
A Thesis By

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, my brother,
and my dear friends
Dude, suckin' at something is the first step towards being sorta good at something.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Robin Henry, for her thoughtful, patient guidance and support. No one should have to put up with my antics for as long as she has. Thanks are also due to the rest of the members of my committee, George Dehner and Darren DeFrain. Both have been very supportive and helpful in my efforts to reach this far in my academic career. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my colleague Felicia Hammons. Our rivalry has pushed my work to higher levels. I also want to thank the History Department, especially Jay Price. The opportunities given to me have been instrumental in helping me in becoming a better historian.
ABSTRACT

This research attempts to show the need to expand comic-book scholarship through critically examining how comic writers and artists express cultural, political, and social concepts in the past and present. The reason that this is needed is because most current comic-book scholarship fall short in critically examining comic books. Much of today's scholarship fail in the examination of the crucial content which is inside the panels.

This work hopes to demonstrate the necessity of comic-book expansion through showing the importance of the Silver Age of comic book history; that the pieces of art created can be more than what the basic definition of Silver Age comic books limits them to be. The time period that this research focuses on is the 1960s and 1970s, two decades of social, political, and cultural unrest. Many social movements, such as the civil rights movement, women’s liberation movement, and the counterculture movement have their rise to power in these two decades.

The research focuses on three comic-book series that have their publication during the aforementioned timeframe. These comic books traverse multiple time periods, taking characteristics from more than one era. Captain America’s Secret Empire series followed an iconic superhero who lost faith in his identity and country after traumatic events unfolded in the White House. Superman’s Girlfriend, Lois Lane was a series that attempted to shift its main character, Lois Lane, to be more aligned with current views on women’s issues. Teen Titans was a series that encapsulated the mood and ideals of the youth culture in the 1960s and 1970s. By examining Captain America’s Secret Empire, Superman’s Girlfriend, Lois Lane, and Teen Titans series in the subsequent chapters, the analysis will show that comic books of the Silver Age are culturally deeper and more influential than the boundaries that current scholar’s definition set them to be.
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CHAPTER 1

COMIC BOOKS AND POPULAR CULTURE IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

1.1 Popular Culture and Comic Books

Highbrow entertainment, sometimes referred to as elite or high culture, is often only accessible to the small minority in the upper classes of American society. High culture can be anything considered intellectual, such as classical music concerts or early art films. When the majority of the American people could not access highbrow entertainment, they turned their gazes to media that was more accessible. The ability to find substitutes beyond highbrow entertainment was helped by the advent of mass production. In the fifteenth century, books were eventually no longer hand copied, but printed out in mass quantities by the printing press. The radio allowed music that had been reserved to concert halls to be heard by millions. This separation was how new forms of expressive culture began to emerge. The blues, jazz, rock’n’roll, comic strips, movies, "frequently contained much that was fresh, exciting, innovative, intellectually challenging, and highly imaginative."\(^1\) This construction of lowbrow American culture can also be seen with comic books.

The Silver Age of comic books (1960s through 1970s) saw an increase in the amount of comic books that were heavily tied to social, political, and cultural movements than from the previous era, The Golden Age. The focus of The Golden Age was the building of the superhero archetype, a new style that was introduced in the early part of the twentieth century. Direct evidence of highbrow culture or “intellectual culture” in comic books can be seen in Europe in the middle of the twentieth century. "Serious literature in comic book form may be a relatively concept in American culture, but in Europe, comics have long made broad inroads into highbrow

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culture, especially in France and Belgium and Germany where comics for adults have been published steadily. "During the 1960s and 1970s, French comic books, such as *The Adventures of Tintin* or *The Smurfs* were a high, critical art. Appreciation for comic-book art was high in Europe. "University degrees on this topic may be had in France Germany, Belgium and Italy." \(^2\) It was not unusual to find reviews about comic books in prominent newspapers throughout Europe. American comic books were destined for a different interpretation because of the negative connotation of how cheap they were made and sold, the audience, and the range of topics usually associated with them. The origins of American comic books can be traced back to mid-nineteenth century European newspapers that featured light satiric picture stories that contained features such as panel borders, cartooning, and interdependent combination of words and pictures. This media eventually evolved to include more humorous and adventurous series, away from the usual serious politically charged commentary on society. Aiming to be entertainment for adults and then more towards youth, picture stories eventually became comic strips. Demands for more content than what a comic strip usually contained pushed comic strips to being grouped into magazines, which eventually became known as comic books. \(^3\)

Regularly accessible to almost everyone, comic books in the United States were seen as lowbrow entertainment or low culture because of their mass appeal to an audience that was not considered elite. But this view was not held just by art and culture critics, but even from the creators themselves. According to comic book writer, Bob Haney:

> [C]omics, they’re just the lowest form of popular culture. What the Germans called kitsch. Nowadays, of course, they’re art. And they are much better; they’re much more — great creativity and serious talent. But in those days... It’s kid’s junk. Kid’s poison. Adults have their junk. Whether it’s booze or sex or whatever. Kids needed junk. And the junk was comics for years. That’s why it sought the level that it did. But all of a sudden, as much as comics were

shamed and put down and attacked and vilified, we wrote a lot of “literate stuff.” Quotes around the word “literate,” in the sense that a lot of kids finally learned more about reading the English language from that than anything else. Because they would read comics but they wouldn’t read, maybe, what the teacher assigned.  

The stigma of comic books has been alleviated in recent decades due to the perception of the quality of art and stories in them, but the shift in study of American culture to include comic books has occurred only recently. An examination of university curricula from the 1960s reveals a change in American culture scholarship in the twentieth century. Studies in comic-book history began to include topics formerly ignored in order to understand American culture. Topics included popular and mass entertainment, leisure activities, and the culture of the home. Despite the shift in studies of American culture, comic-book scholarship has received only recently scholarly accreditation, lagging behind scholarly treatment of other art forms such as films. This is due partly to the question of whether or not comic books can be considered as a critical art form. This prolongation has allowed scholars to delve into the cultural-theoretical framework that has traditionally been overlooked. Comic-book scholarship should be expanded through critically examining how comic writers and artists express cultural, political, and social concepts in the past and present.

Early comic-book scholar, Richard Reynolds, wrote his book in an attempt to examine comic-books culturally. Examining comic-books culturally was typical for early scholarship of the mid-1990s. In his book, Reynolds defines the Silver Age, a specific time period in comic book history as:

dating from the revival of the Flash in 1956... [I]n the 1960s and early 1970s... writers and artists [were] creating a wealth of exciting new titles that mixed protagonists more in tune with the mores of the period, and kept an eye for the visual and verbal ironies inherent in situating super-

5 Levine, Highbrow/lowbrow, 248.
powered characters against a background that purported to represent the 'real' world."\(^6\)

While there is a level of truth to this definition, there is an inherent problem as well. Giving such a broad time period of comic-book history such a definition is limiting to comic books that were present in the era. The periodization of comic books is not as clear cut as historians would like it to be. A number of comic books from the Golden Age are often still going during the Silver Age. The inherent problem with defining comic books in a large time frame is that the marginalized works are forgotten. What about genres apart from mainstream ones, such as underground comics and adult oriented comic books? Or what mores were being mixed with protagonists and from whose perspective of these social mores were being considered? Reynold’s definition leaves scholars with more questions rather than answers.

In Tom Spurgeon's introduction to *The Comic Book History of Comics*, he explains why the history of sequential images can be an arduous task:

> The popular idea of a 'Golden Age,' 'Silver Age,' and 'Bronze Age' of comic book fails as a meaningful measure of comics content by any reasonable standard. Worse, it limits that content to a single genre, and re-casts the historical developments of an entire medium into a series of meaningful events in superhero comics publishing.\(^7\)

Mainstream thinking tries to divide the entire modern history into three distinct time periods, Golden Age, Silver Age, and the Bronze Age. This periodization is limiting to series that span multiple decades. Comic-book series, such as Superman, Captain America, and Wonder Woman all have their beginnings in the first half of the twentieth century. All three characters still have series that are being published to this day. American culture has evolved since the middle of the twentieth century. It would suit cultural historians to catalogue comics based on the time period they were generated for and not attempt to define the contents of all comic books for the era. For

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example, the *Teen Titans* comic book series started in the middle of the 1960s and did not end its first serialization until almost 1980. Categorizing this way, however, would downplay comic-book history's importance and uniqueness if it were not differentiated on more than just a time scale. There are often times when there is no clear-cut transition in a comic book series’ cultural relevancy, it is more often a slow evolution. Works similar to Reynold’s, like Stephen Krensky’s *Comic Book Century: The History of American Comic Books*, fall short, as they fail in the examination of the crucial content which is inside the panels. ⁸

What this work hopes to achieve overall is to show the importance of the Silver Age of comic book history; that the pieces of art created can be more than what the basic definition of Silver Age comic books limits them to be. These comic books traverse multiple time periods, taking characteristics from more than one era. By examining Captain America’s *Secret Empire*, *Superman’s Girlfriend, Lois Lane*, and *Teen Titans* series in the subsequent chapters, the analysis will show that comic books of the Silver Age are culturally deeper than what the boundaries of a definition set them to be.

### 1.2 The Silver Age

To better understand current comic-book scholarship, it is important to understand the basic framework and terminology. Considered to be the beginning of modern comic books, the Golden Age of Comics (1930s-1940s) saw comics expand from comic strips into comic books. The following superhero character tropes were also introduced. Male characters were very generic in terms of character depth, they would be overtly masculine, having unrealistic amounts of muscle and usually a “V” shaped body frame. They would always be making the morally correct choice, and always came out on top in every situation. A great example of the atypical

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character from the Golden Age of Comic Books is Superman, who made his first appearance in 1938. How masculine was Superman's first appearance? Superman was shown easily lifting a vehicle, stopping it from running over a cowering man. Author of Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes, Christopher Knowles, compared the cover of Action Comics #1 (Superman's first appearance) to that of Hercules Clubs the Hydra by Antonio del Pollaiolo, a painting depicting a rather buff and almost completely nude Hercules killing a mythical hydra monster.9

On the other hand, female characters were situated in three different archetypes: the career-orientated woman, who was always seeking employment as a nurse, a secretary, or a school teacher, but rarely actually employed; the romantic role, the character was either the atypical "Good Girl" who get their heart broken or "Bad Girl" who breaks the boy's hearts; and the perky teenager role. It is during this time period where women also first appear as superheroes. Limited, however, to the style of "'femme fatale', who was a sexually aggressive woman."10 The glamor of the Golden Age began to dull in the 1950s as the public became aware of comic books’ “harmful” effects on American youth. Senator Robert Hendrickson, a Republican from New Jersey, had taken point in holding public hearings to address accusations brought up against comic books. The claims were that comic books were racist, desensitized youth to violence and gore, gave girls unrealistic ideas concerning body image, taught kids how to commit crimes, starred superheroes who were fascists, promoted illiteracy and homosexual behavior, contained subliminal sexual messages, filled with ads for products not suited to children, reveled in bondage and S&M imagery, and much more. These hearings led by Senator

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Hendrickson eventually led to the establishment of the Comics Code Authority (CCA), which was a self-regulatory code for content admitted in mainstream comic books.\textsuperscript{11}

With the implementation of the CCA, the Silver Age (1956-1970s) began with the revival of some of the more famous Golden Age male superheroes, such as the Flash, while being subservient under the new guidelines of the CCA. The newly rewritten Golden Age superheroes would become more complex in terms of fictional background history and morals. Major comic book publishers, such as Marvel and DC Comics, also went in a new direction with publishers wanting to target a younger audience. Young girls were comic book consumers who represented a largely untapped market at the time of the Silver Age. Such focused comic books include: Charlton's \textit{Nurse Betsy Crane}, Marvel's \textit{Millie the Model}, and Archie Comics' \textit{Betty and Veronica}. All of these comic books featured women in stereotypical roles with stories written by groups of men who rarely had interests that went beyond selling issues at newsstands. There was even a batch of romance genre comics: DC's \textit{Young Romance}, \textit{Young Love}, and Charlton's \textit{My Secret Life}. But the majority of series published still had young boys as their target readers.

While a fair number of comic-book series brimmed with action, a number of cultural movements occurred that would affect the content. These cultural movements also affected the creators, causing them to have social-consciousness shifts in their work. One of the earliest examples of social-consciousness shifts within comic books comes from Will Eisner’s \textit{The Spirit}. It featured an African American sidekick named Ebony White. With a clownish appearance and monkey-like demeanor, the character was a crude and stereotypical representation of African Americans. In the middle of the century, "perhaps due to changing attitudes toward minorities in the postwar-era, Eisner realized that Ebony’s dialect humor was insulting." The Spirit’s sidekick was "sent to the all-black Carter School for Boys to rid himself\textsuperscript{11} Dunlavey, \textit{The Comic Book History of Comics}, 84-85.\
of his 'minstrel accent.'” The fact that the character was self-conscious about the issue meant that Eisner was as well. This was the beginning of a social conscious shift in Eisner's work that would continue as the years passed on.\(^{12}\) For the Civil Rights Movement, black characters, such as The Falcon and Black Panther made appearances. But none, unfortunately, ever became the symbol of equality for blacks in American society.

The 1960s were full of comics that were relatable to other cultural movements at the time. Student demonstrations, women fighting for equal rights, drug abuse, are a few of the themes that appeared regularly in the 1960s and 1970s. Another comic book creator, Stan Lee, created the *Fantastic Four* in the 1960s, with the idea of going away from the typical superhero archetype. The members would argue, not be in control of each situation, and they would be dealing with relationships on a more or less adult level. Lee stated that he "did the *Fantastic Four* the way I felt I would like to write, the way a story ought to be written.” \(^{13}\) This would continue to be the motif of comics during this period, especially in the *Teen Titans* series which overlapped numerous social movements that changed the attitude of American culture.

The 1960s of the Silver Age were full of comics that were relatable to the culture at the time. This is due to intertextual images. These remind readers of something he or she has encountered in other media (movies, books, paintings, TV shows, etc.). Some intertextual pictures refer to real-life events. Most only see those events indirectly, as reports in newspapers or on television. For instance, *Amazing Spider-Man* #68 in 1968 featured a story titled “Crises on Campus.” This was based on the student demonstrations that ended violently in the same year at Columbia University. A similar occurrence happened with Captain America’s *Secret Empire* story that was published from 1973 through 1975, the same time period in which the Watergate

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Scandal was unfolding. In the story, Captain America finds out that the leader behind the evil secret empire was the President of the United States. The potential of comics as a useful visual communication media began to grow.\(^\text{14}\) The transition of comics from the Golden Age to the Silver Age is important in understanding this era of comics as a whole. This is a transition from how comic-book characters were being written and what they did. This transition explains why Silver Age comics shifted their tone of simple superheroes to more complex ones that tackled difficult social, political, and cultural topics. The transition also explains why readers began to identify more with their favorite superheroes. To begin understanding the transition, U.S. cultural history must be juxtaposed with comic-book history. This is because without the actions of a few influential figures in Pop Art scene, the transition from the Golden Age to that of the Silver Age might not have occurred.

1.3 Pop Art and Comic Books

In the 1960s, Roy Lichtenstein projected an individual comic strip panel onto a wall and traced it, all the while removing any sense of style and personality from the original artist. He insisted that the resulting image "was an improvement upon the original and a wholly unique piece of art." Lichtenstein’s "comic strip paintings" was a commercial success in the eyes of New York art dealers and an even bigger hit with the up and coming "Pop" (popular) Art phenomenon. "Though many assumed Lichtenstein's use of trite romance and war comic book imagery... was intended as a critique of commercialist culture... the pop [artist] vehemently rejected such a reading!" Lichtenstein "yearned to reflect society, not criticize it! The world was their museum, and [he] wanted to be as militantly shallow as it." But this mass culture that Pop Art was trying to emulate became more of a reflection of the "hipster's ironic consumption of 'square' culture in

order to mock it." From this, the public's view on comic books shifted to that of purely campy trash. But it was not just Pop Art and the American public who thought comic books were trash, so did the people who wrote and did art work for them. In the comic book industry, creating comic books was only a stepping stone to a more reputable position as perhaps an advertising firm.15

The idea of comic books as "campy" would not change for years. The view on mainstream comics that would eventually ease as years passed on. But from this downturn came an uprising of underground comics that did not have to compete on the newsstands in order to maintain their job as a creator. The same "vitality and freedom" that underground comics were experiencing eventually made its way to syndicated comics. "In 1969, writer Dennis O'Neil and artist Neal Adams began a socially conscious super hero comic, Green Lantern-Green Arrow, in which the costumed crusaders battled against issues ripped from the day's headlines." More companies began to push the socially conscious super hero comic agenda in their series to the point of testing the hold that the Comics Code Authority had on their content.16

1.4 Historiography

Almost all fundamental information that is known about sequential art and its history can be traced to Will Eisner’s *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985). Based on Eisner's sequential art course at New York's School of Visual Art and appeared randomly in "THE SPIRIT" series as a series of essays, this book offers the principles of graphic storytelling and fundamentals of the medium through examining comic books and comic strips. It is "intended to consider and examine the unique aesthetics of Sequential Art as a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and

16 Ibid., 136.
words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea." It also validates sequential art as a whole and as a form of expression by critically examining the media as any other form of expression would be. Eisner’s work is crucial to the larger understanding of Silver Age comic books as it explains that the content within comic books is just as important as the history behind their publication. *Comics and Sequential Art* is considered to be the upmost seminal work of the theoretical field of all sequential art mediums.17

If Eisner is the “Father of the Graphic Novel,” Scott McCloud is the “Father of Analyzing Sequential Art.” McCloud’s *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1994) is an examination of the art-form of comics, the potential of this peculiar media type, and its inner workings. Any attempt at making a history or discussion of comic books derives its lexicon of sequential art terminology from McCloud’s book. *Understanding Comics* establishes the language and defines the basics of what is needed to know in order to fully understand comics and shows how reader's minds process visual language, closure, and time. This is crucial toward understanding the composition of the content of Silver Age comic books, where examining the content within the comic books and how readers will interpret that content is critical in realizing their cultural relevancy. *Reinventing Comics* (2000) discusses the life of comics as an art form, as literature, creators' rights, the business of comics, shifting public perception of comics, sexual and ethnic representation in comics, and digital comics. The third book, aptly named *Making Comics* (2006) deals with how comics were made traditionally, but also how technology has effected the medium.18

