COMIC BOOKS - VEHICLE FOR CHANGE - ANTI-RACISM

ABBIE: Thank you, everyone, for coming. I'd Invite you all to take a deep breath in and fully exhale.

Before we begin, I'd like to invite you to consider a few things. The first is the title of this presentation: Comic Books as a Vehicle for Anti-Racism/Social Change.

Two phrases stick out to me: comic books. And anti-racism. One is a text. A medium. A genre. The other, a goal. A lens.

According to the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, "Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably."

I'd like you to consider the last piece of that definition, specifically. "...so that power is redistributed and shared equitably." There is power in comics.

Maybe you have a vested interest in comic books already, but whether you do or you don't, I'd like you to consider the various roles that you embody in the world. Perhaps that is the role of a student, or an educator, an artist, or a business person, or a consumer. Perhaps that is the role of a parent, or a child, or a friend.

To be truly anti-racist requires a continuous, intentional effort for white-identifying people as well as non-white-identifying people who have existed in the systems of America for centuries. This work can quickly feel overwhelming; so, rather than dismissing it, as a place

of entry, I'd invite you to consider the roles which you embody and the ways in which you can choose to be intentionally anti-racist through the utilization of those roles.

And now, Christopher Tower...

SLIDE ONE

This presentation is about comic books and anti-racism. This is an image from an issue of *Superman* in which Lois Lane spent a day as a woman of color and learned about racism, an over-simplification, as nothing about the experience of being a person of color in America can be learned by playing dress up for a day.

While I was in the creation process and getting bit too lost in the trees and having lost sight of the forest as a whole, my speaking partner and colleague Abbie asked me: "what's the big idea here? Aren't we supposed to be talking about big ideas?"

I realized right away that she was asking a very astute question. How is this idea BIG in the way of ideas like last week's Public Health Communicable Disease Investigation & Prevention by Michelle Ashby or the future subjects yet to be presented in this series.

I hope to answer that question as the answer touches more than just comic books but ultimately finds a personal response.

SLIDE TWO

Even before the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others just this year, people were discussing that being against

racism was not significant enough of a catalyst for social change, and that to make a real paradigm shift, people should commit themselves to being anti-racist.

SLIDE THREE

After all, the book *How to be Anti-Racist* by Ibram X. Kendi came out in 2019, columnist for *The Atlantic*, whose previous book *Stamped from the Beginning* won the National Book Award in 2016.

And now with Black Lives Matter protests that have been held all around the world for months, more people than ever are committed to not just being against racism but being actively anti-racist.

As Kendi writes in his introduction being actively anti-racist is "the struggle to be fully human and see that others are fully human... [as a culture] we know how be racist. We know how to pretend be not racist. Now let's know how to be anti-racist" (11).

SLIDE FOUR

But what does all that talk of anti-racism and our current movement of Black Lives matter have to do with comic books?

SLIDE FIVE

As Captain America reminds the Jingoistic villain Nuke, America is the country of immigrants and that it is patriotic to fight for the American Dream which is to fight for peaceful lives for all people regardless of heritage, religion, or the socially-constructed idea of race?

SLIDE SIX

The question of whether or not comic books can be a vehicle for social change, for anti-racism, should be obvious. **Any** art form can be a catalyst for social change, in particular, anti-racism. The more interesting questions are how comic books have already created social change and promoted anti-racist agendas and how they are going to take this goal even farther inspired by the recent rise of BLACK LIVES MATTER protests have shown us that people are fed up with the systemic racism in our country.

And so, here's the thesis for this presentation.

THESIS: Comic books are ideally suited as an art form for social change, such as anti-racism among other battles against bigotry, and though other art forms also do this same work, the impact and popularity of comic books provide unique opportunities for changing mindsets.

SLIDE SEVEN

I have been a comic nerd since the age of four.

MY FIRST COMIC

Detective Comics #351 - May 1966

Obviously inspired by the new Batman TV show, which debuted in January of 1966.

