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A Cold War on the Dark Knight: Batman and American Culture 1939-1975

by

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A Thesis
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ABSTRACT

In 1930, Batman fought the prevailing fears of urban America. With the addition of Robin in 1940, the comics changed to appeal to children and continued to follow the cultural trends of America during World War II and into the Cold War. Fear and paranoia during the Cold War influenced American culture and domestic policy. Anticommunism was ingrained in American social structure and initiated efforts at social containment in the 1950s. American culture shifted to emphasize morality and domesticity, and many Americans actively sought to protect traditional Christian values in their society.

Among the rising concerns, Americans became increasingly worried about children and children's media. The comic book industry experienced Cold War animosity and campaigns for censorship, culminating in the Comics Code Authority in 1954 (which lasted until 2011). The popular support for censorship was a result of the intense fear that the American people felt during this time and the new emphasis on family and homelife. Batman responded accordingly and the writers changed how they approached violence and gender in the comics. Starting in 1947, the Batman comic slowly transitioned away from the depiction of violence in crime fighting to emphasizing Batman's detective skills. The women of Batman also experienced changes during this time. They became less complex characters that personified American ideals for women and were criticized when they stepped out of the social consensus.

The comics rejected these American strategies of social containment going into the Bronze Age of comics (1970-1985) after the removal of Robin in 1969.

Keywords: Cold War, American culture, comics, censorship, violence, women

DEDICATION

To my amazing little brother, Cory Cantrell, and my best friend, Austin Scheyd, who allowed me to explain my theories and talk to them about nothing but comic books for two years.

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This work would not have been competed without the help of many of the wonderful professors at the University of Southern Mississippi, but especially the patience dedication my thesis advisor, Dr. Andrew Haley. Dr. Haley, thank you for inspiring me to finish this project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCA	Comics Code Authority
DC	Detective Comics

CHAPTER I: THE BAT IN OUR BELFRY

When I was ten years old, I would come home from school and run to my room to turn on the television. Every afternoon, I sat on the floor in front of my TV to watch *Batman: The Animated Series*. I watched Batman, as both a vigilante and billionaire philanthropist Bruce Wayne, protect the innocent from the terrors of the night and extend patience, forgiveness, and understanding time and time again to the seemingly irredeemable and insane villains of Gotham. He was intelligent, compassionate, strong, courageous, and, most importantly, ridden with trauma and loss. This stoic and haunted man, the Dark Knight, was my hero, and I am not the only one. Since his appearance in 1939, Batman remains one of the most popular heroes of Detective Comics. One of his greatest strengths and the source of his enduring popularity has been his adaptation to the needs of his readers in the ever-changing sociocultural atmosphere of the 20th century. Batman's origin story, a young boy who witnesses the violent murder of his parents in an alley, reflected the anxieties of living in urban America during the early 1900s and connected with readers who lived in the same environment. While this characterization rings true in his depiction today, Batman has gone through a long period of change since his creation.

Comic books came into existence in the mid-1930s during the Great Depression, evolving from the comic strips in newspapers.[1] One of the first comics, *Superman*, gave readers hope by telling the story of a hero who would care for the average man and the

[1] Wright, Bradford W. *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America.* John Hopkins Paperbacks. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, 3.

poor.[2] He would do everything in his power to stop crime where it existed, even if that occasionally meant defying the police and the government. But while Superman occasionally worked outside of the confines of the law, the early Batman worked almost exclusively outside the law. Batman's early villains, including some typical villains that crossed over from dime novels, were mostly members of organized crime syndicates, which had gained power during prohibition in the 1920s. The general theme of *Batman* is dark and violent, dealing with loss, anger, and depression, in a realistic setting. These traits are easily traced back to the Great Depression, the hardships people faced, and their hopes for a better future. While the themes in 1939 *Batman* are exactly what spoke to readers during that time, they are the opposite of what Cold War comic book reformers wanted their children to read.

The major event that effected the world of comic books during the Cold War period was dubbed the "Great Comic Book Scare" by the scholar David Hajdu. During this time, the parents of young children and other social institutions became concerned with the impact of increasing violence depicted in comic books after World War II.[3] Two separate instances in 1947 of young boys killing themselves while copying the violence they witnessed in comic books gained public attention. After a jury held comic books responsible for William Brecker's death, politicians officially began to condemn comic books and sought to censor violence in comic books.[4]

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[2] Write, 10.
[3] Hajdu, David. *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How It Changed America*. Picador, 2008, 6,7.
[4] Hajdu, 89.

The popularity and availability of comic books, specifically ones marketed to children and teenagers, and American post-war paranoia over Russia's growing political and nuclear might sparked a morality crisis surrounding comic books in America.[5] After a serious plummet in public opinion, multiple campaigns for local censorship, and a Senate hearing, the comic book industry chose to self-censor with the creation of the Comics Code Authority in 1954. The code forced the comic book industry to change its stories in order to continue selling to children. Although the code mainly applied to horror and crime comics, which were prone to depicting extreme violence, it affected child-friendly comics in complicated ways. Many comics leaned into sci-fi heavy story plots. For Superman, an alien who was launched from a dying planet at birth, a sci-fi heavy story line was not farfetched, but what about a normal human who made his name fighting in the streets – that is, Batman?

Everything that happens in history, especially wide-reaching world crises, affects what people create and choose to enjoy; comic books are no exception to this and are an excellent example of how real-world events shape popular culture and art. This project seeks to study how the Comic Books Scare and the age of McCarthyism changed comic books, specifically through the study of Batman. Batman is a hero that has less wiggle room in his location and abilities than other comics, such as Superman, so the changes to his comic seem out of place. While the changes that *Batman* writers made were queer, they adhered to the regulations imposed by the Comics Code Authority and the turbulent sociocultural atmosphere of post-War America. The most important themes that changed were violence and gender conformity. These changes highlight the far-reaching social

[5] Write, 85.

repercussions of Cold War anti-communist America. The extreme cultural policing, while popularly supported, became obsessed with morality as a means to defend against communism on the home front, reaching into American comics as a means to indoctrinate the youth.

Methods

This project focuses on the years before and after the Comic Book Scare and covers the *Batman* comics from the years 1939-1975. I gathered information from the comics before the cultural shift towards censorship and when censorship would be most prominent. I analyzed the way that the *Batman* comics conform to Cold War American culture throughout this period.

While researching, I read all the issues of *Batman* from the first in 1939 to the last of 1940 to understand how Batman was originally characterized and see how his story changed in the first year. After that, I read two issues per year until 1975, usually the January release and the July release. The January issue is the most important as comics publishers generally launch new material and big story changes in January, and July served as a check-in point for later in the year. I also read many other months in between these to gather information on other important changes. Some important issues I looked for contained the introduction or exit of reoccurring characters or were the first or last issues of the Golden, Silver, or Bronze Age of comics. The Golden (1938-1956), Silver (1956-1970), and Bronze (1970-1985) Ages of comics are commonly known eras that encapsulate big changes in comic books as a whole and aid in the organization of this study. In total, I surveyed over thirty-five years of *Batman* comics.

The comics adopt the CCA mark in 1955 but show signs of adhering to censorship around 1947. Broadly, I focus on spotting changes in the depiction of realistic crime, changes in the formulaic plot of the comics, changes in the depiction of women, and overarching themes and messages. The general characterization of Batman changes in response to cultural concerns, aligning with the changing morals and values of Cold War America. Especially in an age if censorship, mass media marketed to children heavily promotes cultural values that American society deems important. The comics under the CCA emphasize lawfulness, respect for governmental institutions, and the return to traditional gender roles.

Existing Literature

Many scholars have written on the general subject of this project. Both comic books and the Cold War are broad topics that garner significant overlap. These writings provide perspective on the Cold War culture that shaped creative endeavors during this period and provide additional grounds to analyze the reading of the comics. While these are not all of the sources I used in this project, they are the most integral to contextualizing and understanding the Comic Book Scare and how it was produced during the Cold War.

Paul Boyer's book, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, explains the origin of and the depth of fear in American society during the Cold War as well as specific effects of the bomb on American culture. According to Boyer, the emergence of the atomic bomb and the acquisition of the weapon by the USSR facilitated panic. Americans were already wary of and generally

unwelcoming of communist ideology, but the USSR's acquisition of a made it worse. Americas existence, in the fullest extent of the word, could be snuffed out in seconds. *By the Bomb's Early Light* is about Cold War America's fear of violence and explains the driving force behind American decisions during this period. When faced with total annihilation, an 'us vs them' mentality makes sense. Americans would do anything they could to prevent the apocalypse, but there was very little that every day Americans could do. Boyer puts into context what led Cold War Americans to shift towards social policing and to support censoring children's media. The bomb was never going to just disappear, so the only way to keep up the fight was to drill American values into the next generation through all channels, such as comic books.

Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* provides some historical context on how the Cold War affected American home life and values. May's book highlights the ways in which Americans sought to maintain and protect traditional values. She argues that during the Cold War, many Americans willingly returned to traditional gender roles after America's involvement in World War II pushed women into the workforce. Americans retreated into the home, creating the suburbs to escape the dangers of the city. The world was beginning to change in ways beyond their control, so they focused on family life and child rearing. May states that Americans believed that immorality led to communism, so the best way to protect against it was to maintain traditional Christian values. Sex and gender as a way of moral policing became extremely important in Cold War America. May explains what Cold War gender roles entailed, the thought processes behind them, and their popularity among post-war

Americans. Her work aided tremendously in identifying and contextualizing cultural themes concerning the depiction of women in Silver Age comics.

Ellen Schrecker's *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* focusses on Cold War America and the changes that our society underwent in the realm of politics and the consequences of public fear. Much like Boyer, Schrecker explains the domestic factors that affected American ethics and values during the Cold War. However, instead of examining its cause, she examines how Americans chose to react to the pervasive fear they felt after the war. Due to the paranoia that crept on American society after World War II and the threat of Russian communism spreading through the free world, fear-mongering Senator Joseph McCarthy was able to rile up the public, causing a wave of purging suspected communists in the government and workplace. While the firings affected the economic, mental, and sometimes physical wellbeing of those involved, they also set a precedent. Americans could act out of their fear and paranoia and enact policies that negatively affected other American citizens in the name of fighting communism without consequence. In this way, McCarthyism pushed the American public further in support of censorship and social policing.

From the realm of comics, of the most classic pieces of scholarship on comic book history is Bradford Wright's *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. In his book, Wright is focused on the collective history of comic books, starting with the creation of Superman, and its effect on the American youth. As such, he devotes a portion of the book to the Comic Book Scare during the Cold War. In these sections, Wright discusses the trends of individual comic publishers, influential people in the fight for censorship, and attempts at censorship before the CCA. He also

includes opinions from the readers against the censorship movement, but claims that they were not taken seriously or were believed to be fake. Like we see in Schrecker's book, Wright discusses how the censorship movement connected comic books to communist propaganda, justifying their fight in Cold War rhetoric and taking cues from McCarthyism.

Finally, David Hajdu's *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How It Changed America* wholly focuses on the Cold War-era Comic Book Scare. Hajdu tracked down the origin of the fight to censor comic books, starting with the Catholic Church during the Great Depression. While he does mention some specific comic books and stories, Hajdu's book mainly works to contextualize the Comic Book Scare with the fears of the time and the specific problems that parents had with comic books, namely the violence and gore of the crime and the horror genres. His book also contextualizes the rising concerns about morality during the Cold War that were entrenched in Christian values and how comic books became linked with communism in the first place. Overall, Hajdu's book is a thorough interpretation of how and why the Comic Book Scare got started and its connections to the overall cultural ideals of Cold War America.

CHAPTER II: GROWING PAINS AND GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

In May 1939, the Batman made his first appearance in *Detective Comics*. Bruce Wayne is sitting in the home of Commissioner Gordon when the commissioner receives a telephone call that a wealthy young man has allegedly stabbed his father, Old Lambert, to death. It is late in the evening, but the commissioner's young friend follows him to the scene of the crime since he does not have anything better to do. Upon arrival, they find the young man detained in his father's mansion, frantically declaring his innocence. He claims that when he arrived, his father was already dying in front of an empty, open safe, whispering the word 'contract' repeatedly. While they are still at the mansion, another rich gentleman, Steven Crane, one of Lambert's three business partners, calls the residence to speak to Commissioner Gordon. He claims that he just received an anonymous threat on his life and that Lambert received the same the day before. He begs that the police come to his house immediately. Unfortunately, before the police can arrive, Crane is murdered in his home and Batman arrives to intercept the hitmen on a nearby rooftop. The police give chase as Batman flees the scene of the murder to find the other two business partners, Paul Rogers and Alfred Stryker. Rogers, receiving an anonymous threat and hearing of the two murders, flees to Stryker's home to alert him of the danger. Upon arrival, Stryker's butler knocks Rogers unconscious. Stryker, it turns out, is the one who ordered the murders of the other business members so that he could own the whole business himself without having to pay for their shares. Batman arrives in time to save Rogers' life, and in a last attempt to flee, Stryker lunges at the Batman. Batman counters with a punch, sending Stryker into an acid pit below them. Batman remarks that it was a fitting end for Stryker's kind before disappearing through the

skylight.[6] Batman's debut gave America a vigilante amidst the suffering of the Great Depression, a hero for the people, outside of the confines of law and order. Batman's roots run deep with a clear connection to the cultural atmosphere of his creation, but he would have to rely on more than his crime-fighting prowess to survive the social and political turmoil of the Cold War.

