

## Thinking about Journalism with Superman

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Superman is an icon of American popular culture—variously described as being “better known than the president of the United States [and] more familiar to school children than Abraham Lincoln,” a “triumphant mixture of marketing and imagination, familiar all around the world and re-created for generation after generation,” an “ideal, a hope and a dream, the fantasy of millions,” and a symbol of “our universal longing for perfection, for wisdom and power used in service of the human race.”<sup>1</sup> As such, the character offers “clues to hopes and tensions within the current American consciousness,” including the “tensions between our mythic values and the requirements of a democratic society.”<sup>2</sup>

This paper uses Superman as a way of thinking about journalism, following the tradition of cultural and critical studies that uses media artifacts as tools “to size up the shape, character, and direction of society itself.”<sup>3</sup> Superman’s alter ego Clark Kent is of course a reporter for a daily newspaper (and at times for TV news as well), and many of his closest friends and colleagues are also journalists. However, although many scholars have analyzed the Superman mythology, not so many have systematically analyzed what it might say about the real-world press. The paper draws upon Superman’s multiple incarnations over the years in comics, radio, movies, and television in the context of past research and criticism regarding the popular culture phenomenon. It also draws upon the scholarly literature that has examined the roles that

objectivity, gender, power, and myth play in journalism. The purpose is to reflect critically upon journalism's complex and contradictory relationship to the things for which Superman has long been said to fight: "truth, justice, and the American way."<sup>4</sup>

### Literature Review

Superman has been used to think about other key aspects of American life and culture. He has been said to represent the immigrant experience, having traveled from the "old world" of Krypton to the new world of Earth before moving from rural Smallville to big-city Metropolis.<sup>5</sup> He has been analyzed as a symbol of Judaism, given his creation by two young Jewish men (Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster) who gave him parallels with Moses, including being set adrift by his birth parents to be raised by others in a new home.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Superman has been seen as a Christian symbol, as for example implied by the benediction from Superman's father (played by Marlon Brando in the 1978 movie) to his son "Kal-El" upon sending him to live among the people of Earth: "They can be a great people, Kal-El; they wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all, their capacity for good, I have sent them you—*my only son*."<sup>7</sup> By virtue of his good deeds and ability to fly, Superman has been viewed as exemplifying democracy and freedom<sup>8</sup>; by dint of his more brutish superpowers and his propensity to work outside the law, he also has been seen as representing oppression and subjugation.<sup>9</sup>

Superman's relationship to journalism has received less scrutiny. One scholar has argued that he and other superheroes share a mission with journalism at its best by exposing wrongdoing and helping the needy.<sup>10</sup> A master's thesis similarly suggests that movies about Superman have depicted the press positively.<sup>11</sup> On balance, however, scholars have paid comparatively little attention to portrayals of journalism that have developed out of the comics,<sup>12</sup> even as the study of journalism's image in popular culture has grown in recent years. In reviewing research on

cinema's depictions of the press, Brian McNair asserts that movies "are a source of the legitimization myths of liberal journalism, dramati[z]ing and articulating those shared values and ideas about how news works which, alongside many other myth systems, bind us together as citizens in a democracy."<sup>13</sup> Scholars have examined how movies and other popular culture products treat freedom of expression, political and economic pressures, gender relationships, ethics, and other aspects of real-world journalism, as well as how they reproduce archetypes that influence how people view the press.<sup>14</sup> In such ways, the research on journalism's popular image overlaps with journalism studies generally, with scholars having examined the political economy of the press,<sup>15</sup> journalism's connection to the social status quo,<sup>16</sup> the gendered nature of newswork,<sup>17</sup> the place of myth in news,<sup>18</sup> the ethics of journalism,<sup>19</sup> the press's role in fostering or hindering citizenship and public engagement,<sup>20</sup> and so forth.

This paper draws broadly upon all those interdisciplinary strands of research while filling the gap in the literature concerning Superman's representation of journalism. It uses Superman to examine the press's relationship to truth in the context of scholarship on the ethics of truth-telling, the norm of objectivity, and the role of gender in journalism. In terms of justice, the paper looks at journalism's mission to help achieve a more just world versus its propensity toward serving as an agent of the powerful. Regarding the "American way," the paper addresses the press's relationship to public life via research on superhero mythology and the place of heroes in American journalism—specifically, who counts as a hero and what a hero is expected to do.

## **Method**

In media research, the idea of using a text to "think with" is associated most closely with James Carey.<sup>21</sup> Cultural and critical researchers can interpret media texts as "integrated strategies of symbolic action" that comment on culture and society.<sup>22</sup> In turn, researchers can contribute to

the conversation by offering commentaries of their own about what those texts seem to say.

There is a massive supply of potential texts that one could use in studying Superman's portrayal of the press. The character first appeared regularly in comic books in 1938. Over the years, Superman has been revamped (or, in the words of fans, "rebooted" or "retconned") numerous times, so that comics historians speak of Superman's "Golden Age" (roughly from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s), the "Silver Age" (roughly the mid-1950s to the end of the 1960s), the "Bronze Age" (roughly the 1970s to a major "reboot" in 1986), the "Modern Age" (roughly 1986 to the early years of this century), and the current "Post Modern Age."<sup>23</sup> Alongside the comics have been a Superman radio series that aired from 1940 to 1951 and introduced the familiar characters of editor Perry White and cub reporter Jimmy Olsen; an animated series of movie shorts in the early 1940s; a live action movie serial in 1948 and 1950; the 1951 movie *Superman and the Mole Men* that effectively served as the pilot for the George Reeves TV series that followed; a 1960s Broadway musical; four Christopher Reeve movies in the 1970s and 1980s; the 1990s TV series *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* and the TV series *Smallville* that premiered the following decade; the 2006 film *Superman Returns* and 2013 film *Man of Steel*; and assorted spinoff books, cartoons, movies, and TV series.<sup>24</sup>

The goal here is to achieve what has been described as "interpretive sufficiency" by engaging in critical readings of enough texts from different media and eras to be able to justify one's interpretations of the overall body of work.<sup>25</sup> The following were read, viewed, and listened to: an anthology of Superman comic book adventures from the 1930s to the 1980s plus selected comics from recent years; the four Christopher Reeve movies plus *Superman Returns*, *Superman and the Mole Men*, and *Man of Steel*; all the 1940s animated movie shorts plus selected episodes of the 1940s radio series and the 1948-1950 live action film serial; selected

episodes of the George Reeves TV series and of *Lois & Clark*; and most episodes of *Smallville* from 2001-2011. The latter TV series focused on Clark Kent growing up and assuming adult responsibilities, including becoming employed at the *Daily Planet* and engaged to Lois Lane. It has been called “the most well-constructed, faithful, and competent take on the [Clark] character to date.”<sup>26</sup> The paper also draws upon secondary sources including books and online sites that helped identify texts and episodes of potential interest while adding valuable historical context regarding Superman.<sup>27</sup>

