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Representations of Women and Minorities Groups in Comics

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ABSTRACT

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by Laticia Marshall

The focus of this research is to examine the representation of women and minority groups within comic books. Comic books are a cultural product that involves many actors when it comes to changing the representations of women and minorities. Therefore, this research focused on examining not only literary works but also the actions and contributions of producers and consumers throughout the publication of American comics. In the chapters, I examined the various representations of women, African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians in comic books. To conduct my research on changing cultural productions, I used the method of textual analysis and the concept of intersectionality to examine the cultural and historical aspects within character representations in comic books. Throughout this research, I found that the actions of cultural actors determined the directions that these various representations in comic books would take. I came to understand that the representations of women and minority groups in comic books are based on concepts of the cultural norms, expectations, and even the stereotypes surrounding how these groups are regarded in American society throughout time.

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Introduction

This thesis aims to examine the historical changes in the representations of women and minority groups within the comic book medium. These changes were greatly influenced by the actions of both creators and consumers of comic books. Therefore, the representation of women and minorities in comics changed according to the changes in the preferences of the producers and consumers of comics as well. Through this research, I aimed to comprehend these varying representations and present a broad understanding of how the comic book medium exhibits prevailing cultural views of women and minority groups in the United States, which then affects the modern depictions of these groups within media. In order to achieve my research objectives, I attempted to answer the following research questions in the study:

What events have occurred that have caused representations of women and minority groups in graphic novels to change?

How do these representations reflect the culture and historical period they were created in? How do representations of women in graphic novels differ from that of men? Finally, how do representations of minority groups in graphic novels differ in comparison to that of their Caucasian counterparts? Overall, by examining women and minority representations in comic books, I hoped to gain an understanding of the roles of these groups throughout American society.

During my childhood, my father would often take my sister and me to museums to have us learn about history, which in turn caused me to develop a love of both history and anthropology; surprisingly, my love of comic books has similar origins. To supplement my love of history, I would often watch documentary series explaining the history of different concepts and ideas in American society, from presidents to the invention of Coca Cola. Eventually, I found a documentary called *Comic Book Superheroes Unmasked* playing on the History Channel. It explained the history of different comic book characters and their creations. I knew of the characters we see in movies today, like Captain America, Spider-Man, Batman, and Superman, but I never understood the details of their creation. In this documentary, people who defined the comic book medium, like the late Stan Lee, were interviewed and they explained what led them to be inspired to create their characters.

The Fantastic Four were inspired by the acts of the United States trying to land the first man on the moon in the 1960s (Kantor 2013). Years later, hearing the words of inspiring men and women like Stan Lee explain how the different aspects of American culture such as politics and advancing technology inspired the creation of these powerful characters influenced me to write this paper. If Stan Lee placed aspects of history and American culture within his creations, then social scientists could use comic books and other such mediums as time capsules for examining aspects of culture, identity, politics, and history.

During the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Marvel appealed to an older readership of comics, using more mature stories and focusing on science; therefore, there was a crossover between the supporters of the anti-war movement and the Marvel Comics audience(Lee 2013). For that reason, writer Stan Lee decided that he wanted to push himself creatively to see if he could create a character that his fanbase would hate, a product of the culture at the time (Mair 2002). However, his storytelling would lead them to love the character of Iron Man. When creating Iron Man, Stan Lee focused on making him the archetypal capitalist whose character would go against the spirit of the time and of Marvel's readership (Mair 2002). He also focused on making the character go against the sentiments of the anti-war movement by making him a weapons manufacturer (Mair 2002).

Creators did not just take from what was popular at the time or the cultural norms. In order to push themselves creatively, they also created based on what was hated or unpopular at the time. Iron Man is a rather interesting example of this as Stan Lee recognized that his readers would not adore the character as he represented aspects of American society that they disagreed with and rejected.

Furthermore, the fears of advancing technology are also shown through the origins of characters like the Incredible Hulk. Scientist Bruce Banner becomes a rage-filled monster after being in the vicinity of a nuclear bomb being tested by the United States government which he was working on. As Stan Lee was a veteran of World War II, it is not surprising that these aspects of Banner's involvement with this new technology

present a real fear of the advancement in nuclear energy, especially after the creations of the first atomic bombs. During the lifetime of many of these creators, they had seen war and technology advance at a remarkably fast rate. Therefore, it is only natural that these same creators would exhibit their concerns through the art they create.

Two creators who expressed their concerns in their art similar to Lee were artist Jack Kirby and writer Joe Simon, the creators of Captain America. Kirby and Simon, on the cover of the first issue printed on March 1, 1941, featured their new hero punching Hitler in the face to present their distaste for Hitler's political agenda. Both men were of Jewish descent and feeling morally repulsed by the actions of Nazi Germany, and they made their views known right on the cover of that first issue, voicing their view that war with Germany was unavoidable.

When the United States was undergoing a period of isolation with regard to World War II, Simon and Kirby received hate mail and threatening letters from those who viewed the comic as encouraging the war effort (Wright 2001). However, other consumers showed their evolving views and expectations of comics with Captain America's first issue selling over one million copies and fans writing to Simon and Kirby to express their appreciation. Years later, Joe Simon explained that Captain America was a conscious political creation, stating: "The opponents to the war were all quite well organized. We wanted to have our say too" (Wright 2001). With the acceptance of characters such as Iron Man, Hulk, and Captain America, consumers showed that they had new expectations of comics to not only entertain but also to express new ideas and

represent groups and ideas that are typically outside the norm of American society. As comics continue into the 21st century, other creators will follow Lee, Simon and Kirby's examples and represent women and minorities in new ways in American comics. Consumers will continue to make their expectations known through sales and communication with creators and help shape the various representations of women and minorities.

Literature Review

The literature review of this thesis focuses on three aspects related to examining women and minority groups within the medium of comic books. These include a focus on the textual analysis of case studies of literature within anthropology and other disciplines, literature examining how anthropologists in the past have examined works of fiction and media, as well as literature that examines anthropologists' and other social scientists' usage of intersectionality. These analyses are focused on how issues of race, gender, politics, and historical events affected the representations of fictional characters and of persons who represent different cultures. Armand Mattelart used textual analysis to examine American comic books featuring the Disney character Donald Duck. This analysis focused on examining the economic messages within Donald Duck comics during the Chilean revolution (Dorfman 1975). Additionally, anthropologist Catherine A. Lutz conducted a similar textual analysis to examine how Western cultures gain certain perceptions of non-Western cultures by examining how National Geographic presents these non-Western cultures within their magazine. In this analysis, Lutz examined images

presented in the magazine to gain an understanding of what they could portray about race, power and the history of non-Western cultures (Lutz 1993). Mattelart and Lutz's works are relevant to the present study as it uses similar aspects of analysis of both text and images while also attempting to uncover how certain aspects of various cultures, such as politics, race, power, and histories, are represented in media.

Historians have conducted similar textual analyses to examine the history contained within works of literature. Historian Jill Lepore examines the historical transformation of the superhero Wonder Woman by looking at how the women's suffrage movement influenced the character's creation as well as the character's creator William Morton Marston's relationships and career (Lepore 2014). Lepore examines many aspects of Marston's life ranging from taking part in women suffrage campaigns during his time at college to creating the lie detector that influences the origin of Wonder Woman's lasso of truth (Lepore 2014). Lepore simultaneously examines Marston's life along with comic panels from Wonder Woman to show how the creator's life events influenced the character (Lepore 2014). Lepore focuses on examining how historical events influenced pop culture but has not sufficiently investigated how the culture influences the people of the time. Therefore, Lepore's book is relevant because it provides an example of historical analysis of pop culture that I am also attempting which will focus on examining historical events, but I will also examine cultural changes surrounding them, unlike Lepore.

Anthropologist Mitra Emad conducted a similar analysis of changes in Wonder Woman's representation during her publication history. Emad connects these changes in Wonder Woman's depiction of transformations in American culture occurring at the time instead of simply focusing on historical events (Emad 2006). Emad finds parallels in changes in women's roles during the 1940s as many women went into the workforce for the first time; during this period, Wonder Woman appeared as a strong woman efficiently carrying soldier Steve Trevor in her arms (Emad 2006). During the war, Wonder Woman is presented as a positive symbol of feminism; however, when World War II ends, her comics become less focused on showing the character as authoritative and more focused on having her presenting conservative, feminine behavior during the 1950s and 1960s (Emad 2006). Emad's work is relevant as it provides a relevant example of anthropologists studying media by examining cultural changes through textual analysis. However, for the purpose of this study, I will be combining Emad's method of examining cultural changes and Lepore's method of incorporating the relevance of historical events within my analysis of texts.

Similarly, anthropologist Feye Ginsburg found that the evolution of media has allowed groups that are considered "other" to establish their own identities based on their stipulations such as their own cultural views. Visual media such as movies and comic books are capable of going beyond aspects like language, space and time (Ginsburg 1995). This concept of literature representing identity can be seen when anthropologist Michael Angrosino shows that the projecting and presenting identity within media can

cause people to have identity crises by recognizing others that are unlike themselves and things that they view as being strange and something that does not belong to them (Angrosino 1989). Additionally, this fear can arise from the restricted view of one domain and the need to defend one's own identity (Mach 1993). Ginsburg's work establishes a line of reasoning as to why those considered as the "other" would create media and the importance of media in the foundation of identity (1995). In comparison, the works of Angrosino and Mach are relevant as they show how the view of the "other" is established either by viewing people outside of cultures as the "other" or by the need to defend identities.

The theories related to the examination of media and literature that anthropologists and social scientists have employed range from fetishization to intersectionality. The concept of fetishization that Keane uses focuses on fetishism occurring due to what happens when different semiotic ideology interacts (Balthazar 2016).

The concept of semiotic ideology is helpful as it focuses on the beliefs of people's background about signs and how they function in the world (Balthazar 2016), thereby making Balthazar's work relevant as it enables the examination of different signs or assumptions to determine if representations of culture within literature are arbitrary or unavoidably linked to certain events and the prevailing culture. Anthropologists have addressed intersectionality and the various usages of this type of analysis to engage the examination of different aspects of culture. Anthropologist Cathrine Degnen examined how anthropology and sociology can be used together to examine aspects of

intersectionality (Degnen 2017). Degnen explained that sociology examines intersectionality by not only examining the different relationships that define a person such as race and gender but also by examining the power within organizations, philosophies, and social practices that define these relationships and their creation, as well as the differences between them (Degnen 2017).

Anthropology examines intersectionality by looking at ordinary moments and practices within everyday activities based on the idea that intersectionality occurs in the process of creating a social life, which establishes the concepts of belonging and identity. Therefore, anthropologists who investigate intersectionality examine the links formed in a person's life which allows them to establish a sense of belonging and identity that is linked together by social activities (Degnen 2017). Hence, Degnen's work is relevant for this study as it focuses on examining intersectionality that makes up a person's life, such as race and gender, as well as the different levels of power.

To provide a feminist anthropology perspective, I examined the article "Taking Stock—The Transformation of Feminist Theorizing in Anthropology" (2006) by Louise Lamphere. Lamphere's article focuses on depicting the changing aspects of feminist theorizing in anthropology. The transformations most important to my work as Lamphere describes are agency, power, identity, difference, and the gendered body. Agency focused on showing women as active agents within feminist theory and is also seen within my research on representations. The second transformation enabled me to illustrate the status of different minority groups and women as understood from my research process

(Lamphere 2006). The examination of identity and "being different" were also important themes throughout this research, enabling a wider look at agency and power in case studies. Finally, the gendered body helped examine the representations of women and minority groups within comics books, which not only included how gender and race are formed but also how they are transformed and acted upon (Lamphere 2006).

"Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post-Black Feminist Era" places emphasis on post-black feminist ideas of intersectionality with the removal from social science as well as Black women being knowledge creators and subjects of research. First, a single definition of intersectionality does not exist in social science; therefore, part of the article examines how to define the concept of intersectionality.

The author incorporates the work of other social scientists which explain intersectionality is not a clear, specific idea but as an ideograph or a term that stands for a larger conceptual necessity. Ideograph intersectionality acts as a term that accounts for a large amount of scholarly work which aims to understand the oppressive forces that restrained the lives of Black women and other oppressed groups. Other social scientists, such as Crenshaw, describe intersectionality as an idea to describe the "intersecting" or co-determinative forces that racism, sexism, and classism play on the lives of oppressed peoples.

The author explains that it is necessary to view intersectionality through both aspects in order to maintain the reliability of research on this concept (Floyd 2012). However, the

author also explains that the one flaw of viewing intersectionality in this manner is that researchers often do so without theorizing the term and its possible applications. Therefore, when conducting my research, I used intersectionality as both an ideograph and as the idea described by Crenshaw. By doing this, I was able to theorize further about the applications of intersectionality during the writing of my thesis based on the case studies.

Nevertheless, not all anthropologists view intersectionality in this manner. Some anthropologists view intersectionality as an ideograph which is a term that is meant to stand for a greater essential ideological approach (Floyd 2012). The work done by Crenshaw examines the relationship between race, class, and gender when examining the oppression of Black women. When examining intersectionality, Crenshaw relates it to a street with intersections, one street presenting race and the other presenting gender, and an African American woman experiencing intersectionality in her everyday life stands at the intersection of both of these streets. The concept of intersectionality is helpful in explaining how race, gender, sex, ethnicity, ability, body image, sexual identity, and tribal identity and culture interact to affect the views of women and minorities as portrayed in media.

Other anthropologists also expanded on the concept of intersectionality. McCall reviewed multiple studies using intersectionality and identified three approaches: intra-categorical, anti-categorical, and inter-categorical (Walby 2012). The intra-categorical approach focuses on specific social groups at ignored points of the connection to exhibit a

complication of experiences by certain groups. Next, the anti-categorical approach focuses on a methodology that critiques methodical categories and considers the stabilization of categories to be problematic when examining social relationships that may change. Last, the inter-categorical approach takes up existing diagnostic categories to record relationships of inequality in social groups and the changing constructions of inequality (Walby 2012).

Additionally, the inter-categorical approach is helpful when examining larger power structures that could create inequality. For the purpose of this study, I will be combining Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality with the anti-categorical approach to enable me to examine both the historical past as well as the possible future of women and minority representations in comics, as the concepts of gender and race are rather dynamic categories that have undergone significant change over time. To summarize, intersectionality within the context of this research is defined as examining the multiple aspects that transform gender and race over time such as history, agency, power, identity, and the gendered body and how these aspects interact to redefine gender and race throughout time.

Overall, within this literature review, I have examined literature that has shown the past usage of textual analysis and historical analysis within anthropology, other social sciences, and the humanities. I examined literature that focuses on how anthropologists use collected works to examine aspects of culture, especially the concept of identity. Last,

I examined the theory of intersectionality and how social scientists, including anthropologists, define this theory and its usages.

Methodology

To answer the research questions, I utilized historical texts, comics, digital and print news sources and analyzed them using historical and textual analysis to investigate the representations of women and minority groups. Additionally, I examined how these changes in representations in graphic novels occur by investigating historical events and character representations throughout multiple periods of American history. The sampling for this project consists of 36 texts for analysis from different periods, ranging from the 1940s to the early 2000s.

The sampling strategy of this project focuses on ensuring adequate examinations of women and minority groups from the periods under study. Therefore, the media examined represents different minority groups as well as depict women in various roles. To ensure the adequate representation of minority groups, the following groups were taken into account: African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, and Latin Americans.

These racial groups were then divided into case studies for the minority groups being studied to ensure that both men and women are equally represented within this project. The case studies chosen are used to represent a certain period in comics, to show changes in the two variables of study, historical events and changes in representation. However, since traditional methods such as interviews or participant observation were not plausible for this type of project, media are examined to show how creators such as writers and

artists affected the changes of character representation of women and minority groups over time. Through this thesis, the following research questions were answered:

What events have occurred that have influenced the representation of women and minority groups in graphic novels to change?

How do these representations reflect the culture and historical period they were created in?

How do representations of women in graphic novels differ from that of men? How do representations of minority groups in graphic novels differ in comparison to that of their Caucasian counterparts?

To answer these questions, I addressed the theoretical frameworks that define the present study. The theories and methods that define my research are historical analysis, literary analysis, and the theory of intersectionality.

When conducting the analysis of texts, I focused on connecting aspects of history and culture to each of the texts examined. Often, this was done by looking through the comics to find features of the periods of the publication. This would often include looking for mentions of historical events or cultural trends that may have occurred during the period of publication. To illustrate, when analyzing a comic published in the United States during the 1940s, I would often look for mentions of World War II through the usage of either propaganda or ad material relating to war bonds in the text or in the artwork.

Throughout the texts examined, these features would often appear in the dialogue and the artwork. Since comics are a significantly visual medium, my analysis focuses on both

these aspects. This analysis focused on a deep reading of the texts to acquire how the character representations defined how women and minority groups are viewed in America. This reading mostly involved two steps. First, the texts were read once to get familiar with the material; throughout the initial reading, notes were taken to summarize all relevant story material and how the characters within the book were represented. The second reading focuses on specific word panels and artwork that provided the relevant material for analysis. The process by which I evaluated if a text or image was relevant for analysis is if it presented features of past cultural trends, historical events or presented a specific view on women or minority groups. I realize that my interpretations of these texts and images could be different based on my background and knowledge of the comic book medium and could then be interpreted differently. Last, when studying the creators, I would do so through sources such as analyzing interviews on the internet, books, and documentary footage.

In conclusion, historical analysis, textual analysis, and the theory of intersectionality are used to analyze the various text in my thesis. In this section, I have provided examples of how I intend to use these concepts and how I have attempted to adapt them to my own study. The method used to examine the particular changes in events, audience, and representation of characters through these three concepts have been established along with the definitions of the aspects I am investigating.

Overall, by examining women and minority representations in comic books, I hoped to gain an understanding of the specific roles of these groups throughout American

society. Within the chapters of this thesis, I have found that politics, gender roles, concepts of power and the evolution of media have all influenced the representation of women and minorities in comics. Through the analysis, we have come to understand that some of these influencers have had more impact over others. However, throughout these chapters, some—if not all— of these factors will influence the representations of women and minorities in comic books. Nevertheless, one factor remained consistent throughout the analysis of the various groups, regardless of whether these were representations of women, African Americans, or Native Americans; the history of these groups within America played a major role in media representations. I have found that while some minority groups have been able to maintain their presence in American society through political and social movements, others have been rendered invisible.

In the following chapters, I will examine the role of women in comics by examining two of the most well-known women characters in comic books: Lois Lane and the very first female superhero Wonder Woman. The chapters following this analysis will focus on examining the political intersectionality of African Americans within comics and the influence of the blaxploitation in the 1970s. The subsequent chapter will focus on the representation of Latino characters and their diverse portrayals. The succeeding chapter will focus on the representation of Native Americans, and how the creation of their comic book version enables Native cultures to no longer be relegated to America's past. The final analysis is on the representation of Asian Americans and how America's politics and film stars like Bruce Lee influenced these representations within comics. To

understand all of these representations of gender and race, the factors of influence that inspired these writers and artists need to be analyzed as well.

Creators and the Influences of their Art

In this examination of the representations of gender and race in comic books, many creators will be shown to have helped shape these cultural representations through their works. Although this research focuses on analyzing their works, the backgrounds of these creators who helped shape these representations are useful in understanding the sources of certain portrayals of gender and race. When looking at some of the earliest representations of race within comics, nearly 30 years before the creation of Superman, cartoonist George Joseph Herriman would help present a different view of race to 20th-century audiences. Although Herriman would be recognized in his field for his popular comic strip *Krazy Kat*, the comic that actually presented a different aspect of race in the 1900s was *Musical Mose.*

Herriman's work on *Musical Mose* illustrated how race was a major influence in Herriman's life. Although presenting himself as Caucasian, Herriman was known to be a man of mixed-race heritage. During the 1900s, the United States was a heavily racially divided society, and Herriman's mixed-race background would have made him a social outcast. Although *Musical Mose* mostly quite often addresses Herriman's fears of being a social outcast based on race by having the main character hide his race, his popular comic strip *Krazy Kat* also worked on similar ideas. In one issue, Kat is shown to have his hair turned white and this change inspires Kat's long-time love Ignatz to love him. However,

when Kat returns to his unusual dark fur, Ignatz returns to hating Kat and throwing bricks at him. Herriman's art reflected his struggle of coming from a mixed background and constantly having to deal with the possible consequences of his identity being exposed and the hatred he may face. In comparison, creators such as William Moulton Marston presented a view of gender that he believed should be the ideal future for women in United States society.

The creator of Wonder Woman, William Moulton Marston, created one of the first female superheroes during the period of World War II. Marston's focus on presenting Wonder Woman as powerful, feminine, and sexual was considered controversial for the time. Wonder Woman's characteristics were influenced by multiple aspects of his life, both personal and professional. Marston's personal life was considered rather unusual, especially for the 1940s.

Marston lived with his wife Elisabeth and Olive Byrne who was the couple's polygamous life partner. Byrne appears to be the inspiration for Wonder Woman's appearance, her famous bracelets being inspired by the bracelets that Byrne would often wear. Additionally, the idea to create a new female superhero came from Marston's wife Elisabeth who asked her husband to make his hero someone who would fight with love like a woman instead of brute force. Marston's professional life also played a major role in his creation of Wonder Woman. Besides his creation of Wonder Woman, Marston was known for his invention of the systolic blood pressure test which would be a major component of the modern lie detector. Elisabeth also played a role in this invention by

helping her husband observe the connection between emotion and the rise and fall of blood pressure. His connection to the early lie detector would be influential in creating one of Wonder Woman's most well-known weapons, the lasso of truth.

Finally, throughout his life, Marston expressed that he believed that women had certain attributes that separated them from men and, at times, even made them better in certain situations. For instance, due to his work in psychology, Marston viewed women as being more honest than men in some instances and capable of faster and more precise work. Inspired by these views, Marston tried his best to present how he understands gender within *Wonder Woman* as shown by this statement in *The American Scholar* in 1943: "Not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, and power. Not wanting to be girls, they don't want to be tender, submissive, peace-loving as good women are. Women's strong qualities have become despised because of their weakness. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman" (American Scholar 1943).

Through his creation of Wonder Woman, Marston combined the traditional norms of feminine behavior with the power and force that women sought when attempting to advance their rights during this period. He merged traditional femininity with power to create a character that would help redefine gender for years to come. Herriman and Marston both helped refine major aspects of race and gender within the early periods of comic book publishing. Throughout this paper, the contributions of other such creators to

this art form in changing racial and gender norms will be presented, especially illustrated by the contributions of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster who played significant roles in redefining gender in comics with the character of Lois Lane.

Chapter 1: Lois Lane and Wonder Woman: Presenting Changes in Gender

The 1940s saw not only the rise of the Second World War but also the rise of DC comics. At the time of this rise, the comic book medium was going through the golden age of comics which lasted from 1938 to 1950. According to comic historians, the golden age of comics began with the publication of *Action Comics* #1 which introduced the comic book character Superman (Babric 2013). Therefore, it only fits that Lois Lane's introduction into the cultural landscape and comic book history is within Action Comics number one. One year later, in 1941, the first female superhero Wonder Woman was created. Although these cultural icons were created in the early 1940s, both have represented the vast roles that women have had in American society. From the 1940s to the modern age, both of these characters represented the different aspects of gender and how gender is viewed throughout American history and culture.

