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**Super Terror:
The Complex Relationship Between Sequential Art and Real World
Political Violence**

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Abstract

While scholars have recognized that the media plays a very important role in the understanding of terrorism and other forms of political violence, alternative and popular forms of media (such as the Comic Strip, Graphic Novel, Cartoon, etc.) have not been examined as closely by social scientists.

This research is concerned with the reaction by graphic narratives to events of terror and the graphic work as a way of influencing the public in its opinion of terror.

The main piece examined is Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* which was made as a discussion of the justification of terror with specific historical examples such as Guy Fawkes and political violence in Ireland.

Another text that this paper explores is *The 9/11 Report Graphic Adaptation* that is a graphic work that was made in response to the September 11th terrorist attacks in an attempt to better educate the masses about the events leading up to the attack. In contrast to this, I will examine Paul Jenkin's *Marvel Civil War: Front Line*, a superhero narrative which actively criticizes United States governmental policy post 9-11.

This research also starts a discussion of visual codes in Geoff John's *Green Lantern* series that shows and then counters different stereotypes of Arab Americans that resulted from the aftermath of September eleventh and the War on Terror.

Introduction

Words and images have been used to sway opinion, and certainly public opinion since ancient times: the Egyptian hieroglyphics, Roman coins with images engraved on them,

Hammurabi's code carved in stone for all to see. Modern scholars are still perplexed about exactly how words and images work together. They can be used as a tool for subversion or propaganda, as many posters in Hitler's Germany. Contrariwise, they can be used to provide humor or strengthen one's spirits.

The comic book and comic strip is a particularly interesting use of words and images that have been around for quite some time for entertainment. However, they also have been employed as political tools, whether to critique, to subvert, or to excite. In the early American Revolution, the political cartoon (the comic's predecessor) was used widely, and successfully, in an attempt to sway public opinion toward revolution against the British. In recent years, political cartoons have incited violence throughout the Muslim world when a Danish newspaper published 12 cartoons depicting the Muslim Prophet Muhammad in caricatures. According to Cohen (2009) Al Qaeda responded to the cartoons by bombing the Danish embassy in Pakistan, killing eight people (Cohen, 2009).

In the introduction to this paper, I will argue that more research should be done on the effect that alternative forms of media, specifically the comic book, has on the public's perceptions of terrorism. Unfortunately, because graphic fiction, its history, and its social and political implications are so foreign to many scholars, most of this paper will be a summary. However, the summary itself will provide ample evidence for the relationship between the comic book and terrorism.

First, I will discuss some of the existing research on terrorism and media while also giving my definition of terrorism, and then I will discuss various forms of graphic work that deal with terrorism: the graphic memoir, the super hero story, and lastly comics as a tool by terrorists and/or governments. I will then compare the terrorism in the super hero story comic book format

and the more mainstream film adaptations of those books. Lastly, I will list specific reasons why comic books and other forms of graphic fiction should be considered by terrorism scholars and policy makers as media that should be further researched or studied.

After the introduction, I will examine in more depth four important texts. I will examine them chronologically. I will start with an examination of Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, a dystopian text made in reaction to anxieties from the period of Thatcher's leadership of England, and Reagan's of the free world. I will then discuss Paul Jenkin's critique of the U.S. government in the post September 11th world in *Marvel Civil War: Front Line* in contrast with *The 9-11 Commission Report: A Graphic Adaptation* by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon. Last, I will look at the state of terrorism in modern popular comics through *Green Lantern* by Geoff Johns.

Jenkins (2004) argues that the media plays a huge role in constructing how we view terrorism (Jenkins, 2004). To Jenkins, social processes construct terrorism and we make stereotypes based on these processes that demonize certain groups while ignoring others that are just as much of a threat. The images the media uses helps form these stereotypes, but because terrorism focuses so much on social and political processes it is hard to define and therefore difficult to discuss.

In his article, Scott (n.d.) gives a general overview of how terrorism is depicted in comic books, starting with their earliest appearance in the comic books of the 1940's (Scott). His main focus, however are the fictional terrorist groups created by Marvel Comics in the 1960's such as HYDRA, and more modern depictions of terrorism in comic books. Scott's view is that comic books are ways to discuss real events or fears in a fictional, and motivational way. He says, "[Comics] are a reflection of how people have used [9/11 or terrorism in some form] to tell stories of coping, vengeance or heroism" (Scott).

However, I would assert that Scott's definition of terrorism is flawed. His definition, is as follows and is drawn from the *American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural History*:

“Acts of violence committed by groups that view themselves as victimized by some notable historical wrong. Although these groups have no formal connection with governments, they usually have the financial and moral backing with sympathetic governments.”

There are several problems with his definition: First, I do not believe that violence is necessary, only the threat of violence as long as it causes fear or terror. Second, that the groups usually have the financial and moral background of a government is not necessary. In fact, for many domestic terrorist groups this is not the case at all. Furthermore, Zakaria (2004) asserts that this is not the norm anymore and that terrorists do not need states to exist or act (Zakaria 2004). Another problem with Scott's definition is that that the victims should be specified or else it would be difficult to tell the difference between a terrorist and a soldier. Therefore, the acts or threats of violence mentioned above should be directed toward noncombatants in order for it to qualify as an act of terrorism.

What is right about Scott's definition is that terrorists will usually have a perceived altruism, and respond to what they believe to be an injustice or evil against themselves, this implies the political nature of the terrorist because these responses are usually to achieve some political goal that will alleviate their pain from this “historical wrong.”

Therefore, for this paper the definition of terrorism will be: the act or threat of violence directed toward non-combatants by those who are responding to what they believe to be a historical injustice in order to achieve some political aim to correct this injustice.