### **Superman and Truth**

Superman has been labeled an apostle of truth almost from the beginning. As early as March 1940, the spoken introduction to the Superman radio series was proclaiming him a “tireless fighter for truth and justice” (“the American way” would come later).<sup>28</sup> Even before then, the 1938 debut comic strip showed Superman seeking to uncover the truth behind a murder for which two people were being unjustly framed.<sup>29</sup> As such, Superman’s work has been consistent with Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel’s assertion that “journalism’s first obligation is to the truth”; similarly, “Seek Truth and Report It” is the first principle of the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics.<sup>30</sup> In his 1938 debut, Superman becomes a reporter in the guise of Clark Kent specifically to help him further the cause of truth in the public interest: “If I get news dispatches promptly, I’ll be in a better position to help people.”<sup>31</sup>

That makes it all the more ironic that in having a dual identity, Clark Kent is living a lie. Apart from concealing his true nature from almost everyone else, Clark regularly engages in deception when he uses his superpowers to stop bad guys and then covers it for the newspaper, in effect secretly reporting on himself, or rather his other self. (In the 1938 debut, his editor assigns him to track Superman, whereupon Clark replies, “Listen, chief, if *I* can’t find out anything about

this *Superman*, no one can!")<sup>32</sup> Popular culture has regularly depicted reporters assuming false identities in the pursuit of stories, but according to the Society of Professional Journalists, real-life deception is allowable only in exceptional cases after there has been a “meaningful, collaborative, and deliberative decision making process,” for which Clark typically has no time or inclination.<sup>33</sup> If he were to apply the Potter Box of ethical reasoning, he perhaps could justify his deceptions according to the utilitarian principle of doing the greatest good for the greatest number (some of the bad guys Superman thwarts are very bad indeed). He also could claim to be upholding loyalties to friends and family who might be endangered if they or others knew who he really was.<sup>34</sup> He even could claim to be loyal to the public—in one *Smallville* episode, Clark’s decision to reveal his true identity results in a media circus prohibiting him from helping others (fortunately, he is able to make things right by turning back time).<sup>35</sup> Most often, though, Clark does not engage in rigorous self-reflection regarding the extent to which his secret identity might compromise his moral duty to society. In that, he is little different from journalists who resort to deception out of laziness or as a stunt rather than asking whether the story they are pursuing is profoundly important or if there are any alternative ways of getting it.<sup>36</sup>

One might ask why Clark Kent even wants or needs to be a journalist. As of 1938, being close to a news ticker to find out immediately what crises needed remedying made some sense. Seventy years later in *Smallville*, Clark still was in the *Daily Planet* newsroom hunched over a police scanner and a computer set to the Metropolis police website. By then, however, he could have just as easily done that from home with no need for a reporting job. He also could have pursued another line of work close to where the action was, perhaps in law enforcement or as a paramedic. Still, to do so would be to sacrifice a unique advantage—a journalist is the perfect disguise precisely because it seems so inconspicuous and uninvolved.

At the time of Superman's creation, what James Carey labeled as the "professional communicator" was well established not only in journalism but also in popular culture.<sup>37</sup> Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster said they were strongly influenced by Hollywood movies in which the big-city reporter was a familiar figure.<sup>38</sup> Such characters were in turn partly inspired by the journalists in the 1928 Broadway play *The Front Page*. Playwrights Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur based it on their memories of being young Chicago reporters who were well versed in observing urban mayhem, an example of which Hecht related in his autobiography: "A man lay on his back in Barney Grogan's saloon with a knife sticking out of his belly, and I made notes."<sup>39</sup> Such sardonic detachment was common among the first generation of professional reporters, who according to Carey would evolve into "a relatively passive link in a communication chain [recording] the passing scene for audiences."<sup>40</sup> Critical scholars have charged that the occupational code of objectivity that eventually became the norm and that relied upon quoting official sources and not taking sides did little to reduce journalistic passivity.<sup>41</sup> "Journalists wear disguises, and one of them is the disguise of objectivity," two journalism professors and former reporters have written. "This is fiction. All good journalists have agendas."<sup>42</sup> For Superman in his quest not to call attention to his alter ego, being a "meek" and "mild-mannered" reporter with no apparent agenda is ideal.<sup>43</sup>

It should be noted that Clark Kent has not always been the bumbling type as epitomized by Christopher Reeve in the first of his Superman movies (a type that Jules Feiffer has argued was a put-on to begin with, with Clark representing "Superman's opinion of the rest of us, a pointed caricature of what we, the noncriminal element, were really like").<sup>44</sup> There have been many times that Clark has been a skilled and aggressive journalist. In 1946, the Superman radio series portrayed the reporter and his newspaper successfully taking on a Ku Klux Klan-like

group.<sup>45</sup> During the following decade, budget constraints compelled the George Reeves TV series to downplay superpowered spectacle in favor of showing Clark at work. Especially early in the series, he was depicted as a “combative, pugnacious,” and “tenacious investigative reporter” capable even of standing up to a lynch mob.<sup>46</sup> After the Superman comic strip was “rebooted” in 1986, according to one observer, “Clark Kent was no longer a fumbling loser; he became a Pulitzer Prize winner who moonlighted as a successful novelist.”<sup>47</sup> The TV series that followed portrayed him much the same way. In one *Lois & Clark* episode, he was nominated for a prestigious award for writing a retirement home scandal story that his editor Perry White praised as being “first-class journalism” with an “emotional wallop.”<sup>48</sup> It is when Clark is the least mild-mannered and “objective” and when he does embrace an agenda that he is the most effective reporter.<sup>49</sup>

Objectivity as a journalistic means toward obtaining the truth is often problematic in Superman, although it is typically more so for the female journalistic characters than it is for Clark Kent. Following his 1986 reboot, Clark was said to have escaped “the white-bread image of a wimp” in becoming “cooler” and “the epitome of virility.”<sup>50</sup> Such manly qualities have frequently been associated with “hard news.” For example, one scholar has said of Edward R. Murrow’s celebrated World War II dispatches that he and his fellow radio newsmen (who were in fact almost all men) embodied “middle-class, American masculinity” characterized by unflappable cool under pressure. Even when engaging in implicit advocacy the way that Murrow did on behalf of the British during the London Blitz—that is, even when skirting around the strictures of objectivity—they still projected an air of calm, objective authority.<sup>51</sup> Deborah Chambers and Linda Steiner write that in multiple instances over the years, “‘objectivity’ and ‘authority’ were qualities associated with masculinity,” whereas female journalists were



relegated to a “soft news” ghetto of human interest stories. In brief, the weighty business of seeking and reporting truth about public affairs has often been defined as a male preserve, with women forced to consider whether they should “try to act like men” to advance their careers.<sup>52</sup>

The female journalist in popular culture has regularly faced a similar conundrum: “how to incorporate the masculine traits of journalism essential for success—being aggressive, self-reliant, curious, tough, ambitious, cynical, cocky, unsympathetic—while still being the woman society would like her to be.”<sup>53</sup> So it is with Clark Kent’s colleague and sometime love interest, Lois Lane. In creating Lois, Siegel and Shuster again drew inspiration from the movies, basing her partly on Glenda Farrell’s sassy reporter character Torchy Blane who starred in a series of low-budget films. As such, Lois was infused with “courage, independence, and ambition.”<sup>54</sup> In the 1940s Superman animated film series, she was even seen piloting her own plane while chasing a story. When the George Reeves TV series debuted, Phyllis Coates played Lois as “tough and direct,” similar to Reeves’s portrayal of Clark. Margot Kidder’s Lois in *Superman II* pursued nuclear-armed terrorists to the top of the Eiffel Tower.<sup>55</sup> For all that, one writer has asserted that Lois often “seemed intent on proving that she could be just as silly and frivolous as the feminine mystique required.”<sup>56</sup> As opposed to uncovering the truth as a public service, she seemed more concerned with satisfying her amorous curiosity regarding the truth behind Superman’s secret identity. After she finally did so in *Superman II* and shared his bed in his Fortress of Solitude, her memory was wiped clean via a kiss from Superman, who thus not only restored his secret but also maintained his image as a pillar of chaste virtue.<sup>57</sup>