Throughout history, Lois Lane's and Wonder Woman's representations reflected the changing roles of women in American society and the evolution of gender. When they were first created, the characters' representations were influenced by creators who were, in turn, influenced by the media of the day, financial gain, and personal relationships. By the 1950s, gender representations once again underwent changes to reflect society's conservative views and be ultimately influenced by government intervention, flawed research, and an industry that was self-regulating to maintain itself. In the 1960s, gender representation's chaotic power was removed from the social resistance.

In the 1970s, Wonder Woman's character underwent two changes in representation. The first focused on representing gender through the material culture of fashion as based on financial gain and the interpretation of feminism. The second focused on addressing anti-feminism but was ultimately influenced by social movements and economic downfalls. Finally, from the 1980s to the early 2000s, gender was established to be completely represented by the body, especially in Wonder Woman comics, combining the sexuality presented in the early 1940s representations with hyper-femininity that focused on portraying physical strength by depicting a powerful, more muscular body in comic book artwork. These changes in representations are outlined in table below (Table 1). To understand how these changes, occur and what Lois Lane and Wonder Woman stood for, the origins of their creations need to be examined as well.

Table 1: Changes in Women's Representations in Comics Timeline

Gender Influences 1940s	Gender Influences 1950s and 1960s	Gender Influences 1970s	Gender Influences 1980-1990s	Gender Influences 2000s
Gender influenced by financial gain, media and patriotism. Presented by removing previous gender expectations.	Gender influenced by business and government interventions. Gender presentations focused on portraying traditional gender expectations.	Gender influenced by economic pressures and the social influence of feminism. Gender presented through material culture of fashion, fighting anti-feminism villains, and addressing feminist narrative.	Gender during this period was presented through the body showing extreme femininity and power.	Gender representations continue from the 1980s and 1990s and still reminiscent of the sexuality of the 1940s pin up girl but, also maintains the representation of physical power being portrayed by the body.

The Creation of Comic Book Icons

To get a better understanding of Lois Lane's and Wonder Woman's portrayals in the 1940s, the factors that influenced the creation of these characters need to be understood. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created Lois Lane, and they made multiple revisions to the character before Actions Comic number one was handed over to DC Comics. First, the decision to make Lois Lane a reporter was influenced by the current films that featured characters of female reporters who were popular at the time. This creative decision was

shown to be critical throughout Lane's character history and these depictions, at times, defined her heavily. This creative decision resulted in Lois Lane's purpose and her life being completely different from most women in both literature and reality in the 1940s. Film scholar Deac Rossell explained the significance of this choice, by stating that newspaper films were the only genre where an actress could portray a role where she was equal to men (Hanley 2016). The character of Torchy Blane played by Glenda Farrell, who appeared in multiple films from 1937 onwards, majorly influenced Lois Lane's creators.

During a time when working women were still rare, and those who did work being in careers with little or no advancement, Siegel, and Shuster illustrated Lois as a woman who was determined to advance her career and become a successful reporter. To do this, Siegel and Shuster eliminated a common constraint for women from obtaining their career goals; they made Lois Lane completely single. This aspect of her character made Lois absolutely unique, especially in the late 1930s and 1940s. Even the characters whom Siegel and Shuster took inspiration from to create the character could not escape this social expectation of marriage. Many of the women in the newspaper films in the 1930s were either married or in meaningful relationships with marriage and domestic responsibilities an imminent expectation in their future.

These expectations even expanded to Torchy Blane, the main inspiration for Lois's character, who was also shown to be betrothed in her films" Therefore, unlike Lois, she could not just be a newspaperman; she had to have one part of herself rooted in the

conventional womanly spheres of matrimony (Hanley 2016). At the time, marriage and domestic life for women also implied that a woman would lose a certain degree of control over her life. Women like Lois or Torchy may outsmart or disobey the Clark Kents in their lives but once they end up wearing a wedding ring, their lives and the expectations of the lives they would live would be different. Lois did not have to deal with these attachments within her stories. Lois Lane's creation is outlined by the media influence of the time and her creators' view of what women could be capable of when removed from social expectations. Similar aspects of keeping the character removed from traditional societal expectations are also seen in the creation of Wonder Woman.

When Wonder Woman was created in 1941, women did not have many rights; however, her creator, William Moulton Marston, believed that women in the 1940s were growing in power, and he wanted to create a character to present this very change. Marston did this by presenting his view of power embodied in Wonder Woman's character. Marston wanted her to be presented as strong and self-sufficient (Lepore 2014). He also wanted her to be against war but fight for democracy; in fact, Marston's portrayal of Wonder Woman focused on her being extremely patriotic, especially after seeing the introduction of Captain America in Timely Comics which would later come to be known as Marvel Comics. Just like Captain America, Wonder Woman is also dressed in the American flag; however, to sell as many copies of the comic as possible, they portrayed Wonder Woman wearing as little clothing as possible.

Like Siegel and Shuster, Marston found inspiration from mainstream media and asked his artist to draw Wonder Woman like a Vargas Girl. Vargas girls were pin-up girl drawings made by Alberto Vargas that would appear each month in the Esquire magazine that Marston wrote for at the time (Lepore 2014). The influence of the Vargas girls is within some of the first artwork created for Wonder Woman, and it explains why the character is the way that she is in the 1940s to the present day.

Before creating Wonder Woman, Marston was hired by DC Comics as an educational consultant by comic book publisher Max Gaines. Gaines hired him based on an interview where Marston discussed the unfulfilled potential of comic books (Richard 1942). Gaines later gave Marston permission to publish Wonder Woman; by that point, Marston had gained inspiration from the women in his life.

His wife's input helped him decide to make his creation a woman and his lover Olive Byrne, who lived with the couple in a polyamorous relationship, inspired the bracelets that Wonder Woman wears. Marston's creation was a woman as powerful as Superman, as patriotic as Captain America, and who fight for democracy like any man in World War II, but she was also presented as being suggestive and scantily clad like a 1940s pin-up girl to appeal to the male readership. However, inspired by the women in Marston's life, he and Gaines sought new potential in comics. This chapter will examine the characters of Lois Lane and Wonder Woman through textual and visual analysis of the comics they appear in. Since both these characters have rather extensive histories within comic books,

I will be analyzing them through the different decades, ranging from the 1940s to the 2000s.

Lois Lane and Wonder Woman in the 1940s: Removing Restraints

To examine Lois Lane and Wonder Woman's representations during the 1940s, I analyzed stories that provided an explicit portrayal of their characters that showed not only their characterization but also the difference in the representation of women within comics at the time.

When examining Lois's character, I found that three main themes surrounded her character in the 1940s: her devotion to her career, her relationship with Superman and her professional rivalry with Clark Kent. The first significant theme, Lois's devotion to her career, prominently comes from the inspirational women in the newspaper films that her creators enjoyed; additionally, there is a historical significance in her representation as women in this time began working in positions that were previously dominated by men due to the onset of World War II. During the war, propaganda posters and other materials encouraged women to do their part for the war, with images of Rosie the Riveter and recruitment posters aimed at getting women to join the workforce to help their country and the war effort. Since superhero comics at this time were a form of war propaganda, Lois becomes an excellent example of women helping their country by taking on traditionally male jobs. Some of the stories analyzed will provide an insight into Lois's character, as well as the culture and history surrounding her background.

Lois's characterization is formed in the *Superman* issue #58 "Lois Lane Loves Clark Kent" published in 1949. As the issue begins, we see Lois fainting in front of a moving truck while thinking about how wonderful Superman is and is subsequently saved by him. This story signals romantic plotlines in Lois's storylines. As the story continues, Lois visits a doctor who tells her that the reason she is unwell is due to a broken heart caused by Superman not loving her. The doctor then tells her to transfer her love to a normal man like Clark Kent. However, Lois does not like the idea as she thought Clark to be meek and refers to him as a washout. After Lois invites Clark to dinner and he saves her from a purse thief, Lois changes her views about Clark and thinks of him as quick thinking and observant.

However, Lois ends up breaking up with Clark after he publishes a story about Superman before Lois and harms her career. Lois ends her relationship with Clark as she did not want to give up being rivals in their careers. We understand that Lois Lane's representation in the 1940s maintains a devotion to her career and rivalry with Clark. This is especially shown in the panel when Clark asks Lois to sacrifice her career in order to be with him.

Lois flat out refuses. While these events were simply part of a scheme by Clark to have Lois break up with him so that she would not find out that he was Superman, it is clear by this choice of plot that it was not just Lois but also the people around her who understood how important her career is to her.

This devotion to her career is especially finalized in this era with Lois's statement that reporting is her first love and Superman and Clark are her second and third loves. This very clearly exemplifies Lois's willingness to not conduct herself within conventional feminine behavior at the time to protect her career goals, showing her as once again moving beyond the stereotypes of women in media. Although Lois Lane may at times play the role of a damsel in distress, unlike for many women in the 1940s, her career is what defines her.

The eighth issue of All-Star Comics introduces Wonder Woman and her home Paradise Island. In the initial pages, we see the origin of the amazons as told by Wonder Woman's mother Hippolyte, queen of the Amazons. Hippolyte describes how Hercules enslaved the Amazons after he defeated her and took her magic girdle by cheating. In this story, the origin of Wonder Woman's bracelets is revealed as well. Aphrodite, the patron goddess of the Amazons, was upset at them for being tricked by Hercules and his men and refused to help them at first. Eventually, after the Amazons fought for their freedom again, and Hippolyte appealed to Aphrodite for aid, she agreed to do so but her assistance came with two conditions: the Amazons had to leave the man-made world and create their own and, second, they had to always wear the bracelets created by the men who enslaved them, as a reminder to them to never again be trapped by men. In the first issue of Sensation Comics, we see Wonder Woman helping Steve Trevor return to the United States, and representations of gender within Wonder Woman start to become more

pronounced. In this issue, Wonder Woman is shown to have the expected feminine behavior even though she is strong.

In one panel, she is shown to be window shopping and looking at a dress and a frock, and these actions were conveyed with the narrator stating: “Always the woman an outsider when she comes to the United States as shown by two older women describing her as a “hussy” and “brazen”. Furthermore, Diana’s clothing marks her as “other” Wonder Woman comics in the 1940s have this interesting dichotomy of showing Diana doing what can be considered traditionally feminine but also showing Wonder Woman fighting crime and displaying her physical strength in a world dominated by men.

As the publication continues, Wonder Woman, like Lois Lane at this period, uses stereotypical ideas about women to achieve their goals. In her comics, Wonder Woman’s goals include being able to help the United States soldiers and Steve Trevor without revealing her secret identity. In one comic, Diana appears to be frightened and weaker than she is by pretending not to be capable of breaking the ropes her captors used to tie her up. Moreover, like Lois, Diana would even pretend to faint or be clumsy to allow herself to protect others from danger.

In comparison to Lois Lane who is often restricted within her career by the social expectations of women, Wonder Woman is shown to be literally constrained by bondage to put into a weakened state. In issue four of Sensation Comics, this weakness is present, and it harkens back to the origins of the Amazons and their experience of slavery under Hercules and his men. In this issue, Wonder Woman’s weakness is very clearly depicted

as when someone binds her bracelets together, she will become just as weak as the Amazons were when Hercules and the Greeks enslaved them. This leads to another theme in the comics wherein Wonder Woman or other women in the issue were depicted in some state of bondage, causing her to lose her powers temporarily. Wonder Woman's weakness says a lot about how her creator William Moulton Marston viewed women and their abilities. When Wonder Woman is bound in chains in her comics, it causes her not only to lose her powers but to become just as weak as the Amazons were when they were in bondage. In other words, she is as vulnerable as a person who is enslaved and, therefore, her agency is removed.

Wonder Woman's artist in the 1940s, Harry G. Peter, often filled in for feminist cartoonist Lou Rogers who portrayed women in bondages, trying to break free from their bonds (Lepore 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising that Wonder Woman would often be depicted in the same manner. Both Rogers and Peter's depictions of women focus on them removing physical chains that were meant to represent different cultural or social oppression.

The woman in Roger's drawing is removing bonds that say, "politics is not a place for women." Wonder Woman is removing chains that are attributed to prejudice, prudery, and man's superiority. All these aspects of American culture and expectations of women act as limitations on women's agency and, therefore, Marston, Peter, and Rogers's view of women's powers and weaknesses were the same and similarly represented through Wonder Woman. Just like the Amazons, no matter how powerful a woman is, her power

can be lessened or even completely removed because of the limits on her agency based on cultural expectations and the perceived ideals of gender norms.

Finally, in her civilian identity as Diana Prince, Wonder Woman is presented as having two occupations that allowed women to help with the United States war effort: a nurse and, later, a secretary. In other words, Marston also presented Wonder Woman as a portrayal of how women should ideally behave during World War II, even if they could not fight in the warlike the superheroine. Similarly, Lois Lane is represented as being in a profession typically dominated by men during the war, alluding to women becoming involved in male professions during World War II. Throughout the 1940s, both Lois Lane and Wonder Woman represent gender as being defined by removing the restraints from social and cultural norms. Both Lois Lane and Wonder Woman maintained their identity as women by acting within social norms in certain contexts.

For Lois Lane, these contexts fell in times of danger and for Wonder Woman, these contexts included performing traditionally feminine activities such as window shopping right after displaying a feat of strength. However, in other contexts, they subverted traditional gender norms; Lois did so through her ambitions and wanting to be defined not as a wife or mother but as a reporter. Wonder Woman redefined gender not only through her display of physical prowess equivalent to Superman but also through the presentation of her body. Wonder Woman's body in the 1940s presented her as having all the unrestricted sexuality of a 1940s pin-up girl but also gave her unrestrained movement to freely exercise her agency through her physical strength. Towards the end of the

1940s, the representations of gender as depicted by Wonder Woman and Lois Lane changed because of the shift in conservative values within United States culture after World War II; comics were considered as a cause of juvenile delinquency.

Lois Lane and Wonder Woman in the 1950s and 1960s

By the 1950s and 60s, comics underwent a significant change due to social pressure and changes in the media. As the war ended, superhero comics saw a decline in popularity because they were typically being used as propaganda during World War II. Furthermore, comic books at the time moved towards genres of horror and crime. The major event in comic book history that affected the representations of Lois Lane and Wonder Woman in the 1950s was the publication of the book *Seduction of the Innocent* by Dr. Fredic Wertham which made allegations that comic books are harmful to the youth as they depicted images of violence, crime, and deviant sexuality (Junge 2017).

Because of the moral panic over juvenile delinquency during this time combined with the accusations made in Wertham's book, comic book publishers had to testify before Congress about the effects of comics on young people (Junge 2017). One such publisher was William Gaines, who published the satirical comic *Mad* and was the son of DC editor Max Gaines, the man who accepted Marston's proposal to publish Wonder Woman. William Gaines testified on behalf of comic book publishers before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in 1954 in response to Wertham's book and was asked the question "What is the limit to what is put within comics?"; Gaines responded, "Only within the bounds of good taste." Based on Gaines's testimony, Congress decided

that while comics were not responsible for juvenile delinquency, comic book publishers still needed to self-regulate the content in their publications.

Facing the threat of going out of business, comic book publishers decided to create a policy to police themselves called the Comics Code Authority, which set certain rules about comic book content. Because of the backlash that came out of Wertham's book, horror and crime comics ceased to exist and DC Comics devoted themselves wholly to the Comics Code Authority. Consequently, their stories focused on making their comic books as wholesome and inoffensive as possible. After these industry-changing events, the Golden Age of comics came to an end, leading into the Silver Age of comics. With this new age of comics, different representations of Lois Lane and Wonder Woman came about as well, and these representations would only end in the 1970s.

Wertham's book also makes certain accusations against Wonder Woman's comics, describing how he viewed Wonder Woman to be exhibiting lesbianism as she lived on an island with only women. The suggestion of lesbianism being exhibited in any sort of media was quite controversial in the early 1950s. Wertham also did not like over-sexualized depictions of women within comic books, and for the period in question, Wonder Woman's representation was quite sexual. Wertham did not simply state these aspects of comics that he disliked within his book; he provided arguments by analyzing the panels within the comic books that he found objectionable. However, a study conducted by library scientist Carol Tilley found that Wertham controlled, exaggerated, compromised, and concocted evidence for his book. According to Tilley, Wertham

distorted stories and used misrepresentative samples of young readers as all his samples had law-breaking backgrounds, and Wertham manipulated his subjects' statements (Tilley 2012). Nevertheless, with Wertham's findings and pressure from Congress, the comic book industry regulated itself to ensure that comics did not contain inappropriate subject matter. Because of the new comics code authority policy, Wonder Woman's representation had to change so that her character could survive the upcoming decades; to modify the characters, DC Comics chose to change the stories in similar ways for Lois Lane and Wonder Woman, mainly by making their stories focus on romance.

In the silver age of comics, Lois Lane's character moves from being a devoted career woman, who puts her ambitions before traditional gender expectations of marriage, to quite the reverse. In this period, Lois does minimal reporting, even though she was promoted to being a full-time reporter by the end of the 1940s. At the time, Superman editor Mort Weisinger, hoping to get new ideas for the Superman series of comics, would often ask local children what they wanted to see; from his conversations with these children, he developed the idea of giving Lois Lane her own series. Due to the feedback that Weisinger received, Lois was given a series called *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane* in March 1958. At that time, only two female characters had their series in the superhero genre, Lois Lane and Wonder Woman. During this decade, Lois Lane outsold Wonder Woman, often by triple sales numbers.

Lois Lane's series in the 1950s had two main plots: learning Superman's secret identity and getting Superman to marry her. One possible reason for this shift in

representation of Lois character during the 1950s was that women had to go back to traditional feminine paths of being housewives and mothers after World War II as they lost their jobs when the men came home from the war; the country was also pretty conservative about gender roles during this time. Therefore, Lois's stories did not focus on her getting a big story for the front page; instead, it became more of a romance comic. Lois Lane's series also showed another change in the representation of gender by showing the ideal portrayal of beauty at the time.

In *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane* # 5 titled the "Fattest Girl in Metropolis," the plot of the story involves Lois gaining 100 pounds after being hit by a growth ray. Lois, in this issue, is an overweight woman, and the issue focuses on Lois trying to hide her identity from Superman because she's ashamed of her weight gain. Throughout the comic, there are examples of Lois and other overweight women being considered unattractive. To illustrate this, when Lois asks an overweight neighbor to help her out with some clothes that would fit her, she explains that she shops at the "Fat Girl's Shoppe." Furthermore, the narration of the comic refers to Lois as "chubby" and "pudgy" multiple times.

At one point, Superman calls Lois "quite a load" even though he has super strength. There is also a moment where Lois receives a ride to work but her weight causes the car to get a flat tire. Lois's plan to hide her identity is once again thwarted by Superman who explains that he turned Lois fat to hide her identity from a killer. Overall, the issue ends with Lois thinking that "No one would ever love a fat girl."

The majority of this issue focuses on making Lois and other overweight women out to be unattractive. Although Lois only gained 100 pounds, her overweight body is continuously presented as destructive, as shown by Lois's clothing ripping when she gets up in the morning which should be expected based on her significant weight gain. As the issue progresses, Lois's overweight body is constantly characterized as destructive when she gets into a car and the car breaks down. The only people portrayed in this issue as being overweight, unattractive and having destructive bodies are women. Finally, when analyzing this issue, I found that the language within the issue changed based on Lois's weight. When the reader first sees Lois's weight gain, the narrator of the comic refers to her as Lois "Chubby" Lane.

Moreover, in this issue, Lois's weight is referenced as being a weighty problem. In conclusion, I found that this issue represents the difference in gender roles by showing the ideal notions of beauty in the 1950s. Superman and the men around her no longer found Lois attractive due to her weight gain. Additionally, Lois did not find herself attractive either and, by the end of the issue, still believed that an overweight woman could not be loved. Lois, in this issue based on her weight gain, is no longer viewed as a woman but as a person with a destructive body.

This issue of *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane* speaks less about Lois's character and more about the culture prevalent during this representation of Lois Lane's creation. Based on this issue, we understand that the 1950s culture presented an ideal version of feminine behavior and beauty where women focused on marriage and beauty instead of focusing

on their careers, as Lois did in the 1940s. Furthermore, the context of gender also changes because the physical presentation of gender focuses on female bodies having slender bodies, making them attractive and feminine rather than destructive. Wonder Woman's representation of gender also underwent changes in the 1950s and 1960s.

Romantic subplots end up defining Wonder Woman's adventures even when she is fighting villains within her comics. However, in the 1960s, we see how the Wonder Woman bracelets limit her strength in some way. Issue 160 starts with the villainess Cheetah and her minions attacking Wonder Woman and Steve. Continuing a theme from the 1950s, Steve decides to try to fight Cheetah's minions himself to impress Wonder Woman into marrying him with his strength. After Wonder Woman defeats Cheetah, the villainess uses Steve Trevor to get back at Wonder Woman by hypnotizing him into loving her. Seeing this, Wonder Woman does not defend herself from Cheetah's attack and instead starts to cry. Wonder Woman is then tied up in her lasso forcing to her obey Cheetah. However, when Wonder Woman is forced by Cheetah to remove her bracelets, she becomes violent and rageful. The bracelets, according to the narrator, bind Wonder Woman into a lifetime of service and submission, and she goes into a violent and destructive rage without them.

I find Wonder Woman's representation of gender in the 1960s through the magnitude of a woman's power as chaotic. The representation of Wonder Woman's power in this issue could be a response to women trying to obtain more power for themselves during the Feminist Movement in the 1960s (Emad 2006). In the past, women had to use their

power restrictively based on traditional gender roles and societal expectations; in the 1960s, women in America were trying to break those ideas of power and use it without limits. Therefore, Wonder Woman, in this issue, presents a kind of fear of women not exercising power in a passive and kind state. Wonder Woman's rationality and compassion only returns once Steve Trevor places her bracelets back on her wrists thereby subverting the power that Wonder Woman initially presented in the 1940s that showed women's strength in the 1940s limited by society and gender norms. Conversely, in the 1960s Wonder Woman's gender is not presented as being a symbol of what William Moulton Marston viewed as power and sexuality in the 1940s; instead, this issue shows a portrayal of fear of unlimited feminine power by having Wonder Woman's bracelets removed.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the representations of gender as depicted by Lois Lane and Wonder Woman have once again changed contexts. Due to government and business influences, the Lois Lane and Wonder Woman's characters focused on portraying traditional femininity. They pursued the traditional path of marriage by having romance be the focus in their comic book plots. Furthermore, in comparison, the gender restraints broken in the 1940s reappear and are expressed by ideals of beauty and fear of chaotic power. In the 1950s, gender was expressed through limits; for Lois Lane, her representation was focused on limiting the body to, of course, be considered a woman but also not destructive. Wonder Woman's representation in comparison focuses on the limitation of power in order to not be chaotic. As Wonder Woman advanced into the

1970s, gender representations once again underwent changes to adapt to the emergence of the feminist movement.