There have been several works in the field of political science regarding the relationship between terrorism and the traditional media. Wilkinson (1997) argues that the mass media needs to create new ways to practice self-restraint so that terrorists do not get an edge in the propaganda aspect of their war to reach their political goal (Wilkinson 1997). Essentially, the media can be used by a terrorist organization to disseminate their message and spread fear amongst its targets, moving the terrorists closer to their goals.

The most personal approach, although not the approach typical to the comic books, is the graphic memoir. In these works, the author shares a piece of their life with the reader through corresponding words, pictures, and spaces. The graphic memoir is more likely to cause an emotional response from the reader than the typical comic book, and is more personal, than many other forms of media such as typical news magazines or programs.

Whitlock (2006) discusses the importance of graphic memoirs that happen to deal with terrorism, specifically Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (Whitlock 2006). The first is Spiegelman's account of the September 11th terrorist attacks and the despair that came from it, while the latter is the story of a young girl growing up in a revolutionary Iran. Whitlock says that studying works like this is difficult because despite the nostalgia that graphic works bring, new interpretive skills are required in order to interpret these works in a scholarly fashion.

These works, and others such as *American Widow*, a memoir by Alissa Torres on the loss of her husband on September 11th, are more likely to cause an emotional reaction in the reader, whether fear, hope, despair, than other forms of graphic narrative because the reader takes the memoir as a truth. Although parts can be exaggerated or even surreal, the label of memoir makes the author's political ideology (for Spiegelman it was a denouncement of the War in Iraq)

easier to accept as the reader's own. This idea of truth, as in typical text memoirs or video memoirs, is, therefore, more likely to change public opinion, compel to violence, induce fear, or inspire hope.

Scholars have described the super hero story as a modern form of mythology. Reynolds (1992) discusses how characters such as Wonder Woman, Super Man, and Spider Man were created and have changed over time, and also points out the distinct relationship to comics with mythology through characters like Thor, the Norse God of Thunder, who has been turned into a superhero in his own right (Reynolds 1992).

Many have written off the genre as one for children or the barely literate, but historically fans have argued vehemently in defense of the genre. Reynolds says this is at the dismay of many comic book writers who would like to do more to progress the medium into true art and literature. However, the works of Alan Moore and Frank Miller, among others, helped to legitimize the genre amongst critics in the eighties. Titles such as *The Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*, and *The Dark Knight Returns* were true super hero stories, yet they were full of social commentary. That tradition continues today as many titles are made for adults and are entirely political dealing with topics such as civil war, civil rights and civil liberties, democracy, etc.

Particularly interesting in the study of terrorism is *V for Vendetta*, Alan Moore's story of a masked avenger who is essentially a terrorist. He moves to incite fear through the use of violence, often towards noncombatants, in order to achieve the goal of overthrowing the tyrannical government of a future dystopian England. The book has been adapted to film and is one of the most popular graphic narratives of all time, making its argument that terrorism can be justified all the more important for scholars to examine. Both the film version and the original comic book explore the concepts of terrorism, torture, and civil rights and civil liberties. Both do

make a compelling case for why terrorism is a reasonable tactic. This text will be examined more closely later in this paper.

Typically, however, terrorists tend to be the villains in the super hero story. This can be traced back to World War II when typical criminals were replaced by Nazis and the Japanese as the main evil to combat the super heroes. At the same time, ultra-patriotic heroes, like Captain America, were created to fight these villains. The comics would play off racial stereotypes and, although these comics were not created by United States government, were essentially a form of propaganda. Scott says, “The depiction of the Japanese...was one in which the entire race was an enemy and should be considered duplicitous” (Scott). Many were depicted as having fangs or buck teeth, either to give them the impression of being evil, or of being stupid and easy to triumph over in the battlefield.

Modern comics have tried to make progress away from this stereotyping, however. Shaheen (1994) found that “the comic book reader never sees an Arab ‘fighting the good fight’” (Shaheen 1994). His studies found that Arabs are typically commoners who are unimportant to the plot, or villains in one of three categories: “the repulsive terrorist, the sinister sheikh or the rapacious bandit” (Shaheen 1994). However, there has been some progress in recent months in one of America’s most popular super hero series, *Green Lantern*, published by DC comics. In September of 2012, DC comics revealed Simon Baz, a new character who is an Islamic Arab-American wrongfully accused of being a terrorist. There have been other Muslim super heroes, such as the Batman Inc. character, Nightrunner, or Dust, an Afghani member of the X-men, however, it seems that Simon Baz will become the most prominent since he is currently the main character in one of DC’s most popular series. This new character will be discussed more in a later section of the paper.

Running parallel to the super hero comic was the war comic. The most popular of which, a series called *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*, came in the early eighties. It introduced its own terrorist organization, like Marvel comic's other fictional organization, HYDRA. This one was called Cobra. Norlund (2006) contends that it is important to consider how terrorists were imagined in popular culture before September eleventh, and that Cobra is one of the best representations of that (Norlund). Norlund also discusses that compared to its corresponding television series, the GI Joe comic book is often more violent and more ready to depict images of terror and torture. This says a lot about the role of the super hero story in media. While the comic book is usually considered a genre more suited for children, it has become more and more popular amongst adults, and consequently has added darker more grown-up elements and themes.

Because the comic book, like a pamphlet or political cartoon, is easier to read, it is also very easy to use as a tool for spreading information or even propaganda. The violence that ensued after the publications of the Danish cartoons mentioned in the introduction section of this paper proves just how powerful the visual can be.