In her more recent incarnations, Lois Lane has been a stronger character. Like Clark Kent, she was rebooted in the 1980s so that she “became the comic book version of a modern

feminist: a weight-lifting, gun-toting, fist-fighting fashion plate” who had a more equitable professional and romantic relationship with Clark.<sup>58</sup> Movies and TV series have followed suit to a degree. According to one scholar, Lois in *Superman Returns* “is unambiguously the equal of Superman in courage and determination.”<sup>59</sup> She even has won a Pulitzer Prize for a piece titled “Why the World Doesn’t Need Superman” (although she disavows the piece at the end).<sup>60</sup> In *Smallville*, Lois is a hard-driving journalist capable of beating up men and drinking them under the table. Much the same is true of the young woman in *Smallville* who serves as Lois and Clark’s journalistic mentor, Chloe Sullivan. As editor of the high school paper and later as a *Daily Planet* reporter, Chloe draws upon a staggering array of well-placed sources in addition to stellar computer searching and hacking skills. The trunk of her red Volkswagen Beetle is full of surveillance gadgetry and defensive weaponry, including a flash grenade (“I like to come prepared,” she explains).<sup>61</sup>

However, as often has been the case with Lois over the years, Chloe sometimes finds the journalistic mandate of seeking the truth to be fraught with complications. Especially in early seasons of *Smallville*, she is caught between two stereotypes of the female journalist: the overbearing aggressor and the caring nurturer.<sup>62</sup> Her newsgathering zeal collides with her unrequited crush on Clark. Gradually, she evolves past that in learning Clark’s true identity and becoming his self-described sidekick. She even develops superpowers of her own for a time, including the ability to heal others. The actor who portrayed Chloe suggested that such changes represented positive growth for the character, indicating that her ambition, intelligence, and independence were becoming tempered with empathy.<sup>63</sup> As such, Chloe potentially could serve as a positive role model for journalists. Feminist scholars have argued that empathetic and engaged reporting is far preferable to “masculinist” news that purports to be objective and

detached and that largely reproduces “truths” serving the interests of power and patriarchy.<sup>64</sup>

Just as in the real world, though, such a progressive model of journalism is not easily realized in *Smallville*. By the time the series left the air, Chloe Sullivan had departed the news business altogether to work alongside her superhero husband the “Green Arrow” and raise their young son. Meanwhile, Lois Lane was relegated to chasing after the bomb scare of the moment for the *Daily Planet*, her planned marriage to Clark Kent forever on hold.<sup>65</sup>

### **Superman and Justice**

In early comic strips, Superman was labeled the “champion of the oppressed,” in keeping with what Jerry Siegel described as the “tremendous feeling of compassion that Joe [Shuster] and I had for the downtrodden.”<sup>66</sup> Superman thus “evinced and reaffirmed the spirit of New Deal politics, with its ideals of social justice,” while opposing “political and urban corruption” (for example, the 1938 debut showed Superman thwarting a nefarious attempt by munitions manufacturers and crooked politicians to pull America into war).<sup>67</sup> Such a devotion to justice is again in keeping with the highest principles of journalism. The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics says journalists should give “voice to the voiceless” and be “vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.”<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, the editors of a historical anthology of muckraking journalism assert that whatever the press’s shortcomings, it also has told numerous stories that have “contribute[d] to change, the kind of change, in the American reform tradition, that we believe makes America a better place.”<sup>69</sup>

However, Superman’s commitment to the oppressed began to lessen soon after his creation. According to one scholar, by the end of 1940, Superman had been “transformed into a symbol of more general American cultural values in that his individualism was tied to consumerist values,” reflecting his increasingly lucrative status as a pop culture phenomenon; a

new set of storytelling guidelines stipulated that he could not kill villains (as he had with impunity to that point) or destroy private property.<sup>70</sup> Those guidelines were intended to deflect criticism and censorship of the comics industry, but they did not stop a significant backlash against Superman in the years after World War II. Gershon Legman charged that such characters “invest violence with righteousness and prestige” and that “the Superman formula is essentially lynching.”<sup>71</sup> Marshall McLuhan asserted that Superman employed “the strong-arm totalitarian methods of the immature and barbaric mind.”<sup>72</sup> Most notoriously, Fredric Wertham opined in *Seduction of the Innocent* that Superman corrupted the nation’s youth by symbolizing proto-fascism “with the big S on his uniform—we should, I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S.S.”<sup>73</sup> However overheated such criticisms may now seem, they are consistent with more contemporary critical concerns that Superman and other superheroes extol a repressive “vigilante justice.”<sup>74</sup>

They are also consistent with criticisms that today’s corporate press is itself unjust in how it “smuggles in values conducive to the commercial aims of the owners and advertisers as well as the political aims of the owning class” at the expense of quality journalism and those of lesser means.<sup>75</sup> Such concerns about the news media have at times been addressed in Superman. In the movie *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*, a sleazy publisher seizes control of the *Daily Planet* and fires editor Perry White while imposing tabloid values upon the paper.<sup>76</sup> In a *Smallville* story line paralleling a similar story that had appeared in the Superman comics, Lex Luthor buys the *Planet* and kills an exposé that Lois Lane is writing about him. (“You want to bury the truth? Buy the media!” an editor bitterly observes.)<sup>77</sup> As early as 1943 in a Superman comic book that seemed to prophesy capitalism being taken to its logical conclusion, the arch-villainous “Prankster” managed to copyright the alphabet. A Superman historian describes the

consequences: “Immediately the nation is thrown into a panic as everyone has to pay the Prankster exorbitant royalties whenever they wish to write something. The *Daily Planet* is faced with the prospect of going broke; skywriters are suddenly out of work, not to mention typists, librarians, novelists. ... Civilization teeters on the verge of total collapse because—as even Superman is forced to admit—the Prankster’s racket seems totally legit. Not until the Prankster breaks the law by trying to kill Clark and Lois can Superman intervene.”<sup>78</sup>

In such ways, Superman has been used to think about the dangers of power operating beyond institutional restraints. He also has been used to reflect upon the dangers of operating too comfortably *within* institutional restraints. The more mainstream post-1940 Superman increasingly became emblematic of the status quo. According to critics, “[Jerry] Siegel’s original vision of Superman was radically subverted, with a vapid establishmentarian hero substituted in his place”; as a result, “fans of the Man of Steel will find few, if any, examples of their hero exercising his powers to bring about the real and lasting improvement of the human condition.”<sup>79</sup> That is partly due to storytelling imperatives—if Superman brought about real and lasting improvement, there would be nothing left for him to do and no rationale for his continued existence. (“Don’t ever get involved with something Superman could fix,” a screenwriter once advised Christopher Reeve.)<sup>80</sup> Regardless, Superman has come to represent what Umberto Eco called “a perfect example of civic consciousness, completely split from political consciousness.”<sup>81</sup> He still dispenses justice by responding to a never-ending stream of calamities and dispatching one bad guy after another, but he does little to redress underlying systemic inequities, and thus he upholds the status quo. As one critic has put it, “Superman may be ‘the champion of the weak and the oppressed,’ but in a profounder sense, he is also the champion of law and order.”<sup>82</sup>