In the style of Scott McCloud's books, Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey's *Comic Book*
History of Comics (2012) combines six issues of their Comic Book series. Instead of focusing on the theoretics, the authors focus on the history itself. Each issue focuses on a different section of comic history, from the early beginnings of publishing, to the dawn of caped crusaders, to crime and horror magazines, and even modern day comic books. Though a recent addition to the scholarship of comic book history, it is one of the more recent works to come out and attempt to sort out the long history of the media. Even though it still fails when attempting to define a whole era of comic books, it nonetheless succeeds in other comic book history aspects such as the early developmental stages. It helps identify the early identifying features of the Silver Age of comic books. Features such as superhero character development and the transition that publishing companies made when they reinvented the media for a new generation of readers who needed superheroes to take on the issues of their time. Comic Book History of Comics has not been as critically acclaimed as the next.19

When examining books specifically handling comic book history and American culture, Jean-Paul Gabilliet’s Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books is one of the most popular and successful works. It was successful because of how informative Gabilliet is as he introduces the medium in a way that even casual readers would be able to quickly understand the history. Originally published in France and only recently translated into English by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen, Gabilliet documents the rise and development of the American comic book industry from the 1930s to the present. Through addressing visual issues and biographies, Gabilliet’s interests lay with the means of production, distribution, and audience reception, making it one of the few and first interdisciplinary studies of this media type. This work is relevant in conceptualizing readership and gauging their reception of comic books, particularly during the Silver Age where records are not always complete or certain evidence

regarding the audience is not present. A majority of the research in the following chapters focus on letters written to the editors. Analysis of these letters help prove the legitimacy of these Silver Age comic books and their importance as cultural artifacts. Gabilliet discusses the problematic legitimization of the media that has recently occurred within the scholarly and academic world at large. Gabilliet shows how issues faced by comic books are all connected and often unique to this specific art form. Gabilliet’s work is one of the first landmark overviews of comic book history.20

While most academic works on comic-book history are useful, it is often necessary to have direct accounts from the creators themselves. Masters of the Comic Book Universe Revealed! (2006) by Arie Kaplan does just that. The people interviewed include Will Eisner, Stan Lee, Neil Gaiman, Art Spiegelman, Jerry Robinson, Trina Robbins, Dwayne McDuffie, and more. This informal history of the comic book industry contains insightful observations of the industry that are often overlooked when studying comic book history at large. These interviews are with whom Kaplan sees as key figures who represent the "master" or at the very least very well-known creator in their respective niche. Most names are readily recognizable, such as Will Eisner and Neil Gaiman. Kaplan’s interviews help in understanding that the undertaking of having superheroes tackle social, political, and cultural issues often came from the creators. These creators wished for a change in American society and they used their work to get their message out. This is a hallmark feature of these Silver Age comic books that this research seeks to highlight. Hearing directly from the creator’s point of view adds new voices to an often repetitive narrative.21

While it is exciting to hear from well-known creators, it is also welcoming to see a

marginal group of comic book characters receive scholarly attention in the recently published *The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art*. Written by Frances K. Gateward and John Jennings, the book is a composition of fifteen essays, organized thematically into a collection that explores varying ways that black artists and writers have left their mark on a primarily white industry. *The Blacker the Ink* begins in the 1930s with African American newspapers and ends with modern day graphic novels. Gateward and Jenning’s compilation methodically covers the long history of racial stereotypes in comics as well as the writers and artists that have made their mark on the industry. This book points out the irony that is behind most Silver Age comic books. While creators during the Silver Age attempted to comment on social issues such as the Civil Rights Movement, all of the creators were primarily white. This racial dynamic created a haphazard message to readers. While stories contained messages that revolved around the Civil Rights Movement, black characters were presented with stereotypical dialogue and appearances. However, the introduction of black superheroes in the Silver Age sets it apart from the Golden Age. But while the industry has been predominantly white it has also been a male dominated work space.\(^22\)

*Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (2010) by Hillary L. Chute seeks to give voice to marginalized group of comic-book creators. Through the lens of some of the most acclaimed graphic novelist women, Chute puts together an autobiography of sorts that explores the depictions of sex, gender, and lived experiences. It describes these graphic novels as graphic narratives, as they tend to be authors sharing intimate experiences through text and images. The list of creators includes Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Phoebe Gloeckner, Lynda Barry, Marjane Satrapi, and Alison Bechdel. By uprooting the work of women away from the margins,

*Graphic Women* provides a vast insight into the often forgotten part of comic book history. As with *The Black the Ink*, this book points out the irony of the lack of female creators in a time where female superheroes were advocating for equal rights for women. This is another feature of the Silver Age comic books that make it unique.²³

It is important to know about creators of comic books who have been marginalized. It is also helpful to the scholarship when a well-known historian, such as Jill Lepore, writes a widely successful historical analysis of one of the most popular comic book superhero. *Secret History of Wonder Woman* (2014) explores the life of the man who created the world's most recognizable comic book heroine, Wonder Woman. Lepore shows how Moulton Marston's character evolved to be a Progressive Era feminist while still keeping focus on Marston's life, where he, his wife, and mistresses engaged in a cult of female sexual power. Wonder Woman was created around the time of World War II and the book leads up to the character's appearance in *Ms.* magazine in the 1970s. Lepore has demonstrated how important comic-book characters can be in the rise of political, social, and cultural movements. Comic books from the Silver Age have been marginalized. Most superheroes from the Silver Age are not as widely known as Wonder Woman and yet they were still used to advance the efforts of various movements of that time.²⁴

Although recently there has been a multitude of new book releases on comic books, it has primarily been academic journals and articles dealing with comics that have been rapidly appearing within the past decade. One of the most prominent journals is *ImageTexT*, a peer-reviewed, open-access journal that is entirely devoted to the interdisciplinary study of comics. The journal is published by the English Department at the University of Florida with the support of the College of Liberal Arts and Science. Readers will be able to find essays emphasizing the

aesthetics, cognition, productions, reception, distribution, dissemination of comics, other media related to comics, and translations of previously existing research.

The topics and subject matters that are addressed in the articles of ImageTexT are as wide ranging as the number of disciplinary fields. This journal is important because it shows the many different facets of comic books and the different directions one may take in analyzing them. While this research focuses on the historical aspect of the Silver Age of comic books, it also takes into account the historical narrative of Pop Art, which explains how and why the Silver Age came to be. Understanding the different aspects of the Silver Age allows for a better understanding of why there is a difference between the Golden Age and the Silver Age.25

1.5 Proceeding Chapters

This thesis focuses on a cultural and historical analysis on a specific set of Silver Age comic books. This analysis is achieved by focusing on the content within the comic books, but also through examining letters that were written to the editors of each comic-book series. Before the creation of comic-book stores, there were no central hubs of communication for avid readers. These letter columns were the main conduit to which readers could communicate with the editors, but also with other readers. Readers usually wrote a letter expressing their opinion on a variety of topics that involved the comic-book series. Topics included storyline plot details, continuity mistakes, fashion, and often times social, political, and cultural issues. Often times the editors would respond back to the readers’ letters. These social, political, and cultural issues only began to appear in Silver Age comic books. These letters are one of the reasons as to why analysis of Silver Age comic books is important.

The comic books chosen represent prime examples of neglected cultural artifacts of the Silver Age. The works selected in this research are ones that have received little scholarly

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attention. There has not been much, if any scholarly attention, in both regard to historical as well as cultural analysis of Captain America's *Secret Empire*, Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane, and *Teen Titans* series. This neglect is mostly likely due to how new the field is. But the field of comic-book history is rapidly expanding. By recognizing cultural artifacts such as the ones presented in the next three chapters, scholarship will see the importance of the content within comic books and not just the date they were published. The analysis presented in the proceeding chapters represents a work that easily fits in the direction of today's comic-book scholarship. Even though these are considered modern comic books, there is still a great deal of material that has yet to be discussed.

Captain America has been an iconic figure in regard to comic-book characters since the 1940s. It is often rare to find a book concerning American comic-book history that does not mention Captain America throwing a punch at Hitler's face. But this popular figure has a moment in the 1970s that does not have enough academic attention. The first chapter explores how the *Secret Empire* series relates to the culture surrounding the Watergate scandal. In the chapter, the analysis of the series shows an interesting parallel between reader’s feelings towards the American government at the time and the story of Captain America facing off against a covert organization. The chapter seeks to not only shed light on a particular series, but to show how a comic-book series, which spans multiple decades can embody the attributes of two very distinct time periods in American history. While *Captain America* is the most popular comic-book series examined, the next series has one of the most iconic comic-book females.

Lois Lane has received a moderate amount of cultural attention, mostly due to her character being in popular movie and television adaptations of the Superman comic book series. As a comic-book character, Lane has never achieved the level of admiration Wonder Woman has
as a figure for women to look up to, especially during the rise of second-wave feminism during the second half of the twentieth century. The second chapter will show, however, Lane has a lot to offer in terms of being an iconic Silver Age comic-book character and a symbol for feminism. As a female character, Lane stood her ground against and often paired with one of the most iconic male superhero to this day, Superman. The character has often been shown alongside her boyfriend in *Superman’s Girlfriend, Lois Lane*. However, Lane eventually attempts to emerge as an independent female for all readers to see, showing readers that there was more than just one female comic book character who was advocating women’s rights.

The third chapter continues examining elements of late twentieth century feminism, but it also expands its scope to include other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Counterculture Movement. There has little discussion at all on *Teen Titans*, even in recent scholarship. For instance, in *The Power of Comics*, the only discussion relatively close to the *Teen Titans* series was an offhand sentence at the end of a chapter that mentioned the 1980s reboot of the series (titled *New Teen Titans*).\(^{26}\) The chapter focuses on the first run of the series that ended in the late 1970s. Within the series, evidence of cultural links to not only the feminist movement, but also the Civil Rights Movement and the counterculture movement. The chapter highlights points in a lengthy series in which the emergence of social, political, and cultural movements within America also develop within a comic-book series. While the *Teen Titans* may not be as politically charged as Captain America’s *Secret Empire* series, the content within the series itself is important in understanding comic books from the Silver Age because it incorporates a multitude of social issues.

These are just a few reasons as to why Captain America’s *Secret Empire*, Superman’s *Girlfriend, Lois Lane*, and *Teen Titans* series need further analysis. These Silver Age comic

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\(^{26}\) Duncan, *The Power of Comics*, 55.
books need further analysis. It will be shown through this analysis that these comic books break the boundaries to which the definition of Silver Age comic books binds them to. These Silver Age comic books are no longer about superheroes beating up villains. They took on social, political, and cultural issues that many American youths were trying to reconcile with. While other pieces of work have failed in the examination of the critical content inside the panels, this work will show the importance of the Silver Age of comic-book history.
CHAPTER 2

WIRETAPPING CAPTAIN AMERICA

An important idea to remember when discussing different aspects of the Silver Age comic books is that they are part of a bigger discussion on popular culture. The term 'popular culture' is generally defined as "people's culture that predominates in a society at a point in time." Pop culture is unique in that it "both reflects and influences people's everyday life." Adding to this, pop culture is also a product that is "frequently encountered or widely accepted, commonly liked or approved." One of the purposes of pop culture is to give an inharmonious mass of people a beacon to rally around to confirm what is to be considered acceptable or not. This is an organic process that is centered around the idea of choice. Society chooses what is and what is not popular culture. They way this process works is a little mixture of both purposefulness and accidentalness. To better understand a society during specific turning points, it is useful in examining the pop culture that was being produced. Sports, music, toys, TV shows, movies, cars, and fashion; these are just a few examples of what popular culture can entail. Historians could spend endless amount of hours on researching the different intricacies of popular culture.

This notion is especially true when examining the pop culture of the 1960s and 1970s. In Bradford W. Wright's *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, he states that while the youth counterculture (post-war baby boom generation) "of the 1960s involved audiences in the politics of change, the popular culture of the 1970s indulged young people in the politics of the personal. Introspection, existentialism, and narcissism became the marketable commodities in youth entertainment." By the 1970s, pop culture had "emerged from the hangover of 1960s idealism and explored the loneliness and spiritual desolation that

remained. This “1960s idealism” was the idea of America being a beacon of greatness. A country where one of the most popular superhero characters at the time was named “Captain America.” Wright’s statement about the transition between the decades is true to an extent. While there is definitely a shift in attitude involving popular culture between the two decades, there is a remarkable amount of culture that still tries to hold on to that idealism of the 1960s. Pop culture that carries over from the 1960s with its “idealism” could be a leftover byproduct of the “Cold War consensus,” where American policymakers had built domestic support for newly created foreign policies. Captain America, however, is a series that encapsulates the mood of both decades.

While the backdrop of the 1960s remains important to this study, the years between 1972 and 1974 are pivotal, politically, socially, and culturally. These were the years in which President Richard Nixon went from being a national hero who ended a war, to a tyrant who was hiding his secret wiretapping on U.S. citizens. These findings were brought to public attention in the years following the Watergate scandal. The pop culture that followed the Watergate Scandal mirrors this change in status. All the President’s Men by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, later turned into the Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford movie that portrayed how the Watergate scandal eventually surfaced. President Richard Nixon soon became a cultural antihero. British actor Anthony Hopkins played Richard Nixon in the 1995 Oliver Stone film, Nixon. Roger Ebert reviewed the film, stating "Thoughts of Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear come to mind; hear, again, is a ruler destroyed by his fatal flaws." Nixon costume masks were extremely popular, especially after the hit 1991 movie, Point Break. This item can still be bought today and comes with the following product description: "You get to do all sorts of Richard Nixon things in this

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mask, like shake hands, kiss babies and commit treason. With a mask like this, the sky's the limit." The cartoon show, Animaniacs had a "President's Song" which stated that "Richard Nixon, he gets caught and Gerald Ford fell down a lot." One of the most critically examined graphic novels, Watchmen by Alan Moore, has Nixon winning five consecutive terms. Moore also shows Nixon as the one responsible for the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Woodward, and Bernstein.29

Yet, out of all the cultural products to emerge from the Watergate scandal, one particular piece of pop culture seems to have been overlooked. Reaching a mass audience across the United States, Captain America is an important clue to revealing society's thoughts during this time. By coincidence, its Secret Empire series started in 1968 and ended in 1974, a crucial time period in presidential history. On the surface, this short series appears to be just another formulated plot with fictional characters solving problems with their fists. However, by examining how the Watergate scandal is treated within the Captain America series, Secret Empire, the research will display how comic books, and more specifically, this comic book series’ potential to be an appropriate cultural artifact of this era. A cultural artifact that will show a deeper and more personal view on how the American public reacted to the Watergate scandal.

When Captain America first hit the stands in December of 1940, it "promptly sold out. Soon, circulation climbed to near one million copies." Captain America's success "had to also be attributed to the super hero genre's newly proven ability to address readers' contemporary concerns: 'We weren't at war yet, but everyone knew it was coming!!! That's why Captain America was born — America needed a Superpatriot!'"30 Captain America's success pathed the

30 Ryan Dunlavey and Fred Van Lente, The Comic Book History of Comics (San Diego, CA, 2012), 44.
way for other comic book superheroes to be deployed to:

> do battle with the hated Axis Powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan on the comics page! It's no coincidence what's commonly known as the medium's "Golden Age" coincided with World War II! During this turbulent and violent(bold) time, super heroes thrived and comic book circulation tripled! (It didn't hurt that the sudden spike in the defense industry ended the depression, so kids suddenly had allowance to spend on comics!)\(^{31}\)

While the world wide influence of World War II had its set of popular culture created, what kind of culture would be produced after the uncovering of the Watergate scandal?

Despite the seriousness and large ramifications of the Watergate incident, its occurrence went largely unnoticed by society. As suggested by Keith W. Olson in his work, *Watergate: The Presidential Scandal That Shook America*, the public outcry was a snowballing effect that took some time for it to gain any amount of traction. It started on June 17, 1972, police apprehended five men (one of which admitted to being a former employee of the CIA). While carrying wiretapping equipment, this group of men were caught breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office building in Washington, D.C. Among the five men caught, one was a Republican security aide. A $25,000 cashier's check, earmarked for the Nixon campaign, was also found in the bank account of one of the Watergate burglars. On October 10, 1972, less than a month before Nixon's reelection, FBI agents were able to establish that the Watergate incident stems "from a massive campaign of political spying and sabotage conducted on behalf of President Nixon's re-election and directed by officials of the White House and the Committee for the Re-election of the President." Nixon denied any knowledge of such activities and the voters believed him, showing it when they reelected him. There had been no apparent impact on the 1972 election.\(^{32}\)

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The mystery behind the incident had only grown in 1973 with the conviction of former Nixon aides G. Gordon Liddy and James W. McCord Jr. for conspiracy, burglary, and wiretapping. In May, the situation intensified as the Senate Watergate Committee began its nationally televised hearings. The press, special prosecutor, and the courts played key roles in uncovering the evidence of the illegal activities. Reporters for the Washington Post, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein published numerous articles linking higher-up members of Nixon’s staff to the break-in and cover-up. However, it was the special committee of the U.S. Senate that focused the case on the people surrounding the scandal, which in turn helped the public understand what was happening. A Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities was established by the U.S. Senate in 1973 and was led by "country lawyer" Senator Sam Ervin of North Caroline, who proved to be a bit of a tough questioner when it came to witnesses recounting what the President knew and when did he know it. It was found out through questioning of the existence of a secret wiretapping system implanted in the White House which had recorded most of the president's conversations. This information shifted the investigation to where the committee began issuing subpoenas for the tapes. It was then that President Nixon started to push back.

Not wanting to risk national security, the President only released very specific sections of the recordings. As to the reason why, Richard Nixon's defense statement on May 22, 1973 revealed that, at least in his own opinion, the media coverage thus far had been somewhat of a farce, only succeeding in confusing the nation about the situation at hand:


All the President's Men, directed by Alan J. Pakula, United States: Warner Bros., 1976, Film.

