* (Uniontown, PA), vol. 53, no. 295, December 8, 1941, p. 13; James Cross, "Letters To Santa Claus," *The Evening Tribune* (Marysville, OH), vol. 44, no. 70, December 17, 1941, p. 5. And for the Superman sweater, see Glenn Wise, "Letters to Santa Claus From Milan County Children," *The Cameron Herald* (Cameron, TX), vol. 81, no. 36, December 18, 1941, p. 27.

[122] For the 1940s, see George William Pavlik, "Letters To Santa Claus," *The Evening Standard* (Uniontown, PA), vol. 53, no. 7, December 24, 1941, December 24, 1941, p. 11; J. B. Brown, Jr., "Letters To Santa," *The Yazoo City Herald* (Yazoo City, MS), vol. 71, no. 9, December 17, 1943, p. 5; Wylie Moore, "Dear Santa Claus," *The Odessa American* (Odessa, TX), vol. 18, no. 240, December 21, 1943, p. 2; Paul Smith, "Local Kids Write Letters to Santa," *Orem Geneva Times* (Orem, UT), vol. 16, no. 39, December 16, 1948, p. 6; Rodney A. Medus, "Letters to Santa

Claus," *The New Era* (Eunice, LA), vol. 45, no. 17, December 24, 1948, p. 7; "Give Threadbare Dad Suit Boy's Plea to Saint Nick," *The Winnipeg Tribune* (Winnipeg, CAN), Final Edition, yr. 60, no. 298, December 14, 1949, p. 1.

For 1954, see Billy Russell, "Santa's Mailbag: Superman Suit," *The Daily Mountain Eagle* (Jasper, AL), yr. 79, no. 9, December 7, 1950, p. 3-C; John Wyss, "Letters to Santa Claus," *Mexico Evening Ledger* (Mexico, MO), vol. 66, no. 262, December 8, 1954, p. 14; Allen Rogers, "Dear Santa Claus," *The Troy Messenger* (Troy, AL), vol. 89, no. 243, December 8, 1954, p. 7; Bobby Lee Holston, "Santa Claus Letters," *Great Bend Daily Tribune* (Great Bend, KS), yr. 79, no. 104, December 9, 1954, p. 12; Richie Newburg, Jimmy Costello, and Bruce Pace, "Santa's Mail Bag," *Oakdale Leader* (Oakdale, CA), vol. 67, no. 16, December 16, 1954, p. 8; James Michael Summa, "Letters To Santa," *Stanberry Headlight* (Stanberry, MO), vol. 56, no. 45, December 16, 1954, p. 13; Robert Melson, "Letters to Santa Claus," *Mexico Evening Ledger* (Mexico, MO), vol. 66, no. 271, December 20, 1954, p. 13; Dennis Richardson and Kenneth Roger Starr, "Boy Tells Santa, 'I Want To Walk for Christmas," *Chester Times* (Chester, PA), Delaware County Edition, yr. 79, no. 27,078, December 21, 1954, p. 13; Johnny and Roger Reynolds, "Letters to Santa Claus," *Wilmington News-Journal* (Wilmington, OH), yr. 117, no. 58, December 21, 1954, p. 5; Lawrence Kenneth III, "Former Citizen Writes From Land Of Santa Claus," *Greenwood Commonwealth* (Greenwood, MS), vol. 39, no. 98, December 23, 1954, p. 1 (Section Three); John Crissey, "Santa Claus Letters," *Marengo Republican-News* (Marengo, IL), vol. 89, no. 35, December 23, 1954, p. 25; Jackie Baroody, "Last Letters To Santa," *Newark Courier-Gazette* (Newark, NY), vol. 12, no. 51, December 23, 1954, p. 6.

For 1955, see Bill Stuart "Letters To Santa Claus," *The Troy Messenger* (Troy, AL), vol. 90, no. 231, November 22, 1955, p. 5; David Lee, "Santa Claus Letters Handed in at Pre-Christmas Parade," *The Terre Haute Tribune* (Terre Haute, IN), Final Edition, vol. 122, no. 183, November 30, 1955, p. 9; David Wedlake, "Dear Santa," *The Record-Argus* (Greenville, PA), yr. 107, no. 281, December 6, 1955, p. 5; Freddie, "Dear Santa Claus," *The Cherokee County Herald* (Centre, AL), yr. 18, no. 40, December 7, 1955, p. 8; David Roberts, "Letters To Santa," *The Daily Republican* (Monongahela, PA), vol. 109, no. 185, December 8, 1955, p. 10; Sammie Beaird, "Letters to Santa," *The Madill Record* (Madill, OK), vol. 47, no. 23, December 8, 1955, p. 7; Unsigned and Hugh Finlay, "Letters To Santa Claus," *The Troy Messenger* (Troy, AL), vol. 90, no. 243, December 8, 1955, p. 5; Jerry Thompson, "Santa Claus Letters," *The Maryville Daily Forum* (Maryville, MO), vol. 46, no. 161, December 12, 1955, p. 7; Robert Winfield Orr, "Letters To Santa," *Opelika Daily News* (Opelika, AL), vol. 66, no. 169, December 13, 1955, p. 8; Barry and Tommy, "Dear Santa Claus," *Cherokee County Herald* (Centre, AL), yr. 18, no. 41, December 14, 1955, p. 3; Joe Jex, "Letters To Santa Claus," *The Daily Herald* (Provo, UT), yr. 70, no. 144, December 15, 1955, p. 8; David, "Santa Gets a Bag of letters; Have You Sent Yours?," *The Springville Herald* (Springville, UT), vol. 65, no. 50, December 15, 1955, p. 3; Jimmy and Allen Lee Croft, "Santa Claus Letters," *Daily Journal-Gazette* (Matton, IL), yr. 81, no. 280, December 16, 1955, p. 6; Bud Wilhelm, "Letters To Santa," *Denton Journal* (Denton, MD), vol. 110, no. 15, December 16, 1955, p. 16; Chuck Call, "Children Make Pleas to Santa Claus," *The Daily Herald* (Provo, UT), yr. 70, no. 145, December 16, 1955, p. 13; Johnnie Young and Mikel Parks, "LETTERS…To Santa Claus," [*sic*] *The Clinton Eye* (Clinton, MO), vol. 71, no. 33, December 20, 1955, p. 1B; Lyn Bissonette, "Letters To Santa," *The Brockport Republic* (Brockport, NY), vol. 100, no. 11, December 22, 1955, p. 1; Douglass Johnson, "Santa Claus Letters," *Marengo Republican-News* (Marengo, IL), vol. 90, no. 34, December 22, 1955, n.p.; Bobby Rich, "Letters To Santa Tell Children's Fondest Wishes," *The San Saba News* (San Saba, TX), vol. 83, no. 51, December 22, 1955, p. 1 (Section Two); Andy Torres, "Letters To Santa," *The Taylor Daily Press* (Taylor, TX), vol. 42, no. 19, December 22, 1955, n.p.; Jerry Davis, "Letters To Santa Claus," *The Vidette-Messenger* (Valparaiso, IN), vol. 29, no. 146, December 23, 1955, p. 21. See also "Strictly Personal..," [*sic*] *Jim Thorpe Times News* (Jim Thorpe, PA), yr. 72, no. 205, December 2, 1955, p. 6.

For 1956, see "Charles, 7, Opens Season On Santa Claus," *The New Mexican* (Santa Fe, NM), yr. 107, no. 291, November 4, 1956, p. 15A; Robert Dale Neidigh, "Santa Claus Letters," *Daily Journal-Gazette* (Mattoon, IL), yr. 101, December 1, 1956, p. 5; John Klein Harlan, "Letters To Santa Claus," *The Harlan News-Advertiser* (Harlan, IA), vol. 87, no. 49, December 4, 1956, n.p.; Lewis, "Letters to Santa," *American Fork Citizen* (American Fork, UT), vol. 53, no. 41, December 6, 1956, p. 2; Philip Vagnoni, "Dear Santa Claus," *The Index-Journal* (Greenwood, SC), vol. 37, no. 248, December 8, 1956, p. 12; Robbie Emmons, "Dear Santa Claus…," [*sic*] *The Derrick* (Oil City-Franklin-Clarion, PA), no. 22,051, December 11, 1956, p. 12; Leslie H. Wines, "Santa Claus Letters," *Daily Journal-Gazette* (Mattoon, IL), yr. 101, December 12, 1956, p. 7; Unsigned, "Letters to Santa," *The Selinsgrove Times and The Snyder County Tribune* (Selinsgrove, PA), December 13, 1956, p. 6; Johnny Jennings, Jr., "Santa Letters," *The Star-Herald* (Kosciusko, MS), vol. 90, no. 50, December 13, 1956, p. 6; Lewis Linn, "Letters To Santa Claus," *The San Saba News* (San Saba, TX) December 20, 1956, p. 5; Leland Sejkora, "Letters To Santa Claus," *The Summerfield* (Summerfield, KS), vol. 66, no. 14, December 20, 1956, n.p.; Ronny Bozovich, "Santa Claus Letters," *Daily Journal-Gazette* (Mattoon, IL), yr. 101, December 22, 1956, n.p. (Section Two); Sump Bready,

While there must have been many more requests, available records showed that two girls desired the playsuit.[123] These examples demonstrate the influence of Comicland on girls and show children as wishful if not actual consumers of Superman merchandise. The superiority of Superman over Santa Claus in the minds of children was another indication of the power of Comicland. In short, DC Comics effectively commercialized Superman and his universe to children.

Superman's presence at public festivals was evident in other regions across the nation. Sergeant A. J. Kotas, who was stationed near New Orleans, Louisiana, told *The Nebraska Signal* of the first Mardi Gras carnival that resumed operation after the Second World War. On March 26, 1946, he recalled seeing an eight-year-old boy costumed as Superman with blue tights and a blue cape.[124] Another child dressed up as Superman on August 28, 1946, for the forty-second installment of the summer "Baby Parade" in Asbury Park, New Jersey.[125] Similar to Macy's, a Superman balloon was scheduled to appear in 1948 as part of a holiday parade in San Diego, California.[126] The theme for the fortieth annual National Orange Show in San Bernardino, CA, which showcases the state's citrus industry, was "Favorite Funnies." The city of Colton entered the March 1955 parade with an exhibit featuring a Superman statue appearing to be about eight feet tall. There were also entries for the comic strips *Popeye*, *Alley Oop*, *The Timid Soul*, *Joe*

"Santa Is Hitching Up Reindeers For Christmas Trip Around World," *Greenwood Commonwealth* (Greenwood, MS), vol. 41, no. 97, December 22, 1956, p. 4; Steve Farley, "Letters to Old Santa Claus," *The Amarillo Globe-Times* (Amarillo, TX), yr. 33, no. 152, December 24, 1956, p. 16; Tommy Holland, "Letters To Santa," *The Decatur Daily* (Decatur, AL), vol. 45, no. 260, December 24, 1956, p. A-8; Bobby, "Dear Santa," *The Seminole Producer* (Seminole, OK), vol. 30, no. 254, December 24, 1956, p. 5; B. B. R., "Santa Claus Letters," *Fayette County Times* (Fayette, AL), vol. 107, no. 22, December 27, 1956, p. 1.

For the remainder of the 1950s, see Tommy Louis Cervantes, "Dear Santa Claus: Superman Suit," *The Austin Statesman* (Austin, TX), Home Edition, yr. 88, no. 118, December 12, 1958, p. 30; Chuckie Connors, "Letters To Santa," *Republic-Democrat* (Brockport, NY), vol. 104, no. 11, December 17, 1959, p. 1.

For the 1960s, see Randal Clay Smith, "Hot Rod Car," *The Austin Statesman* (Austin, TX), Home Edition, vol. 94, no. 103, December 18, 1964, p. 2; Bobby Mosher, "Letter to Santa," *Republic-Democrat* (Brockport, NY), vol. 112, no. 9, November 23, 1967, p. 1.

[123] Hazel Lynn Stevens, "Letters To Santa Claus," *Winston County Journal* (Louisville, MS), vol. 64, no. 50, December 14, 1956, n.p.; Marcia, "Letters to Santa Claus," *The Maryville Daily Forum* (Maryville, MO), vol. 47, no. 170, December 21, 1956, p. 6.

[124] "Filmore County Soldier Writes of Famous Mardi Gras Carnival," *The Nebraska Signal* (Geneva, NE), yr. 72, no. 26, March 28, 1946, p. 1.

[125] Richard F. Gibbons, "North County Visitor Takes Grand Award," *Asbury Park Evening Press* (Asbury Park, NJ), yr. 60, no. 204, August 29, 1946, pp. 1, 12.

[126] "Yule Parade Plans," *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 79, no. 69, October 7, 1948, p. 46.

Palooka, *Blondie*, *Toonerville Folks*, *The Captain and the Kids*, *Our Boarding House*, *Little Lulu*, *Mutt and Jeff*, and *Red Ryder*.[127]

Back in New York, Superman still exercised his department store dominance. The editors at *Good Housekeeping* documented an interaction in an elevator with a young upper-class girl in 1948 that demonstrated Superman's primacy over Santa Claus, an example less dramatic than the boy in Cleveland who cried wanting Superman back in 1940. Even though the department store is unnamed, Macy's is most likely the establishment.

> The other day we were going up in an elevator at a local department store, and one of the passengers was a minx of about five, in a blue tweed coat and bonnet and a pair of spotless white gloves. Never proof against the young, no matter how aloof and stylish, we said to this poised damsel, "Bet we know where you're going. Bet you're going to see Santa Claus!"
>
> She looked at us with level blue eyes, a little coldly, as if she resented being accosted by strange men. "No," she stated. "I'm going to see Superman."[128]

Macy's 1940 "Superman Adventures"

Macy's connection to Superman surpassed that of all other department stores. They enacted the fourth major expression of Comicland through an immersive in-store experience called "Superman Adventures" with a real-life Man of Steel. In addition to the civic holiday of Thanksgiving, DC Comics linked him to Christmas and consumerism. Macy's ingeniously advertised their yuletide relationship with Superman through a full-page color comic strip. This sequence appeared on November 24, 1940, in the *New York Journal and American*. It functioned as a Jules Verne meets H. G. Wells style visual adventure to manufacture suspense and excitement around Superman and Macy's Toyland. A brown-haired boy named Jack and a blonde-haired girl named Mary meet Superman at Macy's. For twenty-nine cents each, the children obtain a ticket to "Superman's Subterranean Caverns" and "a prize package." Superman takes Jack and Mary into his metal "Vacuum Projecto Car" and propels the vehicle deep into the Earth's core. Superman then destroys the boulders that block access to a secret tunnel. The next panel serves as a plug for the forty-seven cent "Superman Movie Viewer," a toy sold at Macy's.

---

[127] "'Favorite Funnies' Theme of Orange Show Exhibits," *The San Bernardino Daily Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), vol. 61, no. 171, March 18, 1955, p. 22; Hal McClure, "Snyder Crowns Queen While Crowd Cheers: Guthrie Dedicates Brilliant Exposition To Citrus Industry," *The San Bernardino Daily Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), vol. 61, no. 171, March 18, 1955, pp. 1, 3.
[128] "Town Hall," *Good Housekeeping*, vol. 127, no. 6 (December 1948), p. 8.

Superman holds up a sheet of Kryptofilm, which protects the children from a cannonball blast. Returning to the narrative, Superman then leads Jack and Mary across a bridge near an erupting volcano. Using his cloak, Superman shields them from the lava and extreme temperature. Unexpectedly, the exit starts to crumble but Superman quickly secures the stone archway, enabling safe passage. Although visually interesting, the strip's continuity is underdeveloped. The children magically return to the surface without explanation. Superman's alter ego Clark Kent writes an article in the *Daily Planet* about Jack and Mary's adventure and the children clamor for a copy. The young pair suddenly appear before Superman, who stands behind a counter with their prizes. Jack receives a game while Mary gets a paint set. Superman then tells them, "JUST STEP THROUGH THE DOOR TO MY LEFT FOR ANOTHER BIG SURPRISE!" [*sic*] The final panel displays Jack and Mary staring into the room. This conclusion acts as a lead-in to the following three pages, which advertised Macy's Toyland and a litany of products for sale by mail. The text instructs children to "TURN TO THE NEXT THREE PAGES AND SEE WHAT JACK AND MARY SAW." [*sic*] Superman's likeness appeared on all three pages as if assuring the quality of products at Macy's.[129] The *New York Journal and American* published this special feature but did not syndicate the black and white dailies or Sunday color version of the Superman newspaper comic strip making it an unusual choice for advertising the attraction. This piece of marketing directed at children is so significant that legal records even mention it. According to the 1947 court case litigated under premise that DC Comics withheld royalties from Superman's creators, "R.H. Macy & Co., Inc. caused an advertisement containing Superman material to be printed in the New York Journal-American on one occasion, in connection with a Thanksgiving Day parade held by R.H. Macy & Co., Inc., which material was printed with the consent of Detective Comics, Inc." The court record also stated that Macy's did not pay DC Comics to use Superman's image in the advertisement.[130] This suggests the length that the company went to developing the Superman brand by expecting a long term rather than an immediate return on their investment. Jack S. Liebowitz understood that he had to build Comicland to make the Man of Steel profitable.

---

[129] "Macy's Presents Superman In The Subterranean Caverns" and "Macy's Toy Parade for 1940," *New York Journal and American*, Sunday Final, no. 19,333, November 24, 1940, n.p. (Comics Section).

[130] See Findings Of Fact entry 121 and 122 in Appellate Case No. 12-57245, March 5, 2013, ID: 8538472, *DC Comics v. Pacific Pictures Corporation*, et. al, Case No. CV 10-3633 ODW (RZx), Exhibit C: 75, p. ER-620. Originally from the 1947 Westchester action *Jerome Siegel and Joseph Shuster v. National Comics Publications, Inc.*, et al. See also "'Superman's' Creators Win Accounting in Fight Over Profits," *PM Sunday* (New York, NY), vol. 8, no. 42, November 30, 1947, p. 6.

Superman's leading role at Macy's toy department prompted comment by the press. On November 23, 1940, the communist newspaper the *Daily Worker* acknowledged the Superman theme in Macy's Toyland.[131] A few days later a New York sportswriter grumbled, "Macy's replaced Santa Claus with Superman. No tradition is sacred anymore."[132] The gossip column "The Talk of The Town" in the December 14, 1940, issue of *The New Yorker* provided supposed details on the business side and accentuated Superman's preeminence over Santa Claus.

> When Superman, the comic-strip character who can catch cannon balls with his bare hands, moved in on Santa Claus in Macy's toy department, we knew that he was a success. Macy's paid Detective Comics, Inc., a newspaper syndicate, which owns Superman, a substantial license fee for the use of Superman's name and likeness. … Santa Claus is in the public domain, and consequently not so highly regarded. Matter of fact, you'd probably stand a better chance of getting something you wanted if you asked Superman instead of Santa Claus.[133]

The claim of a license fee in the article quoted above somewhat contradicts the legal record covered in the prior paragraph.

Like "Superman Day" at the 1940 New York World's Fair, admiration for the Man of Steel at Macy's was equal between genders. A Girl Scout troop from just north of Manhattan traveled to the city in 1940 for a shopping trip and visited Macy's. The local newspaper for Orangetown and Pearl River, New York, reported, "The children had an enjoyable time at Macy's and saw Santa, the Superman, and enjoyed riding up and down the escalators."[134] *Sparks* explained that local boys and girls skipped school to visit Superman at the store in the winter of 1940–1941: "Macy's Toy Dept. during the Christmas season is such a mecca for children that it has also become the happy hunting ground of the truant officers. They prowl the Fifth Floor regularly in search of boys and girls who prefer Superman to the multiplication tables."[135] According to another article from the same January 1941 issue of *Sparks*, one child fancied Superman over his mother. "Officer Roberts told us of a little boy who was lost in the Christmas rush and when he told him not to cry, that he would find his mother for him, little Junior cried,

---

[131] Harry Raymond, "Point of Order," *Daily Worker* (New York, NY), vol. 17, no. 282, November 23, 1940, p. 6.
[132] Joe Williams, "Best Scouted Play. Beats Cornell. In Penn Game," *Rome Daily Sentinel* (Rome, NY), vol. 59, November 26, 1940, p. 9. The Superman reference is missing from original article, however. See Joe Williams, "Best-Scouted Play. Beats Cornell. In Penn Game," *New York World-Telegram*, 7th Sports Edition, vol. 73, no. 124, November 25, 1940, p. 22.
[133] "The Talk of The Town: Santa's Helper," *The New Yorker*, December 14, 1940, p. 20.
[134] "County Correspondence: Tallman," *Orangetown Telegram and The Pearl River Searchlight* (Orangetown and Pearl River, NY), vol. 47, no. 50, December 13, 1940, p. 2.
[135] "Did You Know That—?," *Sparks* (January 1941), p. 6.

'Wah, I don't want my mother, I want Superman!'"[136] This marks the early expression of tension between mothers and children over Superman and authority. The source of the conflict is that the Man of Steel becomes a de facto parental figure. Postwar superhero play inspired by the television show starring George Reeves amplified the generational conflict. This material appears in the next chapter.

While no images of the Macy's in-store event remain, the comic strip advertisement and subsequent advertisements in the *New York Journal and American* and the *Daily Mirror* implied the creation of a massive subterranean-themed maze for children.[137] *The New Yorker* verified the twenty-nine-cent price and event at Macy's that was apparently called Superman Adventures. The comic strip advertisement visualized the type of experience children would receive in Macy's Toyland with a live actor dressed as the Man of Steel. *The New Yorker* described the event this way:

> If your brood thrives on screaming excitement, don't miss the Macy extravaganza entitled "Superman Adventures." While adult escorts remain safely outside, the children, in carloads, are whizzed into tunnels under the care of Superman himself, who pushes the car through a rock, a cave-in, and a volcano. The kids emerge, dizzy with joy, to receive gifts and newspapers telling of Superman's exploits. That's all, and what more could you ask for twenty-nine cents?[138]

Besides Superman Adventures, Macy's used a miniature story world to entice children to walk by and hopefully enter their Manhattan store. In late 1940, Bliss Display Corporation illustrator Russell Patterson constructed an elaborate window display that included a Superman figure and corresponding skyscraper carved out of wood to form the fifth expression of the corporate vision of Comicland. An image of the design appeared in *Look* magazine for the issue dated December 3, 1940. Although the article failed to indicate for which department store Patterson created the materials, contemporary evidence name-checked Macy's.[139] This was just

---

[136] Violet Chintala, "Balcony Brevities," *Sparks* (January 1941), p. 21.

[137] See the advertisements, *New York Journal and American*, Sunday Final Edition, no. 19,347, December 8, 1940, p. D-5; *New York Journal and American*, 7th Sport Racing Sports Complete Edition, no. 19,349, December 10, 1940, p. 5; *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), Complete Sports Edition, vol. 17, no. 146, December 10, 1940, p. 8; *New York Journal and American*, Sunday Final Edition, no. 19,354, December 15, 1940, p. D-5. There were slight differences in the text of each advertisement.

[138] "Christmas Gifts: Toys," *The New Yorker*, vol. 16, no. 42, November 30, 1940, p. 68.

[139] "Christmas Windows. Best Show of the Year," *Look*, December 3, 1940, pp. 28–29. Another article indicated that Russell Patterson designed the "animated toy windows" for Macy's in 1940. See "Thanksgiving Parade Dinner To Be Held by Macy's," *Women's Wear Daily*, November 4, 1940, p. 20. The tiny print at the top of a Macy's newspaper advertisement mentioned Patterson as the designer for Macy's toy windows. See *New York World-Telegram*, 7th Sports Edition, vol. 73, no. 136, December 9, 1940, p. 13.

another way that Macy's materialized Superman across the cityscape and brought Comicland to life.

Along with selling the playsuit, the New York City retailer capitalized on the Superman craze with a balloon, a live actor and ride, and a window display to draw children and thereby their parents into the flagship store. It is reasonable to infer that a child eager to see Superman could propel a parent to enter Macy's and generate an unplanned sale. This was, at least, the thinking of Macy's as the language indicated in their full-color comic strip advertisement. Macy's urged children to pester their parents. "HAVE YOUR PARENTS BRING YOU TO MACY'S TO MEET SUPERMAN. HURRY! HURRY! HURRY! HURRY!"[140] [*sic*] The twenty-nine-cent admission fee to meet Superman and display window attracted potential customers. John Kobler correctly referenced the power of Superman at Macy's the following summer but made a one cent error on the admission price. "When R. H. Macy & Co. staged a Superman exhibit in its New York store last Christmas, it took in $30,000 in thirty-cent admissions."[141] In other words, over 100,000 children attended the event. Newspaper articles from around the country confirmed the attendance record: "More than a hundred thousand children paid to see the Superman show at department store in New York city."[142] Macy's advertisements following the special comic strip in the *New York Journal and American* stated a price of twenty-nine cents. Under the text "CHILDREN, SEE SUPERMAN!" [*sic*] the description read: "He'll take you through caverns under the earth, you'll get a Prize, all for 29c. Macy's Fifth Floor."[143]

Superman remained a feature of Macy's Christmas events two years after his debut in their Toyland and continued to impact the corporate culture. For example, in the February 1941 of *Sparks*, an employee, obviously tired of their commute, wondered "how much Superman would charge to bring me to Macy's every day???"[144] According to the December 1942 issue, Ed Alence, a Fordham University student and Macy's employee, was scheduled "to play 'Superman'

---

[140] "Macy's Presents Superman In The Subterranean Caverns," *New York Journal and American*, November 24, 1940, n.p. (Comics Section).
[141] Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, p. 15.
[142] "Superman Picture Is Coming To The Strand," *The New Market Era*, December 17, 1941, p. 2; "'Superman' To Be Shown at Ryan's," *The Adirondack Record-Elizabethtown Post*, January 8, 1942, p. 4.
[143] See the advertisements, *New York Journal and American*, December 8, 1940, p. D-5; *New York Journal and American*, December 10, 1940, p. 5; *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), December 10, 1940, p. 8; *New York Journal and American*, December 15, 1940, p. D-5. There were slight differences in the text of each advertisement.
[144] Sylvia Sedell, "Table Tales," *Sparks* (February 1941), p. 28.

for the children during Christmas." However, "For reasons unknown he declined and is now in Toys."[145] *Newsweek* wrote on May 10, 1943, that Superman, Inc. conquered both the comic strips and Santa Claus' den in Macy's Toyland. It is unclear if the article recalled the 1940 attraction, implied that some version of Superman Adventures persisted over the next three years, or referenced a holiday season actor.[146] Newspaper evidence indicated that DC Comics business relationship with Macy's extended into the 1950s. *Women's Wear Daily* explained on February 6, 1953, that Macy's fashioned a deal for a 3 percent commission on Superman products sold at their stores.[147] One can assume that the arrangement had to be similar for the previous decade. Furthermore, it is logical to infer that Macy's believed that Superman offered them a potential revenue stream by enticing children and thereby their parents to their flagship store. The company aimed to force, in the modern lingo, an impulse buy.

Comicland Through Toys

Macy's promoted two other pieces of Superman merchandise besides the playsuit. They exclusively sold the "Superman Movie Viewer" and advertised the product in the Sunday edition of the New York *Daily News* five days earlier. Although Macy's utilized the *New York Journal and American* to promote Superman Adventures, the department store returned to the *Daily News* to market this Superman product as they did the Superman Playsuit. The full-page advertisement on December 15, 1940, for Macy's Toyland indicated that they possessed a 5,000-item stock and that the movie viewers were on sale for thirty-nine cents, a nickel lower than the list price. The toy included eight films, but fans could also purchase an additional five films for twenty-three cents. "Put your whole eye to the peep-hole! See 8 whole, thrilling Superman adventures! Additional Superman films 5 for 23c," the advertisement read. The text in all capital letters also reminded local children of Superman's in-person presence at Macy's. "SEE SUPERMAN ON MACY'S FIFTH FLOOR."[148] [*sic*] Consumption of mail-away products advertised inside comic books such as knives and guns as well as other gimmicky toys like Superman's "Krypto-Raygun" further entrenched children in consumerism and the Superman

---

[145] Ann Moje, "Saturday-Only Snoopings," *Sparks* (December 1942), p. 42.
[146] "Radio: The Children's Hour," *Newsweek*, vol. 21, no. 19, May 10, 1943, p. 72.
[147] "This Week," *Women's Wear Daily* (New York, NY), vol. 86, no. 26, February 6, 1953, p. 11.
[148] See the Macy's Toyland advertisement in *Sunday News* (New York, NY), Manhattan 2-Star to 4-Star Final Editions, vol. 20, no. 35, December 15, 1940, p. 9. For a fleeting reference to the toy, see Gaines, *Contested Culture*, p. 222.

brand as well as transporting them to Comicland.[149] Macy's did not sell the pistol and DC Comics did not advertise the toy outside of the comic book pages. These reasons in conjunction with the absence of new evidence accounts for the lack of attention to the product in this chapter.

DC Comics also deployed Superman during the holidays outside of Macy's Toyland for the Juvenile Aid Bureau. The *New York Post* provided a photograph and brief description of an athletic actor playing Superman at the Floyd Horton Police Athletic League Youth Center in Manhattan. The image from December 20, 1940, revealed an enamored group of boys and girls crowding around Superman. In a display of strength, Superman held a young girl on his left shoulder. Two uniformed police officers stood behind Superman as Deputy Police Commissioner John H. Morris handed out the "Superman Movie Viewer" to at least eight children. Publisher Harry Donenfeld stood nearby and watched with a cheerful grin, effectively supervising his creation of Comicland. The paper reported that Superman, Inc. planned to give away 5,000 toys worth $500 to New York kids. Nonetheless, the charity function may have also acted as a publicity gimmick to sell the Superman toy. Reinforcing the connection examined in an earlier section of this chapter, the laconic actor (whose identity remained secret) simultaneously played Santa Claus at the center.[150]

DC Comics extended their creation of Comicland and commercialist vision with the Superbabe doll in 1947.[151] They used the children's toy, released just in time for the holiday season, as a story line tie-in. Exposure to atomic energy in the Sunday color edition of the *Superman* newspaper comic strip no. 415 dated October 14, 1947, turns the Man of Steel into an infant. The motif lasted until strip no. 428 dated January 11, 1948, when scientists reverse the

---

[149] For the Krypto-Raygun, see Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, p. 15; Daniels, *Superman*, pp. 48–50; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Culture*, pp. 133, 135, 202n17; Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, p. 14; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 113–114; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 22–23, 106–107, 146–147.

See also the critique of comic books advertising weapons as toys and phony medicines by the two major alarmists. Gershon Legman, *Love & Death: A Study in Censorship* (New York, NY: Breaking Point, 1949), p. 32; Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York, NY: Reinhart and Company, Inc., 1953), pp. 4–5, 10, 24–25, 30, 33, 162, 197–198, 207, 212, 214, 319–320. For general mentions of products and advertising, see Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. 84–85, 278, 280; Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, p. 4. Advertising was, however, limited to the back cover plus the inside front cover and the inside back cover. Unlike the newspaper, advertising did not ensure comic book publication. See Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 334, 350.

[150] "Superman Starts Making Christmas Merry," *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 140, no. 29, December 20, 1940, p. 6.

[151] For secondary source mention, see Tye, *Superman*, pp. 125–126.

radioactive effects and restore Superman to normal size.[152] Deemed a newsworthy event, *Time* reported on the peculiar turn in the comic strip on October 27, 1947.

> Readers of Superman got a shock last week. So did their comic-strip hero. As Superman attempted to shut off some loose atomic rays in a research laboratory, the radioactivity changed him into a baby. Superbaby's comment: "Goo."[153]

Little did they know, it was a marketing ploy. DC Comics used this strange story line as another expression of commercializing Comicland to young boys and girls. An advertisement from the Doll-Of-The-Month Club in the New York *Sunday News* on November 30, 1947, announced the confusing marketing for the foot-tall doll named Superbabe costing three dollars and forty-nine cents plus postage. The language stated it was for boys but then told girls to buy the doll to attract the attention of boys, and vice versa. Apparently, toy manufacturers did not yet realize that boys generally dislike dolls, especially those of babies. Just like the comics books, the advertisement used a jarring bold font and capital letters.

> "Look! Up in the Air! Is it a Bird? Is it a Plane? NO ---It's **SUPERMAN! SUPERBABE The DOLL <u>for BOYS!</u>**
>
> You've heard all about how Superman was turned into a Superbaby by an atomic explosion, how the baby is gifted with all the superior strength that Superman had — well here it is — at last! SUPERBABE — the amazing new doll-of-the century!
>
> What a reception you'll get from the **BOYS** when you bring this Super Baby home. And watch the **GIRLS** snatch him to feel his muscles and admire his physique. **SUPERBABE** is 12" tall, opens and closes his eyes, sits down and is absolutely **handsome.**
>
> **WONDER OF THE AGE!**
>
> He is all composition, dressed in the famous Superman costume with Blue Jersey Shirt with red-and-yellow "S" insignia; red cotton shorts with yellow belt; red cotton magic cape; red shoes, blue socks and snap button on cape and pants. Eyes are real, live-looking glass; legs and arms are moveable for easy dressing and undressing. What fun you will have with Superbabe![154]

---

[152] See strips no. 415 to 428, October 12, 1947, in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Sundays, 1946–1949* (San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2014), pp. 71–84.
[153] "The Press: Superbaby," *Time*, vol. 50, no. 17, October 27, 1947, p. 78.
[154] See advertisements in the *Sunday News* (New York, NY), 1-Star Home Edition, vol. 27, no. 31, November 30, 1947, p. 27; *Sunday News* (New York, NY), 3-Star Home Edition (both versions), vol. 27, no. 31, November 30, 1947, p. C31. See also *The Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger*, vol. 237, no. 167, December 14, 1947, p. 21 (Parade – Everybody's Weekly section).

A write up in *The New York Times* that same day listed the cost as five dollars and ninety-five cents but did not name the retailer.[155] Besides the mail order option, Macy's sold a larger version of the Superman baby doll according to another advertisement in the New York *Daily News* on December 9, 1947. This time, they smartly marketed the doll to girls.

> Sale! Super-Babe
>
> Macy's own latex-rubber doll 4.98
>
> He's a 15" latex-rubber-skin baby doll that's made and dressed exactly as he is in the funnies. He's Superman turned baby by mysterious "atomic radiation." His arms and legs move—his eyes open and close. Super-Babe even sits. He's dressed in pants and shirt with his own "S" insignia streamlined flaming red cape. Little girls will bathe him and dress him up in diapers and layettes they own. Write, phone (LA 4-6000). Fixture 2. Macy's Toy Centre, Fifth Floor.[156]

Macy's then reduced the price nine days later to three dollars and ninety-eight cents, presumably to a lack of interest in the product. The advertisements in the *Daily News* and *The New York Times* listed the retail price as five dollars and fifty-nine cents.[157] That same month an Asbury Park, New Jersey, retailer slashed the price from three dollars and twenty-nine cents to two dollars and ninety-eight cents to the closeout price of one dollar and ninety-nine cents.[158] An advertisement for Gimbles department store in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on December 16, 1947, sold the doll for two dollars and ninety-five cents and marketed it to only girls.[159] The Superbabe doll, however unsuccessful, was the final major creation of Comicland by DC Comics in the 1940s. The takeaway here is that while girls traveled to the neighborhood of Comicland, boys were the main residents.

---

[155] "Week's Best Promotions: Women's and Misses' Apparel Lead List of Offerings," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 97, no. 32,817, November 30, 1947, p. 6F (Section 3).
[156] See advertisement in the *Daily News* (New York, NY), Multiple Editions, vol. 29, no. 143, December 9, 1947, p. 9.
[157] See advertisements in the *Daily News* (New York, NY), Multiple Editions, vol. 29, no. 151, December 18, 1947, p. 13; *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 97, no. 32,835, December 18, 1947, p. 7.
[158] See advertisements in the *Asbury Park Evening Press* (Asbury Park, NJ), yr. 61, no. 292, December 12, 1947, p. 6; *Asbury Park Evening Press* (Asbury Park, NJ), yr. 61, no. 298, December 19, 1947, p. 6; *Asbury Park Evening Press* (Asbury Park, NJ), yr. 61, no. 31, December 23, 1947, p. 7.
[159] See advertisement in *The Pittsburgh Press*, 7-Star Final Edition, vol. 64, no. 175, December 16, 1947, p. 3.

Postwar Superman Balloons

DC Comics significantly reduced its commercialization of Comicland during the late 1940s and 1950s because of the comics scare but came back strong in the 1960s with a new balloon that seemed to hold the same appeal. Twenty-six years after gracing the New York skyline, the Man of Steel reappeared for the fortieth anniversary of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade but ten feet smaller than its predecessor.[160] Press outlets around the country announced the new sixty-five-foot Superman balloon for the two-mile procession in 1966. *The Evening Press* of Binghamton, New York, for example, provided Superman's many measurements. According to the paper, Superman, the eighty-seventh balloon created by Macy's, was sixty-five-feet-tall with a "magnificent chest" of 798 inches and biceps bulging to 265 inches. Other articles explained that thirty-three tethers secured Superman. One million people viewed the carnival in person and Macy's estimated that another 60 million watched at home.[161] Along with the campy Batman television show, the parade broadcast Comicland to America and reestablished its cultural power. By this time, the parade was synonymous with the civic holiday and became a family ritual to watch on television. No different than 1940, "The youngsters squealed in delight at the huge floating models of their favorite people: Superman, Popeye, Donald Duck, Smokey the Bear, and others." *The New York Times* registered this historical insight on the audible reaction of children on the twenty-fifth of November.[162] Telling photographic negatives at the Macy's corporate archive showed children moving away from the

---

[160] See the undated and 1966 videos uploaded to YouTube by The University of Akron special collections division. "Goodyear Film: Parade Balloons," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJbqakMRQY0&feature=youtu.be and "1966 Macy Day Parade," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpKXwzXrQ3M&feature=youtu.be.

[161] See, in chronological order, John McDonnell, "Goodyear Lion Ready to Parade," *Chicago Tribune*, Final Edition, vol. 120, no. 317, November 13, 1966, pp. 11, 13; "Goings On About Town: For Children," *The New Yorker*, vol. 42, no. 39, November 19, 1966, p. 14; "Smokey Joins the Parade of Balloons," *The Evening Press* (Binghamton, NY), vol. 88, no. 189, November 19, 1966, p. 8; Elizabeth Sullivan, "TV Goodies Galore for This Thanksgiving Week," *Boston Sunday Globe*, vol. 190, no. 143, November 20, 1966, p. B-66; "Thanksgiving Day Fare: Turkey, Football, Worship," *The Daily Home News* (New Brunswick, NJ), Central Edition, November 23, 1966, p. 46; Paul Jones, "Television Offerings Today Are Typically Thanksgiving," *The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution*, Final Edition, vol. 17, no. 28, November 23, 1966, p. 20-H; The Associated Press, "Prayer, Joy, Charity, and Grief Mark Holiday," *Chicago Tribune*, November 25, 1966, p. 9; The Associated Press, "Millions See N.Y. Parade," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Final City Edition, vol. 40, no. 101, November 25, 1966, p. 4; The Associated Press, "Millions See Thanksgiving Parade," *The Courier-News* (Plainfield, NJ), Final Edition, vol. 83, no. 150, November 25, 1966, p. 12; The Associated Press, "One Million Watch Thanksgiving Day Parade," *The Daily Home News* (New Brunswick, NJ), Central Edition, November 25, 1966, p. 42; The Associated Press, "Millions See Floats, Mammoth Balloons," *The Hartford Courant*, Final Edition, vol. 129, no. 329, November 25, 1966, p. 5; "Contrasts Mark Thanksgiving Day: Festive Parade Is Followed by Antiwar March Here—Many Attend Services," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 106, no. 39,752, November 25, 1966, pp. 1, 41; United Press International, "Calling His Bluff," *The Washington Post Times Herald*, vol. 89, no. 355, November 25, 1966, p. A2.

[162] "Contrasts Mark Thanksgiving Day," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1966, p. 41.

sidewalk and deeper into the street to get a better view of the approaching Superman balloon. This forced a police officer to usher the children back to the sidewalk.[163] Unfavorable weather, unfortunately, obscured the view of Superman. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Superman's head was nearly out of sight in the smog that blanketed much of the northeastern seaboard."[164] Yet, some lucky children experienced Superman up close before the parade. One photograph appearing in local newspapers showed the nets securing Superman that Jon Altschuler mentioned seeing back in the early 1940s. The image displayed a brother and sister playing in front of the Superman balloon. Eight-year-old Andy Weissmann jumped toward the sky in hopes of touching Superman's nose. This photograph proved that nothing had changed in twenty-six years.[165]

Just as in 1940, Superman was a main attraction for the 1966 parade. To create a buzz, Macy's advertised the new balloon in New York newspapers.[166] Goodyear's internal newsletter *The Wingfoot Clan* discussed a publicity stunt for Superman on the seventeenth of November. A photograph showed the Superman balloon surprising two "hapless hoodlums" in front of a getaway car. The article also explained that the "super balloon" created by Goodyear required "almost 500 square yards of rubberized nylon fabric." Unlike the previous incarnation, this Superman balloon possessed a prominent cape. "Superman, easily recognizable in his blue uniform and red cape, is 67 feet high — tall enough to stand flatfooted and look into a sixth-story window." Another photograph held in Macy's archive showed that Superman play was still a popular activity in 1966 or at least a way to publicize the balloon. Somewhere in an Ohio field near the Goodyear factory a young boy in a Superman Playsuit stood with his arms on his hips with the Superman balloon directly behind him. Additionally, *The Wingfoot Clan* recorded the spatial flexibility of the deflated balloons and compared their volume to a telephone booth, the conventional site for Clark Kent's transformation into the Man of Steel. When deflated, Macy's "gasbag caricatures" fit "into a crate no larger than a telephone booth." The comparison seems to be a coded reference to Superman lore. Parade operation was, nevertheless, labor intensive and

---

[163] See binder Parade 1964 to 1966, folder 1966, Macy's.
[164] "SMOG: Air Pollution 1st Alert in New York," *Los Angeles Times*, Final Edition, vol. 85, November 27, 1966, p. 5 (Section G).
[165] The Associated Press, "One Million Watch Thanksgiving Day Parade," *The Daily Home News*, November 25, 1966, p. 42; United Press International, "Calling His Bluff," *The Washington Post Times Herald*, vol. 89, no. 355, November 25, 1966, p. A2
[166] See the advertisements in *Newsday* (Nassau County, NY), vol. 27, no. 62, November 15, 1966, p. 39 and *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 106, no. 39,750, November 23, 1966, p. 12.

tricky. *The Wingfoot Clan* explained the balloon preparation and handling process: "It will take 84,000 cubic feet of helium to inflate the 10 figure balloons this year, and 300 line handlers to guide them safely along the two-and-one-half-mile parade route with its sometimes tricky air currents in the canyons of Columbus Circle, Times Square and Herald Square."[167]

The Superman balloon was the second activity that year with the character. Back on May 17, 1966, Superman actor Bob Holiday appeared at Macy's flagship store in a publicity event to sell records for the struggling Broadway show. The advertisement in the *Daily News* informed readers that Holiday would be autographing the album, which was to become a collector's item.

> Buy Columbia's recording of the musical's original cast. "Superman's" Bob Holiday will be signing the albums you purchase and turning them into collector's items. See a real super-star. Tell your friends you saw Superman . . . [*sic*] show them your autographed record to prove it.

In his autobiography, Holiday writes:

> There were some good crowds at Macy's. A surprising number of kids showed up. I remember signing the albums with "*Up Up and Away*." I felt like a rock and roll star. The store sold quite a few cast albums.[168]

The Superman balloon returned in 1967, 1968, 1969, and 1970.[169] Its new design with an over inflated chest, however, did not convey the might and chiseled physique associated with Superman from the comics. The attempt to highlight the inverted triangle, which is an unattainable body image for most men, ended up creating an overturned pear-shape that made Superman appear clunky and out of proportion. Actually, the 1940 balloon did a better job at capturing Superman's figure and made him appear more human.

The third version of the Superman balloon for the 1980 parade corrected this physiological mistake. Superman reappeared with a more realistic body shape and had a new

---

[167] "Big New Balloons Have Been Built For Parade," *The Wingfoot Clan: The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company* (Akron, OH), Akron Edition, vol. 55, no. 46, November 17, 1966, p. 8. The University of Akron special collections division digitized this publication. For the image of Superman play with the 1966 balloon, see binder Balloons Book 8, Macy's.

[168] "**ZOWIE!** *Bob Holiday of the musical Superman is coming to Macy★s*," [*sic*] *Daily News* (New York, NY), Multiple Editions, vol. 47, no. 258, May 16, 1966, p. 18; Bob Holiday & Chuck Harter, *Superman on Broadway* (n.p.: [Self Published,] 2003), p. 74. The book provides a clipping that is mistakenly attributed to the *New York Herald Tribune* on May 15, 1966. For a secondary source mention, see Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 69.

[169] "Millions To See Company Balloons," *The Wingfoot Clan: The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company* (Akron, OH), Akron Edition, vol. 56, no. 44, November 22, 1967, pp. 1–2; "Balloon By Rockmart: 'Snoopy To Fly In Thanksgiving Parade," *The Wingfoot Clan: The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company* (Akron, OH), Akron Edition, vol. 57, no. 47, November 21, 1968, pp. 1–2; "Macy Parade Gets Color & Lift," *The Wingfoot Clan: The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company* (Akron, OH), Akron Edition, vol. 58, no. 47, November 20, 1969, pp. 1–2.

horizontal design to depict flight in the style of actor Christopher Reeve. This iteration lasted until 1987 to support the four-movie franchise.[170] Unsurprisingly, the balloon disappeared after *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*. Warranting both popular and critical condemnation, the picture exhausted the franchise and the Superman balloon beyond resuscitation.

Yet, the automobile company Honda did not think a Superman balloon was out of gas. Two years later, the one hundredth iteration of the Rose Parade held in Pasadena, California, on January 2, 1989, featured a $60,000 Superman balloon that rivaled the Macy's versions in appearance. Honda commissioned the balloon for its float in the parade. The Man of Helium made the news after breaking free from his tethers and crashing into Cowles Mountain near El Cajon during a stress test. *Los Angeles Times* reporter Caroline Lemke inferred that this was the first time Superman flew unaccompanied in the real world. "In a single bound the 54-foot-high balloon broke loose from its tethers in the parking lot of Bigger Than Life, a company that makes oversized inflatables, and soared up to 7,000 feet before dropping and smashing into the side of Cowles Mountain, about three miles west of El Cajon." Luckily, no one was injured, and the unscheduled flight only damaged Superman's cape, which was repaired in time for the event. Although the Superman balloon's thirty-minute joyride did not interfere with any planes, it did encroach on Lindbergh Field's airspace. Because of their proximity to the airport, Bigger Than Life alerted the Federal Aviation Administration. *Los Angeles Times* journalist David Ferrell, however, offered slightly different information such as the height of the balloon as fifty-five feet. Nevertheless, the most interesting part of the story was an outlandish request to law enforcement. Bigger Than Life employees chased after the Superman balloon in their cars and contacted the San Diego County Sherriff's Department in hopes that they would be able to shoot it down from a police helicopter.[171] Despite Superman's absence from such parades, his presence is still visible

---

[170] Daniels, *Superman*, p. 163.

[171] For Superman at the Rose Parade, see, in chronological order, Caroline Lemke, "Superman Takes Off But His Great Adventure Ends With Landing on Slope of Cowles Mountain," *Los Angeles Times*, San Diego County Edition, November 22, 1988, pp. 1–2 (Part II); "Superman flies in Calif. until the bubble bursts," *The Sun* (Baltimore MD), Sports Final, vol. 304, no. 5, November 22, 1988, p. 9A; Steve Harvey, "Only in L.A./People and Events," *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1988, p. 2; "Stealing a March on Rose Parade," *Los Angeles Times*, Orange County P.M. Final, December 15, 1988, p. 2 (San Gabriel Valley Part IX); David Ferrell, "Parade Comes Up Roses Despite the Challenges," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1988, pp. 1, 20–22 (Part I); David Ferrell, "Rose Parade's Enduring Legacy: Long Year of Preparation Climaxes in Happy Chaos," *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday Final Edition, January 1, 1989, pp. 1, 3, 24–26 (Part I); David Ferrell, "Route to the Rose Parade: Hectic Year Again Ends in Happy Chaos," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1989, pp. 1, 3, 41–43 (Part I); Amy Pyle, "Ham Operators: Parade's Communication's Lifeline," *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1989, pp. 5, 21 (Part I); Patt Morrison, "Variety Marks Rose Parade: For a 100-Year-Old, It Rolled Right Along," *Los Angeles Times*, Standard, Late Final, and Orange

in popular culture in many other ways as the subsequent chapters show. All of these balloons reactivated the third major expression of Comicland first initiated in 1940.

The following year seemed to mark the rise of another DC Comics superhero. The 1989 summer release of the first Batman movie changed American culture. As such, the schedule for the 1990 Israel Parade held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on the thirteenth of May included a Batman cosplayer.[172] *The Jewish Chronicle* reported that "unauthorized" expression of Comicland by one fan on the twelfth of April. Although public engagement with the character did not occur to the same degree as Superman, this climate was ripe for a Batman balloon. Macy's wanted to make sure that DC Comics did not miss another opportunity with their next movie. Given their experience with the Superman and Spider-Man balloons, Macy's suggested to DC Comics' corporate owners Warner Bros. that they sponsor a Batman balloon in March 1992. They were evidently aware of the upcoming summer release of the sequel *Batman Returns*.

> As you know, the Parade has figured prominently in the marketing strategy of many entertainment and merchandise compaigns. [*sic*] It is literally the only television program that offers an excellent audience with demographics that reach the family at a time when they are actively looking to make holiday purchases. As the official start of the holiday shopping season the Parade provides you with not only a savy [*sic*] marketing vehicle, but a spectacular and completely unique venue with an impact not available through traditional product advertising and cross promotion.
>
> A Batman balloon will capture the imagination not only of the public, but the media as well. Based on our experience with Spider-man, [*sic*] Batman will probably break records with media coverage of its premiere appearance in the Parade.

Claiming budget considerations, the chairman's office at Warner Bros. rejected the balloon idea the following month, but it seems that they made another arrangement with Macy's. The winter-themed movie *Batman Returns* dovetailed nicely into Macy's holiday season wheelhouse. Even though no written records exist of an arrangement between the companies, archived photographs

---

County Editions, January 3, 1989, pp. 10, 23 (Part I); Anthony Millican, "Some S.D. Exporters Ready to Reap Benefits of European Changes in '92," *Los Angeles Times*, Orange County Edition, April 12, 1990, pp. D2A–D2B (Business Section). See also the recollection Damon Darlin, "Bigger than life," *Forbes*, vol. 154, no. 14, December 19, 1994, p. 284.

[172] "Floats ahoy for Parade," *The Jewish Chronicle* (Pittsburgh, PA), vol. 29, no. 9, April 12, 1990, p. 22.

depicted several elaborate Macy's Herald Square window displays of the movie's characters and costumes.[173]

Conclusion

The superhero fantasy is clearly not a fad. Superman's popularity evidenced by the playsuit and other merchandise, festivities at the 1940 New York World's Fair, celebration in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and holiday season events over the decades proves this. Superman Day presents unique archival footprints in tracing the behind-the-scenes activities of Detective Comics, Inc. and Superman, Inc. as well as the voices of children. The event is an example of Comic-Con before Comic-Con. If not the original, it is definitely one of the earliest instances of organized costumed play. Comicland is a commercialized form of pageantry separate from the older European expressions as ritual or protest. Alignment with Macy's in the 1940s and 1950s continued Superman's impact on New York City. His unavoidable ubiquity showcases the power of modern fantasy and the growth of secular imagination as he rivaled Santa Claus in the minds of children. Rekindling the aerial partnership in 1966 rocketed Superman back onto the national stage. Five televised years of the Superman balloon reinstated the character's seminal place in American culture and paved the way for the first two Christopher Reeve movies, which the public wholeheartedly welcomed. These celebratory events established Comicland not only in the American psyche of adults, but children as well. The story of how youngsters incorporated Superman in their play and attempted to personify him follows in the next chapter.

[173] Kathryn M. Gaffney to Janice Hamlin, letter, March 23, 1992, and Janice Hamlin to Jean McFaddin, letter, June 22, 1992, drawer 19a, folder Warner Bros., Macy's. For the *Batman Returns* photographs, see drawer 19a, folder Warner Bros. Consumer Products "Batman," Macy's. See also the comment thread by Jose A. Rivera dated December 23, 2019, http://saturdaysleepovers.podwits.com/2019/12/20/batman-returns-1992/.

CHAPTER 2: CHILDHOOD COMICLAND

While DC Comics fashioned Comicland in New York, boys across the country brought Superman and his world to life in their own neighborhoods through imaginary play. Superman's influence and persistence within boys' development became such an undeniable force that he generated a debate over proper child rearing. This phase of Comicland is about the total consumption and adoption of Superman by generations of boys and how that manifested in their play. Now, the Man of Steel was so influential to youngsters that two types of superhero play developed. Most boys safely pretended that they were Superman while the numerical few, yet highest documented, dangerously thought by wearing his cape they too could enact his fantastic feats and suffered broken bones or perished. Others foolishly involved their play around fire resulting in severe burns or unintentional arson. The documentary evidence catalogued here demonstrates the deep saturation of this fictional character in the lives of boys who played Superman. While some have mentioned this behavior, it has yet to be properly analyzed.[1] Three popular Superman historians unwittingly dismiss these reports as mere legend.[2] Superman play and its resulting injury, in turn, raised concerns on many fronts, serving as persistent flashpoint about child psychology, the role of television, and proper parenting. Emulation of Superman speaks to the larger issue of how to raise boys, and what their play signified to adults over the years. The extent that boys materially and physically engaged with Superman ushered in a multidecade concern over health, development, and ultimately fitness for society. As an unlikely battleground, Superman represented flight and freedom (not in the Enlightenment sense but rather unbridled movement) to children but excessive consumerism and violence to many adults. Superhero play and its corresponding discourse solidified the reality of Comicland.

Shortly after Superman's debut in the comics, cognitively balanced and imbalanced boys sought to imitate his ability to leap and fly. The *Adventures of Superman* starring George Reeves premiered on television in 1952. The show, which brought Superman to life as a "real person," deepened the children's bond to the character. Producers fueled the conceit by listing Reeves'

---

[1] See Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 235–236, 278; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 149–150, 241; Scott Bukatman, "Some Observations Pertaining to Cartoon Physics; or, The Cartoon Cat in the Machine," in *Animating Film Theory*, ed. Karen Beckman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 307.

[2] See Grossman, *Superman*, p. 49; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 55; De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 107.

name in the credits but not directly identifying him as playing Superman, a pattern initiated in the 1940s with radio actor Clayton "Bud" Collyer and movie serial actor Kirk Alyn.[3] The television series also moved flight from the imagination to "reality." Although the animated cartoon series by Max Fleischer first visualized Superman's conquest of the skies, it did not have a human actor simulating flight or maintain the same exposure as the television show.[4] Historian Ian Gordon writes that the Reeves series "has not left much evidence of audience engagement." Superman play, however, illustrates otherwise.[5] The campy culture of the 1960s reintroduced Batman and Robin to society and a new generation of youngsters. While Batman and Robin costuming ensued, emulation of their acrobatics was scant in comparison to Superman because the Dynamic Duo could not fly. The Christopher Reeve movie franchise in the late 1970s and 1980s amplified the problem of imitating Superman for a new generation. Regardless of the decade, boys repurposed towels and pillowcases for capes, but gravity triumphed. This dangerous activity of superhero play was a source of concern among the press, educators, transatlantic medical professionals, mothers, and DC Comics. Reports amassed from across America of mentally sound and unsound boys performing stunts like Superman.

"Superhero play,"[6] the term pediatric experts use, expressed a new form of pretend and physical activity that preschool teachers preemptively worried to be violent and aggressive. Yet, superhero roughhousing is simply an outgrowth of cops and robbers play. Although similar, such "rough-and-tumble play," the preferred phrasing by early education specialists, does not include the imaginative component of assuming the role of media characters with superpowers or

---

[3] For Clayton "Bud" Collyer and the related omission of George Reeves in the credits on the special 1957 *I Love Lucy* episode, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 2, 36. The early Superman movie serials did the same thing by billing Kirk Alyn as Clark Kent and not Superman. See "Hail The Forgotten Man!," *Daily Variety*, vol. 61, October 18, 1948, p. 2; Kirk Alyn, *A Job for Superman* (Los Angeles, CA: [Self Published,] 1971), pp. 6–7; Rob Edelman, "Vintage '40s & '50s Film Serials Were Smashes Before TV Did 'Em In," *Variety*, vol. 327, no. 11, July 8, 1987, p. 29; Tye, *Superman*, p. 99; Blair Davis, *Movie Comics: Page to Screen/Screen to Page* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), pp. 112, 117.

[4] For a discussion on Superman's origin of flight, see Tye, *Superman*, pp. 42–43, 92; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 42.

[5] Gordon, *Superman*, p. 139.

[6] Janice J. Beaty, *Converting Conflicts in Preschool* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1995), esp. pp. vii, xi, xiii, 3–4, 36–37, 125–142, 164; Brenda J. Boyd, "Teacher Response to Superhero Play: To Ban or Not To Ban?," *Childhood Education*, vol. 74, no. 1 (Fall 1997), pp. 23–28; Penny Holland, *We Don't Play With Guns Here: War, Weapon, and Superhero Play In The Early Years* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2003); Jeanne Susanne Galbraith, "Multiple Perspectives on Superhero Play In An Early Childhood Classroom" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2007); Jeanne Galbraith, "Welcome to Our Team Shark Boy! Making Superhero Play Visible," in *Educating Toddlers to Teachers: Learning to See and Influence the School and Peer Cultures of Classrooms*, eds. David Fernie, Samara Madrid, and Rebecca Kantor (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2011), pp. 37–62; Steven Popper, *Rethinking Superhero and Weapon Play* (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2013).

extraordinary abilities. The free-form movement of superhero play is also different from playing sports, which are structured games that may or may not include adult supervision and spectating. And unlike sports, superhero play has no established rules or scoring due to the emphasis on imagination. Geography is also a key component. Superheroes inspired children to perform "real-life" characters that live in cities and not the generic frontier archetypes of hero and "savage" found in the colonialist-type play of cowboys and Indians. Studying the influence of comics in January 1946, Columbia University social scientists for the Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) relayed the message that New York area children connected to these characters precisely because they mirrored their urban surroundings. "The characters look like human beings and they live in 'cities just like ours.'" The text also stated that "one might sum them up as physically realistic but psychologically unrealistic."[7] Authors Katherine M. Wolf and Marjorie Fiske phrase the idea a little differently in their essay published three years later. "In short, fantastic adventure comics of the Superman type are peopled by creatures who look like human beings and live in towns and cities just like those we ourselves live in, but who do not behave like human beings. Not only do they do things impossible for ordinary humans, but they fail to display any of the nuances of normal human behavior. The physical setting is realistic, but the psychological setting is unrealistic."[8] These factors made superhero play modern and more worrisome because of its closeness to reality. Technology too played a major role. Besides comic books and newspaper comic strips, broadcast media further cultivated superhero emulation. Author Kathleen Tracy suggests that television, with its fictional characters and worlds, minimized children's physical play and social interaction. "These youngsters would be the first generation to replace pretend friends with broadcast playmates. Instead of having to go outside and interact with others in a game of cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, or angels and devils, children only needed to turn on the television to be transported to another place and time." This opinion is, however, half true. Television watching might have decreased the overall level of children's outdoor physical play, but it did not stop movement. Superman inspired a new kind of solitary and communal play beginning in the 1940s. This activity increased among 1950s

---

[7] Marjorie Fiske and Katherine Wolf, *The Children Talk About Comics: A report on comic book reading, based on detailed case studies of 100 children from various family backgrounds*, no. 83a (January 1946), pp. 9–10, box 114, booklet B0243, BASR. The initials BASR is an abbreviation for the Bureau of Applied Social Research records, 1938–1977, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York.

[8] Katherine M. Wolf and Marjorie Fiske, "Children Talk About Comics," in *Communications Research, 1948–1949*, eds. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 7.

children, who typically viewed Superman as their "broadcast playmate." While girls were fans of Superman as well as Batman and Robin, they did not enact risky play at the same degree probably because of the gendered design of the superhero universe and the gendered approach to child rearing. As such, there is no evidence in the historical record of girls getting injured through superhero play. Although desired, an elaborate homemade or official costume was unnecessary. Playing Superman required only a towel or sheet and an active mind. Most significantly, he gave children an outlet to express their imagination.

At the same time, Superman induced anxiety over children's growing participation in the marketplace. He is perhaps the first major materialistic feature of childhood and arguably created the first national amusement culture for children. More than nickelodeons and movies, the comics fantasy moved kids deeper into the experience of entertainment as leisure, an allegedly adult realm, and made them devout consumers of a brand. The Superman Playsuit and children's treacherous imitation "proved" to crusaders that the entire comics industry and superheroes were a harmful force that required regulation or the more extreme position of elimination. Literature on the comics scare of the late 1940s that crested in 1954 with a three-day US Senate Subcommittee hearing overpasses the fact that the outrage over superheroes, which were wrongly submerged into the debate over the gory imagery of horror comics as instruction for criminal activity, was truly about children as independent consumers.[9] Fears of children becoming materialistic merged with the evils of entertainment philosophy championed throughout the postwar. The panic faded in the 1960s but resurfaced in 1975 and 1977. Apprehension over Superman mimicry and the comics medium were reinforcing discourses and became convenient scapegoats for exaggerated claims of juvenile delinquency and violence. Once children overtook Comicland from the business owners as a way to explore their

---

[9] For analysis of the comics scare, see Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi Press, 1998); Bart Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi Press, 2005); Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*; Mariah Adin, *The Brooklyn Thrill-Kill Gang and the Great Comic Book Scare of the 1950s* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015); Richard Donald Deverell, "The Comics Code Authority: Mass-Media Censorship in Postwar America" (PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 2020).

For the transatlantic dimension of the comics crusade, see Martin Baker, *A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 1984); John A. Lent, ed., *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999). Also see, for example, "The Case Against And For 'Comic Books,'" *UNESCO Courier*, vol. 2, no. 1 (February 1949), p. 12; George H. Pumphrey, *Children's Comics: A Guide for Parents and Teachers* (London, UK: The Epworth Press, 1955); George H. Pumphrey, *Comics And Your Children*, The "Comics" Campaign Council (London, UK: Deaner Printers Ltd., 1957); George H. Pumphrey, *What Children Think of their Comics* (London, UK: The Epworth Press, 1964).

imaginations parents and authorities sought to dismantle this world. These "reformers" led by German-Jewish émigré Dr. Fredric Wertham held a genuine concern over what turned out to be a minor segment of children feeding their fantasy to the extreme. Essentially, superhero play became a generational struggle. Adults challenged the idea of kids' mental and material ownership of the superhero fantasy and its licensed goods. This phase of Comicland was about children exerting their independence as customers and demonstrating their preferred type of entertainment.

The emergence of a kids' culture around superheroes also challenged parental authority and social norms. Parents may have resisted this new type of play and imagination because it indicated to themselves and the larger community that they had little to no control over their children. Imagine tykes running around screaming and jumping in official costumes or improvised ones with towels tied to their necks pretending to be a superpowered alien and leaving a mess in their path. This novel kind of play occurred in the public and domestic spheres. Parents of the older generations—greatest and silent—did not have such autonomy of play and fantasy and could not relate to their boys. Because of their upbringing, most adults deemed superhero play unacceptable and such behavior as unrespectable. The conservative social environment of the 1950s, which culture and entertainment reinforced, promoted a world where middle- and upper-class parents acted in a dignified manner at all times and imparted this unrealistic type of decorum and restraint to their children. In the postwar period, ideas of "respectability" emerged around whiteness, the nuclear family, and anti-communism.[10]. According to this restrictive worldview, by copycatting Superman—the ultimate symbol of unrestrained power—boys played incorrectly. It seems that play required a reflection of the Cold War social order. Such "wild" behavior reflected negatively upon mainly mothers, whose domestic duties included child rearing. Superhero play may have activated feelings of embarrassment and inadequacy as both a caretaker and a homemaker, but it definitely produced frustration. As the evidence below illustrates, this hair-raising activity by boys generated anxiety, headaches, and additional household labor for American mothers.

---

[10] See Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier*; Paul S. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1985; Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); May, *Homeward Bound*; Dianne Suzette Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

Flying Children: "I'm Superman!"

Superman's power of flight began as a satirical topic. Back on April 4, 1940, a cartoon in *The Washington Post* by Ed Reed joked about babies wanting to fly like Superman. It depicted two infants watching a third with a diaper repurposed into a cape leap out of the bar-less crib and hit his head on the ground. Tiny text below the drawing stated, "Tucker is in for a tough time if he tries to imitate Superman."[11] The choice of age seems to comment on the power of Superman over developing minds. According to the cartoon, the next milestone after learning to walk in a youngster's imagination was learning to fly, a step that one baby skipped. Almost three months later, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* of Ohio, reprinted the cartoon and stated that it was a compliment to Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. "Ed Reed, whose famous 'Off the Record' cartoon appears in the daily Plain Dealer, has made this little tribute to the two fellow creators who are the sponsors of 'Superman,' the famous adventure strip and page which appear in the daily and Sunday Plain Dealer. Reed believes in helping out the other fellow, and he thinks 'Superman' is a great feature for any newspaper."[12] Irrespective of Reed's intention, the cartoon forecasted the mimicry of flight as a perilous reality and the formation of childhood Comicland.

Although the idea of flying children offered adults comedic fodder, it quickly became a dangerous actuality. Newspapers and magazines considered these injuries and tragedies newsworthy. Besides the sensationalism factor, it was about fantasy becoming reality, unfamiliar territory at the time, and kids' sincere emulation of a comics character with miraculous abilities genuinely confused adults. Many of these instances, which denote the materialization of Comicland, took place in the summer when children were out of school. Beginning in 1939, stories appeared in the local and national press of children, across the country, imitating Superman with injurious results. "[Y]oungsters have taken to wearing Superman capes and carrying shields. In Milwaukee one enthusiastic young Superman fan jumped off the roof of his house and survived," relayed *Time* on the eleventh of September.[13] The *New York Herald Tribune* recorded the first tragedy to strike Comicland on July 4, 1941. When leaping between

---

[11] See the cartoon, Ed Reed, "He Says If Superman Can Do It Why Can't He?," *The Washington Post*, no. 23,313, April 4, 1940, p. 12.
[12] "Making a One-Point Landing," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, yr. 99, no. 182, June 30, 1940, p. 12-C. The first page of the newspaper is missing from the database and possibly the microfilm reel as well.
[13] "The Press: Superman," *Time*, vol. 34, no. 11, September 11, 1939, p. 56.

tenement roofs in the East Village neighborhood of New York City, twelve-year-old Robert Van Gosig slipped on a wet ledge and fell five stories to his death. Those Manhattan apartments are now ironically named after turn-of-the-century immigrant housing reformer Jacob Riis.[14] Eight days later, four-year-old Frank Toia, the son of a police officer, survived a thirty-foot fall with only bruises. The article in *The Pittsburgh Press* quipped that luckily the only thing the boy from Sewickley, Pennsylvania, shattered was his belief that he could fly like Superman.[15] In August of 1941, Atlanta brothers George and Richard Boney wanted to find out the superior comic strip hero between Tarzan and Superman. After heated arguments, each brother pretended to be their favorite character in a dangerous contest. They attached a rope to a rafter and leaped out of the attic window. Each contestant grabbed the rope and slid down to the ground. The acrobatic skills required for the hazardous game actually fit the mythos of Tarzan and DC Comics superhero duo Batman and Robin, not Superman. Hero confusion did not matter, however. The brothers determined that seven-year-old Richard aka "Superman" won because eight-year-old George aka "Tarzan" badly ripped the skin on his hand, which required medical attention. Even though their father destroyed the rope, both brothers began imitating Superman and leaping off the garage roof instead. A photograph accompanying the article published on the thirtieth of August in *The Atlanta Constitution* showed them airborne wearing makeshift Superman costumes.[16] The following summer, eight-year-old James Henderson of Des Moines, Iowa, sprained his ankle while impersonating Superman. *Time* magazine reported on the tenth of August that he wore a Superman Playsuit, which Macy's and other stores sold during 1940 and 1941 as discussed in chapter 1. Akin to a magical object, Henderson believed Superman's costume bequeathed powers. The article quoted the boy as saying, "The darned thing wouldn't work."[17] Through the

---

[14] "Boy, 12, Falls to Death In 'Follow-the-Leader,'" *New York Herald Tribune*, vol. 101, no. 34,565, July 5, 1941, p. 7. See also United Press, "'Death-Defying Leap Kills Boy,'" *Los Angeles Times*, vol. 60, July 6, 1941, p. 8 (Part II). Covered in many more newspapers around the country. One New York paper reported the tragedy without mentioning any connection to Superman play. See "Local News in Brief," *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 140, no. 195, July 5, 1941, p. 9. For a secondary source mention, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 149.

[15] "Sewickley Boy Discovers He's Not Superman: 4-Year-Old Tries to 'Fly' From Window; Suffers Bruises Only," *The Pittsburgh Press*, vol. 58, no. 20, July 13, 1941, p. 3. Covered in many more newspapers around the country.

[16] Rolfe Edmondson, "Superman Superior to Tarzan And Brothers Here Prove It," *The Atlanta Constitution*, vol. 74, no. 77, August 30, 1941, p. 1.

[17] "Miscellany: Letdown," *Time*, vol. 40, no. 6, August 10, 1942, p. 96; Edgar B. James, "The Bleacherite," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, vol. 68, no. 84, August 11, 1942, p. 1B (Part 2). For secondary source mentions, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 1, 22; Tye, *Superman*, p. 149. No report of the incident appeared in the *Des Moines Register*.

power of flight, the character's main appeal, Superman must have introduced a new form of realism to children and in the process helped to construct Comicland in the everyday world.

Three instances of Superman play combined with the element of fire in the 1940s. Five-year-old Edward Lewis Thompson of Bell Gardens, California, engaged in such dangerous activity on September 18, 1942. Local newspapers reported that he jumped over flaming newspapers while his neighborhood playmates threw lighted pieces of paper at him. Thompson's makeshift cape ignited, and he experienced second and third degree burns to his back and head. The boy died in late January 1943.[18] Ten-year-old Raymond Koteras of Detroit, Michigan, also suffered burns when playing Superman. The brief syndicated article from June 1946 stated that he needed one hundred pints of blood before Christmas to treat his injuries.[19] An Illinois paper recorded another unfortunate result of Superman play on July 15, 1946. Ralph Stevens suffered severe first, second, and third degree burns to his right arm, face, and back after his cape caught fire. Sadly, the four-year-old got too close to a rubbish fire. He and other neighborhood children were probably playing near the flames. The *Alton Evening Telegraph* explained that several boys "tied capes around their necks in imitation of 'Superman.'" Stevens required hospitalization for his burns.[20]

Superman play unfairly received the blame for one teenager's actions. On February 13, 1943, twelve-year-old Boy Scout Eugene H. Annly, Jr. of South Bend, Indiana, strangled himself to death with a rope in what a local paper called a "Superman Stunt." Catholic priest Frank E. Gartland reflected on the story with literary license.

> They admire him. They think he is great stuff. One little boy in South Bend, a few months ago, wanted to imitate Superman. His parents found him hanging from the bathroom door, arms and chest padded like Superman's. The lad had apparently tried to do some sort of flying stunt and he didn't quite make it.

Nothing, however, in the original article by *The South Bend Tribune* indicated that Superman inspired the boy's design. It suggested a vague idea of the funnies poisoning the boy's mind to

---

[18] City News Service, "5-Year-Old Dies in Vain Attempt to Emulate Hero," *The Long Beach Sun* (Long Beach, CA), January 29, 1943, p. A-8; "Boy 'Superman' Dies Of Burns," *Hollywood Citizen News* (Hollywood, CA), vol. 38, no. 261, January 29, 1943, p. 7.

[19] International [News Service], "'Superman' Foiled," *The Bradford Era* (Bradford, PA), vol. 69, no. 189, June 12, 1946, p. 3; International [News Service], "'Superman' Foiled," *The Raleigh Register* (Beckley, WV), vol. 65, no. 307, June 13, 1946, p. 12.

[20] See "Boy Burned at Play, Neighbor Leaps to Rescue," *Alton Evening Telegraph* (Alton, IL), vol. 111, no. 156, July 16, 1946, p. 1; "Hospital Notes," *Alton Evening Telegraph* (Alton, IL), vol. 111, no. 159, July 19, 1946, p. 10. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, however, omitted any connection to Superman. See "Alton Boy, 4, Suffers Burns When Clothing Catches Fire," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Final Edition, vol. 98, no. 314, July 16, 1966, p. 2A.

rationalize the distressing scene. Rather a penchant for knots, probably learned in the Boy Scouts, led to the tragedy or it was a suicide as the boy constructed a "noose."[21] Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Roman Catholic Church demonized superheroes and the comics because they threatened their authority and this is an early example of leveraging a tragedy to push their agenda.[22] Popular culture became the convenient, catch-all blame for this heartbreaking story. Embedded within their religious attacks was an aversion to children as consumers.

Such activity continued in the middle of the decade. Like the Boney brothers from Atlanta, Georgia, twelve-year-old Fred Lammy of Jerseyville, Illinois, fractured his left ankle playing Superman by sliding down a rope on January 15, 1944, the *Alton Evening Telegraph* reported.[23] While visiting his grandparents, *The Daily Review* explained that Sammy Kerr of Arlington, Virginia, broke his elbow on July 21, 1944, when playing Superman on his bicycle.[24] A few days later, Donald Vary of Rochester, New York, broke both his legs after a twenty foot

---

[21] "Boy Strangled by Own Rope As He Tries Superman Stunt," *The South Bend Tribune* (South Bend, IN), vol. 70, February 14, 1943, pp. 1, 6; Frank E. Gartland, "The Comic Books," *Our Sunday Visitor* (Huntington, IN), Fort Wayne Diocesan Edition, vol. 32, no. 7, June 20, 1943, p. 7 (Youth Section). See also Angela A. Clendenin, "Building With Juvenile Books," *The Catholic Library World*, vol. 15, no. 6 (March 1944), p. 175.

[22] See Margaret Frakes, "Comics Are No Longer Comic," *The Christian Century*, vol. 59, November 4, 1942, pp. 1349–1351; Thomas F. Doyle, "What's Wrong With The 'Comics?,'" *The Catholic World: A Monthly Magazine of General Literature and Science*, vol. 156, no. 935 (February 1943), pp. 548–557; Gartland, "The Comic Books," pp. 6–7 (Youth Section); Sister Mary Clare, *Comics: A study of the effects of Comic Books on children less than eleven years old*, 2nd ed. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1943); Clendenin, "Building With Juvenile Books," *The Catholic Library World* (March 1944), pp. 174–176; Robert E. Southard, S. J., "Parents Must Control the Comics," *St. Anthony Messenger: A National Catholic Family Magazine*, vol. 51, no. 12 (May 1944), pp. 3–5; Gabriel Lynn, *The Case Against The Comics: A Study* (St. Paul, MN: Timeless Topix, 1944); Robert E. Southard, S. J., "Crime Comics Contribute to Juvenile Delinquency," *St. Anthony Messenger: A National Catholic Family Magazine*, vol. 52, no. 12 (May 1945), pp. 14–15, 46; Youree Watson, S. J., "The Principle of Leadership in Catholic Action," *Review for Religious*, vol. 2, no. 5, September 15, 1945, pp. 312–326; Walter J. Ong, "The Comics and the Super State: Glimpses Down the Back Alleys of the Mind," *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1945), pp. 35–36, 39; "Flays 'Vicious' Comic Books: Priest Tells Te Deum of 'Dangerous Ideas,'" *Alton Evening Telegraph* (Alton, IL), vol. 114, no. 261, November 17, 1949, p. 2; Robert E. Southard, "Oscar and His Comics," *The Queen's Work Newsletter*, vol. 42, no. 6 (March 1950), pp. 10–11; Robert E. Southard, S. J., *Our Comic-Book Children* (St. Louis, MO: The Queen's Work, 1950). For Catholics and the comics scare, see Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, pp. 56, 71–72, 74–77, 79–82, 86, 118–126, 149, 303.

Robert E. Southard's article "Parents Must Control the Comics" without the volume and issue information can be found in box 20, folder 1, LB. A damaged version of Gabriel Lynn's tiny pamphlet can be found in box 18, folder 3, LB while a marked copy is available among Columbia University's circulating periodicals (yet stored offsite) as well as the University of Notre Dame special collections.

[23] "Farm Groups of Jersey Meet: Supply, Produce Companies Elect Officers: Injured Playing Superman," *Alton Evening Telegraph* (Alton, IL), January 18, 1944, p. 5.

[24] "Sam Kerr Breaks Arm Playing," *The Daily Review* (Clifton Forge, VA), yr. 40, no. 13,647, July 22, 1944, p. 1.

fall out of the window when emulating his hero. Strangely, *The Courier-Journal* of Louisville, Kentucky, was the only major newspaper to print the story.[25]

The local and popular press relayed more stories on Superman-related injuries during the second half of the decade. At an October 1946 conference on safety, Irving J. Lee, chairman of the Department of Public Speaking at Northwestern University, discussed an uncorroborated story of a child who broke both legs after leaping out a second-story window after wearing a Superman outfit. His commentary is the only available record that insinuated poor parenting skills of the father rather than the mother, and more on this later.

> I heard a story (probably a columnist's invention) of a Chicago printer who had a seven-year old [*sic*] son. For the boy's birthday the father bought a "Superman" ou[t]fit, a one-piece suit with a cape of some sort and wing insignia. The family lived in a second story apartment. The boy was delighted with the suit. He put it on, and leaped from the second story window, breaking both legs in the fall.
>
> Remember this was a little boy. In my view the problem here is not the boy's ignorance, but the boy's assumption that if he too put on a suit, he could jump out the window and stay in the air just the same as the man in the comic book. If the boy were "ignorant" and knew nothing about it, he should have asked his dad, "What can I do? Can I do as they do in the funny papers?"[26]

Two documented instances of Superman play surfaced in 1949. The local Pennsylvania newspaper the *Mauch Chunk Times-News* reported on the twenty-ninth of March that five-year-old Wayne Righter "fell while trying to imitate the comic strip character and sustained cuts of the face."[27] *The Delta Democrat-Times* conveyed another example of Superman play on the sixteenth of June. Jack Quartaro, a three-year-old from Mississippi, fell thirty-five feet and luckily only sustained minor scrapes to his head.[28] Also that month, an unnamed boy from Boston got his head stuck in a tin sand-pail playing Superman. The newspaper magazine insert *Parade* provided this example of childhood Comicland.[29]

---

[25] United Press, "Boy 'Superman' Hurt In Leap," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), vol. 180, no. 26, July 26, 1944, p. 8. And for a local paper closer to the source, see "No Superman, Child Breaks Both Legs," *Dunkirk Evening Observer* (Dunkirk, NY), vol. 194, no. 21, July 26, 1944, p. 1.
[26] Dr. Irving J. Lee, "Speaking Straight—Thinking Straight: Lecture IV, Thinking Straight, No. 2," *Transactions: 34th National Safety Congress* (Chicago, IL), October 7–11, 1946, vol. 1, p. 138.
[27] "Strictly Personal …," [*sic*] *Mauch Chunk Times-News* (Mauch Chunk, PA), yr. 66, no. 303, March 29, 1949, [p. 6].
[28] "Won't Make Like Superman Again," *The Delta Democrat-Times* (Greenville, MS), Red Streak Final Edition, vol. 53, no. 241, June 16, 1949, p. 1.
[29] "To The Rescue," *The Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT), vol. 159, no. 66, June 19, 1949, p. 8 (*Parade* magazine).

Popular periodicals referenced two untraceable feats and general Superman play during the 1940s. According to *Business Week*, one "boy who claimed he was Superman … jump[ed] from a second story window."[30] The article published on April 18, 1942, provided no further details. Thomas Whiteside testified on March 3, 1947, for *The New Republic* that Superman's flight cry, popularized by the radio show, inspired juvenile stunts. Superman's public relations firm Kenyon & Eckhardt seemed untroubled by the behavior, nevertheless. "One woman wrote in to say that her neighbor's child became so zealous after listening to Superman's cry of 'Up, Up … and AWA-A-Y!' that he forthwith climbed on the garage roof and attempted to take off, with disastrous results. 'The woman was complaining,' remarked an agency executive after reading the letter."[31]

Jerry Siegel claimed in his unpublished memoir from November 1978 that he tried to mitigate perilous imitation by youngsters. According to Siegel, "[W]hen a newspaper story reported that a child had been injured by jumping from a window while he was pretending to be Superman, I had Superman comment from time-to-time in the comic strip that only Superman could perform such deeds, unharmed."[32] Given the timeline of Siegel's employment at DC Comics (1938–1948 publicly with a byline and 1959–1966 secretly without one) and the media coverage of boys playing Superman, this assertion would most likely be the 1940s. To this author's knowledge, no such warnings exist in either the newspaper comic strips or comic books, however. And if DC Comics published safety messages in the 1960s, it was poor timing because Superman no longer appeared on television. Plus, at that time, dangerous Superman play decreased as more children began to distinguish fantasy from reality.

Superman mimicry persisted as a constant feature of childhood in the 1950s. A US Senate report on juvenile delinquency in 1950 included a letter of testimony from Joseph A. Homer, a juvenile court probation officer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Homer mentioned an example of Superman play but without a date or place. "In one case a boy leaped from a telephone pole, believing himself to be Superman."[33] While sounding more like Tarzan play,

---

[30] "Superman Scores," *Business Week*, no. 659, April 18, 1942, p. 55.
[31] Thomas Whiteside, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!: Superman, lighter-than-air radio hero, uses X-ray vision and supersonic speed to build tolerance—and top Hoopers," *The New Republic*, vol. 116, no. 9, March 3, 1947, p. 15.
[32] Siegel, "Creation of a Superhero," chap. 7, p. 4. For a secondary source mention, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 149. Larry Tye fails to cite Jerry Siegel's memoir.
[33] See "Reply of Joseph A. Homer," in *Juvenile Delinquency: A Compilation of Information and Suggestions Submitted to the Special Senate Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce Relative to the Incidence of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States and the Possible Influence Thereon of So-Called Crime*

seven-year-old Sonny Jones of St. Petersburg, Florida, played Superman in a Banyan tree and got stuck on December 8, 1951. According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, the local firefighters freed the boy after forty-five minutes of sawing and chiseling.[34]

Superman costuming and imitative behavior seems to have increased with the broadcasting of Superman on television in 1952. Children around the country sliced their bodies and broke their bones playing Superman the following year. The earliest documented act inspired by George Reeves' portrayal of the Man of Steel occurred on August 3, 1953. The *Mt. Vernon Register-News* of Illinois recorded that seven-year-old Michael Welge needed seven stitches to his wrist after breaking the glass on his front door.[35] Two months later, five-year-old Dale Bailey of Salt Lake City, Utah, fell out of a tree and broke his arm on October 4, 1953. *The Davis County Clipper* documented this injury in Comicland, which is suspiciously Tarzan-like.[36]

The press trumpeted the story of another boy on September 16, 1953, possibly due to the twin fractures. With a silk scarf around his head and towel attached to his shoulders, eight-year-old Larry King from the Bellwood neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio, jumped from a second-floor fire escape and fell twelve feet, crashing into the pavement. King broke both his wrists and bruised his head. Similar to James Henderson, King thought Superman's cape was a magical garment like in a fairytale. He believed that the cloak enabled Superman to soar and that he could share the ability with his own version. The *Columbus Evening Dispatch* quoted the teary-eyed youngster telling his mother: "I thought the air would get under my towel and float me down like it does Superman." King cautioned other boys: "Tell the kids that Superman may be able to fly but little boys can't." A photograph of King at the Children's Hospital showed him reading a *Superman* comic book, but it is too difficult to determine the issue. Evidently, the injury did not damage his connection to the Man of Steel. Challenging the opinion of Kathleen Tracy, King did not play Superman alone. He and his neighborhood playmate first practiced flying "from the

---

Comic Books During the 5-Year Period 1945 to 1950, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., Committee Report (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), pp. 37–38. See also William Moore, "Crime Comics Held Innocent In Delinquency: Kefauver Study Finds Effects Negligible," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 2-Star City Final Edition, vol. 109, no. 46, November 12, 1950, p. 36 (Part 1); Associated Press, "Parents Of Delinquents Get More Blame Than The Comics," *The Sunday Sun* (Baltimore, MD), vol. 50, no. 46, November 12, 1950, p. 3.