Mainstream journalism has been similarly criticized. As early as 1922, Walter Lippmann famously compared the press to “the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. [People] cannot do the work of the world by this light alone. They cannot govern society by episodes, incidents, and eruptions.”<sup>83</sup> More recently, scholars have charged that such “episodic framing” in the news decontextualizes events and prompts citizens to attribute social problems to individual incompetence or wrongdoing as opposed to broader structural failings, just as Superman limits himself to flying from one episode of personal villainy to another.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, journalism’s reliance on quoting official sources allows those in power to define political reality and helps maintain the existing social order, just as Superman’s good civic deeds ultimately prop up existing institutions regardless of how politically just or unjust they may be at their cores.<sup>85</sup>

### **Superman and the “American Way”**

As previously noted, the “American way” was not originally listed alongside truth and justice as the things for which Superman battled the most. It first appeared in the introduction to the Superman radio series for a couple of years during World War II, but then was dropped. The first of the live action movie serials of 1948 actually featured Clark Kent’s adoptive father urging his son to use his powers “in the interests of truth, *tolerance*, and justice.”<sup>86</sup> That was in line with the radio series’ 1946 depictions of Clark and the *Daily Planet* fighting a Klan-like group that violently opposed a Chinese American youth being on the “Unity House” baseball team. “Intolerance is a filthy weed,” Clark declared in one episode. “The only way you can get rid of it is by hunting out the roots and pulling them out of the ground!” After the villains were finally defeated and the Unity House team won the city championship, *Planet* editor Perry White praised the team for proving “that youngsters of different races and creeds can work and play

together successfully—in *the American way*.<sup>87</sup> By the time that phrase was familiarly ensconced in the opening of the George Reeves TV series a few years later, the “American way” had become identified less with tolerance and more with upholding conservative values during the Cold War.<sup>88</sup>

That in turn highlights the contradictory ways that we can think about the American way as it relates to Superman and the press. It can represent what has been called our “civic dogma” and “political catechism,” or what might also be termed our master mythology: “government by consent of the governed,” “human rights protected by government,” “the right to rebel when our rights are chronically violated,” and “the freedom of the individual to pursue his/her own destiny,” with journalism being a democratic force toward those ends.<sup>89</sup> The “American way” can also represent consumerism, ethnocentrism, and imperialism, with the press complicit in the same. Beyond that, the American way can invoke different conceptualizations of the hero as represented in national mythology as well as in journalism—that of the omnipotent savior versus that of the empowering fellow citizen.

A critical perspective on Superman sees him as embodying what has been called “the American monomyth” in which a male superhero saves society by virtue of his “divine, redemptive powers.” The monomyth “imparts the relaxing feeling that society can actually be redeemed by anti-democratic means.”<sup>90</sup> Again, those means can include vigilantism; for example, several *Smallville* episodes depict Clark Kent, Chloe Sullivan, and others as working for “Watchtower,” a panopticon-like base for superheroes to track evildoers and dispatch justice as they see fit. Beyond that, Superman has been viewed as an icon of consumerism in that he is “a commodity, a registered trademark, which belongs to the Time Warner conglomerate.”<sup>91</sup> His heroic tales “affirm a form of pseudoindividualism, which disguises the actual facts of corporate

power.”<sup>92</sup> At times he has been jingoistic, notably during World War II when animated Superman film shorts with titles such as “Japoteurs” played in cinemas.<sup>93</sup>

Finally, Superman turns public life into a spectator sport, as implied by the famous “*Look—up in the sky!*” opening to the 1940s Superman radio series that then carried over to television and the movies. Roger Ebert noted of *Superman II* (which climaxed with a spectacular public showdown between Superman and three Kryptonian supervillains) that “ordinary citizens seem to spend their days glued to the sidewalk, gazing skyward, and shouting things like ‘Superman is dead!’ or ‘Superman has saved the world!’”<sup>94</sup> According to the critical perspective on Superman, such spectacle “is endemic to advanced capitalist commodity production” and “functions to divert the masses from a critical political awareness of the day-to-day facts of power that oppress them.”<sup>95</sup> It masks that we live in “a super-state with prodigious powers, while as individuals we feel feeble and unable to control our own destinies.”<sup>96</sup> It diminishes social capital and is symptomatic of “the death of the dream of a government responsive to the collective interests and insights of average citizens.”<sup>97</sup>

There are clear parallels between that perspective and contemporary critiques of the American press. Jack Lule has argued that journalism regularly tells mythic stories about heroes, and that in today’s news, heroism is inevitably conflated with celebrity.<sup>98</sup> In Superman comics, movies, and TV shows, Superman himself is a media-manufactured celebrity. The first Christopher Reeve movie shows an as-of-yet unnamed Superman dropping in (literally) on Lois Lane and giving her his first news interview; she in turn gives him his moniker via a front-page story: “I SPENT THE NIGHT WITH SUPERMAN.”<sup>99</sup> In *Smallville*, the press labels Superman as “the Blur,” and when Clark decides to go public with his true identity, he revels in the resulting adoration until he loses all semblance of privacy and the media turn on him by branding



him a public menace.<sup>100</sup> According to Lule, it is often the case that “familiarity breeds contempt” in the news as the media tear down heroes after putting them on a pedestal. Such tales of veneration followed by degradation uphold familiar values and reproduce the existing social order, much as journalism has been criticized for maintaining the status quo in other ways.<sup>101</sup>

Similarly, journalism has been charged with promoting consumerism and commercialism by dint of being controlled by those whose primary concern is making a profit.<sup>102</sup> The news has been said to be ethnocentric in that it “judges other countries by the extent to which they live up to or imitate American practices and values,” with war-themed news such as that about Iraq especially prone to flag-waving.<sup>103</sup> According to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, the press has been a propaganda organ on behalf of imperialistic American foreign policy;<sup>104</sup> according to James Carey and others, it has allowed public life to atrophy by promoting “a journalism of the expert and the conduit” that sees the audience as passive receptacles of information—that is, as little more than spectators.<sup>105</sup>

For all that, there is another, more hopeful way of thinking about journalism and the American way with Superman. Michael Schudson has said of the media that “estimates of their power are frequently exaggerated. Critics look at the press and see Superman when it’s really just Clark Kent.”<sup>106</sup> One might respond that Schudson was underestimating the press’s potential to do harm or good, or conversely that the press’s problem is that it indeed is like Clark Kent—too white-bread and mild-mannered. Nevertheless, Clark’s strength is his “democratic ordinariness” in contrast to Superman’s singular perfection.<sup>107</sup> Although in the movies Superman’s birth father warned his son regarding human beings that “you are not one of them,” the journalist Clark Kent *is* one of us.<sup>108</sup> He and his compatriots Lois Lane, Perry White, and Jimmy Olsen are as humbly human as we are, potentially pointing toward a more “humble

journalism,” as James Carey called for nearly a quarter-century ago: “one partner with the rest of us—no more and no less.”<sup>109</sup> And whereas Schudson said that it is “not media power that disengages people but their belief in it, and the conviction of their own impotence in the face of it,” one can see via Clark and Superman a different model of heroism that can foster engagement and empowerment rather than the opposite.<sup>110</sup>