The comic book industry began in the early 1930s and evolved from newspaper comic strips known as funnies, but the first superhero comic appeared in 1938 in a Detective Comics publication called *Action Comics*.[7] Although Superman was the first, he would not be the last as the superhero genre took off, like the Man of Steel himself, and still thrives in American popular culture nearly one hundred years later. Like any human creation that stands the test of time, comic books reflect the social and cultural changes of the time they were written. Perhaps in a testament to the adaptability of comic books, the era they appeared in, the 20th century, saw the most rapid social, economic, and international changes in recent history. From the Great Depression through World War II and the long era of international tension and strife known as the Cold War, American citizens have lived through multiple crises and social uprisings coupled with a rapid increase in the sophistication of technology after the atomic bomb. In addition to these historical factors, the Comics Code Authority was established in 1954 and directly sought to censor comic books in response to a long-brewing campaign against comic books and their perceived promotion of communism, violence, and immorality. The events surrounding the creators of comic books influenced their writing noticeably during

[6] "The Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 27, 1939.
[7] Wright 5, 9.

the Golden Age (1938-1956), Silver Age (1956-1970), and Bronze Age (1970- 1985) of comics. The events that happen in each consecutive age influenced the writing policies of the age after it, sending forward in time the fears and consequences of an unstable world and handing those fears down to the younger generation.

Golden Age America (1938-1947): The World on Fire

Before the first comic book was ever set to print, the Great Depression hit the United States, starting in 1929. FDR's social programs alleviated some aspects of the Depression, but they were not enough to end it. Millions of Americans faced unemployment, homelessness, and starvation during this period which lasted until 1939, the year that World War II began. While America would enter a new era of economic prosperity due to increased war production, the war would still take its toll on society. Americans became increasingly worried about what their children were doing during and especially after the war.[8] This worry found its way into the realm of comic books, especially as the incoming Cold War triggered a mass panic concerning social norms and family values. Accompanied by a heightening of existing fears about communism invading American society, Americans began to try and strictly govern the morality of the United States. Some of the earliest resistance against the paltry existence of communist ideology in America came from the Catholic church in 1911, combining with early efforts at censorship in 1938.[9]

During the onset of the War, resistance to comic books arose in America with the Catholic organization, NODL, the National Organization for Decent Literature, founded

[8] Wright, 88.
[9] Hajdu, 75.

in 1939. NODL gave Catholic bishops the power to ban their parishioners from reading books that went against the church. The framework for NODL existed in 1917, but gained traction with Bishop John Francis Noll.[10] He first began to speak out against Communism in 1911 in Indiana after reading Socialist newspaper funnies with anti-Catholic sentiments.[11] Noll condemned these texts as "part of a Communist plan to destroy the morals of youths," creating a link between communism, immorality, and comic books.[12] He took his concerns to the national level at an annual meeting of bishops in 1938, gaining traction for the founding of NODL and creating his 'black list' of forbidden literature, which Sensational Comics, the vehicle for Wonder Woman, appeared on.[13] NODL's objection to superhero comics were not the villains or story plots, but more often the heroes themselves. They claimed, among other objections such as indecent dress, that superheroes embodied fascism, as they were private citizens taking on matters of law for themselves.[14] Taking it a step further, they began to conflate superheroes with pagan gods seeking to trick the youth into their worship.[15] Noll's denouncement of comic books appealed to many Americans and picked up steam in the forties, worsened by the aftermath of World War II and the invention of the atom bomb.

The campaign for societal morality rooted in Christian principles was on the rise and directly connected to opposition to fascism and communism, a sentiment that would take off during the Cold War. The Cold War is mostly remembered in American history as a

[10] Hajdu, 75.
[11] Hajdu, 75,76.
[12] Hajdu, 76.
[13] Hajdu, 77.
[14] Hajdu, 80.
[15] Hajdu, 81.

diplomatic and ideologic fight against the spread of Communism. The devastation of the war in Europe created a power vacuum in which the United States and the U.S.S.R. emerged as the world powers, competing for ideological influence in the era of decolonization and independence. Domestically, America's Cold War contained multiple tumultuous social events, starting with efforts at domestic social containment in the 1950s followed by liberal movements against the social constraints of the 50s. The rise of McCarthyism, animosity and paranoia towards communist involvement in the government or places of learning, a general moral panic rooted in post-war trauma from the atomic bomb, and the promotion of democracy over capitalism solidified a conservative view of society. A major catalyst for American return to conservatism after the war was the growing consciousness of the power of nuclear weapons and the fear of nuclear war.

Paul Boyer in *By the Bomb's Early Light* describes the dropping of the atomic bomb as a psychological event. Technology had and continued to go beyond what the average American could have imagined possible, making the world one hundred times more dangerous than it already was. After the surrender of Japan, the world was shocked at the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The death tolls horrified the American people whose general reaction was that the world could not stay the same as it was. Many people across the world, including Americans, began to advocate for a world governing body to regulate this super-weapon.[16] The problems with a world government, however, was the amount of sovereignty that the United States would have to give up, the

[16] Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994, xix.

involvement of the Soviet Union, and the power politics that would inevitably be in play. Most of the governments involved in such a venture would not have the power or the resources to keep either the United States or the Soviet Union in check.[17] The United Nations was newly formed and, as proven in later years with its involvement in colonial freedom movements, would not be very effective at getting countries to cooperate and would be subject to the bi-polar politics of the Cold War.[18] The global situation made cooperation impossible, so America decided to go home focus on containment. Foreign policy was based around two points, suppressing Communism, but also, more importantly, preventing nuclear war.

Golden Age America (1947-1956): Social Containment

After World War II, many Americans experienced a sharp increase in wealth as war production led to the end of the Great Depression. The young adults in the late 1940s and the 1950s were children during the Depression and the war, growing up in extreme poverty and sometimes raised by their grandparents as their fathers were shipped to Europe or Asia and their mothers took over vacated jobs to keep the country afloat.[19] When the war ended, the United States became a superpower with unprecedented global influence and sole ownership of the atomic bomb, but the emergence of the Soviet Union as an opposing force with equal influence and power rocked American's faith in postwar peace.[20] Faced with rising international and political strife and with no way to personally

[17] Boyer, 38,41.
[18] Boyer, 41.
[19] May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988, 5.
[20] Boyer, 336.

stop nuclear annihilation, Americans retreated inwards to focus on what they could control, the family. Many newly prosperous, white Americans moved into neighborhoods outside of cities and established the American suburbs, a controlled environment to raise a family in. The 1950s saw a voluntary, youth-led return to traditional gender roles in the home as well as new concerns about morality and how to raise children to be moral bastions of American democratic society.[21]

As Elaine Tyler May states in her book, *Homeward Bound*, post-war Americans began to emphasize family life, conservatism, and traditional gender roles, counteracting the values that their parents fought for during the Great Depression.[22] Many scholars at the time believed that the family and traditional American society would disintegrate after the war due to women's increased presence in the work force and access to birth control, but young Americans chose to reinforce traditional values, raising the marriage rate substantially, and lowering the divorce rate until at least the 1960s.[23] Combining a newfound sense of economic stability and a retreat to someplace safe for the cultivation of family, the suburbs emerged after the war as a symbol of the white middle-class. While the expansion of suburbs allowed more families to obtain a middle-class lifestyle and integrated white immigrants into American society, African Americans were decidedly excluded from suburbs. Persistent Cold War racism would prove to be a major failure in American society, one that the USSR pointed to as a sign of hypocrisy and spurred on the formation of the Civil Rights movement.[24]

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[21] May, 4, 26.
[22] May, 7.
[23] May, 6, 11.
[24] May, 10, 29.

Cold War domesticity proved problematic in many areas, but most notably in its reinforcing of gender roles, concerns about sex and sexuality, and their relation to child rearing. Cold War America heavily emphasized and took pride in its abundance of nuclear families with a breadwinner and housewife setup. Men were expected to go to work every weekday and provide for the family while women stayed home and cleaned, cooked, took care of the children, and made sure that the home upheld the standards of the middle-class.[25] May claims that the abundance of heterosexual couples with supposedly dominant men and submissive women was a defense against moral degeneracy, a trait that would make the American populace more susceptible to the seduction of communist propaganda.[26] Homosexuals were another group of people on the Cold War hitlist, a morally perverse and unnatural lot seen as directly rising from failed parenting. Theories emerged during this time on the successful rearing of children in direct correlation to sexuality and how well their parents adhered to gender roles. Overly assertive or sexually frustrated mothers would ruin their son's natural development into men and turn them gay.[27] These strict returns to conservatism and pervasive moral policing created the perfect environment for the most infamous Cold War policy in America, McCarthyism.

In her book *Many Are the Crimes*, Ellen Schrecker refers to American McCarthyism during the Cold War as a time of silence. The post-war fears that plagued the American public created an atmosphere of state-sanctioned domestic terror and

[25] May, 22.
[26] May, 91.
[27] May, 93.

political persecution. Although the McCarthy hearings began after the bans and limitations on comic books, McCarthyism is one of the best examples in explaining the American atmosphere and the fear that most of society faced at the time. One of the most well-known anti-communists was former Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. His style of anti-communism was loud, extreme, and did not require proof, and it set the groundwork for public support of censorship.[28] McCarthy excelled at gaining publicity and bringing attention to right-wing Americans' suspicions that the Democrats dealt with Communists too softly. McCarthy publicly claimed possession of an extensive list of Communist traitors in the government which the Truman administration could not ignore. Although his reports were false, he used statistics and reports from loyalty investigations that made his claims appear true to bolster support of his party and institute more controlling anti-communist policies.[29]

The claims that an indefinite number of Communists served in the United States government fanned the flames of fear among Americans who saw communists as their enemies in a potential nuclear war that could destroy the world. In this way, McCarthyism augmented prevailing worries about communist espionage and corruption in the government for publicity, setting a precedent for Cold War censorship and establishing what Schrecker refers to as the 'inquisition' of American citizens.[30] While the people during the inquisition were not always misidentified as communists, the government's persecution and victimization of them negatively affected their wellbeing

[28] Schrecker, Ellen. *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*. 1st ed. Boston, Mass: Little, Brown, 1998, 242.
[29] Schrecker, 243.
[30] Schrecher, 242.

for years after.[31] Thousands of Americans were charged with affiliation to communism and brought before tribunals for judgement. Most of those accused became social pariahs, lost their jobs, had to pay hefty legal fees to fight the allegations, and were always under threat of government surveillance and their case opening back up. In some cases, the stress of the allegations ruined the defendants' health, and most could never reenter the field they were expelled from even after the inquisition's end.[32] Many of the accused were shellshocked at their trials because they mostly viewed themselves as loyal American citizens who were merely engaging their right to political freedom prior to the Cold War. To this day, many survivors of McCarthyism refuse to speak about their experiences in detail or even answer if they were part of the American Communist party, which, until the Cold War, was a valid political party mainly involved with workers unions.[33]

Although, retrospectively, the communist hearings were a misuse of government power and resources, the main reason that being identified as a communist was so damaging was due to a collective vigilante effort from other American citizens. The blacklists, like the one that Hollywood is famous for, made it taboo to hire the people listed and were willingly followed by other American citizens and employers. Many Americans on trial for communism, especially the higher-profile cases, would find burned crosses in their yards and receive threats, anonymous and not, to themselves, their property, and their families, sometimes resulting in cases of beatings and murders. These

[31] Schrecker, 363.
[32] Schrecker, 361.
[33] Schrecker, 360, 120.

cases of voluntary policing and vigilantism illustrate the potency and the depth to which the fear permeated American society during this time and set the stage for a renewed crusade against comic books, resulting in voluntary censorship to avoid vigilante retribution from parents and activists.

