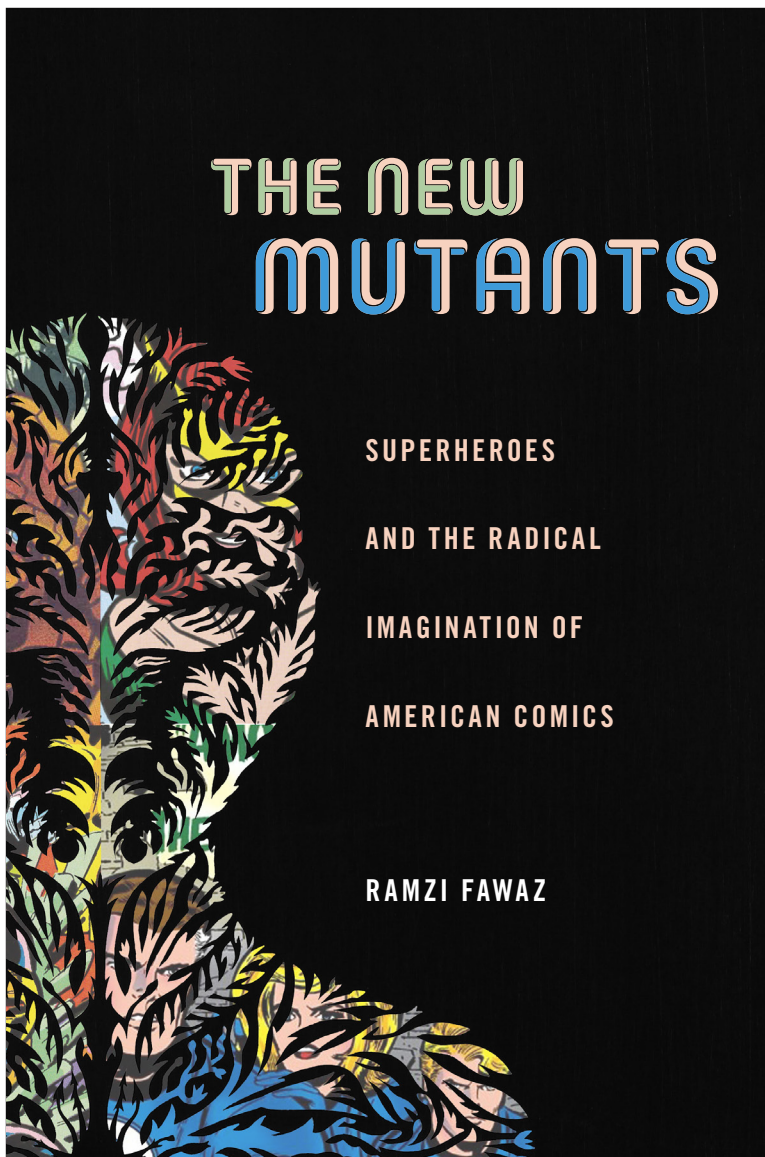


THE NEW MUTANTS

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



In 1964, noted literary critic Leslie Fiedler described American youth as “new mutants,” social rebels severing their attachments to American culture to remake themselves in their own image. 1960s comic book creators, anticipating Fiedler, began to morph American superheroes from icons of nationalism and white masculinity into actual mutant outcasts, defined by their genetic difference from ordinary humanity. These powerful misfits and “freaks” soon came to embody the social and political aspirations of America’s most marginalized groups, including women, racial and sexual minorities, and the working classes.

In *The New Mutants*, Ramzi Fawaz draws upon queer theory to tell the story of these monstrous fantasy figures and how they grapple with radical politics from Civil Rights and The New Left to Women’s and Gay Liberation Movements. Through a series of comic book case studies – including *The Justice League of America*, *The Fantastic Four*, *The X-Men*, and *The New Mutants* – alongside late 20th century fan writing, cultural criticism, and political documents, Fawaz reveals how the American superhero modeled new forms of social belonging that counterculture youth would embrace in the 1960s and after. *The New Mutants* provides the first full-length study to consider the relationship between comic book fantasy and radical politics in the modern United States.