Jay Rosen has asserted that Watergate and the movie *All the President's Men* transformed the *Washington Post's* Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein into the equivalent of journalistic superheroes. That is consistent with Schudson's argument that Watergate represents “the central myth” of American journalism by offering the press “a charter, an inspiration, a reason for being large enough to justify the constitutional protections that journalism enjoys,” even if the truth was that “journalism in Watergate was generally lazy.” For Rosen, a major problem with the myth is that it ignores the role that the televised Watergate Senate hearings played in inviting the public to become invested in American politics. Instead, the myth implies that the press alone paved the path toward “national salvation: truth their only weapon, journalists *save[d]* the day.”<sup>111</sup> Rosen argues that today's journalists no longer can afford to imagine themselves as potential saviors of a citizenry in need of rescue. Instead they must acknowledge that power has shifted toward “the people formerly known as the audience” via interactive citizen-based media, and they should see that the journalist represents simply “a heightened case of an informed citizen” whose job it is to “describe the world in a way that helps people participate in it.”<sup>112</sup>

Just as journalists are said to need to recognize their own limitations, Superman at times has seen the need to do the same. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, DC Comics issued a commemorative book that included Superman in a brief feature titled “Unreal.” “I can defy the laws of gravity,” the superhero was shown as ruminating to himself as he soared

beyond the Earth's atmosphere to save an ailing space shuttle. "I can bring smiles of relief to a thankful populace. But unfortunately..."—Superman continued as the comic book image shifted from him to that of a firefighter rescuing a child—"...the one thing I can *not* do...is break free from the fictional pages where I live and breathe...become *real* during times of crisis...and right the wrongs of an unjust world. A world, *fortunately*, protected by heroes of its own." As one critic observes, the moral of such a story and similar post-9/11 comics preaching tolerance and forbearance is that "we too can be superheroes. By doing what we can to demonstrate that 9/11 did not undermine our faith in the goodness of humanity, we can recover, rebuild, and continue to uphold the principles that first inspired America."<sup>113</sup>

From that perspective, Superman's greatest power is to recognize that although he himself cannot do it all, he can help inspire others to recognize the power within themselves to live up to America's noblest values. According to one critic, "Much of the power of mass entertainment derives from its communality. Every consumer feels invested in it, part of it, free to make it his [or her] own," so that "the whole process becomes a sort of giant conversation."<sup>114</sup> Superman over the years has attracted a passionately devoted fan base that has gone so far as to write its own scripts and produce its own films about the character.<sup>115</sup> Such fans respond to Superman as a symbol of all that is "democratic, open, and idealistic"<sup>116</sup>—in other words, America at its best. One fan is Michael Chabon, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* about the golden age of comic books. He has credited the comics' creators for having "invited me to enter their worlds and play, and in so doing they invited me to create my own. Now I feel that I'm passing on that same invitation on to new readers."<sup>117</sup> In a like vein, a more participatory journalism can invite citizens to see themselves as having the collective ability and responsibility to make a difference in the world.

## Conclusion

Of course, one can be skeptical regarding such seemingly utopian hopes. Cultural and critical scholars have challenged the notion that “fan-made religions” such as that surrounding Superman can ever be truly emancipatory.<sup>118</sup> They also have questioned how much journalism can serve as a agent of change absent any broader structural reform of the press. Herbert Gans has written that although part of the “paraideology” of American journalism is its attachment to “altruistic democracy” and grassroots action, that translates into the belief that “citizens should help themselves without having to resort to government aid” and that “the economic barriers that obstruct the realization of the ideal” are of comparatively little concern.<sup>119</sup> As for participatory journalism, one recent study has found with only a few exceptions “little evidence of new media being deployed to allow journalists to do more journalism or to engage the public more effectively.”<sup>120</sup> According to another scholar, “Media professionals are likely to respond nostalgically and defensively to disruptive change, media management tend to interpret such changes primarily in terms of their potential to ‘depopulate’ the profession, and audiences seem to embrace these developments more as a way to bypass and disintermediate journalism altogether rather than as a mechanism to foster closer ties.”<sup>121</sup>

Such caveats do not diminish the importance of journalism, which ideally should be the “essential nurturer of an informed citizenry.”<sup>122</sup> What they do is point once more to the usefulness of cultural and critical scholarship in sharpening our thinking about journalism, just as it helps us see via Superman “some of the complexity and the disturbing contradictions that mark the national soul.”<sup>123</sup> Superman on the surface appears wonderfully simple—the Man of Steel rights wrongs and saves the day. Journalism in Superman also can seem reassuringly uncomplicated. Far from being “depopulated,” the *Daily Planet* newsroom in *Smallville* is

teeming with life, apparently untouched by the financial pressures buffeting the newspaper industry. Its staff is unburdened by expectations to blog or multitask and free to pursue scoops the old-fashioned way.<sup>124</sup> Such depictions embody a fondly nostalgic perspective on the press, just as Superman himself seems to embody a fondly nostalgic perspective on truth and justice.

Those who try to complicate that perspective do so at their own risk. In the spring of 2011, a Superman comic book showed the Man of Steel renouncing his American citizenship. “I’m tired of having my actions construed as instruments of U.S. policy,” he says. “‘Truth, justice, and the American way’—it’s not enough anymore. The world’s too small, too connected.”<sup>125</sup> The storyline triggered denunciations from some fans and conservatives. “Besides being riddled with a blatant lack of patriotism, and respect for our country, Superman's current creators are belittling the United States as a whole,” a Republican activist told Fox News.<sup>126</sup> Others applauded. “Other governments must not view Superman as an arm of the U.S. military establishment,” wrote one commentator on the website ComicsAlliance.com. “Superman must be a symbol for peace, balance and impartiality. I could not be happier with what the authors did in [this comic book], and I may even start picking up Superman comics again. They've made Superman relevant again.”<sup>127</sup>

Thinking about journalism with Superman suggests that today’s journalists face a comparable challenge—how to transcend nostalgia and assume the risks associated with remaking the press so that it remains relevant in a more complicated age. As one scholar has put it, Superman highlights “things we need to know and think about from time to time,” such as “the strengths and dangers inherent in the American character.”<sup>128</sup> Those include the strengths and dangers inherent in journalism and its relationship to the citizenry. Superman helps us see

how and where journalism falls short while also pointing to how it may better live up to its potential so that “truth, justice, and the American way” moves from slogan toward reality.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> Jenette Kahn, “Foreword,” in *Superman from the Thirties to the Eighties*, rev. ed. (New York: Crown, 1983), 7; Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 1998), 11; Dennis O’Neil, “The Man of Steel and Me,” in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 58; Harlan Ellison qtd. in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America), xi, xv.