[34] John Gardner, "Villainous Ol' Banyan Triumphs Over Superman, Aged 7," *St. Petersburg Times* (St. Petersburg, FL), vol. 68, no. 138, December 9, 1951, p. 15.

[35] "Michael Welge, 7, Cuts Wrist While Playing," *Mt. Vernon Register-News* (Mount Vernon, IL), vol. 33, no. 260, August 4, 1953, p. 2.

[36] "Orchard News North Salt Lake," *The Davis County Clipper* (Davis County, UT), vol. 63, no. 35, October 16, 1953, [p. 9].

lower steps of the fire escape." The event happened at King's home during their school lunch break.[37] *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek* circulated the story.[38] The *Binghamton Press* even jeered at the boy's injury on the eighteenth of September. The New York State newspaper published a gross cartoon reenactment of a grinning boy falling from a fire escape with arms outstretched holding a towel. Indicated by a word bubble, the boy shouted: "Look! Jus' LIKE Supermmm." [*sic*] Underneath the narration stated: "Broken Arms…Coming UP!"[39] [*sic*] Another Catholic clergyman blasted children's entertainment as harmful, this time because of its realism. Reverend James Keller responded to this incident from 1953, as if he had professional psychoanalytical training, by explaining the impressionable nature of the child's mind. He surmised that fantasy and reality are one in the same for children.

> This child's adventure should vividly point out to adult minds how very impressionable a child is apt to be. The line between reality and make-believe is very thin in childhood. In the very early years it hardly exists at all.
>
> What a child thinks and dreams about is determined by the outside influence; the instruction given by parents and teachers, the books given him to read, the pictures he sees, the radio or television programs he listens to. These are all pretty real experiences to him.[40]

The most incidents took place in 1954. Case in point, John J. Hendrie of Long Branch, New Jersey, who the *Daily Home News* described as a "Superman enthusiast." The local hospital examined the five-year-old for "possible head injuries" after leaping out the window of his two-story home on the twenty-third of February. "The mother said the boy told her he was trying to fly like Superman." The next day, the *Asbury Park Evening Press* reported that the hospital found no injuries and Hendrie promised his parents "not to play Superman in the future."[41] The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* shared the story of four-year-old Arthur Sindelar of Cleveland, Ohio.

---

[37] "Superman Can, Kids Can't: Injured Lad Warns Pals On Perils of Trying to Fly," *Columbus Evening Dispatch* (Columbus, OH), Home Edition, vol. 83, no. 79, September 17, 1953, p. 1. For a clear photograph, see Associated Press, "Superman … [*sic*] Almost," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), yr. 121, September 19, 1953, p. 1. Covered in many more newspapers around the country. For a secondary source mention, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 149.
[38] Associated Press, "Superman Emulation Puts Boy in Hospital," *The Washington Post*, no. 28,219, September 19, 1953, p. 16; "Newsmakers: **Superboy**," [*sic*] *Newsweek*, vol. 42, no. 13, September 28, 1953, p. 59.
[39] For the cartoon, see Associated Press, "No Superman," *Binghamton Press* (Binghamton, NY), vol. 75, no. 135, September 18, 1953, p. 16.
[40] Rev. James Keller, "3 Minutes A Day," *The Daily Home News* (New Brunswick, NJ), Late City Edition, November 20, 1953, p. 13.
[41] Associated Press, "Boy Learns He Can't Fly After Trying It," *The Daily Home News* (New Brunswick, NJ), Late City Edition, February 24, 1954, p. 14. For an image, see "'Superman' Grounded," *Asbury Park Evening Press* (Asbury Park, NJ), yr. 68, no. 47, February 25, 1954, p. 1.

After watching the Superman television show, Sindelar leaped out of the first-floor window shouting "I'm Superman" and broke his arm on the twenty-first of April. He tried to fly several times before from greater heights, but his mother stopped him. Sindelar told the emergency room doctors "I'm Superman" but sadly admitted from his hospital bed "I'm not really Superman."[42] Three-year-old David Ankele of San Mateo, California, escaped without injury. The *San Mateo Times* reported that on the second of June, Ankele "fell or dived out of the second story window of his home, landed on the roof of the garage and then toppled to the ground below. His parents rushed him to Community Hospital but medical examination failed to uncover a single injury."[43] In early August, Superman play by seven-year-old Gary Woodward of Pasadena, California, resulted in a possible skull fracture. *The San Bernardino Daily Sun* chronicled the event. Before leaping off a bus stop bench, he shouted: "Look, mother, I'm Superman."[44] Brazoria, Texas, resident Roger Medlock broke his leg on the second of July. The five-year-old donned a towel and leaped off his front porch to save "someone [who] needed help at a distant location." This is how *The Daily Freeport Facts-Review* portrayed his imaginary play.[45]

A child living near Albany, New York, generated a Superman play hoax and national attention. On April 18, 1956, six-year-old Jimmy Maddex alerted the Naval Reserve headquarters that his little brother shouted "I'm Superman" before jumping in the Hudson River and not resurfacing. According to the syndicated article, "Police sped to the scene, launched boats and conducted a two-hour search with grappling hooks. At dark they gave up, took James home and told his mother." Mrs. Maddex informed authorities that he did not have a younger brother. There is no mention of any official or parental reprimand for the child who alarmed authorities of an imaginary drowning.[46]

Several other instances of Superman play happened during the second half of the decade. According to the *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, William Hunter Jr. from Ogden, Utah, on either the sixth or seventh of April 1957 sprained his ankle after falling "off a roof while emulating his

---

[42] "Boy Breaks Arm in Learning That He's No Superman," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Final Edition, yr. 113, no. 112, April 22, 1954, p. 1. See also Associated Press, "Window Leaper Finds He's Not Superman," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, no. 28,435, April 23, 1954, p. 48. Covered in many more newspapers around the country.
[43] "'Superman,' 3, Uninjured in 2-Story Fall," *San Mateo Times* (San Mateo, CA), vol. 54, no. 132, June 3, 1954, p. 2.
[44] United Press, "Boy Hurt Trying To Be Superman," *The San Bernardino Daily Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), vol. 60, no. 293, August 7, 1954, p. 5.
[45] "'Superman' Has Accident," *The Daily Freeport Facts-Review* (Freeport, TX), vol. 42, no. 92, July 6, 1954, p. 3.
[46] For the earliest article, see Associated Press, "'Lost' Boy Hunt Wasted Effort," *Binghamton Press* (Binghamton, NY), vol. 78, no. 8, April 19, 1956, p. 1. Covered in many more newspapers around the country.

favorite TV and comic strip hero."[47] *The New Leader* mentioned without details that one Pennsylvania child even leaped off a barn in 1957.[48] In contrast to the unlucky imitators, one boy from Rochester, New York, walked away unscathed. Tommie Werner leaped from a second-floor window and landed flat on the concrete without a scratch. Recalling the event around 1958, the article in the *Democrat and Chronicle* commented that the five-year-old "discarded his disguise as Clark Kent, put on his Superman cape and leaped into action . . . from a second floor window."[49] Three friends from Chester, Pennsylvania, played Superman by leaping out the second-floor window on June 22, 1958. Seven-year-old George Jones and eight-year-old Nathaniel Manigo safely landed the eighteen-foot drop while five-year-old Russell Toombs fortuitously suffered only a sprained ankle. Jones reportedly cried "I'm Superman" before his jump.[50] Duplicating the behavior of the three boys from the 1940s, five-year-old Terry Petre endured second degree burns on February 27, 1959. The *Garrett Clipper* related the events of that morning in Hamilton, Indiana. "The boy had a scarf tied around his neck, in character with the comic strip and television hero, and had gone to the basement of his home while playing. He started to shake the coal furnace and the scarf caught fire, setting fire to his clothing. The boy suffered second degree burns to the back, back of his neck and right arm before his mother could extinguish the flames."[51] Marcos Roybal of Santa Fe, New Mexico, fancied risky Superman play. In the summer of 1959, he suffered a double break of his arm. The *Las Vegas Sunday Optic* stated on the second of August that "this is the second time this summer he has broken that same arm in falls from high places."[52] The prior instance might well have been another example of Superman imitation. *The Detroit Free Press* published an image on August 21, 1959, of four-year-old Paul Blostein from Huntington Woods, Michigan, perched in a tree. According to the

---

[47] "'Superman' Sprains An Ankle; Six Other Youngsters Injured," *Ogden Standard-Examiner* (Ogden, UT), yr. 86, no. 86, April 8, 1957, p. 10A.
[48] Anita M. Wincelberg, "Writers and Writing: Crime and Expiation," *The New Leader* (East Stroudsburg, PA), vol. 40, no. 14, April 8, 1957, p. 23.
[49] "Like Brother Steve's a Superman—in Courage, Anyway," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), yr. 129, no. 37, February 6, 1961, p. 11.
[50] "Only Injury, Ankle Sprain: 'Superman,' Aged 5, Leaps from 2nd Story," *Chester Times* (Chester, PA), yr. 82, no. 58,166, June 23, 1958, p. 1. For coverage around the country with greater detail, see, for example, Associated Press, "Little Supermen Stir Up Havoc," *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), June 24, 1958, p. 13; Associated Press, "Three Boys Take Brief Space Trips," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), vol. 108, no. 174, June 24, 1958, p. 10; Associated Press, "Bored Boys Go Airborne," *The Atlanta Constitution*, vol. 91, no. 8, June 24, 1958, p. 9; Associated Press, "Boys Fly Into Lazy Afternoon," *St. Petersburg Times* (St. Petersburg, FL), vol. 258, June 24, 1958, p. 1.
[51] "Plays 'Superman,' 5-Year-Old Burned," *Garrett Clipper* (Garrett, IN), vol. 73, no. 49, March 2, 1959, p. 1.
[52] "WagonMound News," *Las Vegas Sunday Optic* (Las Vegas, NM), vol. 1, no. 27, August 2, 1959, p. 2.

caption, Blostein yelled "UP HERE [*sic*] I'm Superman."[53] Apparently, boys played Superman in trees. Like Dale Bailey and Sonny Jones, he merged Tarzan and Superman. Interestingly, newspaper and magazine coverage of Tarzan play did not match that of Superman, who actually came after the jungle hero.[54] Wonder Woman creator Dr. William Moulton Marston noted the phenomenon in the October 1939 issue of the periodical *Your Life*. "The Tarzan stories, for example, in books, cartoon strips and on the screen, resulted in an epidemic of tree climbing and attempted arboreal acrobatics. Scores of boys were injured while the Tarzan suggestion was at its peak of effectiveness."[55] And no comparable records have surfaced regarding children's imitation of other comic strip adventurers such as Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon.

Superman Costuming and General Play

Besides supplying a rush of adrenaline, superhero costuming for American children moved to the realm of competition. A December 1942 article in *The American Home* advocated for a "Comics Jamboree" theme during the holiday season.

> For school-age youngsters. Send out vividly colored invitations for your party, and ask each to come as his or her favorite comic-strip character—Bat-man, [*sic*] Superman, Buck Rogers—you'll get them all. Have the guests write down the names of their fellow guests, and, alongside, the comic-strip person each is supposed to be. When everyone has seen everybody's costume, each in turn calls off his own "name" while the players check their lists. The one with the longest correct list wins the highest honors.[56]

Dressing up as Superman with a self-made costume even offered a potential monetary reward. According to *The Ironwood Times*, a Michigan radio station held a children's party on September 15, 1945, and offered prizes to the boy or girl in the best Superman costume.[57] On October 11, 1951, the *Sausalito News* of California described the fondness of one local six-year-

---

[53] Ray Glonka, "'I'm a Pirate … I'm an Injun … I'm Superman!,'" [*sic*] *The Detroit Free Press*, Metro Final 1-Star Blue Streak Edition, vol. 129, no. 109, August 21, 1959, p. 14.
[54] George Orwell, *Inside The Whale and Other Essay's* (London, UK: Victor Gollancz Limited, 1940), p. 114; "Child Breaks Arm In Fall From Tree," *Big Spring Daily Herald* (Big Spring, TX), vol. 14, no. 72, September 1, 1941, p. 1; C. E. Lucas, "Letters: Super Baby," *Newsweek*, vol. 30, no. 23, December 8, 1947, pp. 2–3; Dan Kiley, *Peter Pan Syndrome* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1983), pp. 48–49.
[55] William Moulton Marston, "Children: What Comics Do to Your Children: *Did you ever stop to realize that those precious offspring of yours literally are being educated by the comic strips?*," *Your Life* (October 1939), p. 86, in box 1, folder 7, WMM2.
[56] Edna S. Sollars, "Comics Jamboree," *The American Home*, vol. 29, no. 1 (December 1942), p. 44.
[57] "WJMS-Tom Mix Party Saturday," *The Ironwood Times* (Ironwood, MI), vol. 58, no. 29, September 12, 1945, p. 1.

old to walk around own dressed as the Man of Steel. "There is a slight difference in age and weight" to the real Superman, they joshed.[58] A boy named Dickie Lane, who dressed up as Superman, won the most original costume in the 1952 Halloween carnival in Bloomington, California. *The San Bernardino Daily Sun* explained that the Alpha Lyman Parent Teacher Association organized the affair.[59] Two years later, Kit Blackmore, a boy from Edwardsville, Illinois, received a custom-made costume for his birthday on the twenty-second of March. As the *Edwardsville Intelligencer* explained:

> Gift of the year is the Superman suit received by Kit Blackmore for his 10th birthday March 22. It was designed and made by Evelyn Dugger at the pleading of his mother, Mrs. J. J. Blackmore. Of bright blue, yellow and red washable print, it is arranged so it can be let out "for growth"—if it lasts that long! The Blackmores aren't taking any bets.[60]

In the San Fernando Valley region of California, a Methodist church's women's group offered a prize to the best Superman outfit on August 4, 1954. The *Valley Times* wrote that the children-contestants also marched in a parade for their "Rural Picnic."[61] *The Southern Democrat* reported that Micky Hazelrig, an elementary schooler from Remlap, Alabama, proudly displayed his Superman Playsuit Christmas present at the first assembly of the new school year on January 4, 1955.[62]

Infatuation with Superman induced other precarious situations. On February 26, 1940, *Time* discussed Jack Hill's near brush with death. Absorbed in either *Action Comics* or the quarterly magazine *Superman*, this ten-year-old from Rockford, Illinois, crossed an intersection without looking and collided with a car but walked away unscathed.

> Jack Hill trudged along the street without looking where he was going. His nose was buried in a comic strip magazine devoted to the exploits of Superman. He started absently across a street. A car missed him by a hair; bystanders yelled at him. Jack moseyed on regardless, smack in front of another car. In the hospital, to everyone's amazement but Superman's, he proved to have no injuries to speak of.[63]

---

[58] J. M. H. "The Cracker Barrel," *Sausalito News* (Sausalito, CA), vol. 66, no. 40, October 11, 1951, p. 1.
[59] "Alpha Lyman Carnival Nets $225; Prizes Won," *The San Bernardino Daily Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), vol. 59, no. 58, November 7, 1952, p. 14.
[60] Mary Corlew, "Main Street," *Edwardsville Intelligencer* (Edwardsville, IL), yr. 92, no. 113, March 30, 1954, p. 3.
[61] "'Rural Picnic' Features Parades, Competitions," *Valley Times* (San Fernando Valley, CA), Home Edition, vol. 18, no. 179, July 28, 1954, p. 4.
[62] Sadie Cowden Hicks, "Remlap School News," *The Southern Democrat* (Oneonta, AL), vol. 61, no. 13, January 13, 1955, p. 4.
[63] "Radio: H-O Superman," *Time*, vol. 35, no. 9, February 26, 1940, p. 42.

References to noninjurious Superman play are documented in these two decades. On April 23, 1941, Michigan children staged a play under the funding of the recreational division of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). They interestingly combined Superman with other fantasy genres. *The Flint Journal* shared an image and a caption explaining that "a group of Martians led by 'Superman' represent organized play and fall upon the dragon of discontent representing children without leadership."[64] Reporting for the September 1942 issue of *The Atlantic*, Louise Dickinson Rich, proudly shared that her son, unlike children his age, "doesn't enter rooms with a piercing shriek of 'It's Superman!'"[65] Besides attacking other mothers as poor parents, this comment demonstrates the ubiquity of Superman play as a feature of childhood and the extent of Comicland. One Utah journalist reported on November 6, 1949, that the penchant for Superman play diminished greatly in his neighborhood. According to *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, "I don't know how long it's been since I heard kids making like machine guns or seen them running around in Superman costumes."[66] The author unintentionally noticed the gap in the Superman Playsuit production, and more on this history shortly. *The Washington Post and Times Herald* commented on July 24, 1955, that in 1940 kids ran around with towels or sheets as capes screaming "I'm Superman!"[67]

Death-defying behavior by children proved to be an alarming trend at midcentury and not solely determinate on parroting Superman, although he seems to be the catalyst. Take the death of Dickie Bonham covered by local California newspapers and *Time* as a case in point. The six-year-old boy from Highland Park, California, died after imitating the Superman offshoot Mighty Mouse on January 9, 1951.[68]

Two children from New York City imitated 1950s television heroes, but no evidence conclusively proved Superman as their inspiration. According to *The New York Times*, a young Brooklyn boy named Dana Schwalbe emulated an unidentified television hero on March 17, 1953. "With their hearts in their mouths, passerbys [*sic*] stared at the boy performing calisthenics

---

[64] "Organized Play Upheld," *The Flint Journal* (Flint, MI), Home Edition, yr. 59, April 24, 1941, p. 13.
[65] Louise Dickinson Rich, "Do You Get Out Very Often?," *The Atlantic*, vol. 107, no. 3 (September 1942), p. 110.
[66] "Old Timer Says It's No Fun to Live Where There Aren't Kids," *The Ogden Standard-Examiner* (Ogden, UT), yr. 78, no. 297, November 6, 1949, p. 6A.
[67] E. E. Kenyon, "The Wit Parade," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, vol. 78, no. 231, July 24, 1955, p. 8 (*American Weekly* Section).
[68] "Boy, 6, apes comic strip flyer, dies," *Daily News* (Los Angeles, CA), Ten Star 6 O'Clock Final Edition, no. 17,472, January 13, 1951, p. 3; United Press, "Boy Who Tried To 'Fly' Off Cliff Killed," *The Sun-Telegram* (San Bernardino County, CA), vol. 4, no. 40, January 14, 1951, p. 4; "National Affairs: Manners & Morals: 'I Almost Did Fly,'" *Time*, vol. 57 no. 4, January 22, 1951, p. 19.

for fifteen minutes on the outer window ledge of his third-floor apartment at 8 Fleet Walk, in the Fort Greene housing project." After his mother left to the laundromat, the five-year-old "jumped up and down on the ledge and then suspended himself from it within one hand."[69] The following year, almost to the day, *The New York Times* published a story about four-year-old Kenneth Ward. The paper used the name "Supergirl" in the article's title to describe the teenage girl who caught the young boy, comically dubbed "Spaceboy," as he fell out of a second-story window on March 16, 1954. Because the character Supergirl did not officially appear until 1959, the paper labeled her the girl version of Superman. The article on Spaceboy and Supergirl described the event this way: "A 4-year-old disciple of interplanetary television drama decided yesterday afternoon to make his own leap through space from a second-floor bedroom in Brooklyn. He was brought safely to earth after a Superman catch by a flash-footed high school girl."[70]

Superman Play in Fiction and Nonfiction

Imitation of Superman by young boys entered 1940s fiction. Walter Grove composed a short story in late 1944 featuring a child who wears a Superman cape while dressed as a cowboy and eventually gets his reluctant older brother to play with him.[71] Mirroring reality, Grove merges frontier play and superhero play. As the urban hero begins to overtake the myth of the western gunslinger there is some overlap in children's play. The following year, the *Longview Daily News* of Texas, presented another example in fiction. After leaping out the window, Ode Monroe rings his own doorbell and greets his shocked mother. He apparently suffered a slight concussion.

> "WHAT in the world—how in the world did YOU get out here?" she asked in amazement. "I thought you were asleep."
>
> "NO," he replied. "I got up early this morning to try out my Superman suit, but it didn't work. When I hit the ground I went to sleep awhile." After checking the little fellow over carefully to determine if he had been hurt (fortunately he hadn't, even though he had jumped from a second story window and was temporarily knocked out) she reminded him that parachutes are used when one jumps from a

[69] "Boy, 5, Causes Chills with Tricks on Ledge," *The New York Times*, vol. 102, no. 34,752, March 18, 1953, p. 33.
[70] "4-Year-Old Space Cadet Tries to Fly; Fleet Supergirl Breaks 25-Foot Fall," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 103, no. 35,116, March 17, 1954, p. 33. Coverage of the article in many more newspapers around the country.
[71] Walter Grove, "The Brothers Patton," *Story*, vol. 25, no. 110 (November–December 1944), pp. 78–86.

> high place. But Ode told her that Superman didn't do it that way—he simply held his breath.[72]

Fourteen-year-old Marian Cowan composed a tale that could be taken from real life. The *Oakland Tribune* of California published the story on October 7, 1945. A mother exploited her son's Superman play by having him do the chores of food shopping and washing dishes because the strong and helpful "Superman" would have been unable to say no. She tuckered out her son that he went to sleep two hours early.[73] More on actual mothers' relationship with Superman play at the end of the chapter.

Short story writer Allan Seager continued the pattern in 1950. "Flight South" explores the desire of the WASP-named boy Forrest Kirby to soar like Superman. Kirby shovels snow for his neighbors and asks for their old newspapers and magazines to sell to junk dealers under the pretense of needing to save up money for a Boy Scout uniform. After earning four dollars and eighty-nine cents, he secretly mails away for a Superman Playsuit. One week passes and then Kirby begins to worry that his mother will discover the package while he is at school. To keep his purchase hidden, Kirby decides to skip school for two days and stalk the mail carrier, and is successful in obtaining his package without interception by his mother. Euphoria best describes Kirby's experience of opening the box and seeing the costume for the first time.

> He raised the cover of the cover of the cardboard box gently. A costume of bright blue stockinette with a red flannel cape and a pair of red leatheroid shoes lay in the box. It was a Superman suit. He had worked four months to get it but now that he could see it and feel of it, it did not seem grand enough, somehow. Could it be trusted?

The story concludes with Kirby donning the playsuit and leaping out his parent's bedroom window. Seager suggests that after breaking his leg, Kirby, unlike James Henderson and Larry King, fails to learn that the outfit did not have magical properties. The boy even envisions a future experiment with the garment.

> He climbed into the suit and pulled on the red boots. He stood before the mirror in the closet door. There was padding at various places inside the suit. He struck out in the air with his fist.

---

[72] "Here'n' There," *Longview Daily News* (Longview, TX), Home Edition, vol. 22, no. 142, August 3, 1945, p. 4. It is unclear if the newspaper article was a fictional or a real-life account.
[73] Marian Cowan, "Superman The Younger," *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA), Last Edition, vol. 143, no. 99, October 7, 1945, p. 3 (*Boys and Girls Magazine* Section).

> … The window was already up a few inches. He raised it silently as far as it would go. He took a Superman pose, his feet apart, his fists on his hips, and looked down on the conquerable world.
>
> … He was sure. He was absolutely sure, he told himself, he would fly once he leaped from the window sill but as he climbed up on the sill and squatted there wretchedly with his chin on his knees, it seemed a long way down into the side yard.
>
> He stood up almost with a jerk, stared up at the high white winter clouds, spread his arms, and jumped. He fell in a slight curve and broke his thighbone when he lit.

… [A]ll he was thinking about was failure. He hadn't done it right. It was only the first time.[74] Seager biographer Stephen E. Connelly emphasizes the autobiographical nature of the story, making Superman a plot device to discuss the feeling of homesickness. "'Flight South,' echoing Seager's jarring childhood transplantation, is a slight story about a boy who has moved north and desperately wants to return home. He secretly orders a Superman costume and jumps from a second-story window in an attempt to fly south."[75]

Nonfiction writers also discussed children's Superman play. Comic book and comic strip artist Alvin Schwartz recalled in 1976 Superman play from 1947 in New York without injury. In an essay for *Children's Literature*, he explains, "[M]y wandering gaze happened to discover about a hundred yards from the house, a group of children dressed in an assortment of improvised capes, very definitely of the Superman variety, engaged in play that constituted unmistakably mimicry of flight and of superstrength."[76] The event was so impactful that Schwartz revisited it in his 1997 memoir. "Outside, on the lawn, a group of youngsters all dressed in capes and costumes of the Superman variety were leaping off small ledges and running around on the tips of their toes in an obvious simulacrum of flight. That is, they were playing at flying—like Superman."[77] At the height of the comics scare, Atlanta, Georgia,

---

[74] Allan Seager, *The Old Man of the Mountain And Seventeen Other Stories* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1950), pp. 68–79. For mention of Superman as a Boy Scout, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 199.
[75] Stephen E. Connelly, *Allan Seager* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1983), p. 34.
[76] Schwartz, "The Real Secret of Superman's Identity," *Children's Literature*, pp. 118–119. He also references this event on page 120. Alvin Stanley Schwartz's World War II draft card with the serial number 2922 indicated that he had a P.O. Box in Woodstock, New York. Therefore, his experience was either in the rural region of New York State or one of the major boroughs of the city. Available on ancestrylibrary.com. Schwartz was born in Manhattan but later moved to Westchester and later upstate near Peekskill. See Alvin Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet: A Metaphysical Memoir by the Legendary Writer of Superman and Batman* (1997; Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2006), pp. 3, 5–6, 37, 97, 123, 168, 179, 185.
[77] Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet*, p. 123. He also references this event on pages 124–125.

journalist Ralph McGill comically referenced the pattern of Superman play. A chapter on comics in his 1954 book *The Fleas Come With The Dog* describes a conversation about the medium's influence over young boys behavior. McGill asks (a concerned yet unnamed person) if the comics "inspired your son to … leap from the window with a Superman cloak streaming behind him[?]"[78] Comicland was so powerful that all types of writers devoted attention to the phenomenon.

Superman Playsuits and the Public Debate Over Superman Play

Mounting reports of children in authorized or homemade costumes parroting Superman's aerial prowess to injurious or fatal ends sparked public debate. This national conversation that threatened Comicland included educators, journalists, and psychoanalysts. Even DC Comics editor Whitney Ellsworth participated to quell the approaching storm. The tone in the press at this time shifted from a neutral stance of reporting on children's misfortunes to judgment. Growing panic over juvenile delinquency helped to drive this transition. Such fears lurk in the background of discussion of Superman play at this historical juncture. To put it simply, awareness of injured boys fueled comic book criticism.

Dr. Bernice E. Leary, curriculum specialist for the Madison, Wisconsin, public school system, railed against the fantastical trend in literature. She is less interested in superhero play itself than what it symbolizes and teaches children, which in her view is escape from reality. Leary bellows in 1944 that the "persistent allegiance to the comic book is proof that when life becomes too real and too earnest they look for a magic cloak or Superman cape with which to take flight."[79] Her criticism is perhaps both rhetorical and literal.

An account by the *Daily Worker* on December 14, 1948, discussed the commercialization of the Superman Playsuit and the damaging result of superhero play by one child consumer. The Communist party newspaper relayed a story, although uncorroborated, of an unnamed department store pulling the item off the shelves after surmounting news of dangerous imitations. The three paragraphs below are presented in verbatim.

---

[78] Ralph McGill, *The Fleas Come With The Dog* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 68. It remains unclear if the reference was hypothetical or biographical.
[79] Bernice E. Leary, "New Purposes in Reading in War and Peace," *Minnesota Libraries*, vol. 14, no. 5 (March 1944), p. 137; Bernice E. Leary and Dora V. Smith, *Growing With Books: A Reading Guide* (Eau Claire, WI: Cadmus Books, 1945), p. 25.

> **I RECENTLY** heard a story which I do not guarantee to be accurate, but which certainly carries the ring of plausibility. A department store, aware of the tremendous juvenile following of the radio program, **Superman**, put in an exclusive line of **Superman, suits** for boys and girls. The suits were complete with cape and emblem.
>
> Unfortunately, the very younger generation had too much faith in **Superman in general,** and the Superman suit in particular. One young fellow, whose mother equipped him with the outfit, drew the perfectly logical conclusion that he could now fly, and without a second thought, he gaily leaped out of a second story window, doing himself no little damage.
>
> The story goes that so great was the hold that **Superman** had on the children, that much mayhem and bodily harm resulted from the sale of the suits, and the department store had to withdraw them.[80]

An article in the January 1949 issue of the periodical *Commentary* published by the American Jewish Committee also mentioned that a child imitated Superman in an official costume. This maybe be same occurrence that the *Daily Worker* cited. Norbert Muhlen's article illustrated how the debate over realism versus fantasy in children's media dovetailed with the newly developed anxiety over the depiction of crime and violence in comics. Summarizing this view broadcasted by the comic book alarmists, Muhlen wrote: "The accusers claim that the child can be so deeply impressed by crime and horror stories without end that it accepts their world as the real world to which it has to adjust itself. The symbol of this theory is the little boy who got a Superman cape on his birthday, wrapped it around himself, and sprang out of the window of his apartment house." Superman editor Whitney Ellsworth, nonetheless, rebuked the idea in a letter to the editor published in the March 1949 issue of *Commentary*. He dismissed the notion that DC Comics and Superman propelled the child to injury and that the company encouraged the activity with licensed clothing. Ellsworth also proclaimed that they never sold such a product. DC Comics, therefore, should not be held accountable for the actions of foolish children.

> Just where the boy got the Superman cape is a mystery to us, since we never manufactured, nor authorized manufacture of, nor ever heard of any *un*authorized [*sic*] manufacture of a Superman cape. This notwithstanding, the premise itself is not very solid. I knew, in my own youth, a highly intelligent boy of twelve who leaped from the rooftop of his parents' three-story brownstone house with an umbrella in lieu of a parachute. The fact that he was fortunate enough only to break both legs is probably more important than the fact that his act predated the

[80] Bob Lauter, "Around the Dial: Radio, Divorce, Murder, Arson And Marriage," *Daily Worker* (New York, NY), vol. 25, no. 184, December 14, 1948, p. 13. Bold and capital letters appear in the original.

> adventures of Superman by more than two decades. There were foolish children before comics, and juvenile delinquents too.[81]

Ellsworth is correct that poor decision-making predated Superman. However, his defense is not factually accurate regarding the material culture of Superman. During the 1940s, DC Comics already approved the creation and sale of at least two Superman Playsuits, as discussed in chapter 1. These corporate products helped children pass through the portal into Comicland and refashion the realm as their own. An important question is whether this statement is an intentional lie or an example of absentmindedness or unawareness of the marketing prowess of Superman, Inc. under the direction of Allen Ducovny. Yet, there is also another take away. This correspondence and growing public concern clearly motivated Ellsworth to downplay the violence on the *Adventures of Superman* when he took control as producer for the second season in 1953. He replaced Robert Maxwell and eliminated the film noir elements of the show.[82]

Fears over juvenile delinquency clouded reason and effectively prevented social science-driven data to circulate. Chief of the special services division for the Illinois Public Aid Commission challenged the atmosphere of fear in 1949. Presenting at the National Conference of Social Work, Simon Stickgold explained that economics and not consumption of culture determine delinquency. Reporting on his talk that defended superhero play, the *Cleveland Call and Post* relayed the message on the twenty-fifth of June that healthy fantasy produces upstanding citizens. "If your child destroys furniture while imitating Superman or Captain Marvel, don't get excited. If he becomes deaf, dumb or blind while in the throes of a comic book, don't let this bother you, either, parents are told." Stickgold's language did not infer actual injuries but enthrallment in the superhero fantasy. Parents must have complained that their children ignored them by shutting off their senses to the outside world. The official statement by Stickgold reportedly stated, "If your child destroys your furniture while imitating Superman or Captain Marvel, he's being motivated by impulses we shall need more of, if the world is to survive—the impulse to annihilate evil." Nevertheless, this coverage of the academic objection

---

[81] See Norbert Muhlen, "Comic Books and Other Horrors," *Commentary*, vol. 7, no. 1 (January 1949), p. 83; Whitney Ellsworth, "Letters from Readers: The Comics Controversy," *Commentary*, vol. 7, no. 3 (March 1949), pp. 293–294.

[82] See Grossman, *Serial to Cereal*, pp. 63, 65–66, 69, 83, 85–86, 103, 140, 164, 170; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 52–54, 56, 58, 152; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 5, 24, 108, 112, 138, 146–147, 149, 152, 164–165, 168, 172–174, 178–180, 197–198, 200, 213, 216, 219, 272, 279, 314 and 230–231 for the speculation of the comics code changing story lines; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 140–150; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 95–97, 102.

to the anticomics fervor did not gain traction in larger press outlets. Conversely, cultural critic Dr. Fredric Wertham lashed out against Stickgold's argument in his 1954 screed *Seduction of the Innocent*. Misreading the point of moralism within imaginative play and children's transfer of the dualist struggle to ordinary objects, Dr. Wertham chirps: "The speaker did not explain what was so evil about the furniture."[83]

Northwestern University Professor of Marketing and Advertising Steuart Henderson Britt articulated the theory of identification and its importance among adults and children. Writing in 1950, the psychologist uses Superman as an example but does not advocate against him like Dr. Fredric Wertham. He explains that Superman provided soldiers with psychological and emotional strength to fight in World War II.

> Another important psychological mechanism is identification. The very term suggests mentally putting oneself in the place of another. This means dependence upon covert types of responses such as imagining oneself a heroine of a movie, or a person who is greatly admired. This tendency accounts in large measure for the appeal of *Superman*. … Who … wouldn't like to be able to become invisible, hurtle through space, and have superhuman strength? Superman can outrun a speeding automobile, outfly an airplane, punch his way through an armor plate.

Later in the text, Britt applies this concept of identification to children. "Who hasn't seen and heard children playing at being Superman, Dick Tracy, Roy Rogers, Babe Ruth, or some other popular personality, real or imagined?" Additionally, he explains that youngsters "have difficulty in differentiating between those things which are real and those which are make-believe. Serious behavior problems occasionally develop because of this confusion."[84] The issue of reality disassociation among children who played Superman appears to be generational and due to the newness of media exposure.

Sociologist David Riesman entered the debate that same year. He, however, dismisses the identification theory and differentiates superheroes from the older literary heroes because of realism and physical impossibility. In his book *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, Riesman rejects the ideas of Steuart Henderson Britt.

> For many reasons the child reader does not identify himself with the comic-strip hero so frequently. For one thing, many children prefer the comics where the hero is not man but Superman or Plastic Man—possessing powers that are obviously

---

[83] "Memo To Parents: If Junior Imitates 'Tarzan' on Furniture, He May Make Better Man," *Cleveland Call and Post* (Cleveland, OH), vol. 33, no. 28, June 25, 1949, p. 2A; Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, p. 248.
[84] Steuart Henderson Britt, *Social Psychology of Modern Life*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1950), pp. 242, 394–395.

> unique. No correspondence course with Lionel Strongfort will turn one, even in the wildest flight of fantasy, into Superman. What is more important, the realism … inhibits identification.

He continues this rickety argument by acknowledging that some children identify with Superman, but this tendency is only aided by the sale of his cape. "But it would be a mistake to assume that each wearer of a Superman cloak identifies with Superman; he may only be a fan, wearing his hero's colors."[85] Nevertheless, it is misguided to proclaim that children wearing the playsuit did not identify with Superman. The playsuit, which helped bring forth their version of Comicland, clearly enabled children to move beyond fanhood and into personal identification. In other words, a physical costume intensified Superman play, heightened the imagination, and made Comicland a real place. Riesman's unsound and unsubstantiated view can be explained by the fact that his analysis against identification hinged on the research of Columbia University social scientists, specifically one source. The 1949 BASR publication, which studied the relationship between children and superheroes, quoted a thirteen-year-old girl as saying: "I would like to be able to fly if everyone else did, *but otherwise it would be kind of conspicuous*." [*sic*] Although they found contrasting examples on children's views of Superman and his powers, especially flight, the study predates the wildly popular Superman television show, which showed a man flying. Moreover, the published quotation is a misrepresentation of the girl's view. She liked Superman precisely because he can fly but did not want to fly herself. As the original report from 1946 stated:

> This desire for an authority who is unmistakably superior to the self is amusingly illustrated by the fan (a thirteen year old [*sic*] girl) who likes "Superman better than the others because the others can't fly and <u>flying is very important.</u>" [*sic*] When asked if she herself would like to fly, her reply was "only if everybody else could, <u>but otherwise it would be kind of conspicuous.</u>" [*sic*] It would, in other words, make her as powerful as Superman if she were the only person who could fly. She does not, characteristically, want to be like him, she wants him to be stronger and more powerful than herself and to worship him.[86]

---

[85] David Riesman with Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950), pp. 105–106.

[86] Wolf and Fiske, "Children Talk About Comics," in Lazarsfeld and Stanton, eds., *Communications Research, 1948–1949*, pp. 11–12, 14, 26–27, 46–47; Riesman with Denney and Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd*, pp. 84, 101–102, 106. See also Fiske and Wolf, *The Children Talk About Comics*, no. 83a (January 1946), esp. pp. 2–3, 41n*, box 114, booklet B0243, BASR. The sample set of 104 children is mainly from greater New York City with the addition of unnamed New Haven, Connecticut, schools.

This example demonstrates that girls did not identify with or want to be Superman the same degree that boys did.

Superman served as a recurring topic of discussion for David Riesman. In his 1954 book *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays*, Riesman again questions the extent that children identify with Superman. In his view, youngsters do not want to be seen by their peers as pretending, which makes no sense because Superman play was often a group activity. He also argues that the airplane is an equal inspiration for flight but fails to see Superman as a symbolic, human version of the machine. Riesman also includes an uncorroborated reference to a fatal instance of costumed Superman play. In light of the evidence, his interpretation seems counterintuitive:

> I recall, for example, the hue and cry among many parents and teachers, already leery of comics, when the story appeared about the boy who had jumped from an apartment-house window wearing a Superman cloak and been killed. It was naturally assumed that children identify themselves with Superman and with other heroes of the newer media. But a careful study of comics readers—one of the very few sophisticated studies we have of any sort of reader—shows that perhaps the majority of children do *not* identify themselves with Superman or other portent wizards of the comics. … [*sic*] The reader's fear of being a sucker; the fear of seeming to make ambitious, envy-arousing claims; the here-and-now interest in aviation coupled with interest in imaginative "flying"—all these things may inhibit the child's power and willingness to identify with a fictional hero.[87]

Northwestern University Professor of Education Paul Witty was concurrently conducting research on adults' and kids' views of mass media around Chicago, Illinois. In his collected papers, a report by the Northwestern University News Service indicated that teachers unsurprisingly disapproved of the Superman television show. Nevertheless, two reports with the same date stated that the *Adventures of Superman* was a favorite of children in 1953 and 1954.[88]

Unlike the classroom academics, clinical psychiatrist and anticomics alarmist Dr. Fredric Wertham drove public opinion. He assails the comics in his 1954 book because they induced

---

[87] David Riesman, *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1954), pp. 262–263; David Riesman, "Tootle," in *Childhood in Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 239. The commentary is a reprint of an article. See David Riesman, "Bookworms & the Social Soil," *The Saturday Evening Review of Literature*, vol. 34, no. 18, May 5, 1951, p. 31.

[88] See Tom Craig, *Northwestern University News Service*, August 3, 1953, Press Release, p. add 1, box 1, folder 6, PW; Bill Young, *Northwestern University News Service*, July 16, 1954, p. add one, box 1, folder 6, PW; *Northwestern University News Service*, July 16, 1954, p. add one, box 1, folder 6, PW. All documents have a strange numerical notation on the pages. The initials PW is an abbreviation for the Paul Witty (1898–1976) Papers, Accession no. 77-26, Deering Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

"imitation" or "copying," a position that contrasts fellow critic David Riesman. Dr. Wertham recounts three tales of Superman-like emulation in *Seduction of the Innocent*. His first example was a California boy who died after trying to fly.

> In California a very handsome six-year-old boy on his way home from school one day trudged to the top of a steep cliff. An ardent comic-book reader, he had translated his reading into practice and made for himself a flying cape or magic cloak. Taking a brisk run he jumped off the cliff to fly as his comic book heroes did. Seriously injured, he told his mother, "Mamma, I almost did fly!" A few days later he died from the injuries he had received.[89]

Examining Dr. Wertham's wording, this reference is to Dickie Bonham, who mimicked Mighty Mouse and not Superman. The second and third examples were not fatal, however. "An eight-year-old boy jumped from a fire escape 'like Superman' and broke both his wrists."[90] This remark must be about Larry King from Columbus, Ohio. Another boy, he writes, "leaped from a telephone pole believing himself to be Superman."[91] Here Dr. Wertham is paraphrasing the letter from Joseph A. Homer to the US Senate on the overblown question of Superman stirring juvenile delinquency.

Dr. Hilda Mosse, an associate of Dr. Fredric Wertham and psychiatrist at the LaFargue mental clinic in New York, similarly blasted the Superman fantasy on February 12, 1954. Speaking to the Newport Citizens Committee on Literature in Rhode Island, she hinted to the detrimental effects of the Superman television show. "Children's play has taken a more violent form nowadays," the *Newport Daily News* reported on the thirteenth of February. "Little boys who think they can fly like Superman are not mentally ill, but have had their fantasy fed to an extreme."[92]

The May 1954 issue of the journal *Childhood Education* included an article about television's impact on youngsters in the classroom. The Oak Lane Country Day School of Temple University documented these changes and Superman play was an issue on their minds. They hoped that a child's obsession with Superman and the letter "S" would lead to further interest in the alphabet.

---

[89] Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, p. 115.
[90] Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, p. 232.
[91] Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, p. 344.
[92] "'Comic Books' Under Heavy Attack Here By Guidance Specialist," *Newport Daily News* (Newport, RI), vol. 110, no. 112, February 13, 1954, pp. 1, 4. See also Weldon, *Superman*, p. 97.

> One five-year-kindergarten boy plays Superman every Tuesday. He arranges a blanket around his shoulder as a cape to which must be pinned the letter "S." Now he prints it himself. It is extremely doubtful that this child would have taken a pencil to hand without a need as urgent as this one. Is he interested in "S's" when he sees them off Superman's cape? Will he soon want to print other letters now that the "S" has been mastered?[93]

One columnist challenged the idea of child ignorance. On January 31, 1955, Meyer Levin dismissed injurious Superman play as fiction and rightly argued that youngsters can distinguish between fantasy and reality in the *Long Island Star-Journal*.

> There seems to be a legend spreading among young mothers, about children who, after watching 'Superman', [*sic*] decide they too can fly, and injure themselves by leaping from high places. The scariest tales are about kids who sail out of the window. I believe children have an inbuilt sense of reality that protects them against this sort of thing. But the legend is having its effect.[94]

Witnessing Superman play in Albany, New York, concerned teenager Marcia Anderson. She advocated supervision and that grownups explain make-believe to children. Her column in *The Knickerbocker News* on March 11, 1955, is quoted below.

> The only thing about "Peter Pan," as well as "Superman," that worries me is that small viewers with strong imaginations might … jump from a window, believing they, too, can fly.
>
> I've seen one of my little neighbors, donned in a cape, hop from our porch claiming he was Superman. I'm just thankful he hasn't any "higher" ambitions.
>
> When little sister or brother is watching such a show I don't think you'd be robbing them of any leisure if you told them these shows were only "make believe" and that real people must do their flying in airplanes.[95]

British psychiatrist Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld agreed with the American doomsayers. She wrote to Dr. Lauretta Bender on May 12, 1955, hoping to discuss the issue of comic books and superheroes and the institutional alignment between publishers and medical professionals. Dr. Lowenfeld described the matter as "puzzling." As such, her letter explained, "It is completely incomprehensible to most of [us] in England that Psychiatrists [*sic*] in [the] U.S.A. should work with the 'Comics' publishing companies and that the Academy of Medicine approves. Someday,

---

[93] Estelle R. Roddy, "The Impact of TV," *Childhood Education*, vol. 30, no. 9 (May 1954), p. 438.
[94] "Meyer Levin, "I Cover Culture: Anchor the Super Kids!," *Long Island Star-Journal* (Long Island, NY), 6-Star Final Edition, vol. 114, no. 257, January 31, 1955, p. 6.
[95] Marcia Anderson, "Teen-Age Chatterbox," *The Knickerbocker News* (Albany, NY), Final Edition, vol. 18, no. 212, March 11, 1955, p. 4-B.

perhaps, we could talk this over. Superman and Superwoman seem to us – and certainly to me – a most undesirable phenomena, which can only do harm to the reality sense of children, and as you will have seen, 'horror comics' have now been banned by law in Britain." Dr. Lowenfeld does not directly discuss superhero parroting leading to disastrous leaps but seemingly inferred that the fantasy presents cognitive dangers and lumped together the unrelated genres of superheroes and horror.[96] The mutually constitutive panics traveled across the Atlantic.

The following year, the Los Angeles based organization called The National Association for Better Radio and Television (NAFBRAT) condemned the Superman television show for its influence over children. On August 6, 1956, *Time* quoted their sixth annual report, "Youngsters believe his 'super' talents to be within the realm of possibility. In this lies the danger." Summarizing their fears, *Time* wrote, "*Superman* may overstimulate young imaginations."[97]

Another writer took the opposing view of Marcia Anderson. Harvey Pack cautioned parents not to destroy their children's imaginations as he did. Fearing that his son Michael might leap from their eighth-floor apartment, Pack shattered his boy's imagination and the illusion of fantasy by revealing that Superman could not fly in a syndicated article published on June 25, 1958. Unfortunately, Pack realized his mistake too late: realism should only be for adults.

> … I told him that Superman is just an actor, he cannot fly, the whole thing is staged in front of a camera and is one big fake. What have I done! At four I have converted him into a cynic unable to escape into the world of fantasy.
>
> … I have tried to make it up to the child, but the wall of the imagination is difficult to repair. I tell him fantastic stories every night, but the questions he asks me are morbidly adult. I realize that in a moment of overprotection I have jeopardized his entire youth.[98]

---

[96] Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, May 12, 1955, p. 1, in box 19, folder 2, LB.

[97] "Education: The Violent & the Bland," *Time*, vol. 68, no. 6, August 6, 1956, p. 44. For secondary source mentions of condemnations of Superman in 1953 and 1956, see Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 178–180, 265; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 140–141, 147.

[98] Harvey Pack, "Doubting Dad Remembers When," *The Daily News* (Tarrytown, NY), June 25, 1958, p. 17; Harvey Pack, "Yes, Michael, There Is A Superman," *The Herald Statesman* (Yonkers, NY), vol. 95, no. 190, June 25, 1958, p. 20; Harvey Pack, "Don't Disillusion Child on Heroes," *The Hutchinson News* (Hutchinson, KS), yr. 86, no. 357, June 25, 1958, p. 5; "TV Writer Asks Forgiveness of Son," *Oswego Palladium-Times* (Oswego, NY), vol. 34, no. 148, June 26, 1958, p. 2; Harvey Pack, "TV Keynotes: A Cynic at Age 4," *The Morning Call* (Allentown, PA), no. 22,261, June 27, 1958, p. 32; Harvey Pack, "Child's World Of Fantasy Easily Shaken By Unwary," *The Hartford Courant*, Daily Edition, vol. 121, June 29, 1958, p. 6 (TV Week Section).

Dr. Lauretta Bender, DC Comics, and the Superman Playsuit

The widespread dialogue over the superhero fantasy and children's behavior affected DC Comics management and their efforts to commercialize Superman. The company wished to avoid exacerbating the problem of death-defying leaps by delaying the reproduction of the Superman Playsuit as a product tie-in for the Superman television show. On February 4, 1954, DC Comics publicity director Jay Emmett wrote to clinical psychiatrist and New York University Professor Dr. Lauretta Bender about producing a children's costume. He did so at the direction of his uncle Jack S. Liebowitz, who was rightly apprehensive about what children might do in such an outfit (given past events documented in the press.) Emmett requested Dr. Bender's advice as the head of the children's ward at Bellevue Hospital on licensing a Superman costume and cape during this climate of public concern over Superman play and spurious allegations of comics inciting juvenile delinquency. At the time, Dr. Bender served on the DC Comics Editorial Advisory Board and was staunch advocate of the comics medium. Like Whitney Ellsworth, Emmett misrepresented the company's past creations of the Superman Playsuit.

> Mr. Jack Liebowitz asked me to write to you to get your advice.
>
> Since the inception of the Superman television series we have received many requests from manufacturers to license a Superman costume and cape.
>
> Thus far we have hesitated to grant such a license on the basis that it might encourage some youngster to emulate the character.
>
> Perhaps we are being overly cautious and anticipating a situation which may never arise.
>
> I would appreciate hearing from you as to what your opinion is on this matter.[99]

Emmett reiterated this sentiment to author Larry Tye approximately fifty years later. "We couldn't have kids buying costumes if they were going to jump out the window."[100] Although painted as greedy and unsavory by Jerry Siegel in his October 1975 press release, which worked in gaining sympathy for his poverty after signing away the Superman copyright back in 1938 and employment termination in 1948, this correspondence and oral history illustrated that Liebowitz valued the welfare of children over profit. DC Comics' operations manager, treasurer, and vice

[99] Jay Emmett to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, February 4, 1954, box 19, folder 2, LB.
[100] Interview with Jay Emmett in Tye, *Superman*, p. 150.

president only authorized production of a *new* Superman Playsuit following approval from a medical expert.

After a discussion with fellow psychiatrists, Dr. Lauretta Bender emphatically responded to Jay Emmett on February 8, 1954, that children have already imitated Superman and will continue to do so even without a licensed outfit. The cape and costume, in her view, would not influence or determine the action of flight. Dr. Bender explained the current and future risks of costume play.

> It is certain that children wearing such costumes will try to fly in them. Many children will get bumps or minor injuries as a result. It is more than possible that sooner or later a child wearing such a costume will be more seriously hurt and that there will be some sort of public acclaim as you may well imagine.
>
> … [T]he cape and costume would not be responsible for the incident, although there might be exceptions to this. The reason we make this last conclusion is that we have observed directly children draping themselves in towels, scarfs, shirts, rags, or even a string around the neck and calling themselves "Superman" and the costume they have on "Superman's" cape by virtue of which they can fly and become invisible and are protected from attacks of others, etc.[101]

Dr. Lauretta Bender further clarified to Jay Emmett in her letter that imaginative play was especially dangerous in unbalanced children, who cannot separate fantasy from reality. Unfortunately, Bellevue cannot house or help all the youngsters who would pretend to be Superman, she wrote. Dr. Bender argued that children unafflicted with mental illness would not engage in unrealistic, perilous flights. As this chapter proves, this was not the case, however.

> This kind of activity would, in my opinion, be carried to the dangerous degree by unrealistic intentions, by neurotic or mentally sick children. As a matter of fact, excessive identification with or fear of Superman, and beli[e]f that one can fly, unrealistically, or fear of flying off the earth is one of the specific fantasy problems of certain types of neurotic and mentally ill children. In other words if the world were made up of normal and happy children, there would be no danger of any of them attempting to fly unrealistically with S[u]perman's cape. But we do not have and never will have all of the maladjusted and disturbed children in Bellevue.[102]

On April 22, 1954, Dr. Lauretta Bender recounted her dialogue with DC Comics over the Superman costume to the US Senate Subcommittee, which investigated comic books as source of juvenile delinquency. Dr. Bender mentioned the apprehension of Jack S. Liebowitz and Jay

---

[101] Dr. Lauretta Bender to Jay Emmett, letter, February 8, 1954, box 19, folder 2, LB.
[102] Dr. Lauretta Bender to Jay Emmett, letter, February 8, 1954, box 19, folder 2, LB.

Emmett. Her testimony stated that children wanted to fly and attempted the feat long before Superman existed.

> [T]here were concerns … to produce a Superman uniform for children, realistic, and copyrighted. The National Publishing Co. said they had this request coming through for many, many years, and they had always turned it down because they were afraid that children would be hurt under the circumstances; but again, it had come up so persistently that they now wanted my advice about it.
>
> So I advised them that in my experience children throughout the ages, long before Superman existed, tried to fly.[103]

The fact that Superman play served as a topic of discussion at the juvenile delinquency hearings illustrated that they were parallel discourses.

Dr. Lauretta Bender articulated this point of children's aerial acrobatics as timeless six years earlier in an interview with Josette Frank of the Child Study Association of America. The spring 1948 issue of the organization's journal *Child Study* quoted Dr. Bender, "[C]hildren have always jumped off heights in imitation of birds or airplanes, even before Superman suggested it to them."[104] This is a true statement and implies humanity's fascination with flying that can be seen in the depictions of angels with feathered wings, myths like Icarus, and the creature called Pegasus.

Youngsters with emotional problems were, however, especially fascinated with or afraid of flying. Dr. Lauretta Bender reported to the subcommittee that this was an acute problem at Bellevue. These kids manufactured their own capes and played Superman inside the facility. Clearly boundless, Comicland manifested inside the hospital walls.

> [A]nd also it has been my specific experience, since I have been at Bellevue Hospital, that certain children with certain emotional problems are particularly preoccupied with the problem of flying, both fascinated by it, and fearful of it.
>
> And we frequently have on our ward the problem of making Superman capes in occupational therapy and then the children wearing them and fighting over them

---

[103] Testimony by Dr. Lauretta Bender in *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., April 22, 1954, p. 157.

[104] Interview with Dr. Lauretta Bender in Josette Frank, "Chills and Thrills in Radio, Movies, and Comics: Some Psychiatric Opinion Reported," *Child Study: A Quarterly Journal of Parental Education*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Spring 1948), p. 45. This article is also included as Exhibit 5 within the appendix of a government pamphlet from 1950 on juvenile delinquency. See *Juvenile Delinquency: A Compilation of Information and Suggestions Submitted to the Special Senate Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce Relative to the Incidence of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States and the Possible Influence Thereon of So-Called Crime Comic Books During the 5-Year Period 1945 to 1950*, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., Committee Report (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), pp. 211–216.

> and one thing or another—and only about three months ago we had such, what we call [an] epidemic, and a number of children were hurt because they tried to fly off the top of radiators or off the top of bookcases or what not and got bumps.
>
> … The sheets form many purposes to these children. Part of it is that it probably gives them the feeling of the power to fly. It also gives them the feeling of protection, almost as if they were invisible when they wore the Superman cape or as if they had the magic power of Superman, so if they wore a Superman's cape they would have these magic powers.[105]

Dr. Lauretta Bender specifically cited the association with Superman and his cape by two hospitalized boys under her care. Her 1954 book *A Dynamic Psychopathology of Childhood*, which recycles her earlier writing in academic journals, catalogues Superman play as a protection mechanism. The first example is an eleven-year-old boy named Kenneth, who suffered from parental abandonment and sexual abuse by an adult man.

> [Kenneth] insisted on wearing a Superman cape. He used his special robe as an excuse for not following routines and for remaining with the girls' group. He boasted to the other patients, the nurses and doctors that he could leave the ward anytime by flying through the walls. Questioning revealed a feeling that at times he might be even better than Superman.
>
> Through Superman this boy found a means of temporary release from his own fears and preoccupations. In his identification with this character who could never be harmed, he achieved a feeling of security which nothing else that was tried had succeeded in doing. In addition, he felt that the cape protected him from assault in the rear. At the same time it gave him an excuse to wear a garb which would more readily admit him to the sanctuary of the girl's group within which he felt safer.

A six-year-old boy named Peter, who, like James Henderson and Larry King, believed the cape to be magical, is the second example. Dr. Bender quotes him:

> Sure I'd like to be Superman. I could fly. I could catch the birds and let them go again. I could catch the bad men and give them to the police. I could be smart. I could be strong. It is his cape. It is magic. With magic you can make everything good.

She concludes that children's imaginations utilized Superman and his cape for different reasons. "The reaction of individual children to the cape, which is an essential part of the costume of a majority of the comic book heroes, is another instance of the decided difference in meaning the same object has to different children. To one it means having the power to fly, to another it has

---

[105] Testimony by Dr. Lauretta Bender in *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., April 22, 1954, pp. 157–158.

nothing to do with flying but represents a magical quality, to a third it means protection, to a fourth it is merely an ornament, to a fifth it means virility 'because the U. S. Marines have capes,' etc. Occasionally one finds a child who discriminates between the types of capes worn, attributing to each a different function."[106] Interestingly, Dr. Bender's patients invented new magical elements to Superman whose design of hurdling skyscrapers, outracing airplanes, and possession of X-ray eyes, which demonstrates the modern dimension of the superhero genre, is actually inspired by science and technology rather than the supernatural. The moniker the Man of Steel also reflects his connection to the skyscraper and the urban world. Besides possessing the ability to "bend steel in his bare hands," as the television show narration proclaimed, it is a coded reference to the modern construction material. For children at Bellevue, wearing his cape offered protection from grownups and their overwhelming world. Historian Jill Lepore analyzes the opinion of Dr. Bender on how superheroes function psychologically for children. "They offered children a way to play, a kind of fantasy, entirely normal—a way, even, to solve problems."[107] In other words, superheroes enabled children to confront real-life problems or past traumas with their imagination, without even realizing they were doing it. This is the mental power of Comicland.

Schizophrenic children were not immune to Superman's magnetism. Dr. Austin M. Des Lauriers shared a copy of his study of schizophrenic children at Topeka State Hospital with Dr. Lauretta Bender. The report from September 24, 1954, explained that a fifteen-year-old Latino boy exhibited unusual behaviors imitating Frankenstein, Samson, and Superman. He sadly "lost his capacity to distinguish the real from the imagined."

> He usually saw himself as Superman -- he would paint the letter S on a sheet and tie it around his neck -- this would be his cape. Then, to prove his point, he would not infrequently tear his bed to pieces, pull the radiator away from the wall, rip up sheets and blankets, and otherwise demonstrate his superhuman strength. His posture was quite bizarre, with shoulders hunched and head pulled back to simulate the Superman stance.[108]

---

[106] Lauretta Bender, *A Dynamic Psychopathology of Childhood* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1954), pp. 225, 237. For the original articles, see Lauretta Bender and Reginald S. Lourie, "The Effect of Comic Books on the Ideology of Children," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 11, no. 3 (July 1941), p. 545; Lauretta Bender, "The Psychology of Children's Reading and the Comics," *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 4 (December 1944), pp. 223, 230. A typescript for the coauthored article appears in box 16, folder 1, LB and a marked draft for the latter appears in box 13, folder 20, LB. See also Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, p. 208.
[107] Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, p. 208.
[108] Austin M. Des Lauriers, "Development of the Sense of Reality in Schizophrenic Children: A Contribution to the study of the Structural Aspects of Schizophrenia," Research Project M-775R, Topeka State Hospital, Topeka, KS,

During a 1956 conference presentation in Winfield, Kansas, Dr. Lauretta Bender advocated for the importance of antigravity play in child development. This play is achieved when parents toss and twirl their infants and young children. She explained that many schizophrenic children exhibit a fear of or heightened interest in flying. Those of the latter category have attempted to soar like Superman with injurious results in New York City.

> [T]hey may become fascinated by it as the articulate schizophrenic children who begin to develop precociously in certain areas and have the fantasy of flying and frequently try it. In fact, we not infrequently get children into the hospital with broken legs because they have tried to fly out of high windows in New York City. We also find that they identify [with] superman [*sic*] in an unrealistic fashion. That again, has become part of our routine examination, to ask the child what he thinks about superman. [*sic*] Is he real? Would he like to be superman? [*sic*] Does he think he could be, or what not.[109]

Her statement indicates a higher number of injured children in New York but such data is sealed per the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and to compound matters Bellevue records are closed to scholars.

The Superman Playsuit, Comic Books, and Television

Besides recounting the mental health incidents of children embodying Superman, Dr. Lauretta Bender also endorsed the Superman Playsuit, made popular by actor George Reeves and the television show. With her reassurance, DC Comics released a Superman cape in June 1954 for one dollar and forty-nine cents. The advertisement text appearing in the *Los Angeles Times* on the eighteenth of June, which contained dramatic ellipses, read:

> It's a plane! It's a bird! No it's Superman! And this is the authentic Superman cape . . . exactly as shown on TV . . . with Superman's insignia right on your back. You'll want to be the first one in your neighborhood to sally forth in search of adventure this summer! Small sizes, 2 ½-5 ½ years; medium sizes, 6-10 years. Supple, comfortable . . . make wonderful rain capes, too! If mom can't bring you down to meet the Superman cast, have her order yours by phone today! Sorry no C.O.D. delivery.[110]

September 24, 1954, p. 2, box 6, folder 4, LB. Dr. Lauriers was presumably a former student of Dr. Lauretta Bender's at New York University.

[109] Dr. Lauretta Bender, "Adequate Medical Diagnosis of the Mentally Retarded to Establish Specific Management and Treatment Programs," Winfield Institute of Research, Winfield, KS, 1956, p. 13, box 9, folder 15, LB.

[110] See *Los Angeles Times*, 9 A.M. Final Edition, vol. 73, June 18, 1954, p. 30. For another advertisement that sells the Superman cape as a raincoat, see Science Service, "New Machines and Gagets," *The Bridgeport Post* (Bridgeport, CT), vol. 71, no. 193, County Edition, August 18, 1954, p. 21.

DC Comics also approved an entire Superman Playsuit for six dollars and ninety-eight cents just a few months later. The four-piece full costume debuted in the fall and anticipated Halloween, Chanukah, and Christmas. The item sold in stores until the end of the decade.[111] They strategically used Superman comic books to notify boys of this exciting new product and encouraged its purchase. *Superman* no. 94 (January 1955) and *Action Comics* no. 200 (January 1955) both featured an identical full-page advertisement of a costumed white boy with the same blue-black hair as Superman. Interestingly, he did not present as a WASP but ambiguously southern and eastern European. Copyright records reveal submission dates of October 31, 1954, and November 28, 1954, respectively. These images were designed to stimulate holiday season gift requests from children to parents. The product description suggested that boys pester their mothers to purchase the playsuit for them and support their plea with the fact that it is durable.

> You'll be one of Superman's buddies, for sure, when you're dressed just like him … [*sic*] and think what fun it is to wear while you're watching him on TV! You get a full, bright red cape with Superman in "gold" right on the back, a shirt with the official Superman insignia, pants with "pretend" boots and a plastic belt.

---

[111] For 1954 advertisements, see, in chronological order, *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, City Final Edition, vol. 113, no. 37, September 12, 1954, p. 8 (Part 7); *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 104, no. 35,309, September 26, 1954, p. 64; *The Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger*, vol. 251, no. 95, October 3, 1954, p. 31A; *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, City Final Edition, vol. 113, no. 42, October 17, 1954, p. 14 (Part 1); *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, vol. 80, no. 132, October 21, 1954, p. 5A; *Parents' Magazine & Family Home Guide*, vol. 29, no. 11 (November 1954), p. 114; *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 104, no. 35,351, November 7, 1954, p. 60; *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), Final Edition, vol. 15, no. 58, November 10, 1954, p. 19; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, vol. 80, no. 156, November 14, 1954, p. 2 (*Special ROTO Section*); *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), yr. 122, November 20, 1954, p. 2.

For 1955 advertisements, see, in chronological order, *Parents' Magazine & Family Home Guide*, vol. 30, no. 3 (March 1955), p. 15; *Los Angeles Times*, Final Edition, vol. 74, March 6, 1955, p. 9 (Part 1A); *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, vol. 80, no. 299, April 6, 1955, p. 14A; *Parents' Magazine & Family Home Guide*, vol. 30, no. 10 (October 1955), p. 144; *The Pittsburgh Press*, vol. 72, no. 108, October 9, 1955, p. 23 (Section I); *Los Angeles Times*, Final Edition, vol. 74, October 23, 1955, p. 30 (Part I); *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 105, no. 35,701, October 23, 1955, p. 77; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, vol. 81, no. 135, October 24, 1955, p. 12A; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, vol. 81, no. 155, November 13, 1955, p. 14 (*Special ROTO Section*); *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), Holiday Edition, yr. 103, no. 328, November 21, 1955, p. B-24; *The Pittsburgh Press*, vol. 72, no. 157, November 27, 1955, p. 11 (*ROTO Magazine* Section); *Parents' Magazine & Family Home Guide*, vol. 30, no. 12 (December 1955), p. 108; *The Boston Sunday Globe*, December 4, 1955, p. 40 (*ROTO Pictorial Magazine* Section); *The Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT), vol. 172, no. 59, December 12, 1955, p. 3.

For 1956 advertisements, see, in chronological order, *The Pittsburgh Press*, vol. 73, no. 120, October 21, 1956, p. 7; *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), Metropolitan Edition, yr. 104, no. 303, October 29, 1956, p. B-8; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, vol. 82, no. 160, November 18, 1956, p. 6.

For 1957 advertisements, see, in chronological order, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Final City Edition, vol. 31, no. 12, August 15, 1957, p. 3; *The Pittsburgh Press*, Sunday Edition, vol. 74, no. 112, October 13, 1957, p. 23.

For a 1958 advertisement, see *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 108, no. 36,793, October 19, 1958, p. 121; *The Garfieldian & Garfield News* (Chicago, IL), yr. 45, no. 44, October 29, 1958, p. 14G.

For 1959 advertisements, see, in chronological order, *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 109, no. 37,157, October 18, 1959, p. 139; *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, vol. 261, no. 110, October 18, 1959, p. 18.

> (Don't forget to tell Mom the suit is made to stand up under lots of hard play—it's made of fine washable rayon gabardine!) In even sizes from 4 to 12.[112]

The following calendar year presented new announcements in the comic books featuring the exploits of Superman. Advertising language in *Superman* no. 101 (November 1955) and *Action Comics* no. 210 (November 1955) for the full costume amplified the request to parents cited above. Reminiscent of the marketing for Macy's 1940 event Superman Adventures, the announcement in all capitals instructed children: "YES! TELL MOM AND DAD THAT IT'S THE GIFT YOU WANT!" According to copyright records, these two issues appeared on newsstands on August 30, 1955, and September 27, 1955, respectively.[113]

At first, Superman actor George Reeves' viewed the costume as a benign feature of the character. Robert Shayne, who portrayed Inspector Bill Henderson on the *Adventures of Superman*, recalled Reeves' attentiveness to his children when they came to a filming during the early part of the second season sometime in 1953. Before the escalation of Superman play and media scrutiny, Reeves had wardrobe construct a special kid's costume.

> We were out on location shooting "Superman" in the Hollywood hills. My wife brought my little boy and girl out there. My son, just five, went wild watching George in his uniform. … Superman kept an automobile from going over a precipice ("The Man Who Could Read Minds"), which of course was all tricked up. My son thought that was fantastic. It was the first time Bob Junior had ever seen pictures made. The trick shot really impressed him, he thought it was real. George was so nice that he later presented him with a little Superman outfit, the "S" and everything. He got the wardrobe man to make up the uniform. My boy had it for years around the home, it was one of the happiest days of his life.[114]

Copyright records chronicle final script submission for "The Man Who Could Read Minds" on September 23, 1953, and the episode aired on October 3, 1953.[115]

A year later, George Reeves reconsidered his position on the Superman costume, which now sold in stores. He soon understood that Superman's garb could be dangerous. Reeves criticized the Superman attire for children and questioned the motivation behind Superman merchandizing. According to the *Los Angeles Times* article dated September 27, 1954, "Reeves is said to have asked officials to halt the sale of Superman capes and other goods that he thought

---

[112] *Superman* no. 94 (January 1955); *Action Comics* no. 200 (January 1955). See Copyright Drawer 1946–1954, SUPERB–SUPRD, card 0341i; Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, ACR–ACTION_R, card 1251.
[113] *Superman* no. 101 (November 1955); *Action Comics* no. 210 (November 1955). See Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, SUPERIOR_Q-SUPERMAN, card 0356b; Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, ACR–ACTION_R, card 1252.
[114] Interview with Robert Shayne in Grossman, *Superman*, p. 48.
[115] See Copyright Drawer 1946–1954, ADVENTURES_O–ADVERTISING_Q, card 0433.

might prove harmful to youngsters." As such, he did not appear at the June 19, 1954, event at The Broadway, a Los Angeles department store; advertising mentioned only his costars.[116] The next spring, nonetheless, Reeves appeared at The Broadway's two locations in a single day as a publicity stunt to promote the playsuit. Attendees received an autographed picture of Superman. *Women's Wear Daily* noted on April 13, 1955, that over 15,000 children attended the downtown event and 20,000 appeared at the Crenshaw location.[117] This is a similar number to Superman Day in New York fifteen years earlier. It is reasonable to assume that DC Comics pressured Reeves to promote the items. He also appeared at other department stores in the 1950s such as Hess in Pennsylvania and Johnny Walker in Milwaukee, Minnesota, with a parade and a float also reminiscent of Superman Day.[118]

Superman's caretakers seemed to worry about the influence of the character and his costume. Dialogue for two episodes of the *Adventures of Superman* attempt to instruct children not to emulate Superman. Analyzing their messages today, readers can see that DC Comics was not direct enough in telling children that Superman was not real and they could not fly. This soft warning can be seen in the December 5, 1953, episode "Panic in The Sky" that featured a conversation between Clark Kent and Jimmy Olsen about whether or not the costume bestowed Superman with powers. After preventing a giant meteor from colliding with Metropolis, the Kryptonian hero suffers temporary amnesia and later finds several Superman costumes hidden inside a secret closet within Kent's apartment. Confused, Kent inquires with Olsen about the source of Superman's powers. It is worth noting that Jackson Gillis' script held by The Writers Guild Foundation is nearly identical to the broadcast, indicating that this message to children against flying was planned in advance.

> Clark Kent: Well, Jimmy, I've been thinking about Superman. Do you suppose it's his costume that gives him his peculiar power?
>
> Jimmy Olsen: I, ya, I don't follow ya.

---

[116] Walter Ames, "Superman George Reeves and Producers Disagree on New Television Deal," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 A.M. Final Edition, vol. 73, September 27, 1954, p. 24 (Part I). For secondary source mentions, see Grossman, *Superman*, p. 53; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 220.

[117] See *Los Angeles Times*, 9 A.M. Final Edition, vol. 74, April 4, 1955, p. 12 (Part 1); "Net Super Sales From Superman Suits," *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 90, no. 72, April 13, 1955, p. 30. See also Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 234–235.

[118] Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 53–54, 57 (image); Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 234–235, 263–265; "SUPER Promotion," *Esquire's Apparel Arts: The Magazine For Men's And Boy's Stores*, vol. 25, no. 10 (October 1955), pp. 158–159.

> Clark Kent: You know what I mean. They haven't been able to find him, and they've got to. The world may not last another day. But suppose, suppose someone else found his costume?
>
> Jimmy Olsen: No, no wait Mr. Kent that's not right. Superman explained it to me once. That costume doesn't have any particular powers. Only Superman can do super-things. Nobody else, nobody.[119]

Besides being a plot device to drive the story forward, the discussion between the characters seems to be directed at children, like James Henderson and Larry King, who imagined Superman's costume as magical. Reports of hazardous leaps by young boys resurfaced in August 1953 and the official playsuit was sold in stores the following year. Curiously, Gillis' script, which has a copyright date of July 13, 1953, predated media coverage of recent Superman play yet the exchange between Kent and Olsen addressed the danger.[120] Four days later, *The Evening Star* of Washington, DC, mentioned the new position of the producers on the reemerging problem of Superman play. Comparing the article text below with the dialogue quoted above, the producers intended Olsen's lines to be a warning to children.

> The producers of the "Superman" TV series recently announced that beginning in September their muscle man will take time out at the end of each episode to lecture small fry on good health habits, safety hints, etc.
>
> What they didn't tell you is that they've been flooded with protests from parents who have found their offspring balancing perilously on window ledges and rooftops and preparing to jump off into the wild blue yonder with no more than a towel or sheet tied around their little necks for support.
>
> "If Superman can do it, why can't I" is the stock answer to mama when she tries to talk her junior birdman off the roof.
>
> Now, Superman will try his hand at talking the kids out of these space trips. And the producers are hailing his coming lectures as a "public service."[121]

The February 25, 1956, episode "The Unlucky Number" took a more direct approach, however. Speaking to the character Bobby Exbrook, Superman says: "Bobby there's something I

---

[119] *Adventures of Superman: The Complete Second Season*, season 2, episode 12, "Panic in The Sky," directed by Thomas Carr, screenplay by Jackson Gillis (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video Inc., 2006), DVD; Jackson Gillis, "The Adventures Of Superman: Panic In The Sky," script, p. 22, in box 1 (XXIII-615), folder Adventures Of Superman, The - "Panic In The Sky" No Draft Info Circa 1953 2–12; Aired 2/5/1953, JG. The initials JG is an abbreviation for the Jackson Gillis Papers, WGF-MS-046, Shavelson-Webb Library, The Writers Guild Foundation, Los Angeles, California. For secondary source mention, see Grossman, *Superman*, p. 96.
[120] See Copyright Drawer 1946–1954, ADVENTURES_O–ADVERTISING_Q, card 0503.
[121] Hal Humphrey, "Movies Won't Lend Stock to TV," *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), yr. 101, no. 198, July 17, 1953, p. B-17.

want you to remember. No one, but no one, can do the things that Superman does. And that goes especially for flying."[122] Comparing the script to the broadcast, Superman biographer Michael J. Hayde surmises that Reeves altered his lines in response to the dangerous Superman play enacted by American youth. There is, conversely, no definitive way of knowing who changed the dialogue on set and, to be frank, DC Comics clearly ruminated on the issue of Superman imitation.[123] Although director Harry Gerstad provided a close-up of Superman's face as he speaks to Exbrook, a more effective message would have been to have Superman break the fourth wall by looking directly at the camera and say those words like a public service announcement at the conclusion of the episode. George Reeves already broke the fourth wall by either looking at the camera or winking at the audience and the comic books previously crafted special pages for messages to children.[124] If the dialogue in "Panic in The Sky" about the origin of Superman's powers was purely coincidental in paralleling the timeframe to the concern of costumed Superman play, that means it took the television show three years to warn children on screen following the rising reports. An announcement should have taken place in the first season because producer Whitney Ellsworth knew of children's imitation of Superman as early as 1949 per the debate in *Commentary*. Copyright records list November 15, 1954, as the date of script submission for "The Unlucky Number" and filming did not take place until at least August 30, 1955.[125] Hayde claims (without clearly demarcated evidence) that this script was submitted for the third season but aired during the fourth because of budget constraints. He places its composition or the schedule change on January 3, 1955.[126]

The Superman television show's technological marvel of making George Reeves appear to fly attracted the interest of the press in 1956. Reeves, nonetheless, cautiously avoided the

---

[122] *Adventures of Superman: The Complete Third & Fourth Seasons in Full Color*, season 4, episode 2, "The Unlucky Number," directed by Harry Gerstad, screenplay by David Chantler (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video Inc., 2006), DVD. For secondary source mention, see Grossman, *Superman*, p. 49.
[123] Michael J. Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 243.
[124] For George Reeves' winking or looking at the camera as breaking the fourth wall, see Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 25, 94, 171; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 139, 227. Reeves winks at the camera for the first time in *Adventures of Superman: The Complete First Season*, season 1, episode 18, "Drums of Death," directed by Lee Sholem, screenplay by Dick Hamilton (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video Inc., 2005), DVD. For more on Superman winking in the comics and movies, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 128, 239; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 87, 150–151, 167.
[125] See Copyright Drawer 1946–1954, ADVENTURES_O–ADVERTISING_Q, card 0520. The filming date is deduced from the copyright submission dates for *Batman* no. 95 (October 1955), *Superboy* no. 44 (October 1955), and *Superman* no. 101 (November 1955), which appeared in the episode on a mock newsstand. See Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, BATHO–BATTERSN, card 0478; Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, SUPER–SUPERIOR_PUB_CO, card 0203c; Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, SUPERIOR_Q–SUPERMAN, card 0356b.
[126] Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 230. Michael J. Hayde does not notate the collection, box, or folder information to track down the scripts at the Library of Congress to corroborate his claims.

discussion of flight. In an article covering his appearance at a Vermont fair, Reeves revealed that playing Superman was difficult both physically and mentally. It was a stressful trifecta. Children pressed Reeves to "fly" at appearances, adults sought displays of strength, and fellow actors heckled him. It is no wonder he detested these probably contractual events. *The Burlington Free Press* noted Reeves' laconic responses to requests for aerial displays on the twenty-eighth of August. "As for flying Reaves [*sic*] is poised enough to parry most remarks with a faint grin and a remark like, 'I only fly on television.'" Yet, Reeves articulated that flying was the key component of the show. "The flying is the most important thing. Without flying, Superman would be just an adventure series."[127] Nine-year-old Michael Hansen of Oceanside, New York, confirmed this when he told *Newsday* in early November the year before: "I like Superman because he flies and all that."[128] Reeves feared that mentioning the superpower would inspire children to attempt to fly. A newspaper article on September 1, 1956, quoted him saying that "during interviews, somebody always wants to know how I learned to fly without wings, and at those times, I feel it is necessary to clam up." *The Journal-News* from Nyack, New York, declared, "That's why Superman isn't revealing any of his flying secrets. There would be youngsters leaping from windows all over the country."[129] Reeves could have discussed flying because the behavior was already happening and by this time the anxiety over the influence of Superman and Comicland temporarily gave way to the new moral panic of rock and roll that Elvis Presley arguably started.[130]

---

[127] Fred Ashcraft, "'Superman' Likes His Job But Keeps Tongue in Cheek," *The Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, VT), vol. 129, no. 206, August 28, 1956, p. 9. For a reference to state fair or county fair appearances and George Reeves' dislike of appearing in costume, see Mort Weisinger, "I Flew With Superman," *Parade*, October 23, 1977, p. 12; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 36; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 57; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 210, 238, 256, 260, 263, 277, 279–281, 518, 520; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 97. *Parade* was magazine insert for newspapers, and the article can be found across the country.

[128] Jo Copolla, "TV Wins Them All—Just 'Because,'" *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), Final Edition, vol. 16, no. 56, November 8, 1955, p. 6c (Center Section).

[129] International News Service, "Phyllis Battelle's Assignment America: Superman Clams Up," *The Journal-News* (Nyack, NY), vol. 67, no. 100, September 1, 1956, p. 4.

[130] For moral panic over media, see Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, pp. 122–140; Leslie Fiedler, *What Was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society* (New York, NY: Simon and Shuster, 1982), pp. 40–49; James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986); Steven Starker, *Evil Influences: Crusades against the Mass Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989); Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, "Moral Panics: Culture, Politics, and Social Construction," *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 20 (1994), pp. 149–171; John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830–1996* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998); Paul S. Boyer, *Purity in Print: Book Censorship in America from the Gilded Age to the Computer Age*, 2nd ed. (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Superman biographer Gary H. Grossman briefly discussed George Reeves uneasiness regarding children imitating him from a secondhand source. Grossman notes that "Reeves expressed his own concern to [costar] Jack Larson. 'Some kids think Superman is indestructible, a few even think the uniform will do the same for them.'" Besides Dr. Lauretta Bender, Reeves eventually became aware that children ascribed a magical quality to the Superman costume. While Grossman paradoxically dismisses the actuality of children's gravity-defying Superman play, he highlights Reeves' genuine concern. Grossman writes, "Reeves was always upset when he heard about young fans pretending to be Superman, trying to fly out of their second-story bedroom windows."[131]

With Dr. Fredric Wertham and his legion of parents and the US Senate Subcommittee hearings two and a half years in the rearview mirror, DC Comics placed Superman back in the spotlight. The 1957 *I Love Lucy* episode entitled "Lucy and Superman" cleverly publicizes the Superman Playsuit on television, acting as an early version of product placement. During the show, little Ricky Ricardo wears the playsuit while watching the Superman television show with his father just as the comic books advised two years prior. At the end of the broadcast, the television program announcer's disembodied voice affirmed the longstanding relationship between Superman's publisher and Macy's. "You children in the New York area, Superman will be making personal appearances this week at Macy's department store. Check your local paper for all details." In response to hearing that Superman would be nearby at Macy's, little Ricky Ricardo innocently pleads to his mother to have Superman attend his birthday party. Lucy Ricardo replies, "Well, I don't know about that honey, but I tell you what. If you're a good boy, I'll take you to Macy's to see him." The announcement may not have been purely pretend. It could have acted as an advertisement to a related event with Superman at Macy's, possibly corresponding with the episode's January airdate or for an intended earlier airdate to match the holiday season. Unfortunately, no traces of Superman events at Macy's in 1957 appear in the historical record. Alternatively, the announcement may just be a coded reference to Superman's many appearances at Macy's during the 1940s as indicated in the previous chapter.[132] Overall,

---

[131] Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 53, 49.

[132] *I Love Lucy*, season 6, episode 13, "Lucy and Superman," directed by James V. Kern, written by Madelyn Martin, Bob Carroll, Jr., Bob Schiller, and Bob Weiskopf, aired January 14, 1957, on CBS. The episode also appears in The Best of *I Love Lucy*, vol. 5, episode 8, on Amazon. And for copyright registration [LP 20686] at the Library of Congress, see Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, DESIGN_O–DESILU_PROD_INC_I, card 1601; Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, I_LOVE_L–I_LOVE_TO_Q, card 0166; Copyright Drawer 1955–1970, LUCKY_I–LUCZ,

the episode encapsulated the marketing innovations of Superman, Inc. The wider lens viewpoint illuminates DC Comics' uncanny ability to navigate troubled waters, ensure Superman's preeminent place in popular culture, and affirm Comicland's resiliency.

The appearance of George Reeves on *I Love Lucy* reflected his evolving opinion on Superman play and the Superman Playsuit. He told a reporter for *The Courier-Journal* of Louisville, Kentucky, that children now began to distinguish fantasy from reality. The article dated July 19, 1958, explained his view, and used italics to show the quotation. However, as the evidence in this chapter shows, children still enacted this behavior.

> One thing George has noticed recently is a decline in the number of youngsters who leap off roofs believing that if "Superman" can fly, so can they.
>
> *"Kids are smarter these days," he says. "They know what is possible and what is just a story. 'Superman' for them is entertainment. They like the 'good over evil' theme, as most kids do. They laugh at Lois Lane because she doesn't know that Clark Kent, the mousy reporter, and 'Superman' are one and the same."*[133]

The Question of Violence

The juvenile delinquency fears of 1954 resurfaced in 1975 and 1977 with a new culprit. Television became the scapegoat for the perceived rise in violence. On June 3, 1975, *The New York Times* wrote about the frustration of the Horace Mann School for Nursery Years over their pupil's television-inspired play. These teachers moaned against the "[r]ecurrent choruses of 'I'm Batman, I'm Superman, I'm a monster, pow, pow, chop, chop,' to the occasional accompaniment of wrestling or karate chops." Educator Miranda Carter complained about boys' play fighting, as if it would not have occurred without the influence of television. The article quoted her as saying: "But when they were yelling 'Batman' or doing karate kicks, it was evident that they were replaying what they had seen on television."[134] During a hearing on the supposed deleterious effects of television organized by the US Senate Subcommittee on Communications, Democratic party Senator Ernest F. Hollings of South Carolina conveyed a personal anecdote of superhero play on May 11, 1977. "My young boy was Robin and Batman. He kept jumping off the garage

---

card 1213. For secondary source mentions, see Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 151–153; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 258, 270, 275–276.

[133] Bill Ladd, "Bill Ladd's TV Almanae: 'Superman' Expecting Heavier Competition," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), vol. 208, no. 19, July 19, 1958, p. 2 (Section 2).

[134] Nadine Brozan, "Film and TV Violence: A Nursery School Takes a Stand," *The New York Times*, Late City Final Edition, vol. 124, no. 42,864, June 3, 1975, p. 28.

and out the second story window and he finally learned he couldn't fly."[135] Also testifying at the hearing, public advocate Ted Carpenter expressed concern about the impact of television on viewers, especially violent imagery, and referenced Senator Hollings' story as support to his view that television watching is instructional. In his role as the executive director of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, Carpenter cited superhero play as proof of television teaching children violence:

> I think we are worried about the impact on the product that reaches the home. That is the program, I think there is a cost to that. There is a social cost to that. We have had all kinds of conjecturers about the degree to which image and programs—what about the image of violence? You talk about [the] passive viewer, and you mentioned your own son is out there imitating Batman and Spiderman [*sic*] and things of that sort.
>
> That doesn't sound passive to me. That sounds like television is translating very actively into our lives. I think that is the real cost of television, that we haven't really figured out.[136]

Any rational person could see through this doomsaying and that there is no correlation between kids' imaginative play and actual violence. Even though media coverage and scholarship lacked hard evidence proving causation, morally conservative leaders embraced the theories.