In the 1970s, Wonder Woman undergoes significant changes in her gender representation. During the 1960s and 1970s, due to the emergence of the feminist movement in the United States, comic book writer Denny O'Neil set out to make Wonder Woman's character appear much more realistic in order to improve DC Comic sales. However, O' Neil was also a supporter of the feminist movement, and he believed that making the character more realistic would appeal to the readers now involved in the feminist movement and enable him to show his support through his work. At the start of this new Wonder Woman series, fans, mostly young women, wrote that they liked the new direction in Wonder Woman's story as she became more relatable without her powers. In comparison, older fans and feminist readers also expressed their views in the DC Comics letter pages, stating that the new series removed the central aspects of the character that Marston established, thereby making the series not feel like a Wonder Woman series at all. Danny O' Neil set out to gain new readers from the Feminist Movement, establish his support of feminism and increase DC Comics sales; however, by the end of his Wonder Woman run, he would achieve none of these.

The first story of this new Wonder Woman series begins with Wonder Woman's boyfriend being accused of murder. Steve is charged with murdering a man named Alex Block who is attending a party that Steve is holding for a friend of his.

During this party, Alex Block continuously insults Wonder Woman, stating the following: “Hey! Know something muscles maid? You ain’t human. You’re a freak”. Wonder Woman’s strength in the early 1970s, solely based on this statement, not only removed her from the context of being a woman but also dehumanized her.

When trying to create Wonder Woman as a more realistic character to try to appeal to a feminist audience, Denny O’ Neil takes this well-known figure of female power and makes her strength a subject of ridicule, and that makes it present her as less than a woman and human. This new representation of gender can be seen further during Steve Trevor’s trial for murder, where Wonder Woman’s strength is used to call Steve’s effectiveness as a soldier into question as well as his masculinity. The prosecutor explains that Wonder Woman has saved Steve hundreds of times as well as saved the world countless times regardless of whether Steve tried to help her or not. The prosecutor makes the point that the only way that Steve could perform the expected male behavior of protecting the woman he loves was by killing the man who insulted her.

This restricts Wonder Woman’s strength and success as a superhero presents her merely as a woman who needs Steve Trevor to perform within the expected masculine behaviors of his gender by protecting her. Finally, this seems to be the conclusion that the writers of Wonder Woman come to as Steve Trevor was found guilty, she spoke the truth on the stand and, ultimately, saying that her life as Wonder Woman made her a freak. This is especially clear when Steve Trevor blames Wonder Woman for him being sent to

jail. To stay with Steve, Wonder Woman decides to give up her powers when her mother tells her she must choose whether to stay in a man's world or return home.

Wonder Woman in the early seventies is a more realistic representation of what the male writers of Wonder Woman thought about women who fought for equality considered as empowerment. This representation of Wonder Woman received mixed reviews from fans at the time, from men as well as women who read her comics. Older readers of Wonder Woman thought that it was okay to update Wonder Woman's image for the 1970s but felt it was harmful to the character to lose her superpowers. Several women wrote to editors at that time saying that they enjoyed this series of Wonder Woman comics as the character was more realistic and had problems that they could relate to. Some female readers especially enjoyed Wonder Woman owning a fashion boutique and being dressed in the latest fashions at the time thereby presenting Wonder Woman's gender in the context of the early 1970s not through her strength but through the material culture of that time—fashion. The fashion at the time was often shown in the covers of the comic books at the time.

By the late 1970s, under the influence of the Lydia Carter Wonder Woman series and the decreasing sales for this new Wonder Woman series, the character's powers and costumes were made to return. However, the final push that caused Wonder Woman to be given back her powers and costume is when *Ms. Magazine* in 1972 placed Wonder Woman in her costume on the cover. The reason why Wonder Woman was chosen to appear on the cover of Ms. Magazine was that the magazine's creator Gloria Steinem

grew up reading Wonder Woman and was offended that the most famous superheroine had her powers removed. This issue of Ms. Magazine included an appreciative essay about Wonder Woman as a character as well. Warner Communications, the owner of DC Comics, was also an investor in *Ms. Magazine*, so this is what most likely influenced this change (Greenberger 2012).

These actions then even led to Wonder Woman receiving new storylines involving the superheroine gaining readmission into the Justice League; to prove to herself that she is worthy of this position, she does 12 labors similar to Hercules, each of them supervised by a member of the Justice League. These new storylines influenced Wonder Woman's character to change in terms of the representation of gender once again.

In issue 212 of the series, Wonder Woman is back as a superhero stopping terrorists at the UN. In this issue, she does not recollect a time when she was without her powers. Although Wonder Woman's series has returned to portraying the character similar to how she was in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, feminism comes across as a major theme in the series; in fact, it is now further ingrained in the Wonder Woman's series. Wonder Woman fights a villain named Caviler who uses chemicals to control women. During the fight, Wonder Woman calls the villain a male chauvinist, and Caviler responds with the following "Chauvinist?" You offend me! I don't merely believe in man's superiority – I'm convinced of it!" (Wein 1974). Incorporating chauvinist and anti-feminist villains becomes a significant theme in the Wonder Woman comics in the late 1970s.

Once again, Wonder Woman's representation of gender changes from the social pressure that stemmed from movements, as shown by the involvement of Gloria Steinem one of the leaders of the 1970s Feminist Movement. The evolution of this representation also came about due to significant economic pressure as the sales for Wonder Woman was low at the time due to fans like Steinem not finding O' Neil representation of the character appealing and the involvement of DC Comics parent company Warner Bro. Inc. Wonder Woman's in the late 1970s focused on addressing a feminist narrative by having her character fight against anti-feminist villains and male chauvinists. Compared to 1970, Wonder Woman's representation of gender-focused on being depicted through the material culture of fashion. Social movements also played a role in establishing the representation of gender in the early 1970s; In the modern age of comics, gender is presented through the physical body as Wonder Woman's body once again undergoes changes as well as expressed the concept of being the "other."

Wonder Woman in Modern Comics: A Body showing the Shift in Gender

In the 1980s, there was a significant event that occurred in the comic book industry when DC comics rebooted their comic book series with the event *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. This story was meant to simplify DC's comic book line to the readers; many of the stories of their significant characters, such as Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, were difficult for new readers to get into as the character's histories and origin stories began in the 1940s and were only continued from that point.

However, this reboot changed Wonder Woman's representation of gender once again. She appeared more foreign when she first comes to the United States. Unlike in the previous decades, this Wonder Woman did not speak English when she first comes to the United States; instead, she spoke a dialect of ancient Greek. Her inability to understand or speak English redefines her as the "other". Language is often used to define identity and to show a connection to space. By having Wonder Woman coming into a new country and not knowing the language, she not only is she defined as an "other" in this new space but the space she enters is "other" to her as well. This concept of "otherness" is expressed in different ways such as her not liking the cities, viewing them as being noisy, or people's disdainful reactions to her costume, who viewed it as revealing—just like in the 1940s.

Here, the theme of defining gender through the representation of the physical body appears once again. Wonder Woman is also shown to view people like Etta Candy as "other" and almost does not see her as a woman based on her body type her understanding of gender focuses on women being fit.

In the 1990s, Wonder Woman's character changes to seem more like a warrior; this is especially depicted through changes in her body. It should be noted that in the 1990s, many comic book characters were drawn in ways that represented hyper-masculinity or femininity. Contrary to the previous publication periods, Wonder Woman in the 1990s is depicted as having a muscular body to show off the character's physical prowess. Still, this does not mean that there were any changes in the character's depiction of her

sexuality, something that was built into the 1940s. Instead, Wonder Woman's sexuality is shown through the storylines.

In 1992, in issue 63, Wonder Woman is fighting a demon who is seeking a powerful body for his mate to possess. Wonder Woman attracts a certain amount of attention from males because of her power. Unlike in the period from the 1940s to the 1980s, her power is more defined by her body, causing people to be attracted to the physical strength that her body displays and not just the sexuality presented in the previous representations.

This issue continues to portray Wonder Woman's stance on women's rights, especially when she tells the demon "Now hear this Drax: Women are not 'meat' nor 'merchandise' …nor 'maggots.' We are not to be 'taken' bartered or sold." Drax the demon states that if he cannot get his mate, he will even settle for Diana. When Wonder Woman starts hitting the demon, the devil says he finds her violent behavior provocative and that no woman around him would put up a better fight. Drax says that he even enjoys the physical challenge that Wonder Woman presents to him during her battle with him, thereby depicting that Wonder Woman's gender representations as Moulton envisioned them still exist within modern culture.

The representation of gender and power through Wonder Woman's body continues to be a theme in modern comics, as illustrated by the comic book series *The New Frontier*, published in 2004 by DC Comics and written and drawn by Darwyn Cooke. In this series, the previous representations of gender, such as what was presented in the 1940s, and the modern interpretations are seen to combine when analyzing Wonder Woman in this

particular series. Wonder Woman is presented as being taller, more muscular, and larger than Superman.

In this image, Wonder Woman looks very much like an Amazon. She is physically imposing and larger than most, if not all, the men in this story. Since this story is set between 1945 to 1960, Cooke's representation of gender maintains the sexuality that Marston valued in the 1940s. Cooke presents Wonder Woman in her costume that is still reminiscent of the sexuality of the 1940s pin-up girl; however, he also maintains the representation of her physical power through her body. Cooke does not present Wonder Woman braking chains or has her costume called revealing her sexuality, power, and gender are all presented only by her image within the art.

Conclusion: Gender Shifting Throughout Time

Throughout history, Lois Lane and Wonder Woman are characters who reflected the changing roles of women in America and the evolution of gender-normative roles. In the 1940s, both characters' representation of gender was influenced by their creators, whose views were shaped by the media of the day, financial gain, and intimate relationships. By the 1950s, these two characters reflected conservative views with respect to the representation of gender, mediated by an industry undergoing government investigation due to harmful research and comic book companies that were trying to maintain their businesses. In the 1960s, gender was presented has chaotic power removed from social opposition. In the 1970s, Wonder Woman underwent two significant changes in terms of

the representation of gender. The first representation focused on depicting gender through the prevalent fashion culture based on monetary gain and on the feminist movement.

The second representation focused on addressing anti-feminism but was greatly influenced by economic downfall and a reinterpretation of feminism. Last, from the 1980s to the early 2000s, gender was purely represented by the body, especially in the Wonder Woman comics, combining the sexuality presented in the early 1940s by William Moulton Marston and the hyper-femininity of the 1990s that focused on portraying brute strength through a dominant muscular body in the comic book artwork. Overall, throughout their 75 years of history, both Lois Lane and Wonder Woman have presented not only the changing social roles of women in the United States but also the vast changes in gender, as well as the influences surrounding these changes in the comic book industry.

In over 75 years, these two fictional characters outlined the different social and historical contexts that influenced what it meant to be a woman throughout this time period and, essentially, provided a time capsule of the changes in gender roles. In comparison, the changing representations of African Americans in comics show the altering contexts of race in America through political connections.

Chapter 2: African American Representation in Comics: Changing Representations of Race

When examining African American characterization within comic books, I found that these characters illustrated the changing view of race within society. Earliest representations of African Americans before comic books focus on two aspects – representing African Americans as persons to feel pity for on account of slavery as well as presenting Africans as persons to be conquered and forcefully civilize through European colonization. After the conception of comic books, some of them featured the African American race within a resistive category, and this remained unchanged regardless of a person's view of their identity. By the 1960s, African Americans took to using comic books to define their own identities and history to present to communities besides their own.

By the 1970s, with the rise in popularity of the blaxploitation genre in the United States, major comic book publishers DC and Marvel Comics began publishing stories featuring African Americans as superheroes. These heroes presented their race as something to be proud of while simultaneously representing immense power within their superhero persona, a power that the African Americans did not have within society then. Later, with the origin of Black Lightning, the representation of race changed once again, focusing on presenting African Americans as successful people who can help bring changes to their own communities, especially by focusing on education. By the early 1980s, the gender that is associated with the depiction of the African American race in

comics changed with the origin of Amanda Waller. Waller completely subverted the genre of blaxploitation as illustrated in the comics and showed how African American characters moved from only saving and protecting their own communities to also protecting the world. The changes in representations of African Americans in comics are summarized in the table below (table 2).

Table 2: Changes in African Americans Representations in Comics Timeline

Representation of Race 1900s	Representation of Race 1940s	Representation of Race 1960s	Representation of Race 1970s	Representation of Race 1980s
Representing the horrors of slavery and the oppression of African Americans used to show the power European colonization by presenting Africans as being civilized or destroyed in warfare.	The creation comic books and stories such as Musical Mose in the early 1900s race is represented as an inflexible and unchanged regardless of personal identification.	Comics are used to rediscover African American identities and history.	In the 1970s due to the rise of the blaxploitation major comic book publishers DC and Marvel Comics published the first American superheroes. Blaxploitation represented race with pride, agency, and power.	Amanda Waller representations would change once again removing African Americans representations of race from blaxspoitation and from masculinize portrayals being the norm.

Early Representation of African Americans: Transformations in Early Representations of Race

While studying the various representations of African Americans, I found that the early representations within political cartoons greatly influenced the later representations within comic books. Before their characterization, in comic books African Americans were featured in cartoons that displayed the horrors of slavery. These cartoons often focused on attempting to educate white readers about the cruel treatment of slaves. One cartoon showed slaves being branded with a hot iron to scare them with their masters' initials (Strömberg 2003) (Figure 1).

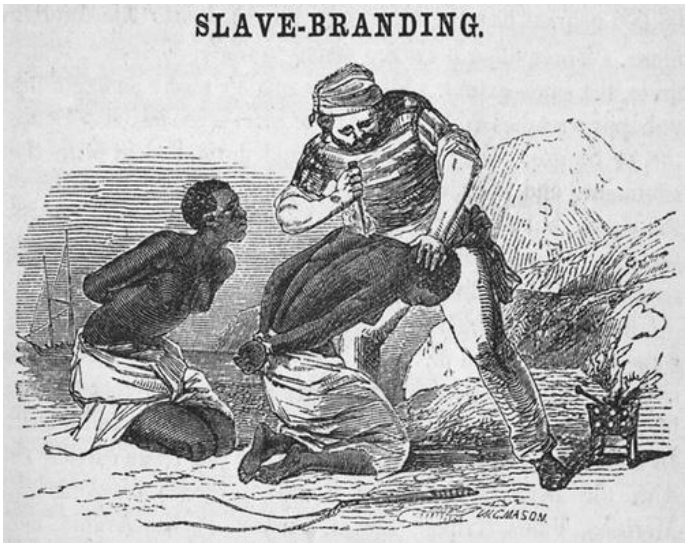

Figure 1. Pre-comics African Americans were often represented in cartoons showing the horrors of slavery. Adapted from Pictorial Press by Pictorial Press, 1853.

While there is no clarity on the exact date when black characters first appeared in comic books, African characters appeared as native stereotypes in early comics. During this period, black characters were often depicted as disciplined savages, who were captured and educated after being lodged in European courts. During this time, comics were used to show political engagement internationally. One comic was called "Civilisons I Afrique" or "Let's Civilize Africa." Civilisons I Afrique depicted the violent nature of colonization on native Africans by showing them being killed by bayonets and shot by cannons at the end of an interaction with their colonists. Similar to the early representations of African Americans slavery cartoons, these comics were meant to evoke a certain emotional response from white readers.

Political cartoons such as "Civilisons I Afrique" focused on showing the greatness of the efforts of European, and later American, colonialization to civilize nations that the colonists viewed as being savage (Strömberg 2003). Before comic books and the evolution of the African American superhero, the representations of African Americans were focused on depicting the cruelty that the slaves endured and their utter lack of power. In other contexts, these cartoons showed Africans not as people to be pitied and helped out of intolerable conditions of slavery but as people who needed to be civilized or destroyed so their resources could benefit the colonizing nation.

However, later American comics focused on portraying African Americans as being the "other." One such comic was called *Musical Mose* and it focused on a poor African American musician trying to make a living playing music at ethnic gatherings but could

only do so by concealing his race. When Mose's true racial background is discovered by an angry audience, they chased him away. The cartoonist George Herriman was half black but did his best not to have this revealed to the public. In order to avoid discovery, Herriman refused to have his photo taken without his hat as he thought his hair was "kinky." In the earliest representations of African Americans in comics, there was a focus on African Americans trying to remove the stigma of being othered in American society. Herriman, through the creation of the *Musical Mose*, examines the fears of being discriminated due to his race and the problems with being an African American in the United States. (Strömberg 2003) It is not surprising that Herriman would create a character who needs to constantly hide his race in order to be accepted into society.

Herriman used *Musical Mose* to show the constant struggle in having to hide his racial identity and the consequences of being discovered in 1900s America, which was heavily divided by race (Figure 2). The comic strip *Musical Mose* aptly depicted the fears of living in a racially divided society for people of African American descent. Moreover, it shows race as being a socially rigid feature. George Herriman, while a successful cartoonist who would create popular characters such as Krazy Kat, used to hid part of his racial identity to protect his career and his social standing. However, although Herriman identified and presented himself as a white man, his birth certificate identified him as colored (Boxer 2007). Through the creation and publication of *Musical Mose*, Herriman was able to present his African American identity while removing himself from inflexible

racial classifications. In comparison, other writers such as Will Eisner created African American characters based on stereotypes.

Figure 2. Musical Mose focuses on an African American man who was trying to make it as a musician by hiding his race. Similar to the creator George Herriman hiding his half Black heritage. Adapted from The Pulitzer Papers by Herriman, 1902.

In the 1940s, Will Eisner, the writer of the crime comic *The Spirit*, created a sidekick for his hero, a young black man named Ebony White. As illustrated by his name, the character would at first be represented as a stereotypical black supporting character with large lips and a southern twang.

In the book, *Will Eisner: Conversations* which compiled interviews with Eisner that discussed his career, he spoke about the origin of Ebony White. Eisner said the following about Ebony: "I realize that Ebony was a stereotype because I drew him as a caricature—but how else would I have treated a black boy in that era at that time"? (Inge 2011, 76).

During the interview Eisner explained that he did not create Ebony as a stereotype with the intention of spreading racist propaganda; rather, as he explained, Ebony was simply a result of the time he was created in. At the time of the interview's publication in 2011, Eisner explained that Ebony's stereotypical representation of African Americans would still be relevant as mediums such as television still featured caricatures of African Americans that are accepted within modern media. Therefore, from this interview, we understand that Eisner presented African Americans based on stereotypes because that was how media presented their racial category during the 1930s. As exhibited by Herriman, even though he was successful, he was not removed from the inflexible racial classifications at the time. Eisner, by presenting Ebony White as a caricature, rendered race as it was in the early 1900s, illustrating it without any complexity or nuance, while also showing that in modern media, these rigid presentations of race still exist. More complex representations of African Americans were not truly presented until African Americans began producing their own representations of race.

One of the earliest representations of African Americans was created based on a series called *Classic Illustrated* which published famous books, plays, and events in history in the form of comics, from 1941 to 1969 (Strömberg 2003). African American organizations, after seeing the success of the *Classic Illustrated* series, realized the potential in being able to educate their children through comics, and they created their own series called *Golden Legacy*.

Golden Legacy focused on aptly reporting African American history and was written for young persons so that they could understand and develop an interest in their own history (Strömberg 2003). Stories within these comics spoke of black inventors, explorers, authors, and freedom fighters. Similar to its counterpart *Classic Illustrated*, *Golden Legacy* focused on using comics as an educational tool. It helped them learn their history at a time when this was not being taught to young people within the public-school system. The publisher Bertram A. Fitzgerald described the goal of this series which was, and still is, "To implant pride and self-esteem in black youth while dispelling myths in others."

It aimed to provide people within the African American community an accurate representation of themselves that would allow them to feel a sense of dignity and gain self-confidence. *Golden Legacy* was also used to provide other communities with a better idea of African American communities that aimed to remove negative stereotypes and prejudices. Created during a period of intense turmoil for African Americans, *Golden Legacy* presented race as part of an identity and their history as a source of pride. Compared to earlier comics, by the late 1960s, the understanding of race presented in African American comics greatly shifted from the narratives that were created in the early 1900s—which focused on the representation of conquests, oppression, unbending identities, and stereotypes—to depicting African Americans taking ownership of their representations in the 1960s. These representations would focus on African Americans rediscovering their history and culture as well as teaching others to discard negative

associations. Because of these new depictions, the genre of blaxploitation emerged and major comic book companies such as Marvel and DC Comics took notice of this and attempted to take advantage of this new market.

The Rise of the First African American Superhero and Blaxploitation

Due to the representation of race moving from depicting conquering African Americans to projecting their pride, blaxploitation became influential in representing the first African American superheroes created in the early 1970s. Blaxploitation is a subgenre of film that received some criticism as it portrayed African American characters within their stereotypes. However, blaxploitation was also one of the first genres to portray African Americans as heroes and make their communities the subject of the films and television shows made at the time. Additionally, while blaxploitation appealed to the African American communities themselves, this appeal expanded beyond their communities to other groups as well. Before the emergence of blaxploitation, the most well-known character of color in comic books was Black Panther. Black Panther focused on representing African culture to American audiences. Therefore, while the character was relatively popular, he was also removed—both geographically and culturally—from the African American readers. Black Panther represented a racial history where his people had never been conquered by a foreign power and, therefore, never subjected to the oppression of slavery. When *Golden Legacy* attempted to regain a lost history and culture suppressed by the consequences of conquest and slavery, Black Panther's character carried no such similarities in his history; this is a possible reason that his

character did not appeal to African American readers. It is not until DC Comics and Marvel comics saw the rise of blaxploitation in the 1970s that African American characters became more prevalent in superhero comics, with the creation of the first African American superheroes John Stewart and Luke Cage.

John Stewart was the first mainstream African American character in DC Comics, and his introduction occurred in the series *Green Lantern, Green Arrow* in issue 87# in 1972. John Stewart's introduction in this series was considered groundbreaking to comic book historians as this series examined political and social issues during the 1960s and 1970s. However, while the comic that introduced Stewart's character-focused on examining these social and political issues, the character's origin was not based on liberal values. Instead, the artist of *Green Lantern, Green Arrow* Neal Adams said that based on the racial population of the world, it only made sense for this new character to be black (Wells 2010).

The story begins by explaining that a replacement Green Lantern was needed. The superior of the Green Lantern Corps goes to the current Green Lantern to introduce him to the man chosen as the new Green Lantern. The current Green Lantern is led to John Stewart who is in a conflict with a police officer; he is shown standing up to a police officer who was harassing young black men playing dominoes. The Green Lantern does not see Stewart as a good substitute, which his superior says is a bigoted view towards Stewart because of his African American background. Based on the way that John stood up to the cop, the Green Lantern believed that John held a grudge against authority

figures. A conversation between the characters reveals that John Stewart is an architect who was having a hard time finding work due to his race.