<sup>3</sup> John J. Pauly, “A Beginner’s Guide to Doing Qualitative Research in Mass Communication,” *Journalism Monographs*, no. 125 (February 1991): 5.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Nelson Bridwell, “Introduction,” in *Superman from the Thirties to the Eighties*, rev. ed. (New York: Crown, 1983), 11.

<sup>5</sup> See Gary Engle, “What Makes Superman So Darned American?,” in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 79-87; Danny Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 53-56; Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 197.

<sup>6</sup> See Dennis Dooley, “The Man of Tomorrow and the Boys of Yesterday,” in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 19-34; Scott Raab, “Is Superman Jewish?” in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 167-168; Danny Fingeroth, *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero* (New York: Continuum, 2007); Simcha Weinstein, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey!: How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero* (Baltimore, MD: Leviathan, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> *Superman: The Movie*, originally released 1978 (available on Warner Home Video). The movie’s director Richard Donner and co-writer Tom Mankiewicz consciously linked Superman’s story to that of Christ; see Bruce Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 80. The 2006 movie *Superman Returns* similarly employed Christian imagery; see Jake Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2008), 294. See also Edward Mehok, “St. Clark of Krypton,” in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis

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Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 123-129; John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> See Patrick L. Eagan, "A Flag with a Human Face," in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 88-89; Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity*, 196-202; Aldo Regalado, "Modernity, Race, and the American Superhero," in *Comics as Philosophy*, ed. Jeff McLaughlin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 90-91.

<sup>9</sup> See Gershon Legman, "From *Love and Death: A Study in Censorship*," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 112-121; Marshall McLuhan, "From *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 104-106; Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Rinehart, 1954); Thomas Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah: The History and Historicity of Superman," in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, ed. Donald Lazere (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 124-138; Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*.

<sup>10</sup> Paulette Kilmer, "The Shared Mission of Journalists and Comic Book Heroes: Saving the Day," *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Journal*, 2 (2010): 86-107, online at <http://ijpc.uscannenber.org/journal/index.php/ijpcjournal/article/view/20/30>.

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Ann (Beck) Foss, "'It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's a Journalist?': A Framing Analysis of the Representation of Journalists and the Press in Comic Book Films," M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 2004, online at <http://ijpc.org/uploads/files/Journalists%20and%20the%20Press%20in%20Comic%20Book%20Films%20-%20Katherine%20Foss%20thesis%20Minnesota.pdf>. See also Brian McNair, *Journalists in Film* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 237-238.

<sup>12</sup> For exceptions, see Loren Ghiglione, *The American Journalist: Paradox of the Press* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1990); Tom Brislin, "EXTRA! The Comic Book Journalist Survives the Censors of 1955," *Journalism History* 21.3 (Autumn 1995): 122-30; Bill Knight, "Comic Book Journalists Beyond Clark Kent," *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Journal*, 1 (2009): 138-146, online at <http://ijpc.uscannenber.org/journal/index.php/ijpcjournal/article/view/12/14>.

<sup>13</sup> Brian McNair, "Journalism in the Cinema," in *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, ed. Stuart Allan (London: Routledge, 2010), 385.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Howard Good, *Acquainted with the Night: The Image of Journalists in American Fiction, 1890-1930* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986); Howard Good, *Outcasts: The Image of Journalists in Contemporary Film* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1989); Howard Good, *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism, and the Movies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1998); Howard Good, *The Drunken Journalist: The Biography of a Film Stereotype* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow,

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2000); Howard Good, ed., *Journalism Ethics Goes to the Movies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Howard Good and Michael J. Dillon, *Media Ethics Goes to the Movies* (New York: Praeger, 2002); Richard R. Ness, *From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1997); Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Los Angeles: Norman Lear Center, University of Southern California, 2002); McNair, *Journalists in Film*; Ghiglione, *The American Journalist*.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols, *The Death and Life of American Journalism* (Philadelphia: Nation Books, 2010); Robert W. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Gaye Tuchman, *Making News* (New York: Free Press, 1978); W. Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 8th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: Guilford, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Clifford G. Christians, John P. Ferré, and P. Mark Fackler, *Good News: Social Ethics and the Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, James W. Carey, "The Press and the Public Discourse," *Center Magazine* 20.2 (March/April 1987): 4-16; Jay Rosen, *What Are Journalists For?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> See James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 142. See also Jeremy Packer and Craig Robertson, ed., *Thinking with James Carey* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> See Pauly, "A Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research," 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> See "Publication History of Superman" Wikipedia entry, online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Superman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Superman). For a broad overview of the history of the comic book version of Superman, see Robert Greenberger and Martin Pasko, *The Essential Superman Encyclopedia* (New York: Del Ray, 2010). See also Larry Tye, *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero* (New York: Random House, 2012); Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History*.

<sup>24</sup> For broad overviews of Superman's depiction in media other than comics, see Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, and Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*.

<sup>25</sup> Christians, Ferré, and Fackler, *Good News*, 120-21; Pauly, "A Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research," 10-14, 20.



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<sup>26</sup> Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, 264. *Smallville* aired its farewell episode in May 2011.

<sup>27</sup> In addition to the sources already listed, see also the “Superman Wiki,” online at [http://superman.wikia.com/wiki/Superman\\_Wiki](http://superman.wikia.com/wiki/Superman_Wiki), and the “Superman Homepage,” online at <http://www.supermanhomepage.com/news.php>. Concerning the importance of adequate contextualization in conducting cultural and critical studies, see Clifford G. Christians and James W. Carey, “The Logic and Aims of Qualitative Research,” in *Research Methods in Mass Communication*, ed. Guido H. Stempel and Bruce H. Westley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 350-354.

<sup>28</sup> “Wolfe vs. the Yellow Mask,” *Adventures of Superman* radio series, originally aired March 22, 1940 (available from Digital Deli Online, <http://digitaldelift.com>).

<sup>29</sup> See *Superman from the Thirties to the Eighties*, rev. ed. (New York: Crown, 1983), 25-31.

<sup>30</sup> Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Three Rivers, 2007), 36; Jay Black, Bob Steele, and Ralph Barney, *Doing Ethics in Journalism*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 35-39.

<sup>31</sup> *Superman from the Thirties to the Eighties*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Black, Steele, and Barney, *Doing Ethics in Journalism*, 163. See also Joe Saltzman, “Deception and Undercover Journalism: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Mr. Deeds*,” in *Journalism Ethics Goes to the Movies*, ed. Howard Good (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 59-72.

<sup>34</sup> See Clifford G. Christians, Mark Fackler, Kim B. Rotzoll, and Kathy Brittain McKee, *Media Ethics*, 6th ed. (New York: Longman, 2001), 1-30.

<sup>35</sup> “Infamous,” *Smallville*, originally aired March 12, 2009 (available on *Smallville* Season 8 DVD from Warner Home Video).

<sup>36</sup> See Christians, Fackler, Rotzoll and McKee, *Media Ethics*, 21-25; Black, Steele and Barney, *Doing Ethics in Journalism*, 163; Saltzman, “Deception and Undercover Journalism.”

<sup>37</sup> See James W. Carey, “The Communications Revolution and the Professional Communicator,” in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, ed. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 128-143.