Like Batman, Superman provided these "reformers" with an easy target. They illogically reasoned that children's appetite for the Man of Steel and mimicry of him would turn them into violent adults. In the same hearing, another official expressed concern over Superman emulation. Republican party Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina summarized the flimsy contemporary research with stereotypically paternalistic and racist language: "'monkey see, monkey do.'" His rhetoric also included the superhero genre. "There have been numerous documented instances of children and adults directly imitating behavior and activities witnessed on the TV or movie screen. Many children have been injured and at least one killed trying to fly like Superman."[137]

---

[135] *Television Broadcast Policies*, US Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, 95th Cong., 1st sess., May 11, 1977, S261-32, p. 192.
[136] Testimony by Ted Carpenter in *Television Broadcast Policies*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., May 11, 1977, pp. 289–290. I have not examined the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting Records at the University of Iowa.
[137] *Television Broadcast Policies*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., May 11, 1977, p. 204. See also Associated Press, "TV violence called a 'health hazard,'" *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Metro Edition, yr. 145, May 12, 1977, p. 2C.

Criminal defense lawyers offered television violence as an explanation for murder. The "television intoxication" defense for insanity preceded the "Twinkie defense" of San Francisco, California, politician Dan White by two years. Florida charged and convicted Miami area teenagers Ronny Zamora and Darrell Agrella of burglary and robbery, possession of a firearm, and the first-degree murder of eighty-three-year-old Elinor Haggart, who Zamora shot to death. The defendant's mother Yolanda, a Costa Rican immigrant, blamed her son's actions on extensive television watching. On October 4, 1977, *The Miami News* relayed her testimony that specifically cited Superman as the cause of his actions.

> His favorite shows were "Superman" and "Batman and Robin," and as he grew older, she said, he began to act them out.
>
> She said he tied a plastic bag around his shoulders and ran along, pretending to be able to fly. He once tried to persuade his father to let him try to fly out their fourth-floor apartment window. "He thought he could do the same things Superman was doing," Mrs. Zamora said.[138]

Medical experts also took an interest in superhero play. Echoing the research of Dr. Lauretta Bender, Bronx-based psychiatrist Dr. Cynthia R. Pfeffer observed the fantasy play of hospitalized children who maintained suicidal tendencies. In her academic journal article published in the winter of 1979 for *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, Pfeffer argues that scrutiny of such play offers a pathway to diagnose and reveal "chronic escalating stress" as well as predict "suicidal potential." She cites an example of a six-year-old boy named Andrew, who responded to the loss of his father through dangerous Superman play.

> A fourth warning sign is the life-endangering, unrealistic repetitive acting out of omnipotent fantasies such as being a superhero like Superman …. The child may attempt miraculous feats, like flying, without regard to the possibility of dangerous consequences. There were many cases of this type of acting out among the children we studied. Andrew is an appropriate example. He was seven when he attempted to jump out a sixth floor [*sic*] window, stating that he was Superman

---

[138] John Katzenbach, "Zamora's mother says Ronney was 'TV addict' at 6," *The Miami News*, Metropolitan 1-Star Edition, October 4, 1977, p. 4A. For a less descriptive mention of his Superman play, see Jim Buchanan, "Mom: Zamora Spoon-Fed in Front of TV," *The Miami Herald*, Final Edition, yr. 67, no. 308, October 4, 1977, p. B2. Covered in many more newspapers around the country with a slightly different account. "He was just crazy about Superman. He would wrap a towel around his neck and ask my husband to open the window so he could jump out." See, for example, Associated Press, "Mom: TV was compulsion," *The Austin American-Statesman* (Austin, TX), Final Evening Edition, vol. 107, no. 50, October 4, 1977, p. A1; Associated Press, "Zamora Wanted To Fly Like Superman: Mother," *The Journal* (Ogdensburg, NY), vol. 26, no. 6370, October 4, 1977, p. 3.

See also "Television in courts: Time for reevaluation," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sports Final Edition, vol. 297, no. 105, October 13, 1977, p. 10-A; "Editorials: Bum rap," *Broadcasting*, vol. 93, no. 16, October 17, 1977, p. 82.

> and that he could fly. Significantly, Andrew's father who had died before Andrew was born, died after a fall from a third floor [*sic*] fire escape. When Andrew was six years old, he began to play Superman and jump off cars. Once pretending to be his hero he climbed to a rock and could not get down, although he insisted he could. He often played Superman at home and would hold a towel outstretched behind him and run to windows and lean out. His mother brought him to the hospital for evaluation because she was worried that she could not leave him alone since he might jump.[139]

In contrast to most pediatric psychology experts, educators recycled the panic over television violence to their students in the next decade. Helene Yarmus, a teacher at P.S. 41 in the Bronx, assigned her fifth-grade class a letter-writing exercise about the question of violent media. Student Michelle Cruz linked a neighbor's dangerous Superman stunt to violence on 1980s television. The article in *The Courier-News* of Bridgewater, New Jersey, on October 10, 1981, quoted Cruz:

> I think violence on TV is making children injure or even kill themselves. For example, my neighbor thought he was Superman. He believed he could fly out the window. Fortunately, it was raining the day he tried and fell on a pile of mud. He was safe. This could have been a tragedy. That's why I'm against violence on TV.[140]

Superhero Play After George Reeves: The 1960s to the Recent Past

DC Comics and the Superman Playsuit manufacturers finally learned their lesson in 1960. This version contained a warning label.[141] According to an article in *The Hartford Courant* on the thirtieth of October, "One manufacturer found so many youngsters injuring themselves by trying to fly in their Superman costumes they had to put in notes warning the suits were strictly earthbound."[142] *Newsday* journalist John Anderson recalled his childhood experience of finding the note on October 24, 1993.

> When I was a lad (harrumph), I had a Superman suit. Inside the shirttail was a warning: "Remember kids: This costume won't make you fly. ONLY

---

[139] Cynthia R. Pfeffer, "Clinical Observations of Play of Hospitalized Suicidal Children," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, vol. 9, no. 4 (Winter 1979), p. 240.
[140] Tony Mauro, "Children from a high crime neighborhood discuss TV violence," *The Courier-News* (Bridgewater, NJ), October 10, 1981, p. C-1.
[141] For the 1960 advertisement, see *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 110, no. 37,577, December 11, 1960, p. 68.
[142] Sid Moody, "Halloween Prospectus: Television Land Outside Your Door: Characters from the video screen such as Zorro and Charlie Weaver claim top spot in small-fry disguises," *The Hartford Courant*, Daily Edition, vol. 123, October 30, 1960, p. 9 (Magazine Section); Sid Moody, "Witches Are Passe: Halloween Unmasked," *The Sunday Press* (Binghamton, NY), vol. 12, no. 8, October 30, 1960, p. 8-C.

> SUPERMAN CAN FLY" — which, when you think about it, was a commercially cautious little juxtaposition of fact and fiction. I thought it was ridiculous though: Of course the cape and tights won't make you fly, any more than your sailor suit was going to qualify you to captain the QE II.[143]

Fellow baby boomer Jerry Seinfeld echoed this experience and then satirized the notion that a written message warning against simulating Superman would have deterred such eager children. His August 8, 1998, stand-up comedy special *"I'm Telling You For The Last Time:" Live on Broadway* for HBO included a routine on dressing up as Superman on Halloween but drifted off on this slight tangent about children moving Comicland too far into reality and getting hurt.

> Do you remember this? Th-this is an obscure one, but—on the side of the box, I remember this on my Superman costume, it actually said: "Do not attempt to fly." They printed that as a warning 'cause kids were putting it on and [vocalizing the whistling sound effect of falling off a cliff from early animated cartoons followed by a clack] going off the roofs. I love the idea of the kid who's stupid enough to think he actually is Superman, but smart enough to check that box before he goes off the roof. "Wait, let me see if it says anything about me being Superman. Oh, wait a second here, I—."[144]

While Seinfeld poked fun at the idea of kids leaping off roofs in the Superman Playsuit, he is publicly articulating an appreciation for the character matched by few entertainers. More on his normalization of the superhero genre through humor in the next chapter.

Superman as a fictional character and his costume held a deep currency among 1960s American children. Cartoonist Bil [*sic*] Keane depicted the struggle to secure a towel on July 2, 1962, in the Hampton, Virginia, newspaper the *Daily Press*. After taking a shower, a father, who was soaking wet, stuck his head out of the bathroom door to find his two boys playing Superman and asked if he could borrow a "cape" to dry off.[145] One adolescent agreed with critics of the previous decade. Fifteen-year-old John Paquette from Rochester, New York, advocated for television censorship in light of Superman's effect on young boys. His letter to the editor published on October 30, 1963, in the *Democrat and Chronicle* mentioned an unverifiable death. "I feel that Superman should be taken off the air because it's an influence on smaller children. The four-year-old boy who jumped off the bridge to his death may have thought he could fly like

---

[143] John Anderson, "On Movies: Crossing The Fantasy-Reality Line," *Sunday Newsday* (Long Island, NY), New York and Nassau Editions, vol. 54, no. 52, October 24, 1993, p. 5 (Fan Fare Section).
[144] *"I'm Telling You For The Last Time:" Live on Broadway*, directed by Marty Callner, written by Jerry Seinfeld (n.p.: HBO Home Video, 1999), DVD. For an alternate version of the joke, see Jerry Seinfeld, *Is This Anything?* (New York, NY: Simon and Shuster, 2020), p. 102.
[145] Bil Keane, "The Family Circus," *Daily Press* (Hampton, VA), vol. 68, no. 174, July 2, 1962, p. 22.

Superman. Smaller kids in our neighborhood play Superman and I feel that some of them think they are super men."[146] Superhero costuming by kids was a widespread pattern and a source of discussion by adults. A syndicated story first published in the Sunday edition of the New York paper the *Daily News* on November 21, 1965, explained that one youngster refused to remove his Superman Playsuit and wore it underneath his plain clothes like Clark Kent. So enamored with Superman, this child even wore the costume to church. Another boy sported the playsuit to the supermarket and proclaimed that he was really Superman but dressed up as Batman on Halloween.

> A friend gave a couple of 10-year-olds those Superman suits. One of them refuses to take the costume off. He was, however, forced to dress up for church, but when he came home peeled off his Sunday duds and sure enough, there was the Superman outfit underneath. One wonders if he told himself in church: "They think I'm Clark Kent but I know I'm Superman." The other youngster wore his suit to the supermarket where the clerk guessed he was Superman for Halloween. "No," said the kid, "for Halloween I changed to Batman. I AM Superman."[147]

These outfits sustained the same popularity among children three years later. With newfound money amounting to twenty-five dollars and fifty cents, five-year-old Oscar Hartley from an unnamed town in Long Island, New York, planned to purchase several heroic costumes in late 1968. The *Newsday* article on the thirtieth of November quoted him as saying: "I'm going to spend it on a racing car, a Batman suit, a Superman suit and a Popeye suit."[148] Superheroes are a part of childhood.

The recurring pattern of Superman play induced hypothetical legal questions. On March 25, 1965, *Time* reported on a fictional lawsuit revealing injurious Superman play. Twelve-year-old Mark Johns climbed a builder's hoist and fell twenty-five feet. Under cross-examination, the lawyer for the defense "got Mark to admit that when he got to the top of the hoist he had shouted: 'Look at me! I'm Superman.'" It is unclear, nonetheless, how Johns' admission of horsing around helped the defense. This exercise was part of the "mock personal-injury trials" held at the

---

[146] John Paquette, "'Children Imperiled Playing Superman,'" letter to the editor, *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Complete Metropolitan Edition, yr. 131, October 20, 1963, p. 2M. I cannot find an article for this Superman play death but include it in my tally at the end of the chapter.
[147] Robert Sylvester, "Dream Street: You Can Bank on It," *Sunday News* (New York, NY), 4-Star Final Edition, vol. 45, no. 27, November 21, 1965, p. 2 (Section 2).
[148] Pete Bowles, "LIRR Warns Against Discrimination," *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), vol. 29, no. 76, November 30, 1968, p. 9.

University of Michigan to better prepare lawyers for real-life cases.[149] In other words, Superman play acted as a potential lawsuit but there is no record of any parents initiating litigation. The legal counsel for Yolanda Zamora, however, followed the cue of the University of Michigan Law School mock trial by using Superman as a defense. While Superman was everywhere some adults still did not know the origin of his powers. The 1968 New Year's Day issue of *Newsweek* indicated that thespian Helen Hayes, like many children, mistakenly thought that Superman's cape was magical.[150]

When Batman grew in popularity in the late 1960s through the hammy television show, children desired to be fearless like the Dynamic Duo.[151] According to the *Los Angeles Times* on August 9, 1966, three-and-a-half-year-old Joseph Koran from El Cajon, California, confused Batman and Superman. Donning a Batman mask and cape, he jumped off his parents second-floor balcony in late June 1966 and broke his thigh, which resulted in a forty-two-day hospital stay. Although his parents convinced him that Batman cannot fly, he retorted that Superman can. To prevent another disastrous leap, the Koran's moved to a one-story house.[152] Referencing the ubiquity of Batman, author Ralph Ellison explained that cultural pressures equally effected white and black children living in Manhattan during 1966. *Time* quoted the novelist on the ninth of September, "You see little Negro batmen flying around Harlem just as you see white ones flying around Sutton Place."[153] Syndicated columnist Dr. Wayne G. Brandstadt wrote in late November 1968 that "parental supervision could have prevented a boy from donning a Batman or Superman suit and jumping off a roof thinking he could fly."[154] It is unclear if Brandstadt was being rhetorical or referencing past events. Regardless, in the case of the California child mentioned above, supervision might not have been enough to impede his determination.

Just as their predecessors did, Generation Xers and early millennials identified with Superman. The August 30, 1976, issue of *People* featured a picture of three-year-old Carter Berg wearing a Superman T-shirt and standing on a chair in Central Park with his arms outstretched

---

[149] "The Law: Law Schools: A Peek at the Pros," *Time*, vol. 87, no. 12, March 25, 1966, pp. 43–44.
[150] Mel Gusso, "Theater: The APA's Big Season," *Newsweek*, vol. 71, no. 1, January 1, 1968, p. 57.
[151] See syndicated columnist Erma Bombeck's lament on Batman eclipsing Superman. Erma Bombeck, "At Wit's End," *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), Final Edition, vol. 26, no. 163, March 16, 1966, p. 57.
[152] "Parents Move to Keep 'Superman' Son, 3, Grounded," *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1966, p. 3. Covered in many more newspapers around the country.
[153] "The Nation: Cities: The Menchildren Speak," *Time*, vol. 88, no. 11, September 9, 1966, p. 22.
[154] Dr. Wayne G. Brandstadt, "The Doctor Says: Child's Playthings Can Be Dangerous," *The Daily Home News* (New Brunswick, NJ), Central Edition, November 25, 1968, p. 17; Dr. Wayne G. Brandstadt, "Family Doctor: Broken Playthings Not Foolproof," *The Pittsburgh Press*, Final Edition, vol. 85, no. 155, November 27, 1968, p. 47.

grasping his homemade cape as if they were wings. "Neither bird nor plane. Carter Berg, 3, prepares for a takeoff in New York's Central Park in his Superman T-shirt and cape."[155] Even more than the late 1960s Saturday morning cartoon series *Super Friends*, which likely cultivated Berg's bond to Comicland, the *Superman* movies starring Christopher Reeve shaped children in the 1980s. *Time* reported on July 7, 1980, that the contest for entry into the upcoming Sears 1981 spring/summer catalogue received countless photographs of children in licensed Superman clothing. "It is obvious too that the makers of Superman costumes are doing a bang-up business. Sherie and Pat have separated out scores of smiling children who have absolutely nothing in common except their costumes: the bright red and blue leotards of the man from Krypton."[156] The redesigned playsuit for 1978—rebranded as simply a costume sometime in the previous decade—which promoted the picture might have retained the do not fly notification issued in 1960.[157] This description in *Time* showed DC Comics' commercialization of Comicland. The impact of the Superman movie franchise and Superman merchandise on American culture is unmistakable, and some criticism of it in the final section of this chapter.

Unfortunately, the darker side of Superman play also occurred in the 1980s and was not restricted to emotionally or mentally unbalanced children. Inspired by a scene in *Superman II*, five-year-old Randy Phillips of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, set fire to the sofa and burned down the house on April 8, 1985, the day after seeing the picture. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Pittsburgh Press* stressed that the boy clearly attempted to replicate Superman's superbreath by defusing the flames. In the movie, Superman blows out a fire started by General Zod and then freezes the fuel tank on a tractor trailer to prevent an explosion.[158] Another example of dangerous Superman play surfaced on February 20, 1989. After watching Superman on television, an unnamed three-year-old boy from California dove out a second-story window. He escaped injury by taking his pillow with him on the plunge. Local newspapers circulated this event in childhood Comicland.[159]

---

[155] "Today's Talkative T-Shirts—Wear Them Anywhere, But Don't Call Them Underwear," *People*, vol. 6, no. 9, August 30, 1976, p. 17.
[156] Steven Holmes, "American Scene: In Chicago: A Sears Catalogue of Kids," *Time*, vol. 116, no. 1, July 7, 1980, p. 6.
[157] See Vincent Coppola with David T. Friendly and Janet Huck, "Now, It's Superhype," *Newsweek*, vol. 92, no. 15, October 19, 1978, p. 79.
[158] "Boy, mimicking Superman, sets house on fire," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, vol. 312, no. 99, April 9, 1985, p. 4B; "Super case of parent burnout," *The Pittsburgh Press*, vol. 101, no. 286, April 9, 1985, p. A6.
[159] For California newspapers, see Associated Press, "Toddler takes 25-foot leap," *Ukiah Daily Journal* (Mendocino County, CA), vol. 128, no. 263, February 21, 1989, p. 1; "Boy unhurt in super fall," *The Sun* (San Bernardino, CA),

Similar stories surfaced in the 1990s about superheroic stunts gone awry. Six-year-old Matthew Mitchell, the child of a nurse living in Knoxville, Tennessee, broke his arm when copycatting Superman. The September 1994 issue of *Good Housekeeping* quoted his mother Marilyn Mitchell as saying: "Two weeks after Matthew cut his head and had stiches, he jumped off a railroad tie trying to fly like Superman and broke his arm. I was still tense from the first accident, so when I heard my neighbor screaming my name, I thought, 'Oh my God, is he dead?'"[160] By this time, parents and pediatric experts expected youngsters to engage in Superman play. An article in the March 1998 issue of *Redbook* prepared middle-to-upper class mothers for different types of injuries, and even mentioned that boys will pretend to "fly like Superman off the hood of the car." It gave them a guide upon how to respond and the type of medical attention needed for such injuries. Advice ranged from ice to bandages and from stiches to casts.[161] Data from a 1997 study by media studies scholar Máire Messenger Davies suggests that most children understood that superheroes were fictional. In her book, *Fake, Fact, and Fantasy: Children's Interpretations of Television Reality*, Davies concludes: "Overall, children of all age groups showed good awareness of TV illusions, with 92% knowing that Superman and Batman cannot really fly."[162]

This decade included ordinary Superman play too. Journalist Larry Tye references his stepdaughter's experience at the age of four of dressing up as Superman (and not Supergirl) for Halloween around the year 1996.[163] Marina Long recalled her uninhibited power rush of pretending to be the Man of Steel.

> I wanted to be Superman for Halloween. I had an awesome outfit with a powerful S emblazoned on its chest, and my mom got me a couple of turtlenecks to wear underneath it, both to keep me warm in the chill of late October New England weather, and to lend my 6-year-old(?) frame a suitably beefy, powerful build so that I could more realistically inhabit Superman's character. I went to the playground and started zooming around, running and jumping off of the 4x4 wooden beams that encircled the play structure. As I paused in my superhero

---

Sports Final Edition, February 21, 1989, p. B1; "Tot unhurt trying 'Superman' flight," *Santa Cruz Sentinel* (Santa Cruz, CA), yr. 133, no. 45, February 21, 1989, p. A-8; "Boy, 3, learns hard way only Superman flies," *The Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), 3-Star Sports Final Edition, February 22, 1989, p. B3. Covered in many more newspapers around the country.

[160] "Parent Profile," *Good Housekeeping*, vol. 219, no. 3 (September 1994), p. 226.

[161] Beth Levine, "11 ways to treat bumps, bruises (and even breaks)," *Redbook*, vol. 190, no. 5 (March 1998), pp. 153–154.

[162] Máire Messenger Davies, *Fake, Fact, and Fantasy: Children's Interpretations of Television Reality* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997), p. 53. See also pages 61, 167, 179–180, and 218.

[163] Tye, *Superman*, p. xi.

> activities, two dads smiled kindly down at me, and one said, "Wow, look, it's Supergirl!" I felt a rush of power, and yelled, "No! I'm Superman!" and bounded off again, buoyed by the delight in talking back to an adult, and in making my intentions clear. If I got strange reactions from those dads after my comment, or other kids, I do not remember them at all. I was completely un-self-conscious, just totally immersed in the power and strength I felt in being a superhero, and speaking truth to my power.[164]

Superman costuming persisted into the millennium. On another Halloween in the first decade of the twentieth century, Larry Tye witnessed the popularity of the Man of Steel. He narrates the experience this way: "The final test came on Halloween, when merchants in my hometown of Lexington, Massachusetts, hand out candy all afternoon, packing sidewalks with costumed kids who provide the perfect sampling with which to judge who's hot in the world of heroes. Spider-Man did well, with half a dozen children dressed in webbed costumes, but the hands-down winner was the blue tights, red cape, and bright yellow *S* of Superman." Tye uses these anecdotes to illustrate that the Man of Steel is not "passé." In other words, they served as justification for writing his 2012 biography on Superman.[165] Still, this observation of Spider-Man as secondary to Superman is unexpected given the success of the Tobey Maguire movie trilogy. Beyond Halloween, children wore Superman outfits as general play. In his 2007 article for *The Saturday Evening Post*, Tait Trussell explained that a neighbor's dog bit his son's bottom when playing Superman. "The boy was running in his Superman suit with cape flying—enough to attract the dog."[166] The Man of Steel remained popular at this time due to the *Smallville* television series. Besides keeping Superman relevant to new generations, media projections of the character enact the corporate vision of Comicland and help sell merchandise like the Superman costume.

United Kingdom medical professionals addressed the issue of children engaging in risky play while wearing superhero costumes in March 2007. The team's academic paper entitled "Superhero-related injuries in paediatrics: a case series" in the journal *Archives of Disease in Childhood* partly echoes the earlier ideas of Dr. Lauretta Bender, who rejected parental overprotection. Although UK experts recognize the need for children to enact risk-taking

---

[164] Marina Long to Andrew Fogel, email correspondence, September 8, 2022.
[165] Tye, *Superman*, p. xi. Larry Tye does not recall the year of the Halloween. "And I presume the other Halloween was when I was writing the book, but not sure which year. Just take my pub [*sic*] date and count back a couple years." Larry Tye to Andrew Fogel, email correspondence, August 30, 2022.
[166] Tait Trussell, "Giving The Dog His Due," *The Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 279, no. 1 (January/February 2007), p. 66.

behavior and imaginative play, parents must supervise their activity, secure windows, and educate their kids on the difference between fantasy and reality to avoid serious injury. The team concludes: "Children have an extraordinary ability to injure themselves and will find new ways to do so in the future. Parents, however, should be aware that a superhero costume can provoke perceived super-abilities which need special supervision." Additionally, they correctly acknowledge the rotating popularity of superheroes. At the time of their small study, X-Men, Spider-Man, and Batman were the three superhero movie franchises. Children will mimic the superheroes that they see projected on screen and present in culture. Therefore, these experts examined injuries when children wore mostly Spider-Man costumes. They also explain that Spider-Man's ability to climb buildings is especially problematic because it mirrors children's need to explore and develop an understanding of risk versus reward. In sum, the character and corresponding outfit may change but the injuries—broken bones, bruises, and sprains—will stay the same.[167] Comicland is a transatlantic feature of modern childhood and only a small portion of the millions of young fans will feed their fantasy to the extreme by enacting risky superhero play.

Mothers and Superman

Like the competing assessments of psychiatrists, journalists, educators, and medical experts, mothers perceived Superman as a mixed bag. On the one hand, Superman provided a mental and physical outlet for their children's creative energy. On the other hand, Superman play raised concerns of infatuation and injury as well as insubordination to parental power. From the available sources, there is a definite consistency over time regarding maternal ambivalence and begrudging acceptance of the Man of Steel.

Mothers maintained a positive relationship with Superman in the early 1940s once he conceded to their authority. They used him to legitimize their power and instill healthy eating habits. *The New Yorker* communicated a story on December 14, 1940, that Superman proclaimed the wisdom of mothers so that children would listen to their elders regarding food choices. "At the request of a worried mother, they once made Superman deliver a brief lecture about how Mother knows best what's good for small boys and girls to eat; this went over so big that now

[167] Patrick Davies, Julia Surridge, Laura Hole, and Lisa Munro-Davies, "Superhero-related injuries in paediatrics: a case series," *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, vol. 92, no. 3 (March 2007), pp. 242–243. For acknowledgement of Spider-Man's greater popularity at the time, see De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 7–8.

Superman gets fan mail from mothers."[168] An on-air advertisement for Superman during *The Fred Allen Show* on October 9, 1940, announced the approval of one mother. "My boy is eight and can't seem to get enough of Superman. I should like to thank the publishers of *Action Comics* magazine for including a health page in every issue. Billy has been eating his cereal and drinking his milk regularly since Superman told him to do so."[169] As these sources suggest, mothers quickly realized the power that Superman wielded and persuaded DC Comics to get him to advocate on their behalf. *Liberty* described Superman as a surrogate parent on September 20, 1941. "Mothers, realizing the power of this third parent, have gotten in the habit of asking Superman to drop a line to Junior, urging Junior to eat his egg yolk, stop beating his cat and biting his nails."[170] Mort Weisinger paraphrased this corporate design to appease mothers in 1946 and again in 1977 without a citation to *Liberty*.[171] Most likely referencing this pattern in 1947, Coulton Waugh writes that "he has taught young people to keep clean and healthy."[172] The 1949 text *Clothing for Children* noted Superman's hygienic effect. As authors Henrietta Mary Thompson and Lucille E. Rea explain, "The 'funnies' are an extraordinary influence on the six- to twelve -year-olds. Superman, that fabulous figure in the world of comics, could be used as an inspiration, or as a method of instruction. If Superman brushes his teeth, takes care of his clothes, and always presents a well-groomed effect before he sets out on his exploits, thousands of grade school boys take greater interest in their own appearance."[173]

The presentation of Superman as a role model is a reaction to early disapproval, which can be viewed as a precursor to the comics scare. Historian Ian Gordon contends that Superman's publishers began presenting its brand and metonymic symbol as "wholesome" to mothers shortly after an attack on comics by Sterling North. On May 8, 1940, *The Chicago Daily News* columnist pleaded to parents to protect their kids from the poisonous mushrooming

---

[168] "The Talk of the Town: Santa's Helper," *The New Yorker*, December 14, 1940, p. 20.

[169] Archive.org and the Supermanhomepage obtained the audio for the show. See https://archive.org/details/otr_fredallen/Fred_Allen__40XXXX_Fred_Interviews_Superman_Writer_Jerry_Sie.mp3; https://www.supermanhomepage.com/multimedia/Sounds/MP3/Radio-Fred-Allen-Siegel.mp3.

See also "Up in the Sky! Look!," *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 26 (July 2003), pp. 29–33; Tye, *Superman*, p. 39; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 194.

[170] Ted Shane, "Super-Duper: The amazing story behind a cartoon character who has 35,000,000 fans," *Liberty*, vol. 18, no. 38, September 20, 1941, p. 40.

[171] See Mort Weisinger, "Here Comes Superman!," *Coronet*, vol. 20, no. 3 (July 1946), p. 24; Weisinger, "I Flew With Superman," *Parade*, p. 12. For secondary source mention without a citation, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 123.

[172] Waugh, *The Comics*, p. 259.

[173] Henrietta Mary Thompson and Lucille E. Rea, *Clothing for Children* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949), p. 13.

medium of comic books. Gordon's point is, however, too narrow because criticism preceded North. Months earlier periodicals mentioned rising concerns by parents and Parent Teacher Associations over the Superman radio show. *Variety* warned back on the twenty-fourth of January that the show's content could incite "further kickbacks from parents and teachers associations." The periodical repeated its analysis on the twenty-first of February. "The only thing that all concerned have to worry about is whether the serial's plots and hard-hitting level of excitement won't incur a kickback from parent-teachers association[s] or kindred groups. The chances are pretty much in the affirmative." Five days later, *Time* wrote, "Superman or no superman he has to watch his step on the radio. Mothers' clubs have their eyes on him." To placate parents and prevent any further public scrutiny, DC Comics and partner company at the time All American Comics instituted an Editorial Advisory Board composed of child psychologists and psychiatrists, educators, and youth advocates. Comic books cover dated October 1941 exhibited an announcement of this change. It is doubtful that kids cared about any sort of intellectual approval of comics. The message appears to be for adults because the publishers assumed that parents reviewed their kids' reading material.[174] All American Comics publisher M. C. Gaines was instrumental in organizing the board and promoting comics as innocuous entertainment, a fact virtually absent from the current historiography. He often engaged with the public and critics in the Catholic Church to temper their animosity and attempt to overturn their position.[175] Correspondence in Dr. Lauretta Bender's files and her testimony to

---

[174] Waugh, *The Comics*, p. 344; Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. 33–34, 89, 171; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 135–137; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 20–21, 101–102; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 48, 60; Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*, pp. 113–114, 149–150; Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, pp. 184, 208, 236; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 136, 149, 153; Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, p. 17. See, for example, *Action Comics* no. 17 (October 1941) and "A Message to Our Readers: Introducing the Editorial Advisory Board," in *More Fun Comics* no. 72 (October 1941).

See also Sterling North, "A National Disgrace," *The Chicago Daily News*, Red Streak Edition, vol. 65, no. 110, May 8, 1940, p. 21. For supportive responses to the editorial, see Louis Newberger, "The Comics," letter to the editor, *The Chicago Daily News*, Final Edition, vol. 65, no. 115, May 14, 1940, p. 10; Margaret N. Heneghan, "The Comic Books," letter to the editor, *The Chicago Daily News*, Final Edition, vol. 65, no. 116, May 15, 1940, p. 14; Mrs. F. W. Yochum, "The 'Comic' Books," letter to the editor, *The Chicago Daily News*, Final Edition, vol. 65, no. 120, May 20, 1940, p. 10. The article is reprinted as Sterling North, "A National Disgrace (And a Challenge to American Parents)," *Childhood Education*, vol. 17, no. 2 (October 1940), p. 56.

For parents, teachers, and mothers, see "'Superman' Too Heroic For Radio," *Variety*, vol. 137, no. 7, January 24, 1940, p. 1; Odec, "'Superman,'" *Variety*, vol. 137, no. 11, February 21, 1940, p. 30; "Radio: H-O Superman," *Time*, vol. 35, no. 9, February 26, 1940, p. 42. For a secondary source mention, see Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 37, 39, 91.

[175] For the advisory board, see M. C. Gaines to Mr. Independent Wholesaler, undated letter, box 11, folder 1-52 This Is Our Enemy, WWB. For engagement with the public, see October 10, 1944, letter and enclosure, box 12, folder 1-52, WWB. For Catholic clergy, see letters in box 19, folder 3, LB; J. F. Regis O'Brien, T.O.R. to M. C. Gaines,

the US Senate on April 22, 1954, indicated that she earned one hundred and fifty dollars a month for her service on both committees and began advising the publishers on February 25, 1944. All American Comics paid fifty dollars and DC Comics one hundred dollars, and the generous remuneration remained unchanged once the two companies merged after the untimely death of Gaines in 1947.[176] Jack S. Liebowitz terminated the board in November 1954, approximately five months after the US Senate hearings.[177] The presentation of Superman as a friend to parents and kids grew through the tolerance messages crafted by the National Social Welfare Assembly (NSWA) starting in 1948, an initiative orchestrated with the board.[178] In a letter to Max Lerner of the *New York Post* dated April 20, 1954, Dr. Lauretta Bender explained the origins and purpose

---

October 25, 1944, box 12, folder 1-52, WWB; M. C. Gaines to Father Robert Southard, S. J., letter, October 26, 1944, pp. 1–2, box 11, folder 1-52, WWB; M. C. Gaines to Clifton Fadiman, letter, October 30, 1944, box 11, folder 1-52, WWB; M. C. Gaines to Frederica Barach, letter, February 14, 1945, box 12, folder 1-52, WWB; Frederica Barach to M. C. Gaines, letter, February 24, 1945, box 12, folder 1-52, WWB; Frederica Barach to M. C. Gaines, letter, February 24, 1945, box 112, folder G 1945, WWB. For his questioning of comics as inciting juvenile delinquency, see M. C. Gaines to Rex Stout, letter, March 30, 1945, box 11, folder 1-52 Progress Report, WWB; Rex Stout to M. C. Gaines, letter, April 3, 1945, box 11, folder 1-52 Progress Report, WWB.

[176] For DC Comics' hiring of Dr. Lauretta Bender as an Editorial Advisory Board member and the question of service as a conflict with the New York Academy of Medicine regulations, see, in chronological order, M. C. Gaines to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, February 8, 1944; Harry E. Childs to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, February 25, 1944, pp. 1–2; Dr. Lauretta Bender to Harry E. Childs, letter, March 1, 1944; Dr. Lauretta Bender to Dr. Iago Galdston, letter, March 2, 1944; Dr. Iago Galdston to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, March 6, 1944; Dr. Lauretta Bender to Harry E. Childs, letter, March 10, 1944; M. C. Gaines to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, March 29, 1944; M. C. Gaines to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, April 26, 1944; M. C. Gaines to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, October 27, 1944. All letters in box 18, folder 5, LB. See also Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, October 21, 1954, pp. 1–2; Dr. Lauretta Bender to Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld, letter, December 18, 1954; and Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, May 12, 1955, p. 1. All letters in box 19, folder 2, LB. See also Sterling North, "Sterling North Reviews the Books," *New York World-Telegram*, 7th Sports Final, vol. 121, no. 215, p. 30 (Second Section). The October 21, 1954, letter mentioned this article—a review of Dr. Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*—that named Dr. Bender as a paid consultant, aka comic book apologist.

For the US Senate and more, see, in chronological order, Dr. Lauretta Bender to Estes Kefauver, letter, August 17, 1950, p. 3, box 19, folder 2, LB; testimony by Dr. Lauretta Bender in *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., April 22, 1954, pp. 157, 305–306; Dr. Lauretta Bender to Karl M. Bowman, letter, July 21, 1960, p. 2, box 1, folder 3, LB.

For M. C. Gaines tragic death on Lake George, New York, due to a boat collision, see "Two Men Are Killed in Crash Of Motorboats on Lake Placid," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 96, no. 32,716, August 21, 1947, p. 1. For claims of an earlier merger in 1944 based on faulty oral history, see Daniels, *Wonder Woman*, p. 22; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 223; Gary Slutsker, "Marketing: The secret is in the packaging," *Forbes*, vol. 139, no. 13, June 15, 1987, p. 232; Murray, "The Driving Force That Really Made DC Great," *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 98 (December 2010), pp. 9, 16.

[177] For the dissolution of DC Comics' Editorial Advisory Board and Dr. Bender's dismissal in that capacity, see Jack S. Liebowitz to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, September 7, 1954, pp. 1–2; Dr. Lauretta Bender to Jack S. Liebowitz, letter, September 17, 1954, pp. 1–2; Dr. Lauretta Bender to Jack S. Liebowitz, letter, November 5, 1954; Jack S. Liebowitz to Dr. Lauretta Bender, letter, November 10, 1954; Dr. Lauretta Bender to Whitney Ellsworth, letter, October 17, 1955. All letters in box 19, folder 2, LB.

See also Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, pp. 270–271, 405n32, 405–406n34. Many of her citations do not match the current box and folder arrangement in the archives.

[178] Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 155–158.

of the arrangement. Her correspondence served as a rebuttal to Lerner's five-part editorial that accentuated the dangers of comic books. He is one of a few Jewish writers that sounded the alarm but only at the apotheosis of the paranoia; Dr. Fredric Wertham was the exception.

> In 1948, National Comics offered to the Assembly a full page in each of its magazines for the purpose of bringing an important socially-worthwhile message each month to the youth of the nation. After carefully scrutinizing all the magazines the Assembly accepted the company's invitation. Under the terms of the agreement, the Assembly examines all of National's publications monthly and is entitled to withhold Assembly messages from any magazine which fails to meet the terms of our editorial code. In five years of co-operative effort -- the Assembly has found fault with only one of the magazines (Brooklyn) and that title was promptly discontinued to conform with the Assembly's wishes.[179]

While advocating for diversity the NSWA messages were, nonetheless, limited in scope and reflected the time period because they reaffirmed the established norms of whiteness as the barometer for citizenship.

Children's heroic imaginative play introduced challenges to caregivers, however. On August 30, 1941, *The Saturday Evening Post* published a poem by a mother who shared her home with many different heroic houseguests. At any given moment, Jane Coffin was unsure which Comicland personality her child was enacting.

> My house is full of people these days
> With peculiar customs and oddish ways.
> When I think I am sending my son to bed,
> I've offended the law and Dick Tracy instead.
> I never quite know to whom I am talking;
> Perhaps it might be Brick Bradford stalking
> Spies, or The Phantom as bold as you please,
> Dressed like the man on the flying trapeze.
> Superman wanders in and out.
> Spinach goes down when Popeye's about.
> Last night I went in to give a scrub

---

[179] [Dr. Lauretta Bender] to Max Lerner, letter, April 20, 1954, p. 5, in box 19, folder 3, LB.

For the five-part series, see Max Lerner, "Your Child and The Comic Books," *New York Post*, Bronx 3-Star Home Edition, vol. 153, no. 121, April 19, 1954, pp. 4, 22; Max Lerner, "II–Your Child and The Comic Books," *New York Post*, Bronx 3-Star Home Edition, vol. 153, no. 122, April 20, 1954, pp. 4, 22; Max Lerner, "III--What the Comic Books Do," *New York Post*, Bronx 2-Star Home Edition, vol. 153, no. 123, April 21, 1954, pp. 4, 42; Max Lerner, "IV—The Case For The Defense," *New York Post*, Bronx 2-Star Home Edition, vol. 153, no. 124, April 22, 1954, pp. 4, 22; Max Lerner, "V—What We Can Do About Comics," *New York Post*, Bronx 3-Star Home Edition, vol. 153, no. 125, April 23, 1954, pp. 4, 38. See also "Experts Divided Over Comic Books' Impact On Child Delinquency," *New York Post*, Bronx 2-Star Home Edition, vol. 153, no. 124, April 22, 1954, p. 6; R. Montanarl, "Dear Editor: Little Boys Laugh," *New York Post*, Bronx 3-Star Home Edition, vol. 153, no. 125, April 23, 1954, p. 39; "What They Said…: **William Gaines**," [*sic*] *New York Post*, Bronx 2-Star Home Edition, vol. 153, no. 126, April 25, 1954, p. 6M (*Week~End Magazine*, Section II).

And I found Captain Midnight awash in the tub!
But I made the worst mistake of all
When I grabbed somebody in the hall
And hugged and kissed (by using force)
The great Lone Ranger and Silver, his horse![180]

The *Ventura County Star-Free Press* published a letter on September 19, 1942, from a distraught mother who lost her seven-year-old son to Superman play. This is the sixth tragedy in childhood Comicland. Crossing the highway to the local park, a car hit him while wearing a Superman outfit, possibly the official playsuit. Like the character in Walter Grove's short story, her son merged Superman with the gunslinger archetype. Mrs. Dickerson of Santa Paula, California, did not blame DC Comics but directed her frustration at careless drivers and the Department of Motor Vehicles for not revoking the licenses of "killers."

> So he went with some other little boys to play in the park across the highway. Everyone knew children played in the park. They all knew they crossed the highway to get to their homes on the other side. So I let him go. I thought my little Superman would be safe.
>
> The next time I saw him he was on the highway—dead. His piece of canvas, his Superman cape, was all bloodied. His little gun was still in his holster. Just a short time before he was full of life, joyous and shouting, "Boy! We're havin' fun!" Then, quite so still there on the highway.
>
> I have another boy. He walks down the highway to school. He is not yet 10. He is as careful as most small boys. But now I have no way to be sure he will stay on the right side. He might dart out into the road, too. There are lots of little children in this county, and even though they belong to Okie ranch hands, we love them. So please try to save some other mother's heartbreak. Please ask the women and men to remember a small boy may be playing Superman on up the road, and dart out too quickly to be saved.[181]

The actual relationship between mothers and Superman began to turn sour in the next decade. Some parents banned the Superman television show in their homes in response to startling superhero play incidents like those mentioned earlier. A local Kansas newspaper article commented on the trend on December 14, 1953. According to the *Council Grove Republican*, "The show has many parents putting it on the 'No, junior, you can't watch it' list because too

---

[180] Jane Coffin, "A Mother's Dilemma," *The Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 214, no. 9, August 30, 1941, p. 60.
[181] Mrs. Dickerson, "A Letter From a Mother: 'My Boy is Gone, but Please Help Save Others,'" *Ventura County Star-Free Press* (Ventura, CA), September 19, 1942, p. 1. For memorial poem about an Iowan boy who liked to play Superman, see E. V. Durling, "'On the Side,'" *Shamokin News-Dispatch* (Shamokin, PA), vol. 13, no. 179, April 17, 1946, p. 6; E. V. Durling, "On The Side," *Medford Mail Tribune* (Medford, OR), yr. 41, no. 20, April 15, 1946, p. 6.

many youngsters have jumped out of second-story windows trying to fly like Superman!"[182] Interestingly, this reaction by Midwestern parents to the live-action Superman show preceded the majority of dangerous Superman play, which started the following year per newspaper accounts.

Besides the concern of flight, Superman's costume sparked vociferous complaint. Little boys' hair-raising antics of dressing up like the Man of Steel miffed and stressed some 1950s mothers. A reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* conducted an informal survey in 1954. "Purpose of the present project was to discover if these mothers had any messages they wished to send to the producers of various TV programs currently popular with their young offspring." During one interview, a five-year-old showcased his ability to transform into Superman by ripping off his clothes with lightning-fast speed. The article published on the thirtieth of August detailed her domestic encounter with a young Superman in Comicland.

> Just then, the door flew open and a small boy jumped into the room. While still in midair, he began to unbutton his shirt. In a flash he had kicked off shoes, socks and blue jeans, emerging in all his 5-year-old glory dressed in red bathing trunks and a snug fitting T shirt with a large "S" crayoned on the front.
>
> Pausing just long enough to snatch the piece of sheet adorned with the "S" from his mother's trembling hands, he adjusted his "cloak" and leaped out the door crying, "Justice to the enemies of Metropolis!"

Because her child constantly made a mess when playing Superman, this mother wished that the television program producers would show Clark Kent cleaning up after himself. "Just once, only once, let them show Clark Kent hanging up his clothes after his transformation to Superman."[183] Readers can easily imagine this behavior occurring today.

The whole idea of Clark Kent wearing his Superman costume underneath his business suit bothered one mother because it taught an illogical message to kids and stifled their movement. She wanted to know how her child could play when dressing up as Clark Kent with Superman underneath. *Los Angeles Times* article documented this complaint:

> Could you please have them tell me how he's (indicating her inflexible child) going to play Superman? Over his underwear he's wearing a long-sleeved T shirt, knit pajama pants with feet, bathing trunks and [a] cape. Over that he has another

---

[182] "Harvey in Hollywood," *Council Grove Republican* (Council Grove, KS), vol. 80, no. 247, December 14, 1953, p. 4.
[183] Mary Lou Downer, "Small-Fry Superman Leave Duds in Heap as They Leap," *Los Angeles Times*, vol. 73, August 30, 1954, p. 5 (Part III).

> shirt, blue jeans, jacket, shoes and socks. He's dressed right, but he can't move a muscle, much less jump off the porch.[184]

Frustration over Superman play did not stop one Wisconsin mother from seeking out the official playsuit, however. She wrote to *The Capital Times* columnist and consumer consultant Herb Jacobs in December 1955 for last minute Christmas shopping help in finding a store that sold the item. Jacobs found the request too tedious, nonetheless. "The questioner today, for instance, would like me to turn up a Superman space suit, and coveralls for a juvenile, which is an exercise in dialing and ad-chasing from which I must beg off because of a lack of time."[185]

Two theories attempted to explain the design of Superman's excessive costuming. Superman biographer Dennis Dooley cleverly postulates that "Clark Kent's eccentric habit of wearing his Superman costume underneath his clothes [was] in order to save time in emergencies."[186] Jerry Siegel, however, mentioned that the inspiration came from his own life. Siegel reports in his 1978 memoir that he often overslept and was running to get to school on time. "On a few occasions, I did it so hastily I didn't bother to remove my pajamas, but ran to school wearing the pajamas under my outer garments. Later Superman wore his costume beneath his outer garments. Unlike me, he did not have pajama leg bottoms sticking partially out into view beneath his trouser legs."[187] Nonetheless, this tale could be invented as a way to support his legal action to recover the Superman copyright. Siegel needed to prove prior design of the character, superpowers, and key characteristics without the editorial aid of DC Comics. Regardless of the costume's purpose, it appealed to children for three reasons. First, in contrast to formal dress, his outfit looked comfortable, like pajamas, and was easy to move in. Second, with his cape flowing behind him, it simulated freedom. Third, inspired by the stage outfits of circus performers and strongmen, superhero costumes were radical attire outside of the carnival space. Summarizing, children embraced the Superman Playsuit, a material expression of Comicland, because it rejected contemporary clothing norms, symbolized independence, and contested the constrictions of adult society.

---

[184] Downer, "Small-Fry Superman Leave Duds in Heap as They Leap," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1954, p. 5 (Part III).
[185] Herb Jacobs, "Try and Stump Me!: Quilt-Comforter Warmest If You Think It Is, Claim: Goose Down, Dacron, Rate High, Jacobs Learns, But So Does Faith in Each of Them," *The Capital Times* (Madison, WI), vol. 77, no. 5, December 17, 1955, p. 15.
[186] Dooley, "The Man Of Tomorrow And The Boys Of Yesterday," in Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, p. 23.
[187] Siegel, "Creation of a Superhero," chap. 1, p. 18.

In 1954, anticomics crusader Dr. Fredric Wertham suggested that Superman taught a rejection of the social order. He articulates the idea that that Superman diminished parental authority. Children, he writes, "have been nourished (or rather poisoned) by the endless repetition of Superman stories. How can they represent the hard-working mother, father or teacher who is so pedestrian, trying to teach common rules of conduct, wanting you to keep your feet on the ground and unable even figuratively speaking fly through the air? Psychologically, Superman undermines the authority and the dignity of the ordinary man and woman in the minds of children." Similar to the Catholic critics, Dr. Wertham is commenting on the shift in youth culture whereby superheroes replaced parents as role models. Embedded in this critique is the idea that comics "seduced" children away from democracy and the nuclear family unit toward fascism and unchecked individualism. Such an interpretation is wildly overblown, nevertheless.[188]

The *I Love Lucy* Superman episode from 1957 captured the struggle of mothers to appease their children's desire for make-believe while retaining their authority. Little Ricky Ricardo's behavior in the episode attempts to reflect those of contemporary children. After watching the *Adventures of Superman*, he refuses to go to sleep and remove his Superman Playsuit before bed. Real-life children must have replicated this behavior complete with tantrums. The next day, he pretends to fly around the living room in his costume. This depiction of a boy quietly zooming past the couch was a sanitized version of Superman play. Even the children at little Ricky Ricardo's birthday party acted too docile around Superman, who made a surprise house visit. The episode downplays the spirited movements and boisterous actions of 1950s children who were obsessed with Superman. DC Comics strategically used *I Love Lucy* to convey the message that superhero play was normal. It likely gave solace to mothers concerned with their children's wild fascination with Superman and their inadequacy to control their youngsters. Lucy Ricardo's failed attempt to satiate her son's enchantment with the Man of Steel by getting stuck on the ledge in a Superman costume quite possibly established a deeper bond with mothers. The majority of story lines for the show emphasized her meddlesome nature as a woman and a wife, which reflected the sexism of the time, but not her role as a mother. Lucy Ricardo's endless mishaps often lacked a parental dimension. Although an exaggerated scenario, many mothers in theory could relate to this episode and the desire to provide their child with a

[188] Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, pp. 97–98.

fun birthday party.[189] Michael J. Hayde indirectly points out that Ricky Ricardo Sr. breaks the fourth wall by addressing the studio audience and not the camera. Hayde hypothesizes that the surprised reaction of the audience in conjunction with Desi Arnaz's break in character shows that Reeves' guest appearance was a secret.[190]

This idea of Comicland as a birthday party and Superman as the main feature transferred to the real world. The *I Love Lucy* plotline of Superman as birthday present already happened during the production of the *Adventures of Superman*. Harry Gerstad, an editor and director of the television show, informed biographer Gary H. Grossman that he caved to pressure from his neighbors to let their daughter visit "the real live [*sic*] Superman" for her ninth birthday. George Reeves fumed but turned on the charm when young Merriam arrived on set and even gave her a kiss on the cheek.[191] The *Madera Tribune* reported that nine-year-old Michael Mitchell held a cartoon-themed costume birthday party at the local park in Madera, California, on October 18, 1963. One child came dressed as Superman.[192] According to *Newsday*, adults appeared as Superman at their children's birthday parties in 1981.[193]

Fear of Superman play overwhelmed one Gardena, California, mother. The *Press≈Telegram* published Sheila LaTourette's letter to the editor letter on June 4, 1959, which imagined Superman play with a plastic bag. She feared that it could result in death by choking.

> No mother, no matter how cautious and careful she is, can watch all her children every minute of every day and night. She does not see her son outside playing "Superman" with a bag tied around his throat for a cape. She looks in only occasionally at her sleeping children. Remember, it takes only one minute.
>
> … We need legislation to curb the distribution of plastic bags.[194]

While sounding unrealistic, eighteen years later Yolanda Zamora declared that her son played Superman with a plastic bag as a cape. Still, this example is clearly an anomaly.

---

[189] "Lucy and Superman." For secondary source mentions of the episode, see Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 258, 270, 275–276; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 151, 208E; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 89, 102–103.
[190] Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 276.
[191] Grossman, *Superman*, p. 50.
[192] Wilma Chidlaw, "Notes From Chowchilla: Newlyweds Establish Home," *Madera Tribune* (Madera, CA), vol. 72, no. 111, October 18, 1963, p. 5.
[193] Henry Gilgoff, "Birthday parties, plain and fancy," *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), Nassau Edition, vol. 42, no. 78, November 19, 1981, p. 9.
[194] Sheila LaTourette, "Public Forum: It Takes Only One Minute," *Press≈Telegram* (Long Beach, CA), Home Edition, vol. 72, no. 105, June 4, 1959, p. A-24.

The relationship between mothers and superheroes in the 1970s can be best described as both negative and positive. Larry Tye mentions the 1970s Saturday morning cartoons produced by Hanna-Barbera as a sort of babysitter. Animated superheroes aided "sleep-deprived parents, who delighted in the extra hours they got in bed while their kids were mesmerized by Superman."[195] This is true, but mothers mainly worried about simulation. Superhero stunts could easily transpire when parents were sleeping. In 1976, columnist Lisa Lansing relayed a tale of superhero play reminiscent of Jane Coffin's poem thirty-five years earlier. A four-year-old boy from Rhode Island named Danny [no last name] pretended to be Batman, Spider-Man, and Superman.

> The four-year-old who lives with us is named Batman (never Robin), or Spiderman, [*sic*] or Superman.
>
> When he is dressed at all, he wears a red T-shirt he has found in the laundry, an unspeakable pair of jeans and a red towel pinned around his shoulders. Summer and winter he wears over his bare feet a pair of red Winnie-the-Pooh boots with yellow soles and stripes. I cut out a big "S" from a magazine cover, safety-pin it to his shirt and he's "SUP-er-maaaaaaaaaan."
>
> Batman wears a blue towel and a pair of black lace underpants I got for Mothers Day two years ago. Batman had to hold up the pants with one hand as he races for his Batmobile, an ancient red tricycle parked in readiness near the back door.
>
> Once, as I was pinning on the fifth cape change in a single afternoon I asked:
>
> "Why don't you be Danny?"
>
> "I can't," and his dark brown eyes filled with tears, "I gots to be Superman."[196]

The struggle is also evident in the next decade. *Redbook* journalist Judy Langford Carter wrote in the February 1981 issue that "the very real power that fictional characters have over the imagination of our children is frightening. All of us have listened uncomfortably to stories of a child who has jumped off the bed or the kitchen counter, or even the house, pretending to fly like Superman. And each time, we have hoped desperately that the wonderful fantasies our children have won't lead them into trouble." The article went on to explain that her son Jason did not enact any dangerous stunts but the superhero genre dictated his imaginative play. Just like the

---

[195] Tye, *Superman*, p. 212.
[196] Lisa Lansing, "Letter from Washington: Danny, Danny all contrary," *The Berkshire Eagle* (Pittsfield, MA), vol. 85, no. 8, May 17, 1976, p. 10. The article originated in Washington, DC, but I do not know the newspaper, possibly the *Washington Star*.

1941 poem about heroic houseguests and the 1976 activities of Danny, Carter told readers that her son "has gone days at a time disguised as the 'true identity' of one hero or another. He sometimes makes me wonder if he'll ever be adjusted to the fact that he is a normal human being after all." This behavior, which is comical from the contemporary perspective, is still occurring today with different heroes—those currently in projected in movies or on television, no matter actor or animated cartoon character. Thus, modern imaginative hero play appears to be timeless. Furthermore, these examples of children living in Comicland reinforces Steuart Henderson Britt's embrace of identification theory. Unsurprisingly, the article featured photographs of the youngster in Spider-Man and Batman clothing as well as his little sister dressed as Wonder Woman and Supergirl. Although troubling to her, Carter admitted that that superheroes fulfill an emotional need, a sort of security net. For instance, her son's blanket transformed into a magical cape that protected him at preschool. The detail quoted below mirrors the interpretation of Dr. Lauretta Bender twenty-seven years earlier.

> A couple of years ago, when Jason was three, we lived with a superhero for nearly two solid months. Almost every morning, our slightly nervous son would approach me cautiously. Looking over his shoulder just before we got into the car to go to school, he would first demand that I never reveal what I knew and then ask me in a polite, secretive whisper to help him hide his cape inside a zipped-up red jacket he wore even in 85-degree Georgia heat. His cape in those days was a piece of his once-white security blanket, its binding on one end carefully pulled away from the edge so he could slip it over his head. He would climb out of the car at nursery school, his jacket bulging mysteriously in the back, and saunter confidently toward the playground, muttering to himself. He was sure that no one would suspect that he was not really a tiny three-year-old, but in fact a mighty hero, capable of overcoming all obstacles and "bad guys" in the grand manner.
>
> Because of his magic cape, Jason could fly, shoot lasers from his fingertips, withstand bullets, knives, arrows and fists, run and jump quicker than the eye could see and become invisible when he chose. He also had imaginary equipment that varied with the situation but that usually included Wonder Woman's magic rope, which forces a captured evildoer to tell the truth, and a collection of webs from Spider-Man. When I asked why he needed any equipment, with all his magic powers, Jason explained patiently that some heroes have "powers," like Superman and Spider-Man. Others, like Batman, don't have powers, but they have special equipment, which gives them the edge over bad guys anyway. Jason Carter, Superhero, had a little bit of everything, just in case nursery school turned out to be the next big battle between the forces of good and evil.

Besides the imaginative play, Judy Langford Carter protested the immense marketing of Comicland and superheroes uncanny ability to bewitch children. According to Carter,

"Television didn't create superheroes, but it did force parents to pay attention to them. TV made the fantastic exploits of imaginary heroes available to preschoolers—the age group that cannot yet read comic books, and that are the most interested in fantasy. And in doing that, TV also created a huge commercial market for anything bearing the names and symbols of these supercreatures." The 1980s marked a turning point in superhero marketing, an extension of the blitz for the 1978 Superman movie. Carter listed products with the superhero insignia such as toothbrushes, shoes, and general toys. Shopping with her son could bring a tantrum if such items are noticed but go unpurchased. Commercialization of superheroes created a power struggle between children and their caretakers.

> In our house, where five-year-old Jason lives and where I like to think I have reasonable control over most situations, we have a Spider-Man bike, a Batman utility belt, a set of Superman cars, a Spider-Man web shooter, a Batman flashlight, a Superheroes board game and a large assortment of wildly colored underwear bearing the identifying marks of Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk, Superman, Superman, Batman, Aquaman and Captain America. There are plenty of other items available that this cruel and heartless mother has been able to avoid bringing home from the stores, sometimes in the face of embarrassingly loud protests.
>
> A lot of Super things have never been shown on TV, but they're out there just the same, waiting for the unsuspecting shopper: Superman raincoats hanging unobtrusively on the rack between the usual yellow slickers; Batmobiles innocently perched among a row of model Volkswagens and Chevrolets; and even in the grocery, all kinds of superheroes equipment lurking inside specially marked boxes of everything from cereal to paper towels.[197]

Even though baby boomer parents like Carter complained about the commoditization of superheroes, they did indulge their children with toys and other paraphernalia. Such begrudging acceptance in the 1980s and 1990s may reflect complaints by men that their mothers threw away their comic books and this generation did not want to be marked with a similar condemnation years later by their sons.[198] The narrative of mothers disposing of treasured items from childhood applies to G.I. Joe and Barbie as well. While fathers too must have discarded these items, mothers are unfairly blamed because of their association to the domestic sphere.

---

[197] See Judy Langford Carter, "My Two Superheroes," *Redbook*, vol. 156, no. 4 (February 1981), pp. 77, 114.
[198] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 190; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 246; Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, p. 300.

Conclusion

These examples of superhero play illustrate the deep bonds that children form with fictional heroes. The comics, George Reeves' do-gooder Superman, Adam West and Burt Ward's campy Batman, and Christopher Reeve's more sophisticated performance captivated children. This connection, however, took a dangerous turn when youngsters began injuring themselves or dying in an attempt to leap or fly like Superman after watching him enact these feats in the comics and on screen. Batman imitation, by contrast, was predominately earthbound because he relied on technology: an airplane to soar and an automobile for speed. If the Caped Crusader possessed the ability to fly like the Man of Steel, more examples of injury would exist in the historical record.

Contrary to the opinion of psychiatrists Dr. Lauretta Bender and Dr. Cynthia R. Pfeffer, the average child, who did not suffer from mental illness, imitated and attempted to fly like Superman. Millions of children watched the television episodes and movies while only a meager portion of the total population injured themselves or worse. Kids wore sheets or towels as substitutes for capes and even ran around shouting "I'm Superman!" Most children played Superman by jumping off couches and beds, not out windows or off roofs. Since modern media prefers to sensationalize and document tragedy, the available evidence showcases the darker side of superhero play: hospital visits and trips to the morgue. The paper trial indicates that twenty-one boys injured themselves and six died playing Superman while one broke his leg playing Batman. The story from the Northwestern University professor might be invented and only two Superman related deaths came from firsthand newspaper accounts. Twelve children went unscathed, one leaned out the window as if he was going to attempt to fly, and one even inadvertently burned down his house. Out of the uninjured twelve, one boy is recorded as playing Batman and Robin rather than Superman. Nine other examples do not have the results. Part of this Superman and Batman and Robin play tally, four boys suffered bad burns and one perished. The lack of detail in some reports and the use of superhero play as a rhetorical or fictional device supply an inexact number. In addition to the fifty-one references and many others to costuming or general play, one child perished by asphyxiation attributed to Superman play and another by imitating the anthropomorphic cartoon character Mighty Mouse. It is interesting to note that there are no known records of parents suing DC Comics or the playsuit

manufacturers after injury or death. Today, it is reasonable to suspect a great deal of legal action would transpire under the same circumstances.

Playing Superman brought unintended consequences and public pressure on his owners as children broke bones or worse. DC Comics did not foresee children confusing the worlds of fantasy and reality. Although DC Comics' initial response—penned by Superman's leading editor Whitney Ellsworth—expressed defensiveness over questions of moral responsibility for children's startling behavior, the company showed concern and halted production of midcentury costumes until receiving approval by at least one pediatric expert. The corporation profited off Superman Playsuits, but money was not the sole motivation it seems.

American children internalized the superhero fantasy and then externalized it through play to produce their version of Comicland. Even though Superman is a "fake" person, a small number of children treated him as real but all brought the character to life and materialized Comicland. As a product of modernity, the superhero imaginary and its allure will remain a central part of society and culture for possibly another eighty years. As long as superheroes continue to exist, children will duplicate their feats. The difference is that today's children are immersed in make-believe and are more cognizant of the separation between fantasy and reality. Parents are also doing a better job of educating their children on the distinction. Thus, the current issue is not so much between fantasy and reality but that children have an underdeveloped concept of risk and lack proper judgment, requiring adult supervision. The next chapter continues the pattern of superhero costuming by teenagers and adults—later renamed cosplay—as well as their wordplay, but without the contentious debate. Through tracing these numerous occurrences on television we can see that these characters sustain the same prevalence among grownups, who reshaped Comicland in their image.

CHAPTER 3: COSPLAY COMICLAND

At virtually the same time children embraced Superman in their physical play, adults ushered in a new phase of Comicland that challenges and sometimes tarnishes the sanitized vision carefully curated by DC Comics. Grownups began to hijack the superhero fantasy from kids during the 1940s. They brought the imaginary world of the superhero to life through parody by way of cartoons as well as stand-up comedy and cosplay on variety shows and sitcoms. These expressions in ordinary life, in magazines, and on television mainly occurred beyond the ritualized and isolated holiday of Halloween and simple costume parties. When children dressed up as their favorite superheroes the language of costuming was adequate, but adults took it to another level. Though the term *cosplay* entered the lexicon in 1993 to designate adult costuming,[1] and currently conjures images of contemporary comics conventions, there is a prehistory. This chapter traces how adults responded to and co-opted the superhero imaginary through play across media (excluding the medium of cinema, which is covered in the next chapter) and follows the activity from the earliest manifestations to the recent past.

Overlapping each other in time, five types of superhero play transpired in everyday life and entertainment. Such cosplay encompassed the modes of celebration, criticism, ridicule, silliness, and adoration. Celebration comprises promotion of the superhero fantasy in the public sphere. Criticism, which is self-explanatory, occurred mainly in written form. Ridicule transpired on cartoons and television shows by entertainers for cheap laughs. Like criticism, the underlying message was that superheroes were childish. The style of silly cosplay, which embraced slapstick and the absurd, capitalized on the cultural currency of the superhero fantasy and acted as a middle ground between celebration and ridicule. This type of humor recognized that the genre was not just for kids. The final stage of adoration is the result of the proliferation of superhero media and the varied discourse of the other types.

Starting in the 1940s, the caretakers at DC Comics initiated the first pattern by celebrating Superman, the company's leading comic book superhero. Future employees replicated the cosplay in the public sphere or in artwork. Concurrently, the populace both embraced and critiqued superheroes. Ordinary people documented in prose and conveyed

[1] Merriam-Webster dictionary pinpointed the earliest use of the word to 1993.

Superman's power through pretend play, a few even under the influence of alcohol that resulted in arrest or death. Even though enacted without a costume, their embodiment of the Man of Steel belongs under the umbrella of cosplay. Other Americans, however, activated the second style by complaining about the deep impact of superheroes. Satirists like Milton Berle, Ernie Kovacs, and Bob Newhart introduced a new discourse that ridiculed Superman and Batman as well as comic strip heroes Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers on television and in stand-up comedy from 1949 through 1966. Nonetheless, underneath their satire there seemed to indicate an appreciation indicative of the first category. Appropriation provides a cover for entertainers to claim that they were "just kidding." Therefore, the third style that was broadcast on television into the homes of the public across the country ironically communicated superheroes growing acceptability and permeation in American culture. Dismissing the fantasy or leveraging it for jokes produced the opposite effect. In other words, adults comically mocking superheroes helped to legitimize the fantasy for new generations. Also, under the style of satire, cartoonists Rea Irvin and George Reckas envisioned Superwoman as the Superman counterpart back in the early 1940s. Such cosplay, however, was not solely an activity for men. Actors Lucille Ball, Elaine Stritch, Carol Burnett, and Margot Kidder reimagined Superman as a woman in the postwar period. All except Kidder, who celebrated the superhero formula because of her role as Lois Lane in the first two Superman movies, implemented the fourth type of silliness. Following the lead of such entertainers, the sitcoms *Bewitched* and *That Girl* as well as the variety show *Happy Days* further incorporated this dimension to superhero cosplay and in the process inverted Superman's ascribed moral standing by depicting him as a criminal or exhibitionist. These three television expressions of Comicland took place in the year 1970. Like Kidder, Elvis Presley acted as the outlier during this quirky fourth iteration with his visibly apparent affinity for Captain Marvel Jr., who rivaled Superman in comic book sales in the early days. In 1971, the King of Rock and Roll altered the cycle to genuine appreciation with his superhero-like stage costumes, but it would take two more decades for other entertainers to openly embrace the superhero genre and the final style of adoration. Either sardonic or goofy, cosplay has been a steady feature since the 1980s on television shows like *M*A*S*H*, *Superman's 50th Anniversary*, *Saturday Night Live*, *Barbarians at the Gate*, and *CSI: NY*. In these works, Lois Lane is sometimes mocked as dim for not deducing that Superman and Clark Kent are the same person. Rejecting these dominant trends, the 1990s cemented the fifth mode introduced by Presley with comedian Jerry Seinfeld leading

the charge in his sitcom *Seinfeld*. The following decade, *Sabrina: The Teenage Witch* similarly embraced the superhero genre. The final subheading in this chapter traces the silliness style and is still Comicland by virtue of appearing on television. Besides the slapstick element, *Looney Tunes* animated cartoons and *Sesame Street* puppets produced another expression of Comicland by forming a circuit between the version for children in chapter 2 and the adult driven cosplay covered here.

Regardless of their intentions, all these works manifested Comicland and transported the audience to this ever-present realm just waiting to appear. This ongoing engagement demonstrates how beloved Superman and his peers are and how impactful they have been on American culture and society by clouding the categories of child and adult.

Who Owns Superheroes?

The superhero wordplay and cosplay by grownups documented in this chapter raises questions about the idea of possession. By growing up with these characters, each generation conceives that they retain a form of social ownership over superheroes and in the process of play they reimagine them.[2] Separating artistic ownership from real estate, legal scholar David Lange contends that "intellectual property is subject to unlimited recreation in the mind of each observer."[3] Historian Neil Harris summarizes the intellectual quandary of seizure of Superman by adults for entertainment. "He exists in a world built around the twin notions of private property and liberty of expression."[4] The "fair use" provision resolves this paradox. Superman, as well as Batman, Robin, and Wonder Woman, are the private property of DC Comics but available for appropriation by the public through sincere or critical humor. This loophole and not the First Amendment enables individuals to alter another's intellectual property outside of the mind. These activities by the public subverted DC Comics' narrative control of their properties afforded under copyright and trademark protections but did not seem to bother them. The company exercised their litigious power to protect their intellectual property from perceived theft from corporations or individuals that aimed to profit from their ideas in print yet ignored caricature by popular entertainers. In theory, DC Comics could have sued performers because

[2] For the generational ownership idea, see Tye, *Superman*, pp. 37, 126, 274, 279.
[3] David Lange, "Recognizing the Public Domain," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Autumn 1981), p. 150.
[4] Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 233.

legal precedent did not yet exist protecting parody against copyright and trademark law. Paralleling the sociocultural changes in American society, judicial decisions starting in 1964 eventually shielded such creative work from infringement.[5] At this juncture, DC Comics then possibly had to begrudgingly accept the mushrooming reinterpretations of their child-focused characters that were flattering, ridiculous, or raunchy.

Using myth as a prism, Neil Harris explores the role of Superman in American culture. His essay suggests that Superman's effectiveness as satire is because he becomes a continual reference point for each generation. Aided through swift public embrace, Superman became a household name, and his backstory broached the status of common knowledge. In other words, the basic details about Superman and his life are not obscure trivia.[6] The Man of Steel secured, in his view, "universal recognition."[7]

> But "Superman" did more than merely establish itself as gargantuan in appeal, or expand the audience for each mass medium it penetrated. Its cast of characters, its setting, its stock phrases, all entered common speech as reference points. So rapid and complete was this penetration that it provoked wonder, awe, and sometimes even anxiety among social commentators. There seemed something fundamental to its appeal.[8]

Harris also discusses the power of parody in circumventing the legality of copyright and trademark. "With modern mythic heroes as private property, contemporary authors, artists, and performers cannot easily employ them unless they are caricatured."[9] He then uses the notions of time and ubiquity to explain the rise of adult superhero play.

> For Superman, Batman, Captain America, Wonderwoman [*sic*], and the other mythic figures of America's mass culture, as they aged and evolved, seemed both to incorporate and to invite increasing ridicule, from commentators and from rivals. By the 1960s and 1970s many of these characters had a generation or two of history behind them. They were no longer sudden intrusions into daily life and fashion. They were part of the record.[10]

Harris suggests the inundation of superheroes into America culture during the postwar period aided their derision and that it took one or two generations of history to interact with these

---

[5] Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, pp. 246–247.
[6] Neil Harris correctly writes that Mort Weisinger, without directly name-checking him, crafted "abstruse lore" in the 1950s and 1960s, and that fandom celebrated and codified such minutiae (generally unknown to the common person) in their nostalgic writings. See Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 245.
[7] Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 233.
[8] Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 235.
[9] Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 247. See also Gaines, *Contested Culture*, p. 294n60.
[10] Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 245.

characters. In actuality, the public response was immediate. Beginning in the 1940s, adults recognized the cultural influence of superheroes and started to play with them. The elapsed time theory for parodying superheroes does not reflect the multimedia sources. The connection first established in childhood and the continuation into adulthood better explains the unceasing appetite for parody of them.

There are several other problems with his essay. First is the framing of Superman in the overused categorization of myth. Diverging from the simplistic analysis and common thinking propagated by the popular and scholarly literature, Superman is much more than entertainment myth with antecedents in Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian legend. Adult performance and ridicule bring him to life. Unlike his religious counterparts, the Man of Steel is alive in our culture. Second is that myth has nothing to do with satire in the case of Superman. A piece of literature or art is lampooned because it is impactful, popular, or pervasive. Superman checks all of these boxes. Third is the undeveloped claim that caricature degrades Superman, which he terms a "commercialized myth."[11] Because of satire, Neil Harris asserts that Superman "fights for survival in our society."[12] The opposite is true. Parody reinforces his place in American culture and ensures longevity. Superman biographer Tom De Haven correctly states, "I think it's safe to say that no other fictional character in the world has been portrayed—drawn, acted, chronicled, parodied, and bootlegged—as often, or in as many media and venues, as Superman."[13] Lastly is the absence of examples of superhero burlesque from these two authors. This chapter aims to correct that omission by cataloguing the numerous expressions of superhero play across media, which unequivocally illustrates the power and breadth of Comicland.

Wordplay and cosplay offer an entry point to explore the reception of Superman and his peers by adults. The ongoing tug of war over Comicland is evident as grownups continually recast the meaning of superheroes in daily life and entertainers project the neighborhood of Comicland on television. When experiencing such expressions many people think of them as isolated events rather than a collage. The reason for all the detail in this chapter is to document these many avenues within the neighborhood of Comicland.

---

[11] For "mythic degradation," see Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, pp. 6, 248. For commercialized myth and similar language, see Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, pp. 234, 249.
[12] Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 233.
[13] De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 23.

Creator and Everyday Superhero Play

Oral history and journalism revealed that the men of DC Comics self-reflectively enacted Superman cosplay, potentially inaugurating the pattern. Publisher Harry Donenfeld supposedly used a Superman T-shirt for cheap laughs at the bar. According to popular author Gerard Jones, "Harry took to wearing a Superman T-shirt under his dress shirt. He'd wait for the right moment—a spilled drink or a beautiful woman alone at the bar—then throw open the tuxedo jacket, jerk open the shirt (pearl studs flying), and yell (Yiddish rhythms pounding on the consonants, stretching the vowels), 'This looks like a job for *Superman!*' Big laughs, more scotch all around."[14] Superman writer Jerry Siegel kept a Superman costume in his University Heights home outside Cleveland, Ohio. He showcased it to neighborhood children, who came knocking to see Superman following rumors that their hero lived there but were disappointed to find only his creator. It is possible that DC Comics gave Siegel the costume Ray Middleton wore at the 1940 New York World's Fair or the one used by another actor at the Macy's Superman Adventures attraction that winter, threads explored in chapter 1. On June 21, 1941, *The Saturday Evening Post* journalist John Kobler shared the tale of Siegel's interaction with local children, who believed Superman was a real person. Siegel encouraged the idea.

> Hopping up and down excitedly, they squealed, "Where is he? We wanna see him!"
>
> "Well, right now," explained the plump youth, "he's engaged on one of his mysterious missions. But he's not far away. He ought to be landing on the roof any minute."
>
> Until dusk fell, the boys kept circling the house, their eyes glued to the roof.
>
> Superman failed to show up that day. But when their mothers called them for supper, the plump young man managed to send them satisfied that Superman was hovering somewhere in the neighborhood.[15]

Kobler's description insinuated that Siegel presented Superman to local children as a living person in their community. Thus, Siegel invoked the idea of Comicland as a neighborhood in his hometown of Cleveland. It was fantasy for him but reality for those children. During his World War II military conscription, Siegel extended the pretense by playing with the idea of secretly

---

[14] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 1, 159. For repetition, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 39; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 185–186.
[15] Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, p. 14. See also Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 181.

being Clark Kent. After basic training in Fort Hayes, Ohio, during the summer of 1943, Siegel served as a noncombatant in the 39th Special Service Company at Fort Meade, Maryland, and later Elkins, West Virginia, where he wrote for the local newspaper the *Inter-Mountain* beginning in late 1943. In August of 1944, the military assigned Siegel to the position of staff writer for the US Army newspaper *Midpacifican* in Honolulu, Hawaii.[16] In this role, Siegel, as biographer Brad Ricca indicates, drew upon his high school newspaper experience writing for *The Glenville Torch*.[17] Most interestingly, two weeks into his transfer, Siegel authored an article on September 9, 1944, as Kent on loan from the Metropolis *Daily Planet*.[18] The manifestation of Comicland was so strong on military bases and among servicemen that they would call Siegel "Superman," but not always endearingly. *Midpacifican* once capitalized on a wardrobe misfortune by Siegel for a joke. At Waikiki Beach, Siegel mistakenly changed in the women's dressing room, and left his clothes there, but with the aid of an eight-year-old girl he got them back. A *Midpacifican* columnist detailed the story on December 2, 1944.

> Superman has been in some hair-raising predicaments during his long and melodramatic career but I seriously doubt if he has ever gone through as harrowing as an experience as he faced last Saturday.

---

[16] For Jerry Siegel's drafting and US Army stint, see Jack Lait, "Waltering for Winchell," *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), Complete Sports Edition and 4-Star Final Edition, vol. 19, no. 137, November 30, 1942, p. 10; "Half of Superman Drafted; Partner Awaits Army Call," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Final Edition, yr. 101, no. 181, June 30, 1943, p. 11; "Creator Of 'Superman' Strip Now Stationed At Fort Hayes," *The Evening Tribune* (Marysville, OH), vol. 45, no. 249, July 17, 1943, p. 1; "Superman's Creator Now Pvt. Siegal," [*sic*] *The Washington Post*, no. 24,530, August 14, 1943, p. B1; Sgt. Wally Wachter, "GI Hollywood Star Here: Dickey Moore And Jerry Siegel With New S.S. Company," *Midpacifican*, vol. 3, no. 18, August 26, 1944, pp. 1, 12. A color copy of the *Midpacifican* article is included in *Laura Siegel Larson v. Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and DC Comics*, Case No. CV-04-8400-ODW (RZx) (C.D. Cal. 9th), Docket 720-1, Exhibit 7, vol. 1, filed April 4, 2013, pp. DC SER 38–39. Jerome Siegel's social security number and military service number was 35067731. His registration card is available on ancestrylibrary.com. For the original, see RG 147, box 1329, card 2219, Draft Registration Cards for Ohio, October 16, 1940–March 31, 1947, National Archives, St. Louis, Missouri. Additionally, see Jerry Siegel to Jack S. Liebowitz, letter, January 1, 1944, in *Larson v. Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.*, Case No. CV-04-8400-ODW (RZx) (C.D. Cal. 9th), Docket 720-1, Exhibit 6, vol. 1, filed April 4, 2013, pp. DC SER 35–36 and *DC Comics v. Pacific Pictures Corporation, et al.*, Case No. CV-10-03633-ODW (RZx) (C.D. Cal. 9th), Docket 469, Exhibit 2, vol. 5, filed August 6, 2012, pp. ER-1144–1145. The letter, an imperfect facsimile, is also included in Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 123–126.

[17] Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 212–213. For discussion of *The Glenville Torch*, see Dennis Dooley "The Man of Tomorrow and the Boys of Yesterday," in Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, pp. 21–25, 28–29; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. xvii, 28–39, 41–43, 45–46, 48–50, 52–53, 60–61, 64, 67, 100, 137, 158, 164–166, 171, 236–237, 254–255, 305–306, 340n42.

[18] Clark Kent, "Hollywood Starlets Play With Fire, Dynamite, Judo At Jungle Training," *Midpacifican*, vol. 3, no. 20, September 9, 1944, p. 9.

Two decades later a Toronto journalist had a dream that he was Clark Kent and Superman and then wrote a column about it. See Pierre Berton, "I Dreamed I Was Superman In My Maidenform Undershirt," *Toronto Daily Star* (Toronto, CAN), Night Edition, February 24, 1961, p. 1 (Section 3); Bobby Gold, "Superman Vindicated," letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star* (Toronto, CAN), Night Edition, March 4, 1961, p. 4.

> I actually witnessed most of the incident—at least the climax. Superman, or as we call him for short, Cpl. Jerry Siegel, creator and continuity writer of the Superman comic strip and at present a Midpacifican staff member, went for a swim.
>
> When I met him at the bath house, he had finished swimming and was searching frantically for his clothes. After 10 minutes of detailed reconnaissance, he came up with the remarkable conclusion that he was in the wrong bath house.

Beneath the text included a cartoon of Siegel, drawn as Superman, proudly leaving the women's bathhouse. *New York Post* syndicated columnist Leonard Lyons got wind of Siegel's mistake and shared the story with the mainland about two weeks later.[19] Superman cosplay returned to the actual world slightly over two years later. Superman radio personality Clayton "Bud" Collyer dressed up as the Man of Steel for children in April 1946 in Madison, Wisconsin, but he did not generate the same response as George Reeves in the 1950s.[20]

The Superman Playsuit, discussed in the previous two chapters, generated imaginary cosplay for ordinary adults. The May 1942 issue of *Esquire* included a cartoon that depicted a father dressed up as a Superman/Buck Rogers hybrid when reading a book in a wingback chair. His wife, another woman, and his son stared at the strange sight of him wearing an orange jumpsuit with matching boots, helmet, and cape. The caption, which speaks to the concern of Superman eclipsing parental authority examined in chapter 2, indicated that his wife told her friend: "We didn't like Edgar's having more respect for Superman than for his father."[21] On April 27, 1946, *The Saturday Evening Post* published a musing that one father threatened to leap out the window as Superman due to frustrations with the suspenseful plots of the Superman radio show. "So help me, if this sort of thing goes on, I am going to buy a Superman suit and jump out the window. EE-E-E-E-EE!"[22] This apparently widespread issue inspired an advertisement in the October 1948 release of *Esquire* for a child's telephone that plays the radio, a precursor to headphones. Technology intervened to rectify the abrasive sounds of suspenseful radio shows.

> **HELLO, SUPERMAN!** [*sic*] With this toy "radio phone" the younger generation can listen privately to their blood and thunder radio programs without disturbing

---

[19] Harry, "Hotel Street Harry: Hair-Raising Day At Waikiki," *Midpacifican*, vol. 3, no. 32, December 2, 1944, p. 10. See also Leonard Lyons, "The Lyons Den," *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, December 15, 1944, p. 22; Leonard Lyons, "Broadway Gazette," *The Washington Post*, no. 25,023, December 19, 1944, p. 5. For secondary source mention, see Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 217.
[20] Marvel Ings, "Bud Collyer As 'Superman' Pays Visit to Penguin Room," *The Capital Times* (Madison, WI), vol. 57, no. 122, April 17, 1946, p. 16.
[21] *Esquire*, vol. 17, no. 5 (May 1942), p. 45.
[22] Robert Fontaine, "Post Scripts: YEE-E-E-E-OO-O-O-O-OW-W-W!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 218, no. 43, April 27, 1946, p. 30.

> everyone else in the house. A real, one-tube radio set is housed inside the plastic toy telephone. Batteries are protected securely and are easily replaced.[23]

The playsuit proved to be so popular among children that it supplied an easy laugh for a medical professional at the expense of a patient. On December 16, 1955, former US Army soldier Bill Beeney recalled an interview with a Navy psychotherapist, who inquired about his nightmares. Beeney then explained his recurring dream of uncontrollable flying. In response, the doctor teased, "Don't worry about it. Just ask Santa Claus for a Superman suit."[24] It remains unclear if the story reported in the *Democrat and Chronicle* of Rochester, New York, was an actual experience or a joke. Regardless, it demonstrates the power of Comicland in everyday life. On Christmas Day 1968, *The New York Times* asked several sports figures what they wanted from Santa Claus. New York Jets coach Wilbur Charles "Weeb" Ewbank told the reporter that he desired "[a] Superman suit in case his New York Jets get to the Super Bowl."[25] The association between Superman and Santa Claus, as covered in chapter 1, resurfaced for adults and merged with the material culture of the playsuit.

Superman ardor, however, turned deadly for intoxicated adults. On December 27, 1952, twenty-year-old Gerard Montgomery from the Woodside neighborhood in Queens, New York, probably drunk, fell six stories after joking: "I'm Superman, I can fly!" At a weekend "post-Christmas party," as two newspaper reports described the affair, Montgomery lost his balance and plummeted to the concrete after leaping onto the windowsill. He suffered severe injuries, including compound fractures of his arms and legs as well as head trauma with a possible skull fracture. Although taken to the hospital, it is unclear if the Wall Street broker endured the fall. The photograph and text in the *Sunday News* indicated that a Catholic priest, apparently attending the party or residing nearby the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Ireland, had given Montgomery his last rites on the street. The Father was most likely affiliated with the Corpus Christi parish and Chapel of Saint Philomena, which still resides three blocks away.[26] Two years

---

[23] "Talking Shop with Esquire," *Esquire*, vol. 30, no. 4 (October 1948), p. 19.
[24] Bill Beeney, "*the* [*sic*] Hometowner: He's Just a Flyweight," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), yr. 123, December 16, 1955, p. 23.
[25] Arthur Daley, "Sports of The Times: Under the Christmas Tree," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 118, no. 40,513, December 25, 1968, p. 47.
[26] The Sunday edition of the *Daily News* listed Gerard Montgomery's age as twenty-one while the other two New York papers stated twenty. See "Hurt in 6-Story Fall; Tried to 'Fly,' Cops Say," *Sunday News* (New York, NY), 4-Star Final Edition, December 28, 1952, pp. 1, 4; "'Superman' Badly Hurt In Super Fall," *New York Journal American*, Sunday Final Edition, no. 23,676, December 28, 1952, p. 32; "Superman Loses Balance On Window Sill, Falls 6 Floors," *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY) 1-Star Final Edition, vol. 21, no. 52, December 28, 1952, p. 12. Also

later, twenty-six-year-old Willis Hensley, a resident Middletown, Ohio, shouted "I'm Superman" at 3 a.m. as he leaped across the rooftops of two adjoining buildings. Unlike Montgomery, Hensley survived his Superman play unscathed in late April 1954. According to the *Chillicothe Gazette* of Ohio, "The police brought him down to earth quickly, and charged him with intoxication, resisting arrest and destruction of property."[27] Skipping ahead ten years, Paul MacMillian of Savannah, Georgia, replicated the tragedy of Montgomery. The drunken thirty-six-year-old "made a running dive out of the second story window of a downtown Atlanta hotel" claiming to be Superman. As *The Atlanta Constitution* further explained on July 28, 1964, "He landed on a roof below his hotel room and was reported in critical condition at Grady Hospital Monday night." No further reporting existed to determine if MacMillian lived.[28] For adults, even mockingly playing Superman, like children in the last chapter, could be nearly fatal or fatal.