Like many people my age and older and younger, comic books were the constant companions of our youth.

SLIDE EIGHT

In his book *Comic Book Nation – The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, Maryland University professor Bradford W. Wright discovered that the heroes in the comic books were more believable than those in his real life of the 1960s and early 1970s. In comics, he "discovered a fantasy world that made more sense than the real one."

Later, looking back as an adult, he realizes that comic books had "not only afforded me an escape from reality, they helped me to perceive reality in terms that I could understand and accept. Comic books helped me to define myself and my world in a way that made both far less frightening. I honestly cannot imagine how I would have navigated my childhood without them" (Wright, ix-x).

SLIDE NINE - WHAT'S ARE COMICS?

In 1993, writer/artist Scott McCloud publishes the book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, which is a graphic novel about comic books. Here's two panels from the beginning of the book as Scott, who draws himself narrating the entire book explains about the stereotypes and misconceptions about comics.

SLIDE TEN

So, in comic lingo, a “panel” is the box in which you find the image and often writing to go with it as seen here. There’s eight panels on this slide, two of which do not really have borders around their image (numbers two and seven).

Comics are read left to right like all our western world books, starting at the top right for each new page as seen in the two pages side-by-side on this slide.

Scott explains how he discovered comics at a much later age than when I did. But we both had the same experience of getting hooked on them because we sensed their hidden power. Thus began a lifelong love of and readership of comics, comic books, and graphic novels.

Like me, throughout his life, Scott has fought against the cultural bigotry toward comics, which may seem strange today given their popularity in movies, television, conventions, and even in the curricula of colleges and universities.

SLIDE ELEVEN

Comics can be about anything, can tell all kinds of stories, they are much more than funnies about talking ducks, tales of 1950s-style Riverdale suburbs, or super heroes.

Because of the subject of this presentation, I will speak primarily of comics portraying super heroes, though in the end, I will broaden that definition and talk about many comic books that do not feature super heroes at all.

Scott works to define comics in this book, and it’s really a brilliant novel and you should read it if you have any interest in comic books as an ART FORM (not a genre).

As you can see here, he begins his definition with comics as a sequential art form, similar to film, in which stories are told by placing pictures in sequence and usually adding writing to these images for narration and dialogue.

SLIDE TWELVE

Examining the history of comics provides an understanding for how comics have influenced our culture quite unlike other art forms and have kindled unique inspiration in the hearts of their readers.

The super hero comic books we know today come from the tradition of the pulp magazines and the radio shows that they spawned. Deriving from the Penny Dreadfuls of Britain and named for the cheap paper made from pulp on which they were printed, pulp magazine also simply known as pulps became an American phenomenon that transformed publishing from 1896 to the late 1950s.

SLIDE THIRTEEN

The hero pulps specifically featured a wide range of fiction from romance, to sports, to science fiction, and horror. They introduced to many characters still famous and popular today, such as the Tarzan creator Edgar Rice Burroughs' creation John Carter of Mars seen here as well as...

SLIDE FOURTEEN

Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, Doc Savage, and the Shadow, who may be the most obvious origin of the Batman of the first super hero comic books that would soon follow.

The downside here, like in comics, is that these are the stories of the domination of the white man and the subjugation of other cultures. After all, when an author conceives a story that an orphaned British Lord becomes King of the African jungle rather than one of the indigenous people of coastal west Africa.

Speech of the band Arrested Development in the song "Kings" from the 2018 album *Craft and Optics* describes this characterization as a "false narrative" creating in the mind's of white people this false sense of superiority and false sense of inferiority in black people.

SLIDE FIFTEEN

Designed with cover art for impulse purchases from the news stands from which they were sold, pulps were often sensational, lurid, and exploitative as seen here.

But like comics, they had that same hidden power to transform and catalyze the readership.