While the comic book has been denounced as a teaching tool by educators across America, most likely for the stigma of the genre which resulted from the Comics Code Authority's ban of adult themes in comics during the 1950's, the American military has used comic books/strips as part of its training program for quite some time. Witty (1994) discusses comics and other visual aids in Army training (Witty 1994). In the article, Witty goes into detail on how the comic strip can be instructional. According to him, an Army monthly magazine entitled *Our War* contained comic strips. "This strip relates the experiences of 'Private Pete' and his friend, 'Daffy.' Issues have dealt with the following topics: Christmas in Camp, Pete Goes

Home, Marksman Pete, and Pete Meets Gas” (Witty 1994). There have been many more military training strips.

The super hero story has been adapted to the big screen and the small several times over the last half century. One of the most popular of these is The Dark Knight trilogy, directed by Christopher Nolan which has become one of the most popular film franchises of all time. In every one of these films the villain is a terrorist and uses terrorist techniques and networks, even cyber terrorism is involved. As a side note, the Joker may not be considered a terrorist by many because of a lack of political or social goals, but it is clear that he has one, although it is not typical: anarchy. Regardless, Ip (2011) among others, consider these films as an allegory for the United States in a post 9/11 world. For instance, the film clearly discusses the USA Patriot Act when the heroes of The Dark Knight discuss the evils of infringing on citizen’s right to privacy. However, the film remains ambiguous on the topic, because despite their demonization of infringing on these rights, it is that very infringement that allows Batman to save the day and stop the terrorist.

A super hero film has caused controversy among radical groups recently as well, when Marvel Studios decided to cast a black actor as a Norse god in the movie Thor. The Council of Conservative Citizens quickly decided to boycott the film when they were informed that British actor, Idris Elba was casted for the role of Heimdall. While the group is not a terrorist group per-se, many American white supremacists groups are considered as terrorist organizations, and it seems like decisions made by the creative teams behind super hero movies are able to cause a reaction from these groups.

In this introduction I have made an argument that there should be more study on the relationship between graphic fiction and terrorism, specifically how this alternative form of media sways public opinion. The concept and the medium have strong ties that should be more closely examined. Throughout the rest of the paper, I will examine some of the ways that comics have depicted and reacted to political violence in three distinct eras of history: Pre-September Eleventh, the aftermath of September Eleventh, and the present which I believe to be, at least in popular culture, the early healing stage for a nation that has lived in fear for a decade.

The Real Masked Avengers: Terror in Comics of the 1980's

In this section, I will discuss three of the most important texts in the world of graphic fiction. Those are Alan Moore's *The Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta*, as well as Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. I will demonstrate how they are important in understanding the relationship between terrorism and this alternative form of media, as well as the relationship between the classic archetype of the superhero and the modern day terrorist. I will also discuss the roles of the media in both writer's perspectives because both are critical of the media for completely different reasons, and as stated earlier the media is one of the most important tools that a terrorist can access.

At first glance, it is difficult for most to see the connection between the superhero of comic books and terrorists of the real world. One almost has to imagine how the real world would look if it was actually filled with masked avengers. In what is critically agreed upon as the greatest superhero narrative of all time, *The Watchmen*, author Alan Moore does just that. I want to stress how critically acclaimed this work is by those in and outside of the comic book industry. Some of the awards that the graphic novel has won include: The Eisner Award for excellence in

the comic book industry, the Hugo Award for excellence in science fiction, and, most significantly, it is one of *Time* magazine's top 100 novels of the last century.

In the novel, Moore imagines a realistic world in which a small group of people decided to wear costumes and fight crime. While his world is realistic there are clear elements of dystopian fantasy. However, the characters seem, for the most part, to have very realistic motives for donning the odd bright costumes and fighting villains. Inspired by the Cold War and the reigns of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, Moore imagines a world in which tension between the Soviet Union and the United States continued to escalate rather than diminish and mutually assured destruction was almost guaranteed.

One character, a masked hero (or villain perhaps) named Adrian Veidt, decides that the only way to avoid a nuclear holocaust is by destroying a large portion of New York City, and therefore to unite the world against this new threat that he has created. This can be considered as terrorist attack for the following reasons: 1]. It is clearly an act of violence. Illustrator, Dave Gibbons starts the final chapter of the book by showing six full-page still images without text in order to show the death and destruction in the aftermath of the attack. (note: this could be considered a sell-out moment because comic books are known to commercialize the use of violence; however, if that is the case it is not economically wise because of the amount of pages taken up without any action) 2]. The attack is made with a clear political goal in mind that being the end of the Cold War. 3]. The attack is against noncombatants, in this case the citizens of New York.

What makes this so interesting is that throughout the narrative, Veidt is considered to be the smartest man in the world, and while there is one character who opposes the ideology that leads Veidt to his decision to kill millions of innocents, the story is resolved when the rest of the

“heroes” come to terms with Veidt’s attack as a necessary evil. Indeed, Veidt views himself as the savior of humanity.

In this way, terrorists always view themselves as altruistic. They label themselves as “freedom fighters” or “holy warriors”. If they do believe that any of their actions are evil, they are necessary evils. Also, as Veidt believed that his attack was the only way to save humanity, many theorists believe that radical groups only turn to terrorism when other forms of action are rendered ineffective. Terrorism has proven to be an extremely effective and cost effective means of protest, leading the tactic to be called by many theorists “a poor man’s air force.”

One reason for terrorism’s effectiveness in modern times is the media. The first big terrorist attack to become a global media event was the hostage taking at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972 in which several Israeli athletes were eventually murdered. After this event, terrorism events rose dramatically worldwide, with a model of trying to be as visible to the media as possible.

It is important to note, that while Veidt’s attack and indeed all real world terrorist attacks are very ideological, there is a lot of evidence that suggests that people do not join terrorist organizations for ideological beliefs as much as social solidarity.