Recent news accounts growing out of testimony in the Watergate investigation have given grossly misleading impressions of many of the facts, as they relate both to my own role and to certain unrelated activities involving national security. Already, on the basis of second- and third-hand testimony by persons either convicted or themselves under investigation in the case, I have found myself accused of involvement in activities I never heard of until I read about them in news accounts. These impressions could also lead to a serious misunderstanding of those national security activities which, though totally unrelated to Watergate, have become entangled in the case. They could lead to further compromise of sensitive national security information.  

Nixon’s attempts to discredit the media to be mudslingers showed the president’s attempt to distance himself from the looming issue. As the Committee's investigations continued, it became clearer that "some sinister force" was at work as the battle to get the White House tapes escalated. It was at this time, the U.S. Supreme Court stepped in and ordered the tapes to be given to the Committee. Congress in turn collapsed in its support for the President. By August 8, 1974, the investigation had forced President Richard Nixon to resign from office rather than face impeachment. Along with the “forced” resignation, twenty-one individuals associated with the Nixon administration and the Committee to Reelect the President went to jail for Watergate-related crimes.  

Nixon's implication with Watergate certainly had a negative effect on the public's opinion of him, the presidency, the government, the general system, and the Republican party. It had been proven that “the behavior of some public officials can actually influence part of the public to reassess its beliefs about the basic nature of all people.” One of the most prevalent facts to come out of discussions of political socialization is the fact that “the political figure most familiar to children is the president, who is typically viewed as being important, powerful, trustworthy, wise, just and benevolent." A study conducted in December 1973 showed that

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children enrolled in grades 3, 4, and 5 of a suburban Boston school at that time had clearly more negative feelings toward the presidency, the American political system and its components than earlier studies of children had indicated.\textsuperscript{41} Studies of preadult political socialization have shown that political events can become a part of a child's political experience. Just like adults, preadults have access to information and certain evaluations of the Watergate scandal through television, radio, newspaper coverage, and sometimes comic books. Some researchers have suggested that major political events can stimulate political learning and make preadults more sensitive to any further intake of political information. This makes the examination of politically oriented comic books all the more important.\textsuperscript{42}

The scandal made people question the integrity of the president, his men, and also the health of the political system. The Watergate scandal focused the nation's attention on problems whose beginnings "preceded the Nixon Administration: the growth of an 'Imperial presidency,' the corrupting influence big money has on the electoral process, the extent to which government secrecy fosters illegal and immoral behavior, and the threat our intelligence agencies can pose to civil liberties."\textsuperscript{43} It can be said that this scandal damaged the larger collective political identity.

As discussed before, one way in which people are able to come to understand their position within a larger collective identity is through pop culture. How does this process work? A great example of pop culture’s role in this process is the comic book superhero, Captain America.

Important to this role is:

Captain America's ability to connect the political projects of American nationalism, internal order, and foreign policy (all formulated at the national or global scale) with the scale of the individual,

or the body. The character of Captain America connects these scales by literally embodying American identity, presenting for readers a hero both of, and for, the nation. Younger readers may even fantasize about being Captain America, connecting themselves to the nation in their imaginations. His characterization as an explicitly American superhero establishes him as both a representative of the idealized American nation and as a defender of the American status quo.  

Captain America is an apex pop culture symbol for American nationalism, examining how this expression of American identity transformed with the Watergate scandal will reveal a unique rendition of society’s perspective and values from a unique source. As the events of the Watergate scandal unfolded in 1972 and through till Nixon’s resignation in 1974, the Captain America “Secret Empire” story began in January 1974. It started with an advertisement catching Captain America's eye (fig. 1.1).

Captain America's integrity is clearly being called into question by this television news media, ironically, sponsored by the Committee to Regain America’s Principles (CRAP), a reference to the Committee for the Re-Election of the President (CREEP). Describing him as a rogue agent that the government refuses to take responsibility of, the advertisement continued to question Captain America’s motives and legitimacy. The person on the TV is named Quentin Harderman, a lead proponent of the CRAP. The character is an obvious hint to Harry Robbins Halderman, White House Chief of Staff to President Nixon. This was similar to the political and character sabotage that was conducted by CREEP. After seeing this ad, Captain America raged at the TV saying, "They deliberately used negative phrases--distortions!... The advertisements trying to turn the public against me! But something that absurd is bound to blow itself out when it comes up against my record." The effect that the media had on the public, however, is seen almost immediately. A bystander commented on the situation when crazed fans rushed up to Captain America and requested an autograph. "Hmmm ... is hero-worship like that safe for our

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country?" The integrity of Captain America is continually called into question. At the end of the story, the hero is falsely framed for a murder by a covert organization named Secret Empire.45

Through the next issue, Captain America is taken into custody for the murder. He became conflicted about leaving his fate to officials since he knows he was innocent. The hero internally debated with himself, saying, "What kind of example is this, Steve Rogers? You've always believed in due process of law! In fact, you've dedicated your life to it!" After much deliberation, Steve Rogers (Captain America) knows that the judicial process would eventually clear his name, but made the decision to go on the run, to be a vigilante, and take the law into his own hands as he tried to clear his name. One writer had an interesting concern relating to both Captain America and President Nixon:

Don't, I repeat, don't let Cap leave that jail through other than due legal process. Cap was (is?) himself a cop. If he has no faith in our judicial system, how can any of the rest of us? Perhaps you can attempt to justify this action (should it occur) by saying that this is not an ordinary person or circumstance, and that it was necessary for Cap to take a shot-cut around the law. But if it works that way for Cap, would it not also be valid for President Nixon or ex-Vice-President Agnew to take the same course of action, reasoning that special persons should be exempt from the law and get special treatment? I am of the opinion that the law should work the same for all, regardless of race, creed, or socio-economic position.46

Concern for the judicial system to still work and for Captain America to still believe in it was all too important as it reaffirmed society’s belief in Captain America as a pop-culture icon. Granted, this was only from one reader. But, for someone to hold the same standards for a fictional comic book character to that of a president gives an appreciable amount of value placed upon Captain America. The writer even ponders how can anyone else have “faith in our judicial system” if a character like Captain America does not. This letter makes Captain America seem like he was

45 Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart (w), Sal Buscema (p), Frank McLaughlin (i), Petra Goldberg (c), and Charlotte Jetter (l), "When a Legend Dies," Captain America and the Falcon #169 (Jan., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 11, 14, 30.
46 Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart and Mike Friedrich (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), Petra Goldberg (c), and Artie Simek (l), "J'Accuse," Captain America and the Falcon #170 (Feb., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 6.
more than a fictional character, almost like a real person that one could compare morals and ideals against. Unfortunately for this letter writer, when Vice President Gerald R. Ford stepped in as the new president, he pardoned Nixon. Though, like the rest of society, when Ford signed the pardon for Nixon, he also signed away his hopes for reelection and the hopes of people who still believed that the government was not as corrupt as other parts of society thought it to be. The long term reason for pardoning Nixon was to save face in front of foreign nations, but the immediate reason was that the public saw rich politicians buying their way out of the justice system.

When Falcon, Captain America’s black sidekick and one of the first black superheroes, confronted Captain America, he agreed to join him in his attempt to clear his name. Right after Falcon declared his unwavering allegiance to Rogers, one of the villains working for the Secret Empire appeared and stated, "You've just sealed your own fate, Falcon! I've just taped your words—to show the world you're Captain America's criminal accomplice!" A nod to secret taping during the Watergate Scandal.

Later in the story, after the two heroes are captured, there was a conversation between a group of three henchmen. Conversing about their leader who had been absent, the first thug stated that, "That guy gives me a very sharp pain!" The one standing next to him added, "Affirmative ... But they're all like that now: nothing but ego and power-hunger! There aren't any real leaders anymore!" The third henchman commented that, "Guys like MacArthur—Eisenhower—they knew they were men like you! But these new fellows think they're little Tin

49 Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart and Mike Friedrich (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), Linda Lessman (c), and Artie Simek (l), "Bust-Out!," Captain America and the Falcon #171 (Mar., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 30.
Commentary by the writers on President's integrity was blatant throughout this conversation with phrases like, “There aren’t any real leaders anymore” or “they knew they were men like you.” But now, these leaders are like “tin gods,” which was a label to refer to minor officials who thought overestimated his or her own self-importance.

It was suddenly made obvious to Captain America that the Secret Empire was behind the undoing of his credibility. This organization is described as being "dedicated to Domination—without the people they dominate being aware of it. They often use advertising—or propaganda—produced by their agents on Madison Avenue—one of whom, the underworld grapevine reveals, is Quentin Harderman!" While Captain America took in such a huge revelation, the letter column page, where letters sent in by readers were published, reveals something important. Titled *Let's Rap with Cap*, the editors had written a letter to the readers before replying to the reader’s letters in their usual style, saying that:

Truth, a wise man once whispered, is stranger than fiction-- and boy, do I know it! The current sequence in *CAPTAIN AMERICA*, beginning with # 169, was conceived around Christmas, 1972, out of a conviction that Cap was not just another superhero, whose gimmick happened to be the wearing of patriotic colors, but rather a man whose image meant something to him and to others, and who represented the most positive aspects of the America dream, such as freedom and independence. Basically, I wanted to do a story about Cap's being attacked by certain unscrupulous politicians-- men who hated this powerful symbol's not being under their control. But, as I said, this was over a year ago-- in other words, before most of the country had recognized the significance of the Watergate scandal. Thus, in those more trusting times, it was eventually decided that Cap's enemies could not be government officials-- and they became advertising men. Nevertheless, I thought I still had a good story in mind-- one that would be the basis for many interesting months of adventure. The trouble is, after I locked myself into this plotline and began work on it, Watergate did break wide open, and each day's new revelations have slowly but surely changed America's understanding of itself. One very minor side-product of this change is to make the underlying assumptions of my plot obsolete. Crises of confidence in much bigger men than Cap have become not only commonplace but old-hat, by now. The upshot of all this is that I've decided to wrap this sequence up a few issues sooner than I originally intended, in order to move on to other, un-co-opted ideas.

50 Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart and Mike Friedrich (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), Michelle Brand (c), and Artie Simek (l), "Believe It or Not: The Banshee!," *Captain America and the Falcon* #172 (Apr., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 3.
51 Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), George Roussos (c), and Artie Simek (l), "The Sins of the Secret Empire!," *Captain America and the Falcon* #173 (May, 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 11.
The creator of the series was attempting to bring a new aspect to *Captain America* by making certain politicians the bad guys. But as stated in the letter, within a few years, corrupted politicians had become “not only commonplace but old-hat, by now.” It is interesting to note the change in attitude of using government officials’ likeness, or even depictions of real ones in comic books, especially in a negative light. At the time, it was seen by editors that it was not in good taste to show “unscrupulous politicians” being the bad guys. A far more devious group of men would have to take their place: advertising men. Yet, despite the creator’s attempts to separate what was happening in real life with the storyline in the series, it inevitably remained closely tied to it. Before the short series had ended, the turnaround of pop culture against showing politicians in a negative view was quick to say the least.

Toward the end of the series, Captain America eventually encountered Number One (masked leader of the Secret Empire). In an attempt to mock Roger's attempt to stop him, Number One revealed his plan and commented that "America is reeling from continuous body blows! First, the toppling of its greatest symbol ... next, the fortuitous Watergate scandal! Ah, if only we'd known that was coming! How much simpler it has made our work."\(^5^3\)

The culmination of this back-and-forth between Captain America and the Secret Empire occurred in issue #175 and lead to an all-out brawl on the front lawn of the White House. After being beaten down, members of the Secret Empire began “ratting” each other out and revealing the corruption that was occurring within the government. Cameras picked up what was happening and began to relay it to every home in America. Before everything was done, the leader of the secret organization, Number One, attempted to run away into the White House.

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53 Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), George Roussos (c), Gaspar Saladino and Charlotte Jetter (l), "It's Always Darkest...!", *Captain America and the Falcon* #174 (Jun., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 6.
Captain America chased him down and ripped his hood off, revealing his identity only to the hero, as his face was turned away from the readers. Captain America exclaimed, "Now let's just have a look underneath your cowl before-- Good Lord! You!! But you—you're—." Number One interrupted him, saying, "Exactly! But high political office didn't satisfy me! My power was still too constrained by legalities! I gambled on a coup to gain me the power I craved--and it appears that my gamble has finally failed! I'll cash my chips, then!" Captain America tried to stop him, but the robed figure shot himself (fig. 1.2). This issue was put out roughly a month before Nixon’s resignation was announced in August.54

The author of this story had intended the ending dialogue to closely relate to that of what he thought the public was feeling when Watergate finally broke out. Though the author tried to make the figure under the hood to be open for interpretation, it is apparent that it was alluded to be President Nixon. Later in the series, in one of the editor's response to a letter writer, the editor stated the following: “Whether Number One was fictional or not, however, is left to you to decide. As Steve said in #173, his original idea had been to feature politicians in the villain's roles; it is too bad it took Watergate to allow him the freedom to do it in the comics.”55 The editor makes it clear that after the Watergate scandal, politicians became legitimate targets (directly or indirectly) for comic-book creators. What is special about this is that the 1954 Comics Code Authority (CCA) specifically established the guideline that "Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority."56 However, it is known that some creators at this time were already pushing against the code by showing drug use and violence in the content of their comic books.

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54 Ibid.
55 Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), Linda Lessman (c), and Artie Simek (l), "Captain America Must Die!," Captain America and the Falcon #176 (Aug., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 19.
This creative freedom came about when a psychologist said the following during an interview in 1973, as the Watergate scandal began to unfold in the eyes of the public, “I imagine ... that confidence in government, and particularly in the present government, has been seriously undermined ... I've seen a few clients in therapy who are starting to generalize; nothing will work out; life itself is useless when you can't even trust the people in high places, etc.”57 Disgusted at corruption in our nation's government and after much thought and reflection, Steve Rogers abandoned his role as Captain America (fig. 1.3). Even after being confronted by close friends, Thor (a Norse god) and Tony Stark (Iron Man), Captain America was still set on killing his alter ego.

Peggy Carter, a close friend of Captain America confronted, the hero. She attempted to talk sense into Steve Rogers about returning as Captain America. The dialogue is filled with rhetoric as to why Americans should not let this recent scandal change their attitude about America: "Have you taken leave of your memory, too? Politicians come and politicians go—but America is still the greatest country on this grand, green Earth! Sure we've had scandals, but we've exposed them—publicly—and gotten back on the right track!" Carter exclaimed that there is nothing wrong with America, "... at least, no more than at any other point in history!" She continued in her speech, but was more concerned about what the symbol of Captain America meant. She stated that Captain America was:

a symbol of the country that's given everything it has to light the torch of liberty throughout the world! For nearly two hundred years, the spirit of freedom has never been forgotten here... and for that reason, countless men and women, crushed under the brutal heel of totalitarianism, have been able to keep alive their dreams of liberation! This is bigger than you or any other individual, Cap! It's bigger than all of us! But you symbolize all of it in your own way—and you're the only one who does! ... Think about your name! It's not Daredevil, or Mr. Fantastic, or anything like that! It's Captain America! Captain America! Just think what those words mean! Lots of people fight crime, or provide inspiration--but only you do it for

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This issue is special as the content is not so much about the action as any other comic book would be filled with. It is filled more with dialogue and reflection of the main protagonist. The dialogue given to the characters can easily be seen as a speech to American's trust in the American system. With phrases such as “This is bigger than you or any other individual” and “It’s bigger than all of us,” the text suggests that this is not merely a message for Captain America, but for all those reading it. The dialogue also goes a long way in reaffirming readers that Captain America is a major pop culture icon for American nationalism. Stating that he was “a symbol of the country” and “only you do it for the United States of America.”

Contemplating what Carter said, Captain America replied with a question: Which America is he supposed to symbolize? Captain America stated that the American people are no longer united against a single enemy and have splintered in their goals, that every person wants something different, some of them contrary to others, and that it ultimately created the problem of having many different versions of what America was. After much consideration, Captain America gathered up the group that tried to persuade him from quitting the hero business. Captain America stated, "I've asked myself if Captain America must die—and if I had the courage to carry out my verdict. The answer to both questions... is yes!"

With Captain America out of commission, the Falcon had taken over for a couple of issues, fighting crime on his own. But soon after, the Nomad series began. Steve Rogers had quit being Captain America and tried to live his life as a normal citizen. He was eventually pulled back into the crime fighting scene, almost comically as Rogers attempted to use a different outfit with a cape (he ended up tripping on it). Rogers tried to adopt an alternative identity called the

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59 Ibid., 32.
Nomad, a man with no country. However, he eventually returned to being Captain America, giving up on his stint as Nomad. As also seen with the United States, recovering from this political disaster was not easy when President Gerald Ford assumed office. As Ford stated when he took office, "My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over. Our Constitution works. Our great republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here the people rule." While the act of pardoning Nixon was universally looked down upon, the years after showed a turnaround in which Ford won praise in his courageous act that allowed the nation to move on.

Aside from this, Ford also oversaw the end of the Vietnam Conflict. Toward the end of the conflict, Ford said in his speech that, "Today, America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam." Also it was time to "look forward to an agenda for the future, to unify, to bind up the nation's wounds."  

It is in these later issues after the Secret Empire series that letters concerning what had occurred during the series began to appear more often. In this case, the writer was able to confirm for himself and other readers the parallels between the fictional story and what occurred in reality:

The Secret Empire, of course, is another apolitical secret government group of the type that played the Communists and the Birchers against one another in THE MACHURIAN CANDIDATE. But its front, the Committee to Regain America's Principles, is shudderin' in lite of the rite wing movement that's still enjoyin' a long comeback even after the "Watergate" revelations. And while I'm still on this subject, I have to comment that endin' the current crazy series wasn't the only or even the best way out. What should 'ave been done was change the story or rather modify it. We know now, in fact, that one of the big links in the "Watergate" chain of crime was the ad agency Howard Hunt and other "Waterbugs" worked for a while carryin' out their illegal activities, that many people connected with this ad agency were also connected with the CIA, etc. … But in a sequel of, say, three issues in length, you could feature the return and final defeat of the Secret Empire and establish links between the SE ad men and some fictional (or unnamed) politicians. After all, CA and the Falcon live in an alternate universe where almost anything's possible.