Superman cosplay migrated to fiction as well. Brian Moore, an Irish novelist and playwright turned-Canadian citizen, wrote "Lion of the Afternoon" in November 1957 for *The Atlantic* about children's entertainers. A character named Davis transforms into Superman but wears the incorrect colors, looking more like Elvis Presley. Davis "began to dress himself in a Superman costume, a black and white suit of cotton tights which clung to his lumpy muscles like shrunken underwear. Dressed, he took out a pocket mirror and began to comb his pompadour of black hair into a series of mounting waves, designed to make him seem even taller." Moore likely drew inspiration from a real-life Superman impersonator or simply documented the influence of the superhero among 1950s children.[29]

The growing acceptance of popular culture in the 1960s, which the expansion of media culture made possible, normalized superhero play and costuming. Adults have dressed up as Superman for their own amusement at Halloween parties since at least 1962, as a *Chicago Daily*

---

covered in other minor papers around the New York metro area. See Associated Press, "'I Can Fly' Like Superman, Says Man, the Falls 6 Stories," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), yr. 120, December 28, 1952, p. 10A; Associated Press, "'I Can Fly,' Party-Goer Says, Falls Six Floors," *The Sunday Times* (New Brunswick, NJ), December 28, 1952, p. 5.

[27] Associated Press, "'Superman' Hops Over Roof Tops," *Chillicothe Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), vol. 155, no. 101, April 28, 1954, p. 20; International News Service, "Police Nab 'Superman' In Flight," *Mansfield News-Journal* (Mansfield, OH), Final Edition, vol. 70, no. 35, April 28, 1954, p. 1.

[28] "Savannah Man Plunges from Hotel Window," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), vol. 97, no. 36, July 28, 1964, p. 3. See also Charles Bailey, "Monsters Aren't What They Used To Be," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, Final Edition, yr. 141, no. 38, October 14, 1965, p. 18.

[29] Brian Moore, "Lion of the Afternoon," *The Atlantic*, vol. 200, no. 5 (November 1957), p. 80.

Tribune article indicated.[30] This cultural shift to openly embracing the superhero is also evident in a letter column from *Action Comics* no. 732 (April 1997). Jonathan Clark Petersen told DC Comics editors that his father dressed up as both Clark Kent and Superman on Halloween in 1969. At midnight, his father revealed the Superman costume hidden underneath a business suit and proposed to his mother.[31] Yet, Superman cosplay was not limited to Halloween. To promote cartoonist Jules Feiffer's book *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, The Dial Press hired actor Art West to don a Superman costume at Scribner Book Store in Manhattan sometime in early January 1966. *Publishers' Weekly* displayed a photograph of a costumed West holding Feiffer's book in one hand and sign in the other in the shape of a cartoon thought balloon to advertise the publication. Feiffer and his publisher promoted not only the book but Comicland.[32]

When Batman arrived on television in 1966, he dominated popular culture and superhero play that year, supplanting Superman's position as the premiere symbol of Comicland. Regarding public engagement with the superhero fantasy, Batman and his partner Robin are second to Superman. This author suspects that the difference rests in Superman's extrahuman powers that spark the imagination to a greater degree than his human counterparts. Additionally, Superman cosplay began almost immediately while the Dynamic Duo started only after the campy television show. The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Jewish community, for example, succumbed to the Batman craze. Local girls created Batman masks and teenagers wore Batman and Robin costumes at a dance in February.[33] *The Economist* wrote on the seventh of May that choreographer Arthur Murray invented a dance called the "Batusi." It is unclear if Murray adapted it from the television show or claimed creation. Actor Adam West contended that he invented the memorable dance moves minutes before shooting it.[34] The Dark Knight, according

---

[30] "Fun Is Keynote During Dress Rehearsal," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3-Star Sports Final Edition, vol. 121, no. 289, December 3, 1962, p. 18 (Part 3).
[31] *Action Comics* no. 732 (April 1997) is available for viewing online at https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Action-Comics-1938/Issue-732?id=26044#33. For secondary source mention, see Gordon, *Superman*, p. 125.
[32] *Publishers' Weekly*, vol. 189, no. 2, January 10, 1966, p. 83. See also Jules Feiffer, *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1965).
[33] For Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania cosplay, see "Batman Beware! Batwomen Are Here!," *the WEEKLY*, vol. 40, no. 21, January 28, 1966, p. 3; "Batman Theme," *the WEEKLY*, vol. 40, no. 22, February 4, 1966, p. 3; "Batman Theme," *the WEEKLY*, vol. 40, no. 23, February 11, 1966, p. 4; Danny Arnheim, "Teen Talk," *the WEEKLY*, vol. 40, no. 24, February 18, 1966, p. 3.
[34] For more on the Batusi dance and the claim that it started in the Chicago bar called Whiskey a Go Go by Trude Heller, see Vicki Kanner, "Proper Channels: TV Radio," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Final City Edition, vol. 274, no. 17, January 17, 1966, p. 12; "ABC-TV's' 'Batman' Sparks 'The Batusi,'" *Variety*, vol. 241, no. 9, January 19, 1966, p. 1; "San Francisco Really Camping Out As Batmania Cues Some New Fads," *Variety*, vol. 241, no. 12, February 9, 1966, p. 62; Jim Langdon, "Batten the Hatches; Batophobia Is Rampant," *The Austin Statesman* (Austin, TX),

to *Newsday*, even had a romp, billed as a "Bat Tie affair," at a club on Manhattan's ritzy East Side on March 10, 1966.[35] It seems that the culture of downtown or New York's Greenwich Village migrated uptown. The element of costuming in theater and drag potentially influenced popular culture. This niche world merged with the self-reflexive trend in camp and the pop art movement. In August 1966, *Esquire* showcased a photograph of cultural figurehead Andy Warhol dressed as Robin and his "girlfriend" Christa Päffgen (aka Nico) from the Velvet Underground as Batman.[36] The Long Island-based musical instrument manufacturer Hohner capitalized on the Batmania the following month. A harmonica advertisement in *Life* and *The New York Times Magazine* from late September 1966 showed Johnny Morley, a high schooler from nearby Freeport, New York, in a Robin costume.

> It's not a whatchamacallit. It's a Hohner harmonica. And it's not what's-his-name, the crimefighter. It's Johnny Morley from Freeport High School. He's knocking them dead at his class costume party playing "The Batman Theme" on the harmonica. The harmonica he got three weeks ago and taught himself to play.

Other advertisements in *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Billboard* replicated Morley as Robin with another person as Batman in a musical ensemble.[37] These promotions are perplexing because there is no direct connection between musical instruments and the television show, but Hohner somehow thought that using Batman and Robin was the way to market their products to consumers. Regardless of the logic, these advertisements validated Comicland as an adult space.

Similar to the schizophrenic children in the previous chapter, a Vietnam conflict paratrooper, who suffered from prior mental illness and then posttraumatic stress disorder

---

Home Edition, vol. 95, no. 147, February 15, 1966, p. 19; Herb Lyon, "Tower Ticker," *Chicago Tribune*, 3-Star Sports Final Edition, yr. 119, no. 46, February 15, 1966, p. 16; "TV-Radio: Strato-camp," *Newsweek*, vol. 67, no. 8, February 21, 1966, p. 96; "Batman ascendant," *The Economist*, vol. 219, no. 6,403, May 7, 1966, p. 586.

[35] Dolores Alexander, "Raising Kane at a Bat Romp," *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), Final Edition, vol. 26, no. 159, March 11, 1966, p. 93.

[36] David Newman and Robert Benton, "Remember the Sixties?," *Esquire*, vol. 66, no. 2 (August 1966), p. 109. More photographs exist online, and I do not know the origin of them.

[37] "Isn't that what's-his-name playing a Hohner whatchamacallit?," *Life*, vol. 61, no. 13, September 23, 1966, p. R17; "Isn't that what's-his-name playing a Hohner whatchamacallit?," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 116, no. 39,691, September 25, 1966, p. 125 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 6).

See also "You Can't Tell the Players Without a Hohner," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 115, no. 39,682, September 16, 1966, p. 50; "Isn't that what's-his-name playing a Hohner whatchamacallit?," *Billboard*, vol. 78, no. 41, October 8, 1966, p. 36; "Isn't that what's-his-name playing a Hohner whatchamacallit?," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 116, no. 39,754, November 27, 1966, p. 105 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 6); "Isn't that what's-his-name playing a Hohner whatchamacallit?," *Billboard*, vol. 79, no. 1, January 7, 1967, p. 46.

(PTSD), imagined himself as Superman. Clinical psychologists Richard B. Ulman and Doris Brothers chronicle the mental cosplay of Chuck [no last name] in their book *The Shattered Self: A Psychoanalytic Study of Trauma*. "Chuck described the first time he parachuted from a plane. He remembered feeling that he could literally fly; he fantasized about himself as Superman, possessing superhuman strength and powers. His Superman fantasies were fueled by the special treatment he received from the other recruits, who were awed by his status as an airborne ranger." During an ambush, Chuck recalled having "gone mad" and "felt capable of superhuman feats 'just like Superman.'" This is experience may not be novel given the opinion of Steuart Henderson Britt back in 1950, which is discussed in chapter 2. Britt explains that World War II soldiers identified with Superman to survive war. However, Ulman and Brothers record that, in the face of bloodshed, Chuck "felt his Superman fantasy slipping away." They continued to document his paradoxical experience with identification. "Chuck reported that this series of events eroded any lingering sense of Superman invulnerability and invincibility."[38] Before his tour of duty from late 1967 to the middle of 1969, Chuck, a runaway teenager, constructed the alter ego Sharky, an older and more streetwise version of himself.[39] The authors conclude, "Receiving training as a paratrooper and learning to fly through the air as a parachutist fueled the embellishment of a highly inflated fantasy of himself as Superman. Chuck had psychologically reorganized himself around a fantasy of himself as Superman, which replaced his previous fantasy of himself a Sharky."[40]

Just like Harry Donenfeld, other men wore Superman T-shirts as well as costumes in the 1970s. At "Superman Day" in Metropolis, Illinois, on January 21, 1972, the Reverend Charles Chandler, pastor of the Metropolis' First Baptist Church, appeared as Superman in the official George Reeves costume and gave a speech in character. Mayor J. P. (Pal) Williams presented this "Superman" with the key to the city and Mike Stanton of the Southern Illinois University television station WSIU interviewed him. Rev. Chandler and the event treated Superman as a real person. He even later appeared as Superman on the television program *To Tell The Truth*.[41] The act of linking Superman to George Reeves underscores the undying connection of baby

---

[38] See Richard B. Ulman and Doris Brothers, *The Shattered Self: A Psychoanalytic Study of Trauma* (n.p.: The Analytic Press, 1988), pp. 180–182.
[39] Ulman and Brothers, *The Shattered Self*, pp. 179, 186.
[40] Ulman and Brothers, *The Shattered Self*, p. 187.
[41] See "Metropolis, Illinois: Story of an American City," *The Amazing World of Superman*, Metropolis Edition (1973), pp. 42–45; Manning, "Metropolis: Supertown," *The Atlantic*, p. 20. The television station WSIU does not have any footage and the airdate of the show *To Tell The Truth* is unknown.

boomer fans to the 1950s television series and how they chose to extend their association with the character through cosplay. *Newsweek* reported on the thirteenth of March that Chandler "takes turns with office manager Larry Davis in wearing the supersuit." To show how deep their cosplay went, the article exhibited an image of Davis leaving a phone booth.[42] The town of Metropolis and the promotion of Superman brought other manifestations of Comicland. Organizer Bob Westerfield claimed in the May 1979 issue of *The Atlantic* to have paraded a college student around St. Louis dressed as Superman. Postmaster Jack Wilkins wore a Superman T-shirt beneath his button-down at Postal Service meetings. Someone at Southern Illinois University brought Clark Kent to life electronically through a fake student account on the registrar computer system but it was erased by administrators upon discovery. *The Atlantic* poignantly wrote, "Metropolis Supermania seems reserved mainly for adults."[43] Stepping backward from the small town and focusing on the whole country, grownups raised on the television show repeatedly cemented the reality of Comicland through their imaginative superhero play. Four-time Olympian Jack Kelly is another example. *The Saturday Evening Post* reported in the Winter 1973 issue that at his victory dinner celebrating a successful campaign for the presidency of the Amateur Athletic Union, Kelly "tore off his dinner jacket to reveal a Superman shirt underneath."[44]

DC Comics employees and those affiliated with the company reclaimed superhero cosplay in the 1970s. The Superman fandom book *The Krypton Companion* printed two examples of DC Comics employees furthering cosplay. Sometime in this decade artist John Costanza drew a birthday card for editor Julius Schwartz as Superman. The decorative caption in capital letters read, "JULIE SCHWARTZ -- OUR SUPERMAN!!" Costanza replaced the first letter "S" in Schwartz's surname with the Superman emblem. Comic book writer Bob Rozakis cosplayed as Superman in a T-shirt in 1974 while his wife dressed up as Wonder Woman and he was again photographed wearing a Superman T-shirt at the 1976 Superman Super-Con in New York City.[45] Director Richard Donner reportedly wore a Superman costume to help convince friend and screenwriter Tom Mankiewicz to rewrite the unfilmable script for *Superman: The*

---

[42] "The Cities: Fame Comes to Metropolis," *Newsweek*, vol. 79, no. 11, March 13, 1972, p. 62.
[43] Manning, "Metropolis: Supertown," *The Atlantic* (May 1979), p. 20.
[44] Jack Kelly, "The Professional Amateur," *The Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 244, no. 4 (Winter 1973), p. 80.
[45] Eury, ed., *The Krypton Companion*, pp. 93, 166, 148.

Movie.[46] The Canadian magazine *Maclean's* reported on December 11, 1978, that he dressed up as Superman for encouragement to finish the picture as money problems arose and a fear of being fired plagued his psyche. And as the photograph in the January 1979 issue of *American Cinematographer* illustrated, Donner also wore a Superman T-shirt on the movie set.[47] *The New York Times* misreported that original scriptwriter Mario Puzo sported a blue Superman T-shirt at the 1978 movie premiere in Washington, DC.[48] *Esquire* corrected this mistake on January 30, 1979. It was just another heavyset man.[49] An exposé in *People* from February 12, 1979, which attempted to present Superman's creators as righteous underdogs in their legal battle for the return of copyright, exhibited a choreographed image of Jerry Siegel ripping open his blazer and white button-down to reveal a Superman T-shirt. In this act, a step further than merely showcasing a Superman costume to children and authoring an article as Clark Kent, Siegel physically pretended to be his creation, the deepest form of cosplay. The image also depicted Siegel's partner Joe Shuster as Kent with the stereotypical fedora and his second wife Joanne wore a shirt with the words "Lois Lane" written on it.[50] Back in 1935, Jolan Kovacs, who later adopted the stage name Joanne Carter, served as inspiration for the intrepid female reporter and love interest of Superman. Although some have questioned the veracity of the story because of a lack of resemblance to Lane, Shuster explained in the 1948 Christmas issue of *The New Yorker* that she was "[t]he original model for Lois [Lane] in 'Superman.'" The trio would confirm this history in the August 1983 issue of the fanzine *Nemo: The Classic Comics Library*.[51] It can be argued that Joanne Siegel was cosplaying not just Lois Lane but herself.

---

[46] Interview with Tom Mankiewicz in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 69; Tye, *Superman*, p. 194.
[47] Ivor Davis, "Marketing the Man of Steel!," *Maclean's* (Toronto, CAN), vol. 91, no. 31, December 11, 1978, p. 49; "Behind The Scenes Of 'Superman,'" *American Cinematographer*, vol. 60, no. 1 (January 1979), p. 30.
[48] Judy Klemesrud, "'Superman' Road Show for the Special Olympics Rolls Into New York," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 128, no. 44,064, December 12, 1978, p. C10 (Science Times Section). For secondary source mention, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 202.
[49] "Dubious Achievement Awards for January: Proof that 1979 is off to a sour beginning: An Honest Mistake," *Esquire*, vol. 91, no. 2, January 30, 1979, p. 88.
[50] See Laura Stevenson, "Superman's Creators Signed Away Their Baby 41 Years Ago, and Therein lies a Sad, Sad Tale," *People*, vol. 11, no. 6, February 12, 1979, p. 79; "Tribute '96," *People*, vol. 46, no. 27, December 30, 1996, p. 190; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 289.
[51] Although some comics aficionados have foolishly questioned the veracity of the modeling story, Brad Ricca potentially discovered Jolan Kovacs' classified advertisement that Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster responded to. His citations lack the page number. See "Situation Wanted—Female: ARTIST MODEL," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, yr. 94, no. 13, January 13, 1935, p. 9-B; "The Talk of The Town: Vulnerable," *The New Yorker*, December 25, 1948, p. 14; Siegel, "Creation of a Superhero," chap. 3, pp. 21–22; interview with Joanne Siegel and Joe Shuster in Tom Andrae, Geoffr[e]y Blum, and Gary Coddington, "Of Supermen and Kids With Dreams," *Nemo: The Classic Comics Library* (August 1983), p. 14; interview with Joe Shuster and Joanne Siegel by Shel Dorf, "Remembering the 1930's," in Eclipse Comics, *Siegel and Shuster Dateline 1930's*, vol. 1, no. 1 (November 1984), p. 33; interview

The Superman movies starring Christopher Reeve encouraged further superhero cosplay in the 1980s. This proclivity for dress up by the public challenged DC Comics' ownership of the character and sparked legal action. DC Comics sued Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus in February 1980 for $150,000 in damages because acrobat Marco Canastrelli wore a Superman costume as part of his act. The program book also utilized the character, which DC Comics noted in their claim in New York Federal Court for both copyright and trademark infringement.[52] The company exerted their legal muscle again in 1984 against Unlimited Monkey Business, Inc. (UMB), a singing telegram company based in Atlanta, Georgia, who, according to the court, infringed DC Comics' copyright and trademark rights of its superheroes Superman and Wonder Woman. UMB distorted the DC Comics' characters into "Super Stud," whose alter ego was "Dark Dent," and "Wonder Wench." (The case summary does not indicate the use of a satirical twist on Wonder Woman's alter ego Diana Prince.) Denying the defense of fair use, the court ruled that UMB diluted and tarnished DC Comics' characters "all-American" image. UMB used the likeness of Superman and Wonder Woman in advertisements, balloons, and costumes. The company adapted the famous Superman narration from multimedia:

> Faster than a speeding tortoise
> More powerful than an armpit
> Able to leap tall broads in a single bound
> It's a nurd
> It's insane
> It's Super Stud

UMB even marketed to the public that they should have Superman pick up their friends at the airport. Additionally, a skit included a toy monkey named "Jimmy Olson," which is a

---

with Joanne Siegel in Murray Bishoff and Alan Light, "Superman Grew Out of Our Personal Feelings About Life," *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 56 (February 2007), pp. 7–8; Dooley, "The Man of Tomorrow and the Boys of Yesterday," in Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, p. 34; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 20–21, 122, 311n21; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 140–142, 170D (image), 227, 357n15, and 357n25; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. xiii, 155. An article in the *Torch* purported that Glennville High School student Geraldine Mandell signed a long-term contract to be the Lois Lane model in the 1940s. Admittedly, Joe Shuster was known to sketch women as a way of flirting. This case is troubling because Mandell was a minor while Shuster was twenty-seven years old at the time. See Jerry Siegel to Jack S. Liebowitz, letter, March 8, 1942, and text in Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 96–97, 99–100.

[52] "Bring back Clark Kent," *Daily News* (New York, NY), Multiple Editions, vol. 61, no. 202, February 15, 1980, p. 9 or 9c; Gerald Etter, "The Scene: *In the nation and the world*. Superman: *Can he leap this in a single bound?*," [*sic*] *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sports Final, vol. 302, no. 46, February 15, 1980, p. 3A; "D.C. Asks Superman Act Be Grounded In N.Y. Suit," *Variety*, vol. 298, no. 3, February 20, 1980, p. 81.

misspelling of the *Daily Planet* cub reporter Jimmy Olsen.[53] Their business model was to encourage adults to bring Comicland to themselves and their friends.

These were not the only acts of litigation this decade, however. In a petty and shameful move, DC Comics intimidated Richard J. Daley City College over its newspaper name. *Time* covered the fight on October 19, 1981. After refusing a 1,000-dollar "gift" to change their name from *Daley Planet*, parent company Warner Communications sued. "Back in 1979, student editors at Chicago's Richard J. Daley City College decided to change their campus newspaper's name from the ominous sounding *The Obstacle* to the more light-hearted *Daley Planet*, after Superman's favorite newspaper. Funny? Certainly not to DC Comics, a division of Warner Communications Inc., which owns the Superman trademark." The article in *Time* also quoted a newspaper staffer further playing with the superhero genre by joking about the conflict with references to Batman and Spider-Man. "Great Caesar's ghost. If we'd known there would be so much trouble, we'd have changed our name to the *Gotham Globe*, or the *Daily Bugle*. Then we'd only have to worry about bats and spiders knocking at our office, and not the Man of Steel."[54] The *Philadelphia Daily News* decried Warner Communications for taking its litigious activities too far in an editorial on the tenth of October. The lawsuit "appears to be sheer pettiness," they wrote. The unsigned editorial continued its justifiably judgmental tone.

> [S]tudents at Daley are getting a good look at what mindless business is all about.
>
> Aside from the obvious fact that the school newspaper does not use *Daily* in its name, the claim that it affords 'unfair competition' to a company that sells more than 500,000 copies of its Superman comic book a month is absurd.
>
> Warner Communications Inc. should hang its corporate head in shame and offer an apology.
>
> Wait'll Superman hears about this![55]

With the final sentence, the editorial offered an interesting appropriation by claiming to have a better understanding of Superman and what he represents than his corporate owners. Back in New York, the Union College newspaper *Concordiensis* reported on the twelfth of November

---

[53] *DC Comics Inc. v. Unlimited Monkey Business, Inc.*, 598 F. Supp. 110–120 (N.D. Ga. 1984). The case is listed as Civ. A. Case No. C82-2264A and was decided on October 11, 1984. The summary cited three advertisements: *Charlotte Uptown Weekly* (Charlotte, NC), June 2, 1981; *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), June 2, 1981; *Sacramento* (February 1981).
[54] "Americana: No Joke, Superman!," *Time*, vol. 118, no. 16, October 19, 1981, p. 51.
[55] "Quick, a Phone Booth!," *Philadelphia Daily News*, yr. 57, no. 163, October 10, 1981, p. 8.

that DC Comics attorney Louise Denbeck expressed her client's position that the paper's masthead was "diluting and destroying a very valuable trademark."[56] Even though DC Comics won the case, David Lange describes the pattern of judicial decisions favoring trademark owners as "unconscionable overreaching" that eliminates individual rights and have potentially caused irrevocable "damage to the public domain." He uses the vivid metaphor of Pac Man, as a representation of intellectual property, devouring the public domain.[57] Lange describes the case as well as the "threat" to DC Comics' intellectual property as "utter nonsense." Assessing this case, he forcefully writes that "the proprietors of the character Superman" in preventing "the students at Chicago's Daley College from naming their campus newspaper *The Daley Planet*, is an example of how the law of trademarks … has begun to spill over its boundaries and encroach into territories in which trademark protection amounts to trespass." Lange delivers more strong language in evaluating the situation as purely bullying students over harmless humor, and touches on the point of Comicland as an individual connection and superheroes imagined as public property.

> I have acknowledged that in selecting the name, logo and slogan for their school paper, the students at Daley City College undoubtedly knew that the origins of their inspiration lay partly in the development of the Superman character. At the same time, the conversion of "Daily" to "Daley"—with its explicit invocation of the college's own name, and perhaps an implicit suggestion of some relationship to a colorful former Chicago mayor whom many saw as a "Superman" in his own right—ought to be enough to signal that the students were having, as students will, a bit of sport. Far from diluting anyone's mark, much less misleading the public, they were simply essaying a modest joke. Even the Man of Steel must yield to gentle humor.
>
> … Superman and all his friends and enemies have a place in the estimation of the American public that simply has nothing to do with the parochial interests of DC Comics, Inc.[58]

---

[56] "The Daley Planet: Student Paper Sued," *Concordiensis* (Schenectady, NY), vol. 111, no. 8, November 12, 1981, p. 2.

[57] See *DC Comics, Inc. v. The Board of Trustees of the City Colleges of Chicago, et al.*, Case No. 81 C, 2402 (N.D. Ill. 1981). According to the US Trademark Office, the case was filed on April 29, 1981. David Lange, however, provides the date of June 17, 1981, in footnote no. 77 on page 165. Regardless, I cannot locate the case in any legal database. See *Official Gazette of the United States Patent and Trademark Office*, vol. 1008, no. 3, July 21, 1981, p. TMOG 15. See also Lange, "Recognizing the Public Domain," *Law and Contemporary Problems* (Autumn 1981), esp. pp. 147, 156, 164, 166, 177–178; Gaines, *Contested Culture*, pp. 224–226.

[58] Lange, "Recognizing the Public Domain," *Law and Contemporary Problems* (Autumn 1981), esp. pp. 158–159, 165–168.

Reiterating, Lange writes, "The proprietors of Superman may be in a position to show that their predecessors did invent the name 'Daily Planet,' but they have not suffered any taking."[59] The two cases above illustrate DC Comics rightfully protecting its intellectual property from violators who sought profit, but the case discussed in this paragraph shows abuse of corporate power and the overextension of trademark protection.

Batman held a smaller place in the public mind before the 1989 movie starring Michael Keaton. Future Batman producer Michael E. Uslan recounted in his memoir the receipt of an unusual parting gift from colleagues at United Artists in 1980. They paid for an entertainer to appear at their office wearing a Batman costume as if it were a children's birthday party. Uslan quit his position as an entertainment lawyer to pursue his dream of producing a noncampy Batman movie, a treatment closer to the superhero's pulp fiction roots. His memoir entitled *The Boy Who Loved Batman* included a picture of Batman holding him like a bride in a wedding photo to document the event.[60] The image also plays with the infamous claim by Dr. Fredric Wertham of Batman and Robin as "homosexuals" and Robin as a surrogate damsel in distress. In this matrimonial scenario, Uslan can be interpreted as Robin.[61]

One record of everyday Superman play existed in the 1990s. In the issue dated October 23, 1995, *Forbes* shared an undated story of rodeo cowboy Casey Tibbs duping fellow poker players in Cheyenne, Wyoming, with Superman as the premise. Tibbs took their money and left after pretending to be Superman but without a costume.

> One time in Cheyenne he and some of his chums were sitting round a table in the hotel, playing a little poker. It was hot, and all they was [*sic*] wearing was their undershorts, bandages, stitches and such. Casey was holding all the money, tucked down in his jockey shorts, there. After a hand, he looked out of the third floor window and he screwed up his brow and he says, "I bet I can tie a towel around my neck and jump out that window and fly all around the building and back in that window just like Superman." He put down a $50 and it was, as you may well imagine, quickly matched by everyone. He tucks the cash in his shorts, knots a towel round his neck, and leaps.

[59] Lange, "Recognizing the Public Domain," *Law and Contemporary Problems* (Autumn 1981), pp. 171–172.
[60] Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*, p. 195.
[61] Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, pp. 189–192.

Soon after the poker players found him down the street pushing a bicycle with one hand and drinking whiskey with the other. It is unclear if Tibbs injured himself after exiting from the window or how he ended up on the ground.[62]

Chatter about the unmade Superman movie, atrophying at the production stage, from the 1990s and the subsequent decade induced its own Superman cosplay. According to Superman biographer Jake Rossen, future Man of Steel actor Brandon Routh won the 2003 Halloween costume contest at Lucky Strike bowling alley in Los Angeles, California, when he dressed up as the character. Routh met the assistant of writer and television producer J. J. Abrams at the venue. The auspicious encounter somehow blossomed into a video audition for director Joseph "McG" McGinty Nichol, who was temporarily associated with a Superman project. Director Bryan Singer ended up choosing Routh for the part in what became *Superman Returns* in 2006 because he somewhat resembled Christopher Reeve.[63] Singer's movie continued the Richard Donner narrative after *Superman II*, erasing the bombs *Superman III* and *Superman IV* from continuity. Rossen also reports that director Brett Ratner superimposed his face on Superman's body in a Christmas card to celebrate his connection to the project a few years earlier.[64] In the 1990s and the next decade, rumored Superman productions were associated with countless directors, including Tim Burton, Michael Bay, Martin Campbell, Oliver Stone, Ralph Zondag, McGinty Nichol, Wolfgang Petersen, Michael Mann, Steven Soderbergh, David Fincher, and Brett Ratner, as well as writers Jonathan Lemkin, Gregory Poirier, Kevin Smith, Wesley Strick, Dan Gilroy, Alex Ford, Keith Giffen, William Wisher, Paul Attanasio, J. J. Abrams, Andrew Kevin Walker, and Akiva Goldsman. Rossen claims that Warner asked M. Night Shyamalan to both write and direct while Glen Weldon asserts that Shyamalan's desire to also write the screenplay served as a deal breaker.[65] *The Krypton Companion*, an edited collection of essays and other anecdotes geared to fandom, includes a photograph of comic book writer Jon Bogdanove dressed up as Superman. The date of his cosplay is unknown but is likely from between 1991, when he started

---

[62] Coyote Jack, "Dismal Moments In The American West: Why cowboys sing the blues," *Forbes*, vol. 156, no. 10, October 23, 1995, p. 129 (*Forbes FYI* Supplement).
[63] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 281–282.
[64] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 273.
[65] See Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 206, 208–221, 223–243, 249–250, 257, 265–296; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 302.

For an official Warner Bros. copy of Kevin Smith's script, see Kevin Smith, *Superman Lives*, unmade screenplay, February 7, 1997, box 4, TH. The initials TH is an abbreviation for the Tim Hunter collection of scripts, audiotapes, and videotapes, *2005MT-77, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

working on Superman comic books, to 2006.[66] Like Superman's caretakers from the 1940s, Ratner and Bogdanove became the character and enacted Comicland in their own lives outside of Halloween.

The superhero cosplay phenomenon continued into the second decade of the twenty first century. In 2016, the *Manhasset Press*, a local Long Island, New York, newspaper, suggested the idea of Superman as an easy last minute Halloween costume for men.

> Channel your inner Superman with a Superman emblem T-shirt underneath a suit. Wear a white dress shirt with a black jacket, pants and tie. Be sure to leave your dress shirt open to show the Superman emblem, and leave your tie slightly askew as though you are just getting ready to fly off to save Metropolis. Don't forget the thick, black-rimmed glasses.[67]

The ubiquity of comic book culture and the new Superman movie franchise with Henry Cavil aided such a proposal to manifest Comicland on Halloween, the socially accepted time that ordinary adults feel most comfortable participating in make-believe in public.

Early Celebrity Cosplay

Superman cosplay invaded variety shows and sitcoms where the fourth space of Comicland broke back through the fourth wall, demonstrating how embedded the Man of Steel is within the cultural fabric of America. Milton Berle was the first broadcast celebrity to enact superhero cosplay. Inspiration for his 1949 performance may have come from an earlier appearance with Clayton "Bud" Collyer, the voice of Superman on the radio. On May 8, 1947, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) organized a five-week series called the *Pursuit of Happiness* that ABC broadcasted over the radio. The premiere episode starred Berle and Collyer, who was serving as vice president of the AFL. A skit by playwright Arthur Miller served as propaganda against the impending Taft-Hartley Act, a law to restrict the power of labor unions. *Newsweek* quoted Superman's criticism: "If … these bills [are passed] … wages will be slashed; purchasing power will diminish sharply; the chief market of the farmer and of industry will be destroyed; production will be cut for lack of buying; millions will lose their jobs … Your voice, the voice of the American people, is the only thing that can kill these slave-labor bills." It is

---

[66] Eury, ed., *The Krypton Companion*, p. 209.
[67] Christina Claus, "Did You Forget About Halloween?," *Manhasset Press* (Manhasset, NY), vol. 84, no. 15, October 26 to November 1, 2016, p. 4A.

unclear if Collyer gave the activist speech in his own persona or in Superman's.[68] On May 16, 1949, *Time* noted that Berle appeared as Superman and Li'l Abner for his Texaco Star Theater television show sometime earlier that year.[69] Berle revisited the idea of the superhero in October. *The New Yorker* described an episode of *The Milton Berle Show* with heroic cosplay. "There was a skit involving people dressed up as Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, and Superman."[70] His interpretation of Comicland combined the superhero fantasy with characters from other comic strip genres. Berle, who seemed to be responding to the popularity of the Superman radio show and the 1948 movie serial starring Kirk Alyn as well as the public affinity for newspaper comic strips, initiated the pattern that many comedians would continue.

In the following decade, humorist Ernie Kovacs lampooned Superman and the *Adventures of Superman* starring George Reeves. The July 2, 1956, evening premiere of *The Ernie Kovacs Show* includes a skit about an idiotic superhero named Superclod whose alias Clark Bent works at *The Daily Granite* and pines over an uninterested Lois, no last name given. The writers may have borrowed part of the idea from the 1953 *Mad* parody "Superduperman," which likewise features a superhero with the alter ego of Clark Bent.[71] In the sketch, the two reporters share an office. Although an inaccurate representation of a newsroom, it served the scene. Its design echoed the spatial arrangement on the *Adventures of Superman* television show. Except for the third episode of the Reeves series, the *Daily Planet* did not have a newsroom but featured separate offices for Clark Kent and Lois Lane. Budgeting constraints produced this inauthentic vision of a newsroom for the original Superman television show, Larry Tye asserts. "The newspaper never had a newsroom—that would have required too many desks and extras—

---

[68] "AFL Launching 250G Radio Drive Against Labor Bills As Legislators Get Tougher," *The Billboard*, vol. 59, no. 18, May 1947, pp. 4, 17; "Business: Labor: It's Superman," *Newsweek*, vol. 29, no. 20, May 19, 1947, pp. 79–80. See also Victor Riesel, "Inside Labor," *New York Post*, 7th Final Edition, vol. 146, no. 229, August 15, 1946, p. 36.
[69] "Radio & Television: The Child Wonder," *Time*, vol. 53, no. 20, May 16, 1949, p. 71.
[70] Philip Hamburger, "Television: The World of Milton Berle," *The New Yorker*, vol. 25, no. 36, October 29, 1949, p. 92. Presumably, *The Milton Berle Show*, season 2, episode 5, aired October 18, 1949, on NBC.
[71] Harvey Kurtzman and Wallace Wood, "Superduperman!," *Mad* no. 4 (April–May 1953), in *The Mad Archives*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 2002), pp. 117–124. The comic is also reprinted in Denis Kitchen and Paul Buhle, *The Art of Harvey Kurtzman: The Mad Genius of Comics* (New York, NY: Abrams ComicArts, 2009), pp. 97–105 and Nick Meglin and John Ficarra, eds., *MAD About Super Heroes* (New York, NY: MAD Books, 2002), n.p.; See also Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 275; Tye, *Superman*, p. 180; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 284; Brod, *Superman Is Jewish?*, p. 61; Bill Schelly, *Harvey Kurtzman: The Man Who Created Mad and Revolutionized Humor in America* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2015), pp. 258–261, 266–267; Jeremy Dauber, *American Comics: A History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2022), pp. 135, 207.

just cramped private offices." Tye's perspective as a journalist informed this analysis.[72] Beyond the economic explanation of cost cutting, having the dialogue take place in isolated offices enhanced the drama and was easier to shoot. Besides the unusual layout of the set, *The Ernie Kovacs Show* parody did not make much narrative sense or maintain enough character development apart from mocking the Superman concept. In the skit, Superclod, who wears a silver football helmet crowned with a stick figure (that looked to be covered in aluminum foil or cellophane), confronts his equally incompetent nemesis Knuckles McGurk and sidekick Weasel at their hideout. Superclod learns of the villain's location from a message they sent to *The Daily Granite* that challenges him to a showdown. McGurk orchestrated a trap that intended to electrocute Superclod with a million volts, but his rubber underwear negates their plan. Soon after, Weasel finds Lois snooping around. Reversing the familiar formula of damsel in distress rescued by the hero, she saves Superclod, who faints for no discernable reason, and seems to fly them away as if she was the future character Supergirl. What is significant about this bit is how the characters repeatedly break the fourth wall to signal or speak to the audience, who are privileged to the secret that Bent is really Superclod. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the comedic style of *The Ernie Kovacs Show* followed in the footsteps of Milton Berle. The July 3, 1956, article discussed the Superman parody. "There was an endless sketch about Superclod, a slob version of Superman, which seemed only an excuse for scenes of the hero flying through space and a shot where, thanks to Superclod's x-ray [*sic*] eyes, the villains did a quick strip—right down to the bones." One of the more unconventional parts of the skit is the portrayal of Superclod almost swimming in the sky. Another Pennsylvania paper, *The Gazette and Daily*, forecasted potential legal action over Superclod a week later. "Incidentally, the comic and his network may face a suit as a result of his lampoon of 'Superman' via the 'Superclod' version on the premiere show July 2." As this chapter shows, DC Comics was known for repeatedly taking legal action to protect the intellectual property of their flagship superheroes. Given the fact that Kovacs revived the character for a skit on the final episode of *Take a Good Look* that aired March 16, 1961, litigation over his satire was unlikely.[73]

---

[72] Tye, *Superman*, p. 136. Larry Tye's commentary is not totally accurate. Although reporters Clark Kent and Lois Lane had their own offices, the show displayed a newsroom in the third episode as I stated in the main text.
[73] *The Ernie Kovacs Show*, season 1, episode 12, directed by Barry Shear, written by Ernie Kovacs, Rex Lardner, Deke Hayward, and Mike Marmer, aired July 2, 1956, on NBC. The video for the Superclod sketch on *The Ernie Kovacs Show* is available on YouTube. See Free The Kinescopes!, "The Ernie Kovacs Show - July 2, 1956," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jalx-bPNoWw. For reviews, see "Screening TV: Ernie's Booby Traps Fail to

Women actors joined the cosplay trend by crossdressing as the prototypical male hero. In the famous *I Love Lucy* episode on January 14, 1957, with George Reeves as Superman, Lucy Ricardo pretends to be Superman for her son Ricky's birthday party. Even if adults did not dress up themselves at the time, they related to the show's premise as their own children probably desired a Superman-themed birthday party, a fact that Brian Moore accentuated in 1957. This episode documents the invasion of Comicland over television and enabled adults to safely explore their enjoyment of Superman without ridicule.[74] Three years later, actor Elaine Stritch transformed into Super Ruth in the second episode of the short-lived series *My Sister Eileen*. According to a promotional image uploaded to Wikipedia, Ruth Sherwood dreamed that she became a superhero "in order to save her little sister Eileen, played by Shirley Bonne, from the clutches of an evil Broadway producer." Just like Superman, the costume of Super Ruth included tights, shorts, a belt, a cape, and a pentagon-shaped emblem with a streamlined letter "R" inside. In the photograph, Super Ruth appeared to have smashed through a New York window and posed with the Empire State Building in the background, a pattern expressed in the Superman newspaper comic strips and comic books that is catalogued in the conclusion chapter. She stood with her hands on her hips to form the familiar superhero stance in a display of strength almost congruous with New York City's immovable brick and steel giant and symbol of economic power. To feminize the character, Super Ruth wore high heels instead of boots. The October 1960 episode is unfortunately not preserved.[75] Women's superhero play continued on March 6, 1962, when Carol Burnett played Supergirl and her alter ego Clara Clean, an unattractive newspaper reporter, on the variety show *The Garry Moore Show*. In the same manner as *I Love Lucy*, the sketch expresses the silliness style. Burnett's presentation of the character utilizes a Tarzan-like yell before flying and pretends to swim in the sky, an interpretation that duplicates Ernie Kovacs' Superclod satire in 1956.[76] Burnett later revealed that she began doing the

---

Snare Laughs," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), Final City Edition, vol. 255, no. 3, July 3, 1956, p. 16; John Lester, "Radio and Television," *The Gazette and Daily* (York, PA), vol. 138, no. 2,2157, July 11, 1956, p. 22.

[74] *I Love Lucy*, "Lucy and Superman," aired January 14, 1957.

[75] *My Sister Eileen*, season 1, episode 2, "Super-Ruth Saves Eileen," aired October 12, 1960, on CBS; image on Wikipedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/6/66/20141120040058%21Elaine_Stritch_My_Sister_Eileen.jpg.

[76] *The Garry Moore Show*, season 4, episode 23, directed by Dave Geisel, written by Vincent Bogert, Arnie Rosen, Coleman Jacoby, Norman Barasch, Caroll Moore, and Woody Allen, aired March 6, 1962, on CBS. The skit appears on disc three in the bonus features section of *The Carol Burnett Show: Carol's Favorites*, vol. 2 (n.p.: Whacko, Inc.,

piercing sound as a child when acting out Tarzan movies with her sister.[77] An exposé on actor Margot Kidder, who played Lois Lane in the original Superman movie franchise, in *People* on August 24, 1981, presented her as the female equivalent of Clark Kent and Superman. This cosplay was political, however. Instead of revealing Kryptonian threads with a large letter "S" under her business suit, Kidder wore a T-shirt protesting firearms designed by the National Coalition to Ban Handguns.[78]

Superhero cosplay by women mirrors the comic book appearance of Supergirl. Editor Mort Weisinger developed the Superman "family" concept through the introduction his Kryptonian cousin Supergirl in *Action Comics* no. 252 (April 1959). However, cartoonist Otto Oscar Binder also professed to be the creator of Supergirl.[79] This is just one of many contentious claims of creation in the comic book field.[80] The two examples of television cosplay on *My Sister Eileen* and *The Garry Moore Show* could be an embrace of the new character but given the close timeframe to Supergirl's debut and the narrative structure of the investigative journalist alter ego in Carol Burnett's sketch, it is more likely that these women appropriated Superman. While the intent of comedians Elaine Stritch and Carol Burnett was humor, the result of their gender-bending Superman performances made Comicland more inclusive.

Before the creation of Supergirl and the appropriation of Superman by these performers a Superwoman satire briefly existed. On June 27, 1943, Rea Irvin crafted a satirical comic strip entitled *Superwoman* for the *New York Herald Tribune*. It lasted only one sequence after DC Comics threatened litigation. New York *Daily Mirror* gossip columnist Walter Winchell first covered the aftermath the next day. "Yesterday's Herald Tribune carried a new cartoon feature called 'Superwoman' by Rea Irvin. It was the first and last appearance in that gazette. 'Superman' threatened suit, and the publisher immediately apologized and said the feature would be withdrawn at once… [*sic*]." *Newsweek* reported on the legal scuffle two weeks after the strip's

---

2012), DVD. For a clip on YouTube, see BigGlee Archives, "Carol Burnett in 1962 SUPERGIRL TV Sketch!," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wY-ofrmCUcE&ab_channel=BigGleeArchives.

[77] Catherine Wright, "Carol Burnett Learned to Do Her 'Tarzan' Yell at a Surprisingly Young Age," August 20, 2020, https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/carol-burnett-learned-to-do-her-tarzan-yell-at-a-surprisingly-young-age.html/.

[78] Peter Lester, "Tell Us It Ain't So, Superman!," *People*, vol. 16, no. 8, August 24, 1981, p. 85.

[79] For Supergirl, see Daniels, *Superman*, p. 104; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 286; Yeffeth, ed., *The Man From Krypton*, pp. 39, 166; Eury, ed., *The Krypton Companion*, pp. 12, 23, 38, 40, 44–46, 76–77, 83; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 145; De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 130; Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman*, pp. 38, 106; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 161, 170; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 114, 117; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 165; Gordon, *Superman*, p. 122.

[80] Tye, *Superman*, pp. 20, 165.

publication. "Herald Tribune lawyers were vastly relieved last week to escape a suit for infringement by dropping the feature." The *Newsweek* article also explained that Irvin was displeased with the situation. "Irvin was visibly upset at the prospect of having to dream up a substitute." The paper ultimately decided to reinstate *The Smythes*, a family strip created by Irvin years earlier. Irvin's *Superwoman* left a great deal unexplained regarding character development and backstory. The caped heroine lacks an alter ego, lives in a mansion with a butler named Potter, and drags a tiny man by the hand as she flies. In her debut, Superwoman helps a hideous-looking man, implied to be a mob boss of sorts, complete a crossword puzzle. This act of "heroism" to eliminate a mental block for a villain clearly satirized the superhero do-gooder ethos. *Newsweek* commented on the mysterious narrative of Irvin's *Superwoman*. "His one-shot take-off on Siegel-Shuster's 'Superman' was limited to half a page. It featured a cloaked, woodenish young lady with droopy eyelids and powers of levitation. On her flights she dragged a spectacled professor-homunculus along by the hand. Exactly what the professor stood for, no one was for sure, and Irvin was too miffed to tell."[81] Back in October of 1942, *Esquire* published a onetime satirical cartoon by George Reckas of Superwoman. Two men watched a woman confidently walking down the street with her chest out wearing a leotard with cape and high heels. The caption read: That's Superwoman – Superman's new girl friend!"[82] [*sic*]

Comedian Bob Newhart embraced Superman and his garments as satire but changed the obstacle of transformation from the phone booth to the dry cleaners. Newhart tested his material about Superman's struggle to locate his costume on three television shows before finalization on a comedy album. According to television listings, Newhart performed a monologue on Superman for *The Entertainers* on October 23, 1964.[83] He reprised the sketch for the *Jack Paar Show* on April 16, 1965.[84] A *Variety* article suggested that Newhart repeated the routine for the premiere

---

[81] For the comic strip, see *New York Herald Tribune*, Late City Edition, vol. 103, no. 35,287, June 27, 1943, p. 3 (Section 7); *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA), Last Edition, vol. 138, no. 178, June 27, 1943, p. 2.

And for commentary, see Walter Winchell, "*In New York*," *Daily Mirror* (New York, NY), Complete Sports Edition, vol. 19, no. 317, June 28, 1943, p. 10; "Fourth Estate: Superwoman's Dive," *Newsweek*, vol. 22, no. 2, July 12, 1943, p. 70. Papers around the country syndicated Winchell's column.

[82] *Esquire*, vol. 18, no. 4 (October 1942), p. 12.

[83] See, for example, "TV Key Previews," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Final City Edition, vol. 38, no. 72, October 23, 1964, p. 31; "TV Scout: Tonight's Programs Previewed," *The Ithaca Journal* (Ithaca, NY), yr. 149, no. 251, October 23, 1964, p. 14; "Tonight's Pick Of The TV Best," *The Journal-News* (Nyack, NY), vol. 75, no. 144, October 23, 1964, p. 34.

[84] See, for example, "TV Key Previews," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Final City Edition, vol. 38, no. 222, April 16, 1965, p. 25; "TV Previews," *The Hartford Courant*, Final Edition, vol. 128, no. 106, April 16, 1965, p. 25; "Tonight's Pick Of The TV Best," *The Journal-News* (Nyack, NY), vol. 75, no. 290, April 16, 1965, p. 20.

of *The Dean Martin Show* on September 16, 1965.[85] The bit entitled "Superman and the Drycleaner" eventually appeared on his 1965 comedy record *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart: The Windmills Are Weakening* (a reference to *Don Quixote*). The material is a live recording of a show at the Ice House in Pasadena, California. Newhart played an irritable Clark Kent struggling to get his Superman suit from the drycleaners in time to save Lois Lane, who was being held for ransom. The satire utilized Newhart's favorite prop: the telephone. The premise of the joke harnessed the ordinary experience of getting the wrong suit from the cleaners. While this may be an inconvenience for the average person, it is a big problem for Superman in an emergency. Newhart set up the joke this way: "He is sitting in his office disguised as Clark Kent at the, at the *Daily Planet*, right, and the phone rings." Newhart then gave a monologue as Kent talking on the phone first to the criminals holding Lois Lane hostage, then the dry cleaners, and finally back to the kidnappers.

> Hello, hello. Yes, yes this is Clark Kent. The, the mild-mannered reporter, yes. You're, you're holding Lois Lane … and unless we come up with a million dollars by tonight, we'll never see her again. She suggested I contact a Mr. S. Yes, I know what she means. We[ll], could, could I put you on hold for just a minute? I … I, I have a bit of a problem.
>
> Hell-hello, hello B&W cleaners. Lo-look, this is Clark Kent and, the mild-mannered reporter, yes. I'm, I'm fine, fine, thank you. Listen there's been a mix-up on my suits and, and I, I need it. I have to go out on a job right now. I'm sure it's not my suit. All right look, I brought it in this morning on one-day service, no. Let me describe my suit to you. The cape is kind of a royal blue with, with white piping and the leotards are, are kind of, are kind of an off blue. No, they're not my wife's, no. They're, they're mine. I'm, I'm not married. What's, what's that supposed to mean? Look, maybe this will help you, on the, on the jersey there's a kinda red "S." S for Clark Kent, yes. With, with an outfit like that you, you wouldn't use your right initials either. Look, how, how would you like somebody to leap over tall buildings in a single bound and land right on your store? Look, look this is very important. All right would you, would you check with the morning men maybe he saw it? You don't recall him laughing. Look, this is very difficult to explain. Uh … see I sometimes fly in that suit. What, what do you mean you bet I do? Would you, would you check with the clerk at the plant? This is very important you s[ee], well I have a crisis here. If you, if you can't find it, you might tide me over with some toreadors and a blouse? How'd you, how'd you like someone to come down there and knock that silly cigar out of your mouth? Never mind how I can see it. I can see it. Look, you can't find the suit is that it? All right, I have someone on hold, all right.

---

[85] See Rick Du Brow, "TV in Review," *The Desert Sun* (Palm Springs, CA), vol. 39, no. 38, September 17, 1965, p. 3; "Television Reviews: Dean Martin Show," *Variety*, vol. 240, no. 5, September 22, 1956, p. 36.

> Hello kidnappers. Could I, could I speak with Lois please? Lois baby, uh, lis[ten]
> I don't think we're going to be able to get you out of this one Lois.[86]

The sketch is extremely clever because Newhart tapped into the idea that only the audience is privy to the secret that Kent and Superman are the same person. He cannot save her without his costume, a key logic to the mythos that divides his two personas. It is not exactly clear, but in this scenario, Lois Lane may be aware of Kent's secret identity yet the drycleaner is too stupid to figure it out. Newhart referenced Superman's powers to leap and see through walls, as well as upended his Boy Scout image by threatening the dry cleaner. It is funny because Superman is not typically irritable or vindictive, nor is he restrained by the mundane difficulties of ordinary life. Just like other comedians would later do, Newhart bent Superman's moral center for a laugh. Newhart also included the homosexuality insinuation through the reference to Superman's flamboyant costume and bachelor status. In sum, Newhart relied on the public's bond with Superman and then twisted the childhood connection into an adult commentary on the frustrations of modern life. With this bit, Newhart effectively transported the audience into Comicland.

Superhero cosplay expanded over the decades. As the guest host for *The Hollywood Palace* on March 5, 1966, Milton Berle replicated his earlier design of merging newspaper comic strip characters with superheroes to enact Comicland through mockery and reductive stereotypes. The nearly fourteen-minute slapstick sketch serves as a response to the popularity of the campy television show *Batman*. Berle appears as Clark Kent and Superman, who transforms back and forth inside a telephone booth that is in his apartment. In the skit, Superman is always on his way to save other comic strip characters in trouble. The superhero role interrupts his ability to eat a spaghetti dinner, and the sauce ends up all over him. Little Orphan Annie informs him that a tribe of African natives captured Daddy Warbucks and Wonder Woman tells him that Martians abducted Lois Lane. Each time, however, Batman beats him to the rescue. In one scene, the Man of Steel reveals his jealousy over the popularity of the Dark Knight when Jungle Jim, another comic strip character, tells him that Batman already saved Daddy Warbucks in Africa.

---

[86] *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart: The Windmills Are Weakening*, written by Bob Newhart (1965; Itasca, IL: Collectors' Choice Music, 2009), CD. Author's personal copy. The CD is not in any library. The audio for "Superman and the Drycleaner" is available on YouTube. See Bob Newhart - Topic, "Superman and the Drycleaner," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeiibkBkzHI&list=OLAK5uy_kS7wJWoGAnv_Gn8PqHgtvvqegb-rhczJ8&index=5. For an album review, see Don Lass with Barry Robinson, "Record Previews: Basie: Yesterday and Today," *Asbury Park Evening News* (Asbury Park, NJ), yr. 86, no. 138, June 12, 1956, p. 8.

> Batman! Batman! Everything is Batman! This year is Batman! Horning in on my territory.

The overarching conceit of the bit is that the Dragon Lady, the villain from *Terry and the Pirates*, seeks to expose Superman's secret identity and pretends to be other popular comic strip characters. Martha Raye plays the Dragon Lady, who disguises herself as Little Orphan Annie, Wonder Woman, and Prince Valliant—more gender-bending in Comicland. Henny Youngman is both Jungle Jim and the Fiddler, a spoof on the Riddler, while another actor pretends to be Buck Rogers. The puzzling parody concludes with television actor Adam West as the Caped Crusader saving Kent from the Fiddler. Confused, Kent asks Batman, who does not have superpowers, how he could be in all those locations so fast. The sketch reveals that Batman has six doppelgängers, who arrive on stage with the Batman television show's up-tempo theme song playing as an ending. Three days later, *The Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger* summarized the episode and accentuated Adam West's cameo.

> Asked by Superman [in his disguise as Clark Kent], alias Berle, how he managed to be in so many places at once, saving Daddy Warbucks in Africa, Lois Lane on Mars and Buck Rogers in outer space, Batman Himself (Adam West) clapped his hands, summoning forth a half dozen Batreplicas.
>
> Actually, Batman was only a bitman in the sketch, which had the Dragon Lady (Martha Raye) trying to unmask Superman by posing as Little Orphan Annie, Wonder Woman and Prince Valliant. Helping to complicate the "plot" was Henny Youngman as Jungle Jim and The [*sic*] Fiddler.[87]

As he did with Superman cosplay in 1949, Berle was the first comedian to incorporate the Dark Knight into the adult version of Comicland through satire and costuming. The *Adventures of Superman* and *Batman* altered the entertainment landscape by making DC Comics' leading superheroes fair game for parody. This form of mockery ironically enhanced their status as household names and advanced Comicland.

---

[87] *The Hollywood Palace*, aired March 5, 1966, on ABC. The video for the comic strip characters sketch is available on YouTube. See dentelTV2, "Adam West as Batman with Milton Berle and Martha Raye," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9EDR90Yvd0&t=346s. For reviews, see Harry Harris, "Screening TV: ABC Turns Spotlight On Policeman's Lot In 'Thin Blue Line,'" *The Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), Final City Edition, vol. 274, no. 67, March 8, 1966, p. 11; Jose, "Tele Follow-Up Comment: Hollywood Palace," *Variety*, vol. 242, no. 3, March 9, 1966, p. 42. A rerun for *The Hollywood Palace* episode broadcasted on June 11, 1966.

Postcamp Cosplay

American entertainment embraced the superhero to a greater degree after the 1960s. From this period forward, superhero parody conveys a critique of the genre but also affirms the unshakable bond developed in childhood. The *Bewitched* episode "Super Arthur" from February 5, 1970, replicates the cosplay trend and activation of Comicland as Samantha Stephen's Uncle Arthur, a warlock played by actor Paul Lynde, morphs into Superman and soars around the neighborhood. After riding a winged horse, Arthur's magic goes on the fritz. He briefly suffers from Bombay syndrome. Dr. Bombay, the sorcerer-doctor who coined the condition, prescribes his own experimental pill to cure Arthur's illness. The medicine, however, generates a side effect that makes Arthur temporarily transform into whatever he thinks or says, which is to fly like Superman at the end of the episode.

> Arthur: Oh, Sammy, it's no use. I just gotta fly. It's in my blood. When I'm up there in that big blue yonder I feel like Superman. [Transforms into Superman.]
>
> Samantha Stephens: Oh, my stars! Uncle Arthur get out of that thing before somebody sees you.
>
> Arthur: Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound!
>
> Samantha Stephens: Uncle Arthur, Uncle Arthur let's go back in the house.
>
> Arthur: Look! Up in the sky. It's a bird. It's a plane. No, it's Superman! Up, up, and away! [Slowly elevates into the sky.]
>
> Samantha Stephens: Uncle Arthur come back! The federal aviation people aren't going to like this! The Flying Nun's not going to be too happy about it either!

Dressed as the character, Arthur then flies around the suburban neighborhood. Samantha Stephens and her nonmagical husband Darrin must convince Darrin's boss and the policemen, who suddenly arrive on the scene, that the strange sight of Arthur's flying over their house is an illusion created by Darrin for an advertising campaign. The couple insist that wires support Uncle Arthur.[88] It is surprising that *Bewitched* deployed the exact catchphrase and costume of Superman. The show's credits, nevertheless, acknowledge DC Comics' copyright of Superman, so they may have had permission. Moreover, there is no evidence of legal action against the

[88] *Bewitched*, season 6, episode 20, "Super Arthur," directed by Richard Michaels, written by Ed Jurist, aired February 5, 1970, on ABC. For secondary source mention, see Eury, ed., *The Krypton Companion*, p. 135.

show for obvious intellectual property violation. The *Bewitched* episode underlines the potency of Comicland. Even in their story world, a sorcerer (with powers comparable to a superhero) desires to become Superman because of a childhood connection. In other words, virtually no modern man is immune to the charms of the Man of Steel and does not outgrow him.

The short-lived variety show *Happy Days*, not to be confused with the more familiar ABC sitcom of the same name about the Cunningham family, parodied Superman in its second episode. The sketch incorporated the styles of ridicule and silliness. On July 2, 1970, comedian Chuck McCann appears as a bashful and buffoonish Superman with his cape sticking out of his business suit. McCann's girth enhances the slapstick performance. Catching Clark Kent off guard, a reporter from *Happy Days* played by Jerry Dexter gets him to admit that he is Superman as well as transform on camera. Superman sheepishly says that he prefers changing inside a telephone booth and then struggles to switch out of his alter ego's clothes. In the skit, Superman wears a one-piece thermal underwear in between his superhero costume and dress suit. The reporter helps the portly Superman get out of his business clothes. Together, they unfasten his suit jacket and white dress shirt. Then, they pry off his pants that are stuck around his ankles because Kent decides to keep his red boots on. Next, they remove his boots and long underwear. During the exaggerated two-minute transformation, Superman jokes that two police officers once saw him changing in the back of a car, implying indecent exposure. The scene concludes with this funny dialogue:

> Reporter: Super, [*sic*] I know, everyone knows that you can leap tall buildings in a single bound. Certainly, we all have heard that you're more powerful than a locomotive.
>
> Superman: I love a good race with a choo-choo.
>
> Reporter: I'm sure you do. But are you faster than a speeding bullet?
>
> Superman: Are you kidding, I'm ten times faster than a speeding bullet.
>
> Reporter: Well, I happen to have a pistol here, Superman.
>
> Superman: Ah, a bullet race, huh.
>
> Reporter: And I'd like to test this out, if I can.
>
> Superman: Okay, anytime you're ready. [Bang! The reporter shoots him in the behind.]

Reporter: Superman! Superman! Superman, are you all right?

Superman: I forgot my bulletproof underwear.

Reporter: Superman, I know a good doctor.

Returning to the slapstick aspect of the skit, the reporter then helps a struggling Superman put all his layers of clothing back on. McCann delivers a concluding clever line, "Well, I need the glasses—you don't want somebody to recognize me, do ya?"[89] The major takeaway is how McCann flips Superman's moral status by disrobing in public and revealing his underwear, a cultural faux pas. The reference to the police catching him do the same thing in the back of a car is another layer to this maneuver. Through social commentary on the body, the show enacts the adult version of Comicland.

Other programs incorporated its characters in Superman's recognizable wardrobe. *That Girl* is a prime example of Superman cosplay and humor on television. The December 3, 1970, episode entitled "Super Reporter" played with the profession of Clark Kent. Donald Hollinger, the love interest of the show's main character, wins the humanitarian award for writing. The office staff of the magazine *Newsview* present the journalist with a costume featuring a stylized letter "D" inside a triangular shield and call him "Super Don." To avoid copyright and trademark infringement, the show's writers had Hollinger's fiancée Ann Marie, the star of the show, design the outfit in an ugly two-toned green and mustard with black trim. Hollinger's colleagues at *Newsview* encourage him to try on the costume. Hollinger at first resists explaining that he must write his speech for the award ceremony that night but quickly caves to their peer pressure. Superman-related wordplay fills the episode. "Where can I change?" Hollinger remarks. "Well for lack of a phone booth, I recommend the closet," Jerry Bauman, a fellow reporter, responds. Then, Bauman says that wearing the outfit will make Hollinger look like a girl, insinuating femininity, homosexuality, or possibly drag. After Hollinger emerges from "the closet" in costume as Super Don, he leaps onto his desk and announces his powers like in the 1950s Superman television show opening.

> Ta-dah! Look up in the sky, it's a cloud! Look down in the ground, its Super Don! Able to leap up on a desk in a single bound! Able to take a company pencil with his bare hands—! [Snaps a pencil in half.]

---

[89] *Happy Days*, aired July 2, 1970, on CBS. The clip is available on YouTube, see Events Beyond the Moon, "Chuck McCann Superman Sketch," April 9, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LonK6mH9aSo.

Newsview supervisor Mr. Jonathan Adams inopportunely enters Hollinger's office without his knowledge while he is changing into Super Don and then disapprovingly watches him pretend to be Superman. Adams' presence startles Super Don mid-monologue. Although the intended effect was comedic, the scene activates the infantilization stigma toward superheroes and highlights a generational dissonance. The episode acted as nostalgia for the show's writers and characters, who matured with George Reeves' portrayal of Superman on television. The older character Adams, however, represented an age range too old to have experienced Superman during childhood. James Gregory, the actor who played the character, was born in late 1911. As such, Hollinger's juvenile behavior displeases Adams, who dismissively mutters "Super Don" on his walk back to his office. This exchange mirrors the consternation of mothers in the 1950s over their young boys Superman play covered in the prior chapter.

The remainder of the episode further toys with the major features of the Superman mythos. Unbeknownst to Ann Marie, the costume was part of an elaborate prank devised by the *Newsview* office staff to leave Donald Hollinger dressed as Super Don for the entire day. Coworker Jerry Bauman steals Hollinger's clothes and tells Marie to keep quiet, otherwise he will not give them back until the next day. The narrative continues with Hollinger returning to his task of speech writing for the evening event. Sitting at the typewriter as Super Don, the show effectively merges Superman and Clark Kent into a single identity. While trapped in the Super Don outfit, Hollinger is forced to interview deputy commissioner Finaly, a law enforcement representative of New York City who sneers at his "immaturity." Like Superman's alter ego, the esteemed reporter Kent, Super Don gets Finlay to reveal his prejudicial attitudes toward the contemporary youth. Finaly takes issue with hippy attire and long hair. Hollinger then returns to his typewriter as Super Don to write his boss's speech to be delivered on live television. Without his boss's knowledge, Hollinger uses the opportunity to expose Finaly's narrowminded outlook, just as Kent would.

"Super Reporter" then follows the playbook of Bob Newhart by reversing the premise of the dry cleaners with the hero unable to obtain his business attire. Reiterating the plot, Donald Hollinger's colleagues neglect to return his clothes, leaving him stuck in the costume. To compound matters, Ann Marie forgets to pick up his tuxedo from the cleaners. At this point, the script inverts Super Don from a hero to a criminal. Unlike Superman, the postwar symbol of law and order, Super Don and Marie try to break into the cleaners to retrieve his tuxedo. Suddenly, a

policeman appears, catching them in the act of attempted burglary, and a comedic exchange transpires between the three characters. Accuracy is so important that the writers made sure not to confuse the mythologies of Superman and Captain Marvel without qualification.

> Super Don: There is no way to open this window.
>
> Officer: Then why don't you just go through the wall?
>
> Ann Marie: Hi officer.
>
> Officer: Well, if it isn't Lois Lane. Go on Supie, I know you are on an important mission, and I wouldn't want to interfere, but, eh, could you do one thing for me first?
>
> Super Don: Officer.
>
> Officer: Like put your hands against the wall, lean over, and keep your feet apart.
>
> Super Don: Off-officer, I'm not.
>
> Officer: Do It! Now I've got to tell you something before we start.
>
> Ann Marie: Oh! I know sir. We have a right to counsel, and you can't hold anything against us without our rights or race, color, or creed.
>
> [Unnecessary dialogue omitted.]
>
> Officer: What are you doing here?
>
> Super Don: Well, well officer it's a wild story.
>
> Officer: Well, why don't you just try me? I mean gimmie a quick Shazam.
>
> Super Don: Oh, no-no-no-no, that's Captain Marvel, sir.

The satire continues with a glass windowed telephone booth that conveniently stands in front of the dry cleaners. It served as a reference to Superman lore and a prop for a single joke. An intoxicated man stumbles by, takes a double take of Super Don, and yells at the officer inside the phone booth who was trying to track down the owner of the store. The drunkard heckles, "Hey, would you hurry up pal? There's a guy out here waiting to change."[90] Even though the telephone booth is a site for Clark Kent to transform into Superman and not the other way around, the joke

[90] *That Girl*, season 5, episode 11, "Super Reporter," directed by Richard Kinon, written by Saul Turteltaub and Bernie Orenstein, aired December 3, 1970, on ABC. The episode is available through Amazon Prime Video.

still works and articulated the narrative conventions of Comicland. Actually, the whole episode relied on Superman as common knowledge.

This type of play existed in artistic performance outside television as well. Elvis Presley incorporated superhero cosplay in his stage persona. Biographer Elaine Dundy insists that Captain Marvel Jr., a superhero published by DC Comics' economic rival Fawcett, probably inspired Presley's pompadour, Taking Care of Business (TCB) lightning bolt logo for his band, Tender Loving Care (TLC) jewelry, and caped jumpsuits.[91] The 1971 jumpsuit named White Fireworks, the first to brandish a cape, began his covert superhero play.[92] The recent film *Elvis* visualized these connections.[93] This affinity for Captain Marvel Jr. led the King of Rock and Roll to initiate the fifth pattern of adoration nearly twenty years before it takes hold on American television. Concert attendees unknowingly experienced Comicland and worshiped Presley like the parade goers at Superman Day.

In his memoir, sportswriter Robert Lipsyte recalls his unsuccessful plan to dress Howard Cosell, a known sports announcer turned television host, in a Superman costume. Cosell hired Lipsyte as a writer on his variety show *Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell*, which aired from September 1975 to January 1976. With no television or comedic writing experience, Lipsyte, in his own words, worked as "the show's 'journalist in residence'" and was chosen by Cosell to be his spy.

> I hated the job, hated it more than being a copyboy in the sports department. I had very little to do and few friends because most of the staff assumed that I had been hired by Howard to spy on them, which was probably true. Howard took me to lunch a few times a week and tried to pump me, but I knew nothing. He mostly wanted to know what the staff thought of him.[94]

---

[91] Almost every biography on Elvis Presley mentions his affinity for the comic book superhero Captain Marvel Jr. For the first book to accentuate this connection, see Elaine Dundy, *Elvis and Gladys* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 3–6, 69–70, 98, 110, 112G, 129–130, 140, 143, 147, 149, 152, 155, 164, 172, 221, 264, 272, 330. And for mention of Elvis Presley and comic books as well as Dr. Fredric Wertham and the comics scare, see pages 68–69, 100, 129, 158, 252–253, 272, 330. However, Dundy got carried away with the analogy by comparing President Andrew Jackson and actor Tony Curtis to the superhero on pages 19 and 137. She also mentions the lawsuit between the publishers of Superman and Captain Marvel on page 159. For an early primary source on Elvis and Captain Marvel Jr., see Lewis Grossberger, "An Elvis Competition," *New York*, vol. 12, no. 6, February 5, 1979, p. 10.
[92] Jouni, "The World of Elvis Jumpsuits – 1971," https://www.elvisconcerts.com/jumpsuits/jump1971.htm.
[93] *Elvis*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, screenplay by Baz Luhrmann, Sam Bromell, Craig Pearce, and Jeremy Doner (n.p.: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., 2022), DVD.
[94] Robert Lipsyte, *An Accidental Sportswriter: A Memoir* (New York, NY: Ecco, 2011), p. 86.

Although Lipsyte did very little at the show, he was passionate about one skit that went unaired. He planned to satirize Superman and then broker a deal between Time Warner—the corporate owner of the Superman property at the time—and Superman's creators. Lipsyte desired to singlehandedly rectify the financial imbalance between the corporation and Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. This idea most likely arose from the rising publicity Siegel stirred with his October 1975 press release attacking the Superman movie that was in preproduction. Enraged by what he perceived as years of mistreatment, which is a fragment of truth, Siegel penned the polemic against the corporation. The sources of tension included removal of his byline on January 11, 1948, disconnection to the character for approximately twenty-three years, and failure to earn any royalties from the upcoming movie starring Christopher Reeve.[95] Siegel had no part in orchestrating Superman or Superboy until a brief period in secret without any credit between 1959 and 1966 to help write the Superman "family" stories under editor Mort Weisinger, a cantankerous man and unpredictable boss per numerous accounts.[96] After losing two legal challenges, Siegel turned to the court of public opinion to gain sympathy and articulate the alleged unfairness of not being properly compensated for creating Superman, one of the world's most valuable intellectual properties. *An Accidental Sportswriter* notes the backstory of using cosplay as an entry point to leverage Time Warner for damages.

> Time Warner had announced plans to produce a blockbuster Superman movie. It was holding auditions for the Man of Steel. I wrote a skit in which Howard wins the title role, dons the Superman suit, and brings on stage Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who as teenagers in Cleveland created the comic hero but never shared in the bonanza. They were old men now and down on their luck. In my skit, while Howard, Siegel and Shuster were onstage, the real head of Time Warner walks on to give each of the Superman creators $10,000 a year for life.
>
> A Time Warner executive brusquely dismissed my idea over the phone ("You have to be fucking joking, Howard Cosell?"), but I decided to press on, if only to embarrass Time Warner. With the help of Mickey Kelley, a young researcher who would become Bill Murray's first wife, I had Siegel and Shuster flown to New

[95] See strip 428 dated January 11, 1948, in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Sundays, 1946–1949*, p. 84.
[96] Siegel, "Creation of a Superhero," chap. 5, pp. 4–5 and chap. 6, p. 3; Jerry Siegel to Dick Giordano, letter to the editor, *Detective Comics* no. 512 (March 1982); interview with Irwin Donenfeld by Robert Beerbohm, Mark Evanier, and Julius Schwartz, "There's A Lot of Myth Out There!," *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 26 (July 2003), p. 23; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 283–284, 287–291, 307–310; interview with Jerry Siegel in Bishoff and Light, "Superman Grew Out of Our Personal Feelings About Life," *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 56 (February 2007), p. 11; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 243–252. See also Ira Berkowitz, "Superman Haunts Creator Jerry Siegel," *Sarasota Journal* (Sarasota, FL), Final Edition, vol. 24, no. 173, December 16, 1975, p. 11-D; Joanne Siegel to Steven J. Ross, letter, February 14, 1982, in *DC Comics v. Pacific Pictures Corporation et al.*, Case No. CV-10-03633-ODW (RZx) (C.D. Cal.), Docket 493, Exhibit 29, vol. 3, filed September 21, 2012, p. ER-355.

> York with their families and out up in a good hotel. Since I was considered Howard's spy, no one on the staff challenged my orders.

Cosell and his wife Emmy, however, rejected the plan at rehearsal. They wanted to scrap the skit, claiming that the aged cartoonists were too ugly for television, and additionally cited the fact that Time Warner was uncooperative. Their reaction infuriated Lipsyte, who threatened to quit over the issue. Calmer heads prevailed, nonetheless. Lipsyte was able to get Siegel and Shuster on the air for the December 6, 1975, episode and imagined that this publicity helped drive the future monetary settlement between the creators and Time Warner.

> We compromised: Siegel and Shuster would sit in the first row during the telecast, and Howard would walk down from the stage to chat with them on camera.
>
> That worked out fine, live on Saturday night, and on Monday morning we got a request from the National Cartoonists Society for the phone numbers of Siegel and Shuster. The Society was going to threaten to strike if Superman's original creators did not get a piece of the action. Eventually—and I want to believe Mickey and I had a part in this—Siegel and Shuster each got $20,000 a year for life.[97]

Not a single reference to Siegel and Shuster on *Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell* appeared in the major press. Lipsyte's efforts, nevertheless, constituted a major stimulus in public recognition of the cartoonists and some semblance of remuneration. After the National Cartoonists Society press conference on December 9, 1975, about the pair the mainstream media gave greater attention to their plight. The *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* initially covered the story in late November, but it was after the press conference that *The New York Times* and other news outlets like the *Sarasota Journal* of Florida and *The Village Voice* of New York City wrote more exposés on their poverty, intensifying public support.[98] Siegel and Shuster,

---

[97] Lipsyte, *An Accidental Sportswriter*, pp. 88–89. See also Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 101; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 163; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 280. There is no video of *Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell*, aired December 6, 1975, on ABC.

[98] Numerous articles on the plight of Superman's creators and eventual minor restitution appeared in newspapers and journals. See, for example, Mary Breasted, "Superman Creators, Nearly Destitute, Invoke His Spirit," *The New York Times*, New York Edition, vol. 125, no. 43,036, November 22, 1975, p. 31; Jennings Parrott, "Newsmakers----: Superman to Honor a Moral Obligation," *Los Angeles Times*, vol. 94, November 25, 1975, p. 2 (Part 1); David Vidal, "Mild-Mannered Cartoonists Go To Aid of Superman's Creators," *The New York Times*, vol. 125, no. 43,054, December 10, 1975, p. 51; Berkowitz, "Superman Haunts Creator Jerry Siegel," *Sarasota Journal*, December 17, 1975, p. 11-D; David Vidal, "Superman's Creators Get Lifetime Pay," *The New York Times*, vol. 125, no. 43,068, December 24, 1975, p. 25; T. J. Collins, "It's Not a Bird Or Plane, but It's Satisfying," *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), vol. 36, no. 112, December 24, 1975, p. 9; Jennings Parrott, "Newsmakers----:Superman Turns Into Santa for Two," *Los Angeles Times*, vol. 95, December 24, 1975, p. 2 (Part 1); Elliot S. Maggin, "How a Real Superhero Saved The

nonetheless, owe their publicity storm to the efforts of cartoonist Phil Yeh, who first covered their plight in his periodical *Cobblestone: A Newspaper of the Arts*.[99]

The 1980s witnessed similar expressions of Superman cosplay and wordplay. In the 1982 Halloween-themed episode for the Korean War comedy *M*A*S*H*, US Army surgeon Captain Benjamin Franklin "Hawkeye" Pierce wears a crude Superman costume and adapts the hero's catchphrases. Irritated by Pierce's festive mood, Major Charles Winchester says: "Rather than sing, Supermouth, why not try leaping off a tall building with a single bound?" Pierce retorts, "Can't help it, Charles. My voice is more powerful than a locomotive." Soon after in the barracks, the surgeons learn that a Marine foolishly lodged a billiard ball his mouth because of a bet. "Well, this doesn't look like a job for Superman," Pierce quips. Another Superman reference sexualizes Major Margaret "Hot Lips" Houlihan. Pierce vocalizes his desire to have Superman's X-ray vision to see through her dress—banter considered sexual harassment today. Again, the trend to disgrace Superman is occurring through comedy. The final joke in the episode refers to the phone booth as a site for Clark Kent's transformation into Superman. Pierce comments that he prefers to change out of his operating room scrubs inside a phone booth.[100]

The 1988 CBS special *Superman 50th Anniversary*, a television event that both celebrated and satirized Superman and his half century presence in American culture, included two examples of superhero cosplay. Playing a fictionalized version of himself, actor Hal Holbrook pretends to be Superman in a one-man show entitled "An Evening With Superman" that is performed in the city of Metropolis. The choice of Holbrook is clearly related to his portrayal of Mark Twain starting in 1954. The television special positions Superman as a real person and Metropolis as a real place. Just before an interview with Holbrook, the movie captures a close-up of a newspaper article that reviews the performance. It is written by Julia Pari in the Theatre section of the *Daily Planet*. Interestingly, a woman named Juli Pari is the associate producer of the program. The depth of pretense is quite remarkable, and the mockumentary can

---

Mild-Mannered Creators of Superman," *The Village Voice* (New York, NY), vol. 21, no. 3, January 19, 1976, pp. 14–15.

[99] See Phil Yeh and Randy Kosht, "**Supersham!** The Men Who Created **Superman** Cannot Leap Over Tall Buildings In A Single Bound," *Cobblestone: A Newspaper of the Arts*, vol. 1, no. 11 (November–December 1975), p. 11; "Will SUPERMAN Rescue Siegel and Shuster?," *Cobblestone: A Newspaper of the Arts*, vol. 1, no. 12 (December 1975–January 1976), p. 19. Copies in author's collection. No library has these issues.

[100] See *M*A*S*H*, season 11, episode 2, "Trick or Treatment," directed by Charles S. Dubin, written by Dennis Koenig, aired November 1, 1982, on CBS. The episode is available on Hulu. Superman biographer Larry Tye writes that the series included several other references to Superman. These instances remain unmentioned, however. See Tye, *Superman*, p. 259.

be described in comics lingo as existing *in-universe*. Performing the role straight, Holbrook describes his artistic process to embody Superman:

> Well, in preparing for the role of Superman I talked with people who know him. I've read everything ever written about him. And what I've found is a vulnerable fellow but one with a strong sense of purpose. A great deal like Mark Twain, except of course Superman can fly and he has heat vision and a lot of other powers that Twain didn't possess. Powers that I have to convey with a subtle raising of the eyebrow or lowering [vocalizing the change in pitch] of my voice. You just have to feel it, you know what I mean. It's a challenge that I truly relish.[101]

The second example from *Superman 50th Anniversary* followed the silliness style popularized in 1970. Comedians Al Franken and Tom Davis pretend to be the real-life superhero team called The Awesome Pair, formerly known as The Crimebusters. Dana Carvey, the host of the special, rightly describes them as amateurs: "Even Metropolis has its share of would-be superheroes." The audience learns that the pair—whose names go unstated—are a kind of bifurcated Superman with Franken's character possessing the powers of X-ray vision, strength, and invisibility while Davis's character can only fly and cannot lift his partner. Davis's superhero persona scouts the situation and then reports to Franken's persona. The physical comedy occurs when they try to fly together and fail during a piggyback ride. Adding to the absurdity are their loud outfits, consisting of a tomato leotard and fluorescent lemon-lime cape and matching trunks. Davis has the letter "A" on his costume while Franken has the letter "P" for Awesome Pair. In the second segment with The Awesome Pair, the amateur heroes criticize Superman's heroic approach as reactive while they are proactive in preventing future thugs and masterminds through an anticrime after school program.

> [Al Franken]: What we have is a program to get to the kids before they become thugs or masterminds.
>
> [Tom Davis]: Absolutely.
>
> [Al Franken]: You see, we get to the root of the problem, whereas Superman—.

[101] The CBS special *Superman 50th Anniversary*, directed by Robert Boyd and written by Adam Green, Bruce McCulloch, Rosie Shuster, and Robert Smigel appears in different video collections. See, for example, its inclusion in *Superman II*, Two-Disc Special Edition, DVD. A version in English with Italian subtitles is available on YouTube. See Superman Italia, "Speciale TV - 50 anni di Superman - sub ita (Superman 50th Anniversary - 1988)," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPPQeO70KMk&t=699s&ab_channel=SupermanItalia. For a vague secondary source mention, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 171–172.

> [Tom Davis]: Oh, Superman will let a problem fester and grow till it gets way out of hand. See, we try to reach these kids and tell them that whatever plans they may have to take over the world—.
>
> [Al Franken]: As good or as original as they think it is.
>
> [Tom Davis]: Right, that these are just doomed to failure. And we want them to consider how unpleasant that can be.

Then, the scene showcases Franken's character screaming at children on a basketball court about the dangers of crime and that breaking the law is nothing but a pathway to prison. "I'm doing this outta compassion! You're not listening!" The writers seem to be simultaneously mocking the ineffective antidrug messaging campaign Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.). Robert Smigel, who is credited as one of the four writers, most likely conceived the two bits, and would continue to play with the superhero genre throughout his career. His skits on *Saturday Night Live* like the Ambiguously Gay Duo and similar ones on the late-night talk shows *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* and *Conan* nourished Comicland on television.

The 1988 *Superman 50th Anniversary Special* also reimagined Bob Newhart's bit on Superman and the dry cleaners. Actor John Randolph plays a dry cleaner named Morton Simon, who discovers that Clark Kent is secretly Superman. Comedian Dana Carvey, who plays a historian conducting a biography on Superman, interviews Simon about his groundbreaking finding for the television special.

> Dana Carvey: Clark Kent. Meek, mild-mannered, the complete opposite of Superman. In fact, this disguise is so successful that even those closest to him haven't discovered they are one in the same. There is one exception, a man who has an intimate relationship with both Clark Kent and Superman.
>
> Morton Simon: You know, Superman's job is to save the world. My job is making sure he looks good doing it. I get all the names, Captain Marvel, Batgirl, Superman—eh, he's a nice kid. Now this one time, Clark Kent came over in a big panic looking for Superman's costume. Well, I double checked, he double checked. And I said to him: "It's not here. Maybe it was stolen?!"
>
> Dana Carvey: So, you're saying Superman and Clark Kent are the same person?
>
> Morton Simon: Well, uh, let's just say they never came in with their dirty laundry at the same time.[102]

[102] *Superman 50th Anniversary* in *Superman II*, DVD.

This scenario plays with the idea that only the audience knows Superman's secret identity. It makes the inquisitive reporter Lois Lane look dim for not figuring it out. Only a simpleminded drycleaner discovered the secret.

The 1992 death of Superman comic book story line propelled two instances of cosplay. *People* hired an actor to wear the Superman costume around New York for an article about the upcoming saga. It depicted Superman as a fish out of water in the modern world. "Of course, what's really happening here is the axing of a 54-year-old Man of Steel who can't make it anymore in the world of silicon chips and miracle alloys." Superman is seen scanning the classified section, taking advice from a psychic about his future, and morosely pondering his mortality on a park bench.[103] *Saturday Night Live* lampooned the idea with a funeral including Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, and editor Perry White as well as nineteen superhero and three supervillain mourners. Crossing universes, both DC and Marvel characters come to Superman's wake at the Metropolis Funeral Home. Sinbad hosted the November 21, 1992, episode and appears as the superhero Black Lightning but is unwelcome because no one knows him. It is not a racial exclusion because black cast members participated in the sketch. Tim Meadows plays Green Lantern and Chris Rock plays Robin, appropriating the superheroes' traditional white identities to black ones. The *Daily Planet* editor gives a speech where he repeats the memorable catchphrases "Great Caesar's ghost!" three times and "Don't call me chief!" once as a nod to the baby boomer fans who grew up with the 1950s Superman television show. Given the superhero subject matter, it seems probable that Robert Smigel had a hand in this sketch. Just as fans are mourning as well as celebrating Superman through buying his memorial comic book and sometimes waiting in long lines, thereby demonstrating the economic power of Comicland, *SNL* is mocking the public attachment to the figure. This sketch sits somewhere in between the styles of ridicule and silliness. Like the 1988 CBS special, it depicts Lane as dopey. She is unable to understand why Clark Kent did not show for the wake.[104] However, in the comic books at this

---

[103] "Trouble: Rust Unto Rust: His unsentimental masters plot the Man of Steel's 'death,'" *People*, vol. 38, no. 12, September 21, 1992, pp. 148–149.

[104] *Saturday Night Live*, season 18, episode 7, aired November 21, 1992, on NBC. The clip is available on YouTube as Saturday Night Live, "Superman's Funeral – SNL," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQvVxY20yOY&ab_channel=SaturdayNightLive. The easily identifiable superheroes of the sketch include Hawkman, Hawkgirl, Aquaman, Flash, Green Lantern, Batman, Robin, Black Lightning, Mister Fantastic, Hulk, Spider-Man, Storm, and Supergirl. The six other attendees are more difficult to pinpoint and may be invented superheroes for the sketch. While speculative, possibilities include Triton and Swamp Thing on the right and Hourman or Vibe and Mera on the left in the back row. The identities of the reptilian man with a tail and stony or crystalline man in white on the left in

time, Superman has revealed his secret to her and the pair were engaged but did not marry until December 1996 to coordinate with the television show *Lois & Clark*. Unlike the imaginary weddings preferred by Mort Weisinger and replicated by later editors, this one was real.[105] Even though *SNL* would continue to lampoon superheroes, the tone would change more toward that of a self-deprecating fan rather than condescension of the superhero genre as childish.