<sup>38</sup> See Dooley, “The Man of Tomorrow and the Boys of Yesterday,” 30-31; Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History*, 20.

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<sup>39</sup> Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 150. See also Ghiglione, *The American Journalist*, 101-2; Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, *The Front Page* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1928).

<sup>40</sup> Carey, "The Communications Revolution," 138. See also James W. Carey, "Some Personal Notes on U.S. Journalism Education," *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* 1.1 (2000): 12-23.

<sup>41</sup> Carey, "The Communications Revolution," 138. See also Tuchman, *Making News*; Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*; Christians, Ferré, and Fackler, *Good News*; Rosen, *What Are Journalists For?*; David Barsamian, *Stenographers to Power* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> Judith Serrin and William Serrin, "Introduction," in *Muckraking!: The Journalism That Changed America*, ed. Judith Serrin and William Serrin (New York: New Press, 2002), xxi.

<sup>43</sup> The "mild-mannered reporter" label on Clark Kent dates back at least to the Superman animated film serial that debuted in 1941. At roughly the same time, he was being called a "meek reporter" in the comic books. In the second episode of the radio series that debuted in 1940, Superman was heard assuming his dual identity and becoming a reporter because he said he needed a job in which he could "observe [people]. Study them. See them at their best and their worst." See "The Mad Scientist," *Superman* animated serial, originally released 1941 (available on *Superman: The Ultimate Max Fleischer Cartoon Collection*, VCI video); *Superman from the Thirties to the Eighties*, 54; "Clark Kent, Reporter," *Adventures of Superman* radio series, originally aired February 14, 1940 (available from Digital Deli Online, <http://digitaldelift.com>).

<sup>44</sup> Jules Feiffer, *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (New York: Dial, 1965), 19. The audience is of course in on Kent's joke; the *Superman* animated serial cartoons often ended with Clark Kent winking at the audience.

<sup>45</sup> See "Clan of the Fiery Cross," parts 1 through 16, *Adventures of Superman* radio series, originally aired June 10-July 1, 1946 (available from Digital Deli Online, <http://digitaldelift.com>).

<sup>46</sup> Philip Skerry and Chris Lambert, "From Panel to Panavision," in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 71-72. See also *Superman and the Mole Men*, originally released 1951 (available on Warner Home Video); the movie, starring George Reeves, later was broadcast as part of Reeves's *Adventures of Superman* TV series under the episode title "The Unknown People."

<sup>47</sup> O'Neil, "The Man of Steel and Me," 57-58.

<sup>48</sup> "Wall of Sound," *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, originally aired September 25, 1994 (available on *Lois & Clark* Season 2 DVD from Warner Home Video).

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<sup>49</sup> At the end of the 2013 movie *Man of Steel*, Clark Kent indicates that his job at the *Daily Planet* will allow him to ask questions about what is going on, implying a more active and less passive journalistic role for him.

<sup>50</sup> Engle, "What Makes Superman So Darned American?," 85; Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History*, 160; Jeffrey S. Lang and Patrick Trimble, "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?: An Examination of the American Monomyth and the Comic Book Superhero," *Journal of Popular Culture* 22.3 (Winter 1988): 171.

<sup>51</sup> Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 197-198. See also Philip Seib, *Broadcasts from the Blitz: How Edward R. Murrow Helped Lead America into War* (Washington, DC: Potomac, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> Deborah Chambers and Linda Steiner, "The Changing Status of Women Journalists," in *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, ed. Stuart Allan (London: Routledge, 2010), 52-53; Linda Steiner, "Gender in the Newsroom," in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, ed. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (New York: Routledge, 2009), 116. See also Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*.

<sup>53</sup> Joe Saltzman, "Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture," *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*, 2003, 1, online at <http://www.ijpc.org/uploads/files/sobsessay.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History*, 20. For more on the Torchy Blane series and its depiction of women in journalism, see Good, *Girl Reporter*.

<sup>55</sup> See "The Mad Scientist," *Superman* animated serial, originally released 1941 (available on *Superman: The Ultimate Max Fleischer Cartoon Collection* from VCI video); Scivally, *Superman on Film, Television, Radio and Broadway*, 49; *Superman II*, originally released 1980 (available on Warner Home Video). Phyllis Coates would be succeeded by Noel Neill in playing Lois in the 1950s TV series.

<sup>56</sup> J.P. Williams, "All's Fair in Love and Journalism: Female Rivalry in *Superman*," *Journal of Popular Culture* 24.2 (Fall 1990): 109. See also Joanna Connors, "Female Meets Supermale," in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 108-115.

<sup>57</sup> For more on Superman's chaste image, see Jane W. Kessler, "Superman and the Dreams of Childhood," in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 137-42; Lester Roebuck, "The Good, the Bad and the Oedipal," in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 143-152; Rose Maria DelVecchio, "Why Is Superman Still a Virgin?," in *Superman at Fifty!*, ed. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, OH: Octavia, 1987), 171-173; Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 58-63; Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1992), 14-15, 60-66. Superman also has been analyzed as a gay icon; see Darwin Porter, *Blood Moon's Guide to Gay and Lesbian Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Blood Moon Productions, 2007), 11-29.

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<sup>58</sup> Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History*, 160, 175-176.

<sup>59</sup> McNair, *Journalists in Film*, 238.

<sup>60</sup> *Superman Returns*, originally released 2006 (available on Warner Home Video). See also Mary-Lou Galician, "The Return of the Sob Sister in 'Superman Returns': Lois Lane and the Fight for Truth and Justice," abstract of paper presented to the International Communication Association, IJPC.org, May 2007, online at <http://www.ijpc.org/uploads/files/Lois%20Lane%20and%20the%20Return%20of%20the%20Sob%20Sister.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> "Mortal," *Smallville*, originally aired October 6, 2005 (available on *Smallville* Season 5 DVD from Warner Home Video).

<sup>62</sup> See Bonnie J. Dow, "Hegemony, Feminist Criticism and the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990): 261-274.

<sup>63</sup> See "Chloe Sullivan" Wikipedia entry, online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chloe\\_Sullivan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chloe_Sullivan).

<sup>64</sup> See Danna L. Walker, Margaretha Geertsema, and Barbara Barnett, "Inverting the Inverted Pyramid: A Conversation about the Use of Feminist Theories to Teach Journalism," *Feminist Teacher* 19.3 (2009): 177-94. For more on the importance of empathy in journalism, see Howard Good, "Journalism and the Victims of War," in *Journalism Ethics Goes to the Movies*, ed. Howard Good (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 149-162.

<sup>65</sup> "Finale," *Smallville*, originally aired May 13, 2011 (available online from Amazon.com). In the 2013 film *Man of Steel*, Amy Adams's Lois Lane is tough and aggressive, although she still falls for Superman and still needs him to rescue her on occasion.

<sup>66</sup> Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History*, 35, 39.

<sup>67</sup> Regalado, "Modernity, Race, and the American Superhero," 91. See also *Superman from the Thirties to the Eighties*, 37-53; Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," 130-131.

<sup>68</sup> Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, SPJ.org, online at <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>.

<sup>69</sup> Serrin and Serrin, "Introduction," xxii.