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61 Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), Linda Lessman (c), and Artie Simek (l), "The Falcon Fights Alone!" Captain America and the Falcon #177 (Sep., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 19.
Other than being spot on about how the series was going to end, the writer of the letter was obviously very opinionated about what was happening with the government. The writer showed an intense form of distrust of the government and mentioned that the fictional Secret Empire was just another “secret government group.” That its front as a committee was still shaken up even though “the rite wing movement” had a long and enjoyable comeback after the scandal. In a later issue, in a session of 'Let's Rap with Cap' letter column, another writer felt inclined to state a few points on what had occurred with Captain America at the end of the Secret Empire series and what had happened in the real world. The writer began his letter by stating that it should not come as a surprise that a character that is the personification of America would eventually have some effect on him because of the Watergate scandal. The writer continued on, stating that he was glad that the “American public took its fair share of back-handed blows.” This is because he felt that they should not forget that the American public should “shoulder part of the responsibility for the mess. Just take a look at the poor voter turn-outs for any major or minor election and you won't have to wonder why politicians haven't been too concerned about serving themselves first, and the public second." The level of cynicism in this writer’s letter is on par with how most Americans felt after the scandal. It is interesting to note that the writer is able to understand how Captain America was intended to be a comic book character personification of the United States, that the character is a reflection of what the mood was in accords with the public.⁶²

As the series continued, more and more readers felt inclined to give their thoughts about what transpired at the end of the Secret Empire series. In issue #180, Warren Bluhm from Chester, New Jersey wrote that "it's been awhile since a CA story hit home as effectively as

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⁶² Steve Englehart (w), "Let's Rap with Cap," Captain America and the Falcon #179 (Nov., 1974), Marvel Comics Group.
‘Captain America Must Die’ in #176." Bluhm continued on in his letter stating that the main reason that government had forgotten its purpose in serving the people and not itself is because the public had allowed it to do so. "If America is less than a representative democracy, it is because enough people have been willing to elect officials who represent only themselves and not their constituency." Just as Captain America had given up, Bluhm sees that the people of America have also given up. He continues on to state that the "real problem is not corrupt government, but the apathy that led to the situation. Captain America would be better off standing behind his idealism and continuing as a symbol of what America should be-whatever that may be." Some readers seemed to be slightly taken aback by what the writers had done with the story. From New Castle, Indiana, Bill Craig set about his letter with "Dear Idiots, What are you trying to prove? I just finished reading CA&F #176. Sure America isn't at the greatest now, but we are still a great nation. Maybe the older people turned against Cap, but did the younger people?" Craig continued on by stating that Captain America is "America's greatest symbol. Something every American should be proud of." Craig ended his letter by letting the readers know that there are others who would have agreed with him, and if "you dump Captain America, you should be lined up and shot." The editor responded with, "So much for democracy." While the level of cynicism amongst the readers and the loyalty to the series varied, there has clearly been universal agreement among the readers of Captain America that the Watergate scandal had some unmeasurable amount of impact on American society. How big of an impact is hard to judge by the varying degree of responses given by the readers.63

The letters sent to the editors of the comic book shows that the readers were well aware of the numerous parallels between Secret Empire and what occurred in the Watergate scandal.

Some of the more obvious points that were in the comic-book series was that the American citizens were susceptible to mass media saturation. One letter writer commented on this, saying that when people begin to easily accept others’ opinions instead of formulating their own and when “the morality of our government is riddled with corruption and rotten at the core, this is a dangerous attitude to take.” These letters show a divide in outlook of the situation. There was an obvious falling out between the citizens and those in the higher up political offices. This falling out led to a mistrust in the system, overall. The commentary that can be taken from the authors when they decided to show an allusion to President Nixon killing himself after being ousted as an evil secret empirical leader is rather telling on the feelings of the public at that time. This Captain America series was part of a people's culture that contributed to the mood and beliefs of that society, making itself a piece of the larger collection of popular culture at that time. However, without knowing actual readership numbers, it is hard to say if this comic book acted as a beacon for people en masse to choose to rally around. To some readers, this short series probably appeared to be just another formulated plot with fictional characters solving problems with their fists. After seeing responses from the readers, Captain America of the Silver Age was different than the one from the Golden Age. But with a deep examination of the popular culture of this time, comics as a media of popular culture, the Watergate scandal, and the Captain America series, “Secret Empire,” this research has shown how Silver Age comic-books’ potential can be as an appropriate cultural artifact for this era. While Captain America was taking on such a controversial political issue, a female character with no superpowers was attempting to take charge on feminist issues of the 1960s and 1970s.

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64 Roy Thomas (ed), "The Falcon Fights Alone!," #177 (Sep., 1974), 32.
CHAPTER 3
LOIS LANE AND THE SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

Lois Lane, as a comic-book character, has been described as “impetuous, reckless, irrepressible, impulsive and unpredictable.” She is “too common.” She is “a combination saint, sinner, imp, imbecile, smartypants, snob, Samaritan.” She is “snoopy, inquisitive, curious, a pest, and can’t keep a secret.” Lane has also been described as “being attractive, ingenious, a star reporter, loyal to SUPERMAN and a terrific booster of worthy charities.” At first glance, the main characteristic of Lane is her dichotomous qualities. However, taking a step back from the character reveals that the framework of women's history in which Lane was originally placed, had begun to shift her character to appear to be more pro-feminist.65 Creators of the character, Joe Siegel and Joe Shuster, had Lane appear “as a fixture in Superman’s life from 1938 on, even before Lex Luthor and Supergirl, she challenged, undermined, superseded, and sometimes, if necessary and convenient, aligned herself with the roles women were assigned in society.”66 Since her inception, Lois Lane has had to navigate her way through multiple feminist waves, ideologies, and perpetual reincarnation by various artists.67 Characters like Lane are outlets for artists and writers to express their individual perspectives on life. In the case of Lane, she is an expression for what her creators thought a woman should be. This expression becomes prominent when the character takes the lead in her own comic book, Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane.

67 Farghaly, Examining Lois Lane, viii.
Lane's comic-book iteration, *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane*, is important because the series both paralleled and reflected the second-wave of feminism. The publication spans from 1958 through 1974, a total of 137 issues. 68 Amy Erdman Farrell states that "scholars have paid little attention to the role of popular culture in forming a collective oppositional consciousness among women in the 1970s and 1980s." 69 Catching the tail end of the era of the "atomic family" and through the emergence of second-wave feminism, *Lois Lane* provides a unique reflection of this period as the series showed how male comic-book creators visualized a female character evolving with the time period. By examining what feminism looked like during this period, what has been previously said about *Lois Lane*, and examining the comics themselves, the character Lois Lane and the series will show to be aligned with what was occurring during the rise of feminism in the real world.

As mentioned, Lane began her series in the late 1950s. The prevailing culture of postwar America in the 1950s was that of domesticity and “the nuclear family,” which emphasized the suburban white, middle-class lifestyle as the norm. This lifestyle was comprised of more would-be fathers being able to achieve a college education that allowed them to receive an income that could support an entire family instead of having individual members pool wages. It was no longer necessary for women to leave the house to get a supplemental income to add to the family's, but instead they could spend more time at home and focus on being a housewife. Stephanie Coontz states that the dominant imagery of the 1950s "nuclear family" was a product of popular culture. Family life during this period, was, however, "as nuanced, troubled, and

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68 For the remainder of this discussion the abbreviated title *Lois Lane* will be used.
The 1950s saw women assigned roles that were seen as essential to the family structure and fundamental to the overall American society. This decade also witnessed the rise in nonconforming women who saw such roles as stifling.

The mid-century observed a fluctuation of men leaving lower, paying white-collar positions for World War II. American society saw a surge in the number of women entering the work force, then consequently, the purge of women from the workforce in post WWII as the need for women to fill in vacant positions vanished as men returned. Women were pushed back to the role of child bearers and homemakers. Despite this push, the 1950s saw the rise of white collar jobs and the number of young, white, middle-class women in those positions, even if upper management was closed off. Even by 1950, "women made up 20 percent of the total workforce and, of those women, 50 percent were married." In 1952 "two million more wives were working than at the peak of war production." The number of women in the workforce in 1955 was higher than in any previous year. Decades that followed showed a steady increase in the number of women who chose to work rather than stay at home. Society demonstrated that when it was in need of labor, it could rely on women to do what was considered to be a male-only position. Women knew this was the time to insert themselves into what was previously conceived as male-dominated worlds. But, it was not just into the workforce sphere that they wanted access.

Young, white, middle-class women, along with early nonconformists, "pioneered the social movements of the 1960s—civil rights workers, campus activists, and youthful founders of the women's liberation movement" that will be seen later in the 1960s. Feminist leaders were

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71 Farghaly, Examining Lois Lane, xv.
72 Cvetkovic, "Feminine Mystique," 49.
encouraged by the Civil Rights Movement, through which many of them gained experience in organizing events. Even though these women often played key roles in the Civil Rights movement, they were often shut out of leadership roles due to gender dynamics imposed by male figureheads. These women were shut out for the same reason they were cut off from upper management positions in white-collar work environments. They were women. Rather than to be continually pushed to the fringes, these women split off from such movements to from their own.

In order to gain more equality in the work force, the independent group named National Organization for Women (NOW) was established in 1965. The founders of NOW were able to unite numerous organizations such as National Manpower Council (NMC) and the Commission on Education of Women (CEW) with John F. Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women's (PCSW) already "established groundwork for the even greater attention to sexual stratification that occurred in the 1960s and contributed to the resurgence of feminism."74 Founding member of NOW, Betty Friedan, gave a name and voice to discontented women in her 1963 book, The Feminine Mystique.75 In it, Friedan "homogenized American women and simplified postwar ideology; she reinforced the stereotype that portrayed all postwar women as middle-class, domestic, and suburban, and she caricatured the popular ideology that she said had suppressed them."76 These women formed "a new civil rights group... that could pressure the government to enact and enforce laws against sexual discrimination."77 The National Organization for Women (NOW) had become the "women's rights" branch of the reemerging feminist movement. NOW was formed to be a feminist pressure group against the still lingering

76 Meyerowitz, Not June Cleaver, 3.
77 Evans, Personal Politics, 19.
discrimination. While NOW was pressuring the government, the women's liberation movement had started generating literature in local communities. "While these journals were produced largely for members of the movement, Gloria Steinem's *Ms. Magazine*, founded in 1971, expanded the audience to the general public at a national level." The magazine “publicized the problems ordinary women faced, published inspirational stories of successful women, and covered grassroots activist efforts across the country." *Ms.* also chose Wonder Woman to appear on its cover in 1972. The cover depicts a giant version of Wonder Woman trying to protect a part of a city with the backdrop of the Vietnam conflict in the background. A sign on the side of a building reads, “PEACE AND JUSTICE IN ’72.” That character was chosen due to strong traits in leadership, ideals, and for being one of the few female superheroes at the time that was as popular as some of the male superheroes.  

As the women's liberation movement evolved through the decade, there was a splinter of radicalism. Betty Friedan's generation sought:

*not to dismantle the prevailing system but to open it up for women's participation on a public, political level. However, the more radical "women's liberation" movement was determined to completely overthrow the patriarchy that they believed was oppressing every facet of women's lives, including their private lives.*

Radical feminists began gaining public recognition through their militant campaign for abortion law repeal, one of their many issues that resounded with their fundamental demand of genuine self-determination. The role that radical feminism played in the overall period was subverting the traditional values and destabilizing what was considered the traditional family makeup. It was not just expectations that drove these women. "Women, including mothers, go to work not

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79 Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 198, vii.)
only out of sheer economic necessity... but because feminism has made it socially acceptable for women to want a life outside the home." The expansion of women's opportunities led to more interesting work and aspirations for the increased independence/mobility that came from earning even a modest wage.\textsuperscript{80}

There was also an expansion of opportunities in the world of art as the number of feminist works began to rise towards the end of the 1960s. Over the centuries, male artists have used women in art to display what the idealized feminine body should look like. In the 1960s, sexualized "images of women circulated via mass media. Those in the form of pin ups were usually well known personalities, but like earlier depictions of women they were presented as sexual objects, their sole purpose to flaunt their sexuality for men."\textsuperscript{81} Women artists, such as Judy Chicago and Hannah Wilke, defied the constructs that tradition imposed, producing a new way for the female subject to be shown in the world of art. When interpreted by women, "the female body became a powerful weapon against the social constructs of gender."\textsuperscript{82} As these women artists began their work in the 1960s, the dawn of this second-wave feminism coincided with a special feature in DC's \textit{Showcase} for two issues in 1957. As the main character, Lois Lane finally stared in her own comic book in 1958.\textsuperscript{83}

An issue with \textit{Lois Lane} is that it displays some of the same traits as romance comic books of this era. Comic books such as these often portrayed women as young, love-stricken, and naïve characters whose goal was often to chase the leading male character. This is why Lane could be passed over for more popular female characters at the time like Wonder Woman. One

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., xi-xii.
\textsuperscript{83} Cvetkovic, "Feminine Mystique," 41. It should also be mentioned that the spinoff before Lois Lane, \textit{Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen} (1954), was a success. This probably helped convinced the viability of the new comic book.
of the reasons why *Lois Lane* is important to scholarly attention is that the series requires an in-depth study to achieve any sort of understanding. Examining the character's development over the span of the series will show that it is not just another Silver Age romance comic book, let alone a typical Silver Age comic book. The series was one of the top selling ones during its publication. Multiple generations of youth have read the series which means that the message of what the editors thought a woman should be like was imprinted onto their minds. Lois Lane is culturally deeper than what has currently written about and the field stands to gain a better understanding of how feminism affected culture at the time. Vibiana Bowman Cvetkovic is one of the first writers to analyze *Lois Lane*, she suggests that the reason Lois Lane obtained her own title was the result of America's reaction to the "Age of Nuclear Anxiety" and the changing economic/cultural realities. "While a close reading of the Silver Age of Lois Lane does not reveal a feminist or even a proto-feminist, it does reveal a strong, smart, independent woman--one who does not completely conform to the standard notions of femininity depicted in the popular culture of the time."84 Cvetkovic describes Lane as "[f]eminine and professional. She dressed fashionably but not fixed. Her demeanor was approachable but proper and no-nonsense. She was well spoken and intelligent. She loved her job as a reporter and she was good at it."85 Cvetkovic's observations shows that she remains unconvinced of Lois Lane's character to be a true "feminist," but rather a professional woman who embraces her feminine side.

An issue with Cvetkovic's analysis is that there is little discussion on specific issues of the *Lois Lane* series. Another author to analyze *Lois Lane* is Jennifer K. Stuller, who suggests that "while stirrings of feminism had already manifested in popular culture by the way of

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84 Ibid., 42.
85 Ibid., 45.
television, a feminist consciousness had yet to reach mainstream comics.” 86 According to Stuller, the issues and concerns of the women's movement do not appear until the late 1960s, starting with #80, and in particular with issues #121 and #122. By this time, Lane "has reflected societal attitudes toward women—particularly career women—for over 70 years. This makes her a unique marker of changing American ideas about gender, perhaps even more so than her contemporary, Wonder Woman." 87 Stuller presents the idea that it was not until “Splitsville for Lois and Superman!” (issue #80) that DC realized that Lane was becoming something more than Superman's girlfriend. However, Stuller suggests that it was in later issues, specifically, "Everything You Wanted to Know about Lois Lane * But Were Afraid to Ask!” and “77 Coffins!” (issues #121 and #122 in 1972) that Lois Lane finally embraced the feminist movement.

Stuller makes a compelling interpretation of the following two issues. The story for issue #121 has Lois returning to Metropolis several weeks after her sister's death. After being mugged, then consequently being rescued by a female bystander, Lane has an epiphany. She quits her job at the Daily Planet so that she can work freelance on important stories. She also tells Superman that they are finished, and moves into an apartment with three roommates (all female). 88 Stuller concludes that, for the representation of women in Lois Lane, the "dialogue is contrived and stereotyped, with talk about “woman power” and “chicks sticking together: and clichés that trivialize feminist politics." However, "[r]ather than focus on the affections of Superman, Lois is focused on her career and her friends—making her much more independent, and suggests the

87 Stuller, "Feminism: Second-wave," 240.
88 Dorothy Woolfolk and Ethan C. Mordden (ed), Cary Bates (w), Werner Roth (p), Vince Colletta and Murphy Anderson (i), "Everything You Wanted to Know about Lois Lane * But Were Afraid to Ask!," Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane #121 (Apr. 1972), National Periodical Publications, Inc. [DC], 1-24.
dynamic character she’s capable of being."\textsuperscript{89} Stuller's analysis is correct to a point, issues #121 and #122 definitely display Lane with a certain level of women's liberation value. This is a more definite conclusion compared to Cvetkovic's, placing Lane more on the side of feminism than just being feminine and professional.

Contrary to what Stuller has said, however, Lois Lane issues before #80 reveal information that shows just as much, if not more connections to the women's liberation movement. By examining the “Letters to Lois” column of these comic books, the importance of these earlier issues become clearer. What exactly is the “Letters to Lois” column? If a reader felt compelled enough, he or she could write a letter to the editor of the series and the letter might be published in the column with a response from the editor. The letters are usually written in the style of being critical of the work, praising it, or stating simple opinions/suggestions as to what should happen with the series. The readers' letters cover a wide variety of subjects such as spanking, hairstyles, fashion, and the Lois/Lana/Superman love triangle. Letters covering these topics might seem to appear more often because the editors believed that was what their readers were interested in. These subjects certainly appeared to be important when portraying other female characters at this time in other comic books, such as Marvel’s \textit{Millie the Model} and Archie Comics’ \textit{Betty and Veronica}. Apart from these casual topics, there are numerous letters that are more concerned with Lane's political position, specifically her stance in regard with the then current women's liberation movement. It would not be surprising to see current trends in American culture such as the women’s liberation movement appear as a topic in the column.