Later, when Stewart is learning the green lantern oath, he says that while he thinks the oath is corny, he likes the part that says “Beware my power”. I scrutinized this panel as having two different possible interpretations for characterization based on the prevalent culture in the United States at the time and the political and social themes presented in this series. At first, I thought the panels were a reference to the Black Power Movement in the 1960s and 1970s which would fit with the publication period of this comic. For further context, the Black Power Movement focused on African American activists performing many forms of advocacy, from armed resistance to political lobbying. Another interpretation of this representation focuses on a powerless person, or a person considered the “other” within society, gaining power for themselves. Unlike in previous representations of race, John Stewart’s character is one of the first instances wherein African American characters are presented as powerful. Furthermore, John Stewart’s representation of race maintains the pride found in representations that African Americans created in the 1960s.

Therefore, in this panel, it is worth noting that a character that would otherwise be considered as “other” and, therefore, powerless in the previous representations of race actually liked the phrase “Beware my power.”

As the issue continues, Green Lantern and John are guarding a racist senator who is running for president. He gives a speech where he says that African Americans have

smaller brains and, therefore, have limited intelligence. During the senator's speech, he is shot at by an angry African American man. However, instead of attempting to capture the gunman, John leaves and allows the man to escape. Instead, he goes to save a cop outside of the speech hall. Justifying his actions, John explains that the gunman and the senator were working together and that the gun had blanks inside of it. To win the election, the senator wanted to make it look like African Americans are going on a violent rampage, making his campaign easier and more successful and causing a possible racial civil war, according to John Stewart. This ends John Stewart's first appearance in DC Comics.

John was generally shown to be intelligent and educated due to his work as an architect; however, when examining stereotypes, I found that John Stewart's representation seemed quite stereotypical for characters who are presented within the blaxploitation genre, especially when analyzing his speech. John uses terms such as "whitey" to represent his character in the blaxploitation genre, along with the usage of jive. Showing that in terms of language Stewart was presented as being quite stereotypical. However, unlike most stereotypical representations of African Americans, John Stewart does not use broken sentences when speaking. Unfortunately, other characters, such as Marvel Comics' first African American superhero Luke Cage, suffer from more stereotypical representations of African Americans in the blaxploitation genre, even with the focus of showing race as powerful and prideful during this period of comic book publication.

During the 1970s, Marvel created Luke Cage. Similar to John Stewart, Luke Cage also utilized the 1970s blaxploitation genre to show another representation of African Americans within American culture. When examining Luke Cage's evolution, I focused on his origin story as, quite often, a character's first story sets the tone of their characterization and representation for years to come. Luke Cage is similar to John Stewart as both of their first appearances examine different social and political issues that affected African Americans at the time. The first issue of Luke Cage's series opens with him in prison in Harlem, New York. The series begins by examining some of the racial discrimination issues that Luke Cage must deal with as an African American man and convict.

In the first issue, we see some examples of discrimination that Luke Cage faces from the prison guards who often demean him by calling him "boy" (Figure 3). Throughout this first issue, Luke Cage remains very proud and dignified and does not fight back, saying that he does not want to give the guards a reason to punish him. In

most of the initial issues, the correctional officers have this constant need to break down Cage and call him “uppity.”

Figure 3. Hints of racism in Luke Cage when the prison guards refer to Cage as “boy.” Reprinted with permission from Marvel Comics from Luke Cage Hero for Hire #1 by Goodwin,1972.

The actions of the guards become even more ruthless when Cage refuses to become an informant for the former prison warden. When it seems that Cage is about to be beaten to death by the correctional officers, the new prison warden saves him. Unlike the previous warden, this new warden is shown to be a reformer who wants to end such abusive behavior from the guards and even fires the main guard who was responsible for Cage’s mistreatment. I found that this aspect of the comic appeared to parallel the Civil Rights Movement within the United States, which enabled African Americans, just like

Luke Cage, to take back their dignity and self-respect. The changes that African Americans fought for during the Civil Rights Movement could only be enacted by persons in power who were mostly white men. Luke Cage's movement towards maintaining his self-respect could only be achieved by a person of power enabling his right to do so. Therefore, although Luke Cage's representation maintains this new depiction of his race in the 1970s, the setting of Cage's story in a prison shows the limitations of the power that these new African American heroes depict.

As the issue continues, it is revealed that Cage ended up in prison because his friend framed him for dealing drugs as he was jealous of Cage's relationship with a woman he loved. The theme of urban crime and drug usage is quite ingrained within the blaxploitation genre, consequently making Luke Cage's character very defined within the genre. This theme continues in the first issue when Cage has a chance to earn parole if he works with a scientist for an experiment. During the experiment, one of the correctional officers who wanted to harm Cage comes in and turns up the power of the machine to dangerous levels hoping to kill him. Instead of killing Cage, the machine turns his skin bulletproof and indestructible and gives him super strength. I found the description of Luke Cage's powers, combined with the prevalent social issues such as racism and corruption within the justice system, to be remarkably political and topical not only for the 1970s but also for the present.

When considering the scope of Luke Cage's powers, Roy Thomas, Archie Goodwin, and John Romita Sr.—the creators of Luke Cage—turned his skin, which was viewed in

1970s America as a social weakness and a mark of social inferiority, into his strength and that kept with the changing representation of race for African Americans in American comics. Luke Cage's skin makes him physically stronger, and it enables him to break out of prison and regain his freedom, thereby further distancing these representations of race from the early illustrations of African Americans. Cage's character shows how blaxploitation while enforcing stereotypes of African American communities, instilled a sense of pride and represented the power that African Americans did not previously have—through superpowers.

In the subsequent issues of Luke Cage's series, I found that the social and racial issues were never as significant as in issue one; in fact, these themes seem to somewhat disappear. Instead, Luke Cage's representation focuses on showing the character within the blaxploitation genre as much as possible. To provide some clarification, blaxploitation focused on violence, sex, and drug culture. Luke Cage, at the beginning of the series, does depict certain aspects of blaxploitation; however, these aspects are used to further the plot and to provide a background for Cage's character and does not read as stereotypical. As the series moves further, Luke Cage recreates himself as a hero for hire; at this point in the series, Cage's representation illustrates him as a very physical character. In other words, he does not think through a problem, he merely punches through it. Over time, as the popularity of blaxploitation decreases, Cage would later be paired with the white superhero Iron Fist, whose series also suffered from low sales due

to the fading popularity of the martial arts genre, to become the first interracial cast in American comic books.

This series would be named *Power Man and Iron Fist*. One of the series' final writers—before its eventual cancellation—was an African American writer Christopher Priest; he would try to remove Cage from his blaxploitation roots by giving him a larger vocabulary and having him throw around his catchphrase "Sweet Christmas" much less. It's not surprising that Priest attempted to improve Cage's language during his writing of his series; Luke Cage is often seen to be speaking in jive and broken sentences while the white characters spoke in complete, grammatically correct sentences. The use of jive as a dialect was a major theme in blaxploitation media; when examining its use within Luke Cage's limited language combined with the comic book covers at the time, we understand that is meant to represent characters such as Luke Cage and John Stewart purely as men of action and power.

The cover of Luke Cage's first comic is quite reminiscent of blaxploitation themes of African American men fighting the "man" and appearing powerful and commanding (Figure 4). Fighting the "man" or authority and appearing dominant is a theme present in

the first cover featuring John Stewart as well. Stewart is shown standing over Green Lantern and saying that “they whipped Green Lantern now let’ em try me!”.

Figure 4. The cover of Luke Cage’s first issue has many aspects of the blaxploitation genre depicted such as sex, prison, and drug use. Reprinted with permission from Marvel Comics Luke Cage Hero for Hire # 1 by Goodwin,1972.

Both characters, through the usage of aggressive imagery and the jive language, were explicitly depicted as men of action. Compared to previous representations of race, as featured in the early 1900s that had African Americans presented as passive, John Stewart and Luke Cage presented African Americans as active agents. Following this, representations of African Americans in comics featured pride, power, and agency. As the 1970s progressed, other African American superheroes were created; however, as comic book companies saw blaxploitation media becoming less popular, their influence

on superheroes began to wane, and stereotypes were removed, and portrayals of power were changed for the African American characters.

In the early 1970s, the theme of blaxploitation within African American characters became less prevalent. Representations became more realistic; the character of Black Lightning shows how the creators moving towards modern representations of African Americans with blaxploitation themes that were popular during this period and formed an interesting amalgamation within the character itself. When examining Black Lightning, I decided to examine the character by looking closely at their earliest or most critical storylines. Unlike other characters, Black Lightning seemed to gain more popularity after DC Comics reworked his origin story. Therefore, to examine Black Lightning's representation entirely, I decided to examine his original 1970s origin story and compare it to his modern origins.

The first point of examination are the graphics used to represent Black Lightning on the cover of these two origin stories. In the story published in the 1970s, Black Lightning appears to be fighting some drug pushers on the cover. He wears his costume, which was somewhat similar to Luke Cage's costume, that has his chest revealed and he wears a jumpsuit similar to a disco jumpsuit along with an afro. Similar to the Luke Cage cover, Black Lightning is shown to be engaging in a fight on the cover. He also uses the line "You pushers have wrecked the city long enough. Now it is my turn to wreck you" while punching a drug dealer.

However, the cover of the modern Black Lighting storyline is somewhat understated. Unlike in the original cover, the character is seen standing in the middle of the cover with lightning shooting from his fingertips. He no longer sports an Afro; instead, he has dreadlocks and wears a costume more akin to a tracksuit. Comparing the two different representations of Black Lightning's character based on the covers alone, the 1970s Black Lightning cover is similar to the Luke Cage cover which focused on providing the reader with tropes of the blaxploitation genre that was popular during the 1970s. Like his predecessors, Black Lightning is seen as primarily action-oriented, even showing the character in a fight. This depicts the aspect of pride in his identity as an African American man along with his physical power and agency. However, the ways in which power and agency are expressed in the Black Lightning series is quite different.

While the setting of Black Lightning's stories is similar to Luke Cage's—both have urban settings with their storylines focusing on urban issues such as crime and drugs—the blaxploitation influences end there. Black Lightning's character uses the representations of race presented through blaxploitation on the surface. However, ultimately, Black Lightning's representation of race will remove African American heroes from blaxploitation representations of race in the future.

Within the first issues of both origin stories, we learn that Black Lightning, or Jefferson Pierce, grew up in the lower economic side of the city of Metropolis and managed to leave this area and gain success by getting a proper education and pursuing athletics, even getting an Olympic medal. Black Lightning's origin alone marks a

significant change in the representation of racial stereotypes of African Americans in comics. Not only did Pierce work to bring himself out of lower economic status, he later returns to his home as an educator to provide the same opportunities for others.

In comparison, John Stewart has also received an education and is an architect by trade, but he is unemployed. Luke Cage, in his stories, is never shown to have received any education and presents African American relationships with law enforcement during this period. Jefferson Pierce is an educated man who has a stable job as a principal and is even shown to have a wife and children. Jefferson Pierce's representation is important because it not only shows this new focus on pride and power but also shows African Americans in a successful position. Due to his status within his community, in both versions of his origin story, Jefferson used stereotypes based on African American men to form his identity.

In the 1970s, Pierce explains that the reason his costume looked like many stereotypical blaxploitation characters of the 1970s is because he did not want people who saw him to know he was an educated man and figure out his identity. In the 1970s, this secret identity included an afro wig and a mask. When examining Black Lightning's speech in his origin story, I found that when in the identity of Black Lightning, Pierce would speak only in jive in order to hide his identity. When he was his usual self, Pierce spoke in clear English. Unlike other African characters at this time, Black Lightning's speech patterns did not use jive in the same way when he was speaking as Black

Lightning or as Jefferson Pierce. The usage of language was the same in the 1970s origin story as well as the modern retelling.

In the modern version of Black Lightning's origins, Pierce does not use the same stereotypes in order to hide his identity. Instead of changing his speech, he focuses on his physical appearance to hide his identity, using a wig that makes him look like he has dreadlocks. Furthermore, in the 1970s, the majority of the social issues examined in the Black Lightning series focused on Jefferson trying to end drug dealing and gang activities. In the modern origin, many other social issues were examined, including racism, voting, education, drug issues, gang activities, and poverty to name a few.

The modern retelling of Black Lightning's origin story provides a more rounded experience and representation of poverty and issues that affected people from lower economic areas. The 1970s origin focused heavily on drug activities and gang violence and, therefore, maintained an underlining blaxploitation narrative similar to Luke Cage. Without the origin of Black Lighting, modern successful representations of African American characters would not have occurred, and many stories would have maintained a blaxploitation narrative that shows people with pride and power but not success.

When Black Lightning was created by writer Tony Isabella in 1977, he focused on making the character a role model. In many ways, Isabella was successful because Jefferson Pierce helped remove blaxploitation narratives from African American representations in comics while still providing the aspects of that genre that made it a successful agency, namely through power, pride, and the portrayal of African Americans

as heroes in their own stories. Black Lightning was also influential in terms of future representations of African Americans wherein success, pride, and the agency was seen to be obtained not only through physical prowess but also through education.

Reinventing for the Modern Age

By the 1980s, newer representations of African American characters show them being removed from the blaxploitation genre completely with stories focusing on social and cultural issues, especially dealing with poverty and urban crime. During this period, John Stewart received a modern update in storytelling that removed him from the blaxploitation genre. One of these changes included John Stewart becoming the main character of his own Green Lantern series, which is what showed the most significant difference in his characterization during the modern age of comics. The most significant change in storytelling occurs in issue #11 of John Stewart's series as it examines many cultural and social issues that Stewart had to deal with throughout his life.

Issue #11 starts with John Stewart experiencing an illusion and reliving his childhood. At the beginning of this issue, John's father is introduced, and he explains that he wants John to make something of himself. To do this, he often tells John to seek power and to pursue the white man's power because that is the only power worth pursuing. John's father states that while many black men are powerful in their communities, that is not enough to survive in the world. He tells John he needs to be needed and have power outside of his community. Once again, power is a major theme within John Stewart's storylines.

Unlike his first appearance, the context of this scene is John's father ensuring that he obtains an education and skills to have a better life. In the Black Lightning series, we understand that education was the key to making Jefferson Pierce a successful man; however, because he returned to his hometown, the power he received from his education is limited. John's father, in the early sections of this issue, is referring to men like Pierce who found success by pursuing education but only limitedly because they did not move outside of their African American communities.

However, throughout this issue, John's father uses physical violence to ensure that he pursues an education so that no one can be better than him and he has a good life. This idea of a better life and what would happen to John if he did not pursue education is presented through the architecture of the homes in different neighborhoods. John describes the homes in a pre-war suburb owned by white professionals and believes that this is what his father wanted for him, comparing the area to a form of heaven. In comparison, John then describes his grandmother's home, which was originally a 3-unit middle-class home during the 1890s but was later cut into six units when African Americans came to work in car factories during the 1920s; he says that his father worked on assembly lines to escape this place. Last, John explains that if the suburbs were the place that his father wanted for him, then he needed to advance in his education; otherwise, he would end up in public housing and that place was hell.

Public housing is a sign of total helplessness; John explains that the home his grandmother had was a stepping-stone for his father, but public housing was the very

bottom, almost like a prison. John explains that public housing was initially meant to free people from poverty and crime by architects like Le Corbusier; in turn, it only led crime and poverty to move to these areas. In John Stewart's modern representation, the themes of poverty and crime are still prevalent in his origin story. However, due to the influence of characters like Black Lightning, the themes of agency, power in education, and success have become quite prominent in race representations for African Americans in comics in the modern age. African American characters and stories no longer focus on punching a problem out, instead choosing to focus on thinking and working a way out of a situation. It was also not long before gender representation also changed during this time. Up until this point, African American women were not major characters with influences on the storylines within comics. However, all that changed with Amanda Waller.

Gender Changes within African American Representations

Like her male counterparts, Amanda Waller's origin and stories are focused on poverty and crime. Three things separate Amanda Waller from Luke Cage, John Stewart, and Black Lightning: Amanda Waller is not a superhero character, she is a woman, and the blaxploitation genre does not influence her representation. An analysis of the landscape of African American representations in comics shows how African American women in leading roles or having their own titles are far and few. One of the possible reasons for the same is the influence of the blaxploitation genre in the creation of African American representation in media. Images from the blaxploitation genre, such as from Shaft, clearly depict that the heroes of the blaxploitation genre are men.

In the covers of John Stewart, Luke Cage, and Black Lightning's first appearances, we see aggressive masculine imagery as a recurring theme. Therefore, it is not surprising that African American women representation is not very popular within the genre; these new representations of race were quite gendered from a masculine point of view. With a different gender, Waller's representation continued this trend of depicting success and education, which continued even after the waning of blaxploitation themes in African American representations.

When examining Amanda Waller, I began with her origin story. Amanda Waller's origin story, just like Black Lightning's, focuses on examining the effects of gang violence within African American communities. Amanda Waller's origin story begins with an explanation of why she became involved in politics—a great deal of gang-related violence in the region of Chicago where she was living. Her eldest son, while still in high school, was murdered by gang members. Six months later, her second eldest child, a daughter, was kidnapped and murdered. The police could not act despite knowing who murdered her daughter because of a lack of physical evidence.

This feeling of injustice caused Amanda's husband to seek revenge and this, in turn, caused him to shoot their daughter's murderer; in the crossfire, he ended up being shot and killed as well. Seeing her loved ones die one by one because of the criminal actions of people she considered as evil, Waller decided to stop evil and protect the innocent at all costs. Waller then explains that once her last surviving child finished college, she furthered her education and got a degree in political science. Eventually, she became a

perceptive political operator and formed a team called the Suicide Squad or Task Force X. Waller chooses to create Task Force X to fight against enemies that traditional organizations within the United States government could not. Additionally, Waller wanted a new team that would be not hindered by the law or by the morality of superheroes.

When examining Amanda Waller, I found that many aspects of her origin were similar to her male counterparts, such as being affected by urban crime and violence in some way. However, like the more modern stories with John Stewart, there is also the prevalent idea of education allowing African Americans to obtain power for themselves outside of their communities. This once again brings to attention the shift in representation of power from the blaxploitation genre's influence that focused on physical masculine power to focus on the power of education. Amanda Waller is a perfect example of this new representation as she chooses to use her education in politics to obtain a position within the White House and to achieve her goals.

Finally, the critical feature that separates Amanda Waller from the other characters I have covered throughout this chapter is that her representation truly marks the end of the African American characters being associated with the blaxploitation genre in their representations and instead focuses on presenting African American struggles and takes them away from their communities; Amanda Waller does not engage in politics just to only help her community but the world as well.

While comic book writers like Christopher Priest helped redefine what it meant to be African American during the early years of the prevalence of the blaxploitation genre, other creators made contributions as well. One of these creators was the comic book writer and television writer Dwayne McDuffie. One of McDuffie's most well-known works involved his writing of the Justice League Animated television show that presented African American Green Lantern John Stewart to non-comic book readers not only by giving the character a new backstory but also by making him a main character in the show. However, McDuffie's greatest contribution to redefining African Americans in comics was the creation of the publisher Milestone Media. His reasoning behind creating Milestone comics was that he wanted to tap into a multicultural awareness that he felt was missing in most mainstream comic books of the early 1990s. McDuffie explained his vision for Milestone in the following statement:

If you do a black character or a female character or an Asian character, then they aren't just that character. They represent that race or that sex, and they can't be interesting because everything they do has to represent an entire block of people. You know, Superman isn't all white people, and neither is Lex Luthor. We knew we had to present a range of characters within each ethnic group, which means that we couldn't do just one book. We had to do a series of books and we had to present a view of the world that's wider than the world we've seen before. (McDuffie 2011)

Some of Milestone's creations included the teenage superhero Static, who would later be given his own animated series, and the character Icon who was represented as a

conservative Republican, a rarity for African American characters in media. However, McDuffie expressed that his own political views were very liberal and expressed worries that his writing of Icon would fuel extreme conservatism. Nevertheless, with the creation of characters like Icon and Static, not only does McDuffie continue the work of his predecessors by removing African American characters from blaxploitation themes but he also shows a diverse representation of what it means to African American. McDuffie, with the creation of Milestone, attempted to present a changing representation of African Americans as well as a wider, multicultural world. As comics continue to advance in their various social representations, consumers turned producers like McDuffie will attempt to present new multicultural representations to the world.

Conclusion: Changing What it Means to be African American

In this chapter, I examined multiple African American characters even before the creation of modern African American superheroes and the representations of African Americans within comic books and how these portrayals present race. In the earliest illustrations of African Americans before comic books, the representation of race focused on two aspects: representing the horrors of slavery and the oppression of African Americans as well as depicting the power of European colonization by presenting Africans as made to be civilized or destroyed in warfare. With the conception of comic books and stories such as *Musical Mose* in the early 1900s, race was represented as an inflexible category that was unchanged regardless of personal identification. In the 1960s, African Americans used comics to rediscover their identities and history display that to

populations besides their own. By the 1970s, with the rise of blaxploitation, major comic book publishers DC and Marvel Comics would publish the first African American superheroes. These heroes represented race with pride, agency, and power.

The creation and representations of the characters Black Lightning and Amanda Waller would evolve once again, taking their representation of race away from blaxploitation and from normative masculine portrayals. However, most importantly, these two characters would present African Americans as finding success through education and moving beyond the streets of Harlem, Suicide Slums, and Chicago to the wider world and being heroes for all people. What it meant to be African American in comics has changed dramatically from being the subject of oppression to showing off the power and pride presented through blaxploitation and, finally, realizing the power of education and portraying success. Finally, the work of writer Dwayne McDuffie and the creation of Milestone Comics incorporated new multicultural aspects into comics, focusing on presenting different races and groups in order to provide a multicultural substance to the comic book industry. This shift in African American identity that is represented in the comics was shared by Latino characters in comics as well.

Chapter 3: From Zorro to a Latino Spider-Man: The Advancement of Latino Characters in Comics

Similar to the evolution of African American representation in comic books, Latino characters underwent a wide variety of changes in their portrayals that have affected the contexts of identity and race. Significant changes in Latinos' racial identity have occurred due to the influence of American history, media, and changing contexts of race. Over time, characters began representing the condition of living on the border of two cultures and being portrayed as the "other" within American culture. Sometimes, these aspects are represented through physical appearance or social issues represented in a series. In time, what it means to be Latino becomes harder to define with the introduction of mixed-race characters whose identities present the changing dynamics of racial identity that emerges from two different cultures.

Finally, the introduction of a patriotic hero causes the representation of the "other" to be removed from Latinos in comics, rather depicting parts of Latino culture and identity as part of the American culture. These changes in representations are summarized in the table below (table 3). However, none of these changes would have occurred had it not been for the introduction of the first Latino superhero, Zorro.