Similar to the crusade in the late 30s and 40s by the Catholic church, many parents and local politicians started to view comic books in an unfavorable light and connected their quest to preserve the morality of America's youth with the fight against communism. Immediately after the war, Comic Books existed as the least censored and most readily available form of media for children.[34] According to Bradford Wright in his book *Comic Book Nation*, the genre of crime and horror started to become more popular during this time and the industry published stories with gruesome depictions of decapitation, sexual deviancy, and mental illness among other topics. These extremely morally corrupting topics, critics argued, put American youth at risk for moral degeneracy and falling to the trickery of communists. Unfortunately for the comics industry, the rise of the horror genre coincided with a general rise in juvenile delinquency in 1947 as well as some cases of young children killing or injuring themselves or others. Law enforcement claimed that the children were copying behaviors that they saw in comic books, and the theory gained traction.[35] Child psychologists theorized that comic books targeted the poor, portrayed extreme violence because explicit sexual content was off the table, and brought back the notion that superheroes sported fascist ideologies.[36]

[34] Wright, 88.
[35] Wright, 90.
[36] Wright, 91, 92.

One psychologist, Frederick Wertham, thought that comic books were directly linked to juvenile delinquency and heavily campaigned to ban all of them. A U.S. Senate hearing was held on the subject, but any previous attempt at government censorship was struck down as unconstitutional and the Senate could do nothing except pressure the industry to self-regulate.[37] At any rate, the bad press the comics industry was receiving took its toll and forced efforts at self-censorship to stay in business.

The Comics Code Authority was established in 1954. Its prerogative is clearly stated in its preamble: "members of the industry must see to it that gains made in this medium are not lost and that violations of standards of good taste, which might tend toward corruption of the comic book as an instructive and wholesome form of entertainment, will be eliminated."[38] Although it steadily lost influence and became negligible in the 1970s and 80s, its mark would remain on comic book covers until it died off completely in 2011.[39] The CCA had a written code with a board of members who vetted comics and decided whether each issue was granted the CCA stamp of approval. Titles without this stamp would not be sold by vendors and most likely not allowed by parents. The code mostly applied to the horror and crime genres, prohibiting the use of crime or horror in titles; the appearance of ghouls, cannibals, or death; or a sympathetic depiction of criminals. It also prohibited general depictions of any government agency or employee in a disrespectful way, seduction or rape, the depiction of divorce in a

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[37] Wright, 99.
Lougheed, David. "The Coming and Going of the Comics Code Authority." History Magazine 14, no. 2 (December 2012): 25–26. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true &db =ahl&AN=83768303&site=ehost-live, 25.
[38] "The Comics Code of 1954." Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. CBLDF, 1986. http://cbldf.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/.
[39] Louglieed, 26.

favorable way, attacks on any religious or racial group, or immodest dress.[40] Although horror and crime was its main target, the code applied to other genres or titles that did not depict gruesome material, such as Batman, in more subtle and sophisticated ways. In this way, the events that transpired during the Golden Age restricted and influenced the way that comics in the Silver Age could be written.

Silver Age America (1956 – 1970): Social Rebellion

The entirety of the Silver Age occurs during the reign of the CCA. Although the CCA influenced how the comics were written, its establishment fit in with popular cultural shifts during the Cold War. For example, the heavy science fiction phase from 1958-1962 in *Detective Comics* displays American's consciousness and curiosity with atomic energy. The main concern of the code was the depictions of violence and women, which reflects the concerns of American citizens and parents. Americans who had just survived the gruesome realities of world war and the societal changes it brought wanted to retreat into their homes and isolate themselves from factors that escaped their control. In doing so, most Americans adopted traditional gender roles in conjunction with focusing on family life and children.[41] The Silver Age of comics (1956-1970) closely followed this pattern and curbed the depiction of violence and matched the prevailing opinions on gender norms. While the social events during the Golden Age facilitated social containment and efforts to preserve traditional American values, the events of the Silver Age actively and in some cases specifically rebel against the social constraints of the post-war era. This, in turn, made the transition from Silver to Bronze a much more

[40] "The Comics Code of 1954."
[41] May, 3.

explosive one. World War II and previous efforts to censor comic books allowed the CCA to take root, but social unrest worked against it and censorship noticeably began to weaken towards the end of the Silver Age.

Outside the realm of comics, America was experiencing massive social unrest and upheaval. Beginning in 1954 with the start of the modern Civil Rights Movement, Americans begin to act out in popular protests. Disenchanted at returning home to an increasingly volatile America after fighting a war against racism, African Americans began to organize and fight for equal rights under the law.[42] Televising the Civil Rights movement allowed it to gain more support, but also, in some cases, showed Americans the brutality of their own government to its citizens during peaceful protests. In combination with the uptake in sexual persecution that LGBTQ+ individuals faced after the war, discontented women disappointed with Cold War sexism, staged a general rebellion against traditional gender norms with the sexual revolution in the 60s. While Americans fought at home against Cold War racism, reinforced gender roles, and the Cold War obsession with morality, the war for global influence still raged abroad, producing proxy wars that American soldiers helped fight on foreign soil and intertwining with domestic unrest. The generally liberal participants of the social movements disapproved of the United Sates' involvement in foreign countries, notoriously in the case of Vietnam. Television aided the downswing in public opinion as Americans watched their soldiers shoot malnourished Vietnamese, contributing to the rising disapproval of the government.

[42] May, 10.

After the suffering of the Great Depression, World War II, and the intense pace at which the world was changing, post-war Americans were panic-stricken. Americans who grew up during the Great Depression and the World War returned to conservative societal norms to chase a semblance of normalcy and peace, reinforcing, and doubling down on imperfect and harmful societal norms. More than that, if they could maintain moral superiority over the godless communist who held the threat of death, they could survive to see the future and kick the U.S.S.R. out of global politics. The inherent need to protect the future caused Americans to force their ideals of morality onto their children in an effort to protect them, but instead incited national social unrest. The children of 1956 were teenagers in the 1960s and 70s and were fully capable of recognizing and calling out what they saw happening. The social movements that occurred during the Silver Age of comics actively defied Cold War ideals of race, gender, and sexuality.

CHAPTER III: FALLOUT

In January 1962, Batman and Robin become "Prey of the Alien Hunters." Batman and Robin are walking through the street on patrol when they are unceremoniously lifted into the sky by colorful beams of light. They wake up in an unfamiliar territory, another planet, and encounter three unfriendly aliens competing to capture Batman and Robin. Meanwhile, a giant glass eye looms above them, broadcasting their plight to an alien emperor, Kaale. Through the eye, Kaale offers Batman and Robin their freedom if they escape their hunters and make it to the east gate by sunset. Kaale promised the hunters the same if they were able to capture Batman and Robin. Using his sharp intellect, Batman outwits the hunters, and the Dynamic Duo flee to another area that Kaale's camera cannot see. Far from safe, multiple beasts attack them on land and in the water. When it looks like Batman and Robin will meet their doom via sea serpent, a group of rebel fighters arrive to save them and inform them of a popular uprising against Kaale. Sometime later, Batman and Robin reappear on camera. Once they defeat the alien hunters, the Dynamic Duo make their way to the east gate and are paraded through the streets, wheeling the unconscious hunters on a cart behind them. When they reach the inside of Kaale' s palace, the hunters rise to help Batman and Robin attack Kaale. Batman and Robin had secretly hatched a plan to gain all their freedom. With backup from the rebels outside, the fight was over quickly. The rebel leader thanked the hunters, Batman, and Robin and promised to send them home. In the last panel, Batman says, "Farewell friends! We have learned that those who believe in freedom can work together even though they come from places millions of miles apart across the endless seas of

space!" [43] This story is not what one typically associates with Batman but is a testament to the influence of real-world events in the *Batman* comics. The United States' desire to spread democracy and destroy communism was paralleled in Batman's battle with the all-seeing Kaale.

The *Batman* comics adapted to suit the audiences they entertained and the ever-changing cultural climate those audiences lived in. The implementation of the Comics Code of 1954 complicated the jobs of the writers, but *Batman* still reflected cultural ideals of the Cold War. Conforming to the Comics Code of 1954 was met with subtle adaptation, mostly pertaining to the level of violence and the role of women. Violence began to lessen in the comics in 1947 with the introduction of more comedic story plots, but it would almost disappear under the code. During the Silver Age of *Batman* comics, most of the problems were too big or too complicated for Batman and Robin to simply punch with their fists. While there were still action and fight scenes, they became a smaller and less important part of the comics; instead, the writers choose to emphasize Batman's detective work. The use of realistic firearms also diminished, and the depiction of death became non-existent.

While violence experienced somewhat of a gradual disappearance from the comics, the role of women changed almost immediately after the adoption of the code. Previously, Batman's women were headstrong, dignified, and well-rounded characters who played a vital role in either balancing or countering Batman, such as Catwoman. After the Code, these characters began to reflect the Cold War return to domesticity. Already existing characters adopted more traditional feminine traits or served as a

[43] "Prey of the Alien Hunters," *Detective Comics*, no. 299, 1962, 13.

warning against assertiveness in women (and some were dropped until they returned in the 1960s or the massive DC reboot called the New 52 in 2011). Due to the turbulent events that occurred during the Silver Age, the two women appearing in this time, Batwoman and Batgirl, would both conform to Cold War traditional gender roles and when they failed to conform, it was in complicated ways. The change in the depiction of violence and women are vital to understanding Cold War American culture's influence on Batman and the subtle effect of the CCA.

The Quiet Streets of Gotham City: Violence in Batman

The level and scope of violence has changed multiple times from the first appearance of Batman in *Detective Comics* #27 (1939). Most notably at the beginning of the Silver Age in 1956, one year after the appearance of the Comics Code Authority stamp on DC titles, and at the beginning of the Bronze Age in 1970, there were significant shifts. From Gold to Silver, there was a slow shift away from violence. Then, reflecting the explosive events in the 1960s and 70s, violence and vigilantism return. The major indication of an overall tonal shift in the comics was an art style change and these occurred several times, one in 1940 for the reveal of Robin, multiple times through the 1940s, and then in 1950, 1964, 1969, and 1970. The frequency of art style change denotes major building points and shifts in the comics, nearly lining up with the beginnings and endings of the ages.

Golden Era Evolution and Vampires: 1938-1956

The early years of the *Batman* comics would define Batman's long-standing characterization, setting, and atmosphere. The stories in the Golden Age are delightfully dark, wild, and chaotic, reflecting the creation and growth of a new story gaining its footing in the world of comics. Batman's overall characterization in his debut is very similar to his modern interpretation. The introduction card commonly described him as "the winged bringer of venging," "weird menace to all crime," and "eerie figure of the night."[44] The original intent of the *Batman* was to create a frightening and mysterious figure with dubious morals and extra-legal motivations. He is characterized by the fear that he places in the hearts of criminals and his athletic prowess in combat. He rarely speaks during fights, dangles criminals out of windows to interrogate them, and is on the run from the police that he aides.[45] His early characterization is indicative of American needs during the worst years of the Great Depression. Many Americans were disillusioned with the government and dealing with extreme poverty. They needed a hero that would not rely on corrupt local governments to help them.

Although he is still a master detective, this depiction of Batman puts more emphasis on his physical attributes and leans more into a violent depiction of crime and combat. In this way, Batman is cracking down on crime and corruption with a vigor that Americans did not perceive from the government, and he is doing so mostly without the use of gadgets. Year one Batman is missing many of his iconic tools and supporting characters. His signature weapons and vehicles began to appear in and after the first year, such as the baterangs and batplane in November 1939, issue #31, along with the

[44] "The Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 31, 1939, 1. "The Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 32, 1. "The Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 33, 1.
[45] "The Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 28, 1939, 5.

boatmobile in January 1940. Batman sometimes carried and used a gun in his early Golden Age comics, with no real depiction of his modern hatred for firearms. In fact, Batman dispatched the Monk with a silver bullet at the end of issue #32 in October 1939.