For instance, *Black Mask* launched in 1920 by famous journalist H.L. Mencken and drama critic George Jean Nathan made enough money to support Mencken's prestigious "literary" magazine *The Smart Set* and launched the careers of famous writers like Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas.

WHAT WE THINK OF AS COMIC BOOKS

SLIDE SIXTEEN

Though we can trace the concept of the comic to medieval Europe or even ancient Asia, the cartoons of William Hogarth of the 18th century or early newspaper strips like *The Yellow Kid* are among the first modern concepts of what we think of as comics as well as the many strips that followed, such as

SLIDE SEVENTEEN

The Katzenjammer Kids (1897–2006; 109 years)

Gasoline Alley (1918–present)

Ripley's Believe It or Not! (1918–present)

Barney Google and Snuffy Smith (1919–present)

Thimble Theater/Popeye (1919–present)

Blondie (1930–present)

Dick Tracy (1931–present)

Alley Oop (1932–present)

Bringing Up Father (1913–2000; 87 years)

Little Orphan Annie (1924–2010; 86 years)

SLIDE EIGHTEEN

The first publication that we would consider a comic book is *Famous Funnies* published in 1933 that reprinted newspaper strips.

SLIDE NINETEEN

Mainly, comics books as we know them really started with the advent of the super hero in 1938 with emergence of SUPERMAN, the first of the super heroes who would come to dominate comics.

SLIDE TWENTY

Created by first-generation Jewish immigrants writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, Superman is an obvious take off on the idea of the Uber Mensch, the Super Man popular in Nazi Germany at the time, but soon became the most enduring and iconic of the super heroes, even powerful enough to advertise imitation cheese spread.

SLIDE TWENTY-ONE

Even though he is an "ALIEN," he becomes the symbol of THE AMERICAN WAY. Superman is the Super immigrant.

SLIDE TWENTY-TWO

Batman comes next in May of 1939, and unlike Superman whose powers come from the sun, Batman is without "super" powers but has honed his natural human characteristics to extraordinary levels. He's the natural progression of the pulp hero THE SHADOW.

SLIDE TWENTY-THREE

If Superman is light and sunshine, then Batman is darkness and moonlight. Maybe too dark... he's softened shortly after his debut in given a child to foster, a ward, so that he can be a father without introducing the complications of a mother or of marriage.

SLIDE TWENTY-FOUR

And from there, things really take off. More and more heroes are created.

Many of those early heroes will survive or be re-imagined in what we know today as the Justice League by DC Comics.

SLIDE TWENTY-FIVE

Many more won’t be created for twenty or more years in another explosion of modern heroes. Don’t worry. We’ll take a look at them soon.

SLIDE TWENTY-SIX

The industry does not neglect women, creating more and more iconic characters that endure to this day.

SLIDE TWENTY-SEVEN

And as the era of the comic book super hero dawns at the end of the 1930s as America begins to shrug off the Great Depression, the second World War sweeps through Europe, officially in 1939, and soon after Japan attacks Pearl Harbor and the United States goes to war in the Pacific while at home, comic books show their new readers just how powerful America is and can be.

SLIDE TWENTY-EIGHT

World War II is very good for comic books.

Comic books go overseas. At least, 35,000 copies of *Superman* alone are shipped to troops each month during the war (Wright, 31).

SLIDE TWENTY-NINE

By 1942, in America, 15 million comic books are being sold each month, and publishers report that for every one purchase, five additional people read that comic books, so imagine at least 75 million readers (Wright, 31). (U.S. population in 1942 is 135 million. Eurostat graph) By the of 1943, 125 different titles of comic books are being published and sales total nearly $30 million (Wright, 31).

SLIDE THIRTY

Though Superman alone could have stopped World War Two in a few minutes, and though some heroes did directly confront the great enemies of America in the war, like Captain America, mostly they were portrayed as soldiers serving in the military or heroes fighting against infiltrators at home.