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Introduction

SUMMARY

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In *The New Mutants*, Ramzi Fawaz draws upon queer theory to tell the story of these monstrous fantasy figures and how they grapple with radical politics from Civil Rights and The New Left to Women’s and Gay Liberation Movements. Through a series of comic book case studies – including The Justice League of America, The Fantastic Four, The X-Men, and The New Mutants –alongside late 20th century fan writing, cultural criticism, and political documents, Fawaz reveals how the American superhero modeled new forms of social belonging that counterculture youth would embrace in the 1960s and after. *The New Mutants* provides the first full-length study to consider the relationship between comic book fantasy and radical politics in the modern United States.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are key differences between comic book superheroes in the period before WWII and after? What historical realities made the transformation of the superhero across this time period possible?
- What did it look like for superhero comic books to “scale upward” in their visual and narrative imagination in the post-WWII period? How did scaling upward allow the American superhero to represent a wider range of political possibilities and identities?
- What is fantasy? What are some of the ways that superhero comic books used fantasy in reinventing the post-WWII superhero? What are some of the consequences of seeing fantasy as a political category, rather than just as pure entertainment, or escapism?

LESSON PLANS

- After reading the introduction for one class session, have students read the first 5-10 issues of The Fantastic Four series (available as collected reprint editions) alongside the introduction to Jane Bennett’s *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* in the following session. What are some of the visual and narrative elements of *The Fantastic Four* that invoke enchant-

ment as Bennett describes it? Does that feeling potentially produce attachment to characters, ethical worldviews or new kinds of political commitments?

➤ Over 2 class sessions, have students read this introduction and issue #1 of *The Fantastic Four* either alongside, or after, teaching the introduction to José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* or Eve Sedgwick's "Paranoid and Reparative Reading." This introduction can function as a model of both queer utopian possibilities or reparative reading practices around a traditionally denigrated cultural form (the comic book medium). Ask students what is distinctly "queer" about post-WWII superhero comic books and have them develop a "reparative reading" of *The Fantastic Four* #1.

The Superhero Team and the Promise of Universal Citizenship

SUMMARY

Chapter 1 explores how *The Justice League of America* became one of the first comic book series to present the superhero as a global citizen, or an active participant in seeking justice and freedom for all people regardless of national origin or geographical location. The series depicted the majority of its central heroes—a team composed of both iconic and newly introduced superheroic adventurers working together to ward off threats to global security—as figures who hold dual allegiance or citizenship to both the United States and another locale, whether it be an alien planet (like J’onn J’onzz’s Mars), a mythical island (like Wonder Woman’s Paradise Island), or more local affiliations with distinct cities or towns (like Green Lantern’s Star City). In so doing, the comic book both questioned the assumed American citizenship of previous superheroic icons and also explored some of the political possibilities that the discourses of internationalism and human rights made available after WWII. These discourses celebrated the importance of global cooperation in the face of political threats to international freedom including fascism and totalitarianism, and consequently suggested the value of post-national forms of citizenship that exceeded the limits of any single nation. Moreover, the series repeatedly presented its heroes as purveyors of scientific knowledge, using scientific ingenuity and know-how to defeat villains and extend political freedom to people around the world, and even across the cosmos. In this way, the series identified science as a key vehicle for promoting international solidarity. Alongside these messages, the series presented a new visual depiction of the superhero as an intergalactic adventurer who could secure forms of political freedom not only on Earth but also throughout the galaxies. Even as it depicted egalitarian projects for global peacekeeping and justice through the intelligent and ethical use of science, the comic book also made the ideal and seemingly invulnerable superheroic body appear as a rare and exceptional figure who might be the only person capable of successfully inhabiting a form of global or world citizenship.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the different forms of citizenship that circulate throughout the narrative of *The Justice League of America*? How does the comic book both visually dramatize these forms of citizenship, and negotiate potential contradictions between them?
- How does *The Justice League of America* deal with both the possibilities and dangers of post-WWII science and technology? What is “scientific cosmopolitanism” and what might be its limits?
- Why might *The Justice League of America*’s inability to deal with disability be a problem for its vision of global justice? What do you make of the contradiction

between superheroes as extra-powerful beings, and also vulnerable and potentially disabled subjects?