The Golden Age would establish the basic lore of the comics and produce Batman's most iconic villains, however, the main villains for year one were scientists, Asians, and monsters. Multiple villains from year one were criminal geniuses that pit their wit against Batman's, such as the elusive Dr. Death who plans to ransom and blackmail the wealthy to fund his projects of villainy.[46] Henchmen were abundant and hulking characters in comparison to the Batman. The comics do not lend much to their characterization, and they either do not speak at all or speak with an accent that conveys Asian origin. For example, Doctor Death's henchman in issue #29 is named Jabah. He is described as Indian, drawn wearing a turban, stereotypically Hindu clothing, and dark skin. There are also multiple storylines involving those of Asian descent as villains, such as issue #39 in 1940 where Batman and Robin fight a gang of Chinese Americans over the fate of Gotham's Chinatown and the production and sale of opium. This follows the tropes of dime novel detective stories that commonly placed Asians, the Chinese in particular, in antagonistic roles and heavily stereotyped them amidst the immigration boom in the mid-to-late 19th century. The other villains for this period are vampires and werewolves, such as the Monk, who was both, and kidnapped Bruce Wayne's fiancée Julie Madison.[47] These villains are typical of early comics, especially the racist depiction of Asians, and borrowed heavily from dime novels that displayed American anxieties

[46] "The Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 29, 1939, 2.
[47] "The Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 32, 1939,6 10.

over urban crime. The more well established and long-lasting villains and supporting characters would appear after Robin: Catwoman and Joker in 1940, Penguin and Scarecrow in 1941, Two Face in 1942, Alfred in 1944, and Vicki Vale in 1946.

Robin's appearance in April 1940 causes a distinct change in the comics and in the writing of Batman. The shift is marked by an art style change in Robin's debut comic and changes to Batman's characterization. Batman becomes chattier as he takes on his ward, quipping to antagonize thugs in combat, and becomes more involved in the lives of individuals. Instead of working outside of the law, he becomes a consulting detective to Gotham police and an official deputy of the law. The stories stop being action packed and become more narrative and complex; some of the strongest examples occurring in 1941. One story from January 1941 is a social commentary on the rich and their relationship with money. A banker, Midas, is too preoccupied with his stocks to spend time with his children or care about their wishes. His son, Roger, wants to be a musician and his daughter, Diane, is in love with a man below her social status. After Rodger's dreams are shrugged off, he takes to drinking and gets involved with gang members, commits a drunken hit-and-run, and gets shot during a payoff to the mob to keep the hit-and-run quiet. Midas marries off Diane to a count instead of the man she loves, and when their marriage inevitably falls apart, the count tries to murder her for her father's money (as he had with his previous wife). Batman continuously warns the man that money cannot solve all of his problems, and Batman's words ring true when Rodger is on the operating table and all of Midas' money cannot sway the outcome of the surgery.[48] Another story from July 1941 follows Batman as he rallies the entire city of Gotham, calling in favors

[48] "Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder," *Detective Comics*, no. 47, 1941.

from social elites to help a failing actress impress her visiting parents and land a leading role after Batman thwarted her suicide attempt on the docks. In this story, Batman mobilizes the entire city to this woman's aide, simultaneously winning a bet as Bruce Wayne and proving that Gotham cares for its citizens.[49]

The evolution of the comics happened very quickly after Robin appeared. The addition of a young partner in crime stopping appealed strongly to DC's younger readers, the new target audience.[50] The appeal to children explains the increasingly complex story lines and social commentary. Many of the more frightening aspects of *Batman* were abandoned in an effort to deliver life lessons to children and help them understand complex societal problems. The comics developed new traits for Batman, like his fatherly nature after taking in Dick Greyson. In *The Tyrannical Twins* (1945), a distressed mother gives her twin infants to Bruce Wayne for protection because she heard that he likes children.[51] Batman changes in 1940 from dark terror of the night to a fatherly, respected, and responsible member of society. Batman's characterization as a father figure begins during the years of the Great Depression but is most apparent during and after World War II. While Bruce Wayne's money and Batman's desire to clean up the streets align with the general American dream during the Great Depression, his fatherlier aspect is a fantasy for the younger readers who could imagine themselves in the place of Robin, especially as World War II began to send many fathers overseas. This characterization would seamlessly mesh with the trajectory of the Silver Age and the overall attitude of the era, which became progressively sillier.

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[49] "Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder," *Detective Comics*, no. 53 1941.
[50] Wright, 56.
[51] "The Tyrannical Twins," *Detective Comics*, no. 101, 1945.

The transition to Silver Age is visible in the late 1940s. DC took a different turn with their comics than most of their competitors, perhaps due to rising criticism of the genre as a whole and a general atmosphere of Americans wanting to withdraw into the home, get away from the cities, and go into the suburbs.[52] DC began to sprinkle in more silly stories in an effort to make the transition more natural, such as in 1947, issue #119, "The Case of the Famous Foes," in which the antagonist uses mental patients that believed they were US presidents and founding fathers to commit crimes. The silly comics take hold in 1949: the January and July issues featured "The Pied Piper of Peril" and "Joker: The Sound Effect Crimes". These issues dealt with a criminal who conducted themed crime using various types of pipes and the Joker using sound effects to frighten people, making them easier to rob.[53] In 1951, Batman and Robin get sent back in time via hypnosis to protect Cleopatra and solve the mystery of an errant batsignal that appeared on ancient hieroglyphs. In 1952 Bruce Wayne is Mayor for a day while a thug masquerades as Batman. By 1953, the writers banished death from the comics. Batman becoming more comical, going away from Gotham city, denying death, and, most importantly, emphasizing intelligence and detective work over combat ability. These transformations directly relate to preparation for self-censorship and the guidelines of the CCA.

The Comics Code Authority began to appear on DC publications in March 1955. This issue of *Batman* was #217, "The Mental Giant of Gotham City," in which a police station janitor temporarily gains massive intellectual power from exposure to radiation,

[52] Write, 59. May, 28.
[53] "The Pied Piper of Peril," *Detective Comics*, no. 143, 1949. "Joker: The Sound Effect Crimes," *Detective Comics*, no. 149, 1949.

finds out Batman's secret identity, and uses this information to blackmail Batman into destroying crime by killing criminals. The zealotry of the janitor, Barney Barrow, stems from the murder of his brother when he was young and his own inability to become a detective. Batman finds a way to cleverly avoid carrying out the will of Barney and, after the incident, Barney has no recollection of what happened. Out of pity, Batman gets the commissioner to allow Barney to wear a police uniform while mopping the station, to which Barney remarks that he feels like a regular policeman and that Batman is a wonderful detective.[54]

Silver Age Aliens and Atomic Aesthetic: 1956-1970

Batman's Silver Age persona emerged gradually, but soon took on a life of its own. The Silver Age comics emphasize the lawfulness of our outlaw, pushing the caped crusader into the light of day. These comics are generally more colorful than the Golden Age comics, including the ones that contain Robin. Unlike either the early or late periods of the Golden Age, Silver Age Batman is a respected member of the community and has far less independence. The comics shift away from Batman's physical prowess in combat to his intelligence and ability to solve crime through detective work and cooperation with the Gotham Police Department as an official deputy of the law. He primarily functions in these stories as a consulting detective, becoming a glorified appendage of the police force. Commissioner Gordon assigns him to cases that are too tough or too dangerous for policemen to handle alone. Every case he takes up comes from the police and contacting Commissioner Gordon is the only channel that exists for anyone else to contact Batman.

[54] "The Mental Giant of Gotham City," *Detective Comics*, no. 217, 1955, 10.

In addition to this, the comics shy away from depicting fight scenes as often as they had in the Golden Age. The first couple of years focus on redefining Batman himself, such as 1956's January issue, "The 50 faces of Batman", which focus on Batman's skill and talent for disguise. In this story, an actor/make-up artist who taught Batman everything he knows about the art of disguise starts a make-up school and askes Batman to lecture for him. Nearly the entire story is Batman lecturing at this school and telling stories of his past disguises.[55] Another story from 1957, "The Dynamic Trio", centers around Batman's respect for Commissioner Gordon. Instead of usurping Gordon's case at the behest of the mayor, Batman arranges for Gordon to join him and Robin as another masked vigilante, Mystery Man. Batman latter arranges for Vickie Vale to expose Mystery Man's identity in the end so that Gordon gets credit on the case.[56] The comics would settle with this style until 1964.

The stories of the early Silver Age focus more on the enemy without instead of the enemy within as the Golden Age had done. Shying away from the previously rough and tumble mobsters of Gotham, early Silver Age villains commonly use alien/advanced technology to aide in their crimes, are aliens themselves, or are from the future. These stories criminalize the 'other.' Foreign or advanced technology cause problems in Gotham during this time, so much, in fact, that Batman became a victim. In the 1958 story "The Alien Batman," common Gotham thugs use special effects, props, and make-up to convince the city that Batman is an alien spying on the city. Batman briefly loses the trust of Gotham's citizens and police force until he can prove that he is not an alien.[57]

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[55] "The 50 Faces of Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 227, 1956.
[56] "The Dynamic Trio," Detective Comcis, no. 245, 1957.
[57] "The Alien Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 251, 1958.

This is only the beginning of the alien and sci-fi themed stories. In the same year, Batman and Robin faced a being of fantastical power named Karko who stole copious amounts of relatively mundane objects with his mysterious, invincible bubbles. It is later revealed that Karko is a criminal from the future and is sending these objects to sell as antiques.[58] The following year, in "The Secret of the Fantastic Weapons," the secret was that a native village was given alien technology and a group of criminals discovered this and the technology to commit crimes.[59] In the 1960's "The Zebra Batman," Batman encounters a villain who uses technology to imbue himself with black and white lines of force, causing him to be unstoppable, and later causing Batman the misfortune of the same power but without control.[60] The next year hosts "Prisoners of the Dark World" in which the combination of a mysterious mist and an electrical storm transports Batman, Robin, and the passengers on a ferry to another dimension.[61]

These fantastical and otherwise out of place stories began directly after the Comics Code Authority appeared on the cover and proliferated until 1964. These stories distinctly featured technology and aliens as the cause of Batman's problems, yielding about six years of condemnation for the otherworldly. Antagonism towards foreignness and technology, both viewed as dangerous, reflects Cold War fears of atomic energy. According to Boyer, many Americans were so afraid of having a Hiroshima on American soil that they wanted the fraternization with atomic power to completely stop.[62] The Silver Age comics condemned the use of advanced technology because humanity was not

[58] "Batman's Invincible Foe," *Detective Comics*, no. 257 1958.
[59] "The Secret of the Fantastic Weapons," *Detective Comics*, no. 263 1959.
[60] "The Zebra Batman," *Detective Comics*, no. 275 1960.
[61] "Prisoners of the Dark World," *Detective Comics*, no. 293, 1961.
[62] Boyer, 344.

ready for such technology and individuals would inevitably be irresponsible with it. The technology itself was not evil, as shown with how it aided and enhanced the lives of the native tribe in "The Mystery of the Fantastic Weapons," but what some men did with it could be, as with how the mobsters used the technology in the same story. Here, the comics state the belief that the morality of the modern world was dubious at best and not a good combination with an oncoming nuclear apocalypse. The solution given in the *Batman* comics was to destroy the technology so that it could not be used for evil. This solution deprives everyone of advancement in the name of peace and out of the fear of what a few bad men would do with it. This solution both displays early attitudes about the bomb and the trend towards symbolic, rather than outspoken, opposition to it.[63]

In addition to this, Batman frequently fought outside of Gotham and dealt with strange/otherworldly threats. This coincides with the flow of Americans outside of the cities, into the suburbs, and the emerging threats that they faced in the atomic age.[64] The looming threat of nuclear annihilation was something that no one ever thought would be possible, and Americans were not mentally prepared to deal with it. The advanced technology that Batman and Robin have no idea how to fight against is an in-comics stand in for this cultural worry. While *Batman's* solution for Cold War problems was the general response of social containment and returning to tradition, he also fought the main antagonists of Cold War America, the Soviets, head on in these metaphorical and representative story plots. However much Cold War American wanted time to stop, rapid change continued to gain momentum in the latter half of the 20th century.

[63] Boyer, 341.
[64] May, 6.

Batman changed again in 1964, returning to look more like the late Golden Era. While the April issue featured "Captives of the Alien Zoo," the May issue changed both the subject and art style with the "Mystery of the Menacing Mask."[65] In the May story, Batman and Robin investigate crime in Gotham Village and discover a den of criminals, including one who used an isotope to paralyze the dynamic duo whenever they try to stop him. This story returns the comics to the original Golden Age theme, local crime fighting. The original cast of villains from the Golden Age also become more active at this time, such as in 1965 with "The Joker's Comedy Capers." While it is not an immediate transformation, various villains, namely the Joker, appear in more comedic stories to aid the transformation.