Table 3: Changing Representations of Latinos in Comics Timeline

First Latino Superhero Zorro in the 1900s	Blue Beetle Representing the "other" physically in the 2000s	Presenting Latinos as "other" (Cont.)	Border Town presenting changes in Latino identity in 2018	La Borinquena making Latino apart of American culture in 2019
Created in the early 1900s Zorro underwent significant changes in his racial identity due to the influence of American history, media, and changing contexts of race.	Blue Beetle represented living at the border of two cultures. The character of Blue Beetle starts the representations of Latino characters being presented as "other" due to his appearance.	Jessica Cruz continues the representation of Latino characters have as other but, instead of representing this aspect through physical appearance or moving between borders it focuses on the treatment of persons with mental health issues.	Border Town, presenting a mixed-race Latino character now only presents changes in racial identity for Latinos in comics but, also presents issues such as racial stereotypes and immigration through the usage of Mexican mythology.	La Borinquena represents Puerto Rican culture as the islands patriotic hero and removes the representation of Latinos as other by presenting Puerto Rican culture as part of American culture.

Zorro: Changing Representation through History

When examining Latino characters in comics, I found that one of the most well-known Latino characters in Zorro very distinctly depicts the changing context of race throughout time and history. The character of Zorro was created in the 1900s by pulp magazine writer Johnston McCulley in the story called *Curse of the Capistrano* (Hind

2011) (Figure 5). His main character, Don Diego de La Vega, is the son of a wealthy landowner in 1800s California who projects himself as lazy and cowardly to avoid the people around him learning of his crime-fighting activities as Zorro (Hind 2011).

Figure 5. The first novel featuring Zorro, which would later inspired Douglas Fairbanks to make a Zorro movie. Adapted from Curse of Capistrano by McCulley, 1919.

When examining the representation of race within Zorro's comics, I focused on the setting of many of Zorro's adventures—which was during the mission period in California—and compared historical events that occurred during this period to the original *Curse of the Capistrano* novel. This comparison was focused on because of the historical setting of Zorro's original pulp novel in which was the mission period in California between 1822 to 1848—the period that California was under the rule of Mexico (Curtis 1997). Since Zorro's rise to fame, the historical accuracy of his creator Johnston McCulley's adventures featuring the masked swordsman has continuously

undergone scrutiny by historians. One of the historical inconsistencies found in this story is the establishment of the power structures in the world that Zorro lives in. McCulley sets Zorro's story in the period when Spain still maintained California as one of its colonies. However, looking closely at the setting as described in the stories, historians have found that McCulley combined the elements of the Spanish California rule and the Mexican rule of California after Mexico achieved independence from Spain in 1821 and gained the right to rule over the colony in California. McCully combined the two periods in Zorro's representation of California's history; these periods are known as "the days of missions" and "the days of ranchos" (Curtis 1997)

McCulley makes a reference to the King of Spain sanctioning land permits to certain persons in the California colony before the secularization of mission lands and the ranchos system came into effect in California. Much of McCulley's images of early California that Zorro's stories occur in, according to historians, comes from California's "romantic period" from 1782 to 1810 (Curtis 1997).

McCulley describes this particular period in the stories as one in which California was experiencing prosperity, where men and women had open social interactions with one another, and there was plenty of leisure time. Conversely, it must be understood that these activities were only for members of the higher social class and that the character of Zorro could emerge, partly, because he was the son of a landowner. McCulley constantly alludes to class by introducing balls, festivals, and the idea of education in the stories; most significantly, he speaks of Zorro's race through the statement: "No white man had

to concern himself greatly with work, and even school books were a thing apart" (Curtis 1997). Therefore, within the context of the early 1900s when Zorro's creation took place, based on the historical nature of the fictional world created by McCulley, Zorro's representation did not exist within the context of presenting Latino racial groups but, instead, was referring to a white man.

The reason for Zorro's shift from a white man to Latino is based on the historical context. During the periods of colonization by the Spanish—from 1492 to the early 1800s—the definition of a full-blooded Spaniard changed as many of the early colonizers took Native women as their wives. Therefore, because the Spanish colonization caused the European Spanish populations to come into contact with other ethnic groups, from Native Americans to Africans, racial categories were redefined to understand race within colonies. Thus, the Spanish government constructed new racial categories to form new class and racial categories. Throughout the novel, McCulley describes Diego as being a white man. Therefore, with some help, it is possible to derive what racial category Diego belonged to according to the categories of the California mission period. Since Diego's family was wealthy and he was a man of means, along with him being referred to as white, it is clear that he was part of the mestizo racial category.

The definition of mestizos is a person born from a Native American person and a Spaniard. Out of all the racial groups, besides Europeans, this is the second-highest racial category in colonial Mexico. The historical reasoning behind this racial category being considered more highly by Europeans is because one of the original European colonizers

of the New World, Heran Cortez, took a Native woman named La Malinche, also known as Dona Marina—an interpreter when conquering the Aztecs. At some point during the conquest of the Aztecs, La Malinche gave birth to Cortez's son, who is viewed as one of the first mestizos to be born in the New World. Thus, the racial category of mestizos is not only in the hierarchy of racial groups in colonial California—to maintain European ancestry and whiteness—but it is also ingrained in the mythology of the colonization process of the Spanish colonies. Thus, the term mestizos, unlike other racial categories, addresses the birth of the Spanish empire; through its establishment, it enables this new Spanish Empire to thrive through the children of the men who conquered the Aztecs.

Therefore, based on the long history of class and race and its connections to California history before the mission system, it would not be surprising that Zorro's family—based on their wealth and class—are a part of the mestizos class. Thus, it makes sense that although in modern contexts Zorro is considered a Mexican or Latino, in the 1900s, Zorro's character—due to being created in a period similar to early African American comics—is presented as rigid and inflexible in terms of race; Zorro would still maintain his identity as a white man. Zorro's character representation presents a very early case of how race changes with context. A character who was first created in the 1900s and presented as a white man in the 1800s is, in modern contexts, considered as one of the first Latino superheroes. Along those lines, DC Comics superhero Blue Beetle provides an example of how Latinos are presented as the "other."

Blue Beetle: The Latino Superhero Presenting the "Other."

Decades after the introduction of Zorro, Latino characters in comics, for the most part, were reduced to being background characters. By February 2006, DC Comics created a new Latino superhero, a teenage boy living in El Paso, Texas, named Jaime Reyes. Though Jaime Reyes is the first Latino to use the mantle of Blue Beetle, he is not the first person to hold this title. In the history of DC Comics, two other men held the title of Blue Beetle: an archaeologist Dan Garrett and his student Ted Kord. Compared to the previous Blue Beetles, Jaime's costume looks somewhat alien and bug-like. The aspect of Jaime being "other" is depicted clearly in his first storyline by having his younger sister appear scared of him once she sees him in his costume.

Therefore, showing this new representation of race for Latino characters focusing characters as "other" or outsiders. For Jaime, this new representation is shown in the appearance of his costume as well as through the inclusion of various aspects of Mexican culture within his series.

Throughout the Blue Beetle series, Jaime's identity as a Latino plays a significant role in him being a superhero. For instance, in Jaime's series, the borderland between Mexico and the United States is not presented as a zone of division between two cultures and countries but as a flexible, physical and cultural space that Jaime and his family move in and out of. To illustrate this, we see Jaime and his supporting cast code-switching between English and Spanish throughout the series in conversations with other characters.

The concept of code-switching is quite regularly demonstrated in the racial representations of Latino characters in comic books, often to show an intrinsic aspect of the character's Latino culture. Throughout the series, Jaime is shown to move in and out of the physical and cultural space of being Latino, and this is even presented through the publication of his series when one issue is published completely in Spanish. Jaime Reyes's portrayal of the Blue Beetle kicks off the representation of Latinos being considered as the "other" in popular culture and the switching between two cultural spaces that Latinos often encounter while living in the United States. While Jaime's storyline featured flexible cultural spaces and depicted his being the "other" through his body, the character of Jessica Cruz worked on bringing to light yet another aspect of representation through the portrayal of a woman with mental illness.

Jessica Cruz: A Modern Representation of Mental Illness

When attempting to examine modern representations of Latino characters in comics, I struggled to find a female Latino superhero for this purpose. As previously established, many characters of color, and especially women of color, in comics are often simply supporting characters. In August 2014, DC Comics writer Geoff Johns created the character of Jessica Cruz. Jessica's introduction into the comics begins with Johns presenting her as a woman who experiences extreme anxiety and has agoraphobia, the fear of places and situations that could cause fear, powerlessness, or humiliation. The circumstances surrounding Jessica's anxiety and phobia is her witnessing the murder of her friends on a hunting trip after they see two men disposing of a body.

In the initial issues of the series, Johns shows that Jessica's mental health causes her to be viewed as the "other" by herself and the people around her. In issue #31 of *Justice League*, when Jessica goes on a rampage because of an evil that takes control of her by preying on her fear and anxiety, the Doom Patrol tries to capture her to recruit her. The Doom Patrol trying to recruit Jessica in this story is significant, as it shows how Jessica's illness makes her the "other." Among comic book readers, the Doom Patrol is known as the superheroes who have powers that no one would want because it makes them appear freakish.

The Doom Patrol leader is shown to want to have full control over his team because he does not view them as people but as "freaks." This idea of control is even expanded to Jessica within this issue as he tells his team to capture her so he can lobotomize her and, consequently, fully control her. Jessica's character, during her early appearances, focuses on presenting mental illness in such a way that it appears to make someone an outsider and a threat to society, even to the point that people are attempting to exercise control over the mentally ill. For some context, a lobotomy is a surgical procedure that was previously used to treat mental illness, until the 1950s, in the United States. The focus on capturing Jessica and the mention of a lobotomy illustrates how there is still a prevalent view of wanting to control a person's mental illness by taking away their free will.

In issue #31 of *Justice League*, there is a short commentary on mental illness and its relationship to criminal behavior. This commentary takes place in a small moment between Batman and Jessica, where he helps Jessica calm down. In this sequence, Jessica

asks Batman why she should not be afraid of him. He explains to her that only criminals should be afraid of him and that she is not a criminal. In her early introduction, Jessica Cruz's characterization focuses on presenting how American society treats the mentally ill, either by viewing them as "freaks" that need to be controlled, as criminals or as people who need to be medically treated and shown sympathy. As DC Comics develops Jessica's character beyond her introduction, we see that she continues to present the nuances of dealing with different aspects of mental illness. After her introduction in *Justice League*, and through her adventures with the team, Jessica learns to overcome her fears and becomes a Green Lantern. In order to become a Green Lantern, a person must be capable of overcoming fear in their lives. Therefore, this evolution of her character shows Jessica progressing in her mental health. The series that chronicles her adventures is called *Green Lanterns*, where Jessica is teamed up with another Green Lantern as her partner; however, it is important to note that Jessica's anxiety does not merely disappear due to her new status.

Throughout the series, Jessica is seen dealing with her anxiety and keeping her fear in check by regularly doing activities such as deep breathing, exercising, and engaging with her family and friends. This aspect of the series shows how maintaining your mental health is an everyday effort that affects people all over the world; this could cause those around them to view these people as the "other", even themselves. Jessica Cruz's character not only provided comic books with a Latina superheroine—no longer a background character—but her representation also characterization also illustrates the

very true facets of an ongoing battle of maintaining one's mental health. Her character helped understand how people who suffer from mental health issues are viewed as "others" by society and by themselves. Jessica Cruz is not the only character who gives a modern interpretation of a Latino character in media; the character of Miles Morales shows a person bound to certain identities, presenting a changing view of race in comics for Latino characters, once again.

Miles Morales: The Latino Spider-Man

Created by Brian Michael Bendis for the Marvel Comics Ultimate Comics line in 2011, Miles Morales was originally never meant to go beyond this alternate line of Marvel comics. For some context, the Ultimate Comics line was created by Marvel Comics to retell Marvel Comics stories from the 1960s and 1970s within modern settings. These retellings included the narratives of the Fantastic Four, the X-Men, the Avengers, and Spider-Man. Since this was an alternate line for Marvel Comics, writers like Brian Michael Bendis were able to create storylines that the main Marvel Comics line would not think of following, such as killing off Peter Parker. Because of a storyline called the Death of Spider-Man, Miles Morales was introduced into the Ultimate Comics line to become the new Spider-Man. The nature of his introduction led many to be quite skeptical of his character and viewed it as simply pandering to Latinos' sentiments. However, the controversial nature of Miles's introduction was not the only aspect that separated him from the previous Latino characters; he also presents two different cultural groups.

The character of Miles Morales provides a new representation of Latinos in comics because he walks along the border of two cultures. Unlike the other case studies that examined race, Miles is mixed race as he has an African American father and a Puerto Rican mother. Because of his mixed-race background, it was difficult to decide whether to include Miles Morales in the chapter on African Americans or this chapter specifically. However, while conducting my research on the character and exploring the different forums and websites devoted to Miles Morales's character, I had a realization; it did not matter what chapter I placed the character in because he was representative of both the African American as well as the Latino cultures, to the point that the character could even be referred to as Blatino. Upon researching further, I found that this term is also used to refer to men who have been involved in gay pornography and happen to fit into the Black and Latino ethnicities. While the term Blatino has a sexual connotation in some contexts, it is also used to describe a person of mixed race of African and Latino descent, like Miles Morales. However, unlike Jaime Reyes, Zorro, and even Jessica Cruz, Miles' race is not a notable aspect of his characterization within his comic book series.

While Jaime Reyes and Jessica Cruz exhibit code-switching between Spanish and English within their comic books during speech, this is not seen at all in Miles's series. There are hints that Miles understands Spanish because he is shown to understands words and statements spoken by other characters, such as his mother, but Miles is never seen to reply in Spanish. When looking at Miles's series as a whole, his writer and creator Brian Michael Bendis appeared not to focus on presenting Miles as either black or Latino;

instead, he wrote a story about the experiences of a young man growing up and becoming a superhero in an urban environment. At the start of the series, we see Miles and his parents focusing on getting him into a better school through a lottery process, which Miles gets picked for. Due to his mixed-race background, Miles's story depicts some of the themes present in modern interpretations of African Americans in comics such as portraying the positive role of education.

Similar to Luke Cage and Black Lightning, Miles's comics also addresses aspects of crime by speaking of how his father had engaged in criminal activity in the past before becoming a police officer. In this comic book series, Miles Morales's author distances his character from Peter Parker not by focusing on Miles's ethnicity but through different experiences in Miles's background. However, in the film, Miles's portrayal of the different cultural aspects in his background becomes more clear.

As of December 14, 2018, Miles Morales made his film debut in the movie "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse". The movie has been quite critically and financially successful, making a gross profit of $169,000,242 as of January 27, 2019. The film won multiple awards, including a Golden Globe for Best Animated Motion Picture. While the movie was quite successful, I wanted to focus on how Miles was represented with slight changes from his comic book version. At the core of the movie, Miles' story still focuses on presenting the experiences of a young man living in an urban environment. However, there are some notable changes in Miles's presentation in the movie which show him engaging in activities that allude to his Latino and African American cultures. Unlike in

the comics, Miles practices code-switching by speaking in Spanish with his mother and then changing to English in a conversation with his father. Furthermore, Miles is seen listening to rap music and often rapping in his room, which is also not seen in the comics. Finally, Miles is also shown to be engaging in graffiti-style artwork which is often associated with the hip hop culture.

Unlike the comic book representation of Miles Morales, the movie strikes a great balance when illustrating Miles's experiences as a mixed-race teenager immersed in two cultures. Miles Morales' portrayal of Latinos alludes to the ever-changing aspects of racial categories within the United States. In comparison to Zorro whose race was based on inflexible racial categories and history, Miles Morales's character shows how much the frameworks of racial categories have not only changed but also begun to blend together. Miles Morales is referred to as both the black or Latino Spider-Man; this is because he represents the dynamic changes in the frameworks of race and culture that are not seen in previous comic book representations. However, Miles Morales's character which presented the changing context of race and identity for Latinos in comic books did nothing to change their status from being the "other," as shown by the DC Vertigo Comics comic series *Border Town.*

Border Town: Examining Changing Aspects of Race

Although only four issues of the Vertigo series *Border Town* were ever published, this comic book series presents the political and social aspects of immigration. *Border Town* is set in the fictional town of Devil's Fork, Arizona, on the border between the

United States and Mexico. Devil's Fork also serves as a boundary between reality and Mictlan, the underworld in Aztec mythology and the home to numerous monsters within Aztec myths. The writer of *Border Town*, Eric M. Esquivel based the main character Frank on himself and his experiences as a teenager, moving from Illinois to Arizona as a sophomore in high school. Esquivel explained that when he moved to Arizona, the social groups surrounding him were very clearly defined by race. In the *Border Town* series, Frank finds that merging into a town with a divided social group based on race was going to be difficult. Due to the mythological elements involved in *Border Town,* Esquivel explains that what a local person sees when a monster crosses over into Arizona is based on their fear. In the first issue, when a child sees a monster, he sees the Batman villain Bane, and when an undocumented immigrant sees a monster, they might see an ICE agent. When writing this series, Esquivel and artist Ramon Villalobos focused on making the point that stereotypes and hate for others based on race is something that is taught.

By presenting the monsters of *Border Town* different for everyone based on what they fear, there are multiple contexts for how stereotypes about race are formed and play a role in people's lives. These sorts of stereotypes even play a role in Frank's life with people often not considering that Frank is Mexican American because he looks white. Because of Frank's mixed-race heritage, two characters that present the two different sides of the racial spectrum attempt to determine Frank's position within these racial borders of his high school. The first character is Quinteh, who represents the Latino identity in the school, and another classmate named Blake who is a skinhead. In one of

the panels, Frank refuses to side with only one of his racial identities over another and states that he is half-Mexican; one of his other friends corrects Frank explaining that he is Irish, Mexican, and American. On the surface, the comic series *Border Town* appears to be a comic that addresses some of the social and political aspects involved in immigration; However, while it does address these topics, it pays special attention to the concept of identity and what it means to be Latino.

Similar to Miles Morales, the main character of *Border Town*, Frank, does not present or view himself with a single racial identity, quite unlike the other characters in this comic. Characters like Quinteh and Blake represent how people view race to ensure that it defines a person within a single identity. In comparison, Frank exists on these borders of multiple identities as a person who is not only Mexican but also Irish and American as well. However, Frank's character in *Border Town* represents new contexts of race that focuses on not having clearly defined identities; this concept is furthered and depicted in Latinos, through the merging of cultures and geography, who begin to carry multiple racial and cultural identities.

Although Esquivel explains that the fears created by racial stereotypes and the politics of immigration do play a role in *Border Town*, it is not the central focus of the storytelling. Instead, Esquivel does not present the villains or the representation of evil as racists to embody the fears of the border: he uses monsters from Mexican mythology. Some of the monsters that Esquivel uses in *Border Town* are La Llorona, El Cadejo Negro, and Mictlantecuhtli. La Llorona is one of the most well-known myths with

Mexican folklore. The myth of La Llorona describes the story of a woman who was abandoned by her husband and was left alone to raise her two children; overcome with sorrow and rage, she threw her children into a river and killed them. Because of her actions, the woman is forced to wander the earth until she finds the bodies of her children. The other myth Esquivel uses is El Cadejo Negro, which is a spirit that appears at night to travelers; the black version of this creature is sometimes represented as an incarnation of the devil that attempts to kill them. Mictlantecuhtli, the ruler of Mictlan and the Aztec god of the dead, also appears in the series due to the focus on Aztec mythology and Mexican folklore.

Although *Border Town* ended prematurely, it presented a variety of issues involving the Latino community, ranging from immigration to how race and culture influence personal identity. Throughout its storytelling, *Border Town* goes farther than presenting a town that deals with immigration issues because of geographical borders. This comic also addresses what it means to be at the border of multiple cultures and racial identities through the main character Frank and the movement between the real world and Mictlan. Overall, *Border Town* shows the changing contexts of race and the role it plays in the formation of identity. From the changes in the representation of Zorro, we understood that the contexts of race and identity are not static. With the creation of comics such as *Border Town*, it is becoming increasingly clear that especially for Latino characters, race and identity are no longer going to as clearly defined, and there will be intersections between multiple aspects of identity as more characters are presented as existing within

numerous borders that make up identity in American comics. One such character is La Borinqueña, the superheroine of Puerto Rico.

La Borinquena: The Hero of Puerto Rico

The Puerto Rican superhero La Borinquena was created by graphic novelist Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez and is presented as a patriotic symbol of the island of Puerto Rico. Throughout his life, Rodriguez expressed that he was often the target of racial discrimination. especially in the 1970s. For a short period of time, when Rodriguez was living with his family in Puerto Rico, his creative talents bloomed, and his love of Puerto Rico deepened. After graduating from university, Rodriguez maintained his talent for graphic design and, while working at the Latino web magazine *Mi Gente*, he met Marvel's future editor-in-chief, Joe Quesada.

With Rodriguez's connection to Quesada, he would eventually curate an art show featuring the artwork of the six black characters from Marvel Comics: Black Panther, Storm, Luke Cage, The Falcon, Blade, and War Machine. The exhibit was a celebration of these characters' legacy in comic books and a call for more such characters of color. Quesada said the following about what Rodriguez hoped to express through his work: "It's not just guys in capes but socially relevant content and a great story to tell" (Gonzalez 2010). Rodriguez's connection to Puerto Rican culture and the idea of comics being able to express socially relevant content, along with his previous success, urged him to bring in further multicultural aspects in comics with the creation of the Puerto Rican heroine La Borinquena.

The character La Borinquena is presented as a young woman named Marisol Rios De La Luz, a Columbia university student living with her parents in Brooklyn. During a study abroad program to the island of Puerto Rico, Marisol explores some caves and finds five crystals. After finding these five crystals, Atabex, the Taino mother goddess appears; once the crystals are reunited, the goddess summons her sons Yucahu, the spirit of the seas and mountains, and Juracan, the spirit of the hurricanes. They give Marisol superhuman strength, the power of flight, and control over storms. The graphic novel *La Borinquena* features Marisol learning about Puerto Rican culture and presenting different aspects of identity. The name La Borinquena came from the title of a musical composition approved by Puerto Rico's first elected governor Luis Munoz Marin to become its regional anthem in 1952.

Therefore, when combined with the Taino Indian mythology, the *La Borinquena* comic book series presents multiple aspects of Puerto Rican culture. The series focuses on displaying the features of Puerto Rican culture by presenting La Borinquena as a hero who presents all the best aspects of this culture and also having Marisol slowly learning about her Puerto Rican heritage, since she grew up in America, throughout the series. La Borinquena's representation focuses on depicting the national pride of Puerto Rico. This is gleaned not only from the character being named after the Puerto Rican regional anthem or gaining superpowers from the gods of the Taino people who are indigenous to the island but also from the costume that Marisol wears as La Borinquena.

When in the persona of La Borinquena, Marisol wears a costume that resembles the Puerto Rican flag. These features combine to portray La Borinquena as a character that presents not only the unique as aspects of Puerto Rican culture but also Puerto Rican culture as American culture due to being presented as having a connection to both cultures. La Borinquena presents aspects of Latino culture, such as code-switching, in a manner different from other modern comics featuring Latinos. In comparison to other characters who may speak one word of Spanish or have an entire issue devoted to a Spanish speaking audience, La Borinquena takes a different approach.