Moore uses the phrase “masked adventurers” several times throughout his narrative, but many critics and commentators decided to use a different term to describe the characters that Moore has created as well as other comic book characters. The term is “masked avenger” and the difference seems subtle but it is important. Both terms are typically used to refer to a superhero, or perhaps to a character in a comic book who dresses and acts like a typical superhero yet has no actual superpower. The second phrase, however, is interesting because of its darker connotations. While a masked adventurer may be a costumed character travelling the

world, or simply searching for action and excitement, a masked avenger is a character that is out in costume actively seeking revenge. This is a key difference to note, because as masked adventurers are few and far between in the real world, a masked avenger is far more common.

In the introduction to this paper, I said that terrorism is done as a reaction to some perceived historical wrong. In this way terrorists, like superheroes, are both avengers. While Batman may try to avenge the death of his parents killed by a criminal robbing them, a member of the PLO (Palistine Liberation Organization) would want vengeance against Israel for its possession of former Palestinian land, or Al Qaeda would want vengeance against America for what they perceive as its imperialism and the westernization of the Middle East.

The first half of the phrase is also important. While not all terrorists wear masks (in fact most terror organizations do not have a strict uniform) many appear in the media wearing masks. This point was discussed earlier in this paper in the context of Geoff John's *Green Lantern* series. When an American tries to perceive how a terrorist would look, they may draw off these pieces of media and therefore combine them with stereotypes to imagine all terrorists as wearing a mask of some sort.

The most common mask that comes to mind when one thinks of a terrorist is a balaclava or ski mask. These types of masks are seen in hostage videos in which a terrorist is using the mask to hide its identity. They are also seen in photographs of Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organization that uses military style uniforms including balaclavas and camouflage.

One of the most iconic images of right wing extremism and domestic terrorism in the United States is the white hood of the Ku Klux Klan. These were first donned in order for members to keep their anonymity, and also for ritualistic and fraternal purposes. The Ku Klux Klan is an interesting example because, unlike other terrorist organization, the KKK does not

wear what would be considered uniforms but costumes or regalia much like a comic book character would wear.

However, terrorist organizations are usually “masked” figuratively rather than literally. While most organizations claim responsibility for their attacks and actively recruit, they still try to keep a level of secrecy and anonymity. Many organize in ways that are hard to identify or penetrate such as multiple celled organizations or even leaderless ones. Indeed, in an act familiar to readers of the superhero comics, the attackers of September eleventh 2001 even took fake identities in order to fulfill their plan. One mask that has been used by an extremist group in recent years, was, in fact, taken from a comic book character, whose artist took the idea for the mask from a real world terrorist. The mask is from another book by Alan Moore entitled *V for Vendetta*, which was written around the same time as *Watchmen*, and the extremist organization that has taken up the mask as its symbol is known as Anonymous.

V for Vendetta is interesting because its hero, V, is essentially an anarchist and a terrorist. He uses terrorist tactics such as assassinations, kidnappings, the bombing of populated buildings, torture, and even brainwashing. As a terrorist organization would, he operates clandestinely, yet still makes himself known to moderates. He also hacks government computer networks in order to fulfill his plans.

The book is quite comparable to George Orwell’s *1984* in its depiction of an oppressive governmental regime. In addition to V’s use of terrorism, the text also gives examples of state terror, which is when a government acts violently against its own people. In the text, the oppressive dystopian government of a future regime targets several subgroups of its population for genocide. The hero, V, is a survivor of an execution camp and the historical wrong to which he is responding is the state terror that the government has enacted.

As discussed earlier, the use of media is essential in order for a terrorist organization to achieve its goals. Moore demonstrates this idea throughout the text, as V manipulates media several times in his attempt to overthrow the oppressive regime that he fights. This is the same in the film version in which V's character wears a bomb vest in order to get his message aired on television. While Moore is highly critical of the media throughout the text, he also recognizes it as a very important tool. For him, it is too much controlled and manipulated by the government and government interests. In addition to showing how useful of a tool the media can be to a terrorist, he also acknowledges the need for the media to be free in order for citizens to truly understand their situation and to live freely.

Despite all of the horrible acts of terror that V commits, Alan Moore is able to show V as the hero because he is fighting against a highly oppressive regime. In this way, Moore manipulates the reader to see V not as a terrorist, but as a freedom fighter and even a superhero. It seems that Moore is justifying terror as a legitimate tool to use against a system that is oppressive. While it seems that Moore validates terror only as a response to state terror, it is true that oppression is subjective and can be interpreted in many ways. Is a government oppressive if it bans the use of firearms? Is it oppressive when it restricts homosexuals from getting married? The main question posed by the text is when is a government being oppressive and when is it being oppressive to the point that terrorism is justified as a retaliatory act. Moore does not try to touch on whether it is justified as a preemptive act, but clearly tries to justify it as a method when government is obviously and overly oppressive.

V for Vendetta is an extremely popular book and was adapted into a film in 2005, making V's mask a fairly recognizable icon. Although the story behind V's mask is not very well known in the United States, in the United Kingdom, Moore's Homeland, it is an image synonymous

with historical terror. The mask that V wears is one that is usually worn by effigies on Guy Fawkes Night, or Bonfire Night, in the United Kingdom. This is celebrated every November 5th and festivities usually include the lighting of fireworks and bonfires, as well as the burning of a Guy Fawkes effigy. The day is in celebration of Fawkes and the foiling of his plot to explode the houses of parliament and assassinate the king in 1605.

Guy Fawkes was a Catholic and plotted his attack, which is known as “The Gunpowder Plot” or “The Gunpower Treason” in response to the oppression that many Catholics were experiencing in England at the time. Under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, Catholics were often banned from attending mass and forced to attend Anglican services or else pay fines. They had hoped that her successor, James VI, would treat them better; however, their hopes were ill founded. According to Robinson, in February of 1604 the king “publically announced his ‘utter detestation’ of Catholicism” (Robinson). Fawkes, along with five other plotters, set out to destroy parliament, assassinate the king, and establish a Catholic state, thus ending their oppression. However, Fawkes was caught on November 5, 1605, put to death, and effigies of him are still burned in the United Kingdom to this day.