One distinct difference is the level of violence that Batman and Robin are allowed to engage in. Previously, the foes that Batman faced were either so powerful or so bizarre that fights did not last long or were altogether impossible. Batman relied on his intellect to save the day. But with the 1964 story "Castle with Wall-to-Wall Danger," Batman and Robin investigate a man that looks exactly like a runaway criminal and are trapped in his killer castle, dodging death traps and thugs that try to off them at every turn. The comics lean more into fighting in 1967 with the introduction of Batgirl, with three different fight scenes where Batgirl joined in herself.[66] The stories also hint at a return to Batman as the terror of criminals in 1969 with "Batman's Evil Eye" and another art style change. In this story Bruce Wayne runs a charity that rehabilitates criminals from Arkham Asylum, the main antagonist being the Scarecrow. Scarecrow immediately gets back to his life of

[65] "Captives of the Alien Zoo," *Detective Comics*, no. 326, 1964. "Mystery of the Menacing Mask," *Detective Comics*, no. 327, 1964.
[66] "The Million Dollar Debut of Batgirl," *Detective Comics*, no. 359, 1957.

crime after his release and injects Batman with a 3-day fear serum that makes him radiate fear when he looks at people. Initially, Batman is elated at the renewal of the fear he once sparked in criminals, but his renewed power is turned on him when the Scarecrow traps him in a cell of two-way mirrors.

The final nail in the coffin—and the end of the era of Cold War silliness—was the removal of Robin in November 1969. A now grown-up Dick Greyson, who had been gradually getting taller over the years, goes on one last case with Batman before leaving for college. Batman thinks to himself that nothing will be the same without Robin while the ending card of the issue claims, "The biggest change in Batman's life is coming in the December 1969 issue of Batman! You've got to see it to believe it!"[67]

With this transition, the *Batman* comics began to reflect the problems of American society in the1960s and 70s. While the threat of nuclear apocalypse still existed, America was embroiled in a period of social unrest and highly visible, state-sanctioned violence. With children and teenagers being exposed to high levels of violence and profanity, often in the sanctity of their own homes, there was no point in keeping violence out of comics anymore. The violent world that the Greatest Generation created made their efforts at social containment obsolete, causing an end to the effectiveness of censorship. The return of violence and more serious tropes in the Batman comics not only reflects the turbulent world that the readers live in, but also helps them process and develop coping mechanisms for the problems they face.

[67] "The Combo Caper," *Detective Comics*, no. 393, 1969 4,15.

Bronze Brutality and the Rise of the Dark Night: 1970-1985

Although the Silver to Bronze transition loosely mirrors the shift from Gold to Silver, the Bronze Age is much different than either of the prior incarnations and more closely resembles a total reboot. The Bronze Age returns to the Batman that existed before Robin. The Batman of year one was dark, mysterious, vengeful, and frightening. DC jumps back to that incarnation; the disappearance of Robin marks Batman's return as the terror of the night in the same way that his appearance had marked Batman's removal from that world. Although he still works with the police, multiple story lines put him at odds with them, making their relationship rockier. Silver Age Batman had a good relationship with the police because Cold War America decided to rely on the government to handle the new and frightening world that they could not make sense of.[68] Bronze Era Batman is more skeptical of government agencies due to the unrest of the 60s and the rebellion of the youth. The Batman of the Bronze age banters less while fighting, almost exclusively goes out at night, and is thrown into a host of deadly situations. Instead of robberies and protection rackets as the main form of criminal activity, there is notable increase in the number of murders that Batman deals with. The sillier and unearthly story lines of the 1950s have less meaning to the readers in the 1960s who, once again, needed a hero than can combat injustice and corruption. The grim appearance of Gotham City returns to set the scene for the Bronze Age's main antagonists: corruption, iconic and bloodthirsty mobsters, genetically mutated scientists, and the clinically insane.

[68] Boyer, 23.

The very first issue of 1970, "The Secret of the Waiting Graves," is distinctly macabre and horrifying compared to previous stories; the introduction card describing it as eerie, terrifying, and deadly. A mysterious and reclusive couple, Juan and Delores Muerto, own a large estate in central Mexico with two empty graves marked with their names, dating their births as 1840 and 1843, respectively. They hold a party to capture and kill a Mexican federal agent who had tracked them and their ownership of a rare, illegal breed of flowers that grant immortality at the price of complete madness. Batman is undercover as Bruce Wayne at the Muerto's party, secretly saving the life of the federal agent from a group of trained falcons, a hired team of assassins, and then the Muertos themselves. At the end, Batman burns the flowers and the Muertos slowly turn into corpses over multiple panels before falling into their empty graves. Batman then writes in the date of their deaths on their headstones.[69] The tone gets more intense as the years go on. In 1974, issue #441, "Judgment Day," a corrupt Gotham judge kidnaps Robin from his university town to lure Batman into a house riddled with death traps. Years ago, the judge had made a deal with a criminal and then murdered him to escape the consequences. When being apprehended by Batman, the judge fires his gun and shoots his own daughter, blinding her for the rest of her life. Now, the judge blames Batman for the incident and intends to get even, but his blind daughter protests and tries to stop him, stumbling into one of his death traps. Finally, the judge faces the truth that his greed and corruption is what maimed and eventually killed his daughter. Completely grief stricken, he allows Batman and Robin to arrest him.[70]

[69] "The Secret of the Waiting Graves," *Detective Comics*, no. 395, 1970.
[70] "Judgement Day," *Detective Comics*, no. 441, 1974.

In addition to the vastly different changes in the stories that the comics tell during this time, the Bronze Age brings a wave of new villains to the table. Unlike the Silver Age which mostly relied on petty mobsters and the re-use of iconic Golden Age villains, the Bronze Age introduces the readers to Ra's al Ghul, Talia al Ghul, The League of Assassins, Solomon Grundy, Killer Croc, Black Mask, and more—the most iconic of these being the al Ghuls and the League. Talia la Ghul first appeared in 1971 in issue #411 of *Detective Comics*, "Into the Den of the Death Dealers," where she is a medical student kidnapped by the current head of the League of Assassins, Dr. Darkk. Batman is also captured and badly beaten, causing Talia to remove his mask to treat his face. Although she vaguely recognizes him, his face is bruised and swollen enough to maintain his secret identity. The story is continued in the June issue of Batman, a separate publication from *Detective Comics*.[71] Eventually, the al Ghuls discover Batman's identity as Bruce Wayne; admittedly, they are not the first to do so, but they are the most powerful and threatening. The dynamic between the al Ghuls and Batman is a delicate dance of compromise, respect, and honor. While Batman tries to stop the al Ghuls and bring down the League, he is constantly under the threat of Ra's and Talia's knowledge of his Gothamite persona, even though they have no interest in exposing him. Adding to the complexity is Talia's affection for Batman and the romance that can never be. In the 1975 story "Bat-Murderer," Talia is in Gotham planning a heist that Batman foils. He finds them planning the job after he intimidates another criminal into revealing their location. In the end, despite Batman's pleas and his refusal to fight her, Talia runs away after throwing him her gun, which goes off, shooting her in the back. Although it is not

[71] "Into the Den of the Death Dealers," *Detective Comics*, no. 411, 1971, 15.

revealed in the story, this is a plot to either fake Talia's death or get her out of the way and sweep Batman up in it. Talia's relationship with Batman causes him almost as much trouble as the al Ghuls' actions do, a relationship that the comics did not employ since the Golden Age with Catwoman.

Atomic Fear and Social Explosion

Narratively, the passage from the Golden Age into the Silver Age was more natural than the transition from Silver to Bronze. In some ways, the differences in the transition periods directly and inversely parallel each other. Instead of a period of sixteen years, from 1940-1956, like the Golden and Silver Age transition, the Silver to bronze transition took only five years, 1964-1969, and instead of beginning the change with the introduction of Robin, it completed the transition with the removal of Robin. Despite the natural shift from Gold to Silver, the Bronze Age had direct parallels and utilizes more core elements from the Golden Age. The similarity in the depiction of Batman in the Golden Age and Bronze Age was a callback to reestablish Batman's originality and erase the narrative mistakes of the Silver Age while keeping up with world events, changing attitudes on what is socially acceptable, and the aging of their fan base. Robin was a direct line to what DC believed its target audience was. By the Bronze Age, Robin was no longer referred to as the Boy Wonder, but as the Teen Wonder.[72] If his addition made the comics more suitable for children, his removal made them more appealing to teenagers and young adults.

[72] "Judgment Day", *Detective Comics*, no. 441, 1974, 1.

The similarities between the Golden Age and the Bronze Age are not just the writers' attempt to call back the mysterious year one Batman, but also directly reflect the problems that the country faced during those times. Batman emerged during the Great Depression. It is no coincidence that many of his stories during his early years dealt with crime and corruption in the urban cities: racketeering, theft, and apathy from social elites. Similarly, his change in personality and sociability after the introduction of Robin was not just a bid for a younger fan base, but an attempt to enable him to mobilize and serve the community facing the looming threat of war. Eventually, Batman returned to his origins in the late Silver and early Bronze Age in response to massive social unrest. During this time, the United States was engaged in the Civil Rights movement, multiple other movements for social freedom, the Vietnam War, and the Presidency of Richard Nixon. Race riots became common across US cities while protestors crowded the cities' streets. All these events happening in a short period of time made it clear that the major threat to American peace was already inside the house. With televised accounts of brutality at home and overseas, the code became obsolete as many young viewers were exposed to worse violence than the comic books could depict. Batman returned to the cities when the rest of America did, especially since the foremost concern of President Nixon was restoring law and order. America did not need a silly Batman anymore; they needed a protector and a hero, just as they did in the Golden Age.

The Silver Age was different than the Golden and Bronze because the world was facing different problems at this time. The gradual shift from Gold to Silver reveals two things. Amidst the atmosphere of comic books coming under scrutiny and the looming threat of a Comics Code, DC got ahead of the competition and cleaned themselves up

before they could fall under scrutiny. The other and more compelling observation is that the change followed the flow of Americans out of the urban cities and into the suburbs, reflected their fears of nuclear power, and followed the laws of domestic social containment. The stories, although less thrilling than before, were complex in their own way and adhered to American Cold War culture. As the United States began to rely on the bomb for protection against the communists, opposition to nuclear weapons became more symbolic than outspoken to avoid gaining bad press.[73] Advanced or alien technology and aliens themselves directly caused problems for Batman and Robin and destabilized Gotham. This trope directly lines up with anxieties over what to do with nuclear power. The answer that Batman settled on is the world is not ready for such technology and it will cause more trouble than it is worth. Conversely, the much quicker and less foreshadowed transition from Silver to Bronze emulated the rebellion against reinforced tradition in America's youth. Silver Age comics could not explore certain areas that made Batman compelling before, such as coping with deep emotional trauma and concerns that morality and lawfulness do not always align. These tropes reemerged in the Bronze Age because they were what young Americans were dealing with and needed guidance on.

Although they allowed Batman to directly combat Cold War anxieties, the simplicity and monotony of Silver Age comics left very little room for creativity in the plot and character creation. Many Silver Age villains were simply reused Golden Age ones, generic mobsters, aliens, crossovers from other comics, and strange additions, like Zebra Man, that did not stand the test of time. While the artwork for the comics looked

[73] Boyer, 341.

creative, CCA restrictions served to stunt the comic's growth by taking away the plot elements that drew readers to it in the first place. Excluding Batwoman and Batgirl, we have few lasting characters from the Silver Age like we do from the Golden and the Bronze. These women are an anomaly and come with their own sets of baggage in accordance with or in defiance of Cold War gender norms. DC added whole characters to the comics to display the changing attitudes about, depiction of, and characterization of women in the 1950s and 60s, making them an integral part of the comics' cultural value.

The Culture of Domesticity: Batman and Women

Despite male dominance in the world of comics, women are present and have more to add to the story than just being a love interest or a damsel in distress. Although they may not be essential to the story or imbued with the powers and prowess of the main characters, these women reveal concepts of gender from the time they were written and the artist's interpretation of women's place in both comics and society. The roles and attitudes that the women of Batman take, as well as their relationships to the overall story and Batman himself, both reflect and defy the gender norms of the 20th century.

From the beginning, *Detective Comics* has written interesting and compelling female characters, whether they intended to or not. Julie Madison, Bruce Wayne's fiancée, was a successful actress with strong morals and principles. Catwoman always gave Batman a run for his money and did as she pleased, even in defiance of the law and her love for Batman. Vicki Vale is a spitfire reporter who seeks danger out of love for her occupation and lets Bruce Wayne know on multiple occasions that he is taking her to dinner. Batwoman became a rival crime-stopper inspired by but pitted against the Batman

to uphold law and order in Gotham city. Finally, Batgirl becomes part of the crime stopping team and brings her amazing intellect and physical prowess to the aid of the Dynamic Duo. All these women have their strengths and weaknesses, but the Golden Age ladies Julie, Catwoman, and Vickie have more substance. Although Golden Age women may have had more limited roles in combat, they generally had deeper character, flaws, ambitions, and principles than the women added during the Silver Age.