La Borinquena's code-switching is much more natural in comparison to other Latino characters in comics as, here, Spanish acts like a bridge to another culture. In speech, Marisol can be seen moving from Spanish to English or vice versa, showing that Spanish is just as natural in America as the English language is in Puerto Rico.

In comparison, to other representations of code-switching and depictions of Latino culture in comics, La Borinquena's representation, especially of code-switching, presents a new presentation showing two cultures merging together since she's been living in Brooklyn for the vast majority of her life and then getting this role as the regional hero of Puerto Rico, Marisol's character presents this culture not only by depicting certain unique aspects of it, such as mythology and regional pride but also by depicting Puerto Rico regardless of geographic barriers as American. By illustrating La Borinquena as a character who was born in raised in Brooklyn, New York, wearing the Puerto Rican flag and speaking fluent Spanish and English—the languages of two identities—in one panel,

it not only represents Puerto Rican regional pride and identity but also shows Marisol and Puerto Ricans as American.

La Borinquena's representation is reminiscent of characters like Captain America who are meant to represent national pride. She is similar to Captain America in that both characters are named in such a way to evoke feelings of national pride. Furthermore, both characters are meant to represent the best of their regions by wearing the flags of their nations as their costumes, with Captain America wearing a costume inspired by the American flag and La Borinquena wearing one inspired by the Puerto Rican flag.

However, unlike Captain America who was created when comics were used for propaganda, La Borinquena's representation is not meant to evoke nationalism for the purpose of war propaganda but to present Puerto Ricans and their culture as a part of America. La Borinquena being used to connect Puerto Rican culture to American culture is detailed further in the graphic novel *Ricanstruction: Reminiscing & Rebuilding Puerto Rico*. This graphic novel was created in response to Hurricane Maria's destruction of the island and was meant to be a fundraising project to help rebuild the island of Puerto Rico. *Ricanstruction: Reminiscing & Rebuilding Puerto Rico* featured La Borinquena teaming up with DC Comic heroes Wonder Woman, Superman, and Batman to provide relief to the island after the hurricane and to celebrate Puerto Rican history. By placing La Borinquena alongside known American superheroes, she is shown not only as a regional Puerto Rican superhero but also shows her and other Puerto Ricans as Americans. The character of La Borinquena presents Latinos and their cultures moving beyond cultural

and geographic barriers as seen in previous comic book representations. While she wears a costume inspired by the Puerto Rican flag, her character and the island she represents fall within American society and culture.

Conclusion: Changes in Representations of Race Moving Away from "Other"

The representation of Latino characters has undergone a wide variety of changes that have affected the contexts of identity and race. Zorro underwent significant changes in his racial identity due to the influence of American history, media, and the changing contexts of race. Over time, characters such as Blue Beetle came to represent living at the border of two cultures. Through the use of code-switching and the setting of his stories being around the Mexican border, Blue Beetle presents as a character that moves between cultural spaces. The character of Blue Beetle, with his appearance, begins the discussion on the representations of Latino characters as the "other." The section on DC Comics character Jessica Cruz continues the representation of Latino characters as the other; however, instead of representing this aspect through physical appearance or moving between borders, it focuses on the social treatment of persons with mental health issues. With Marvel Comics character Miles Morales, the representation of race in comics changes for Latinos once again as is Miles both African American as well as Latino.

Unlike Blue Beetle who represents Latino characters moving in and out of the surrounding cultural spaces, Miles is presented as having a more dynamic racial identity that emerges from two different cultures. The changing contexts for race in Latino comics continue with the analysis of the comic book series *Border Town*. The main character of

Border Town, Frank is half Irish and Latino; upon moving to Arizona, he must deal with his mixed identity as he only lives on the border now but even begins attending a racial divided high school. *Border Town* presents changes in the representation of racial identity for Latinos in comics along with presenting issues such as stereotyping, and immigration worries through the employment of Mexican mythology. Finally, La Borinquena represents Puerto Rican culture as the island's patriotic hero and removes the representation of Latinos as the "other" by presenting the Puerto Rican culture as a part of American culture.

Chapter 4: Native Americans in Comics: Representations Stuck in the Past

The next representation of identity in comics that was examined was of Native Americans. I found that representations of this group focus, almost exclusively, on the past. Quite often, the representations of these characters would feature them focusing on the Western genre in comics. In comparison to the previous groups that were examined whose genres of storytelling were diverse and allowing for different representations of women and minorities within media, I have found that the majority of Native American characters are strictly placed within the Western genre of comic books, with some exceptions.

This chapter will focus on examining numerous representations of Native Americans within comic books. Some representations focus on portraying the ideal example of a stereotypical Indian. Others will address certain aspects of Native American culture to address social issues such as racism. As Native American representations move towards the modern age of comics in the early 1970s and 1980s, the New Age Movement within the United States influenced many such representations and removed these depictions that were steeped in the past as well as changed aspects of gender in Native American interpretations.

Over time, previous character depictions were redefined to remove stereotypes that were previously present. Eventually, as comic books become a source of redefining identity and representing cultures, Native American tribal groups used this medium for two purposes: educating the public and themselves about their culture and history as well

as addressing social issues that were still present within their communities and, hence, defining their identities within comics themselves. These changes in Native Americans in comics are summarized in the table below (table 4).

A character I found that defined Native Americans portrayals in comics and is also one of the most long-standing Native Americans in pop culture was Tonto from the *Lone Ranger* comic book series.

Table 4: Changing Representations of Native Americans in Comics Timeline

Tonto: A Representation of the Past Native Americans in the 1950s	Firehair: A realistic representation of Native Americans in 1960s	Talisman: Changing gender in Native American Comics in the 1980s	Tonto: A Classic Revisited in the 1990s	*Tribal Force*: Presenting Native American social issues in the 2000s
Tonto due to lack of tribal affiliation, broken speech, and subjugated status is meant represented the generic Native American.	Firehair's representation focuses on addressing race and racism but also shows both Native Americans and American settlers as more realistic characters. By adding aspects of Blackfeet culture.	Marvel Comic character Talisman's representations changed not only depictions of gender but, also move Native American portrayals into modern contexts by showing her as educated and in the present.	In the 1990s Tonto is given a more modern interpretation removing aspects of his 1950s presentation of broken speech, subservient behavior, and generic representation.	By the 2000s with the publication of comics like *Tribal Force* Native Americans presented current issues such as alcoholism and tribal authority. Enabling Native Americans to be presented as cultures and people with a contemporary presence.

Tonto: Sidekick, Indian Lawyer, and a Representation of the Past

Although not the oldest Native American character within American comics, Tonto is by far the most well-known. Initially created for the radio in the 1930s, the Lone Ranger radio show would later become popular enough with the public to gain its own newspaper strip and comic book series. The character of Tonto would later get his own series called *The Lone Ranger's Faithful Indian Companion: Tonto.* As I read to understand Tonto's character, in the *Lone Ranger* comic book as well as his own series, I found that Tonto's characteristics did not make him seem stereotypical or offensive. Author Michael A. Sheyahshe described Tonto as being much more filled with characteristics that can be both stereotypical and a source of pride to native peoples. Within both the comics, Tonto is shown as compelling, fit, sympathetic, perceptive, and an expert outdoorsman (Sheyahshe 2008). Tonto's character is trustworthy, often doing things that he says he will do, regardless of the consequences. On the other hand, Sheyahshe also alludes to some of the stereotypical characteristics displayed by Tonto that makes him somewhat of a problematic representation of Native American people.

Tonto is shown to have a limited understanding of the English language (Sheyahshe 2008). Even his name is meant to Native American people as being less intelligent as his name in Spanish means "dummy" (Sheyahshe 2008). Although Tonto may have

characteristics that accurately present Native American persons, his representation is also limited in some ways to being a stereotypical Indian.

When examining Tonto, Sheyahshe describes how Tonto is contentiously in a subjugated position to the Lone Ranger throughout his comic book history. Although the men are meant to be a team, the Lone Ranger is often shown giving Tonto orders. Hence, there is no true equality between the two men; instead, in those moments, Tonto is shown to be under the Lone Ranger and is merely following the orders of a man from the dominant culture. Additionally, to further address Tonto's character as being the generic stand-in for Native American stereotypes, his tribal affiliation is not mentioned in any form within either the original *Lone Ranger* series or his separate series.

According to Sheyahshe, Tonto's clothing offers no idea of his tribal origin. Instead, his buckskin jumpsuit and single-feather headband is a stereotypical representation of Native Americans in the Wild West of the United States (Sheyahshe 2008). Similar to other scholars' ideas, Tonto's character being a somewhat mixed representation of Native Americans was recognized in my own examination. One of the examples of this is Tonto acting as a bridge between Native American culture and white culture in the Western United States.

Tonto interactions with other Indians within his comic book series appears to show him becoming involved in problems in the frontier. Throughout his adventures, Tonto uses his skills to help other native people; however, within all Dell Comics copyrighted *Lone Ranger* comics, it has been shown that Tonto's interventions into other Native

American conflicts are often meant to serve the purposes of the United States government (Allen 2009). In his comic book series, Tonto's interventions show him trying to broker peace between the United States citizens and the Native American tribal groups. These "peace treaties" often include having the United States take away the natural resources of the native tribes in the area, mostly their gold and silver. Tonto even helps develop the technology for communication and transportation for the United States by advancing that development by removing natives from their own lands.

Last, Tonto is often shown helping to develop non-native usage of Native American lands, especially for mining and raising herd animals for white settlers (Allen 2009). Looking at the Dell Comics version of Tonto, this representation is meant to support the concept of American settlement. With the depiction of Tonto taking way the rights and lands of other Native Americans with his "peace treaties," it enables the history of this period to be sanitized and show Native American people giving up their traditional ways of life and their autonomy to become the missionaries of American ideals and culture, similar to Tonto.

As I continued examining Tonto's character to find any critical differences between his representation in his series and the original *Lone Ranger* comic book series, I found that his language was fundamentally different. Tonto's speech in *Lone Ranger* is broken, showing that he had not mastered the English language. However, in his series *The Lone Ranger's Companion Tonto*, we see Tonto's language take a shift. Since Tonto is the main character of this series, more of his thoughts are illustrated in the comics as along

with more interactions with other Native Americans; within his speech bubbles, Tonto's English is perfectly understandable and fluent. Whether speaking to other Native Americans or to white characters, his language is articulate and very eloquent. When considering what this means for Tonto's representation, it shows that only the comic book reader and other Native American characters know how intelligent Tonto is. In comparison to other people within the *Lone Ranger* series, especially to white characters, Tonto appears imprudent.

Finally, in this examination of the other Native Americans within these comics, I found that Tonto along with all of the Native American characters in the *Lone Ranger* comics are merely meant to present generic plains tribes. This is mainly made clear when Tonto is easily able to speak to any Native American person he encounters during his adventures. Overall, while Tonto is not a completely stereotypical character, his representation provides a thought-provoking aspect of the United States' view of Native Americans, mainly since his representation in comics and other media has lasted a long time. Tonto's presentation within comics represents Native Americans as generic people who are uniform in their culture, do not need autonomy, and are relics of America's Old West past. However, these aspects change as comics become more modernized.

Firehair, Talisman, and the Future of Native American Heroes

When examining modern representations of Native Americans in comic books, there was a significant contrast to Tonto's early representation. One of the first characters I examined to get a better understanding of these differences is Firehair. Firehair is a

Native American character created in 1969 by DC Comics creator Joe Kubert in *Showcase* #85. It appears that the Firehair comic provides a more realistic representation of Native Americans by examining the themes of racism during the settlement of the Western United States. At the beginning of the comic, Firehair explains that due to his lighter skin and red hair, the Blackfoot tribe that he was born into did not accept him. One of the main differences from Tonto's representation to Firehair is that Firehair is not shown to be a generic native person. Unlike Tonto whose tribal affiliation is unknown to the comic book reader, Firehair's clothing and his dialogue explains that he is a part of the Blackfoot tribe. Kubert expands on Firehair's Blackfoot heritage by referencing Blackfoot mythology and their creator god called Naapi or the "old man."

Firehair's lighter skin results in him being rejected by the Blackfoot tribe; however, he is also not accepted by American society due to his Native American heritage. Once again, in comparison to Tonto's series which focuses on showing the advancement of American society in the settlement of the United States by him acting as a bridge for American and Native American societies, Firehair's comic focuses on addressing a more realistic representation not only of the concepts of race and the inevitable racism but also the characterization of Native Americans and American settlers. Tonto's representation focuses on attempting to show other Native Americans the greatness of American society by acting as an Indian lawyer and getting them to give up their autonomy to join American society.

In comparison, Firehair's representation focuses on examining the effects of racism on a Native American man in the United States during the period of the Western settlement. This depiction of Native Americans in more rounded characterizations enables the rejection of the stereotypical portrayal of Native Americans that Tonto's representation created, and this continues throughout the modern age with superhero characters like Talisman from Marvel Comics. Introduced in the Marvel Comics series *Alpha Flight*, the character of Talisman represents a significant change in the representations of Native Americans in modern comics Talisman's representation focuses on placing a Native American character in a modern setting.

However, she is presented as being a character with control over the spiritual realm, causing her to become the stereotypical idea of a Native American being an instant shaman. The instant shaman representation focuses on showing how a Native can become a divine figure without the training that other shamans are required to go through and, thus, represents spirituality as innate within Native Americans (Sheyahshe 2008). However, although Talisman does present certain stereotypical representations of Native Americans within media, her presentation in Marvel Comics shows advancement from generic Native American stereotypes. Like Firehair, Talisman's speech is clear and not presented as fumbling like Tonto's. Furthermore, Talisman is an educated Native American woman who is attending college.

Although her adventures in the *Alpha Flight* comic book series has her traveling back in time, Talisman is not a product of these periods (Sheyahshe 2008), thereby showing

Native Americans not as a cultural group that no longer exists within American society but as a present and living culture. Talisman's representation is indeed an advancement to Native American representations within mainstream comic books. However, most of the future changes in representations may be done by Native Americans creating their representations within the comic books.

Themes of Native Americans Within American Comics and a Classic Evolved

From my research on American comics' representations of Native Americans, I found a common theme. Quite often, for the consumers' enjoyment and education, the images of Native Americans are reconstructed throughout media (King 2009). This remodeling of the Indian image for European or Western audiences involves removing aspects of Indian culture from the representations. All throughout the representations of Native Americans in American comics, removing tribal identities from characters is quite prevalent, thereby forcing the various tribal cultures of Native Americans into a collective group.

During the 1950s, characters like Tonto acted as a bridge between Native Americans and American settlers to enable Native American tribes to accept the settling of the American newcomers. This presents a Eurocentric ideal of what Native Americans should be and removes the fear of the savage Indian from American comics. Warrior representations like Tonto and Firehair show the typical noble Indian warrior that was popular in Western comics in the 1940s and 1950s, and mystical characters like Talisman have become more popular over time.

While the Native warrior stereotype is focused on a representation of Native Americans being rooted in the past, the representation of the Native American mystic appears to correlate with the New Age Movement within the United States (King 2009). For some context, the New Age Movement was a religious movement that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s throughout the metaphysical religious and occult communities.

The relation between the timeline of this movement and Talisman's creation occurring in 1983 shows a continuing trend of character representations in comics often being influenced by social movements within the United States. While most Native American characters are men, one of the interesting aspects that separate Native American women's characterization from male representation is the hypersexuality and mystical powers within their portrayals. Comparing Talisman's character to Tonto and Firehair brings up the apparent lack of sexuality within Tonto and Firehair's representations. In their portrayals, there is a much larger focus on depicting Tonto as the good or noble Indian and presenting Firehair as an outcast or the "other".

In comparison, Talisman's representation is hypersexualized. This sexualization is mainly seen in her costume; although not the stereotypical fringe jumpsuit that Tonto wears in his comic, it focuses on presenting Talisman as a mystical character as well as a sexual character. The first issue of *Alpha Flight* to feature Talisman shows her in this red and yellow costume with multiple cutouts near her chest and legs along with a pair of high heels. However, while the depicts Talisman in a rather sexualized costume, it also shows her using some form of mystical powers, thereby representing Talisman as being

incorporated within the New Age Movement that was occurring around this time in America. Another character that represented this period of the New Age Movement is Dawnstar.

A mainstream DC superhero, Dawnstar characterizes the various possible futures that await the Native Americans". Dawnstar is a character from a possible future of DC Comics set in the 31st century. While her character might appear to have escaped certain aspects of overdone Native American representations on the surface, that is shown not to be the case. Dawnstar's character, similar to Marvel's character Talisman, was created during the New Age Movement in April 1977. While Dawnstar's representation is meant to show a possible future for Native Americans in the 31st century, certain aspects presenting Native Americans as relics exist within her portrayal. First, Dawnstar's costume has fringes and feathers, similar to Tonto's appearance in the 1950s, thereby showcasing generic Native American clothing and culture.

Compared to previous Native American characters such as Firehair, Dawnstar's tribal affiliation is known to us as Anasazi; however, other aspects of the tribal culture are not presented in the comics. Dawnstar's representation, although focusing on a potential future for DC Comics by depicting the 31st century, maintains aspects of colonization because part of her origin explains that she comes from a group of Native Americans who were abducted by aliens and forced to colonize a planet in the 13th century. The character of Dawnstar, like Talisman, addresses problems seen in previous representations of Native Americans and provides a diversity that past generic Native portrayals lacked.

Both characters provide significant changes in representations of Native Americans by illustrating aspects of gender representation that are not seen in their male counterparts by displaying sexuality through their physical bodies. Dawnstar and Talisman, due to the rise of the New Age Movement in the United States, shift representations of Native Americans away from the past and towards the present and distant future. While there are certainly problematic aspects of Native American representations in American comics similar to more mainstream characters like Lois Lane and Wonder Woman, they still change throughout time, as understood by the modern interpretation of Tonto.

In 1994, the Native American character Tonto was revisited by Topps Comics. This Tonto is no longer presented as the noble Indian or the Lone Ranger's faithful sidekick. One of the best examples of Tonto's move from being the Lone Ranger's sidekick to a more human character is in the first panel of this comic, which shows Tonto punching Lone Ranger in the face. In the initial representation of Tonto, he appears as a character who is rather subservient to the Lone Ranger during their adventures. However, the 1990s representation of Tonto does not speak in broken English; instead, regardless of whom Tonto is speaking to, he speaks in perfect English. In fact, to exemplify this changed representation of Tonto's understanding of English, the comic shows Tonto making fun of the stereotypical view of Native Americans speaking broken English in the first issue.

The 1990s version of Tonto focuses on rejecting the stereotypes found in the previous comic book representation of Tonto. Quite contrary to the 1950s version where Tonto

would say nothing about being called the Lone Ranger's Indian, this version of Tonto takes offense at such as remark, saying "I'm not his Indian. I'm not anyone's Indian. I'm Tonto."

The modern version of Tonto flat out rejects all stereotypical ideas of Native Americans that were prevalent in the original Lone Ranger comics and radio show. Some of these rejections can be seen in the changes in Tonto's representation through comic art. Although presented in the familiar buckskin jumpsuit like the original comics, there are some added elements to Tonto's physical presentation: a red bandana, scalp lock, and earrings. These additions to his physical appearance enable Tonto to no longer appear as a generic Native American that would appear in any Western comic in the 1940s and 1950s, thereby giving the character more individuality. This move towards removing Tonto from the stereotypes of the 1950s representation is continually depicted in this modern retelling of the Lone Ranger. Unlike the 1950s presentation of Tonto that focuses on showing the character as being Lone Ranger's faithful companion and the ideal bridge to persuade other Native Americans to accept the settlement of Native lands, the modern Tonto is neither. Instead, the modern Tonto is extremely animated and has a rather dry sense of humor, in comparison to the 1950s representation whose personality did not go beyond showing himself as a devoted companion to Lone Ranger and brave but showed little wit if any.

Some aspects from the original representation of Tonto remain the same. While this comic is a revision of the older *Lone Ranger* series, its setting still focuses on the Old

West. Therefore, although this revision of Tonto's character focuses on modernizing the character and removing Native Americans from the stereotypes of the past, it still maintains the notion that Native people exist in the past. However, in a sharp contrast to the Native Americans who are constantly viewed as artifacts of the Old West, many mediums including comics attempt to show modern representations of "cowboys" outside of the old west, ranging from the television show "Walker Texas Ranger" to DC Comics character Jonah Hex appearing in modern-day Gotham city to partner with Batman. The usage of a cowboy character represents a lifestyle choice; being a Native American is not a choice, it is an ethnicity, cultural identity, and is connected to spirituality and complex political implications. Therefore, based on this cultural segregation in American society, Native Americans are often compartmentalized by readers into being artifacts of America's past. However, such labeling can be changed with the help of Native Americans creating their own representations of their cultures within comic books.

Native Americans Creating Native Representations in Comics

Like many mediums, in order for diverse but accurate representations to exist, comic books need minority groups to create their art within the medium. Minority groups creating their own representations can be seen in African American representations within the blaxploitation medium and, later, the formation of Milestone comics to provide more diverse representations of characters of color. Naturally, Native American writers and artists looked to the comic books to create more diverse representations of themselves within media. The art and writing within Native American comics often take

two forms. The first form focuses on providing diverse representations of what it means to be Native American and to provide interpretations of the world around them. The second form that Native artists of comic books focus on is telling stories of the past, celebrating their cultures, and revitalizing the future generations of their community (King 2009).

One comic that illustrates the first form of Native American storytelling is the comic *Tribal Force*. *Tribal Force* was created by Jon Proudstar and Ryan Huan Smith and sold more than 10,000 copies; however, only one issue was ever published. This comic book focuses on a team of Native American superheroes, similar to the X-Men. The plot of the book brings together four Native Americans to fight against the federal government and protect the Native lands. Although *Tribal Force* only published one issue, the characters within this comic deal with significant social issues that are prevalent within Native American communities. For instance, one of the main characters of *Tribal Force*, a mute Lakota named Gabriel Medicine God—also known as the superhero Little Big Horn—is seen dealing with the issues of unemployment and suffering from the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome.

For some context, although published in 1996, *Tribal Force* deals with social issues that still affect Native American communities, thereby making the comic book and the need for representation of these issues quite relevant. The National Institute on Drug Abuse found that there is a higher rate of substance abuse among Native American youth on reservations (Drug 2018). The study found that Native American youth, among all

grade levels, examined, used more illegal substances in their lifetime than the Monitoring the Future sample (Drug 2018). Therefore, the concepts of drug abuse within Native American communities, which Proudstar and Smith allude to with the creation of the character Gabriel Medicine God, is still quite relevant in modern representations of Native Americans in comics.