These letters show direct interaction between the consumers and the producers of this specific comic book. The responses by the editors reveal the kind of mentality and mindset that were a huge part in putting together the comic book that audiences, both the targeted youth and

\textsuperscript{89} Stuller, "Feminism: Second-wave," 249.
older readers, were taking in. For instance, in the late 1950s (still in the nuclear family era), a letter from Ethel Guiness appears in “The Girl Who Stole Superman's Heart!” (issue #7). In it, she says:

You've given us stories in which we've seen Lois Lane as a waitress, a pretzel-bender, and actress, a WAC and a convict. Apparently, Lois Lane's line is anything and everything, so let's see her as a spy, a model, a big-game hunter, an ambassador, a daredevil, an heiress, and a queen.  

An interesting suggestion, one in which the author of the letter would like to see Lois Lane in more assertive roles than she normally appears. Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* puts forth the same sentiments of having women lead lives outside of the household. The letter shows similar ideas as to what women felt during the postwar era in regard with entering a previously male dominated work force. Just like these assertive roles, upper management was denied to women.

In response to this letter, the editor admits that “our versatile Lois can handle all the professions you suggest, but we think the career she prefers most is being a house-wife for SUPERMAN!” A similar response was given to one letter writer when they asked if Lana Lang (Lois Lane’s best friend and rival for Superman’s love) would ever get her own comic book series. The editor responded by saying that the “only book Lana is interested in is a cookbook--so she can whip up tempting meals for SUPERMAN after she lands him for a husband.” When asked why Lois Lane could not be trusted with Superman's secret identity, the editor says that "[e]verybody knows that no woman can keep a secret." Patricia Newland inquired about why Lois Lane was so persistent in trying to figure out who Superman really was. The editor answered back by asking, "Did you ever know of a woman who could take "No!" for an

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90 Mark Voger and Kathy Vogelson, *Hero Gets Girl!: The Life and Art of Kurt Schaffenberger, Illustrator of Lois Lane and Captain Marvel* (Raleigh: TwoMorrows Pub, 2003), 49.
91 Ibid.
answer?" It is apparent in some of the replies to the readers' letters by editors that the issues brought up were not taken seriously. Similar responses are shown when a reader would write in wondering why Lane simply not leave Superman for a man that would obviously be better for her. The editors would respond by saying that even though the two seem to quarrel a lot, they were just playing the “love game.” Or the editors would even state that the story would not be the same if they did not have Lane continually “fall” for Superman. These responses might simply be the own editor's opinion on the matter or that they did not feel the column was a place for serious responses at that time. But it could also be that the editors did not take the feminist movement seriously at the time. 94

In some of the letters, the writers seem agitated at the way the series portrays women in certain settings and how they interact with other characters. In Judith Stevens' letter, she voices her opinion by commenting that:

don't you think it was rather mean of SUPERMAN to embarrass Lois Lane in front of Lana Lang? I think it's awful the way you insult women, and particularly the way you heap abuse upon Lois. You're always saying she's snoopy, inquisitive, curious, a pest, and can't keep a secret. Well, men aren't angels, either! 95

A similar letter comes from Ronnie Raney, saying that he "liked the story, ‘Lois Lane's Anti-Superman Campaign,’ but I think you're anti-female. You show nearly all men around Lois' booth when she's campaigning for the Senate. I'm only a teen-ager, but I think more women would be interested in voting for her. Replying back, the editor writes that “[w]hen you're old enough to vote, vote as you please. In the meantime grant these guys the same right. Besides, can you blame them for flocking around a pretty chick?” But one of the many goals of leaders such as Friedan was to open up women’s participation on a political level. Like most women trying to enter the political scene, Lane found it hard trying to be taken seriously as politician.

Interesting enough, as early as "The "Superman-Lois" Hit Record!" (issue #45), there is a letter from Elva Evans which goes against Cvetkovic's analysis that Lois Lane "does not completely conform to the standard notions of femininity depicted in the popular culture of the time." In Evan's letter, she states "I just adore Lois Lane. She's cute as a button, always getting into hot water. (She reminds me of Mary Tyler Moore, of the Dick Van Dyke TV show, the way she is always getting into trouble and crying her pretty little head off.)" In response to this letter, the editors seemed to agree that Lane sometimes gets in over her head in some situations.

Another response was given to Anne Zeek, in which she asked in her letter about what would happen between Lois and Clark Kent's rivalry at the Daily Planet. "Will this rivalry exist even after their... marriage? If so, what would happen if Lois feels that Clark stole a story she was working on?" Replying back, the editor says, "We don't think this problem will come up. SUPERMAN believes that a wife's place is in the home." A common theme among the responses from the editors was beginning to show itself. The idea that a married woman’s place should be in the home while the man worked was indicative of the creator’s views on women’s rights.

Letters and the responses to them are common throughout the first eighty issues. If there is already this much reader response to Lane in the early years of the series, then the amount of concern after she liberates herself from Superman's shadow in 1968 will be apparent.

Without having to read the entire story in the comic book, there is a blatant enough statement being made on the cover as Lois Lane begins her change in issue #80 in 1968 (fig. 2.1). The cover shows Lane throwing the “Girl Friend” part of the title on the ground. She then demands Superman leave her magazine as she wants to start a new life without him. As the more independent sounding Lane is shown with her luggage in the background, the only thing

96 Cvetkovic, "Feminine Mystique," 42.
Superman can do is stand there, in shock. Inside the issue, sobbing on her bed, Lane says, "I've been kidding myself and everyone else! The whole world knows I've tossed away my life waiting for Superman! I'll bet everybody's laughing behind my back!" Lane is determined to start a new life without Superman, even to go so far as to get an entirely new wardrobe, dispose of all the souvenirs from Superman, change her name, and start fresh in a new city. Meanwhile, Superman/Clark Kent has become bored at the Daily Planet due to the lack of trouble-prone Lois Lane and her attempts of going after "scoops." The next time that they inevitably cross paths, Superman asks her, "You said you wanted to get me out of your life... is that really true?" To which she repeatedly says “yes.” With this giant step in the direction of Lois reaffirming her independence from Superman, it would seem as if she is finally breaking her own mold.

The cover to “No Witnesses in Outer Space!” (issue #81) cover shows Superman and Lane in space, with Superman apparently ripping apart Lois' air tube and her exclaiming, "Gasp! Superman's snapped my air-hose because I won't marry him. He's committing the perfect murder!" This could just be the writer's hook to get potential readers, maybe they still have Lois Lane breaking the mold. Unfortunately, they did not. Lane eventually proclaims her born-again love for Superman. In “Death House Honeymoon!” (issue #105), when Lane approaches the editor to allow her to cover a story, Lois exclaims, "Let me get you the inside story... It's a woman's story!" Clark Kent responds by stating, that it is too dangerous of an assignment and that “It's a man's job!” Perry White, the editor, says, "Clark's right! The... story is no assignment for a woman! It's yours, Clark!" Lois responds, "That's not fair, Perry! You're

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100 Ibid., 30.
101 Weisinger (ed), "No Witnesses in Outer Space!," #81 (Feb. 1968), 1.
discriminating against me because I'm a woman! I protest!" One of the original goals of the feminist movement was the dissimilation of workplace inequality through the implementation of anti-discrimination laws. This included dismissal of advancements to better job opportunities and salaries. Representative of Virginia, Howard Smith, proposed adding a prohibition on gender discrimination into the Civil Rights Act in 1964. He did this as joke because he knew it would never pass. After being laughed at by other Congressmen, the law was still able to be passed with the amendment intact thanks to the leadership of Michigan Representative, Martha Griffiths. Though, short in length, this new attitude of Lois’ is only just the beginning and a nod to women’s liberation movement’s goal for equal employment.

Not too long before that particular comic book issue came out, the federal government began to recognize women's issues in the work force. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, that included the decisive Title VII. This prohibited discrimination by private employees, employment agencies, and unions on the basis of sex as well as race, color, religion, and national origin. An agency titled Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was set up to enforce the law's protection of women workers. Feeling that EEOC was not carrying out its job adequately in 1965, NOW was founded. These women formed "a new civil rights group... that could pressure the government to enact and enforce laws against sexual discrimination." Apparently the government had not reached the offices of the Daily Planet yet when #105 was published.

In the next comic book, Lois Lane takes on a then relevant cultural issue (fig. 2.2). In "I Am Curious (Black)!" (issue #106), editor E. Nelson Bridwell created a series of opportunities

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103 Ibid., 5.
105 Evans, *Personal Politics*, 16.
106 Ibid., 19.
for cultural frontier-crossing, including juxtaposing the single, white, professional Lois Lane of the 1970s into the black community. Lane receives the assignment of her life, to get the inside story of Metropolis' Little Africa. Lane is shown receiving a glimpse into the daily lives of black men, women, and children as the struggle each day to the next. Though this single comic book did not end the racial divide at the time, it does mirror the early activities of women who attempted to be more prominent and active in fighting for civil rights. As mentioned beforehand, young women helped pioneer the social movements of the 1960s, including the Civil Rights movement. During the Civil Rights movement, many feminist leaders were energized by the movement and were able to gain experience in organizing events. Through local organizations, many black women were able to play key roles in the Civil Rights movement. However, even within this movement, there was a gender role divide and many women were blocked from important leadership roles. Through working with these early movements, however, many women gained experience that would help in developing the women's liberation movement.\(^{107}\)

Not too long after this issue, Lane confronts the social issues of another minority group, as seen in "Indian Death Charge!" (issue #110) (fig. 2.3). To begin a synopsis of the story, it started off with Lane being shunned by a mother from the "ghetto" for trying to find a candidate for the "mother of the year" award when Lane herself was not a mother and therefore had not seen "her child growing up in a jungle!"\(^{108}\) Back at the Daily Planet, Lois took an assignment to cover a rain dance by a group of Pueblo Indians on a reservation near Santa Fe.

While waiting, the Lane overheard some tourists complaining: "Those Indians look like they never heard of a comb! They're ugly sons-of-guns, aren't they? They all look alike to me!"

\(^{107}\) Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 238.

\(^{108}\) Bridwell (ed), "Indian Death Charge!," #110 (May 1971), 4-5.
Bet they'd never've beat Custer if they'd fought fair!109 Just then, Johnny Lone Eagle arrived to
tell the crowd of tourists and construction workers that the rain dance has permanently been
canceled. An angry mob formed from the people who "came all the way here to see the show!
We paid for our tickets! You redskins aren't going' to cheat us!"110 Soon a brawl started up and
Superman comes just in time to break it up. As the crowd disperses, Lane pleaded with Johnny to
let her come with them. Johnny responded by saying, "We want no help from a white woman!
But come with me and my sister Singing Rain! And I will give you a story for your "People,
U.S.A." series, Miss Lane!"111 Lane soon learned that a dam was being built that would drown a
local village when the water is held back. She also learned that this particular group of militant
Native Americans intended to "be human bombs... blowing up the dam--and ourselves, if
necessary! There's your story, Miss Lane!"112

Trying to figure out a way out of the situation, Lois attempted to contact Superman via
smoke signals. Superman arrived again in time before anything drastic could happen and
singlehandedly relocating the dam to another area. But shortly after, Lane comes across Johnny's
sister who had collapsed with grief over the fact that her husband went missing in action in
Vietnam. On her deathbed, Singing Rain challenged Lane, saying "Do you care enough... to
promise a dying... red woman... to be mother to... her Indian Baby... as if he... were... your...
own... flesh?"113 Lois promised to take care of Little Moon as if he were her own. Soon
afterwards, protestors began to appear outside of Lois' apartment building with picket signs.
There seems to be two sides of the protest, one who supported "Woman Power!" and for Lane
not to give up Little Moon because of "male intolerance." The other side advocated "Indian

109 Ibid., 5.
110 Ibid., 6.
111 Ibid., 8.
112 Ibid., 11.
113 Ibid., 14.
Power!" and one sign that stated, "You stole our land—now our children!" The use of stereotypes to advance a more liberal agenda shows that progress was slow to shift the entirety of the series’ overall message. Perhaps the editors only saw it fit to focus on certain social issues.

Before deciding on what to do with Little Moon, Lane ran into the father of baby, who was returning home after escaping from a VC POW camp. Later, before Lane and Little Moon separated, Lane was voted as the "Foster Mother of the Year." During the ceremony, a man in the crowd yelled out, "Lois Lane is color-blind if she thinks she, a white woman, can bring up a Red Indian Baby!" Lane ends the story by saying, "It's you who are blind! My heart and Little Moon's are the same color!" Again, Lane deals with early movements that young women had a hand in during the 1960s.

Native American and the Anti-War Movements both played large roles in the development of the feminist movement. At the time of women's anti-war movement against the Vietnam War, a new generation of younger and more radical women joined the protest. But they also protested "the way in which the tradition women's peace movement condoned and even enforced the gender hierarchy in which men made war and women wept." Throughout the nation, women attempted to inject women's rights into the New Left, especially through college campuses. There efforts, however, were overlooked and rejected through disdain by male student leaders. At a New Politics conference, a feminist activist was told, "Cool down, little girl. We have more important things to do here than talk about women's problems." Encounters such as these discouraged women from participating in movements that marginalized their own goals, forcing them to form their own movement for the betterment of women.

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114 Ibid., 16.
115 Ibid., 21.
117 Collins, 372-373.
Much like the Civil Rights movement, the Native American movement had its own goals in mind rather than that of women's rights. Though, not as suicidal as they were portrayed in the "Indian Death Charge!" comic book issue, American Indian Movement (AIM) has had a brief history of radical actions since their formation in 1968. Probably one of the most notable events in AIM history was Radio Free Alcatraz. In 1969, Alcatraz Island was occupied for nineteen months. AIM was one of the main groups of activists on the island when it was reclaimed in the name of Native Nations. The first Indian radio broadcasts (Radio Free Alcatraz) was heard in the Bay Area of San Francisco. The broadcast shared stories about the occupation of Alcatraz by the various activist groups.

The last overt message that was present in this particular issue was the idea that Lane was being shunned for not having a child of her own and then again at the end of the issue for adopting one. While racism is involved here, when the man in the crowd yelled at Lane saying that she was color-blind if she thought she could raise a Native American child as a white woman, the content brings forth the original issue that gave rise to the second-wave feminism. Staying home and raising children against seeking fulfillment outside of the home. As mentioned before, this social issue was brought to light in Betty Friedan's work, Feminine Mystique.

Another issue brought forth is the idea that racism and gender identity are two separate issues. At this time, most prominent women’s rights organizations were led and followed by middle and upper-class white women. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “Black Feminism” in 1989 to bring together the two concepts into one issue. While Crenshaw has opened the idea to scholarly attention, the issue was brought forth by certain groups at the time. The Combahee River Collective, a black feminist organization that was active in the middle of the 1970s, was

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pivotal in illuminating the disparity between those fighting for white women’s rights and black women’s rights. Here in the comic book issue, readers are able to see Lane walk a line between seeking fulfillment in her career, as a white woman, and as a mother when she adopted the child.119

Some readers were not too acceptable of the inclusion of social issues. Albert Tanner from Baltimore believes that women’s liberation should be separate from entertainment when he says:

I must agree with those readers who feel Lois has become too much oriented toward "social causes," "minority groups" and so on. A comic book must primarily be a source of entertainment if it is to sell and it is easy to jeopardize its success in this respect by overemphasizing moral messages. This applies to Lois' Women's Lib convictions also... I'm sure the great majority of both men and women readers would not like her as a militant Women's Lib extremist.120

The letter from Tanner suggests that the "social issues," "minority groups," and political viewpoints have caused Lois Lane to be less of an entertaining comic book and more of a moral guide trying to exert itself onto readers.

If it is not already clear through analysis, it was clear to the readers that the amount of social issues that Lane confronts in these Silver Age comic books is a noticeable change. Lois Lane is no longer just about Lane chasing Superman, but rather a woman confronting very real social problems of this time. The fact that this is only issue #110 and there is already a letter from a reader stating that “if Lois sounds off about Women's Lib in every issue, she'll get to sound like a broken record,” shows that a closer examination of Lois Lane has already yielded more convincing evidence of feminism. Why the change? It could possibly be because the social issues were changing the cultural landscape of America and the editors of the series sought to

embody these changes through their lead female character in order to better represent women at the time to their readership. An example of this type of cultural shift in comic books comes from Will Eisner’s The Spirit. An African American sidekick named Ebony White was featured with a clownish appearance and monkey-like demeanor. The character was a crude and stereotypical representation of African Americans. In the 1950s, "perhaps due to changing attitudes toward minorities in the postwar-era, Eisner realized that Ebony’s dialect humor was insulting." The Spirit’s sidekick was "sent to the all-black Carter School for Boys to rid himself of his ‘minstrel accent.’” The fact that the character was self-conscious about the issue meant that Eisner was as well. This was the beginning of a social conscious shift in Eisner's work that would continue as the years passed on, as also seen in Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane.

As shown, women's liberation movement issues began to appear more often in the stories themselves after issue #80, but well before and just as prominent as the issue #121. Aside from the stories in the series, there is also an increase in letters concerning this change, showing that the readers took notice. For example, in Mark Thomase’s letter:

I complain about—Lois Lane supporting Women's Lib? Heaven forbid! Lois has shown, subtly that she supports it. Why? She is an attractive girl—she nearly has Superman at her feet. She is a reporter on the Daily Planet and it looks like she's practically living in luxury. She must get a good salary. Lois has shown that women can get equal pay for equal jobs! What more does Women's Lib want? DO they want to go to Viet Nam and fight in the front lines?