Superheroes in Jerry Seinfeld's World

Adult superhero play takes an extended place on the 1990s television show *Seinfeld* and is a turning point in the normalization of Comicland in American culture thanks to the comedy of Jerry Seinfeld. Although no costuming transpired on any aired programs, the sitcom logged numerous verbal and visual references to superheroes and their abilities in at least forty-four episodes (including scrapped material). Put another way, approximately one quarter of the 180 syndicated episodes encompassed the superhero genre. (Alternatively, fans list the episode tally as 172 by combining the two-part editions but excluding the highlight reel specials.) This count, however, does not include the Superman action figure or refrigerator magnets of Superman and *Action Comics* no. 1 occasionally visible in the background. A drawing of Superman and the Statue of Liberty, which most popular authors and scholars ignore or possibly have never even noticed, displayed on the fridge of character Jerry Seinfeld is also excluded from this tally of forty-four.[106] Page restrictions prevent an itemized analysis of this extensive superhero play by

---

the penultimate row escape me. The supervillains include Lex Luthor, Penguin, and Catwoman. For secondary source mention, see De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 11.

[105] For the engagement and official comic book wedding, see "It's a match made in Metropolis: Superman, Lois to fly down aisle," *Chicago Tribune*, 2-Star Final Edition, yr. 144, no. 294, October 21, 1990, p. 4; E. Mitchell and W. Cole, "People: Super Proposal," *Time*, vol. 136, no. 20, November 5, 1990, p. 81; "Melting the Man of Steel," *Newsweek*, vol. 116, no. 19, November 5, 1990, p. 85; Jeannie MacDonald, "My Turn: Get Real Men of Steel!," *Newsweek*, vol. 117, no. 12, March 25, 1991, p. 10. For secondary sources, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 203; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 14, 205; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 243, 255–256; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 241–243, 261–262, 263–264, and 324; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 294; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 66, 126. For the seesaw treatment of marriage on *Lois & Clark*, see Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 126, 130–132; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 192, 202–204; Tye, *Superman*, 243, 255, 257; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 242, 260–261, 263; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 294.

For imaginary marriages orchestrated by Mort Weisinger and other editors, see De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 113, 143; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 158–159, 255–256; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 38–39, 62, 70, 125–127; Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 363n67; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 30–32 as well as 51 and 53. For marriage in Alan Moore's two-part "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?," see Tye, *Superman*, p. 227; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 222.

[106] For mentions of the show material and Jerry Seinfeld's interest in Superman and other superheroes, see Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 161–165; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 67, 144–145, 260; Josh Levine, *Jerry Seinfeld: Much Ado about Nothing* (Toronto, CAN: ECW Press, 1993), pp. 5–6, 11, 44–45, 98; Bruce Fretts and Jeannie Park, ed., *The Entertainment Weekly* Seinfeld *Companion. Atomic Wedgies to Zipper Jobs: An*

the *Seinfeld* cast as well as props. It is important to note that the topics of superhearing, alter egos, masks, and Batman and Superman were recurring elements in Seinfeld's stand-up material and are catalogued in his 1993 comedy book entitled *SeinLanguage*. Some of these bits appear on *Seinfeld* in the form of comedy club routine clips interspersed throughout the show in its early years.[107]

Journalists and Jerry Seinfeld himself imagined a relationship between the show's four main characters and the superhero team concept. In the May 4, 1998, special issue of *Entertainment Weekly* entitled "So Long, Seinfeld!," writer Ken Tucker suggested a comparison between *Seinfeld* and the Fantastic Four. His article "The Fantastic 4" included artwork depicting them, arguably a form of artistic cosplay reminiscent of Julius Schwartz drawn as Superman, as the four superheroes in the arrangement of Jerry Seinfeld as Mister Fantastic, Elaine Benes as the Invisible Woman, Cosmo Kramer as Johnny Storm, and George Costanza as the Thing. Tucker also used the adjectives jealousy, rage, insecurity, and hopelessness without assigning them to a specific character. While the fusion of *Seinfeld* with Marvel Comics' concept of Comicland as existing in the Big Apple is an apt observation, his word choices were uneven. They do not accurately describe the quirky New Yorkers or align with the temperaments and personalities of the Fantastic Four. A better description for the grouping would be the *in*flexible Seinfeld as Mister Fantastic, the *un*caring Benes as the Invisible Woman, the reckless Kramer as Johnny Storm, and the volatile Costanza as the Thing. Another problem is that Tucker provided no analysis to the Fantastic Four, which made the article title misleading. The only real similarity between the distorted nuclear family or "friends-as-family" premise of *Seinfeld* and the New York City-based superhero team is that both quartets are dysfunctional and often rely on each other to escape precarious situations. (Actor Ryan Reynolds, known for his portrayal of the antihero Deadpool, executed the same trope of superhero association to sitcom characters with

---

Unofficial Guide to TV's Funniest Show (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1993), p. 71; Kathleen Tracy, *Jerry Seinfeld: The Entire Domain* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1998), pp. 6, 107, 157, 163, 188; Tim Delaney, *Seinology: The Sociology of Seinfeld* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006), pp. 38, 82, 277–278; Gregg Gattuso, *The Seinfeld Universe: An Unauthorized Fan's-eye View of the Entire Domain* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1998), pp. 3, 38, 77, 92, 101, 103, 108, 116; William Irwin, ed., *Seinfeld and Philosophy: A Book about Everything and Nothing* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2000), pp. 8, 179; David Lavery with Sara Lewis Dunne, eds., *Seinfeld, Master of Its Domain: Revisiting Television's Greatest Sitcom* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2006), pp. 52–53, 56, 104, 255–256; Armstrong, *Seinfeldia*, pp. 10, 13, 174–176, 182, 243; Paul Arras, *Seinfeld: A Cultural History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), pp. 4, 71, 92, 95. For periodicals, see *Entertainment Weekly*, no. 430, May 4, 1998, pp. 13, 18, 21, 23, 29, 42, 59, 70–71, 80, 84–85 (their count of thirty-seven on page 85 is short seven citations); Chris Heath, "The End," *Rolling Stone*, no. 787, May 28, 1998, p. 70.

[107] Jerry Seinfeld, *SeinLanguage* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1993), pp. 33–34, 59–60, 108–111.

his ad agency Maximum Effort. Establishing Comicland, he made a prank Twitter post on April 30, 2021, depicting the *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* quintet to the Fantastic Four and their adversary Doctor Doom in a mock movie poster.) Although the initial order above is appropriate, a case could also be made for Seinfeld's childishness and girl chasing as analogous to Johnny Storm and Kramer's rubbery or elastic physical comedy as symbolic of Mister Fantastic. This comparison, nonetheless, takes Seinfeld out of the position as leader. In his article, Tucker astutely compared Kramer to the mischievous funny animal cartoons of Krazy Kat and Donald Duck.[108] The real Seinfeld, however, preferred the Superman analogy, of course. He told Susan King of the *Los Angeles Times* in April 1993, "I am Superman on the show, George [Costanza] is Perry White, Elaine [Benes] is Lois Lane and [Cosmo] Kramer is Jimmy Olsen."[109] Simply put, several strains of comicdom potentially influenced the show and its characters.

Regardless of the best superhero comparison, *Seinfeld* expressed adoration for the superhero genre by playing the characters as selfish and amoral antiheroes. Discussion of superheroes on the show acted as a foil to illustrate how petty they were. Comparatively speaking, the writing contrasted selfish New Yorkers against exemplars of morality and self-sacrifice. The narcissistic antiheroes of *Seinfeld* adored superheroes but could never model their behavior. This analysis is apparent in the October 1996 Superman-inspired Bizarro episode where Elaine Benes befriended a group of doppelgängers to the show's male characters. In "The Bizarro Jerry," she finds herself at the crossroads of two opposing universes: the ethical Bizarro world and the unethical Seinfeld world that is Superman encoded. The juxtaposition frames Jerry Seinfeld, George Costanza, and Cosmo Kramer as the villains in the superhero binary. The three virtuous counterpart New Yorkers named Kevin, Gene, and Feldman, who frequent their own diner, are ironically labeled bizarre. Benes eventually realizes that she does not belong in the Bizarro world after expressing unwanted aggression toward her new companions. She shoves Kevin in excitement for getting everyone tickets to the ballet. The audience is left with the idea

---

[108] For the Fantastic Four connection, see Ken Tucker, "The Fantastic 4," *Entertainment Weekly*, no. 430, May 4, 1998, pp. 12–15. And for *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* as the Fantastic Four, see, for example, Fareid El Gafy, "Ryan Reynolds' Fantastic Four Reboot Idea Features It's Always Sunny Cast," Screen Rant, May 1, 2021, https://screenrant.com/fantastic-four-always-sunny-philadelphia-ryan-reynolds-poster/.

See Delaney, *Seinology*, p. 203 for the non-nuclear family view and Arras, *Seinfeld*, p. 158 for the "friends-as-family" concept. Jerry Seinfeld, however, once described the relationship between George Costanza and Elaine Benes as "friends-in-law." See Jerry Seinfeld, "Comedy Is Easy. Lunch Is Hard," *GQ*, vol. 61, no. 11 (November 1991), p. 255.

[109] Susan King, "Super Seinfeld: But Just How Do They Come Up With Those Ideas, Anyway?," *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 1993, p. 5 (TV Times section).

that the three good versions will eventually find a Bizarro Benes because even Newman existed in their world as a cheerful FedEx driver.[110] The episode is so beloved that one fan suggested an ending to the series with a twist on the idea. David Tackett of Edmond, Oklahoma, wished for an alternate reality "where Jerry [Seinfeld] is the annoying postman, and Newman is the comedian."[111] The important takeaway is that although Seinfeld had to explain the Bizarro component of the Superman mythos to Benes in the episode and simultaneously a large portion of the audience, because it was not common knowledge or an element of the Christopher Reeve movies, *Seinfeld* successfully transported viewers into Comicland. Even the show's depiction of a mythic New York mirrors the imagined geography of Comicland in multimedia.

On April 18, 1992, Jerry Seinfeld hosted *Saturday Night Live* and enacted Superman cosplay in a sketch that raised the question of the superhero's obligations to Metropolis if he were real. Superman appears as a guest on the talk radio program *The Lenny Wise Show*, which is clearly satirizing talk show host Larry King. Seinfeld plays Superman as a regular guy, who does not intercede in every problem facing the city of Metropolis. Superman's inaction during the prior year's two-week garbage strike incenses one caller. In a heated tone, she chirps that he could have rectified the whole situation in ten minutes by fusing all the stinky waste into a large ball and throwing it into space. The Metropolis resident wanted Superman to be the neighborhood trash collector in addition to saving lives. Irritated, Superman responds that he is not a garbageman and that is where he draws the line on his civic responsibilities.[112] Seinfeld would later star in a series of American Express commercials as himself with an animated Superman voiced by comedian Patrick Warburton, who played David Puddy—the on-and-off boyfriend of Elaine Benes—on *Seinfeld*. Although he sees himself as Superman, in this dynamic, Jerry Seinfeld becomes a sort of Jimmy Olsen.[113]

---

[110] *Seinfeld*, season 8, episode 3, "The Bizarro Jerry," directed by Andy Ackerman, written by David Mandel, aired October 3, 1996, on NBC. See *Seinfeld: Season 8* (n.p.: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment Inc., 2018), DVD. Also available on Netflix.

[111] Frazier Moore, "Living: Readers suggest 'Seinfeld' swan song," *Courier-Post* (Cherry Hill, NJ), vol. 123, no. 8, February 4, 1998, p. 8C. This Associated Press article is found in local papers around the country. It is also available online. See Frazier Moore, "Readers Suggest Seinfeld Swan Song," Associated Press, February 4, 1998, https://apnews.com/article/ce18e77f563d8eaa4b78af25fb8659b7.

[112] *Saturday Night Live*, season 17, episode 18, aired April 18, 1992, on NBC. For a transcript of the *SNL* episode, see Don Roy King, "SNL Transcripts: Jerry Seinfeld: 04/18/92: The Lenny Wise Show," October 8, 2018, SNL Transcripts Tonight: For Die Hard Saturday Night Live Fans, https://snltranscripts.jt.org/91/91rlennywise.phtml. Vimeo removed a working video per copyright infringement claim by NBC.

[113] For mention of the American Express commercials with Jerry Seinfeld and Superman, see "Seinfeld Meets a Really 'Super' Salesman," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 147, no. 51,031, January 8, 1998, p. D9;

Superman is central to Jerry Seinfeld's mindset as well as journalists' treatment of him and the show. It is no surprise that superheroes were a regular source of discussion or unexplained parallels (like Seinfeld's Manhattan apartment as the Fortress of Solitude) in published interviews with or articles about the cast of *Seinfeld*.[114] In his biography of Seinfeld, Josh Levine mentions that a writer from the show told him that Seinfeld is a superhero: Microscope Man. Basically, he has an uncanny ability to scrutinize the minutia of daily life under a microscope and magnify it to a comedic level. Piggybacking on the idea, Levine proclaims that after Seinfeld notices something "he puts it under his microscope and blows it up larger so that the rest of us who aren't as blessed with the same vision can see it too."[115] Seinfeld in this analysis, as comedy scientist and superhero, is an unintended analogy to Mister Fantastic that compliments the comparison by Ken Tucker.

Jerry Seinfeld even recalled dressing up as Superman as a child on Halloween in his stand-up routine circa 1994.[116] The version quoted below is from his televised HBO special *"I'm Telling You For The Last Time:" Live on Broadway*. The material discussed his anticipation for Halloween, disappointment with the Superman costume material and fit, and begrudging surrender to parental authority by having to wear a jacket over the costume.

> So, the first couple of years I made my own costumes, which of course sucked. The ghost, the hobo, no good. Then, finally, third year, begging the parents, got the Superman Halloween costume, not surprisingly. Cardboard box, cellophane top, mask included. Remember the rubber band on the back of that mask? That was a quality item there, wasn't it? That was good for about ten seconds before it snapped out of that cheap little staple, they put it there with. You go to your first house. "Trick or—" Snap! It broke, I don't believe it.

Bill Hoffman, "Jerry, Superman shilling for Amex," *New York Post*, Metro Edition, vol. 203, no. 136, March 30, 2004, p. 35; Lou Lumenick, "Pulse: SUPER Seinfeld: Jerry & Man of Steel deliver big laughs in quickie comedy," *New York Post*, Late City Final Edition, vol. 203, no. 137, March 31, 2004, p. 43; Lev Grossman with Lina Lofaro and Jeffrey Ressner, "The Problem with Superman," *Time*, vol. 163, no. 20, May 17, 2004, p. 72; Adam Buckman, "Seinfeld Web ad nabs spot in NBC lineup," *New York Post*, Late City Final and Metro Editions, vol. 203, no. 187, May 20, 2004, p. 98. For secondary source mentions, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 243–244; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 161–165; Tye, *Superman*, p. 260; Ricca, *Super Boys*, 396n6; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 13, 116.

[114] See, for example, Jerry Seinfeld, "Laughing Matters: Confessions Of An Unromantic Man," *Redbook*, vol. 176, no. 4 (February 1991), p. 62; Alan Richman, "You're a Comic. Make me Laugh!," *GQ*, vol. 62, no. 5 (May 1992), pp. 136, 139–140, 202; Bill Zehme, "Jerry & George & Kramer & Elaine: Exposing the secrets of Seinfeld's success," *Rolling Stone*, nos. 660–661, July 8–22, 1993, p. 45; "David Rensin, "Playboy Interview: Jerry Seinfeld," *Playboy*, vol. 40, no. 10 (October 1993), pp. 48, 54; Billy Zehme, "Dr. Seinfeld Is In," *Esquire*, vol. 122, no. 3 (September 1994), pp. 124–125.

[115] Levine, *Jerry Seinfeld*, pp. 6–7.

[116] See Fred Schruers, "Jerry Seinfeld," *Rolling Stone*, no. 691, September 22, 1994, p. 49.

> … So, I had my little costume, I was physically ready, I was preparing myself. I did not try on the costume prior to Halloween. … So anyway, but, my hopes were up, I was thinking that this is probably the same exact costume that Superman wears himself. When you put these things on, it's not exactly the super-*fit* that you are hoping for. It looks more like Superman's pajamas, is what it looks like. It's all kinda loose and flowing and the neckline kinda comes down about there. [Lowering his hand to mid-chest.] Flimsy little ribbon string in the back. Plus, my mother makes me wear my winter coat over the costume anyway. I don't recall Superman wearing *a jacket*. Not like I had: cheap, corduroy, phony fur. "Boy, I'm Superman, but it's a little chilly out and I'm glad I've got this cheap little ten-year-old kid's jacket."
>
> So I'm going out, I'm trick-or-treating, but the mask's, the rubber band keeps breaking, it keeps getting shorter. I'm fixing it, it's getting tighter and tighter on my face. [Mimed his struggle.] You know, when it starts slicing into your eyeballs there, and you're trying to breathe through that little hole [made wheezing noises], getting all sweaty. "I can't see, I can't breathe, but we gotta keep going, we gotta get the candy!" [Made wheezing noises again.] And a half an hour into it, you just take that mask: "Oh, the hell with it." [Mimed tossing away the mask.] Bing-bong! "Yeah, it's me, give me the candy. Yeah, I'm Superman, look at the pant legs, what do you care?"

Seinfeld published an alternate version of the long joke in his 2020 book *Is This Anything?* This personal memory and comedy bit even inspired a children's book in 2002 called *Halloween* that examined the same event.[117]

Through his stand up, sitcom, and books, Jerry Seinfeld helped to normalize superheroes as mundane topics of discussion and overturn the childishness stigma. Seinfeld moved Comicland beyond the traditional cosplay of other comedians, and unlike them, he does not deride Superman and the superhero genre but rather expresses sincere adoration. In many cases, superheroes and their lore act as entry points for his comedy. The larger point is that the leading comic and sitcom television star of the 1990s felt comfortable referencing Superman so much is evidence of the power of Comicland and the transition from the domain of kids to adults. Seinfeld is not embarrassed to admit and embrace his connection to the Man of Steel. He plays it for laughs, but clearly loves Superman.

---

[117] Seinfeld, *"I'm Telling You For The Last Time:" Live on Broadway*; Seinfeld, *Is This Anything?*, pp. 101–104; Jerry Seinfeld, *Halloween* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 2002). For secondary source mention, see Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 161.

Twenty-First Century Cosplay

Superhero cosplay continued into the twenty-first century and mainly fits under the category of adoration. The teen sitcom *Sabrina: The Teenage Witch*, which is based on the comic book series by Archie Comics, addressed the childhood dream of young boys to become superheroes by merging the characters of Superman and Batman into Mighty Teen. In the episode "Super Hero" broadcast on January 20, 2000, Sabrina Spellman brews—with the help of her aunt Hilda Spellman—a potion called "Dream Come True" to resolve the midlife crisis of her principal Willard Kraft. The ladies conceal the childhood dream spell potion inside a water gun. Her aunt Hilda Spellman says, "All you have to do is squirt him, and he'll become what he wanted to be as a child." Although Sabrina Spellman dislikes Mr. Kraft, she attempts to help because he is dating her other aunt Zelda Spellman. In keeping with the show's modus operandi of failed interference in human affairs with magic narrative, the plan backfires. According to the substory of the episode, Mr. Kraft decides to leave his lucrative career in education to follow his passions, and after a series of failures ends up as a barista at the same coffeehouse where Sabrina Spellman works after school. Armed with the potion, Spellman sprays Mr. Kraft, but things predictably go sideways, this time because of male roughhousing. Acting like a typical teenager, the character Brad Alcerro quickly grabs what he perceives to be a toy and then sprays Spellman's love interest Harvey Kinkle. Amidst the ruckus, a thief steals the coffeehouse tip jar. Doused with the potion, this action allows Kinkle to reveal his childhood desire to become a superhero. Basically, the plot duplicates the *Bewitched* episode with magic turning grown men into Superman. In a confident tone, he tells the onlookers to "go about your business" and then runs out of the coffeehouse after the petty criminal as John Williams type music from *Superman: The Movie* plays in the background. Kinkle then remerges as Mighty Teen, an official comic book superhero in their story world, with the thief holding the tip jar. "Mighty Teen to the rescue!" he announces. With a letter "T" emblazoned on his chest, the costume, which consists of the colors purple, crimson, and black with silver and crimson trim, copies the design of Superman without violating DC Comics' intellectual property rights. The following day at their high school, Kinkle wears glasses to conceal his identity just as the Man of Steel pretends to be Clark Kent. Like Batman, Mighty Teen wears a utility belt and requires technology to catch criminals and rescue endangered citizens. Fusing the Batmobile with Superman's extrahuman abilities, a magical rocket-powered skateboard allows him to fly. Spellman clamors to reverse

the spell but learns that it would automatically end once the person lives out their childhood dream, and foolishly decides to let the magic run its course naturally.

A significant aspect of the episode is that it showcases the generational difference in the way that boys desired to fly. Willard Kraft represents the peer group before his time by wishing to soar across the Atlantic Ocean as Charles Lindbergh. The spell impels Mr. Kraft to build a 1920s era two-seater airplane and reenact the flight of the Spirit of St. Louis to the exact detail regardless of its hazards. After Mr. Kraft takes off, Spellman uses her magic to teleport into the rear seat of the airplane midflight to protect him, but an impromptu loop and spin jams her magical index finger, leaving her powerless. The plane suddenly runs out of fuel and enters a dangerous dive. Miraculously, the plane levels out and then they hear triumphant music. Mighty Teen, whose motto is "To save the world," rescues them.

> Sabrina Spellman: We're flying again. Look!
>
> Willard Kraft: What? But how? Where's that music coming from?
>
> Sabrina Spellman: When trouble's around, Mighty Teen really will be found. [The airplane safely lands.] My Hero! That sounds so phony in comic books, but now I get it.
>
> Mighty Teen: Well, the emotion in comic books are real. Just don't send away for the X-ray specs.
>
> Sabrina Spellman: Ow! Oh. I hurt my finger in the world's most ill-advised barrel roll.
>
> Mighty Teen: Well, lucky for you, I have some Teen Bactine in my utility belt. [He restores her magic finger.]
>
> Sabrina Spellman: At the risk of being redundant—my hero!
>
> Mighty Teen: Often heard but never tiresome.
>
> Sabrina Spellman: … Is there any way I can talk you out of going off to save the world?
>
> Mighty Teen: But I already saved it. You're my world. [He transforms back into Harvey Kinkle.]

> Sabrina Spellman: Now I know why Superman ruined Lois [Lane] for other men.[118]

Just as Lindbergh and the idea of aviation potentially inspired the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloons, he may have also sparked Superman's ability to fly. Chapter 1 hints to this connection, but this *Sabrina: The Teenage Witch* episode joins these threads of possibility.

CSI: NY underscored the prevalence of superhero cosplay in American culture. The April 12, 2006, episode "Super Men" solves the murder of a twenty-something man who dresses up like Superman and fights petty crime on the streets of New York, specifically the Upper West Side. One scene included the Sixty-Fifth Street subway station for the 1, 2, and 3 lines in the background. The unknown superhero wears red tights, a red shirt, a yellow cape, and gray athletic trunks with yellow trim and a black waistband. The elastic appears to be folded over to mimic a belt. To further resemble Superman (but not violate DC Comics' copyright and trademark), his chest exhibits a raised black letter "S" outlined in yellow like the ones found on varsity letter jackets. His waistband prominently displays a smaller black letter "S" with the same yellow accent. Even his real name is a coded reference to Clark Kent. Detectives Mac Taylor and Stella Bonasera learn that the identity of the John Doe superhero is Clark Kranen, a permanent patient at the New York Psychiatric Home who suffers from cognitive and communication impairment and receives antipsychotic and antidepressant medication: Lithium and Risperidone. This explains why tape and not laces secured the mentally ill Superman's black boots to his feet as well as the lack of zippers to his attire. Rope is hazardous to the mentally unbalanced, access is a self-harm or suicide by strangulation risk. In the story, Kranen discovers that an orderly at the institution—where he was committed by his mother about twenty-five years earlier—is dealing prescription drugs on the street by way of forged slips. Kranen escapes the institution at night as his "Superman" alter ego and tries to stop him from dealing. During a confrontation in an alley, the orderly named Vern Dox karate chops—one scene it was a hand and the other an elbow—Kranen in the back of the head, instantly killing him. Unlike Superman, there is no funeral, and few people mourn his death.

Superman wordplay and symbolism filled the *CSI: NY* episode. Approaching the mysterious dead man wearing the makeshift superhero outfit in an alley, detective Stella

---

[118] *Sabrina: The Teenage Witch*, season 4, episode 14, "Super Hero," directed by Melissa Joan Hart, written by Nick Bakay, aired January 21, 2000, on ABC. The episode is available on Hulu.

Bonasera announces: “Hey, It’s a bird. It’s a plane. It’s—.” (At this point in the story, the police are unaware that mental hospital patient Clark Kranen is the deceased.) To prevent copyright and trademark infringement, officer Don Flack, who was already at the crime scene, interrupts, saying, “Matthew Palmer.” The police find Palmer’s wallet and mistakenly presume that he was the victim. To expand the Superman motif, Palmer’s business card reveals the address of his office as 123 Clark Ave. Then, a snoopy reporter named Jane, who clearly represents Lois Lane, requests details for an exclusive story; no other members of the press were present at the crime scene. And according to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), the investigative journalist character does not appear in any other episode. At the show’s conclusion, the camera quickly glances at an “exclusive” article on the front page of the newspaper the *New York Weekly*, presumably written by Jane. The all-caps headline reads: “REAL LIFE SUPER HERO: NY RESIDENT FOILS MULTIPLE CRIMES.” The fabricated paper and the sensationalized story gestures to the actual Big Apple tabloids the *New York Post* or the *Daily News*. The episode’s parallel plotline to solve the murder of recently drafted football player Tyrell Mann to the NFL references the Man of Steel. Fans call him “Super Mann.”

Furthering the Superman play, the show’s lead detectives find a pair of eyeglasses and set of clothes in a city phone booth. The audience later learns that Clark Kranen transformed into his superhero identity inside the phone booth and left these items. The setting shifts to the morgue where coroner Sid Hammerback jokes that the costumed hero was “no Man of Steel.” Hammerback then explains that he removed two foreign objects from the deceased’s body, a .22 bullet and a metal shard from a scissor. Another medical examiner discovers broken glass in the victim’s body. These were old wounds, about three years old. Apparently, Kranen sutured himself with the objects still inside. Later at the police precinct, Stella Bonasera asks partner Mac Taylor: “When you were a kid did you ever tie a towel around your neck, pretend to be a superhero? Little Mac Man, maybe?” Taylor mentions favoring war comics and pretended to be a soldier as a young boy. “Sgt. Rock couldn’t get me out of fatigues when I was a kid.” CSI lab technician Adam Ross enters the scene and reveals that he uncovered the noble gas Krypton in the glass found in the victim’s body. Connecting the story to the Man of Steel mythos, Ross says: “Kryptonite was Superman’s only weakness.” At the New York Psychiatric Home, three other patients refer to themselves as superheroes: Flash, Thor, and Aquaman. Toward the conclusion of the show, the victim’s older brother Steve Kranen shares a story of his younger brother

pretending to be Superman and leaping out the window. The episode cuts to a flashback of this Superman play. Not feeling well, Ms. Kranen asked her ten-year-old son Steve Kranen to look after his younger brother as she laid down to take a nap. Four-year-old Clark Kranen avoided being seen by his older brother, who was distracted watching the funny animal Superman knockoff Mighty Mouse, and jumped out the window wearing a makeshift Superman costume with swimming goggles. Medical workers revived the boy, but he was never the same, which is why his mother placed him at a psychiatric hospital. Guilt plagues Steve Kranen, who wishes that he "could turn back time," a controversial power bequeathed to Superman in the 1978 movie. Although the older brother blames himself, the common refrain of improper parenting—generally volleyed at minority mothers—is activated at the white Mrs. Kranen regarding her son's potentially fatal Superman play. The show ends with the REM song "Superman," suggesting a comparison between first responders and the fictional character.[119]

The level of layers referencing Superman in this episode from cosplay to wordplay to rhetorical signaling of kids leaping out windows and wearing makeshift costumes to music shows the breadth of Comicland in the cultural imaginary. While the episode generally celebrates Superman, it also reactivates the trope of anti-Superman play and stigmatizes mental illness. Following the playbook of the 1940s and 1950s alarmists, the message seems to be that Superman play can lead to permanent injury and dangerous behavior later in life. The story line can simultaneously be read as *what if* one of Dr. Lauretta Bender's patients never outgrew the superhero fantasy. Still, the prevalence of superhero television shows and movies in the post–9/11 era, because they are immensely profitable and welcomed by general audiences, altered the landscape so that it is now acceptable to present the culture of comics and superheroes in a serious crime drama. The next chapter explains this phenomenon of cinematic Comicland.

Cartoons and Puppets

Adult culture workers expanded Comicland by repackaging the serious conventions of the superhero fantasy to children as an exercise in silliness. Even though they presented their work as caricature, children probably did not see it that way. *Looney Tunes* animated cartoons

[119] *CSI: NY*, season 2, episode 19, "Super Men," directed by Steven DePaul, written by Peter M. Lenkov, aired April 12, 2006, on CBS. See *CSI: NY. The Complete Second Season* (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2006), DVD. The episode is available on Paramount+.

started parodying superheroes in 1943. While starting out as movie shorts they quickly transition to television, the medium most children experienced them. The Merrie Melodies short "Super Rabbit" speaks to the early power of Superman in American culture and signals the beginning of adults appropriating superheroes. The opening narration and imagery set the tone for the show's banter. Warner Bros. voice actor Mel Blanc deploys a New York accent and writer Tedd Pierce adapts the lingo from the Superman radio show and Max Fleischer cartoons just enough to evade legal action for copyright and trademark infringement.

> Male voice no. 1: Look! Up there in the sky!
>
> Male voice no. 2: It's a boid!
>
> Male voice no. 3: Nah, it ain't a boid. It's a dive bomber.
>
> Narrator: No, it's Super Rabbit! Faster than a speeding bullet! More powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap the tallest building! Bugs Bunny, the Super Rabbit! The Rabbit of Tomorrow!

The cartoon uses the beloved trickster Bugs Bunny to caricature the 1940s animated Superman shorts with agriculture as the prism. Professor Canafraza, a scientist resembling the Kentucky Fried Chicken brand ambassador Colonel Sanders, invents a serum to transform ordinary carrots into super carrots, which he gives to Bugs Bunny. After ingesting the vegetable, the wisecracking hare temporarily develops Superman's powers of flight and invincibility.

> Professor Canafraza: You are now a Super Rabbit.
>
> Bugs Bunny: You mean able to leap the highest buildings? Et cetera, et cetera.
>
> Professor Canafraza: Exac-itly.

Besides the opening narration and line above about leaping over buildings, the script continues to play with Superman's catchphrases and props. Bugs Bunny announces, "This looks like a job for Super Rabbit!" And then just like the Fleischer cartoons, he zooms into a closet and changes into Super Rabbit while the audience sees only a dark gray silhouette during the transformation. Bugs Bunny emerges wearing the familiar blue tights and red cape, but it was too big. The outfit matches Jerry Seinfeld's description of the one size fits all Superman Halloween costume for children. It looked almost like pajamas, which adds to the comedy. With his newfound superpowers, Bugs Bunny soars to Texas to trifle with rabbit hunter Cottontail Smith. The remainder of the cartoon showcases Bugs Bunny flying as well as withstanding bullets and a

cannonball.[120] Superman biographer Glen Weldon writes that a 1942 *Looney Tunes Merrie Melodies* comic book spoof on Superman predated and inspired this animated version.[121]

Thirteen years later, writer Tedd Pierce recycled his Superman material by making Daffy Duck into the incompetent Stupor Duck. This cartoon that lampoons Superman came out during the apotheosis of George Reeves' portrayal of the character. Replicating the pattern in "Super Rabbit," this episode plays with Superman's catchphrases but alters the familiar language that made its way in the 1950s television series.

> Male voice no. 1: Up there in the sky!
>
> Male voice no. 2: It's a birrrrrrrd!
>
> Male voice no. 3: It's a plane!
>
> Male voice no. 4: No, it's Stupor Duck!
>
> Narrator: Yes, it's Stupor Duck! Possessing extraordinary powers, this strange being from another planet is—. Faster than a bullet! More powerful than a speeding locomotive! Able to leap the tallest buildings!
>
> Disguised a Cluck Trent, a mild-mannered reporter on a metropolitan newspaper, Stupor Duck fights an endless battle against the forces of … e-vil.

The story begins with the intrepid reporter Cluck Trent overhearing the voice of a criminal mastermind in his editor's office. Aardvark Ratnik divulges his plan to take over the world by blowing up buildings, bridges, powerplants, trains, and ships. Cluck Trent announces, "This looks like a job for Stupor Duck!" He then rushes to the broom closet and transforms into Stupor Duck. The "stupid hero" does not realize that his editor was only watching a television soap opera and ends up chasing the schemes of an imaginary villain. Attempting to save the day, Stupor Duck prevents a building demolition, a submarine from diving, and a train explosion for a Warner Brothers western. Lastly, Stupor Duck endeavors to stop a rocket launch, presumably believing it to be a nuclear warhead, but is blasted off into space with the missile.[122] Cartoon

---

[120] *Looney Tunes*, season 9, episode 6, "Super Rabbit," directed by Chuck Jones, written by Tedd Pierce, aired 1943. The episode is available on HBO Max. For secondary source mention, see Weldon, *Superman*, p 68.
[121] "Super-Duper Rabbit," *Looney Tunes Merrie Melodies Comics* no. 5 (March 1942). See also Weldon, *Superman*, p 68.
[122] *Looney Tunes*, season 21, episode 14, "Stupor Duck," directed by Robert McKimson, written by Tedd Pierce, aired 1956. The episode is available on HBO Max.

characters like Mighty Mouse, Underdog, and Super-Goof further satirize Superman, but in the process rebuild Comicland for children under the silliness rubric.[123]

Batman did not escape *Looney Tunes*' mockery. The 1965 short "Zip Zip Hooray!" specifically mentioned the Caped Crusader. In a metascenario, the cartoon depicts children watching the television show *The Road Runner* and then a commercial sponsored by the makers of a Batman costume. The announcer says, "Brought to you by Acme Batman outfits, guaranteed for the life of the user." As a tie-in advertisement, Wile E. Coyote stands on the top of a cliff in the desert wearing a green bodysuit with wings and leaps off. The inept canine avoids crashing into the jagged rocks below and soars through the sky only to smash into another rockface and falls to the ground. The announcer then says, "Acme, the only Batman outfit worn by bats," as if instructing children not to play Batman. A few years earlier, another episode depicted Wile E. Coyote in a similar green winged glider and green helmet powered by a rocket. The 1961 short "Beep Prepared," however, does not connect the outfit to Batman but the intent is clear when watching the shorts together.[124] The interesting fact is that these two animated cartoons preceded the 1966 debut of the campy Batman television show.

In 1996, the superhero theme returned to *Looney Tunes* in the Superman satire "Superior Duck," which envisioned a science fiction future. The incompetent Daffy Duck in this cartoon is now drawn as the Superman knockoff Superior Duck, but his red, green, and yellow costume evokes Robin. The familiar pattern of mocking Superman's description of powers is evident through narration and episode dialogue.

Male voice no. 1: Look! Up there in the sky!

Male voice no. 2: It's a comet!

Male voice no. 3: It's an astral body!

Male voice no. 2: It's a black hole!

Male voice no. 3: It's a quark!

---

[123] For Mighty Mouse and others as Superman parodies, see Philip Skerry with Chris Lambert, "From Panel to Panavision," in Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, p. 65; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 214; Eury, ed., *The Krypton Companion*, p. 134; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and* Broadway, p. 63; Tye, *Superman*, p. 96; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 68–69, 136.

[124] *Looney Tunes*, season 27, episode 15, "Zip Zip Hooray!," directed by Chuck Jones, written by John Dunn, aired 1965; *Looney Tunes*, season 26, episode 10, "Beep Prepared," directed by Chuck Jones, written by John Dunn and Chuck Jones, aired 1961. The episodes are available on HBO Max.

> Male voices nos. 1–3: No! It's Superior Duck!
>
> Narrator: Yes, it's Superior Duck. The Duck of Yesterday.
>
> Superior Duck: Tomorrow, the Duck of Tomorrow.
>
> Narrator: [Stammers unintelligibly.] Yeh-yeh, yes. [Clears throat.] Superior Duck. The Duck of Tomorrow!

This metacommunication in the cartoon between the narrator and Superior Duck, which symbolically breaks the fourth wall, continues as he interacts with other popular *Looney Tunes* characters. The familiar cast of talking animals includes Foghorn Leghorn, Tweety Bird, Road Runner, Wile E. Coyote, Porky Pig as a Buck Rogers-type space cadet, and the Tasmanian Devil. Besides the funny animals, the alien Marvin the Martian makes a cameo. Superior Duck is supposed to be "superior," but these characters best him in strength and speed. Discouraged by these interactions with his animated contemporaries, who debased his power and manhood, Superior Duck decides to take to the sky to save the world. However, Superman, who makes a surprise appearance, thwarts Superior Duck's altruistic mission for encroaching on his domain and position as Earth's guardian. Superior Duck heeds Superman's warning by literally becoming a super bug.

> Superior Duck: I don't care if I am faster or stronger or leafier than anybody. I'm gonna do something simple like, like saving the human race. Superior Duck rides again! Superior Duck! The duck of destiny, the hater of evil, lover of just–.
>
> Superman: Look Mac, I'm working this side of the street so bug off.
>
> Superior Duck: He suggested that I "bug off," so naturally I'll bug off. I'm Superior Bug. The Bug of Tomorrow!
>
> Narrator: Faster than a speeding flyswatter. Able to leap the highest flypaper. More powerful than the leading bug spray.[125]

These *Looney Tunes* shorts paved the way through humor for adults to hijack Comicland for themselves.

Like Stupor Duck and Superior Duck, puppeteers for the children's educational program *Sesame Street* appropriated Superman into a bumbling superhero. Super Grover debuted on

[125] *Looney Tunes*, season 31, episode 3, "Superior Duck," directed and written by Chuck Jones, aired 1996.

January 30, 1974.[126] This character, arising just before Christopher Reeve's portrayal of Superman in the movies, extends the infiltration of the superhero into American culture and pays homage to the campy Superman musical and Batman productions of the mid-to-late 1960s. The uncoordinated puppet Super Grover flies and wears a metal helmet and red cape like Superman but the lightning bolt logo more closely resembled Captain Marvel. A narrator introduces the character and borrows from the familiar language of Superman multimedia.

> Narrator: Presenting the further adventures of everybody's favorite hero. The man who is faster than lightning, stronger than steel, smarter than a speeding bullet. It's Super Grover!
>
> Super Grover: And I am cute, too.

In his memorable second appearance on April 23, 1974, Super Grover struggles to help a lost little girl. The quandary is that they both desire the telephone booth. She wants to call her mom at home while alter ego Grover Kent needs the space to change into Super Grover to help her.[127] Geography is also an important dimension to both *Sesame Street* and Comicland. Borrowing the superhero theme, writers later positioned Super Grover's residence in Metro City, a twist on Superman's Metropolis.

Superheroes have since kept a constant presence on *Sesame Street*. Several other episodes featured animated cartoons with Superman and Batman and Robin. For example, Superman lists words that start with the letter S, his favorite. In another short, Batman and Robin warn children to cross the street at the crosswalk, with the safety lesson illustrated by the Joker falling down an open manhole into the sewer when running away from the Dynamic Duo after robbing a bank.[128] But the key point is that *Sesame Street* incorporated the idea of superheroes into their neighborhood, which is modeled on the row houses of New York City. The metageographical Comicland permeated the fictional neighborhood of Sesame Street.

Four decades later, the neighborhoods collided. Adults introduced a feedback loop between the two imaginary New York's of Gotham City and Sesame Street and combined both worlds for novel cosplay. *Saturday Night Live* fused the Batman universe with the neighborhood

---

[126] *Sesame Street*, season 5, episode 588, aired January 30, 1974. A clip is available on YouTube. See Tiny Dancer, "Sesame Street - Super Grover and the Boxes (1974)," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-B8MVb-sGs&ab_channel=TinyDancer. For secondary source mention of Super Grover, see Eury, ed., *The Krypton Companion*, p. 135.

[127] *Sesame Street*, season 5, episode 647, aired April 23, 1974. For the "Telephone Booth" clip, see *Sesame Street*, *Old School, 1969–1974*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Sony Wonder, 2006), DVD.

[128] For the Superman and Batman and Robin animated shorts, see *Sesame Street*, *Old School, 1969–1974*, DVD.

Sesame Street into a dark comedy spoof that blends the styles of ridicule, silliness, and adoration. Actor David Harbour stars as Oscar the Grouch in a dual parody of Todd Phillips' psychodrama *Joker* and the educational children's show. On October 12, 2019, *SNL* aired the satirical trailer for the film *Grouch*, an "antihero origin story." Set in a grim 1970s or 1980s New York City rendered through the prism of *Sesame Street*, a garbageman named Oscar, who is disturbed by the growing violence around him in Sesame County, becomes the antihero Grouch. The parody trailer opens with garbagemen Grover M. and Oscar fighting about the smell of trash. Grover says, "Yeah? You like trash so much why don't you live in it?" Oscar angrily retorts, "Why don't you bite me?!" Responding to Oscar, Grover makes the metajoke, "Damn Oscar, why you such a grouch, man?" In a later sequence, Guy Smiley of ABCDEFG News reports on the changing climate of Sesame Street. "Once friendly neighborhood of Sesame Street has now become a haven of crime and corruption." A later scene suggests that Oscar suffers a mental breakdown. When speaking to St. Sesame Medical Center registered nurse Susan Robinson, who should have been a psychotherapist to fit with the *Joker* theme, a sullen Oscar says: "If everyone calls you trash, and everyone treats you like trash, why don't you just become trash?" Then, the audience watches Oscar climb into a metal trash can to hide from the dreary neighborhood of Sesame Street. Additionally, the writers twist other familiar characters into shady stereotypes: Snuffleupagus is a black pimp, Prairie Dawn is a sex worker, Big Bird is a stripper, the Count is a prescription pill addict, Cookie Monster is homeless, and Elmo is a Mexican crack dealer. Like the depiction of sexuality and drug use, violence is also a theme in the trailer. A mugger traps Bert and Ernie in an alley, and then kills Ernie after he refuses to part with his rubber duckie. The scene ends with Bert helplessly screaming his friend's name. The short concludes with the narrator saying, "Brought to you by the letter R," a clever reference to the literacy message of *Sesame Street* and the depiction of murder and adult themes in *Grouch*. The sardonic trailer accentuates my point about the public corporealizing Comicland as a metaneighborhood. The skit takes the Marvel concept of the neighborhood as located in New York and applies it to the DC universe, which utilizes mythical versions of the actual city expressed as Metropolis and Gotham City.[129] This geographic analysis is covered in greater detail in the next chapter and

[129] *Saturday Night Live*, season 45, episode 3, aired October 12, 2019, on NBC. Clips are accessible online and the entire episode is available on Hulu. See Saturday Night Live, "Grouch (Joker Parody) – SNL," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqpak5lFxvs&ab_channel=SaturdayNightLive.

conclusion. It is also worth noting that Harbour portrayed the Russian superhero Red Guardian in the movie *Black Widow*, crossing over from his DC parody to the actual MCU, an action other actors have replicated by participating in both cinematic universes for the monetary benefits.

Regardless of the kiddie dimension, grownups commandeered Comicland for their own amusement. Superheroes may be written for children but emerge from the minds of adults. Playing with Superman, Batman, and Robin encompasses actual and imagined cosplay as well as cartoons and puppets. The fantasy is imprinted all over American television.

Conclusion

This chapter about adults overtaking the superhero imaginary illustrates that playing with these characters transcends age and generation. Superheroes captured the imagination of not just children but teenagers and adults too. The creators, fellow culture workers, and everyday people all participated in superhero wordplay and cosplay. The evidence indicates that Superman as well as Batman and Robin, to a lesser degree, were not abandoned as childish things, and such embrace shows a rejection of society's prescription for adulthood. This paradigm suggests a reevaluation of the parameters of fun and what constitutes acceptable play because superheroes live on in adulthood. Superhero play is clearly a recursive phenomenon. Watching kids' unfettered excitement possibly sparked adults' creativity and a desire to experience the same joy. Adults want to play too, and the costuming explored in this chapter offered a vehicle to do so before the phenomenon of comiccons and as a television alternative to Halloween performance. Regardless of inspiration or location, superhero play in all its forms—whether verbal or physical—is effective because of common knowledge. Nearly everyone knows Superman thanks to corporate capitalization of the character through multimedia. The unintended consequence of such dissemination was adults' seizure of Superman as *their* cultural property, and the bond between them is virtually unbreakable because of a lasting affinity developed in childhood. Years of superhero cosplay on television normalizes the genre and helps to explain why the current swell of characters on film has become a contested space over money and distribution as well as the idea of what constitutes art. While cosplay is a recurring theme for some, the next

---

The narrative is ripe for a Batman parody with Bert as Duckman, an implied Dark Knight, because the incident echoes the Batman origin story. In the comics, mugger Joe Chill kills Bruce Wayne's parents Thomas and Martha outside the Monarch Theater.

chapter shows that watching their childhood heroes on screen is the desired experience for most grownups.

CHAPTER 4: CINEMATIC COMICLAND

One of the important concepts of Comicland is the neighborhood metaphor. Marvel Comics established this design in the mid-1960s by locating their heroes in the actual environs of New York instead of the mythical Metropolis and Gotham City manicured by DC Comics in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The change in geography from a fictional city to an actual one enabled fans to connect to superheroes on a deeper level. By tethering them to recognizable landscapes, buildings, and bridges, it became easier for audiences to imagine themselves as civilians in Comicland, the superhero version of the Big Apple. Geographic identification and the element of realism allows for an enhanced emotional investment in the stories and guardians, who save New York—America's symbolic city—from human, machine, supernatural, and extraterrestrial threats. This becomes most visually realized in the movies. DC Comics laid the foundation for cinematic Comicland with the original *Superman* movies featuring Christopher Reeve and *Batman* movies starring Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer, and George Clooney. Marvel Comics, however, transformed the narrative landscape and began to dominate box office numbers starting in the first decade of the twentieth century with the *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* trilogies. Christopher Nolan's *Batman* trilogy as well as Marvel Studios' tailored writing and interwoven universe, helps to explain the current explosion of Comicland on television, in movies, and on streaming platforms.

Money is the key factor in the proliferation of the superhero genre, and it shows the return of the cycle of Comicland back to the corporate overseers, as traced in chapter 1. Today's stewardship of the characters by big business harkens back to the vision enacted by Jack S. Liebowitz and his team in 1940 with Superman. The corporation reasserted their authority and is again in control of Comicland. Many of these movies draw over a billion dollars worldwide, not including toys and other tie-ins. Four Marvel movies are in the top ten highest grossing pictures globally and five domestically according to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) statistics.[1] The programs available to watch from home probably maintain comparable figures given the record profits of Disney+ with currently over 130 million subscribers and HBO Max with over 75 million. Exact numbers are difficult to measure, nevertheless, because a subscription allows

[1] See Box Office Mojo by IMDb Pro, Top Lifetime Grosses, July 30, 10:02 PDT, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/ww_top_lifetime_gross/?area=XWW and https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top_lifetime_gross/.

patrons to watch multiple superhero programs and people share their accounts, no different than trading comic books as twentieth century children did.

The newfound economic and cultural influence of these movies, however, sparked controversy that climaxed in 2019. Detractors described their presence as a takeover of the box office. The point of contention by a small but vocal group of journalists, filmmakers, and actors is that these movies grew into behemoth franchises and are preventing other stories from reaching audiences. It is, nonetheless, a mischaracterization that the movie theater is now all Marvel and DC. Out of 558 pictures released at the US box office in 2019, these two companies produced six that were superhero movies when you include the R-rated *Joker*.[2] In other words, the genre accounted for around 1.1 percent of the stories that year. Even with a moderate calculation of say 200 movies that garnered comparable promotion and distribution that puts the figure at 3 percent. That in any stretch of the imagination cannot be called a monopoly. Though it may seem like it, superhero movies franchises are not "taking over" as critics such as Derek Thompson want to believe. They howl that there is no room for other stories and the movies are squelching cinematic creativity, but this is a perception problem. First, there is no publicly available proof that the superhero movies and the franchise model is preventing other films from being made. Second, their viewpoint that the superhero movie genre as a franchise somehow precludes it from being creative is misguided.[3] Granted, the COVID-19 pandemic halted production and many movies that still made it to theaters of late have been of the superhero or fantasy variety. However, there is clearly room for other stories, but people are just not paying to see them in the same numbers. The year 2019, for example, had the traditional genres like war, drama, suspense, comedy, and music as well as eccentric films such as *1917*, *Knives Out*, *Good Boys*, *Hustlers*, *Rocketman*, *Yesterday*, *Ford v. Ferrari*, *Little Women*, *The Upside*, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, *Jojo Rabbit*, and *Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood*. None of these films are franchises but competed with the more popular make-believe movies. Scholars once called Hollywood the "Dream Factory," but now critics lament that the movies are too fantastical. (*Netflix* and *Amazon*, for instance, bankroll their own productions that increase the overall number of consumer options for movies outside of the theater.) By combining either figure with

[2] See "Top 2019 Movies at the Domestic Box Office," The Numbers, https://www.the-numbers.com/box-office-records/domestic/all-movies/cumulative/released-in-2019.
[3] See, for example, Derek Thompson, "America Is Running on Fumes: In film, science, and the economy, the U.S. has fallen out of love with the hard work of ushering new ideas into the world," The Atlantic, December 1, 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/12/america-innovation-film-science-business/620858/.

other fantasy genres like science fiction and technology and sword and sorcery this percentage increases. This statistical analysis indicates that Marvel has become the scapegoat for a larger shift and the passage of a new generation. It is the money behind making and marketing superhero movies that makes their presence seem larger than it is. This is the power of Comicland. According to figures by IMDb, those six movies made 2.2 billion domestically and 6.75 billion worldwide.[4] Big investment has led to bigger returns. What this group of critics is really articulating is that they are losing viewers and thus not making as much money because of the new fantasy movie trend. Implicit in their cry is also a fight about the proper or approved forms of imagination for movies.

Fans, in contrast, cheered this shift in programming. The studios are pandering to people's desires to enact, take part in, or visit Comicland. In other words, big business is clearly leveraging the childhood connection for profit. Asking studios to forgo making money for originality, which is highly subjective, is irrational and goes against the wishes of paying customers. Most fans, however, do not feel taken advantage of but only pleasure in watching all these movies, including reboots. While astronomical amounts of money are being made from audiences, their agency in choosing to watch these stories matters.

Even at the outset, and to the dismay of some purists, film and television have eclipsed the comic book as the medium to showcase the superhero fantasy. Resistance to cinematic Comicland by traditionalists in Hollywood because of its mammoth popularity, seemingly endless expansion, and supposed lack of artistry, as charted here, illustrates that the superhero genre still holds nearly the same currency as it did eighty years ago.[5] Playing a superhero on screen was once career suicide, but it is now a vehicle for stardom and the potential for institutional recognition with an Oscar nomination or win. Challenging convention, directors like Kevin Smith and Alejandro G. Iñárritu have embraced the superhero as device for humor and social commentary. Even poets and authors have embedded the superhero formula in their stanzas and novels. This diverse genre also holds acclaim in the form of a Pulitzer Prize thanks to Michael Chabon. The superhero offers a narrative template no different from the gangster or detective genres, revered formulas that do not carry the lowbrow stigma volleyed at comics.

---

[4] See Box Office Mojo by IMDb Pro, Domestic Box Office For 2019, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2019/?grossesOption=calendarGrosses; Box Office Mojo by IMDb Pro, 2019 Worldwide Box Office, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/world/2019/.

[5] For agreement, see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 339.

Decades prior, a majority of adults scoffed at the superhero but now most embrace today's more nuanced interpretations because they grew up with these characters and stories. The medium of movies and literature show that superhero is ingrained in American culture with no sign of its presence lessening. Some in Hollywood may resist the residency of the Comicland neighborhood, but Superman and his contemporaries have proved their longevity and meaning for modern adult audiences.

Overturning the Stigma

The unescapable presence of the superhero genre has reshaped the landscape of modern entertainment, challenging long-held beliefs contrasting high art with popular taste. Negative opinions of superhero movies extend the disdainful view of superheroes—and arguably comics given the intertwined perception of the genre and the medium—as lowbrow or children's fare. This stigma forced *New York Yankees* star Joe DiMaggio to conceal his interest. Teammate Lefty Gomez told *The New York Times* back in 1941 that he often purchased comic books featuring Superman and Batman for DiMaggio.[6] Ten days later, *The Washington Post* revealed that Superman is the favorite comic book character of *New York Giants* catcher Harry Danning. The article expressed a similar tone of disapproval, but Danning did not seem to hide his pastime.[7] Superman biographer Glen Weldon makes a similar claim about gangster Anthony "Dukey" Maffetore.[8] A great deal changed in twenty-two years among baseball players. *Cleveland Indians* outfielder Vic Davalillo publicly declared comic book reading his hobby in 1963. He treasured

---

[6] Russell Owen, "DiMaggio, The Unruffled," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 90, no. 30,486, July 13, 1941, p. 19 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 7).

For replication of this story and Joe DiMaggio's enjoyment of superheroes, see "DiMaggio & Gomes Tell Amiable Lies," *The Austin Statesman* (Austin, TX), Evening Edition, vol. 99, no. 164, March 20, 1970, p. 39; Maury Allen, *Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?: The Story of America's Last Hero* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975), pp. 45–46; William K. Klingaman, *1941: Our Lives in a World on the Edge* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), p. 153; Michael Seidel, *Streak: Joe DiMaggio and the Summer of '41* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988), pp. 136, 188–189; Richard Ben Cramer, *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero's Life* (New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, 2000), pp. 109, 130, 183; Daniel Okrent, "Books: Say It Ain't So, Joe," *Time*, vol. 156, no. 19, November 6, 2000, p. 114; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 212; Tye, *Superman*, pp. ix, 37–38, 41.

[7] George Kirksey, "Batting Around the Circuits: Superman Is Catcher Harry Danning's Hero," *The Washington Post*, no. 23,777, July 22, 1941, pp. 16, 21.

[8] Weldon, *Superman*, p. 67. Weldon's book does not include endnotes and I have been unable to find a source that corroborates the claim that Maffetore secretly read Superman. Whether the claim is true or not, making it supports the belief in the existence of the stigma.

Superman and Superboy, but Mighty Mouse took preference.[9] Superman writer Alvin Schwartz explains in 1976 that the character "was not originally written for children, yet somehow it had been taken over by them."[10]

Adults gravitated to superhero stories because they emerge from and carry deeper messages. Jerry Siegel's creation of Superman seems to have been one way for him to process the trauma of his father's death.[11] Wonder Woman's lasso and bracelets hinted at the sexual

---

[9] See for example, Hal Lebovitz, "Here Are Sketches of New Indians," *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), Greater Cleveland Final Edition, yr. 122, no. 6, April 13, 1963, p. 26; Sandy Prisant, "Comic Book Hero: **Davalillo Matches Mighty Mouse**," *The Desert Sun* (Palm Springs, CA), vol. 41, no. 12, August 18, 1967, p. 7.

[10] Schwartz, "The Real Secret of Superman's Identity," *Children's Literature*, p. 120.

[11] Comics scholars such as Gerard Jones, Danny Fingeroth, Brad Meltzer, Larry Tye, and Brad Ricca contend that personal tragedy inspired Superman. In June of 1932, Jerry Siegel's father died of heart attack as a result of a robbery of his secondhand clothing store or by gunfire according to family legend. Coroner and police reports refute the latter thanks to the research of Marc Tyler Nobleman and later Ricca. This event traumatized Siegel and could have inspired Superman's bulletproof skin and near invincibility as well as the motif of being the sole survivor of a destroyed planet. Regardless of Nobleman's correction to the legend, I refer to the theory offered by comics scholars as the "bullet thesis." Ricca takes the idea further into psychohistory by suggesting that any reference by Siegel to high blood pressure, a heart attack, murder and a son's vow to avenge, suspended animation, or the resurrection of a character within Superman and non-Superman comics is a coded reference to his father. Superman is "perhaps a carefully constructed mythology through which the young Jerry [Siegel] can attempt to understand his father's death. Jerry must have wondered if the time and effort he put into his creation of Superman was a response to his father leaving him." Buried in an endnote, Ricca also writes that Siegel created "a world where his father can live an invulnerable, fantastic life." In addition to Superman, Siegel created a horror superhero that could speak to his personal grief. Gangsters murdered detective Jim Corrigan who comes back to life as a corporeal ghost named the Spectre and enacts vengeful justice. Interestingly, in his autobiography Siegel identified a heart attack as the cause of his father's death and did not entertain the bullet thesis. "In June of 1932, my father Michael [Siegel] had a heart attack after a robbery of his store and he died." Siegel made a veiled reference to the ordeal during his time in military. A joke in the column "Take A Break" in the US Army newspaper *The Stars and Stripes* reads: "Thieves entered a secondhand men's store in Indianapolis, swiped several suits, returned three of them the next night because the pants didn't match." Siegel changed the city from Cleveland to Indianapolis. It is important to note, however, that the bulletproof motif also appears in Philip Wylie's *Gladiator* and other narratives, as Ricca admits.

For Michael Siegel's death, see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. xi–xii, 23–24, 34, 38–39, 121, 154–155, 172, 288, 291, 344; Fingeroth, *Disguised as Clark Kent*, pp. 41–42, 48; Brad Meltzer, *The Book of Lies* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2008), pp. 335–336; Marc Tyler Nobleman, *Boys of Steel: The Creators of Superman* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008); Rick Bowers, *Superman Versus The Ku Klux Klan: The True Story of How the Iconic Superhero Battled the Men of Hate* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2012), p. 21; Tye, *Superman*, pp. x, 6, 8, 34, 55, 169; Johnson, *Super-History*, p. 18; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 3–4, 6–7, 18, 53–54, 59, 69–70, 100, 105, 107, 301–304, 306–310, 326–327, 333n4, 393n14–15, 394n37, 394–395n38, 395–396n51; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 84, 239n25.

For newspaper articles on Michael Siegel's death, see "Dies After Robbery: Coroner Says Heart Disease Caused Death of Merchant," *The Cleveland Press*, Home Edition, no. 17172, June 3, 1932, p. 1; "Died," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Final Edition, yr. 91, no. 156, June 4, 1932, p. 18; "Obituary: Michel Siegel," *The Jewish Independent: A Weekly Newspaper* (Cleveland, OH), vol. 55, no. 4, June 10, 1932, p. 6; "Deaths: Michael Siegel," *The Jewish Review and Observer: Devoted to the Interests of the Jewish People* (Cleveland, OH), vol. 58, no. 28, June 10, 1932, p. 6; Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," p. 70; David Colton, "Superman's secret origin: How a street crime in 1932 Cleveland may have created the Man of Steel," *USA Today*, August 26, 2008, pp. 1D–2D (Life Section); David J. Krajicek, "Truth, Justice And A Stickup," *Daily News* (New York, NY), Sports Final Edition, vol. 90, no. 66, August 31, 2008, p. 49.

For the psychohistory viewpoint, see Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 87, 107, 157, 246–247, 266, 306, 309, 341n42, 394n37. For the Spectre, see Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 172–175.

proclivities of creator Dr. William Moulton Marston toward bondage.[12] From the beginning comics were never just for kids, as sociologists and readership surveys indicate.[13] Considering this history, the expectation that superhero movies would be different is a misunderstanding of the long-established relationship of audiences with the genre. As Superman biographer Jake Rossen explains, *Superman: The Movie*, the progenitor of the genre, "was not a kiddie film, and the marketing department had to work overtime to correct early assumptions to the contrary."[14] The picture held such an appeal that Christopher Reeve, who was filming *Somewhere in Time*, provided the dialogue and narrated the picture for an audience when the sound system failed in the only theater in the small town of Mackinac Island, Michigan. *People* relayed this unique occurrence on August 20, 1979.

> Crisis struck the old-time Michigan resort community of Mackinac Island when the sound system at the only theater died a few minutes into the first reel of *Superman*. Disgruntlement spread through the crowd as the figures on the screen mouthed dialogue in baffling silence. Suddenly there arose from the audience a strange visitor with powers far beyond those of mortal men—at least, he was able to speak all the parts and narrate the story until the sound system was revived. Who was this stranger with the gift of tongues? None other than Superman

---

For Jerry Siegel's assessment of his father's death, see Siegel, "Creation of a Superhero," chap. 1, p. 17. This document is generally a problematic source for its creation date parallels the 1978 court case. According to Brad Ricca, it is also important to note that "Jerry [Siegel] was, first and foremost, a storyteller." See Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 337n3, 355n30. And for Siegel's joke, see T4 Jerry Siegel, "Take A Break," *The Stars and Stripes: U.S. Armed Forces Daily In The Middle Pacific Arena*, Final Edition, vol. 1, no. 202, January 7, 1946, p. 2. Brad Ricca references the Indianapolis robbery comment as an allusion to real life. Several of Siegel's newspaper articles in chapter 18 are misattributed to different dates. See Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 219, 374n41.

For the bulletproof motif, see Philip Wylie, *Gladiator* (1930; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press and Bison Books, 2004), pp. 15, 178, 183, 191, 199–200, 220, 255. For alternative sources of bulletproof narratives that could have inspired Superman, see Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 360–361n36.

[12] These sources are referenced in the introduction chapter at footnote no. 26. See also *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*, directed and written by Angela Robinson (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2018), DVD.

[13] See Harvey Zorbaugh, "The Comics—There They Stand!," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 4 (December 1944), pp. 196–203; Sgt. Sanderson Vanderbilt, "The Comics: An investigation of what makes Kid Eternity tick and of the wartime publishing bonanza in 'funny books,'" *Yank*, vol. 4, no. 23, November 23, 1945, p. 8; Waugh, *The Comics*, p. 334; *Juvenile Delinquency, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., Committee Report* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), pp. 202–203. For secondary source mentions and attribution of the readership data as presented in *Publishers' Weekly*, see Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, p. 57; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 71, 98.

For the limited argument that adults became comic book consumers only during the World War II, see, for example, Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 231. While mainly presenting superheroes and comics as a kid's fantasy in *Superman*, Larry Tye mentions a dual audience of kids and grownups on pages 85, 90, 140, 144, and 179–180. His passing mention of marketing Superman shaving cream and car products clearly makes it an adult fantasy too (124). Tye also acknowledges on pages ix and 41 that superheroes develop into an entertainment without such age divisions. See also Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 128–130, 132, 142, 153, 156–157; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 26, 101; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 71, 99–100, 135, 138, 156, 197. For acknowledgement of adult readers, see Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 152–153; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 67, 214.

[14] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 108.

himself, Christopher Reeve, who happened to be in town to film his next feature, *Somewhere in Time*.[15]

This unexpected metaperformance beyond the fourth wall inside the theater is an example of the power and manifestation of Comicland. It likewise challenges the assumed view that "grown-ups" do not care about superheroes. As time passes and the frequency of superhero movies increase, adults become more open in admitting their enjoyment of the genre.

The stigma is clear in the language used against superhero movies. In many circles, they cannot qualify as film or cinema. Their marketplace power created a battle over the very meaning of the terms *movie*, *film*, and *cinema*. This chapter, and the whole text, separates the descriptive nouns movie (and picture) from film and cinema to highlight the linguistic hierarchy deployed by critics. However, the adjective cinematic is used to describe all movies, especially since Marvel and DC deployed this terminology for their own movie universes. The heart of this story is a struggle over who controls the narrative of what constitutes entertainment. While there have always been action movies, the superhero franchise is framed as somehow demeaning the artform of film. Yet, the popularity of superhero movies tells America and the world that adults can have fun at the theater, and to play with the words of actor Heath Ledger as the Joker in *The Dark Knight*, film does not have to be *so serious*.

Not in My Cinematic Neighborhood, said Martin Scorsese

Martin Scorsese was the most vocal critic against the new big-budget franchise model in 2019. At the close of the year, he directed forty-nine films, shorts, and documentaries. Scorsese had been privileged to pursue his preferences for sixty years but imagined that Marvel now threatened his ability to continue making films. It was not his narrative sensibilities that diverged from the public but the conquest of an avaricious monstrosity. Besides *The Color of Money*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Kundun*, and *Hugo*, most of his films are replicas of the same themes. Scorsese represents the old guard of cinema and stale story lines.

The October and November 2019 issues of the United Kingdom motion picture magazine *Empire* focused on Martin Scorsese and his critically acclaimed movie *The Irishman*. Featuring gangster-genre superstars Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, and Joe Pesci, it is the latest installment in a long line of mafia movies, a truly exhausted and predictable narrative built on unflattering

[15] "Chatter: **Supercue**," *People*, vol. 12, no. 8, August 20, 1979, p. 100.

stereotypes of Irish and Italian Catholics as dysfunctional, foul-mouthed pistol-waving thugs that strangely continues to be celebrated by audiences and critics alike despite artistically peaking in the 1990s with *Goodfellas*, *A Bronx Tale*, *Casino*, and *Heat*. The oversweet interview with Scorsese published in November, however, took a sour turn with discussion of the current cinematic climate. Like many traditionalists, Scorsese scornfully characterized contemporary moviemaking as a carnivalesque space dominated by superheroes, especially the better-known Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU).

> I don't see them …. I tried, you know? But that's not cinema. Honestly, the closest I can think of them, as well-made as they are, with actors doing the best they can under the circumstances, is theme parks. It isn't the cinema of human beings trying to convey emotional, psychological experiences to another human being.[16]

These snippy words of Scorsese branded the superhero movie genre as merely "theme park entertainment" and critiqued what comics scholar Peter Coogan calls the "superhero movie renaissance" of the post–9/11 world.[17] Media scholar Blair Davis argues that the superhero "comic book movie" is part of a larger and longer trend of adaptations flowing between cinema and comics, a two-way transmedia street moving from either page-to-screen or screen-to-page. According to Davis, both visual mediums—projected on the screen and drawn on the page—have been "allies" from the beginning.[18] In addition to the multitude of superhero television shows and animated cartoons that have maintained an ongoing presence in American broadcasting since the 1950s,[19] the current flurry of movies speaks volumes about the state of global culture, box office power, and the bankroll behind entertainment production today. Now entering its ninth decade—starting with the Max Fleischer animated *Superman* shorts of the 1940s—multimedia superhero entertainment, mainly produced by rival comic book publishers Marvel and DC, includes a wide-range of characters and story lines. These live-action yarns

---

[16] See Nick De Semlyen, "One Last Hit," *Empire*, no. 366 (October 2019), pp. 62–73; Nick De Semlyen, "Fire Me. Shoot Me. Kill Me," *Empire*, no. 367 (November 2019), pp. 92–97 with the quote on the last page. The latter article is accessible online at https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/irishman-week-martin-scorsese-interview/.
[17] See Peter Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain Books, 2006), pp. 1–13; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 13, 221, 225–227. See also Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 270; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 119, 166; Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, pp. 3, 14, 29–30, 268–296, 272–273, 275–276.
[18] See Davis, *Movie Comics*, esp. pp. 2, 6, 11, 55, 85, 122, 207, 243, 251.
[19] For a brief discussion of early superhero television, see Barbara Rowes, "Stan Lee, Creator Of Spider-Man And The Incredible Hulk, Is America's Biggest Mythmaker," *People*, vol. 11, no. 4, January 29, 1979, p. 51; "Show Business: Marvels of The Mind: *The comics go Hollywood*," *Time*, vol. 113, no. 6, February 5, 1979, p. 138; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 97, 235; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 225–226.

show the latest phase in a decades-long process of permeation by the superhero into modern, mainstream culture.[20] Historian Paul S. Hirsch, however, insists on different language. "Comic book culture is beyond mainstream culture—it's *American* culture."[21]

Not even the Oscar-winning director Martin Scorsese can escape the influence of Comicland. In his eyes, and possibly those of other establishment filmmakers, superheroes are an outsider population currently occupying the cinematic neighborhood that once redlined the genre from serious consideration by leading actors and directors, as well as the Oscars. In other words, superhero movie franchises constitute unwanted competition in a supposedly shrinking market. Scorsese's statement in *Empire* treated the genre as both an economic and aesthetic threat. In contrast, the major film studios and audiences have happily welcomed and inhabited the superhero fantasy, a process enabled by smart casting of the heroes, the insertion of esteemed actors in supporting roles, and the improvement of special effects technology.[22] Scorsese's disparaging comments of the "superhero turn" in film overshadowed his interview in *Empire* and its intended publicity for *The Irishman*. Media outlets across the Atlantic focused on his assault on the superhero movie genre rather than the promotion of his film. The public overwhelmingly rebuked his elitist attitude toward film and cry against an "invasion" of what comics scholars and writers simply term "superhero storytelling" or "superhero fiction."[23] Admittedly, many people supported Scorsese's opinion, and still do, but the media did not broadcast such defenses. The blowback outweighed solidarity. Scorsese stormed, and the English-speaking world rejected his position against Marvel because they enjoy amusement, a pattern extending back to the early nineteenth century.[24] Audiences around the globe clearly favor the superhero epic, and the major studios are funding such projects because of market forces and multigenerational interest. For some, it is their preferred entertainment. For others, it is a stroll down memory lane into the

---

[20] For comics culture as now being mainstream, see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 237, 326; Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*, pp. 240, 249.
[21] Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, p. 3.
[22] Coogan, *Superhero*, p. 2; Morrison, *Supergods*, p. xvi; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 116.
[23] For the terms "superhero storytelling" and "superhero fiction," which dismantle the lowbrow stigma and situate the genre as just another type of story/fantasy, see Weldon, *Superman*, p. 218; Fawaz, *The New Mutants*, pp. 5, 8, 33, 38, 42, 64, 72, 144, 147, 204, 233, 282; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 3, 6, 8–12, 14–15, 80, 111, 114, 120, 146, 170, 204, 206–207, 212, 220–221, 225–227; Morrison, *Supergods*, pp. xv, 155, 215, 270, 272. Fawaz also decenters the derogatory associations to comics with the phrase "comic book storytelling" on pages 19 and 34 whereas Regalado widens the scope to "heroic fiction" on pages 5–7, 33, 35, 41, 43–44, 67, and 72 and "adventure fiction" on pages 17–18, 52, 72, and 157.
[24] For an overview of the history of amusement, see LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (2006; Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012).

comfortable world of their mental hometown from childhood populated by comics or animated cartoons. This is how Comicland exists in the minds of adults. Besides the public, the people in power at Disney and Warner Bros. Discovery, the current corporate homes of Marvel and DC, and the emerging movie house leaders sustain a nostalgia for the characters that they grew up with and favor established franchises for their minimized financial risk. The superhero fantasy is a socioeconomic powerhouse and now maintains a mutually constitutive relationship between the studios and viewers.[25]

Martin Scorsese's commentary is significant because of what lies beneath its surface. It is reminiscent of the derogatory tropes of comics as "junk" or "trash" and the cultural hierarchy,[26] an arbitrary division between highbrow and lowbrow creative works brilliantly dismantled by historian Lawrence W. Levine.[27] Popular culture scholars and the public already decided this argument: fantasy is not cheap or inferior art. The irony is that the *fine art* label that cinema now enjoys was the result of a concerted effort in the 1920s to repackage its sullied image through ornate movie theater architecture as well as the establishment of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Academy Awards. The organization and its awards were ingenious inventions by the Jewish studio magnates to exalt the new medium viewed by the WASP elite as entertainment suitable only for the immigrant working-class. Lavish movie houses, which at first echoed European standards of art, and the Oscars manufactured prestige and legitimized the nascent American industry.[28] Another irony is that Scorsese failed to realize that the majority of

---

[25] Interview with Michael Uslan in Edward Douglas, "Michael Uslan: Man Behind the Batman - Part 2," Superhero Hype, August 9, 2005, http://www.superherohype.com/news/featuresnews.php?id=3388. See also Davis, *Movie Comics*, p. 250. For an early discussion of the question of whether consumers hold any power or agency in determining the content they see verses the idea of producers imposing culture upon audiences in the name of profit, see Gans, *Popular and High Culture*, pp. viii–ix.

[26] For the discussion of comics as "junk," "trash," or an artistic "ghetto," see Feiffer, *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, pp. 50, 186–187, 189; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 135, 170, 213, 278; Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, pp. 33, 35, 38; Tye, *Superman*, p. 13; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 9; Siegel, "Creation of a Superhero," chap. 1, p. 16. For the stigma as now irrelevant, see Samuele F. S. Pardini, ed., *The Devil Gets His Due: The Uncollected Essays of Leslie Fiedler* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2008), p. 167. For lowbrow stigma, see also Weldon, *Superman*, p. 142.

While an exercise in semantics, historian Paul S. Hirsch differentiates between garbage culture and trash culture. Comic books belong to the latter category because they were trashed after being consumed to the point of deterioration. It is a spin on the axiom, one person's trash is another person's treasure. Thus, the paradox of trash as also treasure. See Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, pp. 13–14, 16, 19, 34, 268–269, 274–275.

[27] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[28] See, for example, the cartoon Helen E. Hokinson, "Mamma—does God live here?," *The New Yorker*, vol. 5, no. 1, February 23, 1929, p. 16. For historiography on the lavish movie place mixing classical, renaissance, and oriental motifs as a contrast to Victorian architecture and its transition after the Great Depression toward a modern machinelike design intended to invoke democracy and classlessness as well as the drive-in theater, see Sklar, *Movie-*

his own films are not deep explorations into the human experience but formulaic narratives of sociopathic cops and criminals. Too many of his characters operate as glamorized versions of nativist anti-Catholic stereotypes; he continually projects Irish and Italian Americans in an unfavorable light but probably believes the opposite. Besides topical narrowness, the lack of ethnoracial diversity is apparent in the fact that Scorsese repeatedly casts the same Italian American actors, most notably Robert De Niro, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Joe Pesci, in the leading or supporting role. Gender is a parallel problem. His films are male dominated with women as accessories or merely narrative agents, underdeveloped secondary characters who serve to reinforce the male hero or antihero. Scorsese is one of the foremost architects of the gangster trope but trapped inside a house of his own making.

In early November, amid the transatlantic backlash, Martin Scorsese doubled down on his viewpoint. His op-ed on the fifth for *The New York Times*, a poorly crafted response and defense of his position, explained that superhero movies are just "audiovisual entertainment" and not *cinema*. Scorsese backpedaled slightly from his initial statement by admitting that superhero movies contain the basics but ultimately stood his ground on the idea that they are unsophisticated narratives and not *fine art*. Scorsese situated himself between the older Hollywood avant garde of Sam Fuller, Ingmar Bergman, Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly, Kenneth Anger, Jean-Luc Godard, Don Siegel, and Alfred Hitchcock and the younger commercially and critically successful arthouse directors Paul Thomas Anderson, Claire Denis, Spike Lee, Ari Aster, Kathryn Bigelow, and Wes Anderson, all of whom he specifically named.

> When I was in England in early October, I gave an interview to Empire magazine. I was asked a question about Marvel movies. I answered it. I said that I've tried to watch a few of them and that they're not for me, that they seem to me to be closer to theme parks than they are to movies as I've known and loved them throughout my life, and that in the end, I don't think they're cinema.

Made America, pp. 86, 150; Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 16, 147–148, 150–152, 154–156, 158, 160–164, 166; Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 15–17, 101–120, 125–129, 134, 170–171, 262. For more on the cathedral and temple analogy as well as orientalism, see Ben M. Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of Golden Age of the Movie Palace* (New York, NY: Bramhall House, 1961). Hall's text is valuable for the pictures but lacks analytical heft.

For the aim by Jewish men to make the new artform respectable, see Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1988), pp. 166, 170, 321; *Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own*, DVD. For the European standard of art, see May, *Screening Out the Past*, p. 151; May, *The Big Tomorrow*, pp. 15–17, 56, 101–102, 258. For cinema as a religious threat, see Susman, *Culture as History*, p. 284. See also Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, p. 54.

> … Many of the elements that define cinema as I know it are there in Marvel pictures. What's not there is revelation, mystery or genuine emotional danger. Nothing at risk. The pictures are made to satisfy a specific set of demands, and they are designed as variations on a finite number of themes.[29]

Although Martin Scorsese implied that auteurs would avoid or decry the superhero genre, this is false in the case of European filmmakers Federico Fellini and Alain Resnais and messier regarding Jean-Luc Godard. Fellini visited Marvel on November 3, 1965, a fact documented in the Marvel Bulletin Bullpens in *The Amazing Spider-Man* no. 37 (June 1966).[30] To his wife's chagrin, Resnais adored Marvel to the extent of packing his comic books in chronological order when traveling in America. Florence Malraux gave film scholar Paul Thomas the impression that the job of arranging them properly in the suitcase fell to her. Resnais confided to Thomas circa 1970 that his reason "for being in New York [at the time] was personal: a determination to track down [Marvel editor-in-chief] Stan Lee." Popular authors reference that Resnais became friends with Lee and collaborated with him on unmade movie scripts such as *The Monster Maker* and *The Inmates*. According to Thomas, this appreciation for comics began with Milton Caniff's *Steve Canyon* during World War II and extended to Lee Falk's *Mandrake the Magician*, which has a visual presence in his film *L'année dernière á Marienbad*.[31] Two popular authors claim that Godard visited Marvel in the late 1960s as a fan and Lee documented this in a comic book.[32] This is unfortunately an urban legend because Godard despised superheroes as expressions of American cultural imperialism and capitalist militarism. His 1967 Maoist film *La Chinoise* utilized comic book images of Batman as well as Captain America and Sgt. Fury as substitutes

---

[29] Martin Scorsese, "The Dying Art of Filmmaking," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 169, no. 58,502, November 5, 2019, p. A27. The article is accessible online at https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/opinion/martin-scorsese-marvel.html.

[30] For Federico Fellini, see The Marvel Comics Bulletins Bullpen Index, June 1966, https://bullpenbulletins.blogspot.com/search/label/1966; Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon, *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2003), p. 187; Sean Howe, *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012), pp. 61, 69, 113; Danny Fingeroth and Roy Thomas, eds., *The Stan Lee Universe* (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2011), pp. 91, 133; Danny Fingeroth, *A Marvelous Life: The Amazing Story of Stan Lee* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 2019), pp. 6–7, 160, 177.

[31] For Alain Resnais, see Paul Thomas, "Remembering Resnais: An Encounter on the First Anniversary (Approximately) of His Death," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Summer 2015), pp. 86–87; Raphael and Spurgeon, *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book*, pp. 184–185, 187–189; Howe, *Marvel Comics*, pp. 103–104, 113–114, 117, 119–120, 414; Fingeroth and Thomas, eds., *The Stan Lee Universe*, pp. 6, 90, 133–134, 145–149; Bob Batchelor, *Stan Lee: The Man Behind Marvel* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp. 154–155; Fingeroth, *A Marvelous Life*, pp. 6–7, 84, 160, 217–219, 223, 226–227, 232, 235, 271, 279, 295. See also Reinhold Reitberger and Wolfgang Fuchs, *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), p. 170.

[32] Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 136–137; Morrison, *Supergods*, p. 95.

for American soldiers and the American military industrial complex. When discussing the Vietnam conflict, the film repeatedly flashes between these two images with the sound of machine gun fire. However, as film scholar James Roy MacBean points out, Godard held a paradoxical view by featuring superheroes, comic strip panels, and comic art motifs in *La Chinoise* and *Made in U.S.A.* making them sort of pop art style films.[33]

Martin Scorsese clarified his comments for the third time on January 6, 2020, at a "Directors Roundtable" captured by YouTube and moderated by Stephen Galloway of *The Hollywood Reporter*. Regarding the *Empire* interview, he audaciously asserted being a victim of sensationalist journalism. Scorsese hooted to the panel, "I said superhero films. I never—I don't even know Marvel. I remember it was a comic book." Then, he unpacked his theme park analogy for the first time, citing Disneyland as an expression of the venture into real estate by the entertainment business, which Universal Studios later copied. Scorsese had the platform to explain this point of literal world building in *The New York Times* but still whined to the panel that the media misconstrued his words.

> No because I remember, you know, when Disneyland was built. I'm that ancient, you know. And one of the aspirations of the studios was to become as important, in a sense, to American culture as "the Disneyland," and I think the first studio to really do that was Universal, Universal Tours and then you add the sense of blockbuster on top of that and then why not? The sense of theme park has always been there. It's always been there—it's not bad. We used to love to go to amusement parks, you know, but now in the amusement park you have the film.[34]

His language suggested that the studios have become theme park developers instead of movie houses and trampled the hallowed cinematic neighborhood. He inherently charged studios with buying up the foreclosed movie palaces and redeveloping them into playgrounds erected around the superhero theme. If Scorsese meant the entire superhero movie genre, he should not have cited only Marvel in *The New York Times*. This fact undercut his accusation of being misquoted by *Empire*. Even though he name-checked only Marvel, Scorsese implied the superhero team and franchise *The Avengers*, whose final movie is currently the second highest grossing movie of all time at the box office and the top picture that year by earning 858 million domestically and

---

[33] *La Chinoise*, directed and written by Jean-Luc Godard (1967; Port Washington, NY: KOCH Entertainment, 2008), DVD; *Made in U.S.A.*, directed and written by Jean-Luc Godard (1966; Irvington, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2009), DVD; James Roy MacBean, "Painting, Politics, and the Language of Signs in Godard's *Made in USA*," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Spring 1969), pp. 18–25. See also Reitberger and Fuchs, *Comics*, p. 170.
[34] The Hollywood Reporter, "Directors Roundtable: Todd Phillips, Martin Scorsese, Greta Gerwig, Noah Baumbach | Close Up," January 6, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iLtjMwkOlg.

2.7 billion dollars globally.[35] Although couched in a debate about *fine art*, economics is the key contention. Nonetheless, Scorsese's hostility toward Marvel, whose cinematic universe currently holds greater name recognition over other superhero franchises for its superior movies and monetary success, might have been incorrectly named and blamed due to his actual competition that year with DC and their film *Joker*. Scorsese seemed to reveal that he was and possibly still is unaware that Marvel and DC are competitors and own the rights to different characters. His commentary unfairly painted the superhero genre as monolithic.

Returning to the geographic metaphor established in the introduction chapter, Martin Scorsese was bitter that the residential area of Comicland grew so large that it overtook the downtown district of Hollywoodland and priced him out of living and working there. Geek culture, which embraces the realms of science fiction and fantasy, infiltrated the gated community of Hollywood and redistributed power.[36] As such, Scorsese revealed that it took nine years to get the financing for *The Irishman*, which (even though it had a theatrical release component) was mainly sidelined to the streaming service Netflix, a digital space conveniently accessible on all internet compatible devices that he seemed to view as a kind of cinematic ghetto similar to an independent theater.[37] In other words, he had great difficulty getting a mortgage to finance his new house, *The Irishman*, which is a prefabricated replica of his earlier gangster themed properties. Put another way, Scorsese's interpretation of *cinema* is outdated architecture. It is as if hipsters or minorities moved into Manhattan's Little Italy, and he resents his new neighbors for changing the composition of the community. Redevelopment or diversity, which seems to be the hallmark of the new onscreen superhero (at least on the surface) epitomized by the movies *Wonder Woman*, *Captain Marvel*, and *Black Panther*, is poisonous to the established culture of white male bravado that Scorsese has projected throughout his career.[38] Paul S. Hirsch

---

[35] Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 226. See Box Office Mojo by IMDb Pro, Domestic Box Office For 2019, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2019/?grossesOption=calendarGrosses; Box Office Mojo by IMDb Pro, 2019 Worldwide Box Office, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/world/2019/.

[36] For an early reference to nerd replacing square as a pejorative in 1950s Detroit, Michigan, see "National Affairs: Jelly Tot, Square Bear-Man!," *Newsweek*, vol. 38, no. 15, October 28, 1952, p. 28.

[37] The Hollywood Reporter, "Directors Roundtable."