Tribal Force is not the only way that Native Americans were able to tell their stories within the comic books. The second form of Native American stories that focuses on sharing the history and culture of the community is found in the comic book series *Chickasaw Adventures*. *Chickasaw Adventures* is a four-part comic book series commissioned by the Chickasaw Nation; it focuses on telling the history of the tribe by following a young boy named Johnny as he travels through time, relieving some of the historical events that occurred in the Chickasaw Nation's history.

One of the events that Johnny experiences is the Trail of Tears, which occurred due to the signing of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The goal of titles like this one focuses on enabling children of the Chickasaw Nation to have a clear understanding of their tribe's history. Comics like this also serve a purpose in educating Americans about aspects of history that is typically not represented within the American society.

Although this comic does present the history of the Native Americans, it is not done in a way that restricts these groups as relics of the past. Instead, comics like *Chickasaw Adventures* take on a similar role for Native Americans that the *Golden Legacy* comic book series took for African Americans during the 1960s and 1970s. Comics like these

not only focus on educating the youths and adults who read them but also focus on instilling a sense of pride within these communities by celebrating their past so they can advance towards making improvements for their cultures' futures.

In recent years, Native Americans have been making progress in moving their representations accurately into mainstream comics. One creator helping to present Native Americans in modern mainstream comics is artist Jeffrey Veregge. Veregge grew up reading comics at the Port Gamble S'klallam Indian Reservation where he grew up and dreamed of being a comic book artist. While Veregge loved characters like Spider-Man, he felt that Native American representation in comics was quite lacking, even describing them as "dim-witted savages out to get the hero." Veregge eventually combined Salish form line art to present superheroes like Batman and Spider-Man in a Native art style.

Over time, Veregge's work captured the attention of Marvel Comics, who at the time were attempting to revive *Red Wolf*, Marvel's first Native American character. Marvel asked Veregge to not only contribute to the cover art for issues of *Red Wolf* but also hired him as a consultant on the project to ensure that Native characters and their issues were illustrated accurately. With organizations like Marvel now including Native American creators in the process of creating accurate representations, Native Americans in comics move beyond their own communities and lesser-known indie publishers to more mainstream audiences.

Conclusion: Moving Beyond the Past

Throughout this chapter, I have found that Native American representations within mainstream comics are at a standstill. With characters like Tonto and Firehair, we see that many Native American representations focus on the Old West history of Native Americans. This constant representation of Native peoples being stuck in the past within the comic book medium leads to the misconception that these cultures are no longer alive. However, efforts have been made to rectify these notions with the creation of modern Native American characters like the Marvel Comics character Talisman and DC Comics Dawnstar, whose representations change not only the depictions of gender but also move Native American portrayals into the modern and possible future contexts. To tell stories that genuinely present their cultures and the issues that affect their communities, Native communities began publishing their own stories within comics. These stories take two forms, the first focusing on presenting social issues that still exist within Native communities such as alcoholism and tribal authority, as seen in *Tribal Force*. The second focuses on presenting the history and culture of Native groups to their communities as well as outsiders, as shown in the comic series *Chickasaw Adventures*.

By focusing on defining themselves within comics, Native American representations have been able to move beyond the generic representation that is embodied by the character of Tonto and they also do not present Native people as artifacts of America's past; instead, these comics focus not only on providing Native children and adults with an understanding of their tribal history within the United States but also educating those

outside of their culture about the Native experience within the United States. Finally, with the work of creators like Jeffrey Veregge, Native American creators can move their stories beyond their own communities and share them with a wider audience. Veregge was able to accomplish this by including his own tribal art style to more mainstream comic book heroes, eventually leading to the revival of one of the first Native American heroes in comics. Like all works of art, comic books serve a larger purpose; they educate their readers and impart certain narratives that serve as a reflection of the culture they are discovering while protecting the dignity of the people who can see themselves on these pages. Like the other minority groups, the representation of Asian characters in comics had changed greatly as well.

Chapter 5: Asian Representations in Comics: Fanged Monsters to Heroic Scientists

This chapter will examine the numerous representations of Asian characters in comic books. These examinations focus on understanding the role of these representations in comic books as propaganda during World War II, highlighting representations of the Japanese within them. By the 1950s, representations of Asians in comics take on a new focus on communism and the fear of Chinese immigration. Beyond that, Asian representations undergo another change due to the rise in popularity of martial arts films because of the influence of Bruce Lee. Lee's influence is tremendously evident in the creation of Asian martial artists in comics, including a character based on Lee created by Marvel Comics. Lee's influence on the representations of Asians in media will, over time, would prove to be a source of pride; however, due to oversaturation of martial arts films after Lee's death, the martial artist representation will eventually fade, and new representations will be created.

These new, more modern characters take Asian characters away from the stereotypes of martial artists as well as representations of being the "other." Instead, American culture will be represented as being foreign by a young Chinese man who is trying to become a professor and superhero. Additionally, I will examine the role of comic artist Jim Lee who, in his capacity as one of the founders of Image comics, worked to improve Asian representations in comics. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an analysis of the aspects of gender within manga or Japanese comics. Although not American in origin, the rise in popularity of manga has influenced Asian representation in American comics.

Throughout this section, aspects of gender, such as the categorization of manga genres, the role of women in manga, and gender roles in general, will be examined, mainly to illustrate a move towards nontraditional gender roles in manga, especially for women. The changes in representations of Asians in comics are encapsulated in the table below (table 5). To begin this section, the earliest representations of Asians in American comics, ones that worked as World War II propaganda, need to be analyzed first.

Table 5: Changing Representations of Asians in Comics Timeline

Asians in 1940s: Fanged Monsters	Asians in 1950s: Fears and communism	Asians in 1970s: The Rise of the martial Artist	Asians in the 2000s: No longer "other"	Asians in 2010s: Manga Changing Gender
In the 1940s during World War II propaganda presenting the Japanese as monsters in order to dehumanize the enemy army.	During the 1950s due to the rising fears of communism and Chinese immigration characters like Yellow Claw were introduced.	Due to the influence of martial artist Bruce Lee the martial arts genre gained popularity in the United States during the 1970s and comics started to present Asian characters as heroes using the martial artist genre starting with Marvel character Shang Chi.	With the creation of DC Comics character Ryan Choi Asians are no longer presented as "other" and instead American culture is examined from that perspective as "other."	With the introduction of women writing shonen manga, gender representations underwent significant changes for women, removing the good wife, wise mother stereotypes in current manga such as *Noragami*.

Asian Representations in World War II: Fanged Monsters and Propaganda

Throughout this research, I have come to see that historical events have influenced the representations of different racial groups, and this is especially true of Asian representations. During the golden age of comics in the 1940s, the vast majority of Asian representation focused on propaganda for World War II. Therefore, the first representations of Asian characters in American comic books were quite problematic and focused on presenting Asians less as characters and more as monsters representing the evil of the Axis powers.

During the 1940s, there was a fair amount of patriotically themed superheroes in American comic books; some of these characters such as Captain America were fighting against internal threats to the United States, such as Axis power spies, to show the Asian population as subhuman (Scott 2014). After the attack on Pearl Harbor, American comic books focused on rallying the Americans into the war effort; this majorly influenced the representation of the enemies within World War II comics, especially the Japanese, as depraved, cruel, and subhuman (Cord 2014).

During the 1930s and 1940s, there was not a lot of distinction between the different ethnic groups within Asia. In *Captain America* issue #6, a new enemy is introduced called the Arch Fiend of the Orient. Throughout the comics at the time, although all the Asian characters were shown as being Chinese with skullcaps and red robes, the context within this comic showed that Asians were working together to dominate not only the East but also the entire world. Nevertheless, as WWII progressed, there was an increase

in trying to distinguish the Japanese from the Chinese in the comic books, which lead to certain stereotypes in Asian characterization.

To illustrate, all the Japanese characters shown within comics at this time were depicted as obsessive, cruel, and unsympathetic. These stereotypes were substantiated by the artwork at the time, showing the Japanese not as people but as monsters. This style of art was greatly furthered by American comic book artists and writers being ignorant of Asian culture and the stereotypes of Japanese culture already existing in American culture but trying to show the Japanese as enemies. When drawn in American comics during this period, the Japanese were often shown to have buck teeth, thick glasses, and a rat-like facial structure. It was only once World War II ended that these representations of Asian characters were removed from American comic books as war comics were no longer popular. However, a consistent theme of Asian representations in comics during this time, especially among the Japanese, is how beast-like these characters looked, with their fanged teeth, abnormally shaped heads, and animal-like features as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. The typical representation of Asians, especially the Japanese, during WWII. Often showing Asians as fanged non-humans. Reprinted with permission from Marvel Comics from Captain America #6, by Simon 1941.

The fact that the Japanese were represented in such a way during World War II greatly affected the policy surrounding them during the war and the treatment of Japanese Americans at the time. However, to be accurate, it was not only the Japanese who were imprisoned during World War II but also German and Italian immigrants within the United States, mostly due to such dominating propaganda within American comics. During World War II, 31,275 people were interned; of these people, 17,477 were of Japanese ancestry (Kashima 2003).

Furthermore, after President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, government employees incarcerated nearly 120,000 people of Japanese descent (Kashima 2003). Moreover, many of these people were from the Western United States and incarcerated throughout the country. About two-thirds of the

people imprisoned in this camp were American citizens. However, at the time, the imprisonment of Japanese American citizens received minimal media coverage (Kashima 2003). The fact that this abomination was not covered by American news media at the time is not surprising.

Throughout this research, if one thing has remained clear it is that media representations are extremely influential in how cultures are viewed by persons throughout history. Therefore, it makes sense that many news organizations during the 1940s did not report these incidents; they had to maintain the representations of the Japanese as inhuman monsters intending to destroy America during World War II. In comparison, Executive Order 9066 also addressed Italian and German Americans they were not imprisoned but had to move away from western coastal areas and from the coastline from at least 150 miles due to individual exclusion orders. Additionally, Italian and German Americans were not held due to their large numbers and part of a growing economy in the areas they were located. Similar conditions were given to Japanese Americans in Hawaii due to their similar numbers and impact on the economy (Baer 2017).

However, these fears of Asian American citizens in the United States continue into the 1950s. The character of Yellow Claw shows the anxiety involved in Chinese immigrants moving to the United States because of the cold war and political fear of communism in the 1950s (Figure 7). For some historical context, after World War II,

Chinese immigrants who were refugees after the chaos of the war migrated from China to other countries including the United States.

Representations like Yellow Claw, as shown in Figure 7, show how the fear of immigration still exists within the United States and how the concept of the "other" transferred from the Japanese to Chinese Americans. In the comic *Yellow Claw*, we see the fear of communism expressed through Chinese representations in the series which shows the villain Yellow Claw focusing on dominating Western civilization. The representation of Chinese people within this story once again reflects the political fears of the United States being taken over by communists. Based on the historical events of the 1950s, it is not surprising that Chinese representations in comics focused on the fear of communism.

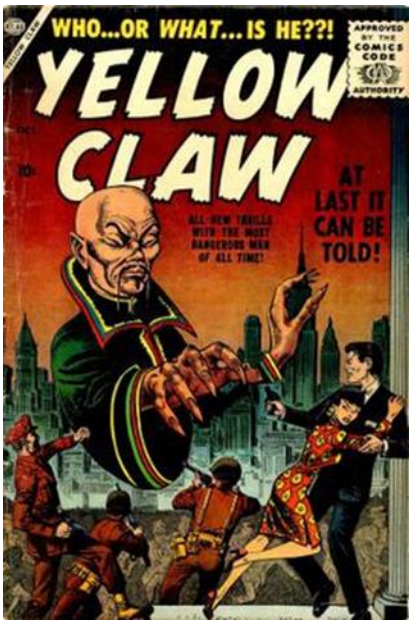

Figure 7. The villain Yellow Claw presented fears of communism in the 1950s. Reprinted with permission from Marvel Comics from Yellow Claw #1 by Feldstein 1956.

For instance, during the 1950s, Joseph McCarthy produced a series of investigations and hearings in order to expose so-called communist infiltration within the United States government. For some more context, after being elected into the Senate in 1946, McCarthy rose to importance in the 1950s because he claimed that 205 communists penetrated the State Department. McCarthy then began searching for communists in the Central Intelligence Agency and other areas of American society, including the entertainment industry. After McCarthy was reelected in 1952, he was made the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. For the next two years, McCarthy focused his investigations on government departments and questioned numerous witnesses about suspected communist affiliations.

Throughout, these hearings McCarthy failed to make a credible case against any suspect; however, due to the stigma of being called a communist, many of the people subjected to McCarthy's investigations were forced out of their careers and condemned by the public. One such person was Qian Xuesen, who was known as the founder of engineering cybernetics and considered the father of the Chinese space program. Due to McCarthy's investigation, Xuesen was stripped of his security clearance for his work and, ultimately, decided to return to China. Yet, he ended up being detained in Los Angeles and spent five years under house arrest (Tsien 2013). However, he was later released in exchange for two American pilots who were captured during the Korean War.

These historical events, often referred to as the Second Red Scare, explain the image of Chinese Americans representations during the 1950s in American comics. With the

end of World War II, the fear was no longer of enemies abroad but of threats coming from inside the United States, threats of changing political ideologies and people sharing these different ideologies to gain control of the United States. However, these Asian representations began to change. Unlike the representations of fanged monsters, a new genre of film, the martial arts film, emerged; from that, a new representation of Asian characters was born—the martial artist. Nonetheless, in order to understand the martial artist representation entirely, the history of the genre in other media needs to be examined as well, mainly by studying the man who brought this genre to the United States—Bruce Lee.

Bruce Lee and the Asian Stereotype of the Martial Artist

Bruce Lee was a martial artist who hailed from China and popularized the genre of martial art movies in the United States during the 1960s. After Bruce Lee's death in 1973, there was a significant increase in the number of martial arts movies made in the United States; this was referred to as "Bruceploitation." In other words, many people within the entertainment industry, due to the popularity of Bruce Lee's on-screen persona tried to create many Bruce Lee-style martial arts movies. Bruce Lee's popularity empowered Asian American representations, and, over time, his character became a stereotype of Asian America (Hu 2008). To provide further context, the concept of "Bruceploitation" refers to a film that uses a style similar to Bruce Lee films, including visuals and mood qualities such as costume, body movements, and voice (Hu 2008). The stars of these films would also take on names similar to Lee's such as Bruce Li, Bruce

Le, and Dragon Lee (Hu 2008). The creation of these “Bruceploitation” actors were thought to be tricking consumers into thinking themselves as watching a Bruce Lee film. Over time, the usage of “Bruceploitation” for the representation of Asians within media continued, even within the comic book genre with the creation of many martial artist characters in the 1970s and early 1980s. One such character, Shang-Chi, is even meant to be based on Lee and was created the same year of his sudden death.

The stereotype of Asian characters representing martial artists has existed in multiple forms of media, and the medium of comic books is no different. When studying these occurrences, I found at least five different Asian characters who were martial artists, created from the years 1973 to 1999. One of the first characters created in 1973 was the Marvel character Shang-Chi, whose characterization comes from martial artist Bruce Lee. Another character created during this period was the DC Comics character Katana who was created in 1983. Due to the significant similarities in their representations as Asian characters depicting the martial artists' genre, I will be examining these characters alongside each other. One of the first aspects of Shang-chi and Katana’s stories that allude to the martial arts genre is their origin stories. Shang-chi’s origin story focuses on his father Fu Manchu raising Shang-chi to become the ultimate weapon by training him extensively in martial arts.

As the story progresses, Shang-chi learns that his father had ordered him to kill an innocent man because he was harming his criminal empire that Shang-chi was unaware of. The comic then focuses on Shang-Chi trying to get revenge on his father for using

him as a weapon and to end his father's criminal activities. Katana's origin is quite similar, and it starts with Katana explaining that she grew up as a friend of two brothers, one of whom she eventually married. The other brother gets involved in criminal activity, and feeling betrayed when Katana refuses to marry him, he kills her husband and starts a fire that also kills her children. During this conflict, Katana gets a sword that contains the soul of her husband and is determined to get revenge against her brother-in-law.

One of the main similarities between Shang-Chi and Katana's origin stories is the betrayal from a family member leading to a quest for revenge. The quest for revenge is a well-known trope in the martial arts genre and, therefore, is a significant theme in their origin stories. However, other typical themes from the martial artist genre also appear in both Shang-Chi and Katana's representations. For instance, both Shang-Chi and Katana's characters show them as being viewed as the "other" in Western societies. In his first issue, we see Shang-Chi not knowing where to go to file a missing-person report in London. He says that he does not understand London society because he was protected in his father's home for the vast majority of his life.

Others in the series view Shang-Chi as being the "other", often illustrating this by referring to him as a Chinaman. In comparison, Katana's representation of her being the "other" is shown more indirectly during her interactions with her teammates. For instance, one of Katana's teammates, who was examined in a previous chapter, Black Lightning, has a conflict with her because she killed a general during a mission. Katana justifies her actions by telling Black Lightning that the general had committed a crime

against her and that she spared the soldiers' lives because they were not involved in the crime. Last, one of the final similarities between Shang-Chi and Katana's representations is the concept of mysticism involved in their martial arts.

For instance, the imagery used within the series shows Shang-Chi using martial arts in a mystical manner instead of showing it realistically. I found this representation of Shang Chi to be very similar to the concept of having the Native Americans represented more spiritually or having a natural connection to their spirituality. We also see this concept of the mystic with Katana's sword being able to take souls. Furthermore, Shang-Chi is shown to have a mystical connection to nature within his series he is often seen learning different martial arts from animals.

Finally, when examining Katana, I found her to have a great range of emotions unlike Shang-chi, from sadness to anger, all a result of the deaths of her husband and children. Like many female superheroes, Katana's gender also plays a role in her representation. For instance, Katana is referred to as the "prize" by her brother-in-law when he is fighting her husband in her origin story. This shows that although Katana is a skilled martial artist, her brother-in-law disrespects her skills and, instead, views her as a possession or a prize. Last, this statement also shows the brother-in-law trying to force Katana into a traditional Asian stereotype by being submissive to him. As we move into the early 2000s, a new Asian character was created, allowing Asian characters in comics to move past the martial arts genre.

Ryan Choi: The All-New Atom

For the majority of my research, I had a hard time finding Asian characters that were not influenced by martial arts within American comics until I came across recent publications. Created by Gail Simone for DC Comics in 2006, Ryan Choi represents Asian characters outside of the martial arts genre in American comic books. One of the first things that are noticeable about Ryan Choi Ryan's comic genre focuses on science fiction. Instead of being presented as a martial arts master like Katana and Shang-Chi, Ryan is presented as uninterested in martial arts like his peers and, instead, focuses on science.

Additionally, Ryan Choi's origin story of becoming the Atom is not the typical "fighting for revenge" trope that is present in Shang-Chi's and Katana's origins. Ryan's story focuses on him being in correspondence with the original Atom, Ray Palmer, through letters. However, when his mentor disappears, Ryan is asked to take on his role as a professor at the college he worked. Besides his superhero origin story not being a revenge story, Ryan is culturally is different as well.

One of the first things that separate Ryan Choi from Shang-Chi and Katana is that the readers know Ryan's country of origin as Hong Kong, China. Throughout my reading of Katana's storylines, we do not know what country she is from, even though it is implied to be Japan, or what area of Japan she is from. Furthermore, when examining Shang-Chi since his stories presenting martial arts more mystically, his country of origin is presented as another dimension that has a culture similar to China. Additionally, Ryan's culture is

not derived from the stereotypical representation of martial artists or clothing. He is often shown to engage in code-switching with his father, switching to English when he is talking to his friends but speaking in Cantonese with his father.

When addressing the typical representations of Asians in comics, we see that Ryan is not good at martial arts and, instead, his powers focus on him understanding technology and science. Yet another difference is that Ryan is not considered the "other" within his comic series. Instead, Ryan views American culture as being the "other" and strange; these interactions with the culture range from Ryan trying to understand the United States currency to his interactions with women in the comics.

However, Choi's representation could be interpreted as a stereotype known as the model minority. The model minority stereotype focused on presenting Asian Americans as geniuses in math, science, or music. The model minority stereotype is further compounded by their parents often being portrayed as mothers who force their children to work harder to achieve success and fathers who are nerdy, effeminate who hold prestigious positions but not leadership roles (Blackburn 2019). Based on this definition Choi's representation avoids this stereotype when looking deeper at his representation. First, as a child, Choi is not presented as a genius but instead being a child with a natural curiosity for science.

Additionally, Choi avoids the stereotype of having a forceful mother due to his mother having passed away early in his childhood. Finally, Choi's father is presented as being a rather stern and direct man who does push Choi to pursue science as a career but

only to encourage his son's personal interests. Lastly, throughout the series shows pride when his son stands up for himself even against him. Therefore, removing Choi's father from the stereotype of the domineering Asian parent. On the surface Ryan Choi's representation could be viewed as a model minority stereotype but, the character's backstory removes him from this stereotypical representation.

Overall, Ryan Choi, the All-New Atom shows the advancing representations of Asians in comics by not presenting Ryan and his culture as the "other" but simply showing him as a person trying to live within and understand a different culture while maintaining and redefining his identity and not portraying Choi as a model minority stereotype. However, as I continued examining American representations of Asians within comics, I found that the creators had a significant amount of influence in the direction that the medium would take in representations. This is especially clear in the careers of comic book writer and artist Jim Lee and mangaka Rumiko Takahashi.

Creators Influencing Business and Representations

The American comic book artist and writer Jim Lee was born in Seoul, South Korea, but spent his childhood in St. Louis, Missouri. As an immigrant, Lee often described feeling like an outsider and, therefore, was drawn to characters like the *X-Men* due to their status as outsiders as well. Throughout his career, Lee explained that his art benefited from him connecting to characters who were marginalized. Initially deciding to follow his father into medicine, Lee was eventually inspired by works such as *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* to pursue a career in comics (Baker 2010). During a trip to

a New York comic book convention, Lee presented his art portfolio to Marvel Comics editor Archie Goodwin.

Goodwin invited Lee to Marvel Comics and his first assignment was being the artist for the comic book series *Alpha Flight* (Baker 2010). Eventually, Lee would become the ongoing artist for the comic book series *X-Men* and gain more creative control of the title because his artwork maintained a large fanbase. Eventually, wanting to have more control over his own work, Lee joined other creators leaving Marvel to form their own publisher, Image Comics (Tantimedh 2006). Image Comics creations were owned by their creators and not Image itself. Therefore, Lee and his fellow artists owned their creations. With his involvement in Image Comics, Lee made a big move towards creators having more autonomy over their creations.