Thomase's letter suggests that Lane has achieved enough personal equality to quit actively supporting the women's liberation movement any further. His last statement implies, however, that women should be grateful for not being too equal as they are not forced to fight in a foreign conflict. Thomase’s sentiments echo that of the arguments used by Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) opponents such as Phyllis Schlafly, who had risen in power during the 1970s. Anti-ERA

121 Ibid., 33.
123 Woolfolk (ed), "77 Coffins!," #122 (May 1972), 49.
organizers claimed that the ERA "would deny woman's right to be supported by her husband, privacy rights would be overturned, women would be sent into combat, and abortion rights and homosexual marriages would be upheld." Gerard Triano’s letter displays a more conservative side of women’s liberation:

About the subject of Women's Lib, Lois is carrying it too far and Superman not far enough. He must realize that "woman power" means more than fisticuffs and inane clichés, and that being loved and needed doesn't mean being enslaved. Her actions in the last two issues show that she must believe this. Her crack about "cooking in the kitchen" is the reason that some of the women I know hate the movement. It makes the woman who wants to fulfill herself "just" as a wife and mother feel worthless. What Women's Lib should boil down to is the right of every woman to choose the life she wants for herself and to be able to live it. I hope Lois and Supie both wake up.

This letter suggests that Lane has become too radical in her support of the women's liberation movement. One of the main oppositions of radical feminism at this time came from women who believed that there was nothing to be ashamed of in finding fulfillment as a housewife. Triano falls into this group, as the letter would suggest.

B.J. Reed from Oxnard, California also believed that Lane is taking the women's liberation movement to the extreme by losing her feminine side:

The need for better and equal terms doesn't mean a woman has to stop being female. A woman cannot be a man, is not as strong as a man, and cannot think like a man-I know because I'm married to one, and he doesn't think like I think!

Lois wants many things for her fellow women: equal pay, rights, etc... the same things any man enjoys. But should Lois scream about her rights as a woman, while in the same breath criticizing Superman for wanting to behave like a man? A woman's normal instincts are to be feminine and coy. A man's are to flex his muscles. Who likes a feminine man? Nobody! So who likes a masculine woman?

Reed's letter suggests that Lane has taken feminism so far as to have almost completely lose her gender identity as a woman. This letter shows that there were readers who took the opposite stance than those who supported the women’s liberation movement. Not only did progressive

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125 Woolfolk (ed), "Death Rides the Wheels!," #125 (Aug. 1972), 22.
126 "Your Mystery Columnist," #126.
women read the comic book series, but so did conservative women. What makes letters like these important is that they are able to show the readers' opinions of what they know about the women's liberation movement and then compare it to what they see happening in *Lois Lane*.

Even though there are examples of women's liberation values in the stories of the series, the fact that there are responses from the readers in which they themselves took the time to examine the same values in the character is a validation of Lois Lane's transformation to being more aligned with the feminist movement. While some readers questioned or criticized the women's liberation movement's values in the series, there are some letters from readers who believed that *Lois Lane* could be more aligned with feminism without exerting such overtones. Gary Kimber from Ontario pondered if it even possible to have "women's lib in a comic book? How can a medium that sports men in underwear doing impossible feats hope to deal seriously with something so real?" Keith Griffen from Alabama rejoiced when he could ignore the women's liberation movement narratives. For one issue, he exclaimed: "Hooray! The one and only LOIS LANE has returned! Many thanks... for turning out the best LOIS script in a long time... There were no roommates to detract from Lois' role in the tale, and no heavy "women's lib" overtones.

Gerard Triano of Elmont, New York was getting bored of the repetitiveness of the Women's Liberation theme. In Triano’s letter, he wrote "Why must every ish allude to Women's Lib? I can't tell you how boring the subject has become." On the other side of the United States, Scott Gibson from Sterling, Colorado believes that audience for *Lois Lane* has become too narrow, saying, "the magazine may be selling well among Women's Libbers, but it's too

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127 Ibid.
much for anyone else.” Triano and Gibson's letters suggests that the series has become too specialized in dealing only with women's liberation issues and that it has started to alienate itself from the general readership who apparently do not share the same political views. An example of this alienation is seen by Susan Bregman who finds Lane's attempts to be a feminist agitating. In her letter, she says, "LOIS LANE is not liberated. LOIS LANE is a fool... Her goal in life seems to be to prove herself better than men... Her concept of liberation seems to be yelling at Superman when he rescues her, instead of batting her eyes and sighing." The comments in these letters suggest a level of backlash to Lane’s evolution as a working woman who was crossing boundaries that were not normally crossed until this time. It must be telling of the series if “Women’s Lib” had become a repetitive and boring subject. Or if some readers saw the character’s change cause to call her “not liberated” or a “fool.” Not only have these letters appeared to be conservative in their tone, but they also seem to take offense to Lane as a character. These reactions show the diversity of readers who responded to Lane’s character shift. It was not only readers, both male and female who read this comic book series, but also those who seem to identify with all the varying views in regards to feminism. 

Even though readers complained about the series, Lois Lane was important because when it ended, there were very few other comic books on the market to accompany to the women's liberation movement. DC Comics attempted to introduce feminist values into Wonder Woman during the Diana Prince era (1968-1972). This "new" Diana captured the tone of the women's movement by having the character embrace her civilian side of life more so than her superhero side. This contradicted the Amazonian values, which alarmed editors of Ms., who praised the original version. In 1972 and 1973, "Marvel Comics, keen to hitch its wagon to the women's liberation movement..."
movement, produced three ‘women's comics’—*Night Nurse, Shanna the She-Devil*, and *The Cat*; all failed after fewer than half a dozen issues."\(^{132}\) These comic-book series never obtained the mainstream popularity or success as the other aforementioned ones. Perhaps this is because these series were created when the feminist movement began to decline. Or that these comic book series did not have ties to more popular characters as *Superman’s Girlfriend, Lois Lane* had. It also could be due to the fact that the Silver Age of Comics was coming to an end and publishers began shifting focus on what was being published and who it was being published for.

Unlike other comic books with a female lead, *Lois Lane* is important because the character resonates with the time period. A lot of social movements occurred at the beginning of the 1960s that carried on well past the end of the decade. Unlike Wonder Woman, Lane was never championed by a women's movement magazine. At its peak in popularity in 1962, *Lois Lane* was the third bestselling comic book, third only to *Superman* and *Superboy*.\(^{133}\) The comic book series is an important piece to pop culture history as it reflects second-wave feminism in a form of media that deserves more attention. While Lane may not have been adopted to be the symbol of feminism such as Wonder Woman, she has just as much content worth analyzing as Wonder Woman. Especially since the character has been able to adapt and remain a relevant and popular character for DC Comics, outlasting all the other romance comic books that were made during her time. But not just within comic books, she has been seen in graphic novels, TV shows, and movies that are still being created to this day. Even without superpowers, Lane was able to reach a mass audience; an audience who read and took in what was presented to them; an independent and intelligent woman who had a career that was fulfilling. While Lane was being a

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role model for young women, a group of superheroes were trying to appeal to all American youth and tackle more social issues than just the feminist movement.
A caption jumps out from the cover page, "THEY JUST COULDN'T WAIT TO START THEIR OWN MAG!" Approved by the Comics Code Authority and officially sealed with the Superman DC National Comics brand, the cover reveals four super powered teenagers in the midst of a struggle for their very lives. "NO, YOU"RE NOT SEEING THINGS! THAT'S ROBIN, WONDER GIRL, KID FLASH and AQUALAD-- ALL FIGHTING THE SAME VILLAIN... The BEAST-GOD of XOCATAN!" Young readers across the nation could get their hands on this thrilling first issue and debut of a newly formed superhero team for only twelve cents, a decent price for nearly forty pages of entertainment. Young adults and children thought so too, back in 1966 when this comic book issue was first published. As exhilarating as it would be to see the Teen Titans battle a Beast-God named Xochatan, however. What is more important, historically, was what was being implicitly expressed through this series. During a time when a multitude of social movements were rapidly progressing toward social equality for most Americans, their own superheroes now seemed to be joining them.\textsuperscript{134}

What may seem like a mere comic-book series can also be seen as an important historical and cultural piece from a tumultuous time period. Examining the contextual relevance and analysis of how the superhero characters of the \textit{Teen Titans} series evolved in response to shifting social mores and historical events from the 1960s to the 1970s will reveal how important this series is historically and culturally. The findings of this cultural analysis will also provide a deeper understanding of the society these comic books were created for.

\textsuperscript{134} George Kashdan (editor), Bob Haney (script), Nick Cardy (ink)(pencil), "The Beast-God of Xochatan!," \textit{Teen Titans} #1 (Jan.-Feb., 1966), National Periodical Publications, Inc., [DC], 1.
An important part in understanding comic-book series, such as *Teen Titans*, is knowing that the task of completing one requires the combined efforts of a group of specialized creators. Writers and artists are able to develop a social consciousness in their work as they and the times they are in progress. These social-consciousness shifts within comic books encompass complex issues such as race, gender, and drug abuse, to name a few. Some of the most famous comic-book series known today were written during this period, but not all have been critically examined. By critically examining these famous comic-book series, historians stand to gain more insight into the cultural, political, and social depths of American culture.

Comics exploring social issues started receiving positive media attention—enough to be noticed by government officials. In 1972, an official at the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare sought out one of the most prominent comic book creators at the time. Stan Lee was encouraged to use Marvel Comics (specifically their most popular character, Spider-Man) to educate young people about the dangers of drug use. Lee eventually went to write a three-part story about Peter Parker’s friend, Harry Osborn, and his brief battle with drug addiction in *Amazing Spider-Man* #96-98 (1971). A *Teen Titan* character would eventually be used as well (fig. 3.1). Speedy, ward to Green Arrow, was revealed to be a heroin addict on a cover page for a *Green Lantern* issue. A teen superhero with a drug syringe would be a shocking image for most comic book readers.\(^{135}\)

Before this shift in making overtly shocking issues, DC Comics would debut its new series specifically aimed at a young audience. To be successful, the company would assemble some of their most notable creators. Examining the original creators of the series will provide clarity in understanding why certain topics appear in *Teen Titans*. The series is unique in the fact that the editor, artist, and scripter remained the same for the first couple of years. The editor for

\(^{135}\) Ibid., 51.
this series was George Kashdan. Kashdan graduated from the University of Chicago with a Bachelor of Arts degree with a heavy background in Liberal Arts and Philosophy and was soon writing and editing for DC comics. From 1947 until the 1970s, he dealt with many known major characters such as: Batman, Superman, Tomahawk, Blackhawk, Aquaman, Green Arrow, Teen Titans, Sea Devils, and Metamorpho.136

While Kashdan oversaw the entire development of each issue, Nick Cardy would be there to produce the art for the series. Graduating from the School of Industrial Arts, Cardy eventually went to work for Will Eisner in 1940. After being drafted in 1943 and surviving World War II, Cardy started doing work for advertisement companies in 1946. Working at various studios for a couple of years, Cardy eventually approached DC for a job in the 1950s. His most noticeable claim of work came when he started drawing the covers for the newly introduced Aquaman series.137 Cardy eventually started work on the newly serialized Teen Titans series.

Writing for the new series was Bob Haney. The main goal of the writer is to take a concept and turn it into a fleshed out script. After having worked in New York in publishing for about five years in the 1940s, Haney eventually found his way into DC Comics. In one of DC's published profiles, Haney is described as "one of those guys you build companies around." Since joining, he “has had the opportunity to write a portion of the saga of almost each and every super-hero ever published by DC Comics." A series that Haney is most known for is Teen Titans. When asked about his writing for the series, he stated that the "PR research that they had done showed — this is still the early ’60s — the average reader was a 12-year-old boy living in Dayton, Ohio... Who was not that sophisticated. So a lot of my stuff I wrote... was aimed at him.

Generic little boy."\textsuperscript{138} Haney was also involved in the political scene. Regarding his involvement in the movements of the 1960s, Haney stated that he "went to Washington a few times. I was against [the] war. I went to antiwar meetings as early... as '64 and '5. [I] went to meetings of the old Left against [the] war."\textsuperscript{139} With his background in political movements, Haney further reveals where the source of the dialogue for the series came from:

That awful stuff?... Some of that stuff you did hear around here. That’s what some of the people who were criticizing me didn’t appreciate. Around Woodstock, you did hear some of that. You heard a better form and a more raunchy form. You couldn’t put that in the comics. I had to water it down and make it kind of juvenile. But, you know, some of the rap — my barber here, he’s an old ex-hippy. But he’s a great rapper. His stuff’s very creative and very interesting and very adult. I used to go get a haircut and I’d come back and type in all his dialogue that he’d given me in my ear while he was cutting my hair... Young people who worked on the strip... they met me and they said, “Where’d an old guy like you learn all this kind of hip talk?” I didn’t tell them it was my barber in Woodstock.\textsuperscript{140}

The editors believed this language change would help the characters seem more relatable to the youth at the time. This lingo would need “hip” characters that could match the dialogue. The grouping of four young popular teenage characters would prove to be the best setup in order to appeal to the "generic little boy" in a tumultuous period in American history.

The 1960s was driven by progressivism and domestic policy changes that saw numerous presidential initiatives, judicial rulings, and social protest movements. The civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, the youth movement, and the environmental movement washed over the landscape of America, changing the lives of many Americans. However, this wave of reform also produced an atmosphere of rebellion, confrontation, and upheaval in what historians call the counterculture movement. This movement consisted of an anti-establishment cultural feeling. Leading this movement was a social group known as Hippies,


\textsuperscript{139} Mike Gold, "DC Profiles #11, Bob Haney," Batman #289 (July, 1977), DC Comics, Inc.

\textsuperscript{140} Catron, "Bob Haney Interviewed."
or flower children, who criticized war, middle-class values, promoted sexual freedom, and often used psychedelic drugs to expand their consciousness. Hippies, who were originally beatniks, had their start as a counterculture group in the 1950s. This long clash of establishment versus anti-establishment inevitably started a war over the minds of the youth; a war that would see the establishment use comic books as its conduit to deliver its message.  

In 1989, comic-book historian Mike Benton wrote that "the American comic book has touched the lives of nearly everyone alive today." This is evident when examining letters that were written to the editors. Letters for this series were printed in the Tell it to the Titans column that appeared in nearly every issue. The letter column provided a forum for readers to catch mistakes, give opinions or suggestions, or to say what they liked or did not like about the series. This makes examining letter columns such as Tell it to the Titans all the more important.

Found in issue #25, the letter from Mike Callahan of New Jersey makes it clear as to why analysis of this comic book series is important:

Dear [Editor]:
I must compliment you on your tremendous work on Teen Titans. I had stopped reading it around Issue #8 or #9 after it became, to me, just another comic with immature heroes (in this case, immature teen-agers) running around saving people, and occasionally the world, from horrible menaces and nasty monsters. Then I bought an issue of the "new" Teen Titans, a comic with immature heroes (in this case, immature teen-agers) running around saving people, and occasionally the world, from horrible menaces and nasty monsters. While that doesn't sound any different, it really is. The present-day TT no longer flaunt their immaturity. It is still evident, but it has been changed to the innocent immaturity (if such a thing exists) that characterizes true young people in a [tumultuous] time of their lives. I would say that Bob Haney is either (a) a teen-ager, (b) an extremely acute observer or (c) a father with youngsters of his own, for only one of those three could write with such insight and understanding. It's become easy to identify with the Teen Titans (my fantasy counterpart is Kid Flash) and not terribly difficult to believe in them. In fact, it is this quality that will keep me a fan for a long, long time.

141 Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s (New York: Routledge, 2002).
142 Duncan, The Power of Comics, xvii.
Letters like Callahan's make the *Teen Titans* series especially important historically and culturally. Callahan's letter makes three important statements. The first was his own notice of how the comic series evolved into a different type of maturity that better reflected the mindset of "true young people" in the turbulent time of their lives. Secondly, Callahan notes that Bob Haney, the main scriptwriter for the series, was able to provide insight and understanding into the life of teenagers that readers were able to relate to. Lastly, he stated the ease to which he himself was able to identify with the Teen Titans. The reason that Callahan could identify with the Teen Titans is because they were teenagers as well.

The original Teen Titans consisted of four teenage superheroes. Each character was a teenage adaptation of their grownup counterparts, i.e., Robin to Batman, Wonder Girl to Wonder Woman, Kid Flash to Flash, and Aqualad to Aqua Man. The series followed their adventures as they tried to live up to the ideals of their adult equivalents. Why a team of teen superheroes? According to the editor, "The TEEN TITANS are our 'experts' on teen problems. Sure, their job is to tackle trouble where it arises—but as a teen team, they'll be looking for situations that call for the 'teen touch.'" After all, "there are some things they can do on their own!" These characters have allowed the comic book series to be more relatable to the target readers.

Often portrayed as leader of the team, Robin "Boy Wonder" acted the most mature of the bunch. He was typically the character who told the others to quit joking, slacking off, or messing around. The second member is Aqualad. The youthful marine marvel usually had to have scenarios adjusted to fit his aquatic powers (or limitations in some scenarios). The third superhero is Kid Flash. Nicknamed "Twinkletoes," Kid Flash was the jester of the group. The last male character is Speedy. The "Boy Bowman" made frequent guests appearances in the

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series until he eventually replaced Aqualad. The original composition consisted of three males and one female.

Wonder Girl, otherwise nicknamed Wonder Chick, Teen-Age Amazon, Feminine Titan, Teen Titaness, Doll Face, and many others, was the only female member of the group. She was also the most stereotypically written character. The character was written to be more concerned with how boys look, wooing over Rock'n'Roll stars, and pondering her chances of going out with boys she liked. Wonder Girl was also very juvenile compared to the other team members and would rather dance to music than train with the other members. Even though the characters are meant to be juvenile, Wonder Girl seems to have been written more so than the others. A lot of young women in comic books at this time were also written in the same manner. It is not surprising to see Wonder Girl similarly. This fits in with how comic books viewed women before the influence of the feminist movement began to have an effect. In a letter to the editor, Colleen Chavas from Hartford, Connecticut, stated that:

Being a girl myself, perhaps the only reason I read TEEN TITANS is to see WONDER GIRL in action. As the boys have many teenaged heroes to follow, we girls need something to keep our ego up, too. I think I have an idea that would considerably improve the appearance of WONDER GIRL. When she first appeared with WONDER WOMAN, several years ago, WONDERGIRL wore a mini-skirt. Although this was later discontinued in favor of shorts, a skirt would look much more feminine.