SLIDE THIRTY-ONE

Comic books enjoy another surge in the 1950s with primarily romance, horror, science fiction, and true crime titles. Over 650 different titles were published each month grossing at least $90 million in

sales each month in 1953 and some estimate over $100 million in revenue.

SLIDE THIRTY-TWO

American readers spent over $1 billion on comic books in 1953.

SLIDE THIRTY-THREE

90% of boys and girls under 18 years read comic books at this time, and survey estimates revealed that 25% of high school graduates also read them and this number is likely far too low. American GIs are still choosing comic books as their literature by the thousands (Wright, 155).

SLIDE THIRTY-FOUR

Though these sales and the readership could not be maintained for reasons to be explained later, comics enjoyed another surge of popularity from 1962-1967 with the dawn of what is known as the Marvel Age of Comics for the resurgence of the Marvel Comics publishing company with new direction and new characters created by ...

SLIDE THIRTY-FIVE

... primarily by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

SLIDE THIRTY-SIX

Though Marvel's sales doubled through those years, they remained a close second to their competition, the home of Superman and Batman, DC Comics. But unlike their competitor, Marvel enjoyed immense popularity of college campuses.

SLIDE THIRTY-SEVEN

Fifty thousand college students joined the Marvel fan club and a 1965 college poll showed that college students ranked Spider-Man and the Hulk alongside Bob Dylan and Che Guevara as their favorite revolutionary icons (Wright, 223).

SLIDE THIRTY-EIGHT

Despite the declining popularity of comic books, which

in the 1970s and 1980s looked like they were never to regain the

wide readership of the 1940s and 1950s, despite how throughout my formative years much like Scott McCloud's, we argued for comics to be taken seriously or hid our passions for fear of ridicule and bullying... that has all changed.

SLIDE THIRTY-NINE

Really it all started with the DC Batman movies in 1989 and kids growing up on Batman, X-Men, Spider-Man, and Teen Titans cartoons.

SLIDE FORTY

AND NOW... The Marvel movies, which have enjoyed popularity and revenue the likes of which most of us comic fans and surely their creators never dreamed!!!

SLIDE FORTY-ONE

Reaping world wide box office gross in the billions, the Marvel parent company now owned by Disney and the DC Comics company now owned by Warner Brothers have made undreamed of riches, little to none of it returned to the creators of these “properties” as they were considered work-for-hire writers and artists and did not own the fruits of their imaginations.

SLIDE FORTY-TWO

Returning to the fantasy comment by Wright that “this fantasy world [of heroes] made more sense than the real one,” the super heroes with their bright costumes, super powers, and catchy names are our modern mythology. Many are styled on classic Gods and Goddesses, such as Superman who is very much like Apollo or the original Flash and Hermes...

SLIDE FORTY-THREE

or are actually gods themselves, like Wonder Woman, Thor, and the Spectre.

SLIDE FORTY-FOUR

They appeal to our better natures. They espouse the values we all hold dear. They fight for the common good or our very survival as a species or a planet.

This is an image from a 1940s issue of *Wonder Woman* in which she espouses the need for justice, love, and respect to fight against persecution and intolerance.

SLIDE FORTY-FIVE

As progressive as comics may have been with roots in pulps that were rife with racist tropes, comic books reflected the same ideology of the dominant culture of the times.

"The Captain Marvel of the 1940s, who we now know as SHAZAM as per the movie from 2019, had a sidekick named Steamboat. "Sidekick" may be too generous of a term because he essentially served as Captain Marvel's de facto servant until 1945 when, on appeal from school children, the character was no longer used" (Kirksey).

SLIDE FORTY-SIX

“Whatever awful features were used to depict the ally of Captain America’s sidekick Bucky Barnes – Whitewash Jones – were amplified with Steamboat, and he carried himself with the same poor English and bumbling persona as his Young Allies counterpart, the team Bucky led” (Kirksey).