LESSON PLANS

➤ Read the introduction to Christina Klein's *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination*, and circulate images from Edward Steichen's 1955 *Family of Man* exhibit online or in a slideshow. How do various forms of visual culture, like *The Family of Man* and *The Justice League of America*, offer different responses to the cold war logic of integration? How do their visual strategies overlap and diverge? (Alternatively, have students read the first 10 issues of *The Justice League of America* alongside Klein's introduction).

➤ In one class session, have students read David Hollinger's essay "Science as a Weapon of Kulturkampf in the United States Before and After WWII" and watch selections from Walt Disney's "Our Friend the Atom"; have them read this chapter and 2-3 issues of *The Justice League of America* the following session. What were some of the ways that American popular culture responded to the increasing value of science as a tool for shaping everyday life as well as global politics? How do the approaches to science offered in Disney's "Our Friend the Atom" and *The Justice League of America* differ from, or overlap with, the approach espoused by the proponents of scientific cosmopolitanism?

Nuclear Families, Unstable Molecules, and the Queer History of *The Fantastic Four*

SUMMARY

Chapter 2 begins an extended case study of the most popular American superhero comic book of the post-WWII period *The Fantastic Four*. Unlike *The Justice League of America*, *The Fantastic Four* presented a group of superheroes whose superpowers were gained from exposure to "cosmic rays" that alter their molecular structure, granting them abilities that unravel or mutate their human physiology. In the series, the individual bodies of each team member come to represent distinct material responses to various postwar discourses of normalization, including McCarthyism, psychoanalysis, consumerism, and domesticity. Where *The Justice League* played upon the superhero's dual role as a national and a global citizen, *The Fantastic Four* explored the social and political consequence of the mismatch between the four's individual bodies and their own self-perception as formerly "normal" Americans. In so doing the series questioned the taken-for-granted category of the "human," asking a variety of questions about why bodies that fail to conform to proper forms of gender and sexuality or traditional human physiology are often placed outside the limits of humanity, and hence treated as social misfits or outcasts. The visual pleasure of the series relied on the depiction of superhuman bodies that are constantly in flux between multiple material forms: stretching to incredible lengths, appearing to light on fire, projecting invisible force-shields, or transforming back and forth from rock-like to human form. My inhabiting multiple forms at once, each team member destabilized traditional forms of identity and embodiment in cold war America. In its narrative, the series recast the American nuclear family form as a metaphorical "unstable molecule," an ever-evolving social unit that expanded and adjusted to the consequences of unexpected encounters with a vast world of aliens, mutants, superhumans, and human allies. Ultimately, *The Fantastic Four* framed its four heroes as alternative, and progressive icons of the cold war space race who were invested in egalitarian encounters with different species, cultures, and worlds.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How did *The Fantastic Four* reinvent the superhuman body in the 1960s? What role did the cold war discourses of gender normativity and consumerism play in this reinvention? What were some of the cultural consequences of the way *The Fantastic Four* represented superheroes?
- What are some of the ways that *The Fantastic Four* pressed back against ideas of normalization in post-WWII America?
- What were some of the visual pleasures of the series? How did creators exploit particular kinds of images, visual displays, colors, or forms to represent a new kind of mutated superhero?
- What might have been compelling to 1960s comic book readers about *The*

Fantastic Four's distinct version of family and kinship? Do you think the “unstable molecule” is a useful metaphor for the kind of worldview the series espouses?