Julie Madison - The Fiancée

The first woman to have a reoccurring role in the Batman comics was Julie Madison, Bruce Wayne's fiancée. (She is also the only woman never to be in a CCA approved comic.) Julie is an extraordinarily beautiful young lady with curly, black hair who later picks up a career as an actress (issue #40) and progressively becomes more successful. Her first appearance was in Detective Comics #31 in September 1939 and her last in #49 in March 1941, but she is included in the reboot of the series, the New 52, and would gain a reincarnation in 2011. While her initial run in the comics was short-lived, she is an example of how women were written in comics and the roles they were allowed to have in the beginning of the industry. At first, comic books heavily borrowed tropes from action dime novels. As such, Julie appears as the damsel in distress with very little agency in the plot and no ability to protect herself. This happened in the stories where she is hunted by the villain Clayface. Despite this, she eventually becomes a fleshed-out character with goals, priorities, and standards. In her last story, she breaks off her

engagement to Bruce Wayne because of his bad reputation and refusal to get a job or do anything productive with his time.[74]

In her debut comic in 1939, Julie is hypnotized by the arch-criminal known as the Monk, a vampire-werewolf, and used as a henchman in Gotham City. Batman stops Julie and returns her to her apartment, so the Monk changes tactics and attempts to kidnap her. Batman foils each attempt until the Monk uses another damsel as bait to capture Batman and then collect Julie. The Monk uses Julie to torment Batman while he is paralyzed, revealing that he will turn Julie into a werewolf and kill Batman before he can avenge her. The Monk's plan fails and Batman survives, later killing the werewolf with a silver bullet. This story arch lasts over two issues in which Julie does nothing notable except tell Bruce Wayne that he worries too much. She acts as a plot device to bring Batman to the threat and make him vulnerable. She does not attempt to fight against her attackers, even when the Monk has Batman paralyzed, and heavily relies on Batman to solve the situation by himself.

This trend continues through her debut as an actress in 1940. Clayface, a deranged actor, tries to kill her during the filming of a movie, causing Bruce Wayne and Batman to get involved to protect her. When Bruce Wayne comes to the studio to take her home, her director remarks, "All right. Take Julie home, but be careful…She is valuable property--not only to me but to you, eh? Ha! Ha!"[75] Her last issue was #49 in March 1942 where she is again hunted by Clayface. In this issue, aside from the regular drama of Batman and Robin keeping her out of harm's way, she breaks off her engagement with

[74]"Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder," *Detective Comics*, no. 49, 1941.
[75] "Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder," *Detective Comics*, no. 40, 1940, 3.

millionaire Bruce Wayne because he does not have a job. Although she is still in love with him, she hates his reputation as a playboy and his refusal to make something of himself. In her mind, she has a blossoming career as an actress while her fiancé does nothing. For her, it's just not right for the woman to be the only one who works in a relationship.[76]

Julie is the least technically qualified of all the women studied here. She is a textbook damsel in distress in her first appearances and is blatantly referred to as the property of the men in her life. Despite this, she changes. She evolved from a dime-novel damsel to a Depression Era movie star and a World War II working woman. She tells Bruce that he worries too much about her and refuses to let Clayface ruin her life.[77] When her career as an actress takes off, she wants a man in her life that is successful for more than just sitting on the money he inherited, depicting a Depression-era work ethic. Unlike later women in these comics, she does not allow her fondness or sentiment for Bruce to weaken her principles. (Although she does tell Bruce that he can contact her once he has done something with himself.) In this, Julie is a woman who knows what she wants with her life, career, and relationships, and she refuses to settle for anyone or anything that does not align with her vision and principles, even if it is the millionaire, Bruce Wayne.

Vickie Vale – The Girlfriend

Vicki Vale is an investigative reporter and love interest for both Bruce Wayne and Batman. Her debut was in Batman #49 in October 1946, and she is featured until 1964

[76] "Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder," *Detective Comics*, no. 49, 1942, 2.
[77] "Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder," *Detective Comics*, no. 31, 1939, 2.

with sparse appearances thereafter until her reincarnation in the New 52. Breaking the mold, Vicki has red hair that matches her temper, and she gets herself into dangerous situations in pursuit of photographing criminals and the Batman. Although she often fills the role of damsel in distress, much like Julie, she knows the risks and puts herself in these situations anyway. This trait might have been intended to come across as feminine stubbornness, but allows her to exhibit bravery and dedication, traits not commonly awarded to women in the comics. Vicki is not a villain, yet she has much more agency and displays ambition. She is more than a mere love interest. She seems to boss Bruce Wayne around, even making him get a job as a private eye in issue #155 "Bruce Wayne: Private Detective." She is awarded respect in the story in a way that her predecessors and her protegees did not and will not replicate until the Modern Age of comics (1985-present).

In *Bruce Wayne: Private Detective*, Vicki Vale is given a private tour of the Batcave for a picture story and directly after has a date with the "hopeless" socialite Bruce Wayne.[78] On their date, Vickie remarks that Batman is a real man in comparison with Bruce, to which Bruce replies that he could do just as well as Batman. Vicki immediately whisks him away to Gotham Hospital to visit a friend of hers that is a private detective and forces Bruce to take his place while he recovers. To his chagrin, Vicki hands Bruce a book on the basic steps of being a private eye and sends him off. Bruce Wayne does very well for himself, protecting wedding gifts, finding lost family members, and tracking down jewel thieves. Satisfied, Vicki 'hires'--more like

[78] "Bruce Wayne: Private Detective," *Detective Comics*, no. 155, 3.

commands--him to take her on another date, but all is not well for the detective.[79] After Vicki leaves, a man comes in requesting that Bruce acquire a train for him from Batman's collection, then another comes in after asking the same. With Bruce's suspicion aroused, Batman and Robin give the original man a dummy train. He immediately knows it's a fake and Batman tells him that Bruce Wayne has the real one, sending the man back to the detective office. Unfortunately, Batman forgot about his date with Vicki that night, and she shows up to the office at the same time as the two men who want the model train. Vicki is held hostage for a moment before Bruce knocks the train off the table, switches off the lights, and sends the men into a mad sprint. In the process, Vicki is knocked unconscious, which allows Bruce and Dick to change into their costumes and apprehend the men. At the end of the story, Vicki and Bruce go on their date where she praises him for his trick with the light switch, but again compares him to Batman and says that he does not measure up.[80]

Vicki is the most brazen woman in *Batman* and bosses Bruce Wayne around. She decides that he should be a private eye to prove that he is as good as Batman, constantly compares Batman and his millionaire alter ego, and tells him when he will take her to dinner. In addition to this, she follows Batman and Robin into perilous situations to get a scoop, such as in issue #245, "*The Dynamic Trio*," when she is desperate to find out who Mystery Man is and why he is fighting alongside Batman and Robin. Vicki Vale has a combination of confidence, curiosity, ambition, and bravery that make her a strange depiction of an almost modern, strong woman in a male dominated genre. Her force of

[79] "Bruce Wayne: Private Detective," 4.
[80] "Bruce Wayne: Private Detective," 12.

personality is the product of women entering the work force during World War II. Women were able to do and successfully did all the jobs that men had previously held before the draft, inadvertently disproving theories on the inferiority of female work.

Unfortunately, these characteristics were not positive ones for women in the 1940s and 50s. Vickie refuses to settle down and remains passionate about her work as a photographer, personifying a World War II woman who never went back home. In the post-war era of domesticity and a mass cultural return to traditional gender roles, Vickie Vale's fatal flaw is that she remains single. Her brazen attitude, thrill seeking, and occasional bossiness make her the perfect date, but not the perfect wife. Although Bruce and Vickie go out on multiple occasions, there is no indication that they have ever 'gone steady' like Bruce and Julie. Despite the writers' intention to discredit her by this, Vicki Vale is a competent woman in a very real way and a force to be reckoned with. She is the closest to a real depiction of an American woman that these comics achieved, especially after the CCA rolled around in 1956.

Catwoman – The Wife

Catwoman, alias Selina Kyle, is one of Batman's better-known love interests. She first appeared in Batman #1 in 1940 as a cat-themed jewel thief. She would stay in the story longer than Julie, briefly disappearing after issue #211 in 1954 and reappearing in the Sixties. Although similar in appearance and beauty to Julie Madison, her status as a villain and her characterization makes Catwoman a femme fatale. Her role is evident in her costume, a revealing dress with a V-neck and double slit skirt which manages to show her legs with almost every pose. Although she cares for Batman, she is stuck in her

criminal ways and always ends up in a situation that will harm Batman if she wins their game of cat and mouse. Catwoman is a special case compared to other women in the comics; she is the only villainess from the Golden Age. She is depicted as being extremely intelligent, but a slave to her sentiment and, therefore, less competent as a villain. Due to her sentimentality, Batman successfully convinced her to give up crime and live a normal civilian life, but that condition reverted in issue #203, *Crimes of the Catwoman*, and stayed constant afterwards until the New 52 reboot.

In *Crimes of the Catwoman*, Selina Kyle is reformed and works at a small pet shop, but she turns back to crime after the papers run a story on Batman's greatest cases and titles hers, 'The Conquest of Catwoman." Enraged by the story, the wording, and the ridicule she receives from common thugs who walk into her shop, she once again dons her costume and commits a rash of crimes to outwit Batman and terrorize Gotham. In her mind, crime and terror are the only way that she can gain the respect that she once held in the city, remarking that when she was Catwoman "cheap crooks like you wouldn't have dared come near me."[81] Unfortunately, she was right. The crimes earn her back the respect of the Gotham underworld, but disappoints Batman who had worked very hard to reform her. Batman quickly gets over his attachment to Catwoman and tries to pursue her in the name of justice, but Catwoman is not so quick to change her tone. Through the story, Catwoman has multiple chances to injure or outright kill Batman such as cutting a rope bridge while he crossed or allowing her henchmen to kill him after he succumbs to sleeping gas, but she refuses. Logically, if Batman was out of the way, she would be able to commit her crimes relatively unhindered since he is the only person who can stop her.

[81] "Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder," *Detective Comics*, no. 203, 1954, 2.

This is a repeating theme, Catwoman catching Batman in her paws and letting him go, allowing the chase to continue. Catwoman's habit of letting him live is seen as a weakness. Batman remarked in issue #211 that "sentiment is her weakness" and would eventually lead to her capture.[82]

In her stories, Catwoman is a powerful, successful, and intelligent woman, capable of outsmarting and outmaneuvering the Batman. The way that Batman interacts with Catwoman is different from his other villains. She is the closest to a criminal persona of Batman that the comics had in the Golden Age. For example, she owned and used multiple cat themed gadgets and tools to perpetrate her crimes, like the kitty car, the cat's cradle, and the cat of nine tales.[83] Mostly, their encounters are a game of cat and mouse; they take turns being the hunter and the hunted. Batman, instead of fighting her, tries to reason with her and then eventually capture her without so much as a kick to the legs. Batman fights her male associates and henchmen or her cat minions, but never directly fights her, completely removing her from the contest of physical strength. She is depicted as sneaking in and out of situations and running from the Batman, but never trying to really fight him. Commonly, Catwoman outsmarts Batman for a few rounds and then disappears when he catches up to her.

Although she is extremely intelligent and the "mistress of crime," Catwoman always lets Batman go after she outsmarts him or ensnares him. There are two ways to interpret Catwoman's behavior. She is either subject to the trope of women utilizing sentimentality and emotion over logic, or she is letting Batman chase her so that she stays

[82] "The Jungle Cat-Queen," *Detective Comics*, no. 211, 1954, 12.
[83] "Crimes of the Cat Woman," *Detective Comics*, no. 203, 1954, 4,5.

interesting to him. The answer is both. In a symbolic way, Catwoman and Batman's relationship is indicative of America's view on marriage. While the fatal flaw of all women was their sentimentality and dependance, that was also how they gained and kept their husbands. Here, Catwoman's weakness is also her strength. In caring for Batman, she was able to get him to care about her, starting the cycle that keeps Batman in the game. If Catwoman is intentionally keeping Batman in the game, then her removal for a short time after 1954 adheres to the new Cold War emphasis on Batman as the 'world's greatest detective'. If Batman was going to be the world's greatest detective, he could not be subject to his sentimentality for Catwoman as she was to her sentiment for him.

Batwoman – The Rival

Batwoman appeared in July 1956, issue #233, under a CCA approved title, as a rival crime fighter and love interest for Batman. Her secret identity is Kathy Kane, a millionaire, daredevil, and circus performer extraordinaire who was inspired by Batman's crusade for justice and uses her newfound fortune to become the Batwoman. Kathy looks like two of her predecessors, Julie and Catwoman, with curly black hair and blue eyes. Although her background is just as athletically qualifying to fight crime as a sad, rich man who knows martial arts, she is patronized by both Batman and Robin, Robin mostly, and seen as less capable than the dynamic duo. Most of Robin's and Batman's dialogue for this issue discusses how the crime-fighting world is no place for a woman.