Whitewash Jones seen here comes from *Young Allies #1* in the Summer of 1941. “While his given name was Washington Carver Jones, the character was sadly known as Whitewash Jones... Whitewash, while part of the crew, was apparently only good at "de watermelon" and could "make a harmonica talk." He looked like the worst minstrel show rendition of a black person and was a bumbling idiot to boot... and was drawn to look more like a monkey than an actual human being” (Ranker).

And Steamboat seen here from *America’s Greatest Comics* February 1942, Steamboat was Captain Marvel’s actual servant.

“To say these depictions of black characters were uncommon at this time would be a lie, and it is useful to understand that while we were fighting injustice and oppression on one side of the world against the Nazis and the Japanese, we were buying it up left and right on our own soil” (Kirksey).

SLIDE FORTY-SEVEN

Depictions of people other than the heroes were just as terrible in this period.

“As a nation, Americans may have never hated a foreign population as intensely as they did the Japanese following the stunning attack on Pearl Harbor... reflecting this deep hostility, American media and popular culture abounded with racist caricatures of the Japanese.

Comic books proved uniquely suited to portray the Asian enemy as many Americans saw him – a sinister, ugly, subhuman creature...ghastly yellow demons with fangs and claws or buck-toothed little monkeys with oversized spectacles, comic book Japanese appeared subhuman, inhuman, or even superhuman, but never simply human. Stories with titles like "The Terror of the Slimy Japs" or "The Slant Eye of Satan" glorified the American violence righteously unleashed on ...`the yellow peril'" (Wright, 45-47).

SLIDE FORTY-EIGHT

Though comic books often served as propaganda for national unity against the wartime enemies, many defined national unity meant in terms of racial and ethnic tolerance. DC Comics call for an inclusive America, reminding readers that the Nazis came to power by exploiting the hatreds and prejudices of the German people, hoping to infiltrate our country with the same "divide and conquer" strategy.

In one comic of the time, foiling these plans of the Nazis, the Justice Society reminds readers that "the United States is a great melting pot, into which other races are poured – a pot which converts all of us into one big nation."

Likewise in a Green Lantern comic story entitled "A Tale of a City" in 1944, the hero makes "one of the strongest statements of tolerance found anywhere in wartime comics" (Wright, 53).

As he foils the divisive schemes of the hateful villains, he admonished that “you deliberately confused patriotism with race hatred for one purpose... to make money!”

Chided, the woman admits that she had been a fool.

All above - (Wright, 53-54).

If only this happened in real life.

Though the progressive existed, racist and hate-filled messages threatened to overwhelm them during the comic books of the war years. Nevertheless, this era known as the GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS showed the power comics possessed to motivate and galvanize audiences, in this case reinforcing “the immediacy of the war to a young home front audience fighting it largely on imagination alone” (Wright, 55).

The war was a simple time with a clear enemy, hoping to build on the sizable market established, comic publishers would find that things were much more complicated in the post war era.

SLIDE FORTY-NINE

The progressive messages continued, such as this one from a 1951 Superboy comic in which Superboy inspires young readers to respect others and not judge anyone on the basis of their color or beliefs (Wright, 64-65).

SLIDE FIFTY

But the popularity of comics to entertain and to inspire encountered backlash as all progressive movements do.

For every step forward, there are often two steps backward as people resist change and the traditions of their own intolerance.

In 1948, students of St. Patrick's Parochial School of Binghampton, New York gained notoriety for burning over two thousand comic books in a huge bonfire, part of a boycott because the comics stressed "crime and sex" (Wright, 86).

"Ever since they had first appeared on American newsstands, comic books had been attacked by parents, teachers, librarians, and guardians of traditional culture. Critics charged that comic books caused eyestrain, promoted illiteracy, celebrated bad taste, and encouraged antisocial behavior in children" (Wright, 86).

"Throughout American history, adults have attributed undesirable changes in youth behavior to some aspect of popular culture" (Wright, 87).

This accusation has been true for rock and roll, television, punk music, hip hop music, and today video games, social media, and smart phone apps.