LESSON PLANS

- Have students read “Chapter 1: Postwar Liberalism and the Crisis of Liberal Masculinity” in K.A. Cuordileone’s *Manhood in American Political Culture* for one class session, followed by the first 5-10 issues of *The Fantastic Four* and this chapter for the following session. How did *The Fantastic Four* engage with and rework mid-century discourses of liberal masculinity? How do the four lead characters both embody and destabilize traditional notions of proper gender? Alternatively, you can teach the introduction to Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* along with this chapter and issues of *The Fantastic Four*.
- Over the span of 2-3 class sessions, begin by having students read an excerpt from Sara Ahmed’s essay “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology” followed by this chapter and the first issue of *The Fantastic Four*. Have the class conduct a close reading of the first five pages of the issue (which narrates the origin of the Fantastic Four) using Ahmed’s notion of queer phenomenology. How does the team’s origin story orient readers towards queerness (or deviant forms of embodiment)? How does the layout of the comic book page in this sequence function as a reorientation device that shifts our perspective from “normal” American bodies to queer or non-traditional bodies? What is distinctly queer about the Fantastic Four?

The Fantastic Four's Counterpublic as a World-Making Project

SUMMARY

Chapter 3 extends the case study of *The Fantastic Four* to explore how the series content was heavily influenced by complex interactions between readers and creators about the trajectory of its characters and narratives across the 1960s. As an extension of the series' egalitarian view of the family as a vehicle for forging relationships across difference, the series pioneered a forum for communication between readers and creators in the form of monthly letters pages. These letters pages were dedicated to presenting, in published form, selected letters that fans had written to creators regarding the visual and narrative content of the series. The letters pages became a staple of the series and a site where fans debated questions of serious collective concern including the representation of women superheroes in comics, the political importance of comic book "realism," and the potential limits of anticommunist ideology in modern comics. These dialogues across *Fantastic Four* issues helped produce a counterpublic composed of readers who viewed themselves as participating in a democratic space of mutual dialogue and disagreement about issues related to the political values of the series. These dialogues ultimately dovetailed with the series' own increasing interest in depicting the Fantastic Four's encounters with a racially heterogeneous network of superhuman allies from around the globe. By framing the four heroes' superpowers as a kind of biological aberration that distanced them from proper humanity, the series linked their transformations to the experience of being racial minorities who similarly are deemed "inhuman" or "less than human" on the basis of their racial difference. As a result, the series imagined what cross-racial and cross-species encounter and affiliation might look like outside the logics of cold war containment and integration, modeling and reworking some of the central political values of movements for Black Power and Third World Liberation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is a counterpublic? What are some of the ways that the letters pages of *The Fantastic Four* might be considered a kind of counterpublic? Who were the participants in this counterpublic and what kinds of dialogues did they have?
- How did the conversations that took place in *The Fantastic Four* letters pages combine questions about artistic or creative aspects of the series with political or social concerns? What kind of participant do you think you would have been in these debates if you had been an active reader of the series in the 1960s? What kinds of reactions might you have had to the sentiments other fans expressed in their letters?
- How did the categories of race and species come to take a central place in *The Fantastic Four's* visual and narrative imagination? What are some of the possibilities and limits of the series' take on race?

➤ How did the Fantastic Four's first encounters with the Black Panther and the Inhumans dramatize some of the complexities of cosmopolitanism?

LESSON PLANS

➤ If you wish to stress the elements of this chapter that focus on comic book reading communities and letters pages, you can pair it with either Henry Jenkins's essay "Star Trek Re-run, Re-read, Re-written: Fans as Textual Poachers," or chapter 2 of Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*. Stage a discussion about competing forms of fan participation in influencing the form and content of popular media texts. In the following two class sessions have students read issues #52-53 of *The Fantastic Four* (the first introduction of the Black Panther) and write their own fan letters in responses to the content of the two issues. Have students share their letters with the class and then publically respond to one another. Finally, collectively decide which letters should be "printed" and produce an original letters page made up of student "Letters to the Editor" that you circulate to the entire class.