There must have been previous thoughts on reworking Wonder Girl as the editor replied to the letter saying, "we've been thinking of re-designing WONDER GIRL'S garb, and may be coming up with a new outfit in the next issue." It would be almost 12 more issues (two years) before the character's suit would be updated.

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146 Kashdan, "Large Trouble in Space-Ville!," 10.
147 Ibid.
In *Teen Titans* #23, Wonder Girl updates her outfit from a skirt to a full body suit (fig. 3.2). Wonder Girl appears on the cover of the issue, busting through an old picture of herself as she yells, "Back off, Tigers—the new Wonder Girl is here!" The more mature outfit does not hide the typical over sexualized female figure that is still drawn for the character. The three teammates of the current group (Robin, Kid Flash, and Speedy) stand in the back, shocked at the change that has occurred over Wonder Girl. Instead of her hair in a ponytail, it has been let down. Instead of a sleeveless American Eagle shirt with star spangled underwear tights, it has been replaced with a tight fitting, all red bodysuit. Instead of red heel tops, black boots. The new look is finished off with black and white stars and golden accessories.

This gives a more mature look to the character and tries to make readers take Wonder Girl more seriously as a female superhero. The change appears to fit in with some goals of the feminist movement. However, when Wonder Girl is introduced with her new outfit, she decides not to fight or actively participate. She instead flaunts her new look to draw the attention of a disgruntled crowd as a distraction. This change occurred due to the coinciding rise of the Women's Liberation Movement. To better emulate the times, the editors believed that making Wonder Girl appear to be older would be enough of an adjustment. It clearly was not. Similar changes to other female leads can be seen with the Silver Age comic book characters Wonder Woman and Lois Lane. Jill Lepore’s *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* goes into great detail about how the character evolved to be an iconic figure for the Women’s Liberation Movement. In her solo series, Lane also updates her wardrobe to match her take on feminism. But, with comic book series such as *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* and *Teen Titans*, the changes to the female characters were implemented only to fix the cosmetic issue and not the social issue.  

The series continued to present more opportunities for Wonder Girl to express her feminism, however. In an issue #38, the comic book explored the deepest inner fear of some of the group members. Wonder Girl's fear was anything that diminished her femininity. She theorized that perhaps "it goes back to my Amazon background and how men always fear and put down a strong female! But I can't bear the thought of cutting off my hair! It's my most feminine attribute!" This story poses Wonder Girl in a situation in which she must sacrifice her femininity, in this case, cut her hair to look more boyish so that she and her spy partner may cross a border. Wonder Girl associates her ability to maintain her feminine looks and not appear to be too masculine with being a strong female.

This message of feminism is lost when Cal, the spy traveling with Wonder Girl, exclaims that, "We did it, Donna—thanks to your Amazonian strength—And disguise! You even had me believing you were a guy—!" In a state of embarrassment, Wonder Girl internally thinks, "Just as I feared! He'll never look at me again--without remembering... seeing me as a man... not female!" Cal continues, saying, "And to show my gratitude… You gorgeous thing! MMMMMM." Cal pulls Wonder Girl in for a kiss. At this moment, Wonder Girl realizes that Cal "doesn't find me... masculine!" Wonder Girl's concern that her image of being a strong female would be tarnished when she shaved her head is quickly reconciled because a man said she was still beautiful looking. This sapped the feminist message that was trying to emerge from the story.

The story was a poor representation of what was occurring with the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s. In 1974, pro-sex feminist movement leader, sex educator, author, and

where the main character Lois Lane attempted to reinvent herself to be more independent. The change in character only lasted an issue before reverting back to the overtly male dominated storyline.


150 Boltinoff, *Teen Titans* #38, 12.
artist, Betty Dodson was asked to appear on Aspen's Women's Week. This was to be a full week of feminist TV programming. In Dodson's segment, she showed herself shaving a woman's hair off while being naked. Subsequently, Women's Week was cancelled. Albeit the nudity was what drove the decision to cancel the week of feminine TV programming, the act of shaving a woman’s hair off, in this case, was different than what was seen in the issue of *Teen Titans*. In Dodson's case, shaving the head of another woman symbolized the liberation of women's image and sexuality from a male dominated society. In Wonder Girl’s case, shaving her own head meant the decrease in her own femininity, as she held the man’s opinion of her image higher than she held her own opinion.\(^{151}\)

The 1960s and 1970s not only saw an increase in demands for gender equality, but racial equality as well. Marvel was the first to venture out with new superheroes that fell in line with this movement. Notable characters such as the Black Panther (an African native, not an African American) and the Falcon (a reformed hoodlum that would not rise above the status of Captain America's sidekick for some time) never hit the mark on what most wanted to see in equality for blacks in American society. Luke Cage, from the Marvel series *Hero for Hire* (1972), was the first African American superhero to star in his own comic book series. However, with a staff of all white writers, it was clear to most that the series was created to profit off the early 1970s sensation of blaxploitation films. These films "featured badass, highly sexualized protagonists with ghetto street smarts”\(^{152}\) DC Comics also debuted their first African American superhero in 1972, backup Green Lantern John Stewart.

The first appearance of what would be *Teen Titans’* first major black character came in an issue in 1970. The Titans abandon their costumed identities when Mr. Jupiter (an adult guardian


\(^{152}\) Duncan, *The Power of Comics*, 50.
to the group) sends them to live in Hell's Corner, an inner-city ghetto. A black teenager named Mal (short for Malcom) appears and saves the two women of the Titan group from a couple of street thugs. The irony of six privileged white youth trying to make life work in the inner-city ghetto is not lost on the character. When the group asks where they might find work or a place to live, Mal responds, "Look in the mirror, chick! It'll give you all the answers! You're in the wrong ballpark! Head for the nearest exit!" As the story develops, Mal eventually joins the group in their adventures, despite having no superpowers.153

The series was slow in developing the new character. In the beginning, Mal was restricted in dialogue. Even when the character said something, it was usually stereotypical lines for a black character. But soon, signs of Mal turning into an atypical "soul brother" character began to appear. Especially in regards to the stereotypical dialogue written for him. For example, in issue #32, Mal was having a conversation with Kid Flash and said, "I feel strung out, Flasher—Like the first time I snitched an apple off the fruit stand... and hoped the fuzz was friendly to hungry ghetto kids!"154 The cliché lines continued for Mal in the same story: "Wally, like the old honky saying... have I gone white with fear—'cause I'm really scared, man!?"155 Occasionally the writing for the character did show some depth. In issue #38, when the Teen Titans explored and conquered their deepest fears, readers discovered that Mal's deepest fear was of open spaces. The source of Mal's agoraphobia, as it turns out, was an incident that occurred when he was jumped by three white kids in Hell's Corner.156

155 Boltinoff, Teen Titans #32, 16.
156 Boltinoff, Teen Titans #38.
The most prevalent issue in the series that attempted to take on the issue of racism is published in 1972, issue #41. The story began with the group of Titans traveling to visit Mr. Jupiter's ailing 'aunt,' who had been part of his family since she escaped to the area before the Civil War. Born on a plantation, she and her father were runaway slaves pursued to the fictional town of Litchburg. Mr. Jupiter's aunt was heavily stereotyped into the ‘Mammy’ role. This archetype was used to refer to a black woman who have worked within a white household for generations and has often taken care of the family's children. There was also an attempt by the editor to try to make the story part educational as well. During a flashback to the slave plantation, an editor's note was attached to a bit of dialogue when another slave told Hattie (the future aunt) to follow the 'drinking gourd.' The editor's note stated that: "Drinking Gourd—The Big dipper, the star constellation runaway slaves followed North to freedom!" This was a surprising level of effort to insure historical accuracy in what most would consider a simple comic book.

The intensity of the subject matter increases as the story unfolds. Mal soon became haunted by the ghost of a Civil War era slave hunter (fig. 3.3). The scene shows an African American in the 1970s that was still being constrained by a ghost of slavery past. The imagery of Mal being chased by a ghost with shackles and a pack of hounds certainly strikes the Civil Rights movement chord. Taking a look at the year 1975, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) were becoming more public, even forming groups on college campuses across southern states. Known colleges with a KKK presence on campuses were Vanderbilt University, University of Georgia, and the University of Mississippi. Imagine a college student reading this comic book while

across campus a group of KKK student members were holding a demonstration. The comic book message would certainly feel relatable to most African American readers and shed some light on current civil rights issues to others.¹⁵⁹

The issue of race can also be found within the dialogue itself. At one point, Mal tried to explain what happened to him to the rest of the group. After hearing the story, Mr. Jupiter says, "Look... it's natural because of your color... you'd identify with Aunt Hattie's history —." Mal interrupts with:

I know! I know! Humor the black kid... Give him a little head therapy! Well, I don't buy it! I heard him... heard those chains rattling! Don’t believe me! Man, scratch a white honky soul—and you always find the same attitude... 'Black Folks is just superstitious children, boss!'¹⁶⁰

Mal stormed off, leaving the rest of the group to decide whether or not his story was true or false. The story ended with the group eventually getting rid of the ghost and saving Mal with the help of a voodoo doll. In case the story did not get the civil rights message across to the readers, the editors decided to end the comic book with a quote: "Man's inhumanity to man—history is filled with terrifying examples—right to the present day! But sometimes there is help, like the singed, half-torn-apart straw doll that sits atop a lonely grave in Litchburg Cemetery!"¹⁶¹ The quote began with a level of significance, but saying that sometimes there is help in the form of mysticism to those facing racial misdeeds departed from the overall message of the civil rights movement. The introduction of a black character is special, especially since Mal was one of the first black superheroes. But the progress is limited by the stereotypes that are brought with the character.

¹⁶⁰ Boltinoff, Teen Titans #41, 8.
¹⁶¹ Ibid., 17.
Despite Mal's importance to the series in being a vessel for an underrepresented group in comic books, it was not until late in the publication that Mal's role rose. Through donning old leftover superhero and supervillain gear, Mal became the Guardian. Although Mal had been a part of the Teen Titans' group for quite some time, it was not until this point that he gained some level of superhero ability, let alone a costume. Whether Mal was considered a "superhero" before this issue, he was now one of the earliest black superheroes in DC Comic's history.162

While these characters have cultural relevancy, the storylines of the *Teen Titan* series also contained pertinent relevancy. The very first issue had the team doing their part to help "Uncle Sam" and their "bit for humanity" by traveling to South America to help solve a conflict with the Peace Corps and superstitious villagers. The teenage superheroes were shown going through various Peace Corps orientation courses before leaving. This was that roughly five years after President John F. Kennedy, within weeks of his inauguration, signed Executive Order 10924, establishing the Peace Corps. What better way to appeal to youth about the merits and benefits of the Peace Corps than situating a widely read comic-book story around it.163

Continuing to appeal to the youth, the Titans helped the President's Commission on Education deal with dropouts. The Commission on Education wanted the Teen Titans to infiltrate a school in order to learn more about the teenager's perspectives on dropping out so that the campaign of lowering dropout rates would have a better chance of success. One of the high school students who dropped out did so to get a job to help his mother and sister get by. Robin explains that he could get a better job and a brighter future after he graduated. The boy

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responded by saying he is making a fortune now as a design mechanic at a hot-rod shop, a place where lots of kids who dropped out are making a bundle.

Unbeknownst to the dropouts, their work was going into creating getaway cars for criminals. At the end of the issue, Wonder Girl gave a group of high school kids some words of advice, "Give [school] another try! As you see being a drop-out might look rosy at first—but there's no future in it." What makes this interesting is that the US high school graduation rate peaked in the late 1960s. This was due in part to a number of social guidance videos that were made to help deter kids from dropping out. Some, like The Drop Out (1962) were used to showcase why teenagers dropped out of high school. Unfortunately, having reached 80 percent, high school graduation rates soon went into a 4-5% decline by the 1970s. At the end of the story, the narrator informed readers that even "junior super-heroes have to catch up on the books! But soon as they do, they'll be back."

Political imagery and rhetoric can also be found in the series (fig. 3.4). Knowing that most of the creators had served in WWII and were actively participating in political activities at the time leaves little room to guess where the dialogue source originated from. At the end of a meeting with the Chair of the US Government Treasury Dept., he told the Teen Titans that "[w]e were counting very much on your well-known reputation for aiding those in trouble! And right now, it's your Uncle Sam who needs help!" Robin responds with: "Yes, sir, we all have a high example of that to live up to! Titans . . . Salute!" The group then proceeds to salute a portrait of John F. Kennedy, citing him as a high example to live up to. In the portrait is the quote, "Ask not

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what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country!" This would not be the first time a President's face would appear in Teen Titans. On the Teen Titan's bulletin board, right below a picture of the Beatles is a picture of President Lyndon B. Johnson and it says, "For serving their country, grateful best wishes to the 'Teen Titans.' If you all are in Washington, you-all stop in. Pres. L. B. Johnson."

Political imagery and rhetoric can also be found between stories, in one-shot pages. During this time period, President Kennedy's and Johnson's reform movements were reaching the minds of the youth through Public Service Announcement (PSA) ads. These ads were originally aimed at supporting the US war effort in the 1940s, encouraging paper drives and for donations towards various nonprofit organizations, but they were later used for influencing and educating children. Developed by DC Editor Jack Schiff while working alongside Nobel Prize winner Pearl Buck, the National Social Welfare Assembly, educators, and psychologists, Schiff's goal was to produce an ongoing feature of wholesome messages aimed at young readers. Topics included: racism, lessons on responsibility, manners, safety, world issues and study tips. The PSA pages were:

highly regarded by schools and civic organizations, and for years Schiff tried in vain to persuade DC to establish an educational office so the comics medium could inform and enlighten children. How effective the PSAs were in influencing the minds of young children is unknown, but the pages were definitely an enjoyable part of the comic readers’ experience.

Schiff retired in 1967 and the PSA program faded from the pages of comic books.

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In tandem with the environmental movement at the time, one of the first PSAs shown in the *Teen Titans* series was of President Johnson's Natural Beauty speech (fig. 3.5). In the ad, Johnson says: "At first there seemed to be no end to the wonder of the land. And then the country grew. There came ignorance, greed and ruthless exploitation. Today, natural beauty has new enemies, and we need new weapons to fight these enemies." Cities "devastate the countryside—Highways factories, signs... We must restore as well as protect... bring beauty to the cities and keep it in the countryside." The image showed an overcrowded countryside of billboards and factories with smokestacks. It then compared it to the preferred countryside, suburban-like, with a few homes close together, open pasture fields, a large forest line separating the homes, and the big city in the distance. "Poisons and chemicals pollute air and water; automobiles litter our countryside... We must handle waste products of technology; eliminate and screen auto junk yards."170

The next two panels showed factory runoff going into a river, with the factory's smoke making the sky dark and hazy. On the other side of the river appears to be a dump yard, with a dump truck unloading trash and an abandoned old vehicle stripped bare. The ‘fixed’ scene shows a nice sunny day. The factories were still there, but with less smoke coming out and no run off. A fence has been planted on the other side of the river with a green forest behind it. "The forgotten outdoorsmen today are those who like to walk, hike and ride horseback... We must preserve stretches of scenic rivers; add outdoor recreation areas, enlarge our wilderness system." This panel displays an overcrowded recreational area, with a ski slope, tent ground, cabins, and cars pulling campers. The other image shows a more open wilderness with horseback riders, a canoe, two hikers, and is not nearly as crowded as the other picture. The ad ends with the final narration.

of: "All of us can help clean up open spaces, protect parks from damage, teach friends not to litter, respect the plants and animals that live on Earth with us."\(^{171}\)

Some PSA announcements targeted the youth audience directly, such as one titled "Lost—A Free Education." The ad presents a conversation between two boys and one of them wants to drop out of school in order to line up a job so he can "make some money now and have a good time instead of getting some more book knowledge." An older boy hears their conversation and regales them with his story that he had done the same thing five years ago, but remained an errand boy at the place he got a job at. At the end, he implores the two younger kids to rethink their decision before dropping out and to "remember that education is more than putting learning into your head, it makes a better person of you—a more useful citizen, able to cope with the problems in life you'll be faced with!" This ad bore a stark resemblance to the previously talked about story involving high school dropouts.\(^{172}\)

In a PSA ad titled "CHAMPS AGAINST THE ODDS!," the setting was a malt shop. Three teenagers lamented their recent failing grades and wondered why they even bothered trying. The adult server tells them of a few athletes who had to overcome handicaps to come back and successful at their sports. Examples used were: Mickey Mantle, Wilma Rudolph, Ben Hogan, Billy Talbert, and Glenn Cunningham. Most of the ads that continued to appear in the series encouraged readers to keep in school, make the best of their summer with a summer job, community projects, or even how to "be a hit" at a party. While DC thought it was important for readers to know the importance of preserving the environment or how to be groovy, the company

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\(^{171}\) Ibid.
also felt compelled to make sure the opposition to these reform movements were not to be seen as a favorable style.  

A different series of one-shot pages can be found in the early part of the *Teen Titans* series, but these are intended to be humorous. The title of the one-shot pages is usually some form of 'Beat Nick,' a play on the word 'beatnik,' and follows the character (Nick) around in four different panels (fig. 3.6). In the first panel, two men with goatees are sitting around a table, one of them says to the other that "If you want to be a beatnik all you have to do is give up your job—only you keep up the coffee breaks!" The second panel shows a group of beatniks who are standing next to a man in an overcoat with a long beard. One of the beatniks says that "No, he's not a beatnik—still, you have to respect him!" Proceeding this, a woman was shown talking to a beatnik, and said that "Every woman waits for the perfect man to come into her life Nick—I mean—while she goes out with fellows like you!" Nick was again shown with a woman, this time she jested by saying, "I'll never forget you, Nick—no matter how hard I try!" This one-shot page, clearly a jab at the members of the counterculture group, practically labeled them so ignorant to the point of not being able to tell a person with a beard apart from their group, to not having a job, and not being a suitable enough man that a woman would want in a relationship.