[38] One geography scholar questions the motivations of Disney's diversity angle as being less about inclusion via morality and more about generating profit in emerging nonwhite markets around the globe. See Robert Saunders, "(Profitable) Imaginaries of Black Power: The Popular and Political Geographies of Black Panther," *Political Geography*, vol. 69 (March 2019), esp. pp. 140 and 147. A literary scholar echoes this view of multicultural lip service by suggesting that Marvel intentionally capitalized on the newfound public acceptance of gay rights and gay marriage. See Fawaz, *The New Mutants*, pp. 277–281. As Aldo J. Regalado correctly notes there is a genuine desire for more diverse superhero fare as well as opposition. Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 228.

applauds the shift in Hollywood. "Happily, though, after nearly twenty years of overwhelmingly White, male superhero films and TV shows, studios are at last beginning to produce narratives featuring non-White heroes and women."[39]

A shrewd rebuttal to Martin Scorsese in *The New York Times* best summarized his narrow-minded vision of cinema as white patriarchy. In her letter to the editor published on November 17, 2019, Brenna Davis of Silver Spring, Maryland, wrote:

> Martin Scorsese reveals what he really believes to be cinema: movies made by the white male filmmaker. By referring to the films of [Alfred] Hitchcock, [Ingmar] Bergman and [Jean-Luc] Godard in his argument about what defines cinematic art, he reinforces the decades-old white patriarchal ideals that have pushed female filmmakers and filmmakers of color out of film history and out of mind.
>
> … At least Marvel is working to represent marginalized groups both on and offscreen with "Black Panther" and "Captain Marvel," which is more than Mr. Scorsese has ever offered.[40]

Most recently, film critic Sean Egan of the United Kingdom magazine *The Critic* peppered Martin Scorsese. He argued in the thirty-first issue dated October 2022 that Scorsese is a washed-up director with his "rinse and repeat" mafia movie formulas. The metaphor is an apt analysis of the director's Hollywood identity and, in the author's words, "self-indulgent" mindset. His celebrity status supposedly prevents the studios from administering the oversight needed for his films. While the rejection of *The Irishman* to mainly streaming platforms counteracts this claim, the majority of Egan's position of Scorsese as an overpraised filmmaker is valid. He duplicated many of the criticisms articulated under this subheading and serendipitously used spatial symbolism. For Egan, Scorsese's flicks are not just prefabricated replicas but the same house with rearranged furniture. The experience of seeing his movies is déjà vu.

> No studio daters utter the word "no" to him.
>
> The result is a debasing of his talent: new Scorsese films are routinely an hour too long. The truth, though, is that his directorial talent has never been as great as occasional masterpieces like *Goodfellas* (1990) tricked us into believing it was.
>
> … **TRULY MAGNIFICENT IS** [*sic*] *Goodfellas*, from its stylish construction to its brutally thought-provoking narrative to its blizzard of iconic scenes. In this year of celebrations of the half centenary of *The Godfather*, we are reminded how

---

[39] Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, p. 30.
[40] See also the mixed public responses, "Movies Today: Scorsese's Lament," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 169, no. 58,514, November 17, 2019, p. 10 (Sunday Review Section).

> comparatively little we have heard in recent times about that once omnipresent Francis Ford Coppola picture: quite simply, *Goodfellas* instantly eclipsed it in terms of being the definitive gangster flick.
>
> Since then, though, Scorsese has lazily settled on Mafia-Picture Director as a main calling. This might be a worthwhile pursuit if it described an upward aesthetic gradient, but the fact that, in *Goodfellas*, he had already delivered the genre's ideal makes it instead a grand exercise in futility.
>
> It's also akin to obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Casino* (1995) and *The Irishman* (2019) contain broadly the same milieu, set pieces and morality lessons. Scorsese is simply moving the furniture around. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that he, in another act of laziness, uses the same actors over and over: seeing Robert De Niro, Joe Pesci and Harvey Keitel in a Scorsese mobster movie for the umpteenth time makes for a bizarre feeling of déjà vu-cum-musical chairs.
>
> *The Irishman* took this rinse-and-repeat casting to a risible breaking point, with Scorsese deciding that advances in CGI meant that he could get away with giving the septuagenarian De Niro another turn as a vigorous and violent young hood. New levels of surrealism were created by an artificially unlined De Niro setting about antagonists with limbs stiffened by age.[41]

The truth is that Martin Scorsese and his vision of cinema is passé, and he is struggling to accept this fact. The period when he rose to acclaim, known as the "American New Wave" or the "New Hollywood," expressed the model of the auteur director as the driving force of filmmaking instead of the studio system, and this earlier level of near autonomy still informs his outlook. In the decades since this period from the late 1960s to the 1980s, corporate conglomerates have decentered directorial power. Nevertheless, filmmakers (including the newer voices) and critics still maintain a romantic view of this temporary phase, imagining it as a second golden age of cinema.[42] In the CNN documentary series *The Movies*, film critic Neal Gabler explained that Hollywood has entered a new era of the movie star. Three periods, he argued, define Hollywood: studio driven, director driven, and star driven.[43] Gabler's word choice of "star driven" is, however, confusing because film scholar Lary May already uses the term "star system" to

---

[41] Sean Egan, "Sacred Cows: Martin Scorsese rinse and repeat self-indulgence," *The Critic*, no. 31 (October 2022), pp. 98–99. The article is also available online at https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/october-2022/martin-scorsese-rinse-and-repeat-self-indulgence/.

[42] See, for example, Thomas Schatz, "The New Hollywood," in *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Thomas Schatz (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), pp. 285–314; Jonathan Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age: Politics, Society, and the Seventies Film in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[43] Interview with Neal Gabler on *The Movies*, season 1, episode 6, "The 2000s," aired July 21, 2019, on CNN. The miniseries is now available for streaming on HBO Max.

reference the early Hollywood triumvirate of Mary Pickford, Douglass Fairbanks, and Charlie Chaplin. During the early twentieth century under the studio system, these three actors established the idea of the movie star as a celebrity.[44] Gabler should have defined the new paradigm as franchise driven.[45] Returning to my point, the fact that audiences and tastes have changed further shows how out of touch Scorsese is. Today's patrons appear to care about content and representational equality over the name of the director. Narratives of white male gangsters and law enforcement officers, regardless of whether the characters are morally conflicted or complex, no longer seem to resonate with the increasingly diverse populace. Even white people are becoming more cognizant of the everyday struggles that minorities face and how cinema can reinforce racism because representation matters. For minorities subjugated by racial profiling, police brutality, and systemic racism, stories of white male violence are not entertainment but an everyday reality and paying to watch such expressions of racial power onscreen is also probably traumatizing.

Resistance to white cinematic formulas is warranted and overdue. *Saturday Night Live* comedian Melissa Villaseñor articulated this issue through satire in a Weekend Update segment on January 25, 2020, about the 2020 Oscar nominations. In a song, Villaseñor reduced Hollywood films such as *Joker* and *The Irishman* to their essence as "white male rage." She criticized the Oscars for nominating these films and the overall pattern of white male violence in Hollywood.[46] Comedian Tracy Morgan made this same point with his character Tray Leviticus Barker on the sitcom *The Last O. G.* on May 26, 2020. Barker accentuates a key issue with the narrative makeup of many superheroes as an authorized expression of white rage. Debating superheroes with newsstand owner Jabril [no last name], Barker cries, "The Incredible Hulk is not a real superhero, okay? He's just a drunk white dude in a bar with white rage."[47]

---

[44] See the image "Two Heavy-Weights on a Fairbanks Scale," *Vanity Fair*, vol. 9, no. 1 (September 1917), p. 62; May, *Screening Out the Past*, pp. 32, 96, 99–100, 118–120, 130, 144–145, 154, 163, 169, 176, 190, 196–199, 231–235; May, *The Big Tomorrow*, pp. 77, 85–86.
[45] For a brief journalistic discourse on the rise of franchise cinema in the 1980s, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 116–117.
[46] *Saturday Night Live*, season 45, episode 11, aired January 25, 2020, on NBC. The episode is available on Hulu and a clip is available on YouTube, Saturday Night Live, "Weekend Update: Melissa Villaseñor on Oscar Snubs – SNL," January 26, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vT0h0tXXBzc&ab_channel=SaturdayNightLive.
[47] *The Last O. G.*, season 3, episode 8, "Come Clean (Uncut)," directed by Robert Townsend, written by Keenen Ivory Wayans and Carl Jones, aired May 26, 2020, on TBS.

Defending the Genre

If the superhero film genre is "confectionary" (an old linguistic attack against comics),[48] as Martin Scorsese suggested, then why are celebrated actors joining the party? Historians Bradford W. Wright and Paul S. Hirsch would argue that one answer for this widespread interest by actors and the public is that the world of comics has always been cool and fun.[49] This view validates the concept of Comicland as an undying connection to the superhero fantasy that started in childhood. The other more pertinent answer is big business with lots of money to go around. Because of these harmonious reasons the recent superhero movie franchises for both Marvel and DC have attracted award-winning or award-nominated actors like Sir Ian McKellen, Sir Patrick Stewart, Sir Michael Caine, Sir Anthony Hopkins, Sir Ben Kingsley, Liam Neeson, Gary Oldman, Russell Crowe, Kevin Costner, Kevin Bacon, Robert Redford, Jeff Bridges, Michael Douglass, Morgan Freeman, Samuel L. Jackson, Laurence Fishburne, Anthony Mackie, Idris Elba, Forest Whitaker, Sterling K. Brown, Gwyneth Paltrow, Rene Russo, Cate Blanchett, Jennifer Connelly, Jennifer Lawrence, Elliot Page [formerly Ellen Page], Anne Hathaway, Amy Adams, Angela Bassett, Marisa Tomei, Angelina Jolie, and Salma Hayek—all of whom star in movies Scorsese would classify as *cinema*.[50] In his memoir, Batman producer Michael E. Uslan argues that director Christopher Nolan convinced audiences the realism of Batman and his world through proper casting. Uslan probably defines realism through setting and cinematography.[51] Commenting on the MCU in a minidocumentary for the streaming service Disney+, Marvel Studios copresident Louis D'Esposito said: "They told not only Hollywood but, I believe, the world that we are serious about telling great stories and we have great characters and we are going after the best actors for these roles."[52] In the process, these artists (many of whom are renown thespians) bring a gravitas to the movies. The money together with the superpowers and special effects distract certain critics and filmmakers like Scorsese from seeing the deeper

---

[48] For an interesting mention of comic books as literary candy due to its proximity to sweets on newsstands and its placement in drugstores on spinning racks, see Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, p. 35. See also interview with Josette Frank in Catherine Mackenzie, "Children and The Comics," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 92, no. 31,214, July 11, 1943, p. 23 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 6); Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 207.
[49] See Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. xi, xvii; Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, pp. 18, 274. See also Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 3, 108, 201. For vague references to enchantment as fun, see De Haven, *Superman*, p. 2; Fawaz, *The New Mutants*, p. 29. Michael E. Uslan, in contrast, thinks that only recently comics culture has become cool. Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*, p. 249.
[50] See also Tye, *Superman*, p. 298.
[51] Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*, pp. 229–230.
[52] Interview with Louis D'Esposito in *Marvel Studios: Assembling A Universe* (2014), on Disney+.

discussions on diaspora, alienation, intolerance, familial strife, gender and sexuality, greed and ambition, suffering and loss, tyranny and terrorism, genetic engineering, childhood trauma, mental illness, etc. that are encapsulated in these tales. Tragedy has become the hallmark of the superhero.[53]

Deviating from the view of her contemporaries, *LA Weekly* film critic April Wolfe defended superhero movies in the 2017 documentary series *Robert Kirkman's Secret History of Comics*. "These characters aren't just kind of bland, basic, you know, paper thin people. They become so much more sophisticated, and that's, you know, one of the reasons why they're just so successful at the box office."[54] In December 2021, Tom Holland, who portrays Spider-Man in the MCU, struck back against Scorsese in an online interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* defending superhero movies as *art* and citing their massive budgets as the main difference between other films.

> You can ask [Martin] **Scorsese** [*sic*] "Would you want to make a Marvel movie?" I've made Marvel movies and I've also made movies that have been in the conversation in the world of the Oscars, and the *only* difference, really, is one is much more expensive than the other. But the way I break down the character, the way the director etches out the arc of the story and characters — it's all the same, just done on a different scale. So, I do think they're real art.
>
> When you're making *these* films, you know that, good or bad, millions of people will see them, whereas when you're making a small indie film, if it's not very good no one will watch it. So it comes with different levels of pressure. I mean, you can also ask **Benedict Cumberbatch** or **Robert Downey Jr.** or **Scarlett Johansson** [*sic*] — people who have made the kinds of movies that are "Oscar-worthy" and also made superhero movies — and they will tell you that they're the same, just on a different scale. And there's less Spandex in "Oscar movies."[55]

With top billing and deep subject matter beneath the special effects, superhero movies are not just superficial action movies.

Film critic Sean Egan also defended the superhero movie genre in his polemic essay. "**SCORSESE RECENTLY SLAMMED** [*sic*] the Marvel Cinematic Universe, asserting that its component films are sensationalist and empty. In fact, thoughtfulness and rationalism suffuse

---

[53] For agreement on these themes, see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 23, 155.
[54] Interview with April Wolfe in *Robert Kirkman's Secret History of Comics*, episode 4, "City of Heroes," directed by Rory Karpf, story editing by Corey Frost, aired November 25, 2017, on AMC. See *Robert Kirkman's Secret History of Comics*, directed by Rory Karpf (2017; n.p.: AMC Network Entertainment LLC, 2020), DVD.
[55] Scott Feinberg, "Oscars: 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' Team Plans Best Picture Push, Tom Holland Open to Hosting (Exclusive)," The Hollywood Reporter, December 24, 2021, 5:00 a.m., https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/spider-man-no-way-home-oscars-best-film-push-1235067052/.

every single one of them. In *Captain America: Civil War*, the vigilante nature of superheroes and costumed crime fighters is subject to profound questioning."[56] These movies offer timely social commentary on the post-9/11 world, especially the Patriot Act and mass surveillance. The reality of terrorism on American soil—specifically New York City—and the striking advancements in technology and artificial intelligence seems to enhance the suspense or at least provide a semblance of possibility, which emotionally draws in audiences.

Purist Scholars and Entertainment Industry Haters

Cultural theorist and comics scholar Scott Bukatman is one of the first to denounce the superhero movie genre and he used language nearly identical to Martin Scorsese's later complaint of "theme park entertainment." In *The Poetics of Slumberland*, Bukatman employs the same snobbish tone when he protests back in 2012 that the superhero movie is a blockbuster-crafted franchise devoid of narrative risk, too dependent on special effects, and not artsy enough. He even calls the 2001 movie *Spider-Man* "a thrill ride." As a fan of the original form of comics, he is less interested in the screen version. In addition, Bukatman rejects Blair Davis' thesis of comics and cinema as allies, viewing the big screen as an enemy to the aesthetic purity of comics. In other words, Bukatman appears to see the comic book movie as inauthentic, purity is supposedly lost through adaptation from one medium to another.

> The franchise comics are different: Marvel and DC will often use one title to hold down the "official" version of a character, while other titles can be aimed toward narrower audiences, and there are definite auteurs among comics writers. The remarkable range of the superhero comic finds no real analog in superhero films, which seem to be one of two things: light or dark.
>
> … For the comics fan in me, then, the superhero film generally feels like an impoverished version of superhero comics.

His added grumble against the popular form is that it does not have the refinement of an adult western (a strange defense because they are generally sexist and racist narratives) or a Hollywood musical regarding the relationship between motion and the body.

> In *Spider-Man 2*, by contrast, we have encountered "bodies" in "space"—phenomena generated, composited, or rendered by computer. Roger Ebert similarly complains of the first Spider-Man film: "Not even during Spidey's first experimental outings do we feel that flesh and blood are contending with gravity.

[56] Egan, "Sacred Cows: Martin Scorsese rinse and repeat self-indulgence," *The Critic*, no. 31 (October 2022), p. 99.

> Spidey soars too quickly through the skies of Manhattan; he's as convincing as Mighty Mouse." These films give us corporeality without a *corpus*.
>
> The superhero film, then, provides neither the psychological weight of the adult western nor the ineffable lightness of the musical. It speaks to nothing but its own kinetic effectiveness. By removing the body from space, it removes meaning—lived meaning—from the body.
>
> … Thus the superhero film is an exuberant, performative, embodied genre that, in many ways, inherits the giddy, sensual power of the musical, but without the, um *actual bodies*.[57]

Fellow comics scholar Jeet Heer offered a partially valid critique on the superhero movie explosion as too somber. In a 2015 article for *The New Republic*, Heer lamented that the dystopian turn and excessive violence violates the childlike essence that was once innate to the genre. Aiming stories at only adult audiences is a mistake, he argued. "Superheroes work best as all-ages entertainment because the roots of the genre are in children's daydreams: to be able to fly like Superman, to wield a lasso like Wonder Woman, to run like the Flash, or to leap from building to building like Spider-Man. A good all-ages superhero story works to satisfy the core desire that these emblematic heroes embody, while also providing a narrative hook that allows adult readers to enter the innocence of a fantasy world."[58] The blanket assessment is unfair, however. Not all superhero movies solely project a bleak atmosphere. The humorous R-rated Deadpool franchise demonstrates this difference. The earliest pictures were too campy while many of the contemporary visions, which merely mirror the economic and sociopolitical uneasiness of the post–9/11 world, are too dreary. A middle ground between ham and dystopia is needed. Michael E. Uslan takes a similar position following the success of his *Batman* reboot steered by director Christopher Nolan.

---

[57] Scott Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 200–205. For the earlier version, see Scott Bukatman, "Why I Hate Superhero Movies," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 118–122.

For Scott Bukatman's interest in comics, see Greg M. Smith et al., "Surveying the World of Contemporary Comics Scholarship," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Spring 2011), p. 142. In another essay, Bukatman falsely thinks that he celebrates movement within comics. See Scott Bukatman, "Sculpture, Stasis, the Comics, and Hellboy," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 40, no. 3 (Spring 2014), p. 104. See also Davis, *Movie Comics*, p. 249.

[58] Jeet Heer, "Stop Making Superhero Movies for Grown-ups," *The New Republic*, vol. 246, nos. 9–10 (September/October 2015), pp. 15–17. For a related commentary on comic books and their cinematic counterparts as dystopian or destruction porn, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 289; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 166; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 12, 80; Morrison, *Supergods*, pp. 409–410; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 252, 262, 292, 296–297.

> There's an important lesson to be learned from *The Dark Knight*. Unfortunately, not everyone in Hollywood gets it…sigh…. [*sic*] The movie's stunning success does NOT [*sic*] mean that all comic book superhero films must be dark, gritty, and violent and set in contemporary times. But that's what industry people are claiming.[59]

Enhancements in technology have fostered this so-called mode of "destruction porn" movies, which is larger than just the superhero genre. Case in point are modern monster movies like *Alien vs. Predator* and *Rampage*. The other part of Heer's complaint is also problematic. Storytelling—of any sort—is art, and artists draw on their experiences, emotions, psychological scars, cultural background and traditions, and other stories they have read, heard, and watched. In other words, a conjuring of consciousness, at both the individual and communal level. Comics creators are adults, not children, and as adult artists they designed their characters and crafted their stories from deep personal places, as any artist does, but shaped them for consumers, who were primarily children and subsequently soldiers in the early days of the industry.[60]

Film critics attacked the genre for "taking over" the box office and displacing other kinds of storytelling. In 2019, David Sims critiqued cinematic Comicland as big business but pinpointed the deluge as starting with DC and the Christopher Nolan *Batman* trilogy rather than Marvel and its record-breaking Avengers franchise. "Because they legitimized the superhero movie so much, there's this almost this ruinous effect that [Christopher] Nolan probably doesn't see coming where studios are just like: 'Great, this is it.' This is the backbone of our box office strategy from now on.'" Entertainment journalist Kim Masters also discussed the current state of the box office in the same CNN documentary *The Movies* and located the origin of today's superhero movie renaissance to the earlier Batman movies. "Batman begat all of what we see now. The idea of a comic book being made into a film, that's taken over the movie business." Masters' assessment, however, overlooked the importance of the original Superman movies in setting the current tone.[61] These opinions of superhero movies overrunning the box office and studio disinterest toward innovative filmmaking are emotionally driven, however.

Noise against the superhero movie genre can be heard from further afield than just scholars and film critics. For example, in August 2018, bohemian actor Ethan Hawke inveighed

---

[59] Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*, p. 231.
[60] See also Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, pp. 16–18, 23, 273.
[61] Interview with David Sims on *The Movies*, season 1, episode 6, "The 2000s," aired July 21, 2019, on CNN; interview with Kim Masters on *The Movies*, season 1, episode 4, "The Eighties," aired on July 7, 2019, on CNN.

against the premise that the Marvel movie *Logan* was *cinema*. Hawke blamed the studios for falsely marketing superhero movies as equal to any other production. He also described audiences as passive victims of this messaging. In Hawke's mind, viewers have no agency in deciding what they enjoy and should have no say in determining what counts as *cinema*, a process reserved for elites like himself. Although the character Wolverine wears mainly leather and not spandex in this feature or the other X-Men movies, Hawke, in a way, used its association with superheroes to dismiss the genre as cinema in costume.

> Now we have the problem that they tell us *Logan* is a great movie. Well, it's a great superhero movie. It still involves people in tights with metal coming out of their hands. It's not [Robert] Bresson. It's not [Ingmar] Bergman. But they talk about it like it is. I went to see *Logan* cause everyone was like, "This is a great movie" and I was like, "Really? No, this is a fine superhero movie." There's a difference but big business doesn't think there's a difference. Big business wants you to think that this is a great film because they wanna make money off of it.[62]

However, Hawke's diatribe seems hypocritical now that he is part of the Marvel universe. He played the villain Arthur Harrow in the first season of the Disney+ series *Moon Knight* despite his earlier caustic pronouncements of the genre.

Comedian Marc Maron activated the stigma by comparing Marvel comic book movie fans of the Avengers franchise to religious zealots. In his 2020 Netflix comedy special *End Times Fun* released on the tenth of March, Maron weaved a complex satirical narrative where Iron Man aided Jesus in ending the Apocalypse. Mocking the "religion" of both comics nerds and evangelical Christians, Jesus becomes part of the Avengers after saving the world. Basically, Maron maintained the opinion that too many "grown male nerd children" worship Marvel Comics' characters and movies in a cultlike fashion. He is ultimately commenting on the power of comic book culture. At the same time, Maron trumpeted the overblown notion that embrace of heroic fantasy by men means that we are living in an infantilized society. The message that grown men cannot enjoy superhero fantasy without stigmatization is still strong in certain circles. Expectations of masculinity are encoded in this view. Figures like James Bond or Jason Bourne are acceptable, but Superman or Iron Man are not. Social commentators like Maron are genuinely shocked at the widespread engagement and public celebration of this kind of fantasy.

---

[62] Rory O'Connor, "Ethan Hawke on Dreaming of a Fourth 'Before' Film, Why He's Not Having a McConaughey Moment, and the Necessity of Film Festivals," The Film Stage, August 23, 2018, https://thefilmstage.com/ethan-hawke-on-dreaming-of-a-fourth-before-film-why-hes-not-having-a-mcconaughey-moment-and-the-necessity-of-film-festivals/.

This level of interest in the superhero, nonetheless, has always existed among adults but is now no longer hidden. Detractors have great difficulty accepting the fact that extreme fans and everyday people enjoy the genre. While Maron expressed his disdain for superhero fandom, he still activated the fourth space of Comicland by playing with Iron Man and the Avengers as similar to religious saviors.[63] This is the conundrum of Comicland. When comedians mock the fantasy, they end up transporting the audience there.

Political satirist Bill Maher chided the unartistic direction of Hollywood that fall. Besides the disastrous effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on attendance, he blamed the larger decline on the onslaught of mindless action films and franchises over "creative" stories. During the editorial portion that concludes his show *Real Time with Bill Maher* on September 18, 2020, Maher wanted to know why, as "the industry is reeling," the studios are pushing "sequels, blockbusters, and comic book franchises," which he saw as leeches sucking out the "creativity and originality" of movies.[64] This viewpoint, nevertheless, ignores the power of studios over culture workers and the proliferation of streaming platforms, which have provided more innovative programming to viewers who cannot afford to or are unwilling to pay to attend the movie theater for the same old story that they can access later on via rental or television release. The reality is that the creativity and talent have transitioned to cable and subscription-based services. He slammed the superhero movie genre again on August 19, 2022, and deployed the infantilization facet of the comic book stigma. During his gushy interview with B.J. Novak, who wrote, directed, and acted in the film *Vengeance*, Maher declared: "We make so few adult movies these days. It's different than ones where characters have rays shooting out their fingers."[65] Maher enacted the same judgmental argumentation of *taste* on the eighteenth of November. During the "New Rules" segment, he articulated a metajoke that swapped superheroes for super glue and in the process pilloried the Marvel movie *Captain America: Civil War* as well as *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. "Someone has to make a movie where Super Glue fights Krazy Glue. And then they realize they should be friends and beat the shit out of Gorilla Glue. And then twenty-five sequels from a new movie studio that's all about the *Adhesive Cinematic Universe*." Besides throwing a jab at the MCU, the accompanying graphic deliberately parodied the Marvel Studios logo with the words

---

[63] Marc Maron, *End Times Fun*, director Lynn Shelton (2020), on Netflix. See also Cross, *Men to Boys* for the disparaging label of the "boy-man."
[64] *Real Time with Bill Maher*, season 18, episode 27, aired September 18, 2020, on HBO.
[65] *Real Time with Bill Maher*, season 20, episode 24, aired August 19, 2022, on HBO.

"Adhesive Studios." His critique of Comicland continued into the editorial part of the show. Maher highlighted progressive changes in American society and then punched down the superhero movie as the epitome of cultural decline. "One day we may stop making comic book movies."[66] It is hard for Maher to admit that many people enjoy these movies and falls victim to the perception problem of superheroes overrunning Hollywood.

Actor Emily Blunt also held an unfavorable view. On May 11, 2021, she commented on *The Howard Stern Show* that the superhero genre is currently being "exhausted" as the public is "inundated" through narratives in movies and on television.[67] Granted, the expanding trend of superhero media is leaning dangerously toward overproduction and is, according to popular author Glen Weldon, at risk of causing "spandex fatigue" among interested audiences.[68]

Director James Cameron felt it necessary to also chime in on the superhero movie genre. He is the most recent Hollywood figure to inveigh the fantasy under the scaffolding of adult moviemaking. In an interview published online on October 25, 2022, for *The New York Times*, Cameron argued that superheroes are teenagers, and the movies are inferior because they do not have children.

> When I look at these big, spectacular films — I'm looking at you, Marvel and DC — it doesn't matter how old the characters are, they all act like they're in college. They have relationships, but they really don't. They never hang up their spurs because of their kids. The things that really ground us and give us power, love, and a purpose? Those characters don't experience it, and I think that's not the way to make movies.[69]

There seems to be a sentiment among many of these critics that the silent generation and baby boomers outgrew the superhero, and they are irritated by the choice of subsequent generations to continue to embrace the genre beyond the period of childhood.

---

[66] *Real Time with Bill Maher*, season 20, episode 35, aired November 18, 2022, on HBO.
[67] Interview with Emily Blunt on *The Howard Stern Show*, aired May 11, 2021, on SiriusXM. See https://www.howardstern.com/news/2021/05/11/emily-blunt-dispels-fantastic-four-and-edge-of-tomorrow-2-rumors-and-reveals-how-a-studio-contract-kept-her-from-becoming-marvels-black-widow/.
[68] Weldon, *Superman*, p. 3.
[69] Kyle Buchanan, "James Cameron and the Cast of 'Avatar: The Way of Water' Hold Their Breath. The original was the biggest hit ever, but the sequel still took a long time to come together. How will it resonate in a different era of moviegoing?," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2022, updated November 5, 2022. See https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/movies/avatar-way-of-the-water-james-cameron.html. A version of the article appeared in the Arts and Leisure section for November 6, 2022. The ProQuest database will not have the digitized version by the Graduate School deadline for dissertation submission. Therefore, I am unable to provide the full citation.

Kevin Smith and Stan Lee's "True Believers"

Not all entertainment industry stars, nonetheless, sustain hostility toward comic book culture. Writer, director, and comic book fan Kevin Smith, who has written comics for DC, Marvel, and other publishers outside of his film career, has embraced this form of popular culture and even toyed with its pervasiveness. In the 2019 film *Jay and Silent Bob Reboot*, the recurring character Brodie Bruce, who is known for his long-winded diatribes on American culture, blasted Hollywood for its unoriginality and endless iterations of franchises, which prey on feelings of nostalgia. Bruce's speech was intentionally ironic given the fact that Smith enacted the same idea, albeit satirically, with his comic-book inspired View Askewniverse, the cinematic universe that arose out of his Clerks franchise. Pontificating to Jay and Silent Bob, he declares:

> Hollywood doesn't make sequels anymore. … Studios have given up on new ideas entirely in favor of building multimovie universes that breed brand-loyal customers from cradle to grave. So if you like *Harry Potter*, "cash-in-igus" you're getting ten fucking more. You like the *Fast and the Furious* flicks, were going to drive the franchise into the ground, bitch!

Jay, the verbal half of the comedic duo Jay and Silent Bob, interrupts Bruce and applies the logic toward Marvel franchises. "Ooh, you want another Marvel movie? Here we go." Bruce snaps, nonetheless.

> Hey man! Those Marvel movies are a triumph of cinema. I live on those Marvel movies. I live for those Marvel movies. I watch those Marvel movies more than I watch PornHub and I come twice as hard doing it.[70]

Kevin Smith's 1995 cult classic film *Mallrats*, the second movie in the View Askewniverse, established the fact that Brodie Bruce is a Marvel devotee and a Stan Lee fanboy. Bromance best describes Brodie's encounter with his idol in the mall. Lee appeared as a fictionalized version of himself in Smith's rendition of Comicland as they discussed superhero sexuality and relationships with women. In the movie *Jay and Silent Bob Reboot*, the audience learns that Bruce opened an upscale comic book store in the mall called Brodie's Secret Stash. It even featured a shrine to Lee. The near-religious altar takes Lee's salute to Marvel fans—"True Believer"—to an extreme level. His ribald rant above was a roar in defense of Marvel against

[70] *Jay and Silent Bob Reboot*, directed and written by Kevin Smith (Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate, 2019), DVD. See also the related commentary on the origin of the film franchise, Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 116.

cinema snobs like Martin Scorsese and Ethan Hawke. While Bruce bellows against other franchises in fashion similar to Bill Maher, he makes an exception for MCU movies.

Mallrats is most significant to the discussion here for its Batman cosplay and Superman wordplay. Best friends T.S. Quint and Brodie Bruce, the main characters of the film, plan to sabotage a dating game show occurring at the mall. They also enlist fellow mallrats and troublemakers Jay and his "hetero life mate" Silent Bob to their cause (actor Jason Mewes stars as an embellished version of himself while Kevin Smith plays an ironically tight-lipped version of himself.) A substory of the film is Silent Bob's obsession with the Dark Knight as well as the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* universes. He pretends to be an acrobatic Batman during the acts of sabotage. Perched on a structure almost in the rafters of the mall, he opens his trench coat to reveal a winglike glider, and briefly soars, thanks to a rope attached to his waist. Silent Bob hopes to dislodge a crossbeam pin that would supposedly destroy the stage. The plan, which fails, is aptly named "Operation Dark Knight." In addition to an all-black outfit, Silent Bob wears a pointy-eared black helmet to resemble Batman. His signature trench coat is also a representation of Batman's cape. Later in the film, mall security guards escort the conniving Quint and Bruce outside for the local police to arrest them on false charges. The security guards pretend to find contraband in their possession to ensure that the authorities would detain them until the game show ends. The bumbling duo rescues them. Jay clocks the lead security guard with a bat and howls the most memorable line from *Superman II*, "Come, son of Jor-El! Kneel before Zod!" (Besides imitating the supervillain General Zod, Jay also pretends to be Wolverine at the beginning of the film.) In response, several guards quickly chase after Jay. Silent Bob then emerges from nowhere, uses Spock's Vulcan nerve pinch, and frees the pair from their handcuffs. (Here *Mallrats* leverages *Star Trek* mythology for humor and later *Star Wars* when Silent Bob thinks that he mastered the Force by moving a videotape with his mind like a Jedi Knight.) Although masquerading as Batman, Silent Bob briefly seems to have the superpowers of Superman or Flash as he zooms past the security guards to Jay. The duo hides in a freight-loading alleyway until Silent Bob again transforms into Batman. He lifts his T-shirt to reveal Batman's utility belt and then like a magician, pulls a grappling gun from his trench coat. Silent Bob successfully shoots the grappling hook around a steel beam, attaches the gun to his utility belt, and elevates the duo about twenty feet in the air to prevent capture and arrest. This scene

seems to evoke the 1989 movie *Batman* when the Dark Knight saves love interest Vicki Vale.[71] In a self-referential act, Smith replicated the scene from *Mallrats* in his 2002 film *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*. This time the pair needs the grappling hook to help them break into an animal testing facility. In other Smith movies, the audience learned that Silent Bob and Jay are the inspiration for the superhero team Bluntman and Chronic, a marijuana-smoking parody of Batman and Robin.[72]

Kevin Smith repeatedly incorporates Comicland into his cinematic version of a comic book universe where fans expect superhero and science fiction references. His fictional characters enact cosplay and debate the nature of superheroes and the artistic merits of their media. By engaging with the fourth space of Comicland in his stories, Smith metaphorically breaks back through the fourth wall and, like Jerry Seinfeld on television and on stage, diminishes the stigma.

Once a Curse, Now a Blessing

The desire of leading actors to participate in the superhero movie universe is a recent phenomenon and shows a larger cultural shift. Saturation of the superhero fantasy into everyday life, the rise of geek culture as mainstream, and the inclusion of serious actors reversed the "Superman curse." Here, the interpretation of the curse is about killing careers and not causing actual harm as it is mainly associated with George Reeves' suicide—wildly imagined as murder by conspiracy theorists like Superman biographer Michael J. Hayde—and Christopher Reeves' unfortunate horseback riding incident that caused his paralysis and eventual death. Claude Brodesser of *Variety* and Superman biographers Bruce Scivally and Larry Tye unconvincingly expand the scope of the curse to include the death of radio show actor Superman Clayton "Bud" Collyer by circulation deficiency at age sixty one after returning to voice Superman in the 1966 animated series, the two nearly fatal car accidents of George Reeves, the car crash during the unaired series *Nancy Drew and Daughter* and later mental breakdown of Margot Kidder, the multiple sclerosis diagnosis of Richard Pryor, the failure to greenlight a 1990s Superman movie, and the financial woes and health issues that befell Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe

[71] *Mallrats*, directed and written by Kevin Smith (1995; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 1999), DVD.
[72] *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* (Dimension Collector's Series Edition), directed and written by Kevin Smith (Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc., 2002), DVD.

Shuster.[73] Jake Rossen mentions some of the same illnesses as well as several unfortunate events and close calls related to Superman productions but does not label them evidence of the curse.[74] Fellow biographer Tom De Haven, nonetheless, questions the entire idea of the Superman curse. Besides the two tragic examples of Reeves and Reeve, most actors never suffered any physical harm.

> A lot of different actors have played the character over the past seventy-plus years, including Bud Collyer, who played him more often and longer than anyone, on radio and several different animated cartoon series, and he did just fine, became a famously affable network game-show host, died at a ripe old age. Kirk Alyn from the Columbia serials claimed that he was typecast after playing Superman and couldn't get any roles. Unfortunate, but not tragic. Bob Holiday, who'd played the part on Broadway in *It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman*, gave up show business soon afterward to build vacation homes in the Poconos. No tragic curse there, either. Very successful business.

Rossen and Glen Weldon seem to agree with De Haven, who points out that "the only verifiable Superman curse is the one that Jerry Siegel swore in … 1975 against Warner Communications, the Salkinds, and his old archenemy Jack [S.] Liebowitz."[75] Decades of repressed rage over signing away the Superman copyright and failed litigation for its recovery erupted into a ten-page diatribe against the upcoming Superman movie for which he would see no royalties. An embittered Siegel snarled at his (perceived) mental and fiscal oppressors in his infamous October 1975 press release. "I, Jerry Siegel, the co-originator of SUPERMAN, put a curse on the SUPERMAN Movie! I hope it super-bombs."[76] However in practice, the curse is about typecasting, which is not limited to superhero roles. Typecasting affects actors who are associated with specific roles or specific genres. The best explanation of the supposed "Superman curse" lies in the larger Hollywood practice of typecasting in combination with lackluster acting, which led to uneventful careers for several of these actors.

---

[73] For mentions of the "Superman curse without enough depth as well as it leading to death, injury, or poverty, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 213, 288; Claude Brodesser, "Inside Move: Dark 'Superman' Curse?: Casting kryptonite surrounds role," Variety, March 16, 2003, 4:46pm PT, https://variety.com/2003/film/markets-festivals/inside-move-dark-superman-curse-1117882354/; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 108, 177, 179; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 152, 157, 241–242, 269–272; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, p. xiii. For the conspiracy theory purporting the murder of George Reeves, see Hayde, *Flight of Fantasy*, pp. 525–526.
[74] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 91, 115, 297–298 as well as 87, 98, 112, 123, 166, 179, 182–183, 288. Glen Weldon mentions the death of a stuntperson on *Superman: The Movie* and Larry Tye references a skull fracture to a camera operator during the filming of *Superman Returns*. See Weldon, *Superman*, p. 185; Tye, *Superman*, p. 286.
[75] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 100; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 163; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 184–185.
[76] Siegel, "For Immediate Release: Superman's Originator Puts 'Curse' On Superman Movie," p. 0.

Since Superman's expansion from the comics into multimedia, actors who participated in the child-focused versions of the fantasy dreaded stigmatization. Clayton "Bud" Collyer first expressed apprehension over taking the Superman role in fear of it destroying his radio career. A fact corroborated by his daughter to Bruce Scivally.[77] Stories proliferated of Superman actors Kirk Alyn and George Reeves trapped in tights, forever typecast and unable to escape Comicland no matter how hard they tried to dissociate themselves. Even though occasionally contradicting himself,[78] Alyn affirmed his struggle to secure acting work and shake his connection to Superman. He complains in his 1971 autobiography that the image of Superman lasted for ten years. "I was typed as Superman. Where do you go from there?" Later in life, Alyn embraced his newfound celebrity initiated by his fans now all grown up. But this did not stop Alyn from touting his plight, a key narrative to his identity. On June 15, 1981, ten years after publishing his autobiography, *People* reported Alyn as saying: "I was typed and couldn't get a job for a long time."[79] Authors mention his inconsistent feelings over the years, especially after becoming a minor celebrity on the lucrative convention circuit.[80] The cast and crew for the *Adventures of Superman* television show expressed conflicting views over how George Reeves felt about playing Superman. Jimmy Olsen actor Jack Larson, special effects manager Thol "Si" Simonson, actor-director Tommy Carr, and actor Robert Shayne shared memories of Reeves' professional disappointment while costar Phyllis Coates and friend Natividad Vacio disputed the idea of a dead-end career. Fiancée Lenore Lemmon told the *New York Post* on June 17, 1959, that "the Hollywood system" and typecasting caused his suicide. Admittedly, Reeves had other roles, but he was not regarded as a great actor or leading man before or after playing Superman.[81] Bruce

---

[77] Interview with Cynthia Collyer in Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 18. See also Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 2, 77; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 30. For an opposing view, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 87.

[78] For rejection of the idea of typecasting, see Alyn, *Job for Superman*, pp. 91, 96, 108–109 and the foreword that assigned no page number; interview with Kirk Alyn in Grossman, *Superman*, p. 19; interview with Noel Neill in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 25.

[79] Alyn, *A Job for Superman*, p. 5; "Chatter: The Amazing Shrinking Superman," *People*, vol. 15, no. 23, June 15, 1981, p. 132.

[80] For more on typecasting, see interview with Kirk Alyn as well as repetition by Gary Grossman in Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 20, 30, 39; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 21, 77; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 29, 37, 39–41, 44; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 101–102, 272; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 236. For mixed feelings, see William Stephens, "Film 'Superman' Flies on Wings of Nostalgia," *Los Angeles Times*, Late Final Edition, vol. 91, July 4, 1972, p. 5 (Part II); Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 37, 42–43.

[81] For typecasting, see interviews with Jack Larson, an unnamed source, Milton Frome, Thol "Si" Simonson, and Tommy Carr as well as claims by Gary Grossman in Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 42, 55–58, 151–152, 164; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 58; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 209, 328, 331; Tye,

Scivally poignantly writes, "Even in death, Reeves could not escape the typecasting; few of the headlines included his name, most said only that Superman was dead."[82] Historian Neil Harris first alludes to this point in 1990. "When George Reeves, one of Superman's portrayers, killed himself, headlines trumpeted that Superman had committed suicide."[83] Even Coates, the second onscreen Lois Lane but the first cast for television, shared the typecasting concern. She claimed to have left the *Adventures of Superman* after the first season fearing denial of future acting work.[84] Parallel claims were made by or attributed to Noel Neill, the television show replacement for the second season.[85] Larson similarly verbalized the anxiety of typecasting to *The New York Times* and Jake Rossen but informed Gary H. Grossman years earlier that he was "glad" that he appeared on the television show.[86] Mixed feelings clearly predominate among the performers connected to Superman from the 1940s and 1950s.

The next incarnation of Superman in the movies as a story for both children and adults, nevertheless, brought the same realities and concerns. Margot Kidder, who played Lois Lane,

---

Superman, pp. 133–134, 152, 154 (interview with Lenore Lemmon by Lee Saylor), 156. For rejection of the idea of typecasting, see interviews with Natividad Vacio and Phyllis Coates as well as claims by Gary Grossman in Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 56, 58.

Articles covering the suicide of George Reeves mentioned his anguish over typecasting and the inability to get acting work. They seem to ascertain the information from fiancée Lenore Lemmon. See Jack Goulding, "TV Superman Ends His Life After a Party," *New York Post*, Bronx Home Edition, vol. 158, no. 165, June 16, 1959, p. 2; Earl Wilson, "TV Superman's Fiancee Charges Hollywood 'System' Killed Him," *New York Post*, Bronx Home Edition, vol. 158, no. 166, June 17, 1959, pp. 3, 24; "George Reeves, TV Superman, Commits Suicide at Coast Home," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 108, no. 37,034, June 17, 1959, p. 40; "TV's 'Superman' Kills Himself," *New York Herald Tribune*, Late City Edition, vol. 119, no. 41,104, June 17, 1959, p. 6; "Superman Is Suicide; Fiancee Called Shot," *Daily News* (New York, NY), Multiple Editions, vol. 40, no. 306, June 17, 1959, p. c3 or 3; "Superman Kills Himself; Fiancee Called the Shot," *Daily News* (New York, NY), 5-Star Final Edition, vol. 40, no. 306, June 17, 1959, p. 5; "Human Weakness Killed 'Superman,'" *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), Final Edition, vol. 19, no. 243, June 17, 1959, pp. 1, 5; "Reeves, 'Superman' on TV, Kills Self 3 Days Before Scheduled Marriage," *The Washington Post and Herald*, Final Edition, yr. 82, no. 194, June 17, 1959, pp. A1, A3; "Superman Kills Self as Fiancee Predicts Suicide," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Final City Edition, vol. 260, no. 168, June 17, 1959, p. 3; Kaspar Monahan, "End Of Superman," *The Pittsburgh Press*, Final Edition, vol. 75, no. 356, June 17, 1959, p. 21; "TV Superman Ends His Life With Bullet," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3-Star Sports Final, vol. 118, no. 144, June 17, 1959, p. 13 (Part 3); "Reeves, Superman of TV, Kills Himself in His Home," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 A.M. Final Edition, vol. 78, June 17, 1959, pp. 2, 24 (Part I). See also interview with Jack Larson in Howard Rosenberg, "A Visit With Lois and Jimmy," *Los Angeles Times*, Morning Final Edition, February 16, 1979, p. 32 (Part IV)

[82] Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 58.

[83] Harris, *Cultural Excursions*, p. 248.

[84] Grossman, *Superman*, p. 61; Tye, *Superman*, p. 146.

[85] Rosenberg, "A Visit With Lois and Jimmy," *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 1979, p. 32 (Part IV); Tye, *Superman*, p. xii; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 236.

[86] Interview with Jack Larson in Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 20, 169; Anthony Tommasini, "Golly, Jimmy Olsen Writes Librettos!," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 147, no. 51,158, May 15, 1998, p. E24; interview with Jack Larson as well as repetition by Jake Rossen in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 27, 29, 40, 42. See also Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 60; Tye, *Superman*, p. xii; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 236.

experienced similar marginalization as her predecessors.[87] In his memoir, Christopher Reeve worries that he too would experience the association in the press as his predecessor had. "Back in the Superman years, I always used to joke about needing to be very careful because I didn't want to read a headline in the *New York Post* like 'Superman Hit by Bus.'"[88] Although trepidatious of being typecast as Superman, Reeve did have an ongoing acting career in between and after the four-movie franchise.[89] Fan Suzanne Johnston contested the claim to a local journalist for the November 28, 1994, edition of the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*. The paper posed the question, "What celebrity souvenir do you wish you had?" to people in Aptos Village, California. Johnston responded, "I would like to own Christopher Reeves' cape. I really admire how he broke out of that role and tried to play more serious roles."[90] So did ex-partner Gae Exton, who refuted the typecasting label to Larry Tye.[91] Former *Superman II* actor Jack O'Halloran, nonetheless, correctly pointed out that for Reeve everything but Superman, which rocketed him to stardom, was secondary or forgettable.

> He thought he was a box office superstar. What did he do other than Superman? He did one nice little picture, *Somewhere in Time*. But he's as stiff as a board in that. He never worked again with [Gene] Hackman or anybody. That speaks for itself, doesn't it?

While an accurate assessment overall, O'Halloran problematically hinged his argument on a single cinematic performance by Reeve and ignored his other roles. The tone and language O'Halloran used in an interview with Rossen indicated an extreme dislike of Reeve.[92] Tye agrees that Reeve did not become a box office star. "He was in a series of films after *Superman* … but … never with as much notice as when he was playing the Man of Steel."[93] Reeve himself admits to his everlasting association with Superman by the public in his autobiography. "Although I had made several more 'serious' movies, such as *The Remains of the Day*, it was clearly my portrayal of Superman that the public had taken to. I knew this role had a unique resonance and had won a

---

[87] Tye, *Superman*, p. 271.
[88] Christopher Reeve, *Still Me* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1999), p. 43.
[89] For typecasting, see interview with Jeannot Szwarc as well as claims by Jake Rossen in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 124, 148, 167; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 200, 271. For Christopher Reeve's career beyond Superman, see, for example, Aljean Harmetz, "Reeve Shaking Off His Superman Image," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 128, no. 44,315, August 20, 1979, p. C13; Reeve, *Still Me*, esp. pp. 199–200, 227; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 91, 99, 103, 107.
[90] Eliah Perona, "On the street: What celebrity souvenir do you wish you had?," *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* (Santa Cruz, CA), vol. 138, no. 328, November 28, 1994, p. A-2.
[91] Interview with Gae Exton in Tye, *Superman*, p. 241.
[92] Interview with Jack O'Halloran in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 83–84, 112–113.
[93] Tye, *Superman*, p. 241.

great deal of affection for me, which I had always been grateful."[94] Public embrace of Reeve as Superman continued after he became paraplegic.

> During my stay in Hollywood I entered hotels and buildings through garages, kitchens, and service elevators, and met cooks, waiters, chambermaids, and maintenance crews. Many of them said they were praying for me. Others looked me right in the eye and said, "We love you, Superman. You're our hero." At first I couldn't believe they meant it. Then I realized that they were looking past the chair and honoring me for a role that obviously had real meaning for them. I didn't feel patronized in any way. Clearly a part I had played twenty years before was still valued. The fact that I was in a wheelchair, unable to move below my shoulders, and dependent on the support of others for almost every aspect of my daily life had not diminished the fact that I was—and always would be—their Superman.[95]

These words identify the bond that he reactivated with the public by playing Superman as gentlemanly hero, almost regal.

Superman affected subsequent generations of writers and actors. Stan Berkowitz, scriptwriter for the 1980s television show *Superboy*, told Larry Tye that having the show on his resume killed his career. He became pigeonholed as a children's writer.[96] Season one star John Haymes Newton, according to Jake Rossen, "expunged *Superboy* from his resume, fearing the connection would be detrimental to his career."[97] *Lois & Clark* star Dean Cain likewise has been generally unsuccessful in roles beyond Superman. He complained to *People* in the October 9, 2000, issue about the prejudice of casting directors and his inability to transition to the big screen. "Those guys, they hear you played Superman—and I guarantee you, 90 percent of them have never seen *Superman*—and they're like, 'We don't want him.'"[98] Speaking to Tye a decade later, Cain laughed at the curse and clumsily compared the idea of fearing being typecast to fearing becoming President because you will never get to work again.[99] Some might reference Cain's connection to *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* as a marker of success but hosting that show barely qualified as acting. Although clearly embellishing, *Lois & Clark* producer Bryce Zabel recalled

---

[94] Reeve, *Still Me*, p. 121.
[95] Reeve, *Still Me*, p. 191.
[96] Tye, *Superman*, pp. 239–240.
[97] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 180.
[98] Jason Lynch, "Chatter: Clark Can't," *People*, vol. 54, no. 15, October 9, 2000, p. 168. For a secondary source mention, see Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 133. On page 127, Scivally cites another article with the same sentiment. The source, which I do not own, is Rick Martin, "Super Chat," *TV Guide*, November 6, 1993, p. 29.
[99] Interview with Dean Cain in Tye, *Superman*, pp. 257–258.

to Jake Rossen that Cain possessed a remarkable range.[100] The career of *Smallville* star Tom Welling appears to have flatlined as well. While Welling feared being typecast, he supposedly auditioned for the cinematic role of the Man of Steel when director Brett Ratner was connected to the revolving door project and returned to the role for a brief television appearance in the CW Arrowverse.[101] Paul Walker reportedly turned down the role because of typecasting fears.[102] Actor Brandon Routh, who landed the leading role in *Superman Returns* directed by Bryan Singer, seems trapped in the superhero genre. Most recently, Routh appeared as the Atom, a role better suited to his comedic style, on the television show *DC's Legends of Tomorrow*. He also reprised the role of Superman (hailing from Earth-96) in the Crisis on Infinite Earths Arrowverse crossover event.

But not all actors or writers struggled following an association with Superman. Teri Hatcher, for instance, went on to star in the prime-time soapy drama *Desperate Housewives*. She is arguably the best Lois Lane for two reasons. Hatcher's tough reporter interpretation closely resembled the depiction of the character in the early comics and sex appeal, unlike the actors before and after her, differentiated her as a believable love interest for Clark Kent/Superman. "She's the best Lois Lane, really, ever." Phyllis Coates shared this opinion to the *Los Angeles Times* on April 5, 1994.[103] America Online (AOL), the former corporate owner of the Superman property, turned the actor into a pinup girl. *People* covered the carnal attention on the nineteenth of December that year. "Speeding to a record of sorts, eight promotional pictures of **Teri Hatcher,** [*sic*] 30, on America Online have been snapped up for viewing by subscribers some 12,000 times. The sauciest, in which she wears nothing but an off-the-shoulder Superman cape (left), scored over 4,500 hits alone." The article concluded with a concerned statement by Hatcher. "Still, she is flattered by the attention: 'I hope it's not one guy over and over again. Or my parents.'"[104] Hatcher likely achieved greater success after *Lois & Clark* simply because she is a better actor than former costar Dean Cain. The same can be said for Justin Hartley over Tom

---

[100] Interview with Bryce Zabel as well as claims by Jake Rossen in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 194, 198, 205. For Dean Cain's career beyond Superman, see De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 185.
[101] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 261, 273; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 144; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 281.
[102] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 274.
[103] For similar opinions on Teri Hatcher, see Rip Rense, "Look! Up on the Screen! It's . . . Lois Lane?," *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1994, p. F9 (Calendar Section); Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 195, 197, 201, 205, 299; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 122, 125, 128; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 22, 257; interview with Deborah Joy LeVine and the opinion of Larry Tye in Tye, *Superman*, pp. 252–253.
[104] J.D. Reed, "Cyberchat: Lois Lane: Download Pinup," *People*, vol. 42, no. 25, December 19, 1994, p. 35.

Welling. Hartley played Oliver Queen, aka the Green Arrow, on *Smallville* and progressed to a leading role on the wildly popular drama *This Is Us*. The superhero genre is a stepping-stone for talented actors and a path to enduring fame and the convention circuit for less talented ones.[105]

Times have changed. The Superman curse, which should have been named the superhero curse, is dead and buried. Fantastic characters are now acceptable to a degree previously unimaginable, and playing one on television or the silver screen does not automatically evoke derision by critics, viewers, or fellow performers. The shadow of the superhero no longer prevents talented actors from exploring other roles beyond make-believe. In contrast to the career nosedives of Adam West and Burt Ward, who played Batman and Robin on television and film from 1966 to 1968, taking part in a superhero movie franchise is often rocket fuel for a career: it is lifegiving and a golden ticket to cross over into other cinematic arenas.[106]

Playing a superhero is now a marker of success and ensures financial gain. Take the example of Robert Downey Jr. Before playing the Marvel superhero Iron Man, he was an exceptionally talented but forgotten method actor featured in Tinseltown tabloids for drug use and debauchery. Being cast as the snarky playboy and military industrial complex weapons manufacturer Tony Stark for the 2008 movie *Iron Man* resurrected his acting career. Although his performance as Charlie Chaplin was magnificent and earned an Oscar nomination, Downey Jr. will forever be remembered as Iron Man, and that is not a detriment. By playing the character of Iron Man, Downey Jr. broke the superhero curse and inspired a multimovie universe. The triangular relationship between Downey Jr., Iron Man, and Marvel is the key component. Iron Man turned his career around and saved him in a way; they needed each other. To build its cinematic brand, Marvel demanded a strong actor unafraid of being typecast for its first in-house production as Marvel Studios. The *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* the movies produced by Sony and Twentieth Century Fox reignited the superhero craze in the early 2000s,[107] but it was Downey Jr.—not Tobey Maguire nor Hugh Jackman—who launched Marvel into the cultural stratosphere and sparked the MCU. It is correct that Christian Bale helped to invigorate the superhero movie genre in 2005 by playing Batman in the Christopher Nolan trilogy. Already a strong actor and a rising star, a bad performance as Batman probably would not have destroyed Bale's career or

---

[105] Leslie Goldberg, "Stars Getting Rich Off Fan Conventions: How to Take Home 'Garbage Bags Full of $20s,'" The Hollywood Reporter, September 29, 2016, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/stars-getting-rich-fan-conventions-933062/.
[106] For Adam West and Burt Ward as typecast, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 77.
[107] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 270.

typecast him as a superhero—he was not likely to be subject to it, just as Gene Hackman and Marlon Brando were not for their supporting roles in the *Superman* franchise or Jack Nicholson in *Batman*. Most importantly, Bale's Batman did not initiate the DC Extended Universe (DCEU). This is why he too did not break the curse. Downey Jr. is responsible for the current cinematic world of superheroes enacted by both companies.

This cultural change of normalizing superheroes has seeped into the story worlds of sitcoms and films with fictional characters chasing these roles. In 2005 and 2006, the HBO series *Entourage* broadcasted the significance of securing a superhero franchise during its revival with the early *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* trilogies. In seasons two and three, the character Vincent Chase lands the leading role in *Aquaman*, a fictitious movie written by Andrew Kevin Walker, directed by James Cameron, and produced by Warner Bros. Chase was at first reluctant because of potential typecasting and participating in a campy franchise like the studio-crafted *Batman Forever* and *Batman & Robin* under the direction of Joel Schumacher, but his agent Ari Gold convinces him to accept the role. Excited about the part, Gold declares: "It's like *Spider-Man* underwater." Diegetically, *Aquaman* ended up beating *Spider-Man*, the highest grossing picture at the time, at the box office for an opening weekend. According to the episode, while *Spider-Man* made $114 million (the actual weekend opening gross of the movie in 2002), the studio projected a final number of $116 million for *Aquaman*. The marketing frenzy depicted in the show included announcing *Aquaman* at Comic-Con International in San Diego as well as the creation of a video game and a rollercoaster at Six Flags Magic Mountain.[108]

The Showtime series *Episodes*, a behind-the-scenes exaggeration of Hollywood life and the struggle of a fading actor to remain a celebrity, replicated this pattern in 2017. Matt Le Blanc,

---

[108] See *Entourage*, season 2, episode 1, "Boys Are Back in Town," directed Julian Farino, written by Doug Ellin, aired June 5, 2005, on HBO; *Entourage*, season 2, episode 2, "My Maserati Does 185," directed David Nutter, written by Doug Ellin, aired June 12, 2005, on HBO; *Entourage*, season 2, episode 3, "Aquamansion," directed Julian Farino, written by Doug Ellin, aired June 19, 2005, on HBO; *Entourage*, season 2, episode 8, "Oh, Mandy," directed Daniel Attais, written by Doug Ellin, aired July 24, 2005, on HBO; *Entourage*, season 3A, episode 1, "Aquamom," directed Julian Farino, written by Doug Ellin, aired June 11, 2006, on HBO; *Entourage*, season 3A, episode 2, "One Day in the Valley," directed Julian Farino, written by Doug Ellin, aired June 18, 2006, on HBO; *Entourage*, season 3A, episode 3, "Dominated," directed Julian Farino, written by Doug Ellin, aired June 25, 2006, on HBO.

For the monetary figure and other references to *Spider-Man*, see Neal Gabler, "American Dreams: Inside Every Superhero Lurks a Nerd," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 151, no. 52,116, May 12, 2002, p. 3 (Week in Review, Section 4); Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 259. Larry Tye lists the total gross figure for the *Spider-Man* movie as $822 million. Tye, *Superman*, p. 287.

For a critique of the Joel Schumacher movies *Batman Forever* and *Batman & Robin*, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 211, 219, 223, 226, 231, 250.

who starred as a fictionalized version of himself in the sitcom, desires a role in a superhero franchise. When Le Blanc's character's father dies, he asks his agent Roger Riskin to take care of the arrangements. Le Blanc needs a funeral home to pick up the body. Riskin does not hesitate to help and then asks if there is anything else that he could do for Le Blanc. In a demanding tone, Le Blanc responds: "Yeah, get me a Marvel franchise." Riskin snidely laughs as if the idea was unthinkable for this client and then says dismissively, "One thing at a time."[109]

A similar scenario transpired in the 2017 film *Killing Hasselhoff*. David Hasselhoff, who played a fictionalized version of himself, barks at his agent Barry [no last name], played by Jon Lovitz, to find studio support for his superhero musical movie idea. Chris Kim, played by Ken Jeong, spies on their conversation with a parabolic microphone while hiding in the nearby bushes. The exchange is filled with superhero genre humor and a crude sexual reference.

> Barry: David Hasselhoff! I come bearing wonderful gifts.
>
> Chris Kim: Is your manager like the Penguin or something?
>
> Barry: Eight fantastic scripts.
>
> David Hasselhoff: Not interested. What, you didn't get my email last night?
>
> Barry: Uh, yeah, I got it. Are you drinking again?
>
> David Hasselhoff: No, no. No.
>
> Barry: So you were thinking clearly when you sent me that email that said two words, "superhero musical"?
>
> David Hasselhoff: Crystal.
>
> Chris Kim: [Whispering] Superhero musical?
>
> David Hasselhoff: Let's go down the list. First of all, I have the voice of an angel. I look phenomenal in tights. I'm stronger than most men. Even though I don't have superhuman strength per se, I am—.
>
> Barry: All right. Let's just not forget something. You're David Hasselhoff. You're not Christian Bale.
>
> David Hasselhoff: Whoa, whoa, whoa.
>
> Barry: Let me finish. Christian Bale wishes he was David Hasselhoff.

---

[109] *Episodes: Season 5*, episode 5, directed by Jeffrey Klarik, written by David Crane and Jeffrey Klarik (n.p.: Showtime Networks Inc, 2018), DVD. "Episode Five" aired September 24, 2017 on Showtime.

> David Hasselhoff: Thank you. Come on. I'm super famous all over the world. I mean, hell, in half of Europe I *am* a goddam superhero. … Look, if it's a rights issue, we could create our own superhero. Like, um, Electric Man. He could shoot lightning bolts out of his dick. Phew, phew, phew [jostling his groin and making sound effects]. Ha-ha.

The superhero musical motif evolves in Hasselhoff's mind with his character becoming a sword wielding superhero. He tells Barry about the new character development as he severs watermelons thrown at him in midair by a woman in a bikini.

> Barry: David, do I have to even ask?
>
> David Hasselhoff: My superhero is a master of swords. A swordsmith. Is that a word? Swordsmith?
>
> Barry: There is no superhero musical.
>
> David Hasselhoff: Maybe not now, but there will be. [Slicing watermelons with a sword] Pull! Pull!
>
> Barry: There's no superhero musical.

Toward the end of the film, Hasselhoff enacts his superhero creation as he defends himself with a sword from the gun-toting gay hitman named Redix, played by character actor Colton Dunn. And keeping with the established motif, the sexual association with superheroes continues.

> Redix: You pulled a ninja sword off the wall, dared a black man with a gun to shoot you in the face, then you deflected the bullet like a fly! I ain't gonna lie. That's the sexiest shit I seen in my life.
>
> Chris Kim: [Running into the bedroom] Don't shoot him, please!
>
> Redix: Shoot him? I'm about to suck Michael Knight's dick!
>
> David Hasselhoff: [Grunts in disgust]
>
> Redix: Ya'll should have seen the shit I just saw! It was like MacGyver fucked Batman with Iron Man's dick! I quit.
>
> David Hasselhoff: Barry! You hear that? Batman. Superhero.
>
> Redix: And this n**** could sing.

> David Hasselhoff: The musical! I'm telling you, I know what I'm talking about! Get on the phone, call the heads of all the studios. This is gonna be huge![110]

Killing Hasselhoff is one of the most layered examples in film of playing with the superhero and its conventional image of white heterosexual masculinity. The three levels are that Hasselhoff recognizes the power of the superhero movie renaissance, Kim insults Hasselhoff's boss as a supervillain, and Redix inverts the sexual and racial identity of the fanboy from straight and white to the more inclusive gay and black.

Actors in real life chase the idea or even actively campaign to participate in a superhero franchise. Ryan Reynolds is a prime example. He spent ten years fighting to make an authentic version of the raunchy and sarcastic antihero Deadpool, despite, or even perhaps because of, his leading role in the box office and critical bomb *Green Lantern*. The character's proclivity for breaking the fourth wall definitely enhanced the audience connection to the superhero universe and the surreal dynamic of Comicland. It is more intimate and powerful to have a character speak directly to the audience through the screen than a comic book page. The auditory and spatial elements of the theater intensify the experience of Comicland, and breaking the fourth wall adds another layer of intimacy. Twentieth Century Fox, who owns the movie rights to the X-Men universe that includes Deadpool, finally greenlit the unconventional superhero movie, albeit with a limited budget but more creative freedom, only after fans clamored for it. Two minutes of test footage leaked online in late July 2014 cut the red tape at the studio. Reynolds denied that he or anyone directly connected to the project leaked the footage but was elated by the result. He attributed the 2016 release of *Deadpool*, which simultaneously celebrates and satirizes the genre, to fan enthusiasm on social media. The picture is fun and funny. Its perversity and self-deprecating tone encapsulates the essence of adult Comicland and echoes the expressions on television covered in the previous chapter.[111]

In 2018, John Krasinski, who had previously auditioned for the MCU role of Captain America, reportedly expressed interest in playing Reed Richards, aka Mister Fantastic, in a Fantastic Four reboot. He responded to and encouraged his fan casting as Mister Fantastic on

---

[110] *Killing Hasselhoff*, directed by Darren Grant, written by Peter Hoare (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2017), DVD. The film that streamed on Netflix had slightly different dialogue and must be an edited version.
[111] Josh Rottenberg, "'Deadpool lives': The raw, raunchy superhero is like nothing you've seen before," *Los Angeles Times*, West Edition, February 11, 2016, pp. E1, E4 (Calendar Section). See also Josh Rottenberg, "Ryan Reynolds on putting blood, sweat and 10 years of his life into 'Deadpool,'" LATimes, February 12, 2016, 2:15 PM PT, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/herocomplex/la-et-hc-ryan-reynolds-deadpool-20160209-story.html.

Twitter.[112] And the circle was completed by the new design of Reed Richards in the actor's likeness in the comics the next year as well as his portrayal of the character from Earth-838 in *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*.[113] On May 11, 2021, Krasinski's wife Emily Blunt squashed the rumors of her joining her husband as Sue Richards, aka The Invisible Woman, on *The Howard Stern Show*. Blunt explained that the hype was actually the work of fan casting, they never spoke to anyone at Marvel. She said that superheroes are not for her as an actor.[114] Nevertheless, talk show host Jimmy Fallon reignited the rumors on July 29, 2022, in response to the recent Comic-Con announcement of a Fantastic Four reboot and Krasinski's special appearance in the Doctor Strange sequel. Krasinski, the guest on the show, did not confirm or deny the possibility, claiming that he did not know his future with the MCU.[115]

Black comedian and actor Tiffany Haddish rejected Emily Blunt's sentiment the previous year by requesting a superhero role in the Wonder Woman franchise. Haddish shared an unedited version of her intended acceptance speech for the 2020 Emmy's on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* that pleaded for the role of Nubia, Wonder Woman's sister. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing protocols, the Emmy's were mainly virtual, forcing many nominees to submit a prerecorded video even if they lost as Haddish did. During her speech, Haddish wore the Wonder Woman tiara and if speaking directly to DC Comics said:

> I want to also point that I know you see that I am wearing this Wonder Woman thing. And you know why? Because [in the] 1976–1978 issue of *Wonder Woman* she had a black sister, her name was Nubia. I would like to play her.[116]

Renowned actor Salma Hayek informed late night talk show host Seth Myers on June 21, 2021, at her amazement in being cast as a superhero at her age for the upcoming Marvel movie *Eternals*. Hayek then illustrated the unmatched power of superhero franchises. Marvel made her

---

[112] *Conan*, season 6, episode 121, aired August 23, 2016, on TBS. See Team Coco, "Chris Hemsworth's Hot Body Kept John Krasinski From Being Captain America | CONAN on TBS," August 23, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5B_hr45FtZY. See also Matt McGloin, "John Krasinski Reacts To Fantastic Four Fan Casting," January 12, 2018, 10:04 PM, https://cosmicbook.news/john-krasinski-reacts-fantastic-four-fan-casting.

[113] Cesar Galvan, "Reed Richards Looks A Lot Like John Krasinski In Latest 'Fantastic Four' Comic," May 8, 2019, https://heroichollywood.com/fantastic-four-marvel-john-krasinski/.

[114] Interview with Emily Blunt on *The Howard Stern Show*, aired May 11, 2021, on SiriusXM. See https://www.howardstern.com/news/2021/05/11/emily-blunt-dispels-fantastic-four-and-edge-of-tomorrow-2-rumors-and-reveals-how-a-studio-contract-kept-her-from-becoming-marvels-black-widow/.

[115] *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, season 9, episode 171, aired July 26, 2022, on NBC.

[116] See the interview with Tiffany Haddish on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, season 18, episode 1, aired September 21, 2020, on ABC. Truncated as "Tiffany Haddish Debuts Her Rejected Emmy Speech," https://www.ellentube.com/video/tiffany-haddish-debuts-her-rejected-emmy-speech.html. For the full interview, see TheEllenShow, "Why Tiffany Haddish Spends a Lot of Time at Boyfriend Common's Home," September 21, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEAAIeqeRTM.

sign a contract not to reveal her involvement to anyone, including immediate family. Hayek wanted to shout the news from the rooftops, which made the silence "torturous." The contract also stipulated that she sign without ever seeing a script. No other genre commands that kind obedience from Hollywood's leading actors.[117]

The financial motivation in seeking a superhero role is a leading factor. The YouTube channel Screen Rant summarized the current state of Hollywood in April 2018, correctly identifying the monetary dimension and Robert Downey Jr. as the poster child for the boom.

> What actor in their right mind wouldn't want to play a superhero in a movie? You get to see yourself do superhuman stuff on the big screen, save the day. Not to mention you'll make a whole lot of money doing it, especially if you're Robert Downey Jr. So it's really no surprise that some actors have gone out there to straight up announce that they're interested in doing a superhero movie is the next step in their career.[118]

Such eagerness to take part in a superhero franchise took time. Television's presentation of Superman as juvenile in the 1950s and Batman and Robin as campy in the 1960s stigmatized the genre by reinforcing the conventional views. The failure of Adam West and Burt Ward to transition beyond their capes exacerbated concerns and seemed to confirm the would-be fate of George Reeves. The tide began to turn in 1978 with *Superman: The Movie*. Hefty monetary compensation and a script written by Mario Puzo with the accompanying publicity storm began to dispel typecasting fears around participating in superhero entertainment. Marlon Brando accepted the brief role of Superman's Kryptonian father Jor-El just for the record-breaking paycheck. Having these two names associated with the picture facilitated positive chatter.[119] Besides the lucrative element, today's actors, in contrast to Brando, genuinely desire to be part of

---

[117] See the interview with Salma Hayek on *Late Night with Seth Myers*, season 8, episode 125, aired June 21, 2021, on NBC. A clip of the interview is available at https://www.nbc.com/late-night-with-seth-meyers/video/salma-hayek-was-tortured-by-her-marvel-secret/4383794 or Late Night With Seth Myers, "Salma Hayek Was Tortured by Her Marvel Secret," June 22, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmhdUgL1dJ0.

[118] Screen Rant, "5 Actors Who Desperately Want To Play Superhero Roles," April 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0wsB4tJfao.

[119] See "People," *Time*, vol. 108, no. 10, September 6, 1976, p. 71; Maureen Orth, "Entertainment: Everybody Needs an Agent," *Newsweek*, vol. 89, no. 17, April 25, 1977, p. 91; "Newsmakers," *Newsweek*, vol. 89, no. 21, May 23, 1977, p. 64; "Show Business: Onward and Upward with the New Superman," *Time*, vol. 110, no. 5, August 1, 1977, p. 64; "Screen '78: Chevy & Goldie Entangle, Ali Keeps on Trucking, And We'll Have 'Apocalypse'—Later" *People*, vol. 8, no. 26, December 26, 1977, p. 143; "Inside Hollywood: Going For The Big Score," *Newsweek*, vol. 91, no. 7, February 13, 1978, p. 73; "Here Comes Superman!!!," *Time*, vol. 112, no. 22, November 27, 1978, p. 60; "It's Stardom, Not Flying, That Christopher Reeve Fears: the Last Superman Shot Himself," *People*, vol. 11, no. 1, January 8, 1979, p. 60; Michael Frank, "Marlon Brando: *Best Actor for* <u>*On the Waterfront*</u> *and* <u>*The Godfather*</u> *in His Canyon House*," *Architectural Digest*, vol. 47, no. 4 (April 1990), p. 234; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 66, 82, 86, 104, 106, 120; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 181, 188, 200.

a superhero movie franchise. Yet, there is one known exception to the pattern. Back in 1949, eighteen-year-old Don Sinnott vandalized a Los Angeles theater to get a part in the upcoming movie serial *Atom Man vs. Superman*. According to *Time*, Sinnott "smashed seats, uprooted radiators and unhinged doors … to prove that he deserved a part in a new Superman film."[120]

Bending Reality and "Saving" the Real World

Most of the evidence covered is this project shows how the public moved into the fantasy space of Comicland, but its symbols also infiltrate our world. Consider the fact that Marvel superhero actors are leveraging their power through name recognition and the image of their characters to induce real-world change. In other words, fictional superheroes are now trying to save the real world. Robert Downey Jr. launched a sustainable tech venture called Footprint Coalition, and it has received considerable international media coverage. The company and its green initiatives seem to sustain clout in the public mind because of his association with the tech genius Tony Stark and his alter ego Iron Man. Chris Evans is similarly trying to utilize his role of Captain America to rebuild political common ground. The goal of his company A Starting Point is to foster meaningful civic engagement to counteract the current tribalism of the two-party political system. Captain America is a unique character because he enables conservatives and liberals alike to claim him as representative of their values. Adorned in the American flag and resistant to governmental oversight in the movie *Captain America: Civil War* conservatives see the Sentinel of Liberty as one of their own. The superhero's creation during World War II and crusade against Hitler and Nazism—as well as the thinly veiled depiction of Watergate in the Secret Empire story line in the 1970s—speaks to liberals. Evans is clearly trying to exploit this psychopolitical paradox. However, given Evans' political naiveté as well as his established support for liberal causes and animosity toward former President Donald J. Trump, the initiative seems doomed from the start. Marc Ruffalo, known for his portrayal of scientist Bruce Banner, who transforms into the explosive antihero the Incredible Hulk because of gamma ray radiation exposure, cofounded an organization called The Solutions Project for environmental activism. What does an actor who plays a scientist transformed by radioactivity know about going *green*? Like his costars, Ruffalo is attempting to take advantage of playing Dr. Bruce Banner—including

[120] "National Affairs: Manners & Morals: Americana," *Time*, vol. 53, no. 13, March 28, 1949, p. 23. For secondary source mention, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 20.

the Smart Hulk iteration of the character in *Avengers Endgame*, the end credits scene in *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, and the Disney+ series *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law*—to link himself in the public imagination with scientific expertise and environmentalism. Ruffalo even tapped fellow Avenger Don Cheadle, who portrays the character War Machine, to serve on the board of directors. The power of celebrity for those who play fictional heroes translates into the possibility for actual change.[121] Comicland has grown beyond its kiddie dimension through the real-life appearances of Superman at the 1940 New York World's Fair, department stores such as Macy's in New York and The Broadway in Los Angeles, and state fairs. It is now manifesting and intruding into reality via social commentary with adults as the target audience.

Batman or Birdman?

Returning to the chapter's main thread of the mainstreaming of superhero movies, the 2014 film *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* satirized the elitist idea of superhero genre entertainment as inferior art and its actors as one dimensional. Although its disjointed narrative leaves too many unresolved questions, the film is important to Comicland for its subject matter and extensive character dialogue. The film shows the struggle of former comic book movie star Riggan Thomson, played by Batman actor Michael Keaton, to break the superhero curse and revive his career through a self-funded Broadway play at the St. James Theatre. Thomson funneled his life savings into an adaptation of Raymond Carver's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," an attempt to escape the shadow of his

[121] For Robert Downey Jr., see Janko Roettgers, "Out of This World: Is big tech doing enough to help save the planet?," *Variety*, vol. 345, no. 9, September 10, 2019, p. 53; Cynthia Littleton, "Climate Warriors: Hollywood players are providing money, influence and ingenuity to shape a sustainable future for the business—and the planet," *Variety*, vol. 351, no. 18, April 21, 2021, pp. 52–57.

For Chris Evans, see Nik Decosta, "Why was Chris Evans meeting with members of Congress?," *The Boston Globe*, vol. 295, no. 100, April 10, 2019, p. B12; Mike Sager, "The Escape," *Esquire* (April/May 2020), p. 67; Kevin Slane, "Chris Evans has website for civic engagement," *The Boston Globe*, vol. 298, no. 16, July 16, 2020, p. B6; Andrea Mandell, "Chris Evans' new website helps combat stress during pandemic," *USA Today*, August 5, 2020, pp. 5B, 7B; Geoff Edgers, "Captain America's crusade for civility," *The Washington Post*, yr. 143, no. 325, October 25, 2020, pp. E1, E10; Eli Lang, "Shielding Americans from spin," letter to the editor, *The Washington Post*, yr. 143, no. 330, October 30, 2020, p. A24; David H. Freedman, "A Superhero's New Mission: Chris Evans hung up his Captain America shield. Now he and his partners want to help Generation Z reshape the U.S. political landscape," *Newsweek*, vol. 176, no. 17, June 18–25, 2021, pp. 20–29; David H. Freedman, "How To Save America: Chris Evans wants to use his celebrity to get young voters engaged in politics," *Newsweek*, vol. 176, no. 17, June 18–25, 2021, pp. 30–31.

For Marc Ruffalo, see Leo Barraclough et al., "25 Climate Movers and Shakers Entertainment's environmental warriors are leading the charge," *Variety*, vol. 345, no. 9, September 10, 2019, pp. 46–47; Cynthia Littleton and Brent Lang, "Artist for All Seasons," *Variety*, vol. 347, no. 11, April 15, 2019, pp. 28, 33; Jen Aswad et al., "Earth's Avengers Assemble," *Variety*, vol. 347, no. 12, April 22, 2019, p. 51.

superhero identity Birdman and prove his relevance and artistry to the thespian world. The plot appears to be a metacommentary on Keaton's life after playing Batman and potentially the struggle of fellow Batman actor Adam West. It highlights the power of the superhero genre and potentially the bittersweet feelings that it produced for Keaton. The story can be read as a fictional interpretation of an existential crisis that Keaton may have experienced after playing the Dark Knight. Embedded in the script is this unspoken question: "Who am I after playing Batman?" The fictional superhero Birdman is clearly a tongue-in-cheek reference to Batman.

The picture quickly engaged with the prevalence of the superhero movie genre. During the stage reading for the play, a light drops from the rafters and smashes into the skull of the supporting male actor named Ralph [no last name], who lies unconscious and bleeding. Immediately after this accident, Riggan Thomson briskly walks off stage as everyone else rushes to help. Backstage, Thomson discusses superior replacement candidates with his lawyer and financial partner, Jake [no last name], played by Zach Galifianakis. Ironically, all of his choices—identified as serious actors—are involved in science fiction or superhero franchises and therefore unavailable.

> Riggan Thomson: Just find me an actor—a good actor. Gimmie, uh, Woody Harrelson!
>
> Jake: He's doing the next *Hunger Games*.
>
> Riggan Thomson: Um, uh, Michael Fassbender.
>
> Jake: He's doing the prequel to the *X-Men* prequel.
>
> Riggan Thomson: How about, uh, Jeremy Renner?
>
> Jake: Who?
>
> Riggan Thomson: Jeremy Renner! He was nominated. He was *The Hurt Locker* guy.
>
> Jake: He's an Avenger.
>
> Riggan Thomson: Fuck! They put him in a cape too? God, I can't believe this. I don't care. Just find me someone.

Besides Michael Keaton, three of the films' supporting actors participated in live-action and animated superhero movies, before and after *Birdman*, which deepens the irony. Edward Norton, who portrays the erratic Broadway star Mike Shiner in *Birdman*, appeared as the Hulk in

2008. Emma Stone, Thomson's daughter Sam in the film, portrayed Peter Parker's love interest Gwen Stacy in *The Amazing Spider-Man* in 2012. Zach Galifianakis voiced the Joker in the 2017 animated picture *The Lego Batman Movie*. Another layer of symbolism to this analysis is that Keaton affirmed his elite position in the superhero movie genre in 2017 when he switched sides and crossed universes as a foe for rival studio Marvel. Keaton became the winged supervillain Vulture in *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. This pattern of crossing universes is becoming quite common. Michelle Pfeiffer did the reverse by moving from the DC supervillain/antihero Catwoman to the Marvel superhero the Wasp in *Ant-Man and the Wasp*. Halle Berry started as Storm in the *X-Men* movies and later became Catwoman. Ben Affleck has been both Daredevil and Batman. Tom Hardy played the villain Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises* and the antihero title role in the Venom franchise. Besides Batman, Christian Bale also played the villain Gorr the God Butcherer in *Thor: Love and Thunder*. In the same movie, Russell Crowe was Zeus and before that Superman's father Jor-El in *Man of Steel*. Jared Leto played the Joker in *Suicide Squad* and starred as Morbius, a human vampire hybrid from the Marvel universe. Ryan Reynolds began with Marvel as Wade Wilson, aka Deadpool, in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* switched to DC as Green Lantern but returned to the character Deadpool, whose unexpected popularity has created a franchise. After his cameo as Mister Fantastic, John Krasinski voiced Superman in the animated movie *DC League of Super-Pets*. Secondary role actors also sought association with both superhero companies. Laurence Fishburne played Superman's editor Perry White in two Henry Cavill Superman movies and Dr. Bill Foster in *Ant-Man and the Wasp*. The superhero movie genre is ginormous and being able to work with both studios is extremely profitable for actors.

Birdman further compounded the irony of the superhero, stardom, and success through a comparison of Riggan Thomson (imagined as Michael Keaton and Adam West) to Robert Downey Jr. After the discussion of replacement actors in the play, Thomson returns to his dressing room and hears an entertainment news show promoting their interview with Downey Jr. Before Thompson angrily turns off the television (via telekinesis?), the host mentions the financial windfall of the *Iron Man* and *The Avengers* franchises as well as the new and unexpected celebrity of Downey Jr. (Even this film illustrates that Downey Jr. broke the superhero curse and is the reigning symbol of the genre.) Then, Thomson hears "the voice of Birdman," who explains that the current superhero actors are copycats capitalizing on his earlier

success, an opinion shared by film critic Kim Masters when imagining Thompson as Keaton. The film appears to render Thomson with an undiagnosed mental illness or shifts the film from *cinéma-vérité* to magical realism by giving Thomson actual superpowers—the viewer is left confused because the film never reveals which option was diegetically true. In a failed effort to ignore the voice, Thomson begins a breathing mantra.

> That clown doesn't have half your talent and he's making a fortune in that Tin Man getup. We're the real thing Riggan. We had it all. We gave it away. We handed these posers the keys to the kingdom.

The film ironically toyed with the idea of the comic book movie and superhero actors as substandard. To replace Ralph in the play, Riggan Thomson casts renown but unpredictable stage actor Mike Shiner. Following a tirade on stage during a preview performance, Shiner sneers at Thomson's invasion of the theater and that he could return to Hollywood at any time. The irony of this scene is that Edward Norton, who left *The Incredible Hulk* franchise over artistic disagreements or was not rehired due to an abrasive personality, delivers the elitist speech. Shiner's heated exchange with Thompson as they walk down the street concludes with a "high art" defense.

> If this doesn't work out for you, you fuck off back to your studio pals and dive back into that cultural genocide you guys are perpetrating. You know a douchebag's born every minute. That was P. T. Barnum's premise when he invented the circus and nothing much has changed. And you guys know if you crank out any toxic piece of crap, people will line up and pay to see it. But long after you're gone I'm gonna be on that stage earning my living, bearing my soul, wrestling with complex human emotions. That's what we do.

Martin Scorsese replicated the essence of Shiner's rant: only certain types of stories classify as *cinema* and only certain roles qualify as acting as well as only certain kinds of art have the ability to explore and convey human complexity. Scorsese used the analogy of an amusement park and Shiner the circus.

Birdman also criticized the elitist perspective within the thespian world. To publicize the play required that Riggan Thomson sit through an interview with a pretentious theater critic, who quotes French philosopher and structuralist Roland Barthes to question his leap from the leading role in "a comic book franchise" to the respected stage. Similarly, the character Tabitha Dickinson, a theater critic for *The New York Times*, plans to destroy the play without ever watching it just because of Thomson's prior role as a superhero. Presaging the language of

Martin Scorsese, the burned out and disgusted Dickinson rails at what Thomson represents. Two dramatic scenes take place in a bar near the St. James Theatre and showcase the spiteful nature of critics, who seem to misdirect their anger at actors and not the theater, which is fading into oblivion due to poor attendance over a lack of innovate storytelling. The real and unexpressed rage of critics, at least implied by Dickinson, is that the *stage* is crumbling under the pressure to replace *fine art* with commercialism and candy. Substitute the words cinema for theater and this is essentially Scorsese's complaint. Following his rant, Mike Shiner approaches Dickinson, who appears to be drowning herself in alcohol. Because of Shiner's uncharacteristic association with Thomson, she sarcastically asks if he is heading to Hollywood. Shiner aptly retorts that Hollywood is heading to Broadway and insinuates that she should accept the new reality. Dickinson flippantly counters with another circus metaphor, "He's a Hollywood clown in a Lycra bird suit." Shiner then defends Thomson's courage and questions if she would acknowledge the risk and attend the play's opening. The night before the play's debut, a drunken Thomson initiates an unwanted conversation with Dickinson at the same bar. She growls at him. In her mind, Thompson is an invader of the theater.

> Tabitha Dickinson: It doesn't matter. I'm going to destroy your play.
>
> Riggan Thomson: But you didn't even see it. Um, did I do something to offend you? [Unintelligible stammering]
>
> Tabitha Dickinson: As a matter of fact, you did. You took up space in a theater which otherwise might have been used on something worthwhile.
>
> Riggan Thomson: Okay, well. I mean you don't even know if it's any good or not.
>
> Tabitha Dickinson: That's true. I haven't read a word of it, or even seen a preview but after the opening tomorrow I'm going to turn in the worst review anybody has ever read. And I'm going to close your play. Would you like to know why? Because I hate you and everyone you represent. Entitled, selfish, spoiled children. Blissfully untrained, unversed, and unprepared to even attempt real art. Handing each other awards for cartoons and pornography. Measuring your worth in weekends? Well, this is the theater. And you don't get to come in here and pretend that you can write, direct, and act in your own propaganda piece without coming through me first. So, break a leg.