➤ If you wish to stress the material on race and species, teach the chapter alongside selections from *The Port Huron Statement* or James Baldwin's *New York Times* article "A Negro Assays the Negro Mood." You may also have the class read either *The Fantastic Four* #45-47 or #51-53 (the issues that introduce the Inhumans and the Black Panther respectively). In what ways do the members of the Fantastic Four model the kinds of egalitarian values articulated in *The Port Huron Statement*? What appear to be some of the limits or blind spots of the team's response to difference?

Mutant Superheroes and the Cultural Politics of the Comic Book Space Opera

SUMMARY

Starting in the late 1960s, superhero comics become dominated by stories of cosmic or intergalactic adventure. By the mid-1970s, these stories came to comprise a specific genre, the space opera, that narrated epic tales of superheroes traversing the cosmos. The space opera appeared in two forms, the Messianic Melodrama and The Galactic Space War. The Messianic Melodrama told tales of alienated god-like heroes like the Silver Surfer, Warlock, and Captain Marvel who, after traveling the galaxies, alight on Earth only to discover with horror the petty conflicts of human beings. In the wake of the fracturing of New Left Social movements in the late 1960s, these heroes lobbied a moral complaint against the failures of mankind to embrace tolerance and create peaceful relations across difference. The Messianic Melodrama used the limitless void of outer-space as a metaphor for the alienation moral heroes felt in a world of injustice. In this way, the Messianic Melodrama deployed moral identification—a kind of righteous empathy with the suffering hero—as a response to the inability of radical politics to change hearts and minds. In the mid-1970s, the space opera moved away from the psychic suffering of morally righteous heroes to the dynamic encounters and affiliations forged between mutants, aliens, and cosmic beings across the universe. This second iteration of the space opera, the Galactic Space War, narrated epic cosmic conflicts that brought countless strangers together from every reach of outer-space to combat threats to the universe's flourishing. This version of the space opera was captured in *The X-Men* series, the first comic book to introduce readers to the figure of the mutant superhero, gifted with extraordinary abilities due to an evolution in their genetic make up. As genetic outcasts shunned by humanity, the mutant X-Men seek out bonds with all manner of life in the universe regardless of species, embodied form, or geographical origin; in so doing, the series cast mutation as a category of affiliation not based on traditional notions of identity but on the shared experience of the failure to live up to an idealized image of "universal humanity." In these stories, outer-space is no longer a void of loneliness or alienation but an unpredictable space for forging affinities and kinship.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are some of the key features of the Messianic Melodrama? How does this genre use feeling or sentiment to make political statements? Are you compelled by this form of sentimental or emotional politics or not?
- How did the category of mutation provide a new approach to questions of difference and diversity in superhero comic book publishing? What are some of the visual and narrative innovations that *The X-Men* series deployed to discuss issues around race and gender?

➤ How did *The X-Men's* "queer mutanity" offer a different form of community and kinship from previous versions of collectivity espoused by liberal humanist politics? What are some of the consequences of the series' centralizing of women characters in its visual style and narrative plots? Would you want to be a mutant?

LESSON PLANS

➤ If you want to stress the countercultural aspects of the space opera, pair this chapter with "Chapter 4: Being One: From Knowledge to Consciousness in the Spaceship Society" in Sam Binkley's *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s*. Then have students watch the movie *Barbarella* (Vadim, 1968). What are some of the ways that different visual media forms (film and comics for instance) visualized the hippie counterculture's call for developing expanded consciousness? What role did images of liberated female sexuality play in this visual culture? In what ways were women both central to, but also limited by, countercultural notions of expanded consciousness?

➤ If you wish to stress the queer or collectivist aspects of the space opera, especially as it is displayed in *The X-Men*, pair this chapter with Robert McRuer's essay "Gay Gatherings: Reimagining the Counterculture." You may also assign students to read "The Phoenix Saga," (available as a collected reprint edition). What are some of the consequences of interpreting the X-Men as a form of "gay gathering"? How does the Phoenix Saga deploy certain aspects of the gay counterculture to narrate a story of cross-species kinship?