Another one-shot page simply titled "BEAT" continued to poke fun at beatniks. Similar to the first example discussed, this page sectioned into four loose panels that featured depictions of stereotypical beatnik characters. The first panel presented a band with each member playing a different musical instrument (bongo, saxophone, cello, and drums). After apparently performing

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a wild drum solo and destroying the drum set, another member said, "That was beautiful Steve—only your solo comes in a bit later!" To the right of this, the second panel showed three beatniks, each with bowling balls in their hands. The punchline, delivered by one of the members, was, "All the alleys are crowded! Who has a pad with a long foyer?" Following this a third panel showed a beatnik struggling to paint a horizontally long Weiner dog on a vertically tall canvas. In the last panel, a visibly angry beatnik yelled, "Who needs friends?!" He was shown standing at a ping pong table, with a string attached between a paddle and a ping pong ball. One-shot pages like these were clearly meant to be humorous. But they were also clearly singling out a specific group of people that the editors of the comic book felt needed to be ridiculed.\(^{175}\)

While these one-shot pages and early stories were humorous and lighthearted, the later stories in *Teen Titans* expressed a darker tone, especially ones involving political issues. While attending a peace conference, guest characters of the series Hank and Don (aka Hawk and Dove) offer a dualistic approach to keeping peace (fig. 3.7). Hank represented the more reaction oriented type, wanting to obliterate anything that threatens "our" country. Dove on the other hand, did not believe in using violence for any side, stating that peace is worth any price. The issue was replete with peace rhetoric. The character Dove commented, "Can't these dummies see that violence will send mankind back into the jungle?" Another character, Dr. Swenson (winner of a fictitious Peace Prize), told a crowd that "No baby was born with a gun in his hand! Who put it there? Men of fear and hate! Look at the man nearest you! He is your brother!"\(^ {176}\) The dialogue is relating to the peace movements that had taken place that tried to put an end to the Vietnam conflict.


When a riot erupted at the peace conference, the Titans tried to quell the mob, but Dr. Swenson was shot in the head (fig. 3.8). This is a surprisingly graphic image for the comic series. Shortly before dying, Dr. Swenson had some choice words for the superhero group: "Your powers... and capacities for violence... carry awful responsibilities—you're like... living atom bombs—but... you're still... only kids—teenagers." After Dr. Swenson died, the group ponders their future. An acquaintance reminds them that, "Your mentors have fought innumerable battles against the age-old problems that have plagued mankind! But who will combat the new problems of tomorrow—? —Who will challenge the unknown in man himself? The mystery of riots, prejudice, greed?" At the end, the Teen Titans were left with the thought that soon, the young people of today would inherit the world and its problems.

It is clear that the *Teen Titans* series is well populated with cultural relevancy. The subject matter explored has only been from the first run of a series of reboots that extend to this day. *Teen Titans*, as a whole, is capable of far more cultural analysis for anyone that is interested in comic book history and American culture. The importance of this comic book series has been shown through the examination of the time period in regards to other comic books, the creators of the series, the one-shot ads, and the stories within the serialization itself. The significance was also shown by examining the letters published in the *Tell it to the Titans* column. One final letter demonstrates how impactful the series was:

Dear [Editor]
You have published my letters before, but this particular one I hope is printed because I have something heavy to say about the Teen Titans and this crazy world of ours. Magazines such as Batman, Flash, Wonder Woman, or Justice League depend on some form of violence to make the stories appealing to the readers. The "new" Teen Titans offers a new phase of comics—showing the readers what a world without violence is like, The Titans, although small in number, are using what they know about violence to make the world peaceful. Maybe if the readers of the Teen Titans could transform what they read in the fictional, bi-monthly world of the Titans into ours,

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178 Ibid., 27.
we could carry their message practically and attempt in our own little way, to bring our world to peace. As the Titans are "agents" of Mr. Jupiter, we should be "agents" of the Titans and practice their mission of peace. I may sound long-winded, but I feel as a teen-ager, that something should be attempted to help this world. It's up to our generation to bring the world to Peace.

Jess Haskins Fairview, New Jersey

It is certain that *Teen Titans* had affected a certain number of readers. The letter writer understands that there is a message that should be derived from the series. Haskins believed that the “mission of peace” should be practiced and not just read about in comic books. Through examination of the crucial content within, this analysis has shown that the Silver Age comic-book series, *Teen Titans*, is culturally deeper than what the boundaries of a definition set them to be. The cultural analysis of this series can also be extended further than just this time period. Authors Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith of *The Power of Comics* suggest that although comic books have "played a less direct role in the lives of most Americans more recently, the appropriation of comic book characters and stories into major film, television, and video games franchises results in a perpetuation of indirect influence into subsequent generations." This idea needs further consideration as comic-book scholarship continues to grow. The characters and stories of *Teen Titans* have shown just the surface of what can be learned from studying Silver Age comic books.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Over the past few decades, there has been a surge of interest in the comic books. Silver Age comic books such as the *Teen Titans* have lasted through the Bronze Age (1980s), but also through to the Modern Age (1990s to present) of comic books. Comic books have expanded from just being sold in comic book stores. Not only can one buy comic books in digital form, but the stories are being adapted into major film productions, television series, and video game franchises. This means that the same comic book stories and characters that thrived in their original era are now being appropriated for a completely different generation. The influence of comic books from the Silver Age are still impacting America. The ability of comic books to incorporate real life social, political, and cultural issues has transcended the Silver Age to comic books that are being made today. That is why the critical study of Silver Age comic books is imperative to the understanding of American culture. Characters such as Captain America, Lois Lane, and the Teen Titans have reached past the Silver Age to audiences of today.

For Captain America, the political and social commentary would be a staple for the character. After the Secret Empire series, Captain America's new writers in the 1980s took a step back from social commentary that had embodied the character for so many years and instead, focused on the super heroics and less on issues the character dealt with as a United States citizen. This was because the writers felt Captain America had become too politically charged. When writer Mark Waid took over in 1995, he refocused the character to not just be a "man out of
time," but a "symbol for all times" by fixating stories around the Captain America's soldier aspect.181

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Captain America would appear again to take on political issues that arose in the United States. With issues such as national security, domestic terrorism, and civil liberties causing concern, the U.S. government passed the USA PATRIOT Act, beginning its war on terrorism. In Berkay Erdemandi's article, Marvel Comics' Civil War, Erdemandi analyses the trauma of the 2001 terrorist attacks that had resurfaced when Marvel Comics a year-long series that involved a conglomerate of superhero storylines. Between 2006 and 2007:

Marvel Comics produced the multivolume, crossover superhero storyline Civil War over a period of roughly one year between 2006 and 2007. The Civil War plot, while demonstrating similarities to events that took place around September 11, was crafted as an allegorical treatment of the American Civil War and the terrorist attacks addressing contentious post-9/11 debates over national security and civil liberties. In particular, the series critiqued the American hyper-nationalism of the time by portraying Captain America’s alienation from American patriotic ideology, which had previously been his character’s foundation.182

Captain America has been known to take on political issues and embracing certain ideology was not new. Five years after 9/11, Captain America was used as a conduit to express the thoughts and feelings of the American people who believed that the American government had gained too much power through the USA PATRIOT Act. The series marked another point in Captain America's timeline where the character reconstructed America's identity during a time of uncertainty.

Captain America's most recent endeavors have also caused an uproar. In May 2016, Nick Spencer, the newest writer for the Captain America series, successfully pitched a new idea to

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Marvel editors. The new idea was that Captain America had always been a member of the evil, former Nazi organization, Hydra. In an interview, Marvel executive editor Tom Brevoort was asked what this meant for the Marvel Universe. Brevoort said that it "means on the most fundamental level that the most trusted hero in the Marvel universe is now secretly a deep-cover Hydra operative, a fact that’s really only known to the readers and to him." For loyal follows of Captain America’s patriotic background, this would seem like a betrayal of everything that Captain America once stood for. But taking what is known about pop culture and comic books, the new Captain America needs further consideration.183

Brevoort was asked a question in regards to Hydra, the organization that Captain America now supports. Eliana Dockterman from TIME asked:

In the comic the Red Skull of Hydra talks about “criminal trespassers” who “make a mockery” of America’s borders and calls the refugees in Germany an “invading army” bringing “fanatical beliefs and crime” to Europe. Obviously, this hate speech is nothing new for the organization, but it sounds like rhetoric we’ve been hearing this election. Is that purposeful?184

Brevoort answered by stating:

We try to write comics in 2016 that are about the world and the zeitgeist of 2016, particularly in Captain America. Nick Spencer, the writer, is very politically active. He’s a Capitol Hill head and following this election very closely. So we can talk about political issues in a metaphoric way. That’s what gives our stories weight and meat to them. Any parallels you have seen to situations real or imagined, living or dead, is probably intentional but metaphorically not literally.185

Brevoort’s Hydra storyline was attempting to link recent politics on immigration and border control into a comic-book narrative. Readers who are unaware of the relationship between pop culture and comic books would see Captain America's change of allegiance as a gimmick, a way to sell more issues. This comic-book story has its roots in politics of today, as it did with the *Secret Empire* series did during Nixon's administration. Narratives such as these are nothing new

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184 Dockterman, "Marvel Editor Explains How Captain America Was a Hydra Agent All Along."
185 Ibid.
and has been the trend of most comic books for decades. The trend of having politically charged content within comic books is what drives consumers to buy them. Readers might not be able to make the direct connections between fiction and the real world because comic books are often not taken seriously compared to other media forms. But there is a level of understanding that there is something familiar in what they are reading. However, the same cannot be said of the future of the series examined in the third chapter.

After the Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane series ended, Lane went through a multitude of iterations. In the 1980s mini-series, The Man of Steal, John Byrne altered Lane to be a stronger female character by making her a more tenacious reporter. While Lane was shown to be more assertive, she retained a level of sensitivity. In Superman: The Wedding Album, a one-shot special, Lois Lane and Clark Kent were set to be married. The issue, having featured the work of all currently living artists who had ever worked on any of the previous Superman series, was published in October of 1996. The date was set to coincide with the wedding in an episode of the ABC TV series, Lois & Clark.

Despite how long it took for the two characters to be married, Lane and Kent have had one of the strongest and steadiest relationships in terms of comic-book characters. However, DC Comics made the decision to reboot its main continuity in September of 2011 and while Lane still works for the Daily Planet, she is not married to Clark Kent anymore. She has been reverted to her old self in some ways. For example, Lane continues to go after Superman as a love interest, but ignores Clark Kent. In regard to Clark Kent, she views him as a friend and a

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186 Andrew Helfer (ed), John Byrne (sc)(p), Dick Giordano (i), "Introducing -- Lois Lane!," The Man of Steel #2 (Oct., 1986), DC Comics, Inc., [DC].
respectable colleague, but is no longer aware that he is Superman, even though she has her suspicions. In the most recent iteration of Lane in New 52: Futures End, she is widely considered to be the most outstanding freelance reporter in the world.

One of the qualities of Lois Lane that makes the character unique is that she transcends the media of comic books and has appeared in TV shows and movies. Animated TV shows include *Superman: The Animated Series, Justice League*, and *Justice League Unlimited*. From 1978 through 1987, four live-action Superman movies were produced, starring Christopher Reeve as Clark Kent/Superman and Canadian actress Margot Kidder casted as Lois Lane. When casting for the role, the director and producer had a set of qualities that the actress must achieve in order to really bring the character to life. "Liberated, hard-nosed, witty and attractive," these were the qualities that the director and producer wanted and actress Kidder was chosen for the role for her ability to embody them. Director Richard Donner also believed that Kidder was able to portray the "general American concept of Lois Lane—pretty, pert and perky, intelligent and ambitious without being pushy."

The original idea of the character Lois Lane has withstood decades and cross-media transitions. The strong and independent female reporter has appeared in many different iterations. But there has not been any real change to the character. In all the examples provided, she still remains a side character to all the other DC male characters. The biggest change was when she actually married Clark Kent/Superman, but even that did not last long and was eventually rewritten. Lane might be popular, but she has never been popular for being an

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188 Matt Idelson (ed), George Pérez (sc)(p), Jesus Merino (i), "What Price Tomorrow?", *Superman* #1 (Nov., 2011), DC Comics, [DC].
intelligent and ambitious female who has had a successful career. The character, it appears, will always be in the background to her counterpart, Superman. While the relevancy of Lane as a character has waned, creators and writers made every attempt to keep the Teen Titans relevant.

After the *Teen Titans* was canceled in the 1978, writers Marv Wolfman and George Pérez revived the franchise in 1980, renaming the series *The New Teen Titans*. Previously used characters, Robin, Wonder Girl, and Kid Flash were accompanied by new characters Changeling, Cyborg, Starfire, and Raven. Wolfman and Pérez "launched the Titans into a new series with better quality printing and slicker paper in 1984. With New Titans #50, the title change reflected its maturing cast." Along with a more mature feel, the series saw the addition of several “edgy” characters. Starfire’s costume makes Wonder Girl’s appear modest and conservative. Her costume can best be described as a very thin purple bikini, but this style for female characters during this era was normal. However, sales began to falter. The series lasted until issue #130 in February of 1996.

After the series failed in 1996, writer Dan Jurgens attempted to revitalize the franchise with the help of Pérez. Even adding an entirely new cast of team and lead characters could not keep the series going. The title was canceled in 1998 with *Teen Titans* #24. However, readers "demanded the return of the original members of the team, and DC Comics obliged with *Titans* #1 in March 1999." The original core team members were joined by a slew of new members. But just like the last couple of attempts to revitalize the series, it only lasted for only fifty issues.

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Until DC resolved to remake the series again. Writer Geoff Johns and artist Mike McKone took charge of the series from 2003 until 2011. The creators decided on giving them a central base to operate from, the Titans Tower, which remained a destination for the evolving cast of characters that entered over the years.

In 1983, the animation studio Hanna-Barbera was in the midst of creating a New Teen Titans cartoon series that would feature Wonder Girl as team leader and Raven, Starfire, Cyborg, Changeling, and Kid Flash as team members. However, networks were beginning to replace adventure shows with were replaced with shows that featured 'cute' characters. This is noticeable after a "glance at the three different schedules shows the 10 new shows are predominantly filled with loveable people — a move to counter the phenomenal success of NBC's The Smurfs."

Writer for the Teen Titans comic book series, Marv Wolfman, commented on the status on the production of the animated show:

I don’t know how far the 80s Titans show went. What I remember was I went to H&B with Len Wein and Jenette Khan and I pitched both Titans and Dial ‘H’ For hero. I pitched the concepts and characters and then I went home. I THINK it was later developed by Jeff Scott and, possibly, Alan Burnett. I wasn’t consulted after the original pitch... As far as the drug spot goes, I wrote that. I assume it was on the air somewhere because I’d seen the finished animation – although I don’t have a copy. I had never seen it on TV but did up at DC.

What Wolfman was referencing was live footage from a 1984 DC Marketing Video.

Wolfman stated on The New Teen Titans #41 letter's page:

Sometime this season you'll be seeing The Titans all over the TV tube. Tying in with our special anti-drug comic, Hanna-Barbera will be unleashing a one-minute Titans anti-drug cartoon spot which should be shown on all three networks, most likely during Saturday morning. There will also be 30-second and 20-second version of the public service announcement. We received a call


The Teen Titans had now transitioned from the comic-book medium to that of television. For a largely successful animation studio such as Hannah-Barbera to take a comic-book series to the television screen at the time was big news for Teen Titans. This anti-drug cartoon spot was part of a bigger production. Co-produced by DC Comics, Inc. and the Keebler Company, a special Teen Titans book was created as part of a kit made for distribution to schools across the country.

The kit was made for President Reagan's drug awareness campaign in 1983. "Its goal was to inform schoolchildren (in particular, fourth graders) about the dangers of drug abuse." The original idea was to use one of DC's more well-known characters such as Batman or Superman, but all were being used for other projects. DC recommended to the head of the White House drug program to use their best-selling title, The New Teen Titans. Both agreed that the characters would strongly engage the age group they were targeting. The special book dealt with runaway children and combined with the Hanna Barbara anti-drug spot formed a kit that allowed the Teen Titans to reach school children across the nation.

The reason why the study of Silver Age comic books is so important is because the messages the creators embedded in their work has imprinted onto multiple generations. Visceral images combined with politically, culturally, or socially charged narrative becomes one of the best methods in transferring a message to readers. Today, teachers are using comic books and graphic novels to teach children. Teachers understand that typical methods of reading literature

196 Barbara Randall (ed), Marv Wolfman (sc), Eduardo Barreto (p), Kim DeMulder (i), "Hidden Agenda," The New Teen Titans #41 (Mar., 1988), DC Comics, Inc., [DC].
197 "Hanna-Barbera New Teen Titans," Titanstowercom RSS.
198 Ibid.
do not have the same potency as comic books. Knowing this now makes this analysis of Silver Age comic books all the more important.

Silver Age comic books have influenced generations from their time period, to generations of today. From the day they were put on store shelves, these comic books have continued to impact American culture. The influence of Silver Age comic books extends to any comic books since then, especially those that have incorporated social, political, and cultural issues of their time. Captain America is still a politically charged comic-book character. Lois Lane is still chasing Superman, but she is still a strong, independent woman that is just as recognizable, if not more so than Wonder Woman. The Teen Titans are still representing American youth in a tumultuous world. This is all because of the transition from the Golden Age to the Silver Age. The basic definition of Silver Age comic books limits them to a specific time period, but clearly through examination, their effect spans decades. The stories within these Silver Age comic books have adapted to contemporary times and now reach a broader audience through new media forms, making this research all the more important.
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Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), Petra Goldberg (c), and Artie Simek (l), "...Before the Dawn!," *Captain America and the Falcon* #175 (Jul., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 32.
Fig. 1.3.
Roy Thomas (ed), Steve Englehart (w), Sal Buscema (p), Vince Colletta (i), Linda Lessman (c), and Artie Simek (l), "Captain America Must Die!," *Captain America and the Falcon* #176 (Aug., 1974), Marvel Comics Group, 1.
Fig. 2.1.
Fig. 2.2.
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Fig. 3.1.  
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Fig. 3.3. 
Fig. 3.4.
Fig. 3.5.
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