In her debut issue, Batman and Robin get a call about a break in at the new air terminal, but they arrive to find a new crime fighter is already on the scene, Batwoman. Initially, the thieves are not scared of Batwoman and mock her, but she quickly turns the

tide. Incapacitating one thug by knocking over a huge globe, she uses her powder puff to make the other sneeze uncontrollably. She then handcuffs them for the police with her charm bracelets. In another scene, Batwoman uses her compact mirror to blind a thug that is about to shoot Batman, gaining the praise of the audience surrounding them. On the other side of the cowl, Bruce Wayne and Kathy Kane hit it off at a party until they are whisked away by another crime and unknowingly meet again. It is Batman's turn to save Batwoman's life, pushing her out of the path of a falling statue, and she almost unmasks him while he is unconscious. In the end, Batman discovers Batwoman's identity as Kathy Kane because she referred to "scratch-riders" and "trap-artists" during a fight. Batman finds her secret lair and convinces her to give up crime fighting. He argues that if he found out her secret identity, then others could too, and she would be in danger. Although she has the data from her cameras to prove Batman's identity, she refuses to use it and hands over the tape to him.[84] The end of Batwoman doesn't last long as she reappears in issue #311 and a few additional issues.

Batwoman is not as intelligent as Catwoman but has a few tricks up her sleeve and her expertise in acrobatics and motorcycle stunts giver her as much athletic experience as Batman. Although she beat Batman and Robin to the punch multiple times and was integral in the capture of the main villain for the inaugural issue, thug and hero alike patronize and belittle the proficiency of Batwoman. While thugs make comments such as "What can she do?" and "The girl doesn't count," Robin especially complains about Batwoman's involvement and argues that she is not better than Batman.[85] Robin

[84] "The Batwoman," *Detective Comics*, no. 233, 1956.
[85] "The Batwoman," 2, 11.

believes that Batwoman is making Batman look bad while Batman is continuously concerned for her safety despite evidence that she can handle herself. While Robin's protest of Batwoman's presence in the field could be seen as juvenile, it may have influence over the many little boys and girls who were reading this comic in which they see their heroes saying that a woman is not fit to combat crime. In addition, her feminine tools of crime fighting—perfume, powder puffs, bracelets—are impractical in comparison to Batman's or even Catwoman's. Instead of conveying that femininity is a good thing and something that girls should adhere to, which was probably the author's goal, the story mocks femininity with these nonsensical tools, further dividing the sexes and shaming women. Further, Batman is incorrect that others could find her secret identity. He finds her out because he used the information in the Bat-files and he is the world's greatest detective, but it is unlikely that others would. The reasoning behind Batwoman giving up crime fighting is shoddy at best and a poor excuse to expel her from the comics as a valid female rival for Batman.

Appearing just a year after the first CCA title, Batwoman is at the mercy of the Comics Code Authority. Although it aimed to eliminate the horrific depictions of women in the crime and horror genres, DC's acceptance of the code meant that it would affect the women of Batman. The code explicitly bans seduction, nudity, or the depiction of love outside of the goal for home and marriage.[86] While this generally was used to keep pornography out of children's media, love and relationships are sometimes complicated and messy. Shying away from that aspect left Batwoman's and Batman's relationship rushed, insincere, and bland. The Cold War emphasis on traditional gender norms

[86] "The Comics Code of 1954."

become evident in Batwoman's construction, the tools she is allowed to use, and Batman's concern over her presence in the field of combat. While Catwoman's flaw is that she's sentimental, Batwoman's flaw is that she's a woman. Batwoman represents the women who want equality but fail. She tries to go against the popular cultural consensus of domesticity, and, although she was not injured, she still required Batman and Robin's help and returned to her home at the end of the story.

Batgirl – The Feminist

Barbara Gordon as Batgirl was also born with a CCA stamp on her debut comic, *Detective Comics* issue #359, in January of 1967. There was an earlier attempt to introduce a Batgirl in the *Batman* series #139 in 1961, but Barbara Gordon is the most popular character to hold the title as well as the one who held it the longest. While she is a relatively new addition to the *Batman* universe, she became a long-running character with no breaks between appearances. Batgirl, in contrast to most of the women in these comics, was not a love interest for Batman, although she later became one for Robin. She is the red-headed daughter of Commissioner Gordon, has a PhD, is an expert in Judo, and has a day job as a librarian. Although she is highly skilled in martial arts and extremely athletic, Batman and Robin belittle her abilities while the writers attempted to make her as feminine as possible, with all the disadvantages that came with it.

In her debut comic, *The Million Dollar Debut of Batgirl*, Barbara Gordon creates a Batgirl costume for the police masquerade ball. She wants to show the world that she is not just a "colorless female brain" and dons the Batgirl costume to shock her father and

the boys at the masquerade with how stunningly beautiful she is.[87] Along the way, she sees mothmen attacking and attempting to kidnap Bruce Wayne. She stops the kidnapping with her expertise in Judo and makes *Batman* history by becoming the only female character allowed to physically fight other characters. This gives Bruce enough time to don his Batman disguise and join the fray. Her costume is soiled from the fight, leaving her identity a secret, and giving Barbra Gordon time to re-fashion a new Batgirl suit in time for her trip to deliver a rare book to Bruce Wayne. Upon arrival, she finds two mothmen standing over the dead body of the millionaire in question and immediately jumps in to take them out. Unbeknownst to Batgirl, Batman and Robin set this up in advance to get the mothmen to reveal their secret hideout, and Batgirl's premature attack ruined the surprise. Although she spoiled this encounter, she refuses to be left out of the fight and follows Batman and Robin to the lair of Moth Man where she arrives just in time to save them from an anti-gravity chamber by affixing a magnet to her boots and pulling them out.

Despite the outer packaging of a strong female character, the writers put forth great efforts to make sure that we know that Batgirl is, in fact, a female. The writers go through great efforts to make sure that the reader knows that her main concern is her appearance. It was evident in the first issue when Barbra is resentful that the world only sees her for how knowledgeable she is but becomes increasingly apparent in issue # 371 in which DC commits the January story to "Batgirl's Costume Cutups." In this issue, Batgirl battles her vanity in pursuit of a sports-themed gang of miscreants that are terrorizing Gotham. At first, she is giving the gang a run for their money, but then a bike

[87] "The Million Dollar Debut of Batgirl," *Detective Comics*, no. 359, 1967, 2.

petal moves her mask off center. Her 'feminine reaction' is to move it back where it belongs, and this delay gives the crooks enough time to waylay her and run away. Fortunately, Batman and Robin show up to catch some of them, but Batgirl is very disappointed in herself. Later, she shows up after the Dynamic Duo and screeches upon seeing Batman and Robin in danger, distracting them, and allowing the gang to escape once more. She would have followed, but a crook threw a log at her that splashed mud on her costume. Compelled to first wipe herself clean, she allowed the gang members to escape once again. In the final confrontation with this gang, they prove too numerous for Batman and Robin to handle. Batgirl arrives, but, instead of joining the fray, she pretends to inspect a run in her tights, displaying her shapely, feminine legs, and distracting the thugs long enough that Robin and Batman capture them.[88]

Batgirl represents the feminists of the 1960s and 70s, but from the male perspective. Batgirl is a sexually liberated woman. This makes her interesting to the male audience of *Batman*, but she is still subject to the idea that men are more adept at certain fields, no matter what her qualifications are. She thinks she can be another Robin, but she's a girl so she can't. She does not make any real changes to the comics, and the story still centers around the competence of the Dynamic Duo. Her function is to look cute, mimic feminism, and ultimately fail at it, granting Batman and Robin an elevated status.

Women are Complicated

The women of the *Batman* comics present a conundrum. Contrary to what one would expect, *Batman* has had strong female characters from the very beginning, but they

[88] "Batgirl's Costume Cutups," *Detective Comics*, no. 371, 1968.

become weaker as time passes. The three Golden Age Women in this analysis, Julie, Catwoman, and Vicki, are stronger characters than the early representations of Batwoman and Batgirl. Although they never physically fight anyone in the comics, the Golden Era three are intelligent, dignified, bold, and consistent. Julie is a working woman with a thriving career who refuses to settle for a man who is content to never work a day in his life. She consistently defies Bruce's wishes in the comics when it comes to her safety, showing extreme bravery in the face of danger. Catwoman, exemplifying the femme fatale trope, is characterized as a genius in the realm of crime, feared and served by men in the same trade. She is not content to be made fun of or retrospectively 'conquered' and takes great offense to it, which Batman validates by agreeing that the newspaper was unfair. Her only weakness is that she refuses to kill Batman when she has the chance and is held back by her own sentimentality. Finally, Vicki Vale is the most brazen of the three and every other woman in this analysis. She is intelligent, witty, and confident. She blatantly bosses Bruce around in the comics and it is seen as something comical and occasionally advantageous for his work as Batman. Like Julie, she is passionate about her job, so passionate that she follows Batman into the fray for a good scoop. The Golden Age women are especially well written female characters, so it is a bit disappointing how the writers chose to handle women in the Silver Age.

Unlike those of the Golden Age, Batwoman and Batgirl engage in much more activity during fight scenes. Their backstories set them up to be very powerful forces in stopping crime; one is a motorcycle-daredevil-trapeze artist and the other the daughter of the commissioner with expertise in Judo and a PhD to boot. Although these women are highly overqualified for fighting crime, considering that Batman's only qualifications are

money and sadness, both Batman and Robin repeatedly express their worry (Batman) and indignation (Robin) over the presence of women in the field. Furthermore, in contrast to their physical qualifications and skill, these women are very weak characters. Batwoman, the trapeze artist, was the first female addition to the comics during the Comics Code Authority, and her motivation to begin fighting crime as a vigilante was Batman himself. Although she does outmaneuver Batman and Robin multiple times, the problem lies in her tool bag. Batwoman's tools are nonsensical and completely different from any of the tools used thus far in the comics. Not even Catwoman had such feminized tools as charm bracelet handcuffs and a powderpuff to make criminals sneeze. In this way, Batwoman is infantilized. In addition, her debut comic heavily focusing on the romantic tension between her and Bruce. At the end, whatever convictions drove her to fight crime prove insufficient as she gives it up on the whim that if the greatest detective in the world discovered her identity, then everyone else would too. Her willingness to give up fighting crime, something that she had been passionate about for a long time, makes Kathy Kane a very weak-willed woman and her agreement with Batman's faulty logic makes her an unintelligent one.

Finally, Batgirl might be the most problematic of all. She possesses valid crime-fighting credentials and is the only woman in this study that is allowed to physically fight, but she is the most handicapped. While being an expert in Judo, Batgirl is extremely intelligent, and most people recognize her for her brains. From a woman's point of view, being known first and foremost for your knowledge, expertise, and reputation seems fantastic, but Barbra Gordon is resentful that most of Gotham is not drooling over her good looks. In her very first appearance, she makes a stunning Batgirl

costume so that the attendees at the Police Masquerade will think she is beautiful, instead of only seeing her for her achievements and intelligence. This theme is furthered in "Batgirl's Costume Cutups" where she obsesses over her appearance to the point of losing the gang she was tracking for months on multiple occasions. However equal Batgirl may seem to the Dynamic Duo, she is extremely shallow and laughable in her obsession with femininity.

Here we see a progressive decline in the respect and depth of character given to the women of *Batman*, starting immediately at the beginning of the Silver Age. The cultural shift in women's representation is striking but tied to real world events and cultural ideas of women. The Golden Age women debuted during the Great Depression and shortly after the end of World War II. Women gained some ground in respect and visibility with the Depression, especially big movie stars like Julie, and, in some cases, people turned to crime to escape the Depression, like Catwoman. Then, during World War II, women took over some manufacturing jobs in the United States to keep the nation going during wartime, and the same was true of other jobs as men were shipped overseas. This is where Vicki Vale comes in. All these women are, or eventually in Julie's case, given full and strong characters like the real-world women that existed during these times of hardship.