Urban Folktales and the Triumph of the Working-Class Hero

SUMMARY

Chapter 5 zooms in from the cosmic space adventures of *The Silver Surfer* and *The X-Men* to the local conflicts of inner-city life that were concurrently being displayed in the pages of urban folktales in the 1970s. These stories narrated the return of space-faring superheroes to blighted urban milieus, while depicting the alliances forged between white and black heroes in the interest of combating inner-city crime and poverty. Analyzing DC Comics' acclaimed *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* (1970) miniseries and Marvel Comics' *Captain America and the Falcon* (1974) story lines of the mid-1970s, this chapter shows how the urban folktale was presented as a narrative about informed citizenship that demanded that superheroes acknowledge the lived experiences of the people they claimed to fight for as a requirement of their heroic activity. The urban folktale positioned itself against cosmopolitan projects like those depicted in *The X-Men* by identifying the remasculinization of iconic male heroes as the solution to American racial conflict and economic inequality in the post-civil rights era. At the same time, the genre's documentary-like depiction of the horrors of urban decay, racism, and economic exploitation bolstered the public image of comic books as socially relevant media at a time when the gains of civil rights and New Left politics appeared to be eroding. In so doing, the genre registered the frustration of comic book producers who experienced an economic devaluation of their creative labor under the increasingly corporate restructuring of the comic book industry; consequently, these writers and artists sought to re-infuse superheroes with social relevance as a way to counterbalance economic devaluation with social and political clout. The seeming rehabilitation of iconic American heroes formerly naïve about American urban life presented in the pages of urban folktales allowed creators to frame themselves as progressive thinkers whose work made a valuable contribution to American society.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What were some of the historical factors that encouraged comic book creators to revamp some of the industry's most classic white male superheroes like Green Lantern and Captain America in the 1970s? How did American urban life in this period play a role in the reinvention of these iconic heroes?
- How did identity politics and the ethnic revival differ from other kinds of cultural projects to respond to difference and diversity in the 1960s and 1970s? How did the urban folktale deal with difference visually and narratively?
- What are some of the ways that we can see the economic struggles of creators to maintain the value of their creative labor reflected and reworked in the pages of urban folktales? How would you characterize or describe the relationship between labor, corporatization, and the actual content of comic book production?

in this period?

LESSON PLANS

➤ Prior to reading this chapter have students read *Captain America and the Falcon: Secret Empire* (or else the follow up story *Nomad*; both are available as collected reprint editions) alongside “Chapter 4—The Spirit of ’76: The Bicentennial and Cold War Revivalism” in Natasha Zaretsky’s book *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980*. Do these classic Captain America story lines from the 1970s appear to embody the logic of the American bicentennial? How do the racial politics of the relationship between Captain America and the Falcon address some of the central conflicts over race in the mid- to late 1970s?

➤ With this chapter, assign the first volume of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* (available as a collected reprint edition) and screen the movie *Easy Rider* (Hopper 1969). How do these different texts model shifts in the nature of American masculinity starting in the late 1960s? According to these works of popular culture, what are some of the problems that plague U.S. society in this period and what would a more progressive America look like? What role do men have to play in achieving that progressive vision?