In an article for *Warrior* issue no. 17, Author Alan Moore transcribes the letter in which artist David Lloyd first brought up the idea of using the image of Fawkes:

“Re. The script: While I was writing this, I had this idea about the hero, which is a bit redundant now we’ve got (can’t read the next bit) but nonetheless... I was thinking, why don’t we portray him as a resurrected Guy Fawkes, complete with one of those papier mache masks, in a cape and conical hat? He’d look really bizarre and it would give Guy Fawkes the image he’s deserved all these years. We shouldn’t burn the chap every Nov. 5th but celebrate his attempt to blow up Parliament!”

Recently, the leaderless, online activist group known as Anonymous has used the mask in protests, demonstrations, and videos. The group is on the borderline of being classified as a terrorist organization. While they have not committed any acts of violence, they have issued several threats to the Church of Scientology among other targets. The group makes its home on a few different image-sharing websites such as 4chan.org. Many have called them terrorists, and while they are only on the borderline of being classified as a terrorist group through our definition, they are definitely an important interest group to watch. In addition to their vast numbers and knowledge of computers, they are truly anonymous. If prompted to resort to terrorist tactics they would be almost impossible to infiltrate because of the leaderless structure of their organization. Their group clearly demonstrates the sociological theory of terrorism that states that those on the fringe of society are more likely to form terrorist groups because of the social solidarity that they provide. The fact that such a powerful radical group has decided to use the Guy Fawkes mask as their symbol shows truly how important graphic fiction can be in rationalizing terrorism as a tactic to induce change against (what the group believes to be) a social injustice.

Around the same time that Alan Moore was writing *The Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta* in the United Kingdom, Frank Miller was releasing his revisionary story of Batman in the United States, *The Dark Knight Returns*. At the time of its publication Batman was already a pop culture icon around the world, but Miller decided to show a different character, an aged Batman, returning to his role as hero after years of retirement.

Miller is clearly critical of the media in the text, but for opposite reasons to Moore's. While Miller allows television reporters to narrate the story, they are always arguing, largely

negative, and clearly sensationalized. For him, the media is something that is overly commercialized and used for entertainment purposes.

Miller shows how a terrorist can use the media when The Joker, one of Batman's most popular villains murders a crowd of people on live television. While The Joker's lack of political goals may exclude him from fitting our definition of terrorist, it is clear in the story that attacks that are highly publicized are able to induce terror in the mass population. A terrorist needs the media in order to have an audience for his or her ideals, without this they cannot attain their social or political goals.

One interesting point in the text is that experts are on the narrating television program discussing whether they think Batman is a hero or villain. Often one side argues that Batman terrorizes or is a terrorist and infringes peoples' freedoms. This argument is also shown in film adaptations of Batman such as Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*.

Miller's text ends with Batman actually leading and organizing an underground terrorist cell. While the cell's goal is to stop crime, the organization fits our definition of terror by: 1]. Using violence or the threat of violence. 2]. Having specific political goals, in this case a crime-free utopian society that will consequently be judged by them and infringe on certain civil liberties 3]. Specifically using the element of fear (implied), which Batman is known to use as a tactic throughout the text.

While a political scientist uses theories and models in order to simplify concepts such as terrorism and try to predict outcomes, Moore and Millar as writers seem to acknowledge how complicated terror is and explore it without giving any real ways on how to deal with the problem. The main goal is to start a discussion. For instance, Moore seems to emit social, rational, psychological, and ideological views on terrorism all together throughout *V for Vendetta*

without every saying which one is the best way to view terrorism. He wisely acknowledges that they all can be at play in any given case. In the text, V clearly wants to start a conversation about how justice should work. Moore and Miller seem to be doing the same with their work.

Commission Reports and Civil War: Comics in the Wake of 9-11

The days after the twin towers fell was a period of unrest for many Americans. Although many did not know how their lives would be changed it was clear, even in the early hours after the attack, that life would not be the same. War came along with new legislation, increased security hurdles at airports and venues, and a nationwide feeling of anxiety and vulnerability. Americans saw the world in a new way.

Everyone was looking for a way to respond to the attack. People donated blood, hung up American flags, came together civically, donated money, and volunteered. Industry and media also responded. In the comic book and cartoon industry, many artists responded through their work as a healing mechanism, such as Art Spiegelman with his book *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Others responded for more economic reasons. In her graphic memoir about her struggle with breast cancer, *Cancer Vixen*, Marisa Acocella describes how she was told by her editor not to continue her work on a strip about having the “it” lifestyle on the day the towers fell because it was no longer relevant. She then went about exploring the New York streets in order to create a cartoon chronicling the stories of several New Yorkers on that day.

The government, of course, also responded to the attacks through war, but also through the creation of The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States that sought to find answers to how the attacks happened and give recommendations in order to prevent future terror attacks. Also known as The 9/11 Commission, they were established in

2002, and the report was released by United States government and published in book form in 2004. The report has also been made available for free online by the government.

The report was then adapted into a graphic form in 2006 by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon. The adaptation was approved by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission and is about 3/20 of the size of the original text, which is just under 600 pages. Sid Jacobson (perhaps best known for creating the character Richie Rich) and Ernie Colon gave this as their reason for adapting the report into the graphic form:

Our desire to adapt The 9/11 Report arose from the desire to render the complex accessible. After both of us struggled with the verbal labyrinth of the original report, we decided there must be a better way. Then it occurred to us...that visually adapting the information in the report--comics, the graphic medium—was the better way. We could tell the story graphically to make it more easily understood. For example: by creating a visual timeline of the four planes on that terrible day, we could tell the simultaneous happenings of that calamity more clearly than any attempt to do so using just words. What was more, we could make it more informative, more available, and, to be frank, more likely to be read in its entirety (Jacobson).