Then, the war is over, the Silver Age begins, the Comics Code Authority is in play, and Batwoman is introduced. Its uncanny that a huge shift in Batman's women happened directly in the beginning year of the Silver Age and one year after the CCA appeared on *Detective Comics*. One of the big aims of the CCA was to curb the explicit sexualization of women, mostly in the horror genre. In an already clean comic such as

Batman, the change in regulating women's appearance affected their character more than their looks, making them less bold. While Batwoman comes off as almost ridiculously goofy, it is an unintentional characterization in response to the CCA and the already goofier plot lines of the Silver Age. The same cannot be said for Batgirl who is intentionally mocked. Born in the 1960s, she has all the freedoms that Second-wave Feminism wanted and is represented as a competent crime fighter on paper, but, her feminine nature gets the better of her skill and experience. She is extremely sexualized in comparison to all the women in this study, even Catwoman, which may be due to the Sexual Revolution happening at the same time and was definitely not CCA approved. While it is a step forward that the writers acknowledge her sexuality, this new attention on sexuality reduces her to a pin-up girl for Robin and Batman to tote around to distract villains. Batgirl is advertised as being both sexy and smart, but, in reality, she is not allowed to be both and still be a good crime fighter. She must choose between the two, flattening out her character when she is dressed as Batgirl and being strangely capable when she is Barbra. The message is literally that women cannot be both and it is a disappointment to see as someone who knows what stronger characters like Julie, Catwoman, and Vicki.

Picking Up the Pieces

The depiction of violence and women were subject to changes put in place by the Comics Code Authority, but the changes and the code itself adhere to the general cultural atmosphere of Cold War America. The regulation of violence and the depiction of women were attempts to maintain the morality of the youth. Both topics intersect with

Cold War American beliefs that immorality would lead to sexual degeneracy and make Americans more susceptible to communism.[89] These topics were closely related, but they played vastly different roles in the depiction of American culture. While parents sought to remove violence completely, the women of Batman each correspond to a different cultural idea of gender in the Cold War era.

The fear of violence was a trauma response on the part of the parents after the events of World War II. As more parents were able to monitor their children, a moral panic about juvenile delinquency arose concerning comics. While the number of juvenile delinquency cases were on the rise in the postwar period, claims that comic books incited this behavior were illogical. Bradford Wright states that upwards of 90% of children and adolescents read comic books, so of course some delinquents read them. While parents wanted to retreat into the home, young people were fascinated with the violence that comic books offered. One avid reader, Pace Wigransky, defended the comic book industry by saying that publishers were just giving the audience what they wanted, not inciting moral degeneracy.[90] The ban on violence was exclusively linked to the fear of American parents and other adults. The solution was to remove violence from comics, but this was not the solution for the depiction of women.

The solution to the depiction of women in Batman was to chain them to the plot. While the changes were closely linked to Cold War anticommunism, it played a much more complex role in depicting American culture. Following the popular movement of Cold War Americans into the home and a voluntary adoption of traditional gender roles,

[89] May, 95.
[90] Write, 96.

the women in Batman simultaneously became more and less complex. In Batman, women are used to either represent the ideal American woman or critique women that went against societal norms. The ways in which they display cultural ideals is what makes them complex, such as Batwoman's tool bag, Catwoman's sentiment, or Batgirl's lack of duality. This same concept is what weakens them as characters. The women of Batman's cultural adherence leave them with very little room to grow and break out of the mold they were created in without substantial changes to the overall story.

CHAPTER IV: A NOT SO SILVER LINING

While American society in the 1950s is sometimes viewed as static, it was extremely volatile. American society sought to protect traditional family values during the Cold War through both laws and popular social consensus.[91] In conjunction with the trauma brought about by the Great Depression, World War II, and the invention of the atomic bomb, the world looked much different for Americans in 1950 than it had five years prior. The overwhelming number of changes taking place were accompanied by Russia as a political rival that could blow America off the map.[92] Americans' response to this threat was to withdraw to something that made more sense. Running away to the suburbs and assuming traditional gender roles helped 1950s America cope with its surroundings and gave ordinary American citizens a way to combat the communist threat.

Social containment is a term that I have created to explain the cultural movement of the 1950s and its ties with anticommunism. Americans wanted to isolate themselves from the world's problems and purge themselves of any threat to their perfect society. Social containment worked like building a dam. Americans saw the running river of change beginning to flow towards them and they chose to block it off instead of accommodating it. While most Americans were satisfied with this in the 1950s, the tactics that social containment employed—McCarthyism, for example—repressed the rights of certain minority groups and negatively affected many innocent Americans.[93]

[91] May, 23. Strecker, 367.
[92] Boyer, 339.
[93] May, 91. Strecker, 363.

Trying to suppress the already flowing tide of social and cultural change is what made the 1960s and 70s explosive. The dam of social containment broke under the strain of domestic persecution and volatile world events, but it left clear marks on American society and popular culture.

Comic books are an important form of American popular culture. While the Comics Code Authority censored the comics, it was voluntarily adopted by the comics industry. The comics displayed what Cold War Americans deemed important. The ways in which 1950s America sought to regulate themselves, social containment, was visible in comics in specific topics and changes, namely violence and the depiction of women. Both the restriction of violence in comics and the change in women's roles to more "feminine" and domestic stem from a fear of communism and line up with American social containment strategy. While they share these aspects, their origins have separate strains. Restrictions on violence stemmed from the trauma of the war and the atomic bomb, and the change in the roles of women was a direct reflection of social containment in the private sphere of the home. These can both be seen clearly in the late Golden Age and early Silver Age *Batman* comics, but *Batman* possessed a unique form of cultural reflection, Robin.

In the world of Batman, Robin was the dam of social containment. Robin's arrival in the comics in 1940 immediately transformed *Batman* into a more child-friendly product. Robin's main power as a character was representing the majority of *Batman* readers and creating a world for them that their parents would approve of. Over time, he grew with the readers and became increasingly complex. At the end of the Silver Age, his title changed from the Boy Wonder to the Teen Wonder and his transition to college

graduated the comics into the Bronze Age. Robin's removal from the comics as a permanent character both acknowledged that the audience had matured past the protection he offered and reflected the breaking of social containment in the 1960s and 1970s. From beginning to end, Robin was *Batman's* vehicle for portraying the rise and fall of social containment in American society.

Robin the Teen Wonder

Although the *Batman* comics changed over time in response to historic events and artistic preferences, nothing affected the comics more than the appearance and disappearance of Robin, the Boy Wonder. Robin's appearance was the catalyst for a more child-friendly version of *Batman* in April 1940 and was accompanied by an art style change; both the actual artwork and the hero of the story became brighter. In contrast to the stoic and terrifying visage he presented in 1939, Batman became more social and chattier under the cowl, taking an interest in the lives of individual Gothomites and taunting henchmen during fight scenes. Instead of working outside of the police, Batman became an extension of the police, boasting that he was a fully deputized agent of the law in later comics.

These changes serve to integrate the Batman more fully into society and appeal to DC's target audience. In 1939, World War II reared its head in Europe and America had a good chance of being pulled in. Americans were mobilizing towards a common goal, something that would be needed in wartime. Batman would play his part. It was right after the introduction of Robin that Bruce Wayne became a respected member of the community, renowned for his charity and affinity for children. This new reputation

stemmed from his guardianship of Dick Greyson. Batman also actively involved himself in the personal lives of Gothomites such as the Midas family and helping a failing actress. In addition to the change in pace for Batman and Bruce Wayne, the introduction of Robin provided a character who might relate to the new target demographic of DC and served as an extension of the reader in the story. This ten-year-old boy has faced hardship due to corruption and criminal activity, losing both his parents. While he was added to the story before the Americans joined the war, Robin would be relatable to children who lost their fathers in battle and lost their mothers, in a way, to the war industry. Robin was able to not only gain a rich father figure, but also to fight back against those who wronged him.

In the Silver Age, Batman's new characteristics are exaggerated due to CCA regulation and DC's attempt to make *Batman* more family friendly. The comics, in turn, become sillier and the action lessens. The emphasis is now on Batman and Robin's detective skills and intellectual prowess. Robin also has a more direct role in the comics during this time. Although Batman quips at villains during the scarce chase or fight scenes, Robin provides a string of commentary on Batman's behavior and story events. He becomes much more outspoken, raising and discussing important topics of either moral importance or foreshadowing with Batman. For example, just before the shift to the Bronze Age, Robin has a conversation with Batman while on patrol in the Batmobile.

In the story, "Batman's Evil Eye," Robin talks with Batman about the uses of fear in crime fighting. While he confirms that Batman is frightening and that men should fear him due to ingrained human experiences over the millennia, he states that Batman has lost his shock value and become commonplace. In turn, villains do not fear him like they used to. This story contains a semi-sophisticated analysis of the human psyche and the

use of fear as applicable to Batman's niche aesthetic, and it comes from Robin. Now, instead of mere wish fulfillment, Robin is a kind of meta-character who embodies the growing minds and awareness of the readers. His conversation with Batman embodies the readers' thoughts and feelings of the current aesthetic of the comics and critiques it in an intellectual way that readers, now teenagers and not ten-year-olds, would be able to understand.

Similar to his entrance, Dick Greyson's exit from the comics as a permanent character is the catalyst for change in November 1969 and marks the transition into the Bronze Age and Batman's return to his 1939 roots. Shortly after Robin is sent off to college, the comics experience another art change that casts Gotham in a gloomier light. Batman does not go out during the day any longer and, while he does work with police, he maintains his status as a vigilante. The comics generally become stranger with the introduction of villains such as the Man-Bat and more complicated in terms of relationships with the introduction of the League of Assassins. The *Batman* comics become grittier after the expulsion of Robin who is no longer providing comedic relief and reader cometary. Like his appearance, Robin's exit lines up with cultural shifts and world events in the twentieth century.

The Bronze Age came about after the Civil Rights Movement, which caused massive social upheaval and political strife as African Americans tried to bring about change in a society that was staunchly opposed to it. At the same time, the Vietnam War was televised in the United States, making accounts of extreme violence readily accessible to children and teenagers. With second-wave feminism also on the rise, the main concerns of American social containment, violence, and gender, were either

rendered obsolete or actively under attack. Robin's role in rounding out the tough edges of the original 1939 version of Batman served no purpose in a world that so openly and readily offered the youth access to the world's corruption. Although he once served as a mouthpiece for the reader, child-friendly and silly did not befit the mature audience of the 1970s. As he was an integral part of the Dynamic Duo, Robin is maintained as an occasional presence in the comics. However, the end of his regular appearances was necessary to usher in a new era. Under the strain of crumbling social containment, Robin's audience outgrew the lessons that he taught and the protection he offered.

Tarnished Silver

The Cold War brought on a special set of circumstances into American culture and influenced domestic policy in a negative way. The ongoing changes to American society from the beginning of the 20th century wore down Americans to a state of panic and fear. The way that they chose to combat this fear was to lash out and purge American society with devastating consequences to other Americans. To protect their children from the pervasive and demoralizing threat of communism, Americans hyper-focused on culture and the messages they allowed their children to see. The brunt of American focus on protecting morality was regulating the depiction of violence and protecting traditional gender roles in alignment with Christianity. Americans thought that adherence to Cold War moral standards would offer them protection from cultural degradation.

Despite what many Cold War Americans in the 1950s wanted for their society, the world was already drowning in change. Trying to stop the tide backfired on the American people through McCarthyism, the violence displayed during the Civil Rights

Movement, and the many countercultural movements of the 60s and 70s. Although restricting access to violence and maintaining traditional gender roles were the main focus of social containment, the measures put in place to restrict change is what made the following social reaction so explosive.

This cultural change in America was reflected in the *Batman* comics through the transitions between the Golden Age to the Bronze Age. Much like the shift towards social containment, the shift from the Golden Age to the Silver Age was slow, gaining momentum as Americans were faced with ever increasing stress from world events. Similarly, the quick transition from the Silver Age to the Bronze Age reflected the raging tides of change previously held back by social containment. While censorship played a part in changing the comics during the Silver Age, it was a product of the popular cultural shift towards social containment in the 1950s and was seen much earlier in the *Batman* comics with the addition of Robin.

Just before the dawning of the Silver Age, the Comics Code Authority was voluntarily adopted in 1954. Mirroring what Americans were concerned about their children reading, it featured explicit restrictions on violence and the depiction of women. Changes in the overall story structure of *Batman* followed the application of the code. Silver Age comics adopted an emphasis on Batman's intelligence instead of his athletic ability and significantly changed the characterization of women in the comics. While the code is an important part of analyzing Silver Age comics, the *Batman* comics were already self-regulating in the 1940s. The addition of Robin in 1940 both recognized that DC's main audience was children and began the process of censoring the *Batman* comics. Robin shows that popular culture is extremely sensitive to cultural change and can

embrace social trends before they become widespread. Robin simultaneously personified the readers and protected them until they came of age in the 1960s and 70s. When social containment began to crumble in the United States, he stepped aside. This allowed the *Batman* comics to continue reflecting and relating to American culture in the Bronze Age as they had in the Golden and Silver Age.

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