

# BEYOND THE CAPE OF SUPERHEROES

## CREATING AN ICON - WONDER WOMAN

### Wonder Woman



Wonder Woman's origins have her being born—sort of—on Paradise Island, among the Amazons of Greek mythology. The sort-of is because her mother, Hippolyta, crafted herself a baby girl made from the clay of the island, and members of the Greek pantheon of gods then imbued the baby with the soul of the unborn child of the first woman murdered by a man. This is how Diana came into the world.

The gods bestowed on her amazing powers, too: flight and strength, beauty and wisdom, courage and communication with animals among them. Oh, and she's basically invulnerable. Against her mother's wishes, Diana competed in a competition for the role of emissary to humanity and handily won. In addition to all of her amazing abilities, she came to us with a lasso of truth—a powerful weapon in its own right that can bind even super-strong beings and force any of those tied up with it to be honest. And from Zeus she received indestructible bracelets.



Arriving to comics in the early 1940s—her first cover was Sensation Comics #1 in January of 1942, a month after her first appearance—Wonder Woman began, like many of her fellow Golden Age superheroes, battling the Axis powers. Just as Dr. Marston wanted her to be used as empowering propaganda for girls, she also came to be used as positive propaganda in the war effort, much like Captain America. Indeed, Wonder Woman is literally clad in a star-spangled outfit. It's not subtle, to say the least.

Although a superhero of the first order, Wonder Woman is perhaps best known not so much for her role in comics as for her role outside it. Dr. Marston would be happy to learn that Diana has come to be strongly associated with the intergenerational feminist movement. Her standout moment on this front was appearing on the very first cover of Gloria Steinem's Ms.

Wonder Woman remains all-too relevant now, in the 21st Century, in the ongoing effort to promote gender justice and spread peace on our troubled planet.



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## THE AGE OF DIVERSITY IN COMIC BOOKS

We are witnessing a long overdue and important turning point in comic books with the expanding inclusion of female and minority characters. Yes, Wonder Woman came along early on. Yes, there's Black Panther. Yes, the X-Men are (happily) quite diverse and have been since Claremont's run started. Yes, we have Luke Cage. But fans know that quality superhero stories featuring women and minorities have always been the exception, not the rule. And that looks set to change.

Ms. Marvel is now a Pakistani-American Muslim teenager, Kamala Khan. Captain America is now Sam Wilson, the African-American superhero who was formerly the Falcon. In the Ultimate Marvel universe, Spider-Man is half-African-American, half-Latino teenager Miles Morales. John Stewart, an African-American man, has been Green Lantern. Thor is a woman. It's starting.

- 10 Although most superheroes remain white men, women and minorities are beginning to appear in comic books in a way they never have before, showing up more often and snagging an increasing number of signature titles. Along with this has been a heightened awareness of the way they are portrayed. Female superheroes, for instance, have too often been unnecessarily sexualized in the way they've been drawn. More and more criticism has been brought to bear on this trend, which thankfully is slowly
- 15 but surely going out of style. The demand is not some Puritanical one that insists that female superheroes be portrayed as sexless. Rather, with females now making up close to 50% of the comic book readership, they want their heroes portrayed more like Serena Williams, and have the strength in numbers to make that happen. That's a welcome improvement.

- 20 This increasing diversity has predictably met with some resistance in certain circles. But the resistance doesn't have much of anything to back it up. The various ages of comic books have already shown a thoroughgoing willingness to introduce new characters into established superhero roles with the aim of expanding a title's fan base. Superheroes are *myths*, and to the extent they are, we may make of them what we will with an eye towards continuing to have them be relevant for us. Sad as it may be to some, there is
- 25 no actual realm that has already established once and for all that there simply can't be an African-American Captain America, or female Thor, or whatever. These heroes are *ours*, and we risk them becoming uninteresting if we don't invest them with renewed meaning and significance, as has been done countless times in the past.

- 30 This is all the more important when considering the dawning of the cinematic age of comic books. Hollywood, despite the many great things that it has done for superheroes, has not yet produced costumed crime fighters with the diversity that comic book readers are demanding. And thus comic books are becoming an increasingly important place for this to happen, lest it happen nowhere.

- 35 What, then, is the next age of comic books? It's an age when superhero stories not only splash across panels, but across silver and TV screens throughout the year. It's an age when girls and boys and men and women of all ethnicities, nationalities, and orientations can find meaning in the tales of these costumed crusaders. It's an age when debates about Batman's morality or Wonder Woman's powers are no longer relegated to the geekiest corners
- 40 of the internet, but show up in lunchrooms and boardrooms across the globe.

So watch out, world! Here comes the next age of comic books. It is the Inclusive Age. The Global Age. What would you call it?



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## THE AGE OF DIVERSITY IN COMIC BOOKS

1. What is happening to the superheroes industry in comic books? Explain
2. Give a few examples of major changes.
3. Explain why this change was needed. What would happen to the industry if nothing changed?
4. Compare the trend in comics to what's happening in the recent movies.
5. What's the next step? Explain how the industry will evolve.



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