Thomson responds with his own poignant rant about the destructive "art" of criticism and calls himself an actor. Dickinson, nonetheless, makes sure to get the last word. Epitomizing the smug

critic, she says: "You're no actor, you're a celebrity. Let's be clear on that. I'm going to kill your play." In *Birdman*, Dickinson is the thespian equivalent of Scorsese.

The film's conclusion is equally strange. The allegory of Birdman manifests when Riggan Thomson shoots off his "beak" on stage during opening night, possibly an attempt at suicide. It remains unclear if Thomson actually dies at this moment and the rest of the film is a figment of his imagination. (Earlier that morning, Thomson contemplates suicide on a rooftop. He leaps off a Manhattan building but transforms into Birdman and flies through the sky. Viewers are left puzzled. He may have died at this moment or the act of flying is a figment of his imagination and the story continues. By contrast, Mort Weisinger's Superman and Batman comic books would at least clearly distinguish between dream and reality at the end of the story.) Before the gunshot, he says: "I don't exist. I'm not even here. I'm not even here." Thomson's improvised lines were not in the script of the play he was performing. But unlike Martin Scorsese, the critic Tabitha Dickinson has a change of heart. She attends the play and writes a glowing but pretentiously titled review "The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance." The next morning, Thomson's ex-wife reads the review aloud in the hospital room as he recovers from emergency rhinoplasty surgery. Dickinson proclaims in *The New York Times* that "Birdman" has revitalized the theater.

> Thomson has unwittingly given birth to a new form, which can only be described as super-realism. Blood was spilled both literally and metaphorically by artist and audience alike. Real blood. The blood that has been sorely missing from the veins of the American theater.[122]

Shortly after, Thompson leaps out of the hospital window to either commit suicide, a potential allusion to Superman actor George Reeves, or transform into Birdman and fly away. This scene like the rest of the film blurs the line between cinematic reality and superhero fantasy. Broadening the circus analogy, *Birdman* is a funhouse mirror version of Comicland.

---

[122] *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*, directed by Alejandro G. Iñárritu, written by Alejandro G. Iñárritu, Nicholás Gianobone, Alexander Dinelaris, Jr., and Armando Bo (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD; Kevin O'Keeffe, "Culture: What *Birdman* Understands About the State of Theater and Criticism: A scene in the Michael Keaton-starring movie gets at a central conflict now facing Broadway," *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/10/birdman-has-questions-about-theatre-and-criticism-if-not-answers/381957/.

Golden Statues and a Golden Medal

Comics' respectability and entanglement with wider entertainment is evident in other ways as well. Take the Oscars for instance. The superhero movie has come a long way since its tangential nominations for score, sound, costume, special effects, or cinematography.[123] Jake Rossen comments on the relationship between the Oscars and the superhero genre back in 2008 highlighting how much things have changed: "Virtually no one who had ever sported tights on-screen went on to collect gold statues or play opposite established stars. Only actors who had kept their faces hidden from public view—like radio's [Clayton "Bud"] Collyer—had managed to sustain a career." He then comments that "Warner … considered petitioning [Christopher] Reeve for a Best Actor nod [in *Superman II*]. No matter his talent, the Academy was not likely to ever take a genre performance seriously."[124] After the revival of the superhero movie genre with the *X-Men* franchise beginning in 2000, the situation is exactly the opposite.

This shift toward recognition began with Heath Ledger, who posthumously won best supporting actor in 2008 for his performance of the Joker in *The Dark Knight*. The pattern continued a decade later as *Black Panther* won three Oscars out of seven nominations, including the first best picture nod for a live-action superhero movie. *Black Panther* was the first picture to have an almost entirely all-black cast as well as a black director and writer. The picture had two visible white roles, the secondary villain and a tertiary supporting character who did not need to be white or even possibly part of the story line at all. The rise in quality of superhero movies plus the inclusion of racial geopolitics in the plot and the contentious climate in America around race relations under the Donald J. Trump presidency made it nearly impossible for the Academy to ignore the movie and likely influenced the best picture nomination. Although *Black Panther* is important for its representational equality and warranted some nominations, the historical moment overshined the quality of the movie with the nomination for best picture. Thus, this

---

[123] *Superman: The Movie* (1978) was nominated for best film editing, best original score, and best sound; *Batman* (1989) won for art direction; *Batman Returns* (1992) was nominated for visual effects and makeup; *Batman Forever* (1995) was nominated for cinematography, sound, and visual effects; *Spider Man* (2002) was nominated for visual effects and sound mixing; *Spider Man 2* (2004) was nominated for sound mixing and sound effects and won for visual effects; *Batman Begins* (2005) was nominated for cinematography; *Superman Returns* (2006) was nominated for visual effects. For the special Oscar given to *Superman: The Movie*, see Associated Press, "Special Oscar for 'Superman,'" *New York Post*, Final Edition, vol. 178, no. 73, February 9, 1979, p. 51; "'Superman' voted achievement nod by Academy," *The Hollywood Reporter*, vol. 255, no. 18, February 9, 1979, p. 28; Don Shay, "Richard Donner on Superman," *Cinefantastique*, vol. 8, no. 4, p. 17. See also Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 111, 128; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 191 ,198.

[124] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 77, 128.

political backdrop provided a more favorable reading of the picture than it deserved. The recognition of *Black Panther* may have also been influenced by the OscarsSoWhite hashtag chatter on Twitter in 2015 and acted as a concession and expression of white guilt. This was also apparent with the nomination of Spike Lee's film *BlacKkKlansman* for best picture in 2018. Even though *BlacKkKlansman* is a more creative story on challenging antiblack racism and antisemitism, it lost to *Green Book*, a civil-rights-era Oscar bait film that makes a white man a hero in the story of segregation. In the Netflix special *Attack of the Hollywood Clichés!*, British film critic Ellen E. Jones commented on the white savior trope in Hollywood and how *Green Book* eclipsed the competing black cinematic narratives. "*Green Book* won the best picture in the same year—to add insult to injury—that *Black Panther* … and *BlacKkKlansman* were out, so if you were actually interested in stories about black people then they are right there."[125] It is important to reference that while the Academy recognized *The Irishman* with ten nominations, it did not award the film with a single Oscar. Fellow 2019 movie *Joker*, on the other hand, won two out of its eleven nominations (the most that year), including best actor for Joaquin Phoenix. Such a public acknowledgement of the superhero genre as *cinema* surely refueled Martin Scorsese's anger. The R-rated superhero or supervillain drama, as *Joker* demonstrates, does not have to be a children's story, a fact that must vex Jeet Heer. It can also be a character-driven psychological exposé. In quite an ironic twist, *Joker* director Todd Phillips shared to *The Hollywood Reporter* panel mentioned earlier in the chapter that Scorsese's "New Hollywood" narratives inspired his "anticomic book movie, so to speak." Phillips, who does not complete the thought, noted: "When we were struggling to get *Joker* made, which sounds funny because it exists in the superhero world but it's really not one of these movies, in fact it was greatly inspired by the works of Martin Scorsese and Sidney Lumet and other filmmakers that I sort of grew up worshiping in the 70s and early 80s and their movies." Although Phillips neglected to name a specific film, *Taxi Driver* and *The King of Comedy* seem to be obvious models for the biopic of the Clown Prince of Crime.[126] Putting aside the impressive performances of Ledger and Phoenix as the Joker, *The Dark Knight* and *Joker*—with more emphasis on the cinematography and setting than the writing—are slow, boring, plotless stories about sociopaths that have earned

[125] *Attack of the Hollywood Clichés!*, directed by Sean Doherty, written by Ben Caudell (2021), on Netflix.
[126] The Hollywood Reporter, "Directors Roundtable" and George Edelman, "Scorsese Says Marvel Movies Are 'Not Cinema' As 'Joker,' Based on His Work, Opens Wide," October 4, 2019, https://nofilmschool.com/scorsese-marvel-movies.

unwarranted acclaim. Regardless of this author's view of *The Dark Knight* and *Joker* as poorly executed narratives, two separate portrayals of the supervillain are a testament to the complex dramatic potential of the character and have rightfully earned both best supporting actor and best actor Oscars. Only one other fictional character can claim such a distinction. Ironically, it is the mobster Vito Corleone of *The Godfather* trilogy: Robert De Niro as the younger man and Marlon Brando as the older man. This fact presents an interesting question: Has the superhero drama replaced the gangster film? The answer is unequivocally yes. Anthropologist and Occupy Wall Street activist David Graeber seems to share this view. Graeber postulates, "[I]t sometimes seems comic book-based movies are replacing sci-fi as the main form of Hollywood special effects blockbuster almost as rapidly as the cop movie replaced the Western as the dominant action genre in the seventies."[127] In similar fashion, Blair Davis testifies that "characters like Batman, Wolverine, and Captain America have become the new action movie icons."[128]

The superhero movie renaissance, nevertheless, encapsulates more than just the pictures of DC and Marvel. Animated movies such as *The Incredibles* and *Megamind* deepened the project of Comicland that DC Comics began some eighty years ago. The Oscars again supply a barometer of success and illustrate the fusion of the superhero genre into American culture. *The Incredibles* won best animated feature film—the first superhero movie of any sort to be nominated or win an Oscar in a best film category—and best sound editing in 2004. Finally released fourteen years later, the sequel received a nomination for best animated feature film but lost to the more cleverly written and visualized *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, which presents a more racially diverse hero and superhero space. These narratively sophisticated cartoons built upon the artistry and innovation of the *Superman* shorts from the 1940s. Even though Max Fleischer earned an Oscar nomination in 1941 for short subject (cartoon) due to his rotoscoping technique, it took sixty years to realize an award. Animated movies are not the only expression, however. Superhero-themed pictures like *Unbreakable* (2000) starring Bruce Willis and Samuel L. Jackson, *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* (2006) featuring Uma Thurman, Anna Faris, and Luke Wilson, and *Hancock* (2008) showcasing Will Smith and Charlize Theron, which are packaged within entirely different film genres, only reinforce the influence of Comicland. While none of these three films earned an Oscar nomination, they prove that the superhero (as a

---

[127] David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn, NY: Melvin House, 2015), p. 209.
[128] Davis, *Movie Comics*, p. 1.

character) is more versatile than generally acknowledged. He or she can be portrayed in a psychological thriller, romantic comedy, or action comedy.[129] The 2014 film *Birdman*, which engages with the idea of the superhero actor and the superhero movie genre, won four Oscars, including director, picture, cinematography, and screenplay. According to comic book writer and author Grant Morrison, "Superheroes add an extra level of spice to any genre they touch, and we can expect to see their presence enliven all kinds of otherwise ordinary scenarios."[130] Although Morrison's comment predated *Birdman*, it describes the continued permeation of the superhero into all facets of American entertainment.

Superhero-based poetry and fiction are also prevalent, and the latter have even achieved literary acclaim. As Peter Coogan points out, authors are increasingly drawing from the superhero theme for "metaphorical resonance." In other words, superheroes offer an entry point of common knowledge to explore the human experience.[131] Besides the ones discussed in the previous chapters, stand-alone poems and those contained within larger texts embraced the genre as appropriate subject matter. Such poems comprise LeRoi Jones' *The Dead Lecturer* (1964), Simon Armitage's *Kid* (1992), Rae Armantrout's *Veiled* (2001), Barbara Griest-Devora's *Superheroes and Other Ways to Spend the Night* (2002), Chad Parmenter's "Four Poems" (2004), Jeannine Hall Gailey's "Wonder Woman Dreams of the Amazon" (2005) and *Becoming the Villainess* (2006), James Cummins, David Lehman, and Denise Duhamel's *Jim and Dave Defeat the Masked Man* (2006), A. Van Jordan's *Quantum Lyrics* (2007), Albert Goldbarth's *The Kitchen Sink: New and Selected Poems 1972–2007* (2007), Rae Armantrout's *Versed* (2009), Adrian Matejka's *Mixology* (2009), and Ray McDaniel's, *Special Powers and Abilities: Poems* (2013). Bryan D. Dietrich and Marta Ferguson edited a collection on comics-related poetry entitled *Drawn to Marvel: Poems from the Comic Books* (2014). This is not an American phenomenon either as demonstrated by Jo Shapcott's *Her Book: Poems 1988–1998* (2000) and

---

[129] For brief mentions of these movies as expressions of the superhero genre, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 277; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 185; Morrison, *Supergods*, pp. 322–324, 377–378; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 226.

For mention of Max Fleischer's 1941 Academy Award nomination, see Daniels, *Superman*, p. 58; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 9; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 26; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 47; Tye, *Superman*, p. 95; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 200, 371n16; Davis, *Movie Comics*, p. 90. For rotoscoping and more on the Superman animated cartoons, see also Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 5; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 94, 180; Leslie Cabarga, *The Fleischer Story* (Boston, MA: Da Capo, 1988), esp. pp. 6, 9, 136–141, 145, 183; Richard Fleischer, *Out of the Inkwell: Max Fleischer and the Animation Revolution* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2005).

[130] Morrison, *Supergods*, p. 381.

[131] Coogan, *Superhero*, pp. 14–19.

Ian Gregson's *Call Centre Love Song* (2006). Poems like Karl Shapiro's "Drug Store" (1942) and Phyllis McGinley's "Portrait of Girl with Comic Book" (1952) feature the comic book itself without a connection to the superhero.[132] The growing list of novels utilizing the superhero formula include Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Robert Mayer's *Superfolks* (1977), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Nicholas Baker's *The Fermata* (1994), Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* (1994), Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000), Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003), Andrew Kaufman's *All My Friends Are Superheroes* (2003), Umberto Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2005), Anthony McCarten's *Death of a Superhero* (2005), Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), Perry Moore's *Hero* (2007), Austin Grossman's *Soon I Will Be Invincible* (2007), Brad Meltzer's *The Book of Lies* (2008), Lavie Tidhar's *The Violent Century* (2013), V. E. Schwab's *Vicious* (2013), and Nick Harkaway's *Tigerman* (2014). Even short stories such as Jonathan Lethem's "Super Goat Man" (2005), Deborah Eisenberg's "Twilight of the Superheroes" (2006), and Chabon's "Citizen Conn" (2012) utilize the superhero.[133] Chabon won the Pulitzer Prize's gold medal for his book *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, a work of historical fiction inspired by the lives of Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster and Captain America creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. Many readers—likely including the Pulitzer committee—overlook the important fact that the story is situated around comics, superheroes, and cartoonists. They probably selectively see the themes of homosexuality and the American Jewish experience that run through his works.[134]

The recognition of Michael Chabon's novel, nevertheless, speaks to the long quest of librarians, literary scholars, and comics creators to classify the medium and content of comics as literature.[135] This viewpoint is not exclusive to educators and culture workers. SUNY Brockport

---

[132] Raymond McDaniel, "Brainiac 5's Very Bad Valentine" and Stephen Burt, "Poems About Superheroes," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, vol. 48, no. 4 (Fall 2009), pp. 644–645 and 646–667. See also De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 20.

[133] See Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 168–169, 222; Alaniz, *Death, Disability, and the Superhero*, p. 7; David Barnett, "Superheroes conquer the literary novel: Prose incarnations of the comic-book staples are not new, but they are gaining new potency in serious fiction," *The Guardian*, May 6, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/may/06/superheroes-literary-novel-comic-book-serious-fiction; Chris Gavaler, "The Anti-Superhero in Literary Fiction," *Image [&] Narrative*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2016), pp. 32–45.

[134] Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 329, 339–340; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 168.

[135] For calls to legitimize the medium of comics and its role as literature, see Rocco Versaci, *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007); Paul Lopes, *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2009); Aaron Meskin,

student Bob Confer complained in his college newspaper column on September 24, 2003, that literature classes overlook Superman's contribution.

> Over the course of our college careers many of us will have spent hundreds of hours reading and analyzing classic American novels. Despite these efforts, Western Literature's greatest creation will be entirely ignored, never receiving a footnote, let alone a mention in class discussions. With all due respect to Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne and others, the mythology created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster offers what may be the most influential writings that America has produced. Literature, art, and film as we know it would be lost without *Superman*.[136]

This argument is an extension of Gerald Early's assessment of the three uniquely American cultural creations. In the Ken Burns documentary *Baseball*, he proclaimed: "I think there are only three things that America will be known for 2,000 years from now when they, when they study this civilization: the Constitution, jazz music, and baseball. They're the three most

---

"Comics as Literature?," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 49, no. 3 (July 2009), pp. 219–239; Hannah Miodrag, "Narrative, Language, and Comics-as-Literature," *Studies in Comics*, vol. 2, no. 2 (January 2012), pp. 263–279; Annessa Ann Babic, ed., *Comics as History, Comics as Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society and Entertainment* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014). For articles, see Donald Palumbo, "Comics as Literature: Plot Structure, Foreshadowing, and Irony in the Marvel Comics' *Avengers* 'Cosmic Epic,'" *Extrapolation*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Winter 1981), pp. 309–324; Hillary Chute, "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative," *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 2 (March 2008), pp. 452–465. Citing her point on marketing the "graphic novel" in the second endnote and work cited section, Chute only provides url citations that are now broken. For the correct reference with the page number, see Calvin Reid, "Retailing: D & Q Heads BISAC, Bookseller Efforts," *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 249, no. 51, December 23, 2002, p. 30. The second article does not exist, however. Heidi MacDonald, "New BISAC Category for Graphic Novels/Comics," *Publishers Weekly*, January 17, 2003, may have been online at one time. It is important to note that *Publishers Weekly* did not publish a physical issue on the date in question. For more on the graphic novel debate, see Charles McGrath, "Not Funnies," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 153, no. 52,907, July 11, 2004, pp. 1, 24–33, 46, 55–56 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 6); Catherine Labio, "What's in a Name? The Academic Study of Comics and the 'Graphic Novel,'" *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 123–126.

Several sources articulate the mixed relationship between librarians and Superman, DC Comics' marketing strategy to position comic books in the same sphere as traditional literature, and the supposed desire to propel children to expand their reading beyond comics. One library science scholar presents the latter at face value. Carol L. Tilley fails to accept the possibility that it was simply a publicity stunt because steering children away from comics is unsound business policy. See Catherine Mackenzie, "Parent and Child: Children and The Library," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 91, no. 30,556, September 21, 1941, p. 20 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 7); Catherine Mackenzie, "Parent and Child: Movies—and Superman," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 91, no. 30,577, October 12, 1941, p. 22 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 7); Mary R. Lucas, "Our Friendly Enemy," *Library Journal*, vol. 66, no. 17 (October 1941), pp. 824–827 and the condensed version Mary R. Lucas, "Superman In The Library," *Youth Leaders Digest*, vol. 4, no. 6 (March 1942), pp. 205–206; Margaret K. Thomas, "Superman Teaches School in Lynn, Mass.," *Magazine Digest*, vol. 28, no. 4 (April 1944), pp. 5–7; Margaret Kessler Walraven and Alfred L. Hall-Quest, *Teaching Through the Elementary School Library* (New York, NY: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1948), pp. 78–80; Tilley, "'Superman Says 'Read!,'" National Comics and Reading Promotion;" Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 207. The Margaret K. Thomas article also appears in box 20, folder 1, LB and is summarized as "School Work-Book," *Youth Leaders Digest*, vol. 4, no. 6 (March 1942), p. 206.

[136] Bob Confer, "Off The Deep End: Classic literature study ignores Superman's importance," *The Stylus* (SUNY College at Brockport), vol. 96, no. 4, September 24, 2003, p. 13.

beautifully designed things this culture's ever produced." Superheroes are the fourth category of innovation when considering global dissemination of American thought and culture.[137] The epic of Superman, in Confer's words, is recognizable, timeless, and influential. These three key characteristics demonstrate the character's importance and reason for study. Confer then explained why he thought that Superman myth surpasses the paragon works of the cannon. Most important to this discussion here was Confer's concluding remarks admonishing the curriculum as too narrow.

> No other literary figure has had such a wide-ranging impact as the Man of Steel. Maybe someday his creators will get the respect they deserve. Maybe someday college students will analyze the depth of the Superman myth and its place within culture. I doubt it. [For] [t]o[o] many intellectuals it would be a stretch to say that pulp magazines are true literature. They are wrong. Though aided with line drawings, comic books do have a story to tell, and are literature nonetheless. Like all classic works they offer drama, moralistic intrigue, opinions on society, and – of vast importance to the audience – excitement. For decades now, comic books have been the reading of choice for millions of people from all walks of life. It's too bad that academia has not been as accepting of the legitimate creativity and credibility that popular literature has to offer.[138]

The Modern Shakespeare?

Literary elites have rejected the comics medium for decades. It is then no surprise that references to Shakespeare have long defined the debate around the superhero genre regarding television, movies, and comics. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster biographer Brad Ricca correctly indicates that the special live-action opening to the 1966 Marvel animated cartoons spoken by a costumed Captain America for WNAC Channel 7 in Boston, Massachusetts, explicitly played with the "nunnery scene" soliloquy from *Hamlet*. Actor Arthur Pierce begins the show with the words: "To be, or not to be a Marvelite, that is the question." Jerry Siegel reportedly wrote this wordplay and the remaining stanzas.[139] The connection to Shakespeare is utilized in greater fashion regarding the posterchild of the DC Comics universe. On June 21, 1941, journalist John Kobler wrote in *The Saturday Evening Post* that Superman is "the greatest soliloquizer since

---

[137] Interview with Gerald Early in *Baseball*, directed by Ken Burns, written by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns (1994; n.p.: PBS Distribution, 2021), DVD. The quote appears in chapter 3 on disc 1: Our Game (1840s—1900).
[138] Confer, "Off The Deep End," *The Stylus* (SUNY College at Brockport), vol. 96, no. 4, September 24, 2003, p. 13.
[139] See Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 262–263; TheHoldingCoat, "Capt America 1966," December 14, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM75LsehGk8. Brad Ricca informed me that he does not have hard proof but swears that the dialogue is written in Jerry Siegel's voice. For a similar comparison between *Hamlet* and the death of Captain Marvel, see Alaniz, *Death, Disability, and the Superhero*, p. 213.

Hamlet."[140] *Superman: The Movie* director Richard Donner announced to the *Los Angeles Times* on July 31, 1977, that Superman is the American version of Shakespeare. "We're dealing with American literature here. The British have their Shakespeare. We have our Superman."[141] Screenwriter Tom Mankiewicz repeatedly admitted to crafting the dialogue on Krypton as Shakespearian to impart an air of gravitas.[142] Tapping into Mankiewicz's intentions, Larry Tye compares the romantic balcony scene between Superman and Lois Lane in the movie to *Romeo and Juliet*. Replicating the analogy, Tom De Haven describes the Mort Weisinger orchestrated Superman stories of the 1950s and 1960s as reflecting Shakespearean motifs. Fellow Superman biographer Glen Weldon duplicates this view that Weisinger's imaginary stories are Shakespearean comedy. Comics scholar José Alaniz directly compares the violent deaths in Alan Moore's imaginary story "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?" that was written in the style of Weisinger to "Shakespearean tragedy."[143] Ricca expands this idea further with an unconvincing twofold comparison to *Hamlet*. On one level, the similarity lies in the fact that the audience and not the other characters know that Hamlet's father is "present" in the story in the same way that Clark Kent is really Superman. On the other more dubious level, Superman fans are supposed to be in on a shared secret that the death of Jerry Siegel's father inspired the character. According to Ricca, Superman is a ghost who haunts and drives "Jerry Siegel's professional and (perhaps personal) life."[144] This idea and Siegel family history is, however, not common knowledge.

These sentiments equating Superman with Shakespeare function as a response to try to overturn the stigmatization of comics and superheroes as well as challenge denunciations from the 1990s regarding comics and collegiate coursework. Beginning in the 1970s, comics gained currency as items of study. The first university course on comics as cultural discourse—taught

---

[140] Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, p. 74.
[141] Roderick Mann, "Superman Makes the Leap to the Screen," *Los Angeles Times*, vol. 96, July 31, 1977, pp. 1, 8, 54 (Calendar Section). For a secondary source mention, see Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 80.
[142] Interview with Tom Mankiewicz in *Look Up in The Sky!: The Amazing Story of Superman*, directed by Ken Burns, written by James Grant Goldin and Steven Smith (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006), DVD and Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 109.
[143] De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 113; Tye, *Superman*, p. 200; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 126; Alaniz, *Death, Disability, and the Superhero*, p. 171.
[144] Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 308.

by future Batman movie producer Michael E. Uslan—transpired in 1972 at Indiana University.[145] Following suit, Hobart College senior Jeff Garb composed a paper on Superman in 1983 through the disciplines of American studies and philosophy. The topic garnered attention from local newspapers in western New York.[146] Not all members of the academy supported the change. Critic Barry Gewen blamed the trend on postmodernism. He complained in *The New Leader* in May 1990, "Numerous cultural crimes have been committed as a consequence, from scrap metal displayed as sculpture to college courses in comic books."[147] Traditionalist historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, for example, repeatedly criticized in periodicals the multicultural notion that comic books be included as academic literature and that they are equivalent to the works of Shakespeare, the apotheosis of the secular cannon that supposedly expresses "universal" themes applicable to all groups of people. Howling against the turn in the early 1990s, Himmelfarb articulates the prevailing view, "Superman is as worthy study as Shakespeare. Comic books are as properly a part of the curriculum as *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*."[148] This debate resurfaced with actors involved in the current superhero movie explosion. Kevin Spacey, who played Lex Luthor in *Superman Returns*, roared at *Wizard: The Comics Magazine* journalist Mike Cotton in the July 2006 issue. "It's a f---ing [*sic*] comic book for God's sake. It's not *Othello*."[149] The wider acceptance of Comicland infuriates the Shakespearean gatekeepers as much as the cinematic

---

[145] For the first college course on comics by Michael E. Uslan at Indiana University, see Jennings Parrott, "Newsmakers----: No Evil Lurks in Course on Comics," *Los Angeles Times*, Late Final Edition, vol. 91, February 1, 1972, p. 2 (Part I); Donald Yabush, "Comics in the Classroom: Superman Leaps Into the Halls of Ivy," *Chicago Tribune*, 4-Star Final Edition, yr. 125, no. 345, December 10, 1972, p. 3 (Section 5); Steve Harvey, "Balloons, Too: Comics 101: Education's Turning Mod," *Los Angeles Times*, Final Edition, vol. 92, February 17, 1973, pp. 1, 10 (Part I); Steve Harvey, "In College: Unusual Classes Gain Popularity," *The Austin Statesman*, Evening Home Edition, vol. 102, no. 151, February 27, 1973, p. 10; Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*, pp. 96, 100–107, 120–122, 131, 139, 149, 153, 240. See also Fiedler, *What Was Literature?*, p. 108; Pardini, *The Devil Gets His Due*, p. 130; Tye, *Superman*, p. 295.

For early coursework on comics and its possibility, see May Hill Arbuthnot, "Children and the Comics," *Elementary English*, vol. 24, no. 3 (March 1947), p. 181; Sybil Jacobsen, "A New Guide to Children's Reading," *The Publishers' Weekly*, vol. 135, no. 17, p. 1809; "Mickey Mouse, P.H. D. Animated Cartoons to Be Used in College Instruction," *The Sun* (New York, NY), 6-Star Complete Final Edition, vol. 107, no. 262, July 6, 1940, p. 13; "The Things They Teach," *Time*, vol. 54, no. 22, November 28, 1949, p. 60.

[146] "Man of Steel—Champion of Good," *Chittenango-Bridgeport Times* (Chittenango, NY), no. 14, April 13, 1983, p. 12; "Up, Up, and Away, Superman Research Challenges Myths," *Tempo of the Towns* (Vestal, NY), vol. 13, no. 11, April 14, 1983, p. 7; "Man of Steel – and College Essays," *The Honeoye Falls Times* (Honeoye Falls, NY), vol. 100, no. 15 April 14, 1983, p. 4.

[147] For criticism of comic book courses as the offspring of postmodernism, see Barry Gewen, "Sincerely Truffaut," *The New Leader*, vol. 73, no. 8, May 14–28, 1990, p. 4.

[148] Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Remaking of the Cannon," *Partisan Review*, vol. 58, no. 2 (Spring 1991), p. 363; Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Abyss Revisited," *The American Scholar*, vol. 61, no. 3 (Summer 1992), p. 340.

[149] Interview with Kevin Spacey in Mike Cotton, "Wizard Q&A: Kevin Spacey," *Wizard: The Comics Magazine* no. 177 (July 2006), p. 83. Author's copy. For secondary source mention, see Jake Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 285.

purists. But this disdain for Comicland is not universal among the Bard's aficionados. Tom Hiddleston, the English actor whose portrayal of the Norse god Loki in the MCU is rooted in Shakespearean archetypes, held the opposing position, however. He put the superhero drama in the same category of classical comedy and tragedy and declared on April 19, 2012, in *The Guardian*: "The spectacle is part of the fun – part of the art, part of our shared joy."[150] Hiddleston's inherent comparison of Marvel cinematic epics to Shakespearean plays has weight given his proficiency in both realms.[151] Popular author Sean Howe similarly equates the comic book universe of Thor with its familial strife and regality to Shakespeare, as did *Thor* director Kenneth Branagh, whose Shakespearean bona fides are well-known through his film adaptations *Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midwinter's Tale*, *Hamlet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *As You Like It*.[152]

Conclusion

The unanticipated box office success of Marvel movies and its gentrification of the cinematic neighborhood ignited a cultural battlefield, with both sides taking up arms and sniping at each other. Through his portrayal of Iron Man, Robert Downey Jr. ended the superhero curse and broke ground on a whole new subdivision for Comicland in Hollywood. Notable film industry figures such as Martin Scorsese, Ethan Hawke, and Emily Blunt criticized this sea change initiated by the MCU. Stand-up comedians Marc Maron and Bill Maher are other voices of dissent. Even comics scholars like Scott Bukatman and Jeet Heer chided the content of comic book movies. Holding the outlier opinion, journalist David Sims cited Christian Bale in the *Batman* trilogy and its director Christopher Nolan as the source of the current wave. Fellow journalist Kim Masters backdated it to the Tim Burton franchise but overlooked the influence of the original *Superman* movies. Film critic April Wolfe, nonetheless, acknowledged their deeper dimensions. Writer Grant Morrison, likewise, defended superhero storytelling in print and on screen. Reaching a metalevel influence, fictional characters also joined the debate. This pattern is

---

[150] Tom Hiddleston, "Superheroes movies like Avengers Assemble should not be scorned," The Guardian, Film blog: Movies, April 19, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/apr/19/avengers-assemble-tom-hiddleston-superhero.
[151] Susan King, "Tom Hiddleston returns to Shakespearean roots in 'The Hollow Crown,'" Los Angeles Times, September 19, 2013, 6 AM PT, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/showtracker/la-et-st-tom-hiddleston-hollow-crown-20130919-story.html.
[152] Howe, *Marvel Comics*, p. 71.

evident in the film *Birdman* with the main character Riggan Thomson (Michael Keaton) trying to escape his superhero association and Mike Shiner (Edward Norton) blasting Thompson's resume and Hollywood's penchant for the genre, which gives the picture and its dialogue a deeply ironic dimension considering their experience in the superhero movie genre as Batman and the Hulk. Characters on the television show *Entourage* held mixed positions on superhero movies during its early growth. Loudmouth agent Ari Gold encourages his carefree client Vincent Chase to play Aquaman. Chase resists at first but soon realizes the monetary benefits and future prospects of acting in one. Fictionalized versions of Matt Le Blanc and David Hasselhoff dreamed of becoming superheroes. Unlike Scorsese, director Kevin Smith made his career on playing with the superhero formula through characters like the Stan Lee and Marvel superfan Brodie Bruce. Actors including Tom Holland, John Krasinski, Tiffany Haddish, Salma Hayek, and Tom Hiddleston have either defended the superhero movie genre, petitioned for a part, or celebrated securing a role. The decision of headline actors to participate in superhero franchises illustrates their approval of Comicland, and even if they enjoy the experience money is a prime motivator. This is a reversal of previous thinking in Hollywood. *Superman: The Movie* required the names and corresponding clout of Marlon Brando and Mario Puzo to greenlight the movie and garner respect. Comicland needed actors with Oscars on their resume to bestow prestige, but now actors gain fame and industry weight by playing superheroes and doing so serves as a career launch or boost. It is no longer the case that Hollywood elites bring gravitas into Comicland. To the disapproval of members of the old guard like Scorsese, Comicland now carries its own weight in Hollywood, drawing big players into its district. Like historian Paul S. Hirsch, the cinephile Brenna Davis acknowledged the value of the superhero movie genre for its inclusive turn. Even though representational diversity increased, Melissa Villaseñor and Tracy Morgan, who truly adores the genre as Jerry Seinfeld does, articulated through satire the deeper problem with portrayals of supervillains and superheroes as unquestioned expressions of white violence. The analogies to Shakespeare demonstrated the contentiousness of legitimizing Comicland. The pervasive spread of the superhero has generated a sort of cultural civil war in the entertainment industry. No matter how loud they shout, however, critics will not make superhero movies disappear.

The once undervalued culture of comics has now proven itself to be a big business again. Filmmakers did not care about superheroes on television because it did not threaten their

livelihoods. There was also no critical backlash to the many instances of parody covered in chapter 3. Clearly, television holds less artistic expectations than film. Cosplay and wordplay with superhero media is fun and kitschy on television but becomes an occupying force in Hollywood through profit as the corporate owners retook control of their intellectual properties. The movement of Comicland back in the hands of corporations explains the newfound resistance to it by critics, and underscores the repeating cycle, which is a struggle between the producer and the public over the meaning and presentation of superheroes.

CONCLUSION: LIVING IN COMICLAND

Personally, we believe that SUPERMAN [*sic*] is not going to fade out, but will run on, and on, ad infinitum.
—Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster[1]

Like it or not, we all live in Comicland. The neighborhood opened in 1940 with the mass marketing success of Superman and his conquest of comic books, newspaper comic strips, animated cartoons, the radio airwaves, and the actual skies as a balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Children immediately moved in, embracing this new hero and his media. They proudly dressed up as their fictional idol and imagined becoming him at the 1940 New York World's Fair and in their own communities through official playsuits or with just plain towels tied around their necks. The cultural inundation of Comicland and its encroachment into the real world deepened during the postwar period when the Man of Steel entered the realms of the movie serial and television series. Comicland, however, rose to a new height in 1978 when Superman properly flew for the first time on the silver screen in *Superman: The Movie*, dazzling audiences of all ages. The Dynamic Duo followed a similar path through the 1943 movie serial and the 1966 television show and subsequent movies starting in 1989, particularly with the merchandising success of the first Tim Burton movie. Adults initially concealed their adoration of DC Comics' three flagship characters through parody, innuendo, and ethnoracial and religious appropriation but later embraced or claimed them through the prism of politics. In the fourth space of Comicland, the barrier between reality and fantasy dissolved.

Locating Comicland

Where is Comicland? This fantasy realm is all around us. It is not a virtual reality simulation or a video game. Comicland resides in this world, the one that we live in, and has overtaken culture and entertainment. We enter this metaspace with every comics-based movie or television show we watch at home or at the cineplex, joke or reference we make or hear, Halloween costume worn, trip to a comics store or convention whether in cosplay or not, and merchandise purchase for ourselves or our children. Comicland is a collective manifestation of

[1] See Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster to DC Comics management, letter, May 7, 1940, p. 5 in Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, p. 55.

the world of comics by the corporate owners who seek to profit and the public who play with its characters. Although not covered in this project, fan fiction, fan art, blogs or websites, and discussion through online message boards or listservs related to the Superman universe such as those for the television shows *Lois & Clark* and *Smallville* and the scrapped Tim Burton movie *Superman Lives* are other forms of engagement with Comicland.[2] Unofficial and official fan clubs like the Supermen of America from the 1940s and the later development of comic book letter pages—instituted at DC Comics in 1958 by editor Mort Weisinger and the inclusion of fan's addresses beyond just names by fellow editor Julius Schwartz in 1961—constitute the earliest forms of fan engagement and aided the realization of Comicland.[3] Continuing to cultivate the relationship between creator and consumer they established in the letter pages, Superman's publisher intentionally crafted *Superman* no. 145 (May 1961) with mistakes and urged fans to locate them. The editors called it the "Great Superman Boo-Boo Contest."[4] The following decade, DC Comics, who realized that they were out of touch with the times, directly solicited reader feedback on topics for their magazines in hopes of reconnecting to their readership and the national pulse.[5] To promote *Superman: The Movie*, the company held a contest for comic book fans to become extras in the movie, moving them from observers to actual citizens of Comicland.[6] Superman's caretakers furthered fan engagement with Comicland in the first decade of the twenty-first century through cross-promotion with America Online (AOL), the corporate owners of DC Comics at the time. *Smallville* fans could read the private email of Superman's

---

[2] For discussion of internet forums and the websites like Ain't It Cool News by Harry Knowles, see the preface by Mark Millar and the main text in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. v, xii, 129, 202, 204–205, 229–230, 238–241, 257–258, 271–272, 276, 285, 287; Tye, *Superman*, p. 254; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 196, 259–260, 272, 282, 289, 301, 303, 309–311, 322, 328; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 228; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 78–79, 118–119, 131, 168.

[3] For discussion on letter columns and their use as sources, see Johnson, *Super-History*, p. 49; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 10, 13, 29, 45–47, 58–59, 118–142, 143, 150–153; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 106–107, 118, 176–177. Ian Gordon, nonetheless, fails to give a convincing argument for the larger significance of the letters or what impact they had on DC Comics editors and writers. For the role of DC Comics editors Mort Weisinger and Julius Schwartz, see Coogan, "From Love To Money," *International Journal of Comic Art* (Spring 2010), p. 52; Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*, p. 53; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 118, 120. For the Supermen of America fan club, see "Superman: New Comic Strip Hero Proves There's Big Money In Fantasy," *Look*, February 27, 1940, p. 15;
Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y!," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, p. 15; Ted Shane, "Super-Duper," *Liberty*, vol. 18, no. 38, September 20, 1941, p. 40; Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, p. 181; Daniels, *Superman*, pp. 44, 46; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 45; De Haven, *Our Hero*, p. 13; Tye, *Superman*, p. 113; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 35.

[4] *Superman* no. 145 (May 1961); Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 37, 120. The comic book is viewable online at https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Superman-1939/Issue-145?id=15961#32.

[5] See Weldon, *Superman*, p. 148.

[6] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 95; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 169.

future adversary Lex Luthor.[7] Competitor Marvel Comics, however, inverted the idea of immersion and took it to a new level starting in the 1980s when editor-in-chief Stan Lee began appearing in live-action and animated television shows and movies as himself or various characters as well as through narration and voice-over work. Long before the creation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), Lee, who acted as the face of Marvel since the mid-1960s, crossed over the boundary between fantasy and reality. Put another away, Lee became a character in Comicland, which is an extension of Joanne Carter's self-reflexive cosplay as Lois Lane. Through his college circuit talks, Lee acted as the public figure and salesperson of Comicland. As these examples of entering the fourth space and others in the project show, Comicland developed into a form of world building by its audience as well as its architects. In sum, both groups manifested make-believe.

Comicland and comiccons are not the same. Comicland predates the larger realm of cosplay at comics conventions like the annual Comic-Con International held in San Diego, California, or the New York Comic Con. With its cosplay, fantasy culture, carnivalesque excess, and commercialism, these events are isolated and geographically contained eruptions of Comicland that are mainly geared toward the extreme community of fanboys and fangirls and not the wider public, though they also participate in the spectacle either in person or vicariously through news coverage and references to the affairs in television shows like *The Big Bang Theory* and *Entourage*. These specialized gatherings, with a small percentage of attendees making it a costume party, showcase the expanding zip code of Comicland.[8] The first comics convention transpired in 1964 and the current versions have, over the last two decades, become a cultural institution.[9] Even studios cater to the rabid fanbase with future project announcements and early screenings of television shows and movies. The accepting space of fantasy-themed conventions was a tribal reaction to and rejection of the negative stigma associated with the medium of comics and its marginalization. Comicland was originally peripheral to mainstream

---

[7] Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, p. 257.

[8] For cosplay at Comic-Con and the parallel idea of Comicland called "actualized fantasy," see Kane Anderson, "Actualized Fantasy at Comic-Con and the Confessions of a 'Sad Cosplayer,'" in *It Happens at Comic-Con: Ethnographic Essays on a Pop Culture Phenomenon*, eds. Ben Bolling and Matthew J. Smith (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014), pp. 16–28.

[9] For acknowledgement of the second year in the history of conventions, see "The Talk of The Town: ComiCon," *The New Yorker*, vol. 41, no. 27, August 21, 1965, pp. 23–24. For the commercialization of the New York Comiccon in 1968, see Coogan, "From Love to Money," *International Journal of Comic Art* (Spring 2010), p. 64.

culture, but over the last two decades the subculture of comicdom has become normalized and inescapable.[10]

Comic book culture is currently the center of popular culture. Several authors mention this paradigm shift without tracing its development as my project does. For example, comic book writer Grant Morrison notes, "These days everything felt like being a superhero. They were everywhere now. They walked among us."[11] Historian Jeffrey K. Johnson makes the same point. "While many Americans would contend that they have never read a comic book or have not read one in many years, superheroes nonetheless surround them."[12] Echoing this reality, historian Paul S. Hirsch argues that today comic book characters have a "nearly unavoidable presence."[13] Through the work of the comic book creators, Hirsch partially articulates my argument of a living Comicland: "We occupy a world shaped by the remarkable characters they created, some of which survive into the present day."[14] It goes both ways, however, because the characters inhabit our world and we inhabit theirs. The Stan Lee character is the prime example of the latter. This is the essence of my idea of Comicland as the fourth space, a metalandscape built on imagination that is immune to death. The dynamic space of Comicland explains the ubiquity of comics culture today.

The realm is so powerful that it transformed the geek archetype, the traditional outcast, into an acceptable social identity. We are all geeks now and comfortable with the label, which is no longer a pejorative.[15] This was not always the case, however. The *Saturday Night Live* episode from April 16, 1994, featured a memorable sketch with host Emilio Estevez about a gameshow called "Geek, Dweeb, or Spazz" that insulted uncool high school teenagers who enjoy fantasy entertainment such as *Ghostbusters* and the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*.[16] On May 17, 2002, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* recorded the hand puppet Triumph the Insult Comic Dog, performed by humorist Robert Smigel, teasing fans, especially cosplayers, waiting in line on a Manhattan sidewalk for the premier of *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*.[17] Another

---

[10] For agreement on comic book culture as originally peripheral, see Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, p. 3. For the first known usage of "comicdom" and "stripdom," see Waugh, *The Comics*, pp. 47, 158 and 52, 147.
[11] Morrison, *Supergods*, p. 381.
[12] Johnson, *Super-History*, p. 189.
[13] Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, pp. 14, 268.
[14] Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, pp. 275–276.
[15] See Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*; Morrison, *Supergods*, p. 327; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 9.
[16] *Saturday Night Live*, season 19, episode 18, aired April 16, 1994, on NBC.
[17] *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, season 9, episode 115, aired May 17, 2002, on NBC. See Team Coco, "Triumph Attends The Premiere Of 'Star Wars: Attack Of The Clones' | Late Night with Conan O'Brien," https://www.

remote segment that aired six years later on August 1, 2008, had the raunchy hound hammering fans at Comic-Con International.[18] Unlike *Saturday Night Live*, the goal was not to be mean spirited but rather uncompromisingly self-deprecating given that geeks are a key demographic of Conan O'Brien's fan base and geek culture is a pronounced feature of the show in its various iterations over the years. For example, O'Brien moved his TBS show entitled *Conan* to San Diego, California, for an entire week to cover the convention in the years from 2015 to 2019.

A lot has changed since 1994. Mainstream culture now embraces and celebrates the explosion of this type of fantasy entertainment. From the 1960s to the turn of the twenty-first century, only a niche group desired to attend comics conventions, but today's promoters cannot supply enough tickets to match the overwhelming demand by hardcore and everyday fans. Speaking from experience, the massive venues of the San Diego Convention Center and the Jacob Javits Center are still too small for the affair. A visual analogy to canned food best describes the environment: an attendee cannot navigate the main floor without feeling like a sardine squeezed inside a tin can. In the 1940s and 1950s few adults would admit that they wanted to live in Comicland or even vacation there for a weekend but now there are not enough parcels in the neighborhood to house eager residents and their guests. In other words, it is an extremely desirable nongated community. The curb appeal is massive.

The overwhelming response to the death of Superman story line in late 1992 acts as a harbinger to the current public embrace of comics and speaks to a change in ideas of masculinity. As the television examples above show, many adults felt pressure to quell or keep their enthusiasm for fantasy hidden from the public sphere. The death of Superman comic book opened the door to the current phase of cinematic Comicland. Participation in the lie that it was an investment enabled grown men, who were messaged by society and their peers since becoming teenagers that they were too old for make-believe, to rationalize their purchase. Since any public acknowledgement of comics or superheroes at this time would have been deemed childish, uncool, and unmanly and probably prompted judgment and the 1980s quack pop-psychology label of the "Peter Pan Syndrome," the death issue allowed men to safely and privately, even publicly for many, acknowledge that Superman still mattered to them. A

---

youtube.com/watch?v=YKT7bx-fmtk.

[18] *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, season 15, episode 140, aired August 1, 2008, on NBC. See Team Coco, "Triumph At San Diego Comic-Con® 2008 | Late Night with Conan O'Brien," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgEZSzkAVEY.

gendered dynamic occurred in society where it was socially acceptable for teenage girls and women to watch television soap operas but it was socially unacceptable for men to read the narratively similar comic book superhero dramas because that activity was considered unmacho.[19] Yet, these formulas are not so different. Several writers and critics have called the Marvel universe and less so the DC universe a superhero "soap opera" or "space opera" in light of its more science fiction-based narratives.[20] Furthermore, the hypermasculine imagery of 1980s and 1990s superheroes seems to overcompensate for the idea of fanboys as effeminate and dorky. The rebranding of the "comic book" as the "graphic novel" in the next decade helped raise its profile to the status of literature as well as lessen the childish and unmanly stigmas. This cultural shift took time and is indebted to the entrance of Marvel movies in the twenty first century.

Comicland is now an accepted feature of the sociocultural fabric, not just by kids but grownups too. Today's adults matured with these characters (in their various media incarnations) and as a result most do not question their value or place in culture. Box office sales and Oscars validate this point, which was most notably confirmed by Disney's purchase of Marvel Comics for four billion dollars in 2009. At the time, the decision prompted some doubts and consternation, evidenced by an initial drop in stock price, while "most saw the acquisition as a smart, ambitious expansion maneuver," *The New York Times* reported, and has since been seen as a master move by the House of Mouse.[21] As chapter four argues, the growing list of novels highlighting the genre and Michael Chabon's Pulitzer Prize for his novel *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is further evidence of Comicland's acceptance.

---

[19] For a personal anecdote on the power of the stigma, see Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*, p. 35.

Gerard Jones implies that Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster suffered from the "Peter Pan Syndrome," not a verbatim medical analysis of the theory but the idea of social immaturity. See Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, esp. pp. 117, 233; Gordon, *Superman*, p. 30; Kiley, *The Peter Pan Syndrome*.

[20] For direct or implied language of Marvel as a "soap opera" or "space opera," see Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. 212–213; Morrison, *Supergods*, pp. 98–99, 114, 131, 175, 177, 242, 322, 328, 359; Tye, *Superman*, p. 168; Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016), pp. 34, 125–163, 166. See also the *Avengers: Age of Ultron* film review, John Podhoretz, "Comic Opera: *When the superheroes join forces, it's time to head for the hills*," *The Weekly Standard*, vol. 20, no. 34, May 18, 2015, p. 43. For DC as a "superhero opera," "soap opera," or "space opera," see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, p. 288; Morrison, *Supergods*, p. 280; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 36, 206, 244, 280, 284. More generally, see Alaniz, *Death, Disability, and the Superhero*, pp. 19, 73, 147, 159, 199. For science fiction opera regarding Kevin Smith's sidelined *Superman Lives* movie and general language applied to the Superman television show *Smallville*, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 219, 263.

[21] Brooks Barnes and Michael Cieply, "Disney Swoops Into Action, Buying Marvel For $4 Billion," *The New York Times*, vol. 158, no. 54,785, Late Edition, September 1, 2009, pp. B1, B7. See also Rob Cox and John Foley, "Breakingviews.com: Will Heroes Work Magic at Disney?," *The New York Times*, vol. 158, no. 54,785, Late Edition, September 1, 2009, p. B2.

Imagining New York as the American Neighborhood

Comicland is not merely a digital community, costume party, or television or movie wonderland. It is actually an expanding neighborhood with residents from around the world. This fictive geography crosses the border between fantasy and reality. Although the landscape of Comicland is based on New York City, its spaces hold a unique meaning for people of all locales. DC and Marvel took different approaches to world building but produced the same effect upon consumers: an intangible connection to the fantasy. Fans around the world do not need to live in or ever have visited the Big Apple to feel connected to the city because, like Comicland, it exists in the popular imagination as both real and mythic. Even though DC Comics relocated to Burbank, California, in 2015 and Marvel is rumored to do the same, New York will remain the fictional capitol of Comicland. Projections of these cities across media makes viewers feel like they reside in the superhero neighborhood of an imagined New York City.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, DC Comics designed their urban spaces to symbolize New York rather than depict it realistically. Superman biographer Glen Weldon astutely explains, DC is "keenly aware that Superman's Metropolis isn't the real Manhattan, but instead a shiny, sun-dazzled version of New York City."[22] According to comics writers, the mythic cityscapes of Superman's Metropolis and Batman's Gotham City either act as metaphors for daytime and nighttime Manhattan or symbolize its "mirror-world counterpart[s]" divided at Fourteenth Street. Regarding the latter view, Superman's orbit stretches from Union Square to uptown (minus Harlem) while Batman's sphere constitutes the seedy downtown region.[23] While generally agreed to be substitutes for New York, Metropolis and Gotham City were once

---

[22] Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 38, 276.

[23] Comic book writer Dennis O'Neil popularized the geographic metaphor, and many have since repeated the idea. See interview with Bill Finger in Steranko, *The Steranko History of Comics*, vol. 1, p. 45; Dennis O'Neil, *Batman: Knightfall. A Novel* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1994), p. 344; interview with Denny O'Neil in Bill Biochel, "Batman: Commodity as Myth," in Pearson and Uricchio, eds., *The Many Lives of the Batman*, p. 9; William Safire, "Jersey's Vanishing 'New,'" *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 144, no. 50,138, July 30, 1995, p. 14 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Section 6); Frank Miller quoted in Heidi MacDonald and Peter Sanderson, "New York Is Comics Country," *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 253, no. 5, January 30, 2006, p. 23; Uricchio, "The Batman's Gotham City™," in Ahrens and Meteling, eds., *Comics and the City*, pp. 122–123, 128; Tye, *Superman*, p. 297. See also Martin Cremers, "Gotham City: A Dystopian Comic Book World as an Arena of Modern Myths," in *Real Virtuality: About the Destruction and Multiplication of World*, eds. Ulrich Gehmann and Martin Reiche (Bielefeld, DE: Transcript Verlag, 2014), pp. 141–157. For Metropolis and New York, see also Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 215, 279; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 178; Tye, *Superman*, p. 197; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 264; Gordon, *Superman*, p. 83; Jonathan Bing, "'Superman' Seeking New Helmer of Steel: 'Superman' seeking new helmer of steel: WB, McG unable to agree over location, budget matters," Variety, July 11, 2004, 10:07pm PT. https://variety.com/2004/scene/people-news/superman-seeking-new-helmer-ofsteel1117907631/?jwsource=cl.

officially located in Delaware and along the southern coastline of New Jersey at the advice of DC Comics archivist E. Nelson Bridwell, who reportedly created an unpublished map of superhero geography in America. However, the single newspaper comic strip panel from August 13, 1978, did not permanently establish this odd topography for the entire DC universe or most fans.[24]

Superman's urban residence did not always represent New York. The geography of Metropolis fluctuated in the initial two years of creation. The name of Clark Kent's newspaper highlighted this spatial fluidity. Transition from the *Daily Star* to the *Evening News* to the *Daily Planet* mirrored Superman's creators' migration from Toronto to Cleveland to New York. Born in Toronto, Canada, artist Joe Shuster borrowed the name of the *Toronto Daily Star* for Kent's newspaper the *Daily Star*. On one lone occasion in *Action Comics* no. 2 (July 1938) it mysteriously changed to the Cleveland *Evening News*. Nevertheless, the undefined city of Metropolis quickly morphed into a coded New York as Shuster and his partner Jerry Siegel began traveling to the Big Apple for unfavorable meetings with their editors and supervisors.[25] Additionally, the radio show used the short-lived *Daily Flash* until DC Comics settled on the *Daily Planet*, which instituted a continuity across Superman media.[26] New York is imagined as the center of the world, or in this case the planet, and this association made its way into the name of the intrepid reporter's newspaper.

DC Comics' location and their editorial oversight accelerated the process of transforming Metropolis into an encrypted New York. In correspondence, DC Comics pressured Jerry Siegel

---

[24] See the newspaper comic strip Martin Pasko, George Tuska, and Vince Coletta, *The World's Greatest Superheroes*, August 13, 1978. See also Associated Press, "Bat cave in the marshes? Holy tomato, Gotham's in Jersey," *The Courier-News* (Bridgewater, NJ) August 16, 1978, pp. 1, 10; Associated Press, "Batman's Gotham City Placed in South Jersey," *Asbury Park Press* (Asbury Park, NJ), yr. 99, no. 192, August 16, 1978, p. 9; "Batman's Gotham found in N.J. swamp," *The Ithaca Journal* (Ithaca, NY), August 17, 1978, p. 14.

[25] For the newspaper transition in the comics, see *Action Comics* no. 1 (June 1938) and *Action Comics* no. 2 (July 1938) in DC Comics, *The Superman Chronicles*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 2006), pp. 7–8, 24; *Superman* no. 1 (Summer 1939) and *Superman* no. 4 (Spring 1940) in DC Comics, *Superman Archives*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 1989), pp. 11, 208; "Episode 2: War On Crime" and "Episode 9: Underworld Politics," in DC Comics, *Superman Dailies*, vol. 1, 1939–1940 (New York, NY: DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press, 1999), pp. 20–21, 150; *Action Comics* no. 23 (April 1940) in DC Comics, *Superman: The Action Comics*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 1998), p. 38.

For discussion of these points, see "Man of Steel got his first break at The Star" and Henry Mietkiewicz, "Great Krypton! Superman was The Star's ace reporter," *The Sunday Star* (Toronto, CAN), April 26, 1992, p. A1, A10–A11; Daniels, *Superman*, p. 27; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 31, 34, 42, 51–52, 105, 121, 306; Johnson, *Super-History*, p. 78; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 20–21, 26–27, 29–30, 35, 38–39, 41; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 154–155, 161–162, 361n38, 371n34; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 95, 100, 105, 109.

[26] Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 29, 36; Tye, *Superman*, p. 93; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 39, 41.

and Joe Shuster to relocate to the Big Apple so that they could better monitor the production of Superman, which the company rightly saw as sloppy both in art and writing. A letter from Jack S. Liebowitz dated April 21, 1939, summarized the company's disapproving view of their employees' work ethic. "My suggestion and of our other associates here, is that you and Joe should come to New York where we can be at a moment[']s touch with everything that you do. I think with a daily routine in an office, you will be able to accomplish a great deal more away from the distractions from working from home." Liebowitz concluded the letter in this way, "Your residence in New York need not be forever, but at least until such time that you have the thing going properly and have succeeded in getting ahead on your work."[27] The pause in written communication for a few months in 1939 indicates a temporary relocation.[28] Biographer Brad Ricca writes, "National wanted them to work from their own New York offices at 480 Lexington [Ave], just to have them closer (for deadline purposes) and to avoid all the mail. The boys gave it a shot—but hated it. So they moved back home and rented their own studio in Cleveland."[29] Ricca fails to point out that disliking New York probably had little to do with the city itself but more with the supervision of them by Superman's editors and owners. The Superman Shop, which began in January 1940 and lasted until either late 1943—after the military drafted Siegel into the army—or early 1944, employed several ghost artists to help Shuster with the punishing pace of publishing the character in three comic book magazines and the newspaper comic strips.[30] Siegel told California cartoonists Phil Yeh and Randy Kosht in the fall of 1975 for the periodical *Cobblestone: A Newspaper of the Arts* that after he entered the service DC Comics "took over Joe's end of it." After relinquishing the rights to Superman, Siegel operated under the delusion that he was entitled to oversee the production.

> Joe and I had a studio in Cleveland; Joe had artists working for him. When I went into the service, Joe and his staff went to New York, or at least Joe and some of

---

[27] Jack S. Liebowitz to Jerome Siegel, letter, April 21, 1939, pp. 1–2, in *Laura Siegel Larson v. Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and DC Comics*, Case No. CV-04-8400-ODW (RZx) (C.D. Cal. 9th), Docket 353-2, Exhibit D, vol. 8, filed August 5, 2008, pp. ER 1880–1881; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 32–33, 152. The letter is reproduced in the latter text on pages 31–33.

[28] For their address in Queens, New York, see Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 362n64.

[29] Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 162.

[30] For the Superman Shop, see Tye, *Superman*, pp. 48–49, 52; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 162–165, 192, 196, 211, 223–224, 266B, 349n37, 363n69, 375n7, 378n8; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 14, 30–31, 33, 37, 40, 44–45, 64–66, 74, 93, 120–121, 129, 131, 147, 152. This timeline for their studio is based upon two factors. First, letters from DC Comics addressed to Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster in Cleveland restarted on January 22, 1940. Second, Brad Ricca cites two local articles dated January 18, 1940, and February 29, 1940, about the creators living in their hometown of Cleveland. See Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 163–165, 363n72–74, 363n75, 363n77.

> them (the artists under Shuster's employ) did. I wasn't around and eventually most of Joe's workers worked directly for National instead of Joe. When I came out of the service, I wanted to set up our studio again and operate the way we had before. Incidentally, before I went into the service, I wrote that I hoped they (National) wouldn't take advantage of this (my absence) and try to take away the production of **Superman** [*sic*] from Joe and me, and that's exactly what they did turn around and do or attempt to do, because when I came out, I tried to get things as they were before, where all the material would come solely from Joe and me, and I encountered great resistance on that, and our troubles were on.[31]

Their studio also served as a physical and mental barrier, however unsuccessfully, to the reality that DC Comics owned and controlled Superman. The company is arguably responsible for the character's success and sustained presence in American culture. The fact is Superman was too massive an idea for the pair to develop and maintain themselves. They needed production help and narrative guidance. This is something Siegel and Shuster never admitted publicly. And the same can be said for Bob Kane, who concealed his Batman ghost writers and artists.

The city's architecture also influenced the presentation of Metropolis. Admittedly, there is truth in this view that DC Comics desired more control of Superman, from how he and Lois Lane looked to how they spoke and acted in the comics. This opinion overlooks the allure of New York and the fact that Cleveland is too small to contain Superman and less architecturally interesting. Leaping over or flying among skyscrapers is more mesmerizing when it is the Empire State Building rather than Cleveland's Terminal Tower. Shuster needed to be in New York to draw the urban scale necessary for Superman. Ultimately, New York better matched the grandeur of the character. A photograph in the July 1944 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* showed Superman's artist with a drawing board on DC Comics' rooftop at 480 Lexington Ave. He had an unobstructed view of the Manhattan skyline, especially the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building. These two giants in the sky were again at his disposal.[32] In short, placing

---

[31] Yeh and Kosht, "**Supersham!**," [*sic*] *Cobblestone*, vol. 1, no. 11 (November–December 1975), p. 11.

[32] "The Make Believers," *Harper's Bazaar*, vol. 78, no. 2791 (July 1944), p. 41.

Granted, Shuster was not drawing all the artwork due to poor eyesight and the overwhelming workload. However, he set the tone for the strip and supervised the team of ghost artists. DC Comics followed his blueprint for Metropolis.

For discussion of Joe Shuster's eyesight, see Alexander Ross, "Return of the Invincibles," *Maclean's* (Toronto, CAN), vol. 79, no. 6, March 19, 1966, p. 11; Mordecai Richler, "The Great Comic Book Heroes," *Encounter*, vol. 28, no. 5 (May 1967), p. 50; interview with Jerry Siegel in Bishoff and Light, "Superman Grew Out of Our Personal Feelings About Life," *Alter Ego* (February 2007), p. 5; Joe Shuster to Dick Giordano, letter to the editor, *Detective Comics* no. 512 (March 1982); Jerry Siegel, letter to the editor, *Action Comics* no. 544 (June 1983).

For secondary sources, see Dooley, "The Man Of Tomorrow And The Boys Of Yesterday," in Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, p. 31; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 67, 114, 178, 243, 250, 314, 317; De Haven,

Superman in New York with its art deco architecture made the fantasy more real and exciting. Besides its skyscrapers and the overall skyline, altered versions of the city's bridges appeared in the early comics as well as the Statue of Liberty, Grand Central Station, and the Forty-Second Street New York Public Library with its iconic marble lions named Patience and Fortitude by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia.[33] Although intermittently moving back to Cleveland in the 1940s, Superman's creators settled in New York for the majority of their adult lives—staying even after losing their first court case and being fired from DC Comics sometime between March 1947 and

---

Our Hero, pp. 74–77, 92; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. xi, 48, 101–102; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 15–16, 52, 63, 269; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 8, 19, 36, 63; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 8, 65, 99, 112, 124, 238, 289–290; Gordon, *Superman*, p. 102; Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 30, 70, 120, 126, 140, 155. Brad Ricca plays doctor on page 352n24 by entertaining the idea that Shuster may have suffered from Graves' disease.

[33] For the Empire State Building, see "Episode 10: Unnatural Disasters," in DC Comics, *Superman Dailies*, vol. 1, 1939–1940, p. 173; "Episode 21: The Scientists Of Sudden Death," in DC Comics, *Superman Dailies*, vol. 3, 1941–1942 (New York, NY: DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press, 1999), p. 47; Episode 20: "Liar Of The Leer," Episode: 21: "The Steel Mill Poet," Episode 28: "Little Susie's Fibs," and Episode 29: "The Mischievous Mr. Mxyztplk," in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Dailies, 1942–1944*, pp. 28, 49, 219, 228, 243, 253; "Episode 6: The Chosen," "Episode 14: Arson Evidence," and "Episode 18: Hollywood Victory Training," in DC Comics, *Superman: The Sunday Classics, 1939–1943* (New York, NY: DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press, 1998), pp. 36, 130, 166, 179; Strips 191 and 200 in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Sundays, 1943–1946* (San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2013), pp. 16, 25; *Action Comics* no. 56 (January 1943) in DC Comics, *Superman: The Action Comics*, vol. 4 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 2005), p. 57; Strips 360 and 422 in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Sundays, 1946–1949*, pp. 16, 78; Strip 606 in DC Comics, *Superman: The Atomic Age Sundays, 1949–1953* (San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2015), p. 95.

For the Chrysler Building, see "Episode 15: The Unknown Strikes," in DC Comics, *Superman Dailies*, vol. 2, 1940–1941 (New York, NY: DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press, 1999), pp. 78, 87; "Episode 6: The Chosen," in DC Comics, *Superman: The Sunday Classics, 1939–1943*, p. 36; "Episode 27: Where Is Lois Lane?," in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Dailies, 1942–1944*, p. 194; Strip 418 in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Sundays, 1946–1949*, p. 74.

For the Woolworth Building and City Bank-Farmers Trust Building, see "Episode 24: The Deadly Dwarf," in DC Comics, *Superman Dailies*, vol. 3, 1941–1942, p. 93; "Episode 27: Where Is Lois Lane?," in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Dailies, 1942–1944*, p. 193; "Episode 11: The Committee for a New Order," in DC Comics, *Superman: The Sunday Classics, 1939–1943*, pp. 88–89; Strips 191 and 227 in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Sundays, 1943–1946*, pp. 16, 52.

For the Manhattan Bridge, see "Episode 25: Explosion," in DC Comics, *Superman Dailies*, vol. 3, 1941–1942, p. 109; *Action Comics* no. 32 (January 1941) in DC Comics, *Superman: The Action Comics*, vol. 2, pp. 163–164.

For the Brooklyn Bridge, see *Action Comics* no. 12 (May 1939) in DC Comics, *Superman: The Action Comics*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 1997), p. 98.

For imaginary bridges, see Episode 22: "The Monocle Menace" and "Episode 27: Where Is Lois Lane?," in DC Comics, *Superman: The Golden Age Dailies, 1942–1944*, pp. 78–79, 179–182.

For the Statue of Liberty, see *Action Comics* no. 56 (January 1943) in DC Comics, *Superman: The Action Comics*, vol. 4, p. 58

For Grand Central Station, see "Episode 26: The Electric Rod," in DC Comics, *Superman Dailies*, vol. 3, 1941–1942, p. 119.

For the Forty-Second Street New York Public Library, see *World's Finest Comics* no. 28 (May–June 1947) in DC Comics, *Superman: The World's Finest Comics*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 2009), p. 172.

For Lower Manhattan, see *World's Finest Comics* no. 6 (Summer 1942) in DC Comics, *Superman: The World's Finest Comics*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 2004), p. 108.

January 1948—and spent their later years in Los Angeles, California.[34] The question of geographic inspiration propelled Toronto, Cleveland, and New York to claim Superman as their own through narrative and official postal stamps.[35] The city of Cleveland memorialized Jerry Siegel's childhood home, installed a permanent exhibit at the main branch library, and constructed an audiovisual display at the airport. In addition to the municipality of Metropolis, Illinois, these three cities battled for bragging rights over Superman's "home." Given the depth and usage, only New York's claim has stood the test of time as Toronto and Cleveland are fleeting geographies. Superman may have been born in Cleveland, but he was raised in New York.

Marvel, however, understands the power of the geographic metaphor better than DC and located their world within the actual city of New York and its suburbs. Many of Marvel's superheroes are tied to Big Apple neighborhoods. For example, Midtown Manhattan is the retreat of the Fantastic Four and Iron Man, the Lower East Side is the childhood residence of the Thing, Hell's Kitchen is the domain of Daredevil, Greenwich Village houses the sanctuary of Doctor Strange, Harlem is the dominion of Luke Cage, Westchester is the locale of Charles Xavier's mutant academy and hideout for the X-Men, and Forest Hills is the home of Spider-Man. This association to the local level is explicit in the phrase "your friendly neighborhood

---

[34] For Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's fluctuating residency, see Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 177–180; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 51–52, 121–122, 217, 241; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 13–14, 161, 165, 223–224, 227–229, 237, 259, 272, 285, 362n64. For meetings in New York, see Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. 17, 72, 74, 102, 106, 110, 131, 135.

[35] For US Superman stamps and Canadian Superman coins and stamps, see *People*, vol. 52, no. 23, December 13, 1999, p. 148; *People*, vol. 52, no. 21, November 29, 1999, p. 127; Tye, *Superman*, p. 260; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 273; Jason Dittmer, *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero: Metaphors, Narratives, and Geopolitics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013), p. 191n54; Lee Easton and Kelly Hewson, "Heroes, Borders, and Canadian Culture: The Superman Reclamation Project," in *Reading between the Borderlines: Cultural Production and Consumption across the 49th Parallel*, ed. Gillian Roberts (Montreal, CAN: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), pp. 113–114, 119, 125, 129.

For Canada claiming Superman because artist Joe Shuster was born in Toronto and the usage of the *Daily Star* newspaper in the comics, see Alexander Ross, "Return of the Invincibles," *Maclean's* (Toronto, CAN), vol. 79, no. 6, March 19, 1966, pp. 10–12; Mordecai Richler, "The Great Comic Book Heroes," *Encounter*, vol. 28, no. 5 (May 1967) p. 48; Mordecai Richler, "Canada: 'An Immensely Boring Country'—Until Now," *Life*, vol. 70, no. 13, April 9, 1971, p. 58; Ian Wakefield, "Lords of the tie-in trinkets," *Maclean's* (Toronto, CAN), vol. 91, no. 31, December 11, 1978, p. 48; Arthur Black, "End of the Man of Steel?," *The Windsor Star* (Windsor, CAN), September 21, 1992, p. A6; Jamie Galipeau, "Letters/Comment: Part of Canada's heritage," *The Windsor Star* (Windsor, CAN), October 7, 1992, p. A11; "Trolling for lions, dancing the steamy hootchy-coochy and other Star memories…," [*sic*] *The Toronto Star* (Toronto, CAN), November 3, 1992, p. S5; Dittmer, *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero*, pp. 15–16; trading card source in Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 339n7; Easton and Kelly Hewson, "Heroes, Borders, and Canadian Culture," *Reading between the Borderlines*, pp. 116–118, 123–124, 127–130.

Spider-Man."[36] Marvel's neighborhood design helped to transform Comicland into a fictional world for the public to inhabit. It can be argued that geography is archetypal or mythological for DC while it is "realistic" for Marvel.[37] Historian Bradford W. Wright insists that Marvel stories "took place in a world more relevant to the audience."[38] Film scholar Scott Bukatman asserts that the narrative makeup of Marvel characters cannot work in a mythic city: "Real neuroses demand a real city (or vice versa, I'm not sure which)."[39] Regarding realism in the Spider-Man universe, Marvel's coarchitect Stan Lee gave this explanation in an op-ed piece for *The New York Times* on May 3, 2002: "Instead of living in a fictitious Gotham City or Metropolis, he has his digs in good ol' New York City and … might be found running after a taxi anywhere from Greenwich Village to the Upper East Side."[40] That same year, Lee expounded his explanation for the creation of the New York centered "Marvel Universe" in his autobiography. Lee half-jokingly believes that his fictional representation deserves symbolic recognition from the City of New York. He sought bestowal of the title of honorary mayor.

> It occurred to me that since these colorful superheroes … had to live somewhere, why not let them all live in the same city? That city would be New York, because that's where I lived and it was the one place I felt I could write about with a fair degree of accuracy. My next thought was, if the superheroes and their colorful cohorts all lived in the same city, it seemed reasonable … that their paths would cross from time to time.
>
> Ergo! That was the start of the Marvel Universe, a universe in which the Human Torch is apt to run into Spider-Man while chasing the Hulk down a busy street. After a while, we had so much going on in the streets of Manhattan that you couldn't tell the heroes without a scorecard. It's always baffled me why I haven't been named the honorary mayor of New York.[41]

A 2017 documentary series on AMC called *Robert Kirkman's Secret History of Comics* included a video clip from an earlier interview where Lee replicated his rationale. "Instead of having them

---

[36] See Peter Sanderson, *The Marvel Comics Guide to New York City* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 2007); Howe, *Marvel Comics*, pp. 60, 70–72, 240.
[37] Arno Meteling, "A Tale of Two Cities: Politics and Superheroics in *Starman* and *Ex Machina*" and Jason Bainbridge, "'I Am New York'—Spider-Man, New York City and the Marvel Universe," in Ahrens and Meteling, eds., *Comics and the City*, pp. 138, 142, 163.
[38] Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, p. 207.
[39] Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 206.
[40] Stan Lee, "That's My Spidey," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, vol. 151, no. 52,107, May 3, 2002, p. A23. See also Batchelor, *Stan Lee*, pp. 88–89.
[41] Stan Lee and George Mair, *Excelsior!: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* (New York, NY: Fireside, 2002), pp. 137 and 51. He would replicate this narrative in video deposition, see Fingeroth, *A Marvelous Life*, pp. 88–89.

live in a fictional place like Metropolis or Gotham City, I plunked'em right down in New York City. Because I knew New York City, I could write about New York City, and I figured why not let them live in a real place." In the same episode, comic book writer Paul Jenkins described the location itself as a more than just setting. "New York City is its own character in comics because it represents the United States of America in a very material way."[42] Regarding the original 1989 Batman movie, producer Michael E. Uslan mirrored this point in his memoir. He states that Gotham City was "the third most important character in the movie."[43] Conversely, literary scholar Anthony Lioi viewed the city as a metaphor for the secret identity feature of superheroes. He contends, "During the Golden Age of DC Comics, superheroes lived in places that suggested real cities but never named them directly. The disguise of the city mirrored the superhero's own disguise, signaling the importance of keeping dual identities secret. The thrill of Marvel's New York was the thrill of identity unmasked, but also of shared community: Marvel's Silver Age heroes give the sense that they are just around the corner in Midtown."[44] Grant Morrison likewise addressed superhero realism and geography for Marvel. Their comic books, he argues, transported readers to a fictional version of New York that felt real.

> There was no physical Marvel universe New York. You couldn't buy a ticket and fly there, yet you could buy a comic that would instantly transport you to the only real Marvel universe New York there could ever be—a paper-and-ink virtual-reality simulation—on the pages of the comic books themselves. A wholly alternative, fully functioning duplicate of New York now existed on the paper skin of the next dimension down from our own: a city populated by drawn figures of Daredevil, Spider-Man, and the Fantastic Four. That New York had its own history of alien invasions and tsunamis from Atlantis, but it also kept pace with changing fashions in the "real" world, and it had the capacity to grow in complexity over the decades. It had a continuity that was separate from our own. Its characters outlived real people, including their creators. The [Fantastic Four's] Baxter Building could outlast real houses made of stone.[45]

In the documentary mentioned above, CNN personality and Marvel fan Van Jones alluded to the idea of their New York City as representation of the American neighborhood and noted its imaginative power over comic book readers. "Marvel Comics made New York City the center of this moral drama and they've made it the home of the imagination of a whole generation of

---

[42] Interviews with Stan Lee and Paul Jenkins in *Robert Kirkman's Secret History of Comics*, episode 4, "City of Heroes," DVD.
[43] Uslan, *The Boy Who Loved Batman*, p. 219.
[44] Anthony Lioi, "The Radiant City: New York as Ecotopia in *Promethea*, Book V," in Ahrens and Meteling, eds., *Comics and the City*, p. 152.
[45] Morrison, *Supergods*, p. 220.

young people."[46] In sum, directly identifying Comicland as New York made it more *real* and feel like a neighborhood that you lived in.

Superhero movies spotlight the urban landscape of New York, a fact the Smithsonian television series *Aerial America* acknowledged in 2013, which was relatively early in the superhero movie renaissance. "It's one of the world's most recognizable cities. Homebase to Batman, Spider-Man, and the Fantastic Four." This opening narration framed the discussion of the Chrysler Building and the Manhattan Bridge in Marvel and DC movies.

> But its architecture has made it a filmmaker's favorite for decades. Spider-Man, played by Tobey Maguire, mourns his uncle's death on its rooftop. And the Fantastic Four's Human Torch speeds around it in the 2007 movie *Rise of the Silver Surfer*. It's also one of the few midtown buildings to survive in the Marvel superhero smashup *The Avengers*.
>
> … It takes a beating in the final installment of the Batman trilogy when the villain Bane destroys real and fictional bridges up and down the river. The bridge is part of the fictional Gotham City, a nineteenth century nickname for New York. Batman cocreator Bill Finger said he chose the name so people anywhere could identify with the stories.[47]

Batman screenwriter Jonathan Nolan discussed the role of New York in these movies in the same AMC documentary mentioned above. "You have this sense that New York is a natural place for these superhero films to play out because comic books kind of grew up with the city and they feel inextricably linked to one another."[48] This statement is, nonetheless, peculiar given the camerawork of the Batman trilogy. While the built environment of Manhattan is visible in certain panoramic views, his brother Christopher Nolan shot those movies mainly in Chicago, Illinois. Yet, the geography of the Midwest does not match the aristocratic implications of alter ego Bruce Wayne. Since it is visually and narratively problematic to capture New York as both Metropolis and Gotham City, especially when the characters could interact in future crossover movies, an alternative site is necessary. Even though the Big Apple is the historical influence, Philadelphia is a better choice than Chicago, both geographically and demographically. The Wayne clan and its implied Anglo-Saxon heritage of old money blends into the Main Line. It is

---

[46] Interview with Van Jones in *Robert Kirkman's Secret History of Comics*, episode 4, "City of Heroes," DVD.
[47] *Aerial America*, season 1, episode 37, "Beyond Hollywood," directed by Toby Beach, written by Alicia Green, aired August 25, 2013, on Smithsonian Channel.
[48] Interview with Jonathan Nolan in *Robert Kirkman's Secret History of Comics*, episode 4, "City of Heroes," DVD.

not hard to imagine Wayne Manor concealed in the woodlands of the wealthy suburb Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. There is even a nearby town named Wayne.

Although DC Comics and their mythic, self-assured, and often flawless superheroes established Comicland, Marvel Comics is currently the main landlord of the neighborhood due to their box office dominance[49] and they use their idiosyncratic, neurotic, doubtful, and deeply flawed characters to showcase the complexity of the modern human experience within an action fantasy.[50] As the quote two paragraphs above shows, Stan Lee even imagined himself as the mayor of this fictional New York. Comicland is so powerful that it captured the imagination, dominated entertainment, and imprinted itself in the real world.

Superman, His Caretakers, and Reality

Superheroes matter historically and continue to impact the real world. Superman, the character who created Comicland, is the prime example. He made a permanent mark on American culture as the evidence presented in these four chapters show. The Man of Steel was a material, physical, and economic phenomenon with tangible effects that cannot be simply dismissed as children's fare. Superman has sustained a central role in the everyday lives of kids and adults since he debuted in 1938. What Superman said and did in the conceptual geography of Comicland generated reactions, both playful and serious, in the real world. Superman is more than fantasy because the public consumed him as real.[51] He "exists" as both a character and a historical figure.

As this project has shown, the Man of Steel provides a prism to discuss the American fabric through the themes of commercialization, consumption, childhood, race, politics, gender, and sexuality. This fictional character is one of the most noteworthy creations of American

---

[49] For the previous power dynamic of DC Comics dominating the box office and Marvel Comics as having no cinematic presence, see Gordon, *Comic Strips and Culture*, pp. 153–156. For acknowledgement of DC superheroes as mythic, see, for example, Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 10, 15, 85.

[50] Marvel Comics recreated the superhero formula from the self-assured hero to the doubtful hero. See, for example, Dennis O'Neil, "The Man of Steel and Me," in Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, p. 49; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Culture*, p. 152; Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. 201–225; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, pp. 295–299, 301–302, Robert Genter, "'With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility': Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 40, no. 6 (December 2007), pp. 953–978; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 130, 137–138, 146; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, pp. 10, 189–198, 219.

[51] See Otto Friedrich with Beth Austin and Janice C. Simpson, "Show Business: Up, Up and Awaaay!!!," *Time*, vol. 131, no. 11, March 14, 1988, pp. 62–72, 74.

culture and has held an enduring meaning for children and grownups regardless of the decade.[52] Superman has a timeless quality beyond the constraints of serialized fiction that semiotics scholar Umberto Eco discusses.[53] While the world changes, in many ways it stays the same given Superman's constant presence in our everyday lives. In a somewhat related commentary on Superman's consistency as a character regardless of the human handler's interpretation, Grant Morrison explains:

> Actually, it's as if he's more real than we are. We writers come and go, generations of artists leave their interpretations, and yet something persists, something that is always Superman. We have to adapt to his rules if we enter his world. We can never change him too much, or else we lose what he is. There is a persistent set of characteristics that define Superman through decades of creative voices and it's that essential, unshakeable quality of Superman-ness the character possesses in every incarnation, which is divinity by any other name.[54]

Unlike the many interpretations of Batman, there is an editorial belief at DC against changing the lore of Superman. This narrowminded view has seemingly stifled the character, leading audiences to claim to prefer Batman.[55] Only recently has this narrative constraint begun to change. Case in point is the innovative television reinterpretation of the Superman mythos. The CW series *Superman & Lois* has the couple married with two teenage boys and only the younger is superpowered.

Even if the public currently places Superman in the secondary position of the DC pantheon, he is still such a powerful archetype that he caused a feedback loop into Comicland. An interaction with a Superman cosplayer at Comic-Con International influenced the presentation of the character by Grant Morrison. A self-described occultist and practitioner of chaos magic, Morrison believes that he encountered a manifestation of Superman in 1999. His experience of "talking" to *Superman* in real life helped him to frame the character in his *Superman Now* proposal, which though never produced as a comic book by DC fed into his characterization of Superman in the early twenty-first century miniseries *All-Star Superman*. Morrison recalls the event in his hybrid memoir/treatise on superheroes called *Supergods*:

---

[52] For the endurance thesis of Superman, see Tye, *Superman*, esp. pp. ix, xi–xii, 299–302.
[53] For the timeless thesis, see Eco, "The Myth of Superman," *Diacritics*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 14–22; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 10–11, 15–18, 20, 26–27, 29, 32, 37–38, 40, 44, 56, 64, 67, 85, 160–161.
[54] Morrison, *Supergods*, p. 14. For the somewhat related commentary on Superman changing yet staying the same as a character and the Superman mythos correcting itself, see De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 4, 195–196, 200–201, 205; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 2–3, 196, 221.
[55] See Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. xx.

> He was dressed in a perfectly tailored red, blue, and yellow costume; his hair was slicked back with a kiss curl; and unlike the often weedy or paunchy Supermen who paraded through the convention halls, he was trim, buff, and handsome. He was the most convincing Superman I've ever seen, looking somewhat like a cross between Christopher Reeve and the actor Billy Zane. I knew a visitation when I saw one.
>
> … [I] asked "Superman" if he wouldn't mind answering a few questions. He didn't, and sat on a concrete bollard with one knee to his chest shield, completely relaxed. It occurred to me that this was exactly how Superman would sit. A man who was invulnerable to all harm would be always relaxed and at ease. He'd have no need for the kind of physically aggressive postures superheroes tended to go in for. I suddenly began to understand Superman in a new way.
>
> The whole encounter lasted an hour and a half, then he left, graciously, and on foot I'm sad to say. … Enflamed, I stayed awake the whole night, writing about Superman until the fuming August sun rose above the warships, the hangars, and the Pacific.
>
> … Bumping into someone dressed as Superman at the San Diego Comic Convention may sound about as wondrous and unlikely as meeting an alcoholic at an AA meeting … but … of the dozens of Men of Steel I've witnessed marching up and down the aisles at Comic-Con, or posing with tourists outside Mann's Chinese [Theatre] on Hollywood Boulevard, not one was ever as convincing as the Superman who appeared at the precise moment I needed him most. This is what I mean when I talk about magic: By choosing to frame my encounter as a pop-shamanic vision quest yielding pure contact with embodied archetypal forces, I got much more out of it than if I'd simply sat there with Dan [Raspler] sniggering at the delusional fool in tights. By telling myself a very specific story about what was occurring, I was able to benefit artistically, financially, and I like to think spiritually, in a way that perhaps might not have been possible had I simply assumed that our Superman was a convention "cosplayer."[56]

Alvin Schwartz, a Superman ghostwriter during the 1940s and 1950s,[57] shares Grant Morrison's metaphysical outlook and the belief in the idea of Superman as an entity, a thought form that reverberates in the real world. Echoing Morrison, Schwartz explains in *Children's Literature* in 1976 that Superman's handlers "chose the path of denial. It simply never would have occurred to us that we were, to put it bluntly, 'being directed.'" Unpacking this statement,

---

[56] Morrison, *Supergods*, pp. 403–404 as well as 178, 225, 255–256, 259, 282, 284, 286–288, 395, 409 for his views on magic.

[57] *The New York Times Book Review* outed Alvin Schwartz as Superman's writer when they reviewed his 1948 novel *The Blowtop*. See "People Who Read and Write: It's Superman!," *The New York Times*, Late City Edition, vol. 97, no. 38,852, January 4, 1948, p. 10 (Section 7). Larry Tye mentions this but never cites the article in his endnotes. See Tye, *Superman*, p. xii.

Schwartz writes that "it was not I, or any of the other writers or the editors, or even the originators, [Jerry] Siegel and [Joe] Shuster, who directed Superman's destinies. Superman directed his own destinies. All of us were merely his pawns." Reiterating the concept of Superman's sovereignty, he contends that "as writers and editors, working on Superman, we thought we were, in effect, manufacturing the character. In actuality, we did no more than 'discover' Superman." In other words, the writers and editors maintained an illusion of control because Superman functioned with autonomy.[58] Schwartz clarified this interpretation in his memoir *An Unlikely Prophet* written twenty-one years later. The article from 1976, he writes, treats Superman "[a]s though he were alive and not merely a creature of the imagination." The Man of Steel took over his writers and "had a life of his own." Schwartz again rephrases the problem, "Superman acquired a kind of reality that controlled his writers and editors without their realizing it." Basically, the character and his narrative created a set of unwritten rules with they had to comply. "Superman had grown into a very precisely defined personality over the years—so much so that we had to follow his character as it had developed. Or it wouldn't have been Superman." Schwartz revealed Superman's caretakers' unusual solution to the problem: imagine him as a real person.