Demonic Possession and the Limits of the Superhuman in the 1980s

SUMMARY

Chapter 6 explores the trope of demonic possession in the mainstream superhero comics of the 1980s. Throughout the decade, a variety of iconic heroes found themselves possessed by magical or alien forces that caused them to lose control over their superhuman abilities, wreaking havoc on the very worlds they were sworn to protect. These stories framed demonic possession as a metaphor for the rapacious expansion of late capitalism, where the destruction of the superhero's ethical core embodied the possession of individual Americans' psychic life by corporate greed. Simultaneously, these texts linked the superhero's loss of self-possession with a loss of control over one's sexual and gender identity, depicting those blighted by demonic forces as sexually narcissistic and taking on the characteristics of the opposite gender. This double move was displayed in the decade's two most paradigmatic demonic possession stories, *The X-Men's "Dark Phoenix Saga"* (1980) and *Spider-Man's "Venom Saga"* (1984). In these tales, two of Marvel Comics' most benevolent heroes, Jean Grey and Spider-Man, are transformed into monstrous avatars bent on global destruction, at the same time that their sexual and gender identities are thrown into confusion by their alter egos. Through a comparative case study of these texts, this chapter shows how a refusal of sexual and gender conformity celebrated in the comic books of the 1970s, was now presented as a dangerous collusion with the values of global capital. According to the logic of these texts, under the possession of capitalist forces, gender and sexuality had become disposable identities used for strategic (and villainous) ends rather than avenues for alternative community building.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How did the trope of demonic possession transform the visual and narrative content of American superhero comic books? What are some of the transformations that superheroic characters like the Phoenix and Spiderman underwent in the demonic possession narrative?
- Why did demonic possession stories appear to link questions of gender and sexuality to economic or financial interests? What did this linkage say about contemporary radical and liberal politics in the 1980s?
- How does Venom come to represent a variety of minority and working class identities in his physical form and narrative back-story? In what ways might Venom have represented the feelings of actual comic book creators about the undervaluation of their creative labor in the wake of the increasing corporatization of the comic book industry?

LESSON PLANS

➤ Across the span of 3-4 class sessions: begin by teaching the film *Alien* alongside Carol Clover's "Chapter 2: Opening Up" from her book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Then have students read *The Dark Phoenix Saga* (available as a collected reprint edition) followed by this chapter. How did superhero comic books in the early 1980s absorb, revise, or repurpose the central logics that animated contemporary American horror cinema? In both horror cinema and superhero comic books, what was the purpose of presenting women at threat from demonic or alien outside forces? What kinds of ideologies or oppressive regimes did these forces represent in different cultural texts?

➤ Begin by having students read Wendy Brown's essay "Wounded Attachments" or alternatively, her essay "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy." In the next 2 class sessions have them read *The Dark Phoenix Saga* or selections from the *Venom Saga* (available as a collected reprint edition under the title *The Birth of Venom*). If you're feeling very daring or want to stress the queer aspects of these texts, you might consider pairing selections from the *Venom Saga* with William Friedkin's 1980 movie *Cruising* to consider how the psychosexual and class dynamics of the gay leather scene in downtown Manhattan (as depicted in the movie) map onto similar dynamics in the extended story of *Venom's* rise to power.

Radical Imagination and the Enchantments of Mutant Solidarity in *The New Mutants*

SUMMARY

Chapter 7 develops a case study of the series *The New Mutants* (1984), which revisits the radical race and gender politics of *The X-Men* through the lens of demonic possession. This chapter analyzes how in the late 1980s *The New Mutants* reinvented the trope of demonic possession as a metaphor for American historical atrocities—including Native American genocide, slavery, and imperialism—simultaneously reframing the superhero’s body as a visual map of the forms of violence inflicted upon those excluded from the dominant narratives of American historical progress. By facing the demonic avatars of their individual histories as a collective force, the members of the *New Mutants* offered a novel conception of the superhero not as a crime-fighter, or an icon of identity politics, but as a vehicle for forging political alliances across multiple axes of difference and diverse spiritual and ethical worldviews. Rather than project an image of a utopian mutant kinship based on their shared genetic difference, *The New Mutants* presented its young characters in constant debate and disagreement over the meaning and purpose of hero work, competing interpretations of the historical past, and their multiple loyalties to kind and kin. Ultimately *The New Mutants* modeled a form of radical democratic practice between diverse superhuman characters that echoed the radical politics of contemporaneous social movements like ACT UP and early third wave feminism by presenting racial, sexual, and gender identities as flexible categories of affiliation open to rearticulation, rather than fixed biological realities.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How did *The New Mutants* reinvent the category of mutant identity in the 1980s? What were some of the historical factors that galvanized or influenced this reinvention? What was politically “new” about *The New Mutants*?
- In what ways did the various characters in *The New Mutants* model unpredictability in both their words and their actions? What was the value of unpredictability in the series and what were some of its consequences?
- How did *The New Mutants*’ represent historical atrocities like Native American genocide, the Vietnam War, or religious persecution? How did “The Demon Bear Saga” help make indigeneity an important category of affiliation for the *New Mutants*?
- What does it mean to develop the skill of radical imagination? What do you think is the radical imagination of American comics?