Mangaka Rumiko Takahashi made a different impact on the manga industry in Japan by being a woman in a male-dominated industry, both in creators and content. Takahashi started creating manga in 1975 when she started writing her own dōjinshi or self-published manga. Throughout her career, Takahashi's work focused on the guidance provided by her teacher Kazuo Koike, who encouraged his students to create well-developed and interesting characters. Takahashi's professional career began with her first published work *Those Selfish Aliens* and, later that year, Takahashi would write her first serialized story in Weekly Shonen Sunday: *Urusei Yatsura*, a science fiction comedy. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Takahashi would publish her most well-known works: the romantic comedy *Maison Ikkoku*, the gender bending Shonen martial artist manga

Ranma ½ and the dark fantasy *Inuyasha*. All of Takahashi's major works have been translated into English and other European languages. Takahashi said the following about her Western popularity: “Sure, there are cultural differences in my work. When I see an American comedy, even though the jokes are translated, there's always a moment when I feel puzzled and think, ‘Ah, Americans would probably laugh at this more.’ I suppose the same thing must happen with my books. It’s inevitable. And yet, that doesn’t mean my books can’t be enjoyed by English-speaking readers. I feel confident that there's enough substance to them that people from a variety of cultural backgrounds can have a lot of fun reading them.” (Takahashi 2000)

Both Jim Lee and Rumiko Takahashi made significant impacts on Asian representations in comics. Jim Lee helped establish a company that gave creators more autonomy over their creations. Takahashi helped bring manga representations to Western cultures and, through her success, helped change the genre of shounen manga which was mostly based on the gender of the creators. Due to the impact of creators like Takahashi and the popularity of manga in the west, gender representations within Japanese manga need to be examined as well.

Japanese Manga and Representations of Gender

Japanese manga got its start with the influence of political cartoons and comic book strips from Europe and the United States. Although manga is used commonly to refer to comic books in Japan, due to its popularity in the United States, the definition of manga slowly began being redefined. One of the ways that manga is separated from American

comics is the audience; however, the most common way that manga is defined is by its style. An instance of manga being defined by the audience is when mature manga developed in the United States, due to the localizing of Japanese works and publishing original works from the United States, businesses defined this genre as being a smaller comic book with a cheaper price that women and girls were expected to read (Kacsuk 2018).

When examining style, there are certain aspects of manga that are maintained regardless of whether the manga was made in Japan or not. Certain character designs, visual codes, background designs in the visuals and as well as pages and panel layouts are a few examples of these aspects. One underlying principle within manga is that the subjective viewpoint is most favored. The aspects that define Japanese manga are Japanese cultural references, scripting, usage of the Japanese language, and implicit Japanese background, such as Japanese manga culture (Kacsuk 2018).

Although manga has moved beyond Japan, there remain certain defining aspects such as the genre focusing on connecting to different types of readers but with more of a focus on gender and age, especially in comparison to American comic books. Unlike in the United States where comics were a rather niche market until recently, manga is somewhat mainstream in Japan. Because of this popularity, magazines serialize the different stories, weekly or monthly, in anthology format with different marketing strategies for different audiences based on age and gender. From these, the successful books within these anthologies are compiled into paperbacks. This form of publishing is

rather similar to American comics as the books published either monthly or, sometimes, bi-weekly are published into trade paperbacks. Besides the effect of gender and age affecting marketing strategies, gender plays a significant role in the representation of men and women within Japanese manga.

In comparison to American comics which often show women as being quite sexualized, with more independent and strong imagery appearing around the 1990s in American media, Japanese concepts of gender are rather rigid (Madeley 2012). There are very rigid gender roles within Japanese society, but manga changes these concepts and presents a rather diverse range of gender, sexuality, and gender norms.

The concept of transformation from one gender to another is a common trope within Japanese manga. For instance, in a manga called *Until the Full Moon*, a young man named Marlo whose parents are a vampire and werewolf transforms into a young woman under the light of the full moon. In this story, we see Marlo's parents decided to get him engaged to another young man named David, even though Marlo is uncertain about his attraction to another man. However, it is interesting to note that another common theme for transformation stories of this nature is that while Marlo is confused, frustrated and angry about his transforming gender, people around him accept his transformation as normal (Madeley 2012). Marlo's parents' only concern is having an heir and they do not consider their child's transformation as abnormal or out of the ordinary, and David views Marlo's changing gender as a way to accommodate their attraction to one another.

From manga transformations like *Under the Full Moon,* there is an interesting contrast between the rigid gender roles of Japanese society and this medium that displays these roles as highly flexible and dynamic. However, in comparison to American comics, this contrast makes sense. American comics focus on not only showing the culture and history of the United States but also how the artists view the world around them. Japanese manga in comparison shows not what Japanese culture views as gender roles; instead, the writers and artists of these comics show what they think the future of gender could be, thereby providing an escape to those who do not fit the mold of ideal gender notions within Japanese society. These aspects are especially clear in presentations of women in shonen manga.

Manga, like American comic books, focuses around a specific audience. American comics often focus on appealing to a male audience. Japanese manga does the same thing through the use of different genres to target specific genders and age groups. To illustrate, within Japanese manga, there are the genres of shojo which is meant to appeal to girls and shonen manga that appeals to boys (Madeley 2012). Due to this intense focus on gender, when female writers became more prominent in the shonen genre, certain aspects of gender representations changed. Shonen manga is often meant to appeal to boys in their late teenage years and who are undergoing puberty and developing romantic and sexual interests (Flis 2018). The characteristics of the vast majority of shonen manga often have unsophisticated heteronormative storytelling focusing on a main male character who undergoes certain challenges and setbacks as he journeys towards a better

future. The representations of gender within shonen manga often emphasize the dominant position of men within society and justifies the subordination of women. These gender frameworks even depict women in supporting roles or sexualized roles (Flis 2018). These were the frameworks of shonen manga until the 1990s when an increasing number of women became authors of shonen manga.

After the 1990s, some of the popular manga series included *Inuyasha*, created by Rumiko Takahashi, and Hiromu Arakawa's *Fullmetal Alchemist*, both of which reached mainstream popularity beyond Japan into the United States. Based on the previous gender frameworks involved in shonen manga, while any author would be capable of changing and questioning frameworks within works of art due to the gender aspects involved within manga, female shonen authors were more likely to change inflexible gender representations. In previous years, shonen manga has been disapproved of for its representations of women as being unequal or oppressive. Representations of women within shonen manga often focused on two different portrayals of women, either as sexual objects or as the Good Wife/Wise mother which is viewed as a representative of femininity starting in the 19th century and is still an ideal in Japanese culture.

Although more women are writing shonen manga, there are forms of the previous frameworks that are maintained even now. Take, for instance, the mainstream manga series *Noragami* which was created by Adachitoka, a combination of the writer and the artist's surnames, who are both females. *Noragami* focuses on a Yato, a lesser-known Japanese god, and a human girl Hiyori Iki who can leave her body and live as a spirit.

Noragami conforms to characteristics of shonen manga and in other ways, challenges previous gender frameworks by providing autonomy to the female characters and removes the Good Wife/Wise Mother stereotype (Flis 2018). It still maintains aspects of male gaze, often by sexualizing female characters outside the storytelling through the usage of "fan service". Fan service often takes the form of depictions of female characters that enable the reader to look up skirts and see breasts without other characters being involved in these actions (Flis 2018).

However, *Noragami* attempts to reject previous stereotypes as shown by the representation their main female character. Since she comes from a wealthy family, the main female character Hiyori often uses the spirit world as a means of escape, especially from the pressures of becoming a Good Wife, Wise Mother. Hiyori's story often focuses on removing her from societal expectations and the need to conform to gender norms. In the dialogue of the manga, the reader learns of that Hiyori's non-traditional feminine interests such marital arts and that her mother would like her to conform to a more traditional feminine identity. Throughout the manga, Hiyori explains that she finds her mother's views to be old-fashioned. Hiyori, through her representation, is shown not only to remove female characters in shonen manga from the Good Wife/Wise Mother stereotype but is also seen portraying a character who wants to remove themselves from inflexible gender frameworks.

Overall, comparing Japanese manga and American comics, we see that there is a clear focus on marketing based on gender and age in Japanese manga. American comics have

begun to diversify their marketing by trying to capture more female readers and readers of all ages. One of the great differences is in the representations of gender, with Japanese manga providing a more fluid representation of gender and gender norms in comparison to Japanese society's concepts of these ideas.

American comics, on the other hand, tend to focus on sexuality as presenting gender, often by sexualizing women in comic book imagery. If anything, these concepts show the different cultural views of gender and sexuality within American and Japanese culture. Whether or not these two mediums grow to have representations more closely related to reality and, over time, present Asian characters, in the same way, will depend mainly on how gender and gender roles change in America and Japan as these cultures change with history and the comic book medium.

Moving Beyond Martial Artists, Beasts, and Restricting Gender

Throughout my examination of Asians within American comics, I found these representations that focus on historical representations of Americans' fears and the rise of the martial arts genre. During the 1940s, these fears represented themselves through World War II propaganda, presenting the Japanese as monsters. As the United States moved beyond the Second World War, new fears presented themselves: communism and Chinese immigration, both presented by the comic book villain, the Yellow Claw. By the 1970s, due to the rising popularity of martial art films influenced by the actor and martial artist Bruce Lee, Asian characters in comics began to be presented as martial artists.

During this period, the character Shang-Chi was created by Marvel Comics who was also based on Lee.

Eventually, martial arts, both in films and comics, lost its popularity and was eventually reduced to a stereotype due to Bruceploitation. Many filmmakers attempting to copy Bruce Lee's style of filmmaking caused the martial art representation to become a stereotype of Asian Americans. It was not until characters like Ryan Choi came about that more modern representations of Asians were created. The character of Ryan Choi presents Asian Americans moving away from being fanged monsters who represented fears of war and communism. Choi also removes Asian characters from the stereotype of the martial artist, instead representing the life of a young man attempting to build a career in a new country and viewing the American culture as the "other." Next, the impact of two comic book creators, Jim Lee and Rumiko Takahashi, on the representations of Asians in comics were discussed; this was mainly due to the scale of their careers and impact on the comic book industry in the United States and multicultural contexts.

To conclude, this chapter analyzes aspects of gender within manga. When looking at genres of manga in comparison to American comics that based the genres on the subject matter, Japanese manga created genres based on the gender and age of the target audience. The most notable where shojo manga and shonen manga; the target audience for shojo manga is young women and girls, while for shonen manga is young men and boys.

Due to the distinction of genres focusing on gender, some characteristics of gender became more obvious. First, the female gender within Japanese manga could be rather restrictive, especially in shonen manga, who were either presented as the kind wife, wise mother or were nonexistent. Due to the increase in women writing shonen manga, these stereotypes have lessened and now present female characters with agency within stories, which goes against inflexible gender representations. Transformations within manga from one gender to another have also made an impact on representations of gender, presenting a world in which people can remove themselves from strict gender norms in Japanese culture. Representations of Asians in comics have taken many forms, ranging from war propaganda to young men transforming into women in the moonlight. These representations were created to invoke various feelings, ranging from fear to pride, and to remove the pressures of gender norms. However, most of all, they presented Asians as people who should be presented as diverse as their cultures.

Conclusions: Gender and Race Changing Through Contexts, History, and People

In the first chapter, I examined the changing representations of gender by examining the characters of Lois Lane and Wonder Woman. These two characters reflected the changing roles of women in America and the evolution of gender in comic books. Throughout the1940s, Lois Lane and Wonder Woman's depiction of gender was influenced by the creators, whose ideas were shaped by popular culture through newspaper films and pin-up girls; these creators wanted to achieve financial gain and influence the women in their lives. By the 1950s, these two characters reflected a traditional view of gender, as the comic book industry underwent government investigation due to detrimental research and were trying to maintain their businesses.

In the 1960s, gender was presented as chaotic power when removed from social expectations. In the 1970s, Wonder Woman presented two changes in the depiction of gender. The first illustration focused on representing gender through fashion based on monetary gain and the feminist movement. The second representation of gender-focused on addressing anti-feminism but was greatly influenced by the economic downfall of the Wonder Woman series and a reinterpretation of feminism that was rejected by fans. Last, from the 1980s to the early 2000s, gender was wholly exemplified by the body, especially in the *Wonder Woman* comics, combining the sexuality presented in the early 1940s as presented by William Moulton Marston and the hyper-femininity of the 1990s. This focused on portraying physical strength by showing an assertive muscular body in the artwork. Marston was not the only creator to have a large impact on representations.

In the second chapter that concentrated on African Americans, I examined African American characters before the creation of African American superheroes and how these portrayals presented the race. The earliest illustrations of African Americans focused on two aspects: representing slavery and the oppression of African Americans as well as showing the supremacy of Europeans during colonization by presenting Africans as being forcefully civilized or ruined during warfare. With the creation of stories like *Musical Mose* by George Herriman in the early 1900s, he was able to present race as an unbending category.

In the 1960s, with the creation of *Golden Legacy*, African Americans began to use comics to redefine representations of race. With the rise of the blaxploitation in the 1970s, DC and Marvel Comics would establish the first African American superheroes. Luke Cage and John Stewart illustrated African Americans as people with dignity, agency, and power. Eventually, creator Christopher Priest would work to remove blaxploitation themes from the character of Luke Cage with his work on the series. However, blaxploitation themes would eventually be removed with the creation of two African American characters, the establishment of a new publisher, and modernization of a 1970s hero.

Black Lightning and Amanda Waller would remove African Americans' illustrations of race from the blaxploitation genre and from aggressively masculine representations. Black Lightning, Amanda Waller, and the modern representation of John Stewart would present African Americans as finding success through education. Finally, the creation of

Milestone Media by writer Dwayne McDuffie would focus on bringing a multicultural dimension to comics that was missing largely in previous representations and present multiple representations of what it meant to be African American with the creation of the conservative African American hero Icon and the teenage superhero Static. The meaning of being African American in comics has transformed greatly from political cartoons to modern heroes representing success through education. While this context shifted greatly for African American representations in comics, the same can be said for Latinos in comics as well.

Latino characters have an extensive assortment of transformations in their portrayals that have affected the contexts of their Latino identity. The pulp fiction hero Zorro presented changes in racial identity due to the influence of history, media, and the changing frameworks of race. Blue Beetle exemplified living at the border of two cultures through code-switching and the setting of his comic being the Mexican border. Blue Beetle also presents Latinos as the "other" due to his bug-like appearance.

Jessica Cruz continues the representation of being considered as the "other" but through the behavior of individuals with mental health issues. The Marvel Comics character Miles Morales presented the changing frameworks of race for Latinos as Miles was both African American and Latino. Miles represents a shifting racial identity that emerges from two different cultures. The changing contexts of race in Latino comics continue in the comic book series *Border Town*. Frank, who is half Irish and Latino, moves to a new school in Arizona and must deal with a new context for his mixed

identity with living on the border of Mexico and in a racially divided area. *Border Town* presented deviations in racial identity for Latinos in comics but also portrayed the issues of racial stereotypes and immigration by using Mexican mythology.

Last, writer Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez, through the usage of art, not only advocates for more characters of color within comics but also created a new Latino character to represent the two cultures of America and Puerto Rico, La Borinquena. La Borinquena characterizes Puerto Rican culture as the island's patriotic hero wearing a costume inspired by the Puerto Rican flag. Since she is presented as both American and Puerto Rican, the regional hero represents Latinos, especially the people of Puerto Rico, as a part of American society and culture, advancing them from being "other." Similar changes occurred in the illustrations of Native Americans with the help of creators.

When examining the representations of Native Americans, I found that, once again, history and culture played a significant role in representation. Due to the prevalence of Native American representations in Western comics, the vast majority of representations focus on the Old West history of Native Americans. Portraying Native Americans in historical settings within comics causes a misconception that these societies no longer exist. Attempts to alter this idea have been made with the creation of modern Native American characters Talisman and Dawnstar, whose illustrations transform depictions of gender but also change Native American portrayals into contemporary frameworks with an imaginable future. Native Americans, to show more diverse illustrations of their

communities, also published comic books. One of the persons trying to diversify the representations of Native Americans in comics was artist Jefferey Veregge.

Through his work as a comic book artist and consultant for Marvel Comics on their revival of a comic series featuring the Native American comic book hero *Red Wolf,* Veregge is working to ensure that Native Americans are given accurate and diverse presentations in comics. Narratives presenting Native Americans comics often had two features, the first focusing on presenting societal topics within Native communities and the second emphasizing the teaching of the history and culture of Native groups to their populations as well as outsiders. Through the usage of comic books as educational tools and the work of producers like Jefferey Veregge, I found that Native Americans were able to present themselves as living cultures who have histories and social issues that go beyond America's Old West past.

Asian representations within comics had many themes to the various other problems in representation. First, I found that historical events heavily influenced Asian representations like many of the other case studies. Within American comics, which began in the 1940s, the vast majority of early representation of Asians in comics focused on propaganda against the Japanese during World War II. Moreover, when the war ended during the 1950s, the representations focused on creating a fear of the East and viewing Asians as the "other", especially preying on the fear of communism. In the 1960s and 1970s, newer representations were formed when the martial arts genre became influential due to the films with actor Bruce Lee.

However, eventually, with many people emulating Lee's style of filmmaking after his death, the martial artist character within comics and other media started to seem stereotypical. Eventually, the work of artist and writer Jim Lee would help to provide autonomy to artists within the comic book industry with his involvement in the company Image Comics. Additionally, the works of mangaka Rumiko Takahashi would enable the genre of shonen manga to not only expand beyond Japan into America and Europe but also enable gender norms within Japanese manga to become more fluid and influence future representations of women within the shonen genre.

Yet, the most significant changes in representations occurred in the transformation of gender frameworks within Japanese manga. Compared to American comics, gender in Japanese manga is presented as fluid through the idea of transformations. However, while Japanese representations of gender are fluid in manga, gender norms within the culture of Japan are inflexible; therefore, the concept of gender fluidity seen through gender transformations represents a conceivable future change in the Japanese culture. Similarly, I found that the focus on gender in manga also influenced changes in gender representations within manga greatly. In shonen manga, women are presented as the kind wife, wise mother or are completely absent. The increase of women writing shonen manga enabled these gender stereotypes to diminish, and the changing gender frameworks for female characters now show women with agency and present alternatives to the unbending gender expectations of the Japanese.

In American comics, Asian portrayals changed due the politics of World War II and the Cold War as well as due to the influence of the actor Bruce Lee. In comparison, manga presented a different representation of Asians that focused on transforming gender norms in a society with uncompromising gender norms and expectations. Therefore, by presenting both American comics and Japanese manga, the clear changes in the illustrations of Asians can be analyzed.

Throughout my different examinations of character representations, I found that there were even more groups that I would have found interesting to examine if given more time. I would have liked to examine the representations of disabled characters within American comics as well. Through my reading, I have found that disabled characters within comics are minimal; however, those that do exist and have often played essential roles in comic books, either as main or minor characters.

If given the opportunity, I would examine the representations of characters such as the Daredevil character from Marvel Comics or Batgirl from DC Comics, both of whom are presented as disabled: Daredevil is a blind man and Batgirl is, at one point, physically disabled and paralyzed from the waist down. Additionally, I was originally going to add Batgirl to my chapter on the representations of women; but due to the character's portrayal also affecting representations of disabled persons in media, this case study was removed. Additionally, when examining the scope of my research, I found that I unaware of whether disabled persons would be considered a minority group. Although persons with disabilities are not often presented within media and are even defined as the "other,"

I excluded them from my research due to the majority of case studies focusing on racial minorities.

Second, when considering the concept of representations due to the various aspects of culture such as politics and popular media influencing media representations in the future, I would like to examine the influence of religion within American Comics as well. For instance, within the Daredevil comics, the character is presented as being a devout Catholic, and religious imagery is often used. However, in recent years, other religious groups have also been presented in comics, such as Islamic imagery within the comic book series *Ms. Marvel*. Thus, based on how the aspects of culture and history influenced women and minority representations in American comics, examining religion and other groups considered as the "other" would be the next, most appropriate, research focus. Furthermore, I would also like to examine LGBTQ+ representations within American comics.

Similar to Muslim and Latino representations within comics, LGBTQ+ representations in comics is a vastly new dynamic. These representations often occur by changing some aspects of an established character's history; however, some artists even create new characters to represent the LGBTQ+ community. For the vast majority of publications in mainstream comics, the LGBTQ+ community has been relegated to side characters; however, as of recent years, these characters have become main characters in their own series. Due to culture, history, and media playing significant roles in the representations of minority groups, in the future, it would be interesting to examine if the

LGBTQ+ community representations followed a similar path. Another aspect of possible future research is the roles of the artists in creating representations. Throughout my research, I analyzed how artists formed representations through their experiences with media, culture, and even the historical events occurring during the time of creation.

Nevertheless, certain sections of this thesis, such as the chapter on representations of African Americans, found that certain creators felt restricted by the culture they were living in and, therefore, could not represent minorities in ways they would have preferred. Therefore, I think it would be interesting to look further into the lives of the creators in order to examine more closely how they created their concepts and how their lives affected the formation of their characters. More specifically, I would like to conduct further research to understand the influences of creators on the representations of women and minority groups in the comic book medium. that the influence of technological advances on the formation of Marvel Comics is also an interesting aspect.

To illustrate, it might be possible to examine how advances in the space race affected the representations of characters like the Fantastic Four. Additionally, this would also mean addressing the following question: “Did Stan Lee and other marvel writers later add in other technological advancements into their works?” As I saw throughout my research, culture and historical influences were updated within women and minority representations. However, due to Marvel comics having characters vastly influenced by technology and cultural changes occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, it would be interesting to see how advances in technology influenced these representations of Marvel characters.

Additionally, if I were to continue this research in the future, I would like to examine the representations of African characters.

With the success of movies like “Black Panther” I think it would be interesting to examine the representations of African characters in comparison to African American characters, primarily looking at aspects of power. During my research, I found that the depictions of African Americans represented them as powerful during the period of the Civil Rights Movement and the blaxploitation media in the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if the representations of power are different for African characters. I think it would be interesting to see what aspects of power are represented within Black Panther. Moreover, since the character of Black Panther is a king, it would be interesting to also see how political discourse is represented. Furthermore, the representation of different African tribes within this series is also quite intriguing. Finally, it is also possible to examine aspects of the advancement of technology that occurred in Africa due to the future advancement of technology in the Black Panther’s kingdom.

While my focus was on ethnic minorities and women, I did not examine Muslim characters due to a lack of time within my research period. Given the opportunity, I would like to examine representations of Muslim characters within comics and analyze what themes can be found in the representation of such characters. Additionally, I would like to examine possible political themes due to current news coverage of Muslims within the United States.

The final subject of future research would be the effects of the characters Batman and Superman in pop culture within the United States. Since these characters have existed for the past 75 years, I think this would be a rather large project, especially if it included multiple mediums and not just comics. The themes of crime, poverty, immigration, mental illness, ethics in journalism, and so on, come across heavily in the representations of these characters. Therefore, in the future, it would be interesting to outline the different representations of Batman and Superman through their various portrayals in different mediums.

The significance of this research was that it not only shows how media is influenced by history and culture but that other aspects, such as politics and cultural trends, also play significant roles. However, one of the main points from my research is that representations within media illustrate not only how certain groups are perceived within society but also enable communities to share their culture, history, and knowledge with others. The great significance of my research is that representations within media enable groups of people outside of these cultures to gain an understanding and appreciation of a cultural group. Therefore, for these interactions with new cultures and people to be successful representations within media, we need to reflect people in the most precise ways possible.

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