> Of course, what I was trying to express was the fact that in the excitement of plotting, those of us involved in constantly thinking up new problems and situations to keep Superman going often spoke of him as a real person. … You see, I and my editors knew Superman as a result of long hours spent worrying over him—the way you know an eccentric uncle after years of experience with his ways. So we couldn't tell a new writer exactly what Superman could do, or should do, or wouldn't do. It was necessary first to get acquainted with the character and develop a sense of him as we had. As though, in fact, he were really our living and independent eccentric uncle.[59]

His memoir is a confusing read, entangling memory with a fantastical narrative of Buddhist spirituality. Alvin Schwartz recalled his life with Superman through an encounter with a Tibetan monk named Mr. Thongden, a physical emanation of thought created by anthropologist Dr. Everett Nelson. The text defines Thongden as a tulpa: "A being created by the imagination of another man." Even though presented as real, Thongden is (presumably?) a literary device to help Schwartz understand that the Man of Steel is not simply fictional but rather a partial tulpa—

---

[58] Schwartz, "The Real Secret of Superman's Identity," *Children's Literature*, pp. 117, 124, 126. See also Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet*, pp. 2–5; Tye, *Superman*, p. 210.
[59] Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet*, pp. 2, 4–5, 94. It is important to note that Alvin Schwartz confuses time by mistakenly placing the original article from 1976 somewhere between 1989 and 1991.

an uncontrollable entity and a large part of his life. Speaking about the development of Superman from Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster to Schwartz, Thongden says, "They created the cartoon character. You created your personal living Superman."[60] Thongden continues this line of thought:

> But for you, Superman was necessarily a mental formation. Such visualizing, whether voluntary or not, involves a buildup of psychic forces. Or perhaps I should call them creations. Like children born of the flesh, these mind creations separate their lives from yours, escape your control, and act with an independence entirely their own. … In the case of your Superman, or any other of your visualizations, such independence may have been only partially realized. But it will come in time. You will see.[61]

Thongden then explains that Superman functions as an avatar for Schwartz:

> You began to think of him as a sort of degenerated religious symbol—an avatar for the underprivileged and the dispossessed. All this was in your article. So it was obvious to me that you'd been reflecting quite deeply on Superman. You had indeed made a mantra of him, and in your own way, you did give him a kind of independent reality.[62]

However, the most significant part of the story occurred later when Alvin Schwartz describes a mental encounter with Superman in a New York City cab. Given the context of the book it may have been a "visitation" more magical than Grant Morrison's in San Diego. Although passing the event off as a dream, it seems to prove Mr. Thongden's theory of Superman as hidden part of Schwartz's life.

> I was still in the cab. But Thongden had vanished, and sitting beside me was Superman. His cape had draped over him in such a way that the folds seemed somehow frozen into some hard substance. … I smiled at him.
>
> … Superman wasn't listening to me at all. He was just sitting motionless beside me, his arms folded as he stared straight ahead. His rescue mission completed, he had simply withdrawn into himself. He had nothing to say to me and no interest in listening to me.[63]

It is my sense that the cab experience was real for Schwartz, who then constructed a wild spiritual discourse about life around the event in the guise of a memoir as a way to explain it to himself. The problem is that he writes the whole book as genuine, blurring fantasy and reality

---

[60] Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet*, pp. 8–9. See also Alvin Schwartz, *A Gathering of Selves: The Spiritual Journey of the Legendary Writer of Superman and Batman* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2007), p. 127.
[61] Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet*, p. 93.
[62] Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet*, p. 95.
[63] Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet*, pp. 141–142. See also pages 148 and 200 for a reflection on the encounter.

just as Comicland does. The strange book climaxes with Superman saving Schwartz and his wife's imaginary childhood friend at a nonexistent carnival next to the Bronx Zoo. Thongden sabotages the spinning airplane ride, causing the supporting shaft to break. Schwartz then manifests his Superman tulpa to rescue them. He transfers his consciousness to Superman and envisions himself as the hero.

> I felt the fall of our plane being cushioned, then eased slowly down, while at the same time I felt myself bracing the collapsing shaft, all fifty tons of buckling steel, and lowering it gently to the ground. Then I found myself standing on the outside of a small crowd that had gathered around. They were watching people, unhurt, scrambling from the little planes splayed all about. I had apparently left my seat in the plane at some indeterminate point. And I felt as though, magically, I had flown down.[64]

And his follow-up novel *A Gathering of Selves* published a decade later doubles down on these ideas. Again, the reader is confused whether the Buddhist monk is real for Alvin Schwartz or a literary device. On page one, he writes: "Mr. Thongden, a self-styled *tulpa*—a creation of pure thought and meditation—was the guide as I rode my private Superman fixation on a voyage of discovery, reaching out toward that inner awareness attained by the great metaphysical thinkers and mystics of East and West."[65] Instead of the word *avatar*, Schwartz prefers to use "phantasm" to describe Superman in this text.[66] Then, Schwartz clarifies the events of his carnival hallucination: he became Superman. "I imagined myself to be on a carnival high ride whose sudden collapse caused me to envision myself as Superman and bring about a wholesale rescues of all the passengers, including myself."[67] He further explains that he absorbed the thought form into his consciousness, essentially freeing him.[68] "I absorbed my Superman phantasm after I used him to save us from the collapse of that carnival ride."[69]

In contrast to the generally positive and spiritual experiences of writers Grant Morrison and Alvin Schwartz, editor Mort Weisinger felt haunted by Superman and enlisted psychoanalytical help. Journalist Franklynn Peterson revealed the troubles of Weisinger in *The Indianapolis Star Magazine* on November 29, 1970: "When pressed, Weisinger will admit that

---

[64] Schwartz, *An Unlikely Prophet*, pp. 188, 190, 193–194.
[65] Schwartz, *A Gathering of Selves*, p. 1.
[66] Schwartz, *A Gathering of Selves*, pp. 13, 19–20, 28, 34, 36, 128.
[67] Schwartz, *A Gathering of Selves*, p. 19.
[68] Schwartz, *A Gathering of Selves*, pp. 13, 36.
[69] Schwartz, *A Gathering of Selves*, p. 28.

over the years his super alter ego had given him an inferiority complex." As such, Weisinger moaned to Peterson:

> I was always living under the shadow of Superman. It was as though I never shaped him. Instead, he made me. To preserve my sanity, I began moonlighting as a freelance writer, doing articles for the Reader's Digest and others. It wasn't as though I needed the money. I was getting damn good pay as editor of Superman Comics, vice-president of National Periodicals which turned out the books, and story editor and consultant for the two Superman television shows. But I needed a self-awareness — separated from Superman.

To orchestrate the unyielding volume of stories (crossing several magazines) that featured the red caped hero, Weisinger would imagine that he *was* Superman. Alvin Schwartz refers to Superman as a real person and becomes his art one time while Weisinger repeatedly conjured himself as the character thereby making his connection a more extreme form of psychological entanglement. Like Schwartz, Weisinger engaged in mental cosplay.

> Many times, I'd be walking down the street and I'd say to myself, "A guy who thinks up story ideas for Superman has to be nuts." At least he'd have to think like a wild man.
>
> Whenever I'd sit down to plan a Superman story, I'd say to myself, "Mort, baby, you're Superman. You're the most powerful man in the world. There's nothing you can't do. Now what kind of situation could give a guy like you some trouble? How are you going to keep the readers suspense?" You know, while I was thinking, wracking my brain, I'd actually change into Superman. I do not think I could keep turning out those stories for thirty years if I didn't feel the transformation come over me, the way Clark Kent does as he rips off his business suit revealing the red-and-blue skin tights with the big S on his chest.

Peterson explained that Weisinger went to a psychoanalyst for a few years "[i]n order to achieve self-awareness" because "[t]he more he became wrapped up in the day-by-day fantasy world of the flying man of steel come to earth from the late planet Krypton, the more Mort began to regard his imagined Superman suit as a strait-jacket."[70] [*sic*] Weisinger himself replicated these complaints on October 23, 1977, for the newspaper magazine insert *Parade*. "For 30 years of my life I chased around the universe with that flashing figure in red and blue, the mighty Superman, linked to him like a Siamese twin." He continued, "The incessant deadline pressures sent me to a shrink, gave me an ulcer, hypertension and insomnia." Ultimately, Weisinger admitted that he

[70] Franklynn Peterson, "Superman Goes Mod," *The Indianapolis Star Magazine*, November 29, 1970, pp. 75, 77.

was envious. "Superman gave me a hang up. I resented basking in his reflected glory. I was jealous of him."[71]

Man of Steel cocreator Jerry Siegel shared his editor's affliction. Years of anguish over losing the ability to design the Superman continuity after two failed lawsuits turned his creation into a monster. Siegel, who has a flair for the dramatic and capital letters, declared in his 1951 press release that "SUPERMAN has turned [into] SUPERFRANKENSTEIN!"[72] In his October 1975 press release, Siegel cried: "You hear a great deal about The American Dream. But SUPERMAN, who in the comics and films fights for "truth, justice and the American Way", [*sic*] has for Joe [Shuster] and me become An American Nightmare."[73] On December 16, 1975, Siegel again articulated his living nightmare to a journalist for the *Sarasota Journal*, a local Florida newspaper.

> I feel absolutely haunted whenever I come across a picture of Superman. I can't bear to look at Superman. I get physically ill. I'm a nervous wreck. It's like I'm looking at a distorted mirror. He looks like a demon, a monster, like Satan with that flowing cloak.

The lack of control is evident in his complaints that Superman "is drawn a little pudgier now" and that "Clark Kent was changed from a newspaperman to a television newscaster."[74] The effect of Superman on Siegel is heightened because the fictional character is almost like his child, a point stated in chapter 3. As authors Lauren Agostino and A.L. Newberg insinuate, he lost the custody battle twice and for seven years had visitation rights from Superman's adopted parents when he worked in secret at DC Comics under Mort Weisinger.[75]

In the same way that Superman impacts fans, these four examples illustrate his commanding influence on his caretakers, both joyful and detrimental. The Man of Steel has a life of his own beyond the page and screen. The character establishes a personal connection with his writers, editors, and audience. This is the power of Superman and his contemporaries over the American imagination.

---

[71] Weisinger, "I Flew With Superman," *Parade*, October 23, 1977, p. 10.
[72] Siegel, "Superman Expose," in box 19, folder 3, LB.
[73] Jerry Siegel, "For Immediate Release: Superman's Originator Puts 'Curse' On Superman Movie," October 1975, p. 8.
[74] Berkowitz, "Superman Haunts Creator Jerry Siegel," *Sarasota Journal*, December 16, 1975, p. 11-D.
[75] For the biological and adoption and family metaphors, see Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, pp. ix, xii–xiii, 15–17, 29–30, 40, 64, 73, 80, 85, 100–101, 111, 118–119, 131, 139, 149, 152.

Everlasting

"What makes grown men feel such connection to and even ownership of a fantasy character from their long-past childhoods?" Journalist Larry Tye poses this important question.[76] He and other Superman biographers offer a myriad of unconvincing explanations, often without supporting evidence or sustained analysis, for Superman's popularity and cultural longevity. These popular authors present what I refer to as the "kitchen sink thesis." One answer is the Man of Steel's inherent goodness, air of nobility, defense of democracy, heightened morality, and values such as modesty, honesty, decency, duty, benevolence, selflessness, fairness, tolerance, and righteousness.[77] The character is also an aspirational figure. He provides hope or inspiration are common refrains for this explanation of longevity.[78] A symbol of courage is less common

---

[76] Tye, *Superman*, p. 268.

[77] For this language and related synonyms, see Alyn, *A Job for Superman*, foreword section; Eco, "The Myth of Superman," *Diacritics*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 14, 18, 22; Grossman, *Superman*, pp. 9; 61, 139; Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," *Discourse*, vol. 2 (Summer 1980), pp. 89, 98, 101; Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, pp. 12–13, 20, 23, 30–31, 47, 64, 69, 85, 87–88, 92, 94–95, 98, 101, 127, 133, 138, 141–142, 144, 148–149, 151–152, 173–176; Daniels, *Superman*, pp. 19, 35, 69, 92, 97, 138, 141, 182; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Culture*, pp. 137, 139, 141, 146, 151; Glenn Yeffeth, ed., *The Man From Krypton*, pp. 1–2, 5–6, 10–11, 17–18, 65, 74, 91, 98, 112, 128, 130–131, 134–135, 140, 142, 145–146, 166, 181–183, 185, 188–192, 194–196, 199–200, 204, 212, 214, 217, 219, 222–226, 228; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 2–3, 6, 11, 16, 20–21, 49, 68, 73, 90, 124, 142, 146, 168, 173, 181, 184, 187–188; interview with Ilya Salkind as well as claims by Jake Rossen in Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. x, 4, 18, 26, 36, 59, 85, 116, 143, 169, 181, 210, 283, 289; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 2, 7–8, 68, 70–73, 79–80, 103–105, 104n, 134–135, 150–151, 156–161, 179, 201, 206; Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman*, pp. 13, 17, 21, 23, 24n6, 47–48, 50, 56, 91–96, 99–100, 108, 120, 149–151, 170, 172, 192–197, 209–212, 220, 223, 225–226; interview with Ken Cholette, Emilio Ramos, Jr., Jeph Loeb, Geoff Johns, Chris Clow, Margot Kidder, and Deborah Joy LeVine as well as claims by Larry Tye in Tye, *Superman*, pp. ix, xiii–xiv, 6, 11, 34, 42, 44, 46, 59–61, 68–71, 78, 80–85, 88, 91–92, 107, 111, 135, 140, 144, 172, 182, 196, 203–204, 208, 247, 250–251, 253, 263, 266, 268, 271, 300, 306; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 97, 130, 161, 171–172, 244, 266, 310, 327; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 3–4, 10, 19, 28–29, 34–35, 37, 39–40, 67, 79, 81–82, 90–91, 93, 95, 130, 137, 166, 188, 202, 219, 225–226, 235, 243, 251, 261, 270–271, 277, 288, 263, 296–297, 306–307, 312, 314, 317, 324, 329; Regalado, *Bending Steel*, p. 120; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 5–6, 43–44, 46, 48, 54, 64–67, 73, 86–87, 91, 130, 157, 161; Bevin, *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*, pp. 1–3, 10, 15, 20, 25–28, 30, 33–34, 38–41, 54–55, 69, 85–86, 94–98, 101, 105–108, 120–121, 124–132, 134, 136, 139–142, 145n4, 155, 158, 160–161; Morrison, *Supergods*, pp. 409–410.

[78] For the language of inspiration, aspiration, and hope, see Eco, "The Myth of Superman," *Diacritics*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972), p. 15; Grossman, *Superman*, p. 96; Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," *Discourse*, vol. 2 (Summer 1980), p. 89; Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, pp. 12, 128; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, p. 157; Glenn Yeffeth, ed., *The Man From Krypton*, pp. 74, 129, 142, 146, 214, 219, 223, 228; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 2, 40, 109, 128, 169, 188; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 7, 68, 134; Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman*, pp. 135, 140n55, 151, 160, 196–197, 199–201, 204–207, 225–227; interview with Mark Waid and Chris Clow as well as an assessment by Larry Tye in Tye, *Superman*, pp. 69–70, 78, 196, 262–263, 267, 302; Laura Siegel Larson quoted as well as an assessment by Brad Ricca in Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. xix, xxi, 157, 327, 329; Gordon, Superman, pp. 67, 72; Bevin, *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*, pp. 1, 85–86, 94, 105, 129, 140–141, 151.

probably because that description better fits the impact of Batman on the public.[79] Such vocabulary and more fills many books without clarity.[80] These modern associations that these authors and the public make with Superman somewhat clash with the original narrative of social dissent against crime and corruption, as Brad Ricca explains. "But the stories were not always shining beacons of optimism. In fact, they were often the exact opposite. Superman, bright and smiling, would find himself in dark, real situations. Gangsters, murderers, corrupt manufacturers, shady orphanages, and loads of wanton destruction peppered the early stories."[81] Superman was not exactly a role model but rather an expression of street justice that readers vicariously lived through. Returning to the point at hand, another answer to the persistence question is Superman's icon status.[82] This opinion expands into the idea of the character as a brand with a vast array of merchandise for the consumer to purchase and identify with, and Superman becomes a displayable or wearable symbol.[83] Comics scholars are correct in this assessment of consumption

---

[79] For courage, see Alyn, *A Job for Superman*, foreword section; Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, pp. 12, 70; Glenn Yeffeth, ed., *The Man From Krypton*, pp. 18–19, 146, 223; Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman*, p. 149; Weldon, *Superman*, p. 251; Laura Siegel Larson quoted in Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 327; Bevin, *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*, p. 27.

[80] For additional adjectives and nouns that endeavor to define Superman such as light, optimism, idealism, empathy, and heart, see, for example, interview with Bryan Singer as well as claims by Larry Tye in Tye, *Superman*, pp. xiv, 33, 200, 203, 209, 229, 251, 263, 269, 274, 286.

For virtue and charity, which Ian Gordon unclearly theorizes, see Eco, "The Myth of Superman," *Diacritics*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 14, 22; Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," *Discourse*, vol. 2 (Summer 1980), p. 106; Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, pp. 53, 87, 92; Daniels, *Superman*, p. 74; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Culture*, pp. 135–137, 147–149; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 68; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. 7, 79; Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman*, pp. 3, 99; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 8, 60; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 11, 15–18, 20, 24, 40, 43–44, 67, 77, 86, 156, 161; Bevin, *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*, p. 142.

[81] Ricca, *Super Boys*, p. 172.

[82] For the vague icon thesis and repetitive language, see Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," *Discourse*, vol. 2 (Summer 1980), p. 87; Dooley and Engle, eds., *Superman at Fifty!*, pp. 47, 86, 178; Daniels, *Superman*, pp. 11, 135; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Culture*, pp. 10, 12; Glenn Yeffeth, ed., *The Man From Krypton*, pp. 1–2, 11, 17–18, 23, 179, 196, 202; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, pp. 112, 126, 142, 149, 152, 173, 182–183; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. x, 19, 35, 49, 60, 76, 84, 100, 103, 109, 142, 144, 187, 250, 264, 266, 269, 287; Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, p. 15; De Haven, *Our Hero*, pp. ix, 18, 24, 93, 104, 127; Darowski, ed., *The Ages of Superman*, pp. 1–2, 45–47, 50, 67, 75n30, 107, 112, 116, 126, 129, 136–137, 160, 177, 196–197, 199, 202, 206, 223, 225; Tye, *Superman*, pp. ix, 51, 126, 157, 240, 245, 260, 280, 286, 295–296, 299; Ricca, *Super Boys*, pp. 128, 171, 289, 329, 363n69; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 2–3, 13, 21, 54, 56, 76, 130, 153, 268, 273, 298, 303, 307, 319; Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 3–6, 9–10, 13–14, 24, 27, 74, 84, 94, 114–115, 154, 167, 172–174; Bevin, *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*, pp. 1, 3, 84–85, 117–118, 126, 160.

[83] For Superman products, see, for example, "Picks & Pans: Etc.: Supermania," *People*, vol. 11, no. 16, April 23, 1979, pp. 24, 28; Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 133–135, 137, 153–155, 202n17; Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, p. 14; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. x, 29, 109–110, 192, 211, 155, 192, 210–211, 213, 218–219, 223–224, 229, 231, 244, 258, 270, 290, 293, 296; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 112–115, 123–126, 150, 203, 213–214, 251–252, 259–260, 266, 278, 288, 295; Johnson, *Super-History*, p. 189; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 1–2, 34, 42, 67, 84, 152–153, 164, 171–172, 174, 198, 221, 230, 255, 274, 300, 305, 329; Gordon, *Superman*, esp. pp. 4, 10, 12–14, 17, 21–23, 41, 77, 79, 86, 91–92, 106–107, 110–111, 143, 146–147, 154, 158, 161–165, and 169–175. For mention of

as ensuring longevity, but Ian Gordon takes the logic too far. He theorizes that fans are purchasing memories or reliving them through multimedia.[84] According to Gordon, writers of the Superman universe across media foment nostalgia by recycling the mythology through catchphrases, dialogue, coded references, homages to Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, and cameos or new roles for former actors who cannot escape the superhero curse of typecasting.[85] While an interesting pattern, the content of his third chapter overlooks the key point that baby boomers and early Generation Xers are making these nostalgic "souvenirs" for themselves and trying to inculcate the later generations into their "memories" of Superman. It cannot be nostalgia for individuals who did not have these experiences as children. Gordon's insight is generationally determinant. Tye concludes his book with a vague fivefold answer to the endurance question: flight, the love triangle, the secret identity, nostalgia for childhood, and the disappointment of real-life role models.[86] Lauren Agostino and A.L. Newberg provide a simple but profound statement but do not know why it is true or offer any explanation: "Superman is forever."[87]

In contrast to these mostly simplistic and unhistorical determinations, this text argues that the connection formed during childhood and its immunity to disintegration through adulthood by way of Comicland explains Superman's persistence in the popular imagination. It is not what he symbolizes as much as the unfading, intangible bond established during the formative years.[88] This connection is reactivated later in life through his continued multimedia presence and by playing with—or at—Superman.[89] It is beyond memory, not a past association but an ongoing one. The *reality* of Comicland, which is built on the American people's fondness for superheroes and sustained through continual reimagining, keeps Superman and his genre progeny alive. This project recasts Superman as a living being who has become entangled in our lives. Regardless of

---

Superman logo tattoos, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 197, 214; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 266, 268; Johnson, *Super-History*, p. 189. For Batman products, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 192, 225, 268.

[84] Gordon, *Superman*, esp. pp. 3, 11–12, 92, 173–175.

[85] Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 70–73, 75–77, 79–82, 84–86. This nostalgia and memory theorization does not work without an oral history methodology and source base. To make this claim necessitates ethnographic work on fans, which Gordon does not do. Other Superman biographers mention these occurrences without a framework. See Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, pp. 9, 107, 176, 178, 243–244, 248, 253, 255–257, 260, 292, 299; Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, p. 42; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 96, 209, 239, 250–251, 254, 279, 283; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 187, 216, 224–227, 232, 237, 275, 282, 298, 303, 312, 318, 325.

[86] Tye, *Superman*, p. 300. See also the critique, Gordon, *Superman*, p. 91.

[87] Agostino and Newberg, *Holding Kryptonite*, p. 138.

[88] For agreement, see Tye, *Superman*, p. 212. He uses the language of "lifelong bond."

[89] Ian Gordon both embraces the multimedia argument but also considers it limited. See Gordon, *Superman*, pp. 3–4, 6–8, 93–94, 107–108, 110, 114, 116, 139–141, 145–151, 158, 172–174. See also Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, esp. pp. ix–xi; Tye, *Superman*, pp. 97, 111, 258; Weldon, *Superman*, pp. 2–4.

the debate among comics aficionados, it is time for the academy and wider public to accept the fact that Superman is up, up, and (never going) away.[90]

[90] For agreement on Superman as everlasting, see Hayde, *Flights of Fantasy*, pp. 12, 333.

APPENDIX

Children's Superhero Play (Chronological)

No.	Name	Date	Superhero	Injury	Result
1	Unnamed	1939	Superman	Unknown	Lived
2	Robert Van Gosig	July 4, 1941	Superman	Fatal Fall	Died
3	Frank Toia	July 12, 1941	Superman	Bruised	Lived
4	Richard Boney	August 1941	Superman	None	Lived
5	Unnamed	1942	Superman	Unknown	Unknown
6	James Henderson	August 10, 1942	Superman	Sprained Ankle	Lived
7	Edward L. Thompson	Sept. 18, 1942	Superman	Burned	Died
8	[Unnamed] Dickerson	1942	Superman	Hit By Car	Died
9	Fred Lammy	January 15, 1944	Superman	Broken Ankle	Lived
10	Sammy Kerr	July 21, 1944	Superman	Broken Elbow	Lived
11	Donald Vary	July 2[5], 1944	Superman	Broken Legs	Lived
12	Raymond Koteras	June 1946	Superman	Burned	Lived
13	Ralph Stevens	July 15, 1946	Superman	Burned	Lived
14	*Unnamed	1946	Superman	Broken Legs	Lived
15	*Unnamed	1947	Superman	Unknown	Unknown
16	*Unnamed	1948	Superman	Unknown	Unknown
17	*Unnamed	1949	Superman	Unknown	Unknown
18	Wayne Righter	March 29, 1949	Superman	Cut	Lived
19	Jack Quartaro	June 16, 1949	Superman	Scraped	Lived
20	*Unnamed	June 1949	Superman	Head Stuck	Lived
21	*Unnamed	1950	Superman	Unknown	Unknown
22	*Unnamed	1951/1954	Superman	Fatal Fall	Died
23	Sonny Jones	December 8, 1951	Superman	Stuck In Tree	Lived
24	Michael Welge	August 3, 1953	Superman	Sutured	Lived
25	Larry King	Sept. 16, 1953	Superman	Broken Arms	Lived
26	Dale Bailey	October 4, 1953	Superman	Broken Arm	Lived
27	John J. Hendrie	February 23, 1954	Superman	None	Lived
28	Arthur Sindelar	April 21, 1954	Superman	Broken Arm	Lived
29	David Ankele	June [2], 1954	Superman	None	Lived
30	Roger Medlock	July 2, 1954	Superman	Broken Leg	Lived
31	Gary Woodward	August 1954	Superman	Unknown	Unknown
32	Unnamed	1955	Superman	Unknown	Unknown
33	William Hunter Jr.	April 5 or 6, 1957	Superman	Sprained Ankle	Lived
34	Unnamed	1957	Superman	Unknown	Unknown
35	Tommie Werner	1958	Superman	None	Lived
36	George Jones	June 22, 1958	Superman	None	Lived
37	Nathaniel Manigo	June 22, 1958	Superman	None	Lived
38	Russell Toombs	June 22, 1958	Superman	Sprained Ankle	Lived
39	Terry Petre	February 27, 1959	Superman	Burned	Lived
40	Marcos Roybal	July or Aug. 1959	Superman	Broken Arm	Lived

41	Paul Blostein	August 21, 1959	Superman	None	Lived
42	*Unnamed	1963	Superman	Fatal Fall	Died
43	Joseph Koran	August 9, 1966	Batman	Hospital Stay	Lived
44	*Unnamed	1968	Batman or Superman	Unknown	Unknown
45	*Unnamed	1977	Superman	Unknown	Died
46	[Unnamed] Hollings	1977	Batman and Robin	None	Lived
47	Andrew [Omitted]	1979	Superman	None	Lived
48	Unnamed	1981	Superman	None	Lived
49	Randy Phillips	1985	Superman	Arson	Lived
50	Unnamed	1989	Superman	None	Lived
51	Matthew Mitchell	1994	Superman	Broken Arm	Lived

*Uncorroborated secondhand source

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archives

Bender, Dr. Lauretta. Papers. Accession Number 90-012. Brooklyn College Library Archives. Brooklyn, New York.

Bureau of Applied Social Research records, 1938–1977. Butler Library. Columbia University. New York, New York.

Gillis, Jackson. Papers. WGF-MS-046. Shavelson-Webb Library. The Writers Guild Foundation. Los Angeles, California.

Hunter, Tim. Collection of scripts, audiotapes, and videotapes. *2005MT-77. Houghton Library. Harvard University. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Macy's. Unprocessed corporate collections. Queens, New York.

Marston, William Moulton. Papers, 1899–2002. MC 920. Schlesinger Library. Harvard University. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Marston, William Moulton. Papers, 1852–1975. MC 948. Schlesinger Library. Harvard University. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records. MssCol 2233. New York Public Library. Stephen A. Schwarzman Building. Manuscripts and Archives Division. New York, New York.

New York World's Fair "Negro Week" Records. Sc Mg 42. New York Public Library. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Manuscripts and Archives Division. New York, New York.

Stout, Rex. Papers. MS.1986.096. John J. Burns Library. Boston College. Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

Tobey, Charles W. Papers. ML-3. Rauner Library. Dartmouth College. Hanover, New Hampshire.

Tye, Larry. Papers, 2008–2013. MS#1642. Butler Library. Columbia University. New York, New York.

Witty, Paul. Papers. Accession no. 77-26. Deering Library. Northwestern University. Evanston, Illinois.

Wonder Woman: selected continuities, magazines, Wonder Woman newspaper strip King Features. MSS1618B. Dibner Library. Smithsonian Institution. Washington, District of Columbia.

Wonder Woman letters, 1941–1945. MSS1619B. Dibner Library. Smithsonian Institution. Washington, District of Columbia.

Writers' War Board Records. MSS46722. Library of Congress. James Madison Memorial Building. Manuscript Division. Washington, District of Columbia.

Audiovisual Sources

CDs

Newhart, Bob. *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart: The Windmills Are Weakening*. 1965; Itasca, IL: Collectors' Choice Music, 2009. CD.

DVDs

Adventures of Superman: The Complete First Season. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video Inc., 2005. DVD.

Adventures of Superman: The Complete Second Season. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video Inc., 2006. DVD.

Adventures of Superman: The Complete Third & Fourth Seasons in Full Color. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video Inc., 2006. DVD.

Arntz, William, Betsy Chasse, and Mark Vicente, dirs. *What The Bleep Do We Know!?* Written by William Arntz, Matthew Hoffman, Betsy Chasse, and Mark Vicente. Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005. DVD.

Burns, Ken, dir. *Baseball*. Written by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns (1994; n.p.: PBS Distribution, 2021), DVD.

Burns, Ken, dir. *Look Up in The Sky!: The Amazing Story of Superman*. Written by James Grant Goldin and Steven Smith. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006. DVD.

Callner, Marty, dir. *"I'm Telling You For The Last Time:" Live on Broadway*. Written by Jerry Seinfeld. N.P.: HBO Home Video, 1999. DVD.

Docter, Pete, dir. *Inside Out*. Written by Pete Docter and Ronnie del Carmen. Burbank, CA: Distributed by Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2015. DVD.

The Carol Burnett Show: Carol's Favorites. Vol. 2. N.P.: Whacko, Inc., 2012. DVD.

CSI: NY. The Complete Second Season. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2006. DVD.

Ehlinger Jr., Ladd, dir. *Flatland*. Written by Tom Whalen. Flatland Productions, 2007. DVD.

Episodes: Season 5. N.P.: Showtime Networks Inc, 2018. DVD.

Godard, Jean-Luc, dir. *La Chinoise*. Written by Jean-Luc Godard. 1967; Port Washington, NY: KOCH Entertainment, 2008. DVD.

Godard, Jean-Luc, dir. *Made in U.S.A.* Written by Jean-Luc Godard. 1966; Irvington, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2009. DVD.

Grant, Darren, dir. *Killing Hasselhoff*. Written by Peter Hoare. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2017. DVD.

Iñárritu, Alejandro G., dir. *Birdman (or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance).* Written by Alejandro G. Iñárritu, Nicholás Gianobone, Alexander Dinelaris, Jr., and Armando Bo. Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2014. DVD.

Jacobovici, Simcha and Stuart Samuels, dir. *Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own*. Written by Simcha Jacobovici. 1997; N.P.: A&E Home Video, 2005. DVD.

Johnson, Dano and Jeffrey Travis, dirs. *Flatland: The Movie*. Written by Seth Caplan, Dano Johnson, and Jeffrey Travis. Austin, TX: Flat World Productions, 2007. DVD.

Karpf, Rory, dir. *Robert Kirkman's Secret History of Comics*. 2017; N.P.: AMC Network Entertainment LLC, 2020. DVD.

Lester, Richard, dir. *Superman II*. Two-Disc Special Edition. Written by Mario Puzo, David Newman, and Leslie Newman. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Video, 2006. DVD.

Luhrmann, Baz, dir. *Elvis*. Screenplay by Baz Luhrmann, Sam Bromell, Craig Pearce, and Jeremy Doner. N.P.: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., 2022. DVD.

Martin, Eric, dir. *Flatland*. Written by John Hubley. 1965; Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 2004. DVD.

Reiner, Rob, dir. *Stand by Me*. Written by Steven King, Raynold Gideon, and Bruce A. Evans. 1986; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2018. DVD.

Robinson, Angela, dir. *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*. Written by Angela Robinson. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2018. DVD.

Seinfeld: Season 8. N.P.: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment Inc., 2018. DVD.

Sesame Street, *Old School, 1969–1974*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: Sony Wonder, 2006. DVD.

Smith, Kevin, dir. *Jay and Silent Bob Reboot*. Written by Kevin Smith. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate, 2019. DVD.

Smith, Kevin, dir. *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*. Dimension Collector's Series Edition. Written by Kevin Smith. Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc., 2002. DVD.

Smith, Kevin, dir. *Mallrats*. Written by Kevin Smith. 1995; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 1999. DVD.

Tashlin, Frank, dir. *The Glass Bottom Boat*. Written by Everett Freeman. 1966; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005. DVD.

Television Shows or Specials

Aerial America

Attack of the Hollywood Clichés! (Netflix)

Bewitched

Conan

CSI: NY

The Dean Martin Show

The Ellen DeGeneres Show

End Times Fun (Netflix)

The Entertainers

Entourage

Episodes

The Ernie Kovacs Show

The Garry Moore Show

Happy Days

The Hollywood Palace

I Love Lucy

"I'm Telling You For The Last Time:" Live on Broadway (HBO)

Jack Paar Show

Late Night with Conan O'Brien

Late Night with Seth Myers

Looney Tunes

*M*A*S*H*

Marvel Studios: Assembling A Universe (Disney+)

The Milton Berle Show

The Movies (CNN)

My Sister Eileen

Sabrina: The Teenage Witch

Saturday Night Live

Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell

Seinfeld

Sesame Street

Superman 50th Anniversary

That Girl

The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Websites

https://www.ancestrylibrary.com

https://apnews.com

https://archive.org

https://www.boxofficemojo.com

https://bullpenbulletins.blogspot.com

https://www.cheatsheet.com

https://cosmicbook.news

https://www.ellentube.com

https://www.elvisconcerts.com

https://www.empireonline.com

https://heroichollywood.com

https://www.hollywoodreporter.com

https://www.howardstern.com

https://www.imdb.com

https://www.latimes.com
https://www.nbc.com
https://www.newyorker.com
https://www.noblemania.com
https://nofilmschool.com
https://www.nytimes.com
https://readcomiconline.li
http://saturdaysleepovers.podwits.com
https://screenrant.com
https://www.screenrant.com
https://snltranscripts.jt.org
http://www.superherohype.com
https://www.supermanhomepage.com
theages.superman.nu
https://www.the-numbers.com
https://www.theatlantic.com
https://thecritic.co.uk
https://thefilmstage.com
https://www.theguardian.com
https://variety.com
https://vcc.copyright.gov/browse
https://www.wikimedia.org
https://www.youtube.com

Books

Autobiographies or Memoirs

Alyn, Kirk. *A Job for Superman*. Los Angeles, CA: [Self Published,] 1971.
Holiday, Bob and Chuck Harter. *Superman on Broadway*. N.P.: [Self Published,] 2003.
Lipsyte, Robert. *An Accidental Sportswriter: A Memoir*. New York, NY: Ecco, 2011.
Reeve, Christopher. *Still Me*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1999.

Siegel, Jerry. "Creation of a Superhero." Unpublished. November 7, 1978.

Schwartz, Alvin. *A Gathering of Selves: The Spiritual Journey of the Legendary Writer of Superman and Batman*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2007.

Schwartz, Alvin. *An Unlikely Prophet: A Metaphysical Memoir by the Legendary Writer of Superman and Batman*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2006. First published 1997 by MacMurray & Beck under the title *An Unlikely Prophet: Revelations on the Path without Form*.

Biographies

Connelly, Stephen E. *Allan Seager*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1983.

Dundy, Elaine. *Elvis and Gladys*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985.

Comic Books

Action Comics no. 200 (January 1955)

Action Comics no. 210 (November 1955)

Action Comics no. 544 (June 1983)

The Amazing World of Superman, Metropolis Edition (1973)

Batman no. 4 (Winter 1941)

Siegel and Shuster Dateline 1930's, vol. 1, no. 1 (November 1984)

Detective Comics no. 31 (September 1939)

Detective Comics no. 33 (November 1939)

Detective Comics no. 48 (February 1941)

Detective Comics no. 512 (March 1982)

Funnyman no. 1 (January 1948)

Limited Collectors' Edition no. 31 (October–November 1974)

More Fun Comics no. 72 (October 1941)

Superman no. 94 (January 1955)

Superman no. 101 (November 1955)

Superman no. 145 (May 1961)

Comic Book Reprints

DC Comics. *Batman: The Dark Knight Archives*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: DC Comics, 1992.

DC Comics. *The Batman Archives*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: DC Comics, 1990.

DC Comics. *Superman: The Action Comics*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: DC Comics, 1997.

DC Comics. *Superman: The Action Comics*. Vol. 2. New York, NY: DC Comics, 1998.

DC Comics. *Superman: The Action Comics*. Vol. 4. New York, NY: DC Comics, 2005.

DC Comics. *Superman: The Atomic Age Sundays, 1949–1953*. San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2015.

DC Comics. *Superman: The Golden Age Dailies, 1942–1944*. San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2016.

DC Comics. *Superman: The Golden Age Sundays, 1943–1946*. San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2013.

DC Comics. *Superman: The Golden Age Sundays, 1946–1949*. San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2014.

DC Comics. *Superman: The Sunday Classics, 1939–1943*. New York, NY: DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press, 1998.

DC Comics. *Superman: The World's Finest Comics*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: DC Comics, 2004.

DC Comics. *Superman: The World's Finest Comics*. Vol. 2. New York, NY: DC Comics, 2009.

DC Comics. *Superman Archives*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: DC Comics, 1989.

DC Comics. *The Superman Chronicles*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: DC Comics, 2006.

DC Comics. *Superman Dailies*. Vol. 1, 1939–1940. New York, NY: DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press, 1999.

DC Comics. *Superman Dailies*. Vol. 2, 1940–1941. New York, NY: DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press, 1999.

DC Comics. *Superman Dailies*. Vol. 3, 1941–1942. New York, NY: DC Comics and Kitchen Sink Press, 1999.

The Mad Archives. Vol. 1. New York, NY: DC Comics, 2002.

Comics or Superhero Related Texts

Adin, Mariah. *The Brooklyn Thrill-Kill Gang and the Great Comic Book Scare of the 1950s*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015.

Agostino, Lauren, and A.L. Newberg. *Holding Kryptonite: Truth, Justice and America's First Superhero*. N.P.: Holmes and Watson, 2014.

Ahrens, Jörn and Arno Meteling, eds. *Comics and the City: Urban Space in Print, Picture and Sequence*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2010.

Alaniz, José. *Death, Disability, and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.

Andrae, Thomas and Mel Gordon. *Siegel and Shuster's Funnyman: The First Jewish Superhero From the Creators of Superman*. Port Townsend, WA Feral House, 2010.

Andris, Silke and Ursula Frederick, eds. *Women Willing to Fight: The Fighting Woman in Film*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

Babic, Annessa Ann, ed. *Comics as History, Comics as Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society and Entertainment.* Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014.

Bahlmann, Andrew R. *The Mythology of the Superhero*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016.

Bajac-Carter, Maja, Norma Jones, and Bob Batchelor, eds. *Heroines of Comic Books and Literature: Portrayals in Popular Culture*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

Baker, Martin. *A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign*. London, UK: Pluto Press, 1984.

Ball, Blake Scott. *Charlie Brown's America: The Popular Politics of Peanuts*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Batchelor, Bob. *Stan Lee: The Man Behind Marvel*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

Beard, Jim, ed. *Gotham City 14 Miles: 14 Essays on Why the 1960s Batman TV Series Matters*. Edwardsville, IL: Sequart Research & Literacy Organization, 2010.

Beatty, Scott. *Batman: The Ultimate Guide to the Dark Knight*. New York, NY: DK Publishing, 2001.

Beaty, Bart. *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*. Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi Press, 2005.

Beckman, Karen, ed. *Animating Film Theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

Berlatsky, Noah. *Wonder Woman: Bondage and Feminism in the Marston/Peter Comics, 1941–1948*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015.

Bevin, Phillip. *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2019.

Bifulco, Michael J. *The Original Superman on Television*. Rev. and exp. ed. N.P.: CreateSpace, 2011.

Bolling, Ben and Matthew J. Smith, eds. *It Happens at Comic-Con: Ethnographic Essays on a Pop Culture Phenomenon*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014.

Bowers, Rick. *Superman Versus The Ku Klux Klan: The True Story of How the Iconic Superhero Battled the Men of Hate.* Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2012.

Brod, Harry. *Superman Is Jewish?: How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2016.

Brooker, Will. *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2001.

Brooker, Will. *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman*. New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2012.

Brown, Jeffrey A. *Batman and the Multiplicity of Identity: The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero as Cultural Nexus*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2019.

Brown, Jeffrey A. *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine In Popular Culture*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2015.

Brown, Jeffrey A. *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics and Their Fans*. Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi Press, 2001.

Brown, Jeffrey A. *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2011.

Bukatman, Scott. *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Bukatman, Scott. *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012.

Burke, Liam, ed. *Fan Phenomena: Batman*. Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2013.

Cartmell, Deborah and Imelda Whelehan, eds. *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1999.

Chesler, Phyllis. *Wonder Woman*. New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1972.

Cocca, Carolyn. *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Cocca, Carolyn. *Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel: Militarism and Feminism in Comics and Film*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2021.

Collinson, Gary. *Holy Franchise, Batman!: Bringing the Caped Crusader to the Screen*. London, UK: Robert Hale Limited, 2012.

Coogan, Peter. *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*. Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain Books, 2006.

Costello, Brannon and Qiana J. Whitted, eds. *Comics and the U.S. South*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.

Cronin, Brian. *Was Superman A Spy?: And Other Comic Book Legends Revealed*. New York, NY: Plume, 2009.

Daniels, Les. *Batman: The Complete History*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1999.

Daniels, Les. *Superman: The Complete History*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1998.

Daniels, Les. *Wonder Woman: The Complete History*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2000.

Darowski, John, ed. *Adapting Superman: Essays on the Transmedia Man of Steel*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2021.

Darowski, Joseph J., ed. *The Ages of Superman: Essays on the Man of Steel in Changing Times*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012.

Darowski, Joseph J., ed. *The Ages of Wonder Woman: Essays on the Amazon Princess in Changing Times*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014.

Dauber, Jeremy. *American Comics: A History*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2022.

Davis, Blair. *Movie Comics: Page to Screen/Screen to Page*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017.

De Haven, Tom. *Our Hero: Superman on Earth*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.

Deflem, Mathieu, ed. *Popular Culture, Crime, and Social Control*. Vol. 14. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2010.

Dini, Paul and Chip Kidd. *Batman: Animated*. New York, NY: HarperEntertainment, 1998.

Dittmer, Jason. *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero: Metaphors, Narratives, and Geopolitics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013.

Dooley, Dennis and Gary Engle. eds. *Superman at Fifty! The Persistence of a Legend*. Cleveland, OH: Octavia Press, 1987.

Eisner, Joel. *The Official Batman Batbook*. New York, NY: Contemporary Books, 1986.

Fawaz, Ramzi. *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016.

Feiffer, Jules. *The Great Comic Book Heroes*. New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1965.

Fingeroth, Danny. *A Marvelous Life: The Amazing Story of Stan Lee*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 2019.

Fingeroth, Danny. *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2007.

Fingeroth, Danny and Roy Thomas, eds. *The Stan Lee Universe*. Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2011.

Fleischer, Richard. *Out of the Inkwell: Max Fleischer and the Animation Revolution*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2005.

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

Gehmann, Ulrich and Martin Reiche, eds. *Real Virtuality: About the Destruction and Multiplication of World*. Bielefeld, DE: Transcript Verlag, 2014.

Gordon, Ian. *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890–1945*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002.

Gordon, Ian. *Superman: The Persistence of An American Icon*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017.

Greenberger, Robert. *Wonder Woman: Amazon, Hero, Icon*. New York, NY: Universe, 2010.

Grossman, Gary H. *Superman: Serial to Cereal*. New York, NY: Popular Library, 1977.

Hajdu, David. *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America*. New York, NY: Picador, 2009.

Hanley, Tim. *Wonder Woman Unbound: The Curious History of the World's Most Famous Heroine*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2014.

Harkins, Anthony. *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Hayde, Michael J. *Flights of Fantasy: The Unauthorized but True Story of Radio & TV's Adventures of Superman*. Albany, GA: BearManor Media, 2009.

Hills, Matt. *Fan Cultures*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.

Hise, James Van. *Batmania II*. Las Vegas, NV: Pioneer Books, 1992.

Howe, Sean. *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012.

Hughes, David. *Tales from Development Hell: The Greatest Movies Never Made?* London, UK: Titan Books, 2012.

Inge, M. Thomas. *Comics as Culture*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.

Jesser, Jody Duncan and Janine Pourry. *The Art and Making of the Dark Knight Trilogy*. New York, NY: Abrams, 2012.

Johnson, Jeffrey K. *Super-History: Comic Book Superheroes and American Society, 1938 to the Present*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012.

Jones, Gerard. *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2005.

Kane, Bob with Tom Andrae. *Batman & Me*. Forestville, CA: Eclipse Books, 1989.

Kaplan, Arie. *From Krakow To Krypton: Jews and Comic Books*. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008.

Kidd, Chip and Geoff Spear. *Batman: Collected*. New York, NY: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2001.

Kitchen, Denis and Paul Buhle. *The Art of Harvey Kurtzman: The Mad Genius of Comics*. New York, NY: Abrams ComicArts, 2009.

Lee, Stan and George Mair. *Excelsior!: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*. New York, NY: Fireside, 2002.

Legman, Gershon. *Love & Death: A Study in Censorship*. New York, NY: Breaking Point, 1949.

Lent, John A., ed. *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign*. Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999.

Lepore, Jill. *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2015.

Lopes, Paul. *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2009.

Lowther, George. *The Adventures of Superman*. Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1995. First published 1942 by Random House.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1994.

Meglin, Nick and John Ficarra, eds. *MAD About Super Heroes*. New York, NY: MAD Books, 2002.

Meltzer, Brad. *The Book of Lies*. New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2008.

Miles, Johnny E. *Superheroes and Their Ancient Jewish Parallels: A Comparative Study*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018.

Morrison, Grant. *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us About Being Human*. New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2012.

Nobleman, Marc Tyler. *Bill the Boy Wonder: The Secret Co-Creator of Batman*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2012.

Nobleman, Marc Tyler. *Boys of Steel: The Creators of Superman*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

Nyberg, Amy Kiste. *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code*. Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi Press, 1998.

O'Neil, Dennis, ed. *Batman Unauthorized: Vigilantes, Jokers, and Heroes in Gotham City*. Dallas, TX: 2008.

O'Sullivan, Judith. *The Great American Comic Strip: One Hundred Years of Cartoon Art*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1990.

Ormrod, Joan. *Wonder Woman: The Female Body and Popular Culture*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2020.

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

Pearson, Roberta E., William Uricchio, and Will Brooker, eds. *Many More Lives of the Batman*. 2015; New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2018.

Peretti, Daniel. *Superman in Myth and Folklore*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017.

Phillips, Nickie D. and Staci Strobl. *Comic Book Crime: Truth Justice and the American Way*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013.

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

Raphael, Jordan and Tom Spurgeon. *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2003.

Regalado, Aldo J. *Bending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero*. Jackson, MS: The University Press of Mississippi, 2015.

Reitberger, Reinhold and Wolfgang Fuchs. *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1972.

Reynolds, Richard. *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*. Jackson, MS: The University of Mississippi, 1994.

Ricca, Brad. *Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—The Creators of Superman*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin Press, 2013.

Roberts, Gillian, ed. *Reading between the Borderlines: Cultural Production and Consumption across the 49th Parallel*. Montreal, CAN: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018.

Robinson, Lillian S. *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.

Rosenberg, Robin S. *What's the Matter With Batman?: An Unauthorized Clinical Look Under the Mask of the Caped Crusader*. Lexington, MA: Robin S. Rosenberg, 2012.

Rossen, Jake. *Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2008.

Ryall, Chris and Scott Tipton. *Comic Books 101: The History, Methods and Madness*. Cincinnati, OH: Impact, 2009.

Salkowitz, Rob. *Comic-Con and the Business of Pop Culture*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2012.

Sanders, Joe Sutliff. *Batman: The Animated Series*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2021.

Sanderson, Peter. *The Marvel Comics Guide to New York City*. New York, NY: Pocket Books, 2007.

Schelly, Bill. *Harvey Kurtzman: The Man Who Created Mad and Revolutionized Humor in America*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2015.

Schwartz, Roy. *Is Superman Circumcised?: The Complete Jewish History of the World's Greatest Hero*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2021.

Scivally, Bruce. *Billion Dollar Batman: A History of the Caped Crusader on Film, Radio and Television: From 10c Comic Book to Global Icon*. Wilmette, IL: Henry Gray Publishing, 2011.

Scivally, Bruce. *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008.

Steranko, Jim. *The Steranko History of Comics*. Vol. 1. Reading, PA: Supergraphics Publications, 1970.

Stuller, Jennifer K. *Ink-stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology*. New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2010.

Tye, Larry. *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero*. New York, NY: Random House, 2012.

Uslan, Michael E. *The Boy Who Loved Batman: A Memoir*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2011.

Vaz, Mark Cotta. *Tales of the Dark Knight: Batman's First Fifty Years, 1939–1989*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1989.

Vaz, Mark Cotta. *The Art of Batman Begins: Shadows of the Dark Knight*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2005.

Versaci, Rocco. *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2007.

Waugh, Coulton. *The Comics*. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1947.

Weinstein, Simcha. *Up, Up, and Oy Vey! How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero*. Baltimore, MD: Leviathan Press, 2006.

Weldon, Glen. *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Weldon, Glen. *The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

Williams, Keira V. *Amazons in America: Matriarchs, Utopians, and Wonder Women in U.S. Popular Culture*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2019.

Yeffeh, Glenn, ed. *The Man from Krypton: A Closer Look at Superman*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2005.

Yockey, Matt. *Batman*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2014.

Dissertations

Deverell, Richard Donald. "The Comics Code Authority: Mass-Media Censorship in Postwar America." PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 2020.

Galbraith, Jeanne Susanne. "Multiple Perspectives on Superhero Play In An Early Childhood Classroom." PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2007.

Walowit, Karen M. "Wonder Woman: Enigmatic Heroine of American Popular Culture." PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1974.

Pamphlets

Clare, Sister Mary. *Comics: A study of the effects of Comic Books on children less than eleven years old*. 2nd ed. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1943.

Lynn, Gabriel. *The Case Against The Comics: A Study*. St. Paul, MN: Timeless Topix, 1944.

Pumphrey, George H. *Children's Comics: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*. London, UK: The Epworth Press, 1955.

Pumphrey, George H. *Comics And Your Children*. The "Comics" Campaign Council. London, UK: Deaner Printers Ltd., 1957.

Pumphrey, George H. *What Children Think of their Comics*. London, UK: The Epworth Press, 1964.

Southard, S. J., Robert E. *Our Comic-Book Children*. St. Louis, MO: The Queen's Work, 1950.

Popular Nonfiction Texts

Allen, Maury. *Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?: The Story of America's Last Hero*. New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975.

Andersen, Kurt. *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire: A 500-year History*. New York, NY: Random House, 2017.

Armstrong, Jennifer Keishin. *Seinfeldia: How a Show About Nothing Changed Everything*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

Cabarga, Leslie. *The Fleischer Story*. Boston, MA: Da Capo, 1988.

Cramer, Richard Ben. *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero's Life*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, 2000.

Fretts, Bruce and Jeannie Park, ed. *The Entertainment Weekly* Seinfeld *Companion. Atomic Wedgies to Zipper Jobs: An Unofficial Guide to TV's Funniest Show*. New York, NY: Warner Books, 1993.

Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1988.

Gabler, Neal. *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

Gabler, Neal. *Walt Disney: The Triumph of American Imagination*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

Gattuso, Gregg. *The Seinfeld Universe: An Unauthorized Fan's-eye View of the Entire Domain*. Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1998.

Hall, Ben M. *The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of Golden Age of the Movie Palace*. New York, NY: Bramhall House, 1961.

Johnson, Steven. *Wonderland: How Play Made The Modern World*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2016.

Klingaman, William K. *1941: Our Lives in a World on the Edge*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988.

Klug, Lisa Alcalay. *Cool Jew: The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe*. Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing LLC, 2008.

Levine, Josh. *Jerry Seinfeld: Much Ado about Nothing*. Toronto, CAN: ECW Press, 1993.

Lipsyte, Robert. *SportsWorld: An American Dreamland*. 1975; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018.

Orwell, George. *Inside The Whale and Other Essay's*. London, UK: Victor Gollancz Limited, 1940.

Seidel, Michael. *Streak: Joe DiMaggio and the Summer of '41*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988.

Seinfeld, Jerry. *Halloween*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 2002.

Seinfeld, Jerry. *Is This Anything?* New York, NY: Simon and Shuster, 2020.

Seinfeld, Jerry. *SeinLanguage*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1993.

Thurber, James. *The Beast in Me and Other Animals: A New Collection of Pieces and Drawings about Human Beings and Less Alarming Creatures*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948.

Tracy, Kathleen. *Jerry Seinfeld: The Entire Domain*. Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1998.

Novels and Short Stories

Abbott, Edwin. *Flatland: A Romance in Many Dimensions*. London, U.K.: Seely & Co, 1884.

Chabon, Michael. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. New York, NY: Picador, 2000.

Juster, Norton. *The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics*. New York, NY: Random House, 1963.

Seager, Allan. *The Old Man of the Mountain And Seventeen Other Stories*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1950.

McGill, Ralph. *The Fleas Come With The Dog*. New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1954.

O'Neil, Dennis. *Batman: Knightfall. A Novel*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1994.

Wylie, Philip. *Gladiator*. 1930; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press and Bison Books, 2004.

Scholarly Texts

Alder, Ken. *The Lie Detectors: The History of an American Obsession*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2007.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. New York, NY: Verso, 2016.

Ashby, LeRoy. *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830*. 2006; Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012.

Austin, Allan W. *Quaker Brotherhood: Interracial Activism and the American Friends Service Committee, 1917–1950.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

Baltzell, E. Digby. *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America*. New York, NY: Random House, 1964.

Barrier, Michael. *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008.

Beaty, Janice J. *Converting Conflicts in Preschool*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1995.

Bell, Elizabeth. *Theories of Performance*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2008.

Bender, Lauretta. *A Dynamic Psychopathology of Childhood*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1954.

Benson, Susan Porter. *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940*. Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. 1994; Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004.

Biale, David, ed. *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2002.

Biskind, Peter. *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us To Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1983.

Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. 1985; Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Boyer, Paul S. *Purity in Print: Book Censorship in America from the Gilded Age to the Computer Age*. 2nd ed. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.

Britt, Steuart Henderson. *Social Psychology of Modern Life*. Rev. ed. New York, NY: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1950.

Brown, Tom. *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Bunn, Geoffrey C. *The Truth Machine: A Social History of the Lie Detector*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2012.

Burner, David, Robert D. Marcus, and Jorj Tilson, eds. *America Through the Looking Glass: A Historical Reader in Popular Culture*. Vol. 1. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974.

Burris, John P. *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions, 1851–1893*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2001.

Clark, Barrett H., ed. and trans. *European Theories of the Drama: An Anthology of Dramatic Theory and Criticism from Aristotle to the Present Day, in a Series of Selected Texts, with Commentaries, Biographies, and Bibliographies*. Cincinnati, OH: Stewart & Kidd Company, 1918.

Crosby, Alfred W. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. 2nd ed. 1986; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Cross, Gary. *Kid's Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Cross, Gary. *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Cross, Gary. *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Davies, Máire Messenger. *Fake, Fact, and Fantasy: Children's Interpretations of Television Reality*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997.

Delaney, Tim. *Seinology: The Sociology of Seinfeld*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006.

Denney, Reuel. *The Astonished Muse*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957.

Dinnerstein, Joel *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture Between the World Wars*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

Doherty, Thomas. *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Eco, Umberto. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979.

Efron, John, Steven Weitzman, and Matthias Lehmann. *The Jews: A History*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc., 2014.

Eldridge, David. *American Culture in the 1930s*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

Ellison, Harlan. *Edgeworks: Volume Three, The Collected Ellison*. Clarkston, GA: White Wolf Publishing, 1997.

Fernie, David, Samara Madrid, and Rebecca Kantor, eds. *Educating Toddlers to Teachers: Learning to See and Influence the School and Peer Cultures of Classrooms*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2011.

Forth, Christopher E. *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Fiedler, Leslie. *What Was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society*. New York, NY: Simon and Shuster, 1982.

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Olaf Stapledon: A Man Divided*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Unfinished Business*. New York, NY: Stein and Day, 1972.

Gaines, Jane M. *Contested Culture: The Image, The Voice, and The Law*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Gans, Herbert J. *Popular and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1974.

Ganz, Cheryl R. *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Gerstle, Gary. *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Gilbert, James. *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Goode, Erich and Nachman Ben-Yehuda. *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Graeber, David. *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*. Brooklyn, NY: Melvin House, 2015.

Guglielmo, Thomas A. *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003.

The Harlan Ellison Hornbook. New York, NY: Penzler Books, 1990.

Harris, Dianne Suzette. *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Harris, Neil. *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Hayden, Dolores. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2004.

Hirsch, Paul S. *Pulp Empire: The Secret History of Comic Book Imperialism*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Hoberman J. and Jeffrey Shandler. *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting*. New York, NY: The Jewish Museum and Princeton University Press, 2003.

Holland, Penny. *We Don't Play With Guns Here: War, Weapon, and Superhero Play In The Early Years*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2003.

Howell, Thomas. *Soldiers of the Pen: The Writers' War Board in World War II*. Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019.

Irwin, William, ed. *Seinfeld and Philosophy: A Book about Everything and Nothing*. Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2000.

Jackson, Kenneth T. *The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Kasson, John F. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978.

Kemp, Martin. *Christ to Coke: How Image Becomes Icon*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Kiesel, Diane. *She Can Bring Us Home: Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, Civil Rights Pioneer*. N.P.: Potomac Books, 2015.

Kiley, Dan. *Peter Pan Syndrome*. New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1983.

Kirshner, Jonathan. *Hollywood's Last Golden Age: Politics, Society, and the Seventies Film in America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012.

Lavery, David with Sara Lewis Dunne, eds. *Seinfeld, Master of Its Domain: Revisiting Television's Greatest Sitcom*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2006.

Lazarsfeld, Paul F. and Frank N. Stanton, eds. *Communications Research, 1948–1949*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1949.

Lazere, Donald, ed. *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1993.

Leary, Bernice E. and Dora V. Smith. *Growing With Books: A Reading Guide*. Eau Claire, WI: Cadmus Books, 1945.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. 1974; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2016.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Levine, Lawrence W. *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Looker, Benjamin. *A Nation of Neighborhoods: Imagining Cities, Communities, and Democracy in Postwar America*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Lund, Martin. *Re-Constructing the Man of Steel: Superman 1938–1941, Jewish American History, and the Invention of the Jewish-Comics Connection*. Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

McElvaine, Robert S. *The Depression and New Deal: A History in Documents*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. 1951; Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2002.

Mangan, Michael. *The Drama, Theatre & Performance Companion*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. Rev. ed. 1988; New York, NY: Basic Books, 2017.

May, Lary. *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.

May, Lary. *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Mead, Margaret and Martha Wolfenstein, eds. *Childhood in Contemporary Cultures*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1955.

Mintz, Steven. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.

Moore, William Howard. *The Kefauver Committee and the Politics of Crime, 1950–1952*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1974.

Munford, Rebecca and Melanie Waters. *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014.

Nasaw, David. *Children of the City: At Work and At Play*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985.

Nasaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1993.

Nelson, Scott Reynolds. *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of An American Legend*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Palladino, Grace. *Teenagers: An American History*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996.

Pardini, Samuele F. S., ed. *The Devil Gets His Due: The Uncollected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2008.

Popper, Steven. *Rethinking Superhero and Weapon Play*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2013.

Reiman, Richard A. *The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992.

Riesman, David with Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950.

Riesman, David. *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1954.

Rose, Kenneth D. *Myth and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Rydell, Robert W. *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Saler, Michael. *As If: Modern Enchantment and The Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Sammond, Nicholas. *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1960*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

Schatz, Thomas, ed. *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.

Schwartz, Vanessa R. *Jet Age Aesthetic: The Glamour of Media in Motion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020.

Sklar, Robert. *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. Rev. and updated ed. 1975; New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994.

Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Reissued. ed. 1950; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Springhall, John. *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830–1996*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998.

Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. 1936; New York, NY: Theater Arts Books, 1977.

Starker, Steven. *Evil Influences: Crusades against the Mass Media*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989.

Susman, Warren I. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Sutton-Smith, Brian. *Toys as Culture*. New York, NY: Gardner Press, Inc., 1986.

Thomas, John L. *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983.

Thompson, Henrietta Mary and Lucille E. Rea. *Clothing for Children*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1920.

Ulman, Richard B. and Doris Brothers. *The Shattered Self: A Psychoanalytic Study of Trauma*. N.P.: The Analytic Press, 1988.

Volpe, Judith A. *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1991.

Wald, Alan M. *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Wall, Wendy L. *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Wallace, Mike. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996.

Walraven, Margaret Kessler and Alfred L. Hall-Quest. *Teaching Through the Elementary School Library*. New York, NY: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1948.

Webb, Walter Prescott. *The Great Frontier*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1951.

Westkaemper, Emily. *Selling Women's History: Packaging Feminism in Twentieth-Century American Popular Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017.

White, David Manning and Robert H. Abel, eds. *The Funnies: An American Idiom*. New York, NY: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.

Wilson, Franklin T., ed. *Crime and Media Studies: Diversity of Method, Medium, and Communication*. San Diego, CA: Cognella, Inc., 2015.

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

Court Cases

DC Comics v. Pacific Pictures Corporation, Case No. CV 10-3633 ODW (RZx) (C.D. Cal. 9th)

DC Comics, Inc. v. The Board of Trustees of the City Colleges of Chicago, et al., Case No. 81 C, 2402 (N.D. Ill. 1981)

DC Comics Inc. v. Unlimited Monkey Business, Inc., 598 F. Supp. 110–120 (N.D. Ga. 1984)

Laura Siegel Larson v. Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and DC Comics, Case No. CV-04-8400-ODW (RZx) (C.D. Cal. 9th)

Periodicals

Academic Journals or University Publications

Andrae, Thomas. "From Menace to Messiah: The Prehistory of the Superman in Science Fiction Literature." *Discourse: Berkeley Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, vol. 2 (Summer 1980), pp. 84–111.

Arbuthnot, May Hill. “Children and the Comics,” *Elementary English*, vol. 24, no. 3 (March 1947), pp. 171–183.

Beaty, Bart. “Introduction.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 106–110.

Bender, Lauretta. “The Psychology of Children’s Reading and the Comics.” *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 4 (December 1944), pp. 223–231.

Bender, Lauretta and Reginald S. Lourie. “The Effect of Comic Books on the Ideology of Children.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 11, no. 3 (July 1941), pp. 540–550.

Benson, Lee. “The Historical Background of Turner’s Frontier Essay.” *Agricultural History*, vol. 25, no. 2 (April 1951), pp. 59–82.

Boyd, Brenda J. “Teacher Response to Superhero Play: To Ban or Not To Ban?” *Childhood Education*, vol. 74, no. 1 (Fall 1997), pp. 23–28.

Brower, James K. “The Hebrew Origins of Superman.” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, vol. 5, no. 3 (May/June 1979), pp. 22–26.

Burt, Stephen. “Poems About Superheroes.” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, vol. 48, no. 4 (Fall 2009), pp. 646–667.

Bukatman, Scott. “Why I Hate Superhero Movies.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 118–122.

Bukatman, Scott. “Sculpture, Stasis, the Comics, and Hellboy.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 40, no. 3 (Spring 2014), pp. 104–117.

Chang, Gordon H. ““Superman is about to visit the relocation centers” & the Limits of Wartime Liberalism.” *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1993), pp. 37–59.

Coogan, Peter M. “From Love to Money: The First Decade of Comics Fandom.” *International Journal of Comic Art*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 50–67.

Chute, Hillary. “Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative.” *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 2 (March 2008), pp. 452–465.

Davies, Patrick, Julia Surridge, Laura Hole, and Lisa Munro-Davies. “Superhero-related injuries in paediatrics: a case series.” *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, vol. 92, no. 3 (March 2007), pp. 242–243.

Eble, Kenneth E. “Our Serious Comics.” *The American Scholar*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Winter 1958–1959), pp. 61–71.

Eco, Umberto. “The Myth of Superman.” Translated by Natalie Chilton. *Diacritics*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 14–22.

Emad, Mitra C. “Reading Wonder Woman’s Body: Mythologies of Gender and Nation.” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 39, no. 6 (December 2006), pp. 954–984.

Fogel, Andrew. Review of *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, by Jill Lepore. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 49, no. 3 (June 2016), pp. 685–688.

Frank, Josette. “Chills and Thrills in Radio, Movies, and Comics: Some Psychiatric Opinion Reported.” *Child Study: A Quarterly Journal of Parental Education*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Spring 1948), pp. 42–46, 48.

Freeman, Matthew. “Up, Up and Across: Superman, the Second World War and the Historical Development of Transmedia Storytelling.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2015), pp. 215–239.

Gavaler, Chris. “The Anti-Superhero in Literary Fiction.” *Image [&] Narrative*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2016), pp. 32–45.

Genter, Robert. “‘With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility’: Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics.” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 40, no. 6 (December 2007), pp. 953–978.

Goode, Erich and Nachman Ben-Yehuda. “Moral Panics: Culture, Politics, and Social Construction.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 20 (1994), pp. 149–171.

Harris, Neil. “Who Owns Our Myths Heroism and Copyright in an Age of Mass Culture.” *Social Research*, vol. 52, no. 2 (Summer 1985), pp. 241–267.

Heer, Jeet. “Little Nemo in Comicsland.” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 82, no. 2 (Spring 2006), pp. 104–121.

Himmelfarb, Gertrude. “The Abyss Revisited.” *The American Scholar*, vol. 61, no. 3 (Summer 1992), pp. 337–349.

Himmelfarb, Gertrude. “The Remaking of the Cannon.” *Partisan Review*, vol. 58, no. 2 (Spring 1991), pp. 360–364.

Hofstadter, Richard. “Turner and the Frontier Myth.” *The American Scholar*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1949), pp. 433–443.

Inge, M. Thomas. “Li’l Abner, Snuffy, Pogo, and Friends: The South in the American Comic Strip.” *Southern Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 2 (Winter 2011), pp. 6–74.

Inge, M. Thomas. “Sut, Scarlet, and Their Comic Cousins: The South in the Comic Strip.” *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 19, no. 2 (October 1996), pp. 153–166.

Lamb, Marguerite. “Who Was Wonder Woman?” *Bostonia*, no. 3 (Fall 2001), pp. 12–17.

Labio, Catherine. “What’s in a Name? The Academic Study of Comics and the ‘Graphic Novel.’” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 123–126.

Lange, David. “Recognizing the Public Domain.” *Law and Contemporary Problems*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Autumn 1981), pp. 147–178.

Leary, Bernice E. “New Purposes in Reading in War and Peace.” *Minnesota Libraries*, vol. 14, no. 5 (March 1944), pp. 135–138.

Levine, Lawrence W. “American Culture and the Great Depression.” *The Yale Review*, vol. 74, no. 2 (January 1985), pp. 196–223.

Lucas, Mary R. “Our Friendly Enemy.” *Library Journal*, vol. 66, no. 17 (October 1941), pp. 824–827.

MacBean, James Roy. “Painting, Politics, and the Language of Signs in Godard’s *Made in USA*.” *Film Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Spring 1969), pp. 18–25.

McDaniel, Raymond. “Brainiac 5’s Very Bad Valentine.” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, vol. 48, no. 4 (Fall 2009), pp. 644–645.

Marston, William Moulton. “Why 100,000 Americans Read Comics.” *The American Scholar*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Winter 1943–1944), pp. 35–44.

Meskin, Aaron. “Comics as Literature?” *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 49, no. 3 (July 2009), pp. 219–239.

Miodrag, Hannah. “Narrative, Language, and Comics-as-Literature.” *Studies in Comics*, vol. 2, no. 2 (January 2012), pp. 263–279.

Newman, Graeme. “Batman and Justice: The True Story.” *Humanity & Society*, vol. 17, no. 3 (August 1993), pp. 297–320.

North, Sterling. “A National Disgrace (And a Challenge to American Parents).” *Childhood Education*, vol. 17, no. 2 (October 1940), p. 56.

Ong, Walter J. “The Comics and the Super State: Glimpses Down the Back Alleys of the Mind.” *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1945), pp. 34–48.

Palumbo, Donald. “Comics as Literature: Plot Structure, Foreshadowing, and Irony in the Marvel Comics’ *Avengers* ‘Cosmic Epic.’” *Extrapolation*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Winter 1981), pp. 309–324.

Pfeffer, Cynthia R. “Clinical Observations of Play of Hospitalized Suicidal Children.” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, vol. 9, no. 4 (Winter 1979), pp. 235–244.

Ratner-Rosenhagen, Jennifer. “The Real Lives of Fake People.” *Modern American History*, vol. 1, no. 3 (November 2018), pp. 437–442.

Roddy, Estelle R. “The Impact of TV.” *Childhood Education*, vol. 30, no. 9 (May 1954), pp. 432–439.

Saler, Michael. “Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes’: Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890–1940.” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 43, no. 6 (September 2003), pp. 599–622.

Saunders, Robert. “(Profitable) Imaginaries of Black Power: The Popular and Political Geographies of Black Panther.” *Political Geography*, vol. 69 (March 2019), pp. 139–149.

Schwartz, Alvin. “The Real Secret of Superman’s Identity.” *Children’s Literature*, vol. 5: Annual of The Modern Language Association Group on Children’s Literature and The Children’s Literature Association (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1976), pp. 117–129.

Sklar, Robert. “Windows on a Made-Up World: American Movies and the Cultural Past.” *American Film*, vol. 1, no. 9 (July–August 1976), pp. 60–64.

Smith, Greg M., Thomas Andrae, Scott Bukatman, and Thomas LaMarre, “Surveying the World of Contemporary Comics Scholarship.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 110–112.

Smith, Henry Nash. “Can ‘American Studies’ Develop a Method?” *American Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2, part 2 (Summer 1957), pp. 197–208.

Thomas, Paul. “Remembering Resnais: An Encounter on the First Anniversary (Approximately) of His Death.” *Film Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Summer 2015), pp. 86–87.

Tilley, Carol L. “‘Superman Says ‘Read!’” National Comics and Reading Promotion.” *Children’s Literature in Education*, vol. 44, no. 3 (September 2013), pp. 251–263.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, Forty-First Annual Meeting, December 14, 1893 (Madison, WI: Democrat Printing Company, State Printer, 1894), pp. 79–112.

Vollum, Scott and Cary D. Adkinson. "The Portrayal of Crime and Justice in the Comic Book Superhero Mythos." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2003), pp. 96–108.

Williams, William Appleman. "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy." *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 24, no. 4 (November 1955), pp. 379–395.

Wright, Olivia. "On My World, It Means Hope." *Eastern American Studies Association*, vol. 6, no. 1 (December 2018), pp. 72–87.

Zorbaugh, Harvey. "The Comics—There They Stand!" *Journal of Educational Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 4 (December 1944), pp. 196–203.

Fanzines or Prozines

Andrae, Tom, Geoffr[e]y Blum, and Gary Coddington. "Of Supermen and Kids With Dreams." Edited by Rick Marschall. *Nemo: The Classic Comics Library*, no. 2 (August 1983), pp. 6–12, 14–15, 18–19.

Beerbohm, Robert, Mark Evanier, and Julius Schwartz. "There's A Lot of Myth Out There!" *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 26 (July 2003), pp. 3–28.

Bishoff, Murray and Alan Light. "Superman Grew Out of Our Personal Feelings About Life." *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 56 (February 2007), pp. 3–18.

Cotton, Mike. "Wizard Q&A: Kevin Spacey." *Wizard: The Comics Magazine*, no. 177 (July 2006), pp. 80–83.

Murray, Will. "The Driving Force That Really Made DC Great: Whitney Ellsworth And The Rise Of National/DC Comics." *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 98 (December 2010), pp. 5–20.

Overstreet, Robert M. *Comic Book Price Guide*, 18th ed., 1988–1989 (New York, NY: House of Collectibles, 1988.

"Up in the Sky! Look!" *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 26 (July 2003), pp. 29–33.

Government Reports

1930, 1940, and 1950 Census

Juvenile Delinquency. 81st Cong., 2nd sess., Committee Report. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950.

Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books). US Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., April 21, 22, and June 4, 1954, S. 190.

Juvenile Delinquency: A Compilation of Information and Suggestions Submitted to the Special Senate Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce Relative to the Incidence of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States and the Possible Influence Thereon of So-Called Crime Comic Books During the 5-Year Period 1945 to 1950. 81st Cong., 2nd sess., Committee Report. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950.

Official Gazette of the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Vol. 1008, no. 3, July 21, 1981.

West, James E. *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America, 1940*. US Congress, House, Committee on Education, 77th Cong., 1st sess., March 28, 1941, H.doc. 17.

Newspapers

The Adirondack Record-Elizabethtown Post (Au Sable Forks, NY)

Afro-American Red Star (Washington, DC)

Alton Evening Telegraph (Alton, IL)

The Amarillo Globe Times (Amarillo, TX)

American Fork Citizen (American Fork, UT)

Asbury Park Evening Press (Asbury Park, NJ)

Atlanta Daily World

The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution/*The Atlanta Constitution*

The Austin Statesman/*The Austin American-Statesman* (Austin, TX)

The Berkshire Eagle (Pittsfield, MA)

Binghamton Press (Binghamton, NY)

Blue Island Sun-Standard (Blue Island, IL)

The Boston Globe/*Boston Sunday Globe*

The Bradford Era (Bradford, PA)

Bradford Evening Star and Bradford Daily Record (Bradford, PA)

The Bridgeport Post (Bridgeport, CT)

The Brockport Republic (Brockport, NY)

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle/Brooklyn Eagle

Buffalo Evening News (Buffalo, NY)

Buffalo Evening Times (Buffalo, NY)

The Buffalo Sunday Times (Buffalo, NY)

The Burlington Free Press (Burlington, VT)

The Cameron Herald (Cameron, TX)

The Capital Times (Madison, WI)

The Cherokee County Herald (Centre, AL)

Chester Times (Chester, PA)

The Chicago Daily News

Chicago Tribune/*Chicago Sunday Tribune*

The Chillicothe Constitution (Chillicothe, MO)

Chillicothe Gazette (Chillicothe, OH)

The Chilliwack Progress (Chilliwack, CAN)

Chittenango-Bridgeport Times (Chittenango, NY)

The Cincinnati Enquirer

Cleveland Call and Post (Cleveland, OH)

Cleveland Plain Dealer

The Cleveland Press

The Clinton Eye (Clinton, MO)

Cobblestone: A Newspaper of the Arts

Columbus Evening Dispatch (Columbus, OH)

Concordiensis (Schenectady, NY)

Council Grove Republican (Council Grove, KS)

The Courier-Journal (Louisville, KY)

The Courier-News (Plainfield, NJ) or (Bridgewater, NJ)

Courier-Post (Cherry Hill, NJ)

Cumberland Evening Times (Cumberland, MD)

Daily Egyptian (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale)

The Daily Freeport Facts-Review (Freeport, TX)

The Daily Herald (Provo, UT)

The Daily Home News (New Brunswick, NJ)

Daily Journal-Gazette/*The Daily Journal-Gazette and Commercial-Star* (Matoon, IL)

Daily Mirror and *Sunday Mirror* (New York, NY)

The Daily Mountain Eagle (Jasper, AL)

Daily News (Los Angeles, CA)

Daily News and *Sunday News* (New York, NY)

The Daily News (Tarrytown, NY)

Daily Press (Hampton, VA)

The Daily Republican (Monongahela, PA)

The Daily Review (Clifton Forge, VA)

Daily Worker and *Sunday Worker* (New York, NY)

The Davis County Clipper (Davis County, UT)

The Decatur Daily Review (Decatur, IL)

The Decatur Herald and *Decatur Evening Herald* (Decatur, IL)

The Delta Democrat-Times (Greenville, MS)

Democrat and Chronicle (Rochester, NY)

Denton Journal (Denton, MD)

The Derrick (Oil City-Franklin-Clarion, PA)

The Desert Sun (Palm Springs, CA)

The Detroit Free Press

Dixon Evening Telegraph (Dixon, IL)

Dunkirk Evening Observer (Dunkirk, NY)

Edwardsville Intelligencer (Edwardsville, IL)

The Evening Leader (Corning, NY)

The Evening News (Harrisburg, PA)

The Evening Press (Binghamton, NY)

The Evening Standard (Uniontown, PA)

The Evening Star (Washington, DC)

The Evening Tribune (Marysville, OH)

Fayette County Times (Fayette, AL)

The Flint Journal (Flint, MI)

The Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA)

The Garfieldian & Garfield News (Chicago, IL)

Garrett Clipper (Garrett, IN)

The Gazette and Daily (York, PA)

Great Bend Daily Tribune (Great Bend, KS)

Greenwood Commonwealth (Greenwood, MS)

Hamilton Evening Journal (Fort Hamilton, IN)

The Harlan News-Advertiser (Harlan, IA)

Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, PA)

The Hartford Courant

The Herald Statesman (Yonkers, NY)

Hollywood Citizen News (Hollywood, CA)

The Hollywood Reporter

The Honeoye Falls Times (Honeoye Falls, NY)

The Hutchinson News (Hutchinson, KS)

The Index-Journal (Greenwood, SC)

The Ironwood Times (Ironwood, MI)

The Ithaca Journal (Ithaca, NY)

J.: the Jewish news weekly of Northern California

The Jewish Advocate (Boston, MA)

The Jewish Chronicle (Pittsburgh, PA)

The Jewish Criterion (Pittsburgh, PA)

The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia, PA)

The Jewish Independent: A Weekly Newspaper (Cleveland, OH)

The Jewish News (Detroit, MI)

The Jewish Review and Observer: Devoted to the Interests of the Jewish People (Cleveland, OH)

The Jewish Week (Queens, NY)

Jim Thorpe Times News (Jim Thorpe, PA)

The Journal-News (Nyack, NY)

The Knickerbocker News (Albany, NY)

The Knoxville Sunday Journal (Knoxville, TN)

Las Vegas Sunday Optic (Las Vegas, NM)

Little Rock Daily News (Little Rock, AK)

The Long Beach Sun (Long Beach, CA)

Long Island Star-Journal (Long Island, NY)

Longview Daily News (Longview, TX)

Los Angeles Times

Madera Tribune (Madera, CA)

The Madill Record (Madill, OK)

Manhasset Press (Manhasset, NY)

Mansfield News-Journal (Mansfield, OH)

Marengo Republican-News (Marengo, IL)

The Maryville Daily Forum (Maryville, MO)

Mauch Chunk Times-News (Mauch Chunk, PA)

Medford Mail Tribune (Medford, OR)

Mexico Evening Ledger (Mexico, MO)

The Miami Herald

The Miami News

Midpacifican

The Morning Call (Allentown, PA)

The Morning Herald (Gloversville, NY)

The Morning Herald (Hagerstown, MD)

Mt. Vernon Register-News (Mount Vernon, IL)

The Nebraska Signal (Geneva, NE)

Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln, NE)

The New Leader (East Stroudsburg, PA)

The New Mexican (Santa Fe, NM)

Newark Courier-Gazette (Newark, NY)

Newport Daily News (Newport, RI)

Newsday/*Sunday Newsday* (Nassau County, NY) or (Long Island, NY)

The North Adams Transcript (North Adams, MA)

North Hills News Record (Zelienople, PA)

The New Era (Eunice, LA)

New York Herald Tribune

New York Journal and American

New York Post

New York World-Telegram

The New York Times

The New York Times Magazine

Northwestern University News Service

Oakdale Leader (Oakdale, CA)

Oakland Tribune (Oakland, CA)

The Odessa American (Odessa, TX)

The Ogden Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT)

The Journal (Ogdensburg, NY)

Opelika Daily News (Opelika, AL)

Orangetown Telegram and The Pearl River Searchlight (Orangetown and Pearl River, NY)

Orem Geneva Times (Orem, UT)

Oswego Palladium-Times (Oswego, NY)

The Ottawa Journal (Ottawa, CAN)

Our Sunday Visitor (Huntington, IN)

PM New York Daily and *PM Sunday*

Philadelphia Daily News

The Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Pittsburgh Press

Press≈Telegram (Long Beach, CA)

The Raleigh Register (Beckley, WV)

The Record-Argus (Greenville, PA)

Republic-Democrat (Brockport, NY)

Richmond Times-Dispatch (Richmond, VA)

Rome Daily Sentinel (Rome, NY)

The Salt Lake Tribune (Salt Lake City, UT)

The San Bernardino Daily Sun (San Bernardino, CA)

San Mateo Times (San Mateo, CA)

The San Saba News (San Saba, TX)

Santa Cruz County Sentinel (Santa Cruz, CA)

Sarasota Journal (Sarasota, FL)

Sausalito News (Sausalito, CA)

The Selinsgrove Times and The Snyder County Tribune (Selinsgrove, PA)

The Seminole Producer (Seminole, OK)

Shamokin News-Dispatch (Shamokin, PA)

The South Bend Tribune (South Bend, IN)

The Southern Democrat (Oneonta, AL)

The Springville Herald (Springville, UT)

St. Louis Globe-Democrat

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

St. Petersburg Times (St. Petersburg, FL)

Stanberry Headlight (Stanberry, MO)

The Star-Herald (Kosciusko, MS)

The Stars and Stripes: U.S. Armed Forces Daily In The Middle Pacific Arena

Sterling Daily Gazette (Sterling, IL)

The Stylus (SUNY College at Brockport)

The Sun/*The Sunday Sun* (Baltimore, MD)

The Sun (New York, NY)

The Sun-Telegram/*The Sun* (San Bernardino County, CA)

The Sunday Press (Binghamton, NY)

The Sunday Times (New Brunswick, NJ)

The Summerfield (Summerfield, KS)

The Taylor Daily Press (Taylor, TX)

Tempo of the Towns (Vestal, NY)

The Terre Haute Tribune (Terre Haute, IN)

The Times (London, UK)

The Times Literary Supplement (London, UK)

Toronto Daily Star/*The Sunday Star* (Toronto, CAN)

The Troy Messenger (Troy, AL)

UNESCO Courier

Ukiah Daily Journal (Mendocino County, CA)

USA Today

Valley Times (San Fernando Valley, CA)

Vanity Fair

Ventura County Star-Free Press (Ventura, CA)

The Victoria Advocate (Victoria, TX)

The Vidette-Messenger (Valparaiso, IN)

The Village Voice (New York, NY)

The Washington Post/*The Washington Post Times Herald*/*The Washington Post and Times Herald*

Waxahachie Daily Light (Waxahachie, TX)

the WEEKLY (Pittsburgh, PA)

Wilmington News-Journal (Wilmington, OH)

The Windsor Star (Windsor, CAN)

The Wingfoot Clan: The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company (Akron, OH)

The Winnipeg Tribune (Winnipeg, CAN)

Winston County Journal (Louisville, MS)

Women's Wear Daily

Yank

The Yazoo City Herald (Yazoo City, MS)

Magazines

America

American Cinematographer

The American Home

Architectural Digest

The Atlantic

The Billboard

B'nai B'rith Magazine

Broadcasting

Business Week

The Catholic Library World

The Catholic World: A Monthly Magazine of General Literature and Science

The Christian Century

Cinefantastique

Commentary

Coronet

The Critic

Daily Variety/Variety

The Economist

Editor & Publisher

Empire

Encounter

Entertainment Weekly

Essence

Esquire's Apparel Arts: The Magazine For Men's And Boy's Stores/Esquire

The Family Circle

Forbes

Good Housekeeping

GQ

Harper's Bazaar

The Indianapolis Star Magazine

The Jewish Quarterly

Liberty

Life

Look

Literary Digest

The Lowbrow Reader

Maclean's (Toronto, CAN)

Magazine Digest

Moment

The New Republic

Newsweek

The New Leader

New York

The New Yorker

Parade [newspaper insert]

Parents' Magazine & Family Home Guide

People

Playboy

Print: A Quarterly Journal of the Graphic Arts

The Publishers' Weekly/*Publishers' Weekly*/*Publishers Weekly*

The Queen's Work Newsletter

Radio Daily

Redbook

Review for Religious

Rolling Stone

The Saturday Evening Post

The Saturday Evening Review of Literature

Sparks [Macy's in-house publication]

St. Anthony Messenger: A National Catholic Family Magazine

Story

Time

Transactions: 34th National Safety Congress

Variety

The Weekly Standard

Your Life

Youth Leaders Digest