All of which may seem to you more influential and capable of fomenting social change than comic books. Perhaps this is true. I never said comics alone could create social change.

SLIDE FIFTY-ONE

During this time, a psychiatrist named Fredric Wertham would write a book called *Seduction of the Innocent*, a condemnation of comic books, charging them as a leading cause of a scourge feared in the post-war suburbs: JUVENILE DELINQUENCY.

For those interested, in 2008, David Hajdu wrote a great book on this era and the fight against censorship called *The Ten Cent Plague*.

"I think Hitler was a beginner compared to the comic book industry," wrote psychiatrist Frederic Wertham, famous for the 1950s exposé The Seduction of the Innocent, which "indicted comic books as a leading cause of juvenile delinquency" (Hadju pg. 6). "The time has come to legislate these books off the newsstands and out of the candy stores."

Despite the flames engulfing thousands of comics at this time, EC Comics transformed the industry and the readership of comic books.

Originally, Educational Comics and renamed as Entertaining Comics, EC published some of the most pioneering and innovative comics of all time, such as *Tales From the Crypt*, *Weird Science*, and *the Vault of Horror*.

With some of the best artists and writers in the industry, the comics were aimed at adults and read by all ages.

They were immensely popular.

Publishers competed for readership with increasingly more shocking and extreme imagery and story lines. Stan Lee, then working for Timely, described the problem best: "the horror craze was a challenge for the average publisher because you had to come up with new ideas for every story... not everybody could do it...books came and went because they petered out. The editors couldn't sustain the interest, so they used a lot of tricks to get the reader's attention" (Lee as quoted in Hadju, pg.190).

At the time, under Lee's stewardship, Timely was the most successful publisher in 1952 with sales half again as great as next competitor Dell and double that of National/DC. Still, publishers scrambled to outdo each other, gain readers, and match EC's success.

SLIDE FIFTY-TWO

If a character had his neck slashed in February, in the March issue a character would be decapitated. In another issue, a human head would be used as a bowling ball, and in another, a woman would be shown roasting her husband's body parts (head, a leg, hands, feet) on a barbecue grill.

Such content sparked a national campaign against comic books, the biggest loser of which was EC, who was driven virtually out of business except for one publication, (more on that one in a minute).

Like millions were massacred in WWII, comic books suffered a gutting in a cultural war that left hundreds of talented artists scared off or even blacklisted. The national crusade against the "corrupting" influence of comic books led to bonfires and eventually a Senate hearing that most abused William Gaines and EC.

SLIDE FIFTY-THREE

The only EC publication to survive was *Mad Magazine*, a comic re-branded as a "magazine" to circumvent the self-censoring, comic code authority. Now owned by DC and Warner Brother's *Mad* is still published today and has shaped generations since the 1950s with its satire, parody, and no-holds-barred mocking of American culture. But that topic alone could be an entire presentation.

SLIDE FIFTY-FOUR

Though comics suffered they limped into the 1960s to herald in a new era of comics, ushered by a rejuvenated company around since the 1940s: MARVEL COMICS.

Marvel comics changes the industry forever and ushers in what is known as the SILVER AGE OF COMICS.

SLIDE FIFTY-FIVE

Master minded by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and what became known as the Marvel bullpen, Marvel Comics affirmed the individual's obligation to society as did other publishers, the difference here were tragic characters and stories with grim endings (Wright, 203).

When Peter Parker's father-figure Uncle Ben is killed in a crime he could have prevented, he becomes the hero Spider-Man because with "great power comes great responsibility."

If there is one idea that comic books instills in its readers, inspiring legions of readers, it is Spider-Man's profound credo.

SLIDE FIFTY-SIX

As the voice of Marvel Comics, Stan Lee talks directly to readers in a hip, youthful tone that is still mimicked today.

When the civil right movement of the late 1960s takes center stage in the nation, Stan Lee uses his platform to directly inspire readers to be anti-racist.