<sup>70</sup> Ian Gordon, "Nostalgia, Myth, and Ideology: Visions of Superman at the End of the 'American Century,'" in *Comics and Ideology*, ed. Matthew P. McAllister, Edward H. Sewell, Jr., and Ian Gordon (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 181-182. See also Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History*, 41-42, 63.

<sup>71</sup> Legman, "From *Love and Death*," 117.

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<sup>72</sup> McLuhan, "From *The Mechanical Bride*," 105.

<sup>73</sup> Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, 34.

<sup>74</sup> Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 42.

<sup>75</sup> McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 34.

<sup>76</sup> *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*, originally released 1987 (available on Warner Home Video).

<sup>77</sup> "Gemini," *Smallville*, originally aired December 13, 2007 (available on *Smallville* Season 7 DVD from Warner Home Video). For a summary of the similar story that had appeared in the comics, see the "Daily Planet" entry in Greenberger and Pasko, *The Essential Superman Encyclopedia*, 69-70.

<sup>78</sup> Roebuck, "The Good, the Bad and the Oedipal," 145.

<sup>79</sup> Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," 132; Eagan, "A Flag with a Human Face," 91.

<sup>80</sup> Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, 164.

<sup>81</sup> Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," in *Arguing Comics*, ed. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 164.

<sup>82</sup> Eagan, "A Flag with a Human Face," 92.

<sup>83</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), 364.

<sup>84</sup> See Shanto Iyengar and Jennifer A. McGrady, *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide* (New York: Norton, 2007), 220-23; McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 33-34; Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*.

<sup>85</sup> See Tuchman, *Making News*.

<sup>86</sup> "Superman Comes to Earth," *Superman* movie serial, originally released 1948 (available on Warner Home Video).

<sup>87</sup> "Clan of the Fiery Cross," parts 3 and 16, *Adventures of Superman* radio series, originally aired June 12 and July 1, 1946 (available from Digital Deli Online, <http://digitaldelift.com>). See also Tye, *Superman*, 81-86.

<sup>88</sup> Erik Lundegaard, "Truth, Justice and (Fill in the Blank)," NYTimes.com, June 30, 2006, online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/30/opinion/30iht-ederik.2093103.html>. See also Eagan, "A Flag with a Human Face," 89-90.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 89. See also Fingerroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 73; Reynolds, *Super Heroes*, 74.

<sup>90</sup> Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, xii-xiii.

<sup>91</sup> Gordon, "Nostalgia, Myth, and Ideology," 191.

<sup>92</sup> Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," 133.

<sup>93</sup> See "Japoteurs," *Superman* animated serial, originally released 1942 (available on *Superman: The Ultimate Max Fleischer Cartoon Collection* from VCI video).

<sup>94</sup> Roger Ebert, review of *Superman II*, RogerEbert.com, January 1, 1981, online at <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19810101/REVIEWS/101010303/1023>.

<sup>95</sup> Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah," 133.

<sup>96</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *The Comic-Stripped American* (New York: Walker, 1973), 159.

<sup>97</sup> Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 347.

<sup>98</sup> See Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories*, 81-103.

<sup>99</sup> *Superman: The Movie*, originally released 1978 (available on Warner Home Video).

<sup>100</sup> "Infamous," *Smallville*, originally aired March 12, 2009 (available on *Smallville* Season 8 DVD from Warner Home Video).

<sup>101</sup> Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories*, 85, 191-192.

<sup>102</sup> See McChesney, *The Political Economy of the Media*.

<sup>103</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 42. See also W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston, *When the Press Fails* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>104</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon, 2002).

<sup>105</sup> Carey, "The Press and the Public Discourse": 14. See also Rosen, *What Are Journalists For?*

<sup>106</sup> Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>107</sup> Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 42.

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<sup>108</sup> The scene with Superman's father was originally in the first Christopher Reeve *Superman* film and was alluded to again in *Superman Returns*.

<sup>109</sup> Carey, "The Press and the Public Discourse": 14.

<sup>110</sup> Schudson, *The Power of News*, 17.

<sup>111</sup> Jay Rosen, "Deep Throat, J-School and Newsroom Religion," *Pressthink.org*, June 5, 2005, online at [http://archive.pressthink.org/2005/06/05/wtrg\\_js.html](http://archive.pressthink.org/2005/06/05/wtrg_js.html); Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 124.

<sup>112</sup> Jay Rosen, "The People Formerly Known as the Audience," *Pressthink.org*, June 27, 2006, online at [http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl\\_frmr.html](http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html); Jay Rosen, "The Journalists Formerly Known as the Media: My Advice to the Next Generation," *Pressthink.org*, September 19, 2010, online at <http://pressthink.org/2010/09/the-journalists-formerly-known-as-the-media-my-advice-to-the-next-generation/>.

<sup>113</sup> "Unreal," in *9-11: The World's Finest Comic Book Writers & Artists Tell Stories to Remember* (New York: DC Comics, 2002), 15-16; Terry Kading, "Drawn into 9/11, But Where Have All the Superheroes Gone?" in *Comics as Philosophy*, ed. Jeff McLaughlin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 221.

<sup>114</sup> Gerard Jones, *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-Believe Violence* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 226.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, 222-250, 265-280; "Smallville: Big Fans," featurette on *Smallville* Season 6 DVD (available on Warner Home Video).

<sup>116</sup> Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity*, 198.

<sup>117</sup> Qtd. in Jones, *Killing Monsters*, 229.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, Lawrence and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, 247-264.

<sup>119</sup> Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 43-45, 68.

<sup>120</sup> Natalie Fenton, "Drowning, or Waving? New Media, Journalism and Democracy," in *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age*, ed. Natalie Fenton (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), 15.

<sup>121</sup> Mark Deuze, "Journalism and Convergence Culture," in *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, ed. Stuart Allan (London: Routledge, 2010), 275.

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<sup>122</sup> John Nichols and Robert W. McChesney, “The Death and Life of Great American Newspapers,” TheNation.com, April 6, 2009, online at <http://www.thenation.com/article/death-and-life-great-american-newspapers?page=full>.

<sup>123</sup> Eagan, “A Flag with a Human Face,” 89.

<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, in 2012, the comics showed Clark Kent leaving the *Daily Planet* altogether after complaining that journalism was giving way to entertainment. A Superman writer said that Kent likely would take his journalistic talents to the Internet. See Brian Truitt, “Clark Kent Makes a Major Life Change in New ‘Superman’,” *USA Today*, October 23, 2012, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2012/10/22/clark-kent-superman-comic-book-series/1648921/>.

<sup>125</sup> Qtd. in George Gene Gustines, “Superman Renounces His U.S. Citizenship,” NYTimes.com, April 29, 2011, online at <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/29/superman-renounces-his-u-s-citizenship/>.

<sup>126</sup> Hollie McKay, “Superman Renounces his U.S. Citizenship in 900th Issue of Action Comics,” FoxNews.com, April 28, 2011, online at <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2011/04/28/superman-renounces-citizenship-00th-issue/>.

<sup>127</sup> Laura Hudson, “Superman Renounces U.S. Citizenship in ‘Action Comics’ #900,” ComicsAlliance.com, online at <http://www.comicsalliance.com/2011/04/27/superman-renounces-us-citizenship/>.

<sup>128</sup> Eagan, “A Flag with a Human Face,” 95.