While their adaptation is successful in presenting complex themes and ideas in a condensed and easy to understand book, it does have some faults. The first of these is an obvious one, the cost. For being so much smaller it is considerable more expensive and not put online as a free educational tool as was the original report. In this way, although it conveys information in a easier to understand format, it is still harder to obtain the information.

Another fault in the text is that while many terrorism scholars suggest that lowering the levels of fear felt by citizens after terrorist attacks renders the tactic of terrorism less effective and therefore less likely to be used, the artwork in the adaptation can at many times be disturbing and arouse additional fears and terrors. There are images of Middle Eastern men with box-cutters attacking pilots and taking hostages. While this conveys the truth of the event, this also makes the adaptation unhelpful in educating youth (or at least immature or easily frightened youth), which seems to be one of the main reasons for its creation in the first place.

While on one side of the comic book industry this healing and educational reaction to the September eleventh attacks was happening, in the more commercial world of super hero comic books, artists and writers tried to use the medium as a way to cope as well as vent frustrations and even critique government policy.

One of the most commercially successful pieces that did this was Marvel Comic's *Civil War* storyline, which specifically criticized the USA Patriot act. This storyline was massive, lasting for several issues across several popular characters' books including *The Amazing Spiderman*, *The Fantastic Four*, and *Wolverine*. It also spawned two original mini-series. *Marvel Civil War* and *Marvel Civil War: Front Line*. These books told a tale of a fearful citizenry in the wake of a national disaster calling on its government to have harsher laws that restricted individual privacy. In this superhero world, the government would require all active superheroes to register and reveal their secret identities or else be labeled "enemy combatants" and sent to a special prison, the Gulag, without trial. The reference to Guantanamo Bay is strikingly obvious throughout.

However, especially in Paul Jenkin's *Front Line*, the series remains complicated and refuses to put the issue into black and white morality. The story focuses on reporters Ben Urich

and Sally Floyd who are doing stories on pro-registration and anti-registration super groups respectively. At the start of the narrative Sally is vehemently against the invasion of the privacy that comes with the registration act, while Ben is passively opposed. Throughout the course of the story, however, the two come to realize that the act has its benefits while others become disenfranchised by it. In this way, the author of the story is also able to comment on the role of the media during crisis situations. The message seems to be that for the most part the media sensationalizes news for its own benefit, while there are many reports that mix the true with the sensational.

Every issue in the series is actually composed of two or three continuing stories in addition to the main one about the two reporters. One of these is a series of stories about historical wars that parallel the current plot in the superheroes' world. The most emotionally stirring of these stories is one about the Japanese internment camps during World War II. Through this short story the author describes a Japanese man and his daughter reluctantly accepting their stay in an internment camp as "helping the war effort" and "our duty. Because we are Americans." Next to the image of the family walking into the camp is an image of the Statue of Liberty towering over Spiderman, Marvel's most popular hero. The character is looking up at the symbol of liberty and in a text bubble says, "...with great power, huh?" (Jenkins). This references his classic motto, which has seeped into mainstream popular culture, "With great power comes great responsibility." The clash between the two images is jarring and stirring. One in which a man and his family accept an unjust hardship as his responsibility and in the other the very symbol of American liberty being questioned for not fulfilling hers.

Through these ways the social imagination of the American citizenship was able to be reflected through the comic medium. Like most popular culture of the time, it was used to cope, to heal, to educate, to criticize, to vent, and to provide an outlet for escape.

Geoff John's *Green Lantern*: Combatting and Reinforcing Stereotypes

Now I will discuss an important new and current character in America's post terror healing. Simon Baz, the new title character in DC Comic's *Green Lantern*, is an interesting example of how graphic narratives deal with stereotypes and the public's perceptions of terrorism. Baz who was introduced in 2012 has so far had a short but influential storyline. He has also been picked to be a character in another new series, *Justice League of America*, and has proved to be quite popular with readers and critics alike.

Green Lantern as a long running series has tried to deal with social justice issues for decades, mostly superficially by adding new characters to its roster that are of different racial backgrounds, or even, more recently, sexual orientations. Baz is in line with this tradition as he is one of very few Arabic or Muslim superheroes in the American popular comic market.

The basic premise of the *Green Lantern* series is that there is a intergalactic police force of sorts called The *Green Lantern Corps*. The corps is led by a group of guardians who essentially act as benevolent gods throughout the run of the series. The members of the corps, or the various individual *Green Lanterns*, get their power through magic rings that pick those who have the ability to overcome great fear. These rings are extremely powerful and give them the ability to create energy constructs or emit energy blasts in order to perform rescues, recon, prevent crime and even have epic battles with super-villains.

The main conflict through the first several issues of Simon Baz's run as the Green Lantern, is that the United States government has accused him of being a terrorist because he stole a car that had a bomb in it. After being interrogated, Baz is surprised when a Green Lantern ring (in DC superhero comics, a ring that gives its wearer the power to create constructs out of a mysterious alien energy source, or to use it as a energy weapon, its limits based only on the willpower of the wearer) appears to him in his prison cell and helps him escape. Several issues into the narrative we find that Baz truly is innocent although all the evidence to clear his name was destroyed. Additionally, the real terrorist, who planted the bomb in the first place, turns out to be a middle aged Caucasian man.

The most controversial item in the comic is the appearance of Baz in his costume and his choice to carry a handgun. On the cover of his debut issue (*Green Lantern #0*) Baz is seen wearing a costume that consists of a black outfit with a Green Lantern symbol on the chest topped with a hood that is very similar to a ski mask. The mask is unlike all other Green Lantern masks; most of the other Green Lantern characters choose to wear small masks that cover just around the eyes, or no mask at all. The hooded mask denotes images of masked killers, criminals, or terrorists. In fact several terrorist organizations, including Hamas, have photographs with their members masked similarly. In recent years, many terrorists have been seen wearing a similar mask in hostage videos online. On the cover of the same issue Baz is holding a handgun, pointed directly towards the purchaser of the comic or the reader. Despite being just a picture on a page, the image is quite threatening and may be alarming to many readers or casual passersby.

So essentially, the reader is seeing an Arab man in a terrorist style hood with a gun aimed at them. To make it clear that Baz is Arabic this cover also establishes him as having a bright

green tattoo on his arm, which says the word “courage” in Arabic script. So not only do readers see this threatening image countered with the Green Lantern symbol, but also they are made aware that this threatening looking man is of Arabic decent. To any casual passerby, this image could strongly reinforce post-9/11 American anti-Arabic stereotypes.

The inside of the comic shows a much less threatening character in Simon Baz. He is shown watching the September 11th terrorist attacks on television and deals with the emotional stress of being Arabic-American in the aftermath of the attack. He is shown to be clearly innocent of terrorism (although not auto theft), and he also takes time to care for a sick family member.

The content inside the issues remain very positive countering negative stereotypes throughout. The narrative is quite critical of the way that the United States government pursues and accuses terrorists. However, President Barack Obama appears in the second issue and is informed of the possibility that a terrorist may have acquired a Green Lantern ring, essentially a weapon of mass destruction. Obama is concerned, yet less quick than others to pass judgment on Baz.

Baz is shown to be a very important character to the mythology of the series by being the first character to be able to use his new powers in order to heal someone. This seems to be a direct choice by the writers to counter the prejudices of the government officials in the narrative, because the plot reveals that the man that the officials are pursuing for terrorism is actually a hero with miraculous healing powers.

The moment in the text that perhaps best symbolizes Baz’s acceptance into the superhero community is when the most popular Green Lantern, Hal Jordan (Caucasian), asks what his Arabic tattoo means. When Baz responds by saying “Courage,” there is a bright flash of green

light and a text bubble that says “ring connected” which symbolizes his acceptance and importance in the group. In the same way America is finally learning to step beyond stereotypes caused by the events of September 11th.

Though the actual texts continue to combat stereotypes, the covers continue to contain visual codes that reinforce them. For instance, on one cover there is a close shot of Baz’s arms handcuffed behind him with the Arabic tattoo shining bright green right next. While this image is not threatening like in his debut, it does connote that those who are Arabic should be imprisoned. The only information that the cover reveals about the character is that he is dark skinned and has a tattoo in Arabic. So a person viewing the cover without any prior knowledge of the character would just see a man being held as a criminal for what they can only imply to his being Arabic, and possibly through drawing on stereotypes a terrorist.

Another cover shows Baz fighting the Justice League, which consists of some of the most popular and easily identifiable characters in American pop culture including Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. In the text of the book the reader finds that the Justice League believes him to be a terrorist and is confronting him over his escape from prison. Seeing these classic heroes fighting an Arab man wearing what resembles a ski mask, might make a casual or even frequent reader think that Simon Baz is just the classic racist Arabic archetypal villain.

The most positive cover on which he has appeared on is one in which he is not the main character. That is *Justice League of America* issue #1, which came out February 2013. The cover has many superheroes of different ethnic and racial backgrounds reenacting the classic photograph of the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima. Instead of reinforcing stereotypes, this cover embraces American diversity and shows Baz in a patriotic light. However, the covers featuring Baz have started to grow away from this reinforcement of stereotypes and into the generic

commercial form of other Green Lantern comics. In this way, Baz's religion and ethnicity are becoming less of a hot button issue as he is accepted as a bona fide hero.

Further research

There are several reasons why those who investigate terrorism should be conscious of graphic fiction and the ways that it portrays terrorism. Above, I have given adequate background of how the field of study relates to the medium as well of specific connections through different important time periods in America's consciousness of terrorism, and now I will give some more specific relationships.

It is very possible that rather than as a reaction to terrorism, the graphic memoir can be used as a tool to incite terrorism. Because the visual coding is so personal and emotional, it is more likely to call someone to action, even more than a typical memoir because of the power of the images. If a particularly powerful memoir in reaction to some notable historical wrong called for a violent response, it is very likely that many moderates would join with their more extreme counterparts and take up the call to action.

Also, while I have asserted that is no longer accurate to claim that graphic literature is genre made for children or the illiterate, it can very well be used as a tool for education for either states or terrorist groups. It is important for states to be aware of any alternative media, graphic material or otherwise, that is being produced by terrorist organizations. In an age with media overflow, people will take what is easily available, and (although, as I have said, most major comic book publishers are moving farther away from that) comics can be made to cater to

children and/or the illiterate through the use of picture stories. These two groups are likely more impressionable than others.

In addition to this, political nation-states need to embrace the graphic narrative as a tool, like Jacobson and Colon have done and use it to educate their populations. While the U.S. government has tried unsuccessfully to use visual representations of terror in the past with the Homeland Security Advisory System, the use of the comic as a “picture story” can help to quickly educate the U.S. citizenry terrorism, safety, and almost any other important public issue.

Another important aspect of the comic book that relates to terrorism is the social one. While the superhero story has become more widely receptive thanks to modern Hollywood adaptations, a large portion of readers still tends to be socially alienated. This is important because Abrahms (2008) makes a compelling argument that individuals join terrorist organizations for the social solidarity that it offers, which can be even more important than the social or political goal that the organization has (Abrahms 2008). One of Abrahms’s reasons for this is that terrorist groups appeal to the ostracized (Abrahms 2008). Therefore, perhaps comic book fans are a pool for terrorist organizations to recruit from. However, there is some evidence to the contrary. Duncan (2009) claims that comic book fandom is a cultural community in itself, therefore already providing for social solidarity. Regardless, the correlation is important and deserves further study.

Additionally, political scientists in particular need to move beyond the study of the typical news media and see how more popular forms of media effect and reflect the current American political culture. These popular forms outside of the new media are key to understanding public opinion and public discourse.

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SUPER TERROR

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Abstract

While scholars have recognized that the media plays a very important role in the understanding of terrorism and other forms of political violence, alternative and popular forms of media (such as the Comic Strip, Graphic Novel, Cartoon, etc.) have not been examined as closely by social scientists.

This research is concerned with the reaction by graphic narratives to events of terror and the graphic work as a way of influencing the public in its opinion of terror. The main piece examined is Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* which was made as a discussion of the justification of terror with specific historical examples such as Guy Fawkes and political violence in Ireland. Another text that this paper explores is the *9-11 Report Graphic Adaptation* which is a graphic work that was made in response to the September 11th terrorist attacks in an attempt to better educate the masses about the events leading up to the attack.

This research also starts a discussion of visual codes in Geoff Johns' *Green Lantern* series that shows and then counters different stereotypes of Arab Americans that resulted from the aftermath of September eleven and the War on Terror.

Defining Terror

While there are several definitions of terror that reflect different theories on terrorism, for this project we decided to define terrorism as follows: the act or threat of violence directed toward non-combatants by those who are responding to what they believe to be a historical injustice in order to achieve some political aim to correct this perceived injustice.

Masked Avengers



The Ku Klux Klan has historically been used in order to inspire fear and retain anonymity. It is interesting that their costumes are indeed costumes and have no military or utilitarian purposes the other organizations have adopted.



One of the most interesting masks to be worn by an extremist group, the Guy Fawkes mask is modeled after a 1600s terrorist who plotted to assassinate King James VI as well as destroy the buildings of parliament. The mask was then adopted for the graphic form when superhero *V for Vendetta* in Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*. The comic was adapted into a film, which then inspired online extremist groups. Anonymous, in use as their symbol.



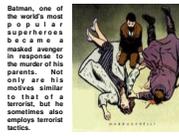
The perceived wrong that the terrorist group, Hamas, responds to is the Zionist occupation of Gaza. They often wear military style uniforms including balaclavas.

When trying to decipher the relationship between the superhero narrative and real-world terrorism, one must imagine a real world with masked vigilantes. Is it so far fetched? Or do masked avengers exist in our world?

As previously stated, a terrorist acts in reaction to some perceived historical wrong. For members of the Ku Klux Klan, for example, that perceived wrong would be the integration of the African American race with the white race, which they believe to be dominant, or for Al Qaeda it would be the westernization of the Middle East caused by United States Imperialism. The superhero of the comic page also shares this trait. They are created by combining some personal tragic event with their own ideology in order to create a new persona.

They are also both masked. An obvious example is The Ku Klux Klan who don costumes and regalia for a very similar reason that many comic book heroes do, for anonymity as well as inducing fear. While many terrorist organizations do not have an official uniform, terrorist organizations are masked in that they are clandestine in nature. Many use false identities, wear balaclavas, and use other devices in order to hide their identity. Although they actively recruit and try to convey their messages, they also operate in cells or even leaderless resistance in order to retain anonymity.

It is important to remember, that terrorists believe themselves to be altruistic. They may label themselves "freedom fighters" or "Holy Warriors". In this way, they like superheroes believe that they are fighting for the greater good of humanity.



Batman, one of the world's most popular superheroes, is a masked avenger in response to the murder of his parents. Not only are his motives similar to that of a terrorist, but he sometimes also employs terrorist tactics.

Complicate and Simplify

Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* and the 9-11 Report Graphic Adaptation



The graphic narrative has always been a very popular form. It also is a form in which people are easily able to retain information. This is because the medium, to a degree that no other art is able to, cause the consumer to interact with it. In order for the brain to translate a sequence of comic panels, it must decipher what happens in between the panels. The reader must use his or her imagination in order to get past the white space.

In both the East and the West, the graphic narrative is being used as a tool to simplify and educate citizens on complex topics. There are two examples of this shown above. The first, on the left is a segment from the 9-11 Report Graphic Adaptation by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon. In this work, the authors take the complicated information from the 9-11 Commission Report and condense it into an easy to read education tool.

The second example is a segment of an Iraqi graphic biography of Saddam Hussein in which Hussein is the "hero" character. Hussein, known as the leader who put down dissenter, is seen as the hero of the story.

Contrary to these narratives pieces of graphic work which aim to simplify the complex, many works of popular graphic fiction have



done the opposite. While a social scientist works to use theories and models to simplify concepts such as terror, acclaimed writers including those in the graphic narrative choose to discuss the concepts in all of their complexity in order to let the reader ponder them further.



V for Vendetta by Alan Moore is a very interesting graphic novel because the hero of the text, V, is essentially an anarchist and a terrorist. He uses terrorist tactics such as assassinations, kidnappings, the bombing of populated buildings, torture, and even brainwashing. Like a terrorist organization would he operates clandestinely, yet still makes himself known to moderates. He also hacks government computer networks in order to fulfill his plans.

The book is quite comparable to George Orwell's 1984 in its depiction of an oppressive governmental regime. In addition to V's use of terrorism, the text



also gives examples of state terror, which is when a government acts violently against its own people. In the text, the oppressive dystopian government of a future targets several subgroups of its population for genocide. The hero, V, is a survivor of an execution camp and the historical wrong that he is responding to is the state terror that the government has enacted.

Despite all of the horrible acts of terror that V commits, Alan Moore is able