He gives voice to the justice and the underlying philosophy of all comics but especially Marvel Comics to "judge each other on our own merits."

I first read these words as a child, and they became part of my soul, the very fabric of my being.

That's why I argue that comics are uniquely suited to inspire social change. When I became an adult, the ideas of anti-racism just seemed natural and sensible to me. And though I have had to uncover the invisible ways my white privilege has perpetuated systemic racism in this country, the process of self-realization to fight for what's right has always been a no-brainer.

SLIDE FIFTY-SEVEN

Even before Stan's soapbox, Marvel Comics created the first black super hero: THE BLACK PANTHER.

Though only coincidentally named the same as a black militant group, Jack Kirby invented the Black Panther in 1966 as King of the African

nation of Wakanda, a scientifically advanced though hidden nation, T'Challa, the Black Panther, was a genius, a diplomat, and a powerful warrior.

SLIDE FIFTY-EIGHT

Though there were questionable stereotypes still in play, this creation was pivotal to changing comics and the hearts and minds of readers. The Black Panther soon became a member of the Avengers and one of the most beloved character in the Marvel canon, and arguably, my favorite.

Recently, Marvel media released the *Black Panther* film with an almost entirely African-American cast of the men and women of fictional Wakanda. I will confess that as soon as I started watching the film I began to cry as I so overwhelmed by the fulfilling of a dream for black people to take center stage over white people in a mega-hit feature film.

I had the same reaction to films that have put women heroes in the star role to inspire young women to be all that they can be, the equal of anyone else.

SLIDE FIFTY-NINE

In 1969, Julius Schwartz at DC Comics hired young guns Dennis O'Neil and Neal Adams to revitalize the failing *Green Lantern* comic.

Inspired by Norman Mailer and Tom Wolfe, O'Neil and Adams created socially relevant stories about racism, poverty, political corruption, and over-population among many other topics (Wright, 227).

They not only created the second prominent African-American hero, a black man as the next Green Lantern, but directly confronted the issue of white privilege and the responsibility of white heroes to fight for everyone, especially those with "black skins."

Though not successful in terms of sales, the stories produced by these creators continue to inspire readers today as the issues confronted are still ongoing concerns and very relevant today.

SLIDE SIXTY

Though Marvel Comics also confronted social issues of racism, drugs, and poverty, many more pages and many more stories were devoted to the persecution of mutants in the *X-Men* comics.

SLIDE SIXTY-ONE

Yet as an analogy for the social ills of America, the merry mutants of Marvel became one of the company's most popular and enduring properties.

SLIDE SIXTY-TWO

In the year 2000, DC Comic published Scott McCloud's *Reinventing Comics*, the sequel to *Understanding Comics*.

Once he again, he wrote about the power of comics to be anything, to do anything, to be a unique and influential vehicle for social change as I argue in my thesis.

He actually calls this concept a BIG IDEA, like the theme of this quarter's Community Conversations.

Eloquently, he posits that a single panel in a comic book, even a "silent" one with no words, may "speak volumes in one book while whole pages of another tell us very little" (McCloud, Reinventing, 34).

SLIDE SIXTY-THREE

He lauded new comics, creator-owned comics, digital comics that were changing the industry and inspiring legions of readers.

Comics such as *Raw* by Art Spielgelman and Francoise Mouly, *Love and Rockets* by Gilbert and Jamie Hernandez, and *Cerebus* by Dave Sim among so many more.

SLIDE SIXTY-FOUR

This entire presentation is really a scratch of the surface of comic books and intersections with anti-racism, diversity, inclusion, creative ownership.

However, the presentation would not be complete without at least a brief mention of MILESTONE MEDIA founded in 1993 by a coalition of African-American artists and writers. And though it only survived to about 1996, it spawned an animated series – *Static Shock* – that won an Emmy and a Humanitas Prize.

Since then the parent company of DC Comics has attempted several revivals, the most recent just this year with *Milestone Returns* #0.