LESSON PLANS

- If you want to use *The New Mutants* as a case study in postmodern identity

politics, spend 1-2 class sessions working through Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," then follow that up by having students read Volume 1 of *New Mutants Classic* (collecting the first 7 issues of the series) alongside this chapter. Have students compare some of the ways that Haraway's description of a post-industrial globally networked world is reflected in *The New Mutants*. Can the new mutants be thought of as cyborgs in Haraway's sense of the term and do they enact cyborg politics through their kinship?

➤ Alternatively, if you want to stress the concepts of radical imagination and entrustment, spend 1-2 class sessions working through the third chapter of Linda Zerilli's *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, titled "Feminists Make Promises: The Milan Collective's Sexual Difference and the Project of World-Building." Then spend the next 1-2 sessions reading "The Demon Bear Saga" (from *New Mutants Classic* Volume 3) alongside this chapter. What are some of the ways that *The Demon Bear Saga* dramatizes the problem of solidarity between socially marginalized or oppressed people? What does the Demon Bear represent and what kind of collective action is required to defeat it?

Epilogue

SUMMARY

Since the late 1980s, the depiction of the deaths of iconic superheroes, both in violent individual conflict or spectacular extinction events, has become a common theme of superhero comic book publishing. The epilogue tracks the political meaning of this turn to narratives of violent death or genocidal massacre by exploring the figure of the “marvelous corpse” or the dead or dying superhero. The marvelous corpse has often functioned as a powerful call to arms that demands readers to acknowledge the necessity of engaging the world directly without the assumption that figures of heroic justice will solve crucial problems of collective or social concern. And yet the visual depiction of extinction or crisis events, in which mass groups of superhuman figures like the mutant X-Men are slaughtered or placed under threat of extinction, often reduces the field of political possibilities to mere survival, and consequently eliminates the possibilities for collective action and democratic debate. In the current historical moment of the new millennium, extinction events are often seen as off-set by the increasing representational diversity of superhero comics, which now showcase superheroes of a variety of races, genders, sexualities and abilities. The epilogue questions the political effectiveness of diversity alone to make up for the violence depicted in crisis stories, and asks questions about what kinds of alternatives could be innovated in contemporary comic book production to narrate the future of democratic life differently.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does the figure of the marvelous corpse have to say about the state of American citizenship in the early 21st century? What are some of the consequences of making the American superhero vulnerable to death and bodily destruction?
- What is the difference between the marvelous corpse and the mass deaths depicted in so-called “crisis” narratives? What do crisis narratives tell us about current global political and economic realities?
- What are some of the historical factors that have potentially diminished the radical imagination of American comics? What is your opinion of comics’ greater representation of women and minorities of all stripes in the new millennium? How does the strategy of greater representational diversity in comics overlap with, and differ from, the forms of world making that characterized comics from the 1960s through the 1980s?
- What do you think it would look like to revitalize the creative political possibilities of American comics (and popular culture more broadly) today?

LESSON PLANS

➤ Across 2-3 class sessions teach Achille Mbembe's essay "Necropolitics" alongside *The Death of Captain America* (available as a collected reprint edition) and this Epilogue. In what ways do contemporary forms of global violence make death both spectacular and ordinary? According to *The Death of Captain America*, what are the consequences of relentless daily forms of violence? Does the story line propose another potential response to mass death besides apathy or complacency?

➤ Teach *The Death of Captain America* and this Epilogue alongside either Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* or documents from the #blacklivesmatter movement. How can fantasy figures like the superhero be used to highlight the uneven valuation of different lives within contemporary America society? In what ways does the marvelous corpse reevaluate or centralize the position of those citizens made most vulnerable to violence, dispossession of rights, and death? How can a figure that seemingly represents death—the marvelous corpse—function to highlight the value of black lives?