Sadly, chief mastermind Dwayne McDuffie passed away in 2011 of complications from heart surgery.

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Here's a sample reading list of the comic books super heroes inspired or the ways in which super hero comics have strived to be more inclusive, diverse, and anti-racist.

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SLIDE SIXTY-FIVE

Superman Smashes the Klan: The Graphic Novel

Novel by Gene Luen Yang

art by Gurihiru

October 2019

by the author of *American Born Chinese*

SLIDE SIXTY-SIX

American Born Chinese

Novel by Gene Luen Yang

- 2006

finalist for the National Book Award

SLIDE SIXTY-SEVEN

MARCH - THREE VOLUMES

- Authors: John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, Nate Powell

- 2015

The ***March trilogy*** is an autobiographical black and white graphic novel trilogy about the Civil rights movement, told through the perspective of civil rights leader and U.S. Congressman John Lewis. The series is written by Lewis and Andrew Aydin, and illustrated and lettered by Nate Powell

SLIDE SIXTY-EIGHT

Palestine

Novel by Joe Sacco

-1993

Palestine is a non-fiction graphic novel written and drawn by Joe Sacco about his experiences in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in December 1991 and January 1992. Sacco's portrayal of the situation emphasizes the history and plight of the Palestinian people, as a group and as individuals.

SLIDE SIXTY-NINE

They Called Us Enemy

Book by George Takei, Justin Eisinger, and Steven Scott

- July 2019

A stunning graphic memoir recounting actor/author/activist George Takei's childhood imprisoned within American concentration camps during World War II. Experience the forces that shaped an American icon -- and America itself -- in this gripping tale of courage, country, loyalty, and love.

SLIDE SEVENTY

Persepolis (2000) is an autobiographical series of bande dessinées (vignettes) by Marjane Satrapi that depicts her childhood up to her early adult years in Iran during and after the Islamic Revolution. The title Persepolis is a reference to the ancient capital of the Persian Empire.

SLIDE SEVENTY-ONE

Maus

Novel by Art Spiegelman

1980-1991

Pulitzer Prize winner

American Book Award winner

Maus is a graphic novel by American cartoonist Art Spiegelman, serialized from 1980 to 1991. It depicts Spiegelman interviewing his father about his experiences as a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor. The work employs postmodernist techniques and represents Jews as mice, Germans as cats, and Poles as pigs.

SLIDE SEVENTY-TWO

Escape from Syria

Book by Samya Kullab

-2017

A graphic story of intense current events. From the pen of former Daily Star (Lebanon) reporter Samya Kullab comes a breathtaking and hard-hitting story of one family's struggle to survive in the face of war, displacement, poverty and relocation

and

Center for Cartoon Studies Presents:

Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow

Book by James Sturm

-2007

NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work - Youth / Teens

Baseball Hall of Famer Leroy "Satchel" Paige (1906 - 1982) changed the face of the game in a career that spanned five decades. Much has been written about this larger-than-life pitcher, but when it comes to Paige, fact does not easily separate from fiction

SLIDE SEVENTY-THREE

Influencing Machine

Novel by Brooke Gladstone

- 2011

The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media is a nonfiction graphic novel by journalist Brooke Gladstone and cartoonist Josh Neufeld.

A guide through the complexities of modern media, especially the news media.

SLIDE SEVENTY-FOUR

Green Lantern: Legacy Hardcover Edition

Book by Minh Le (Vietnamese)

art by Andie Tong (Malaysian)

- Jan 21, 2020

- The owner of the Jade Market has a secret--one that will soon change her grandson's life. Thirteen-year-old Tai Pham lives in the apartment above his grandmother's store, where his bedroom is crammed with sketchpads and comic books.

- Wonder Woman as a black woman?

- Marvel’s diversity revamp:

Riri Williams - young genius - Ironheart

- Jane Foster as Thor

- Muslim Teen as Ms. Marvel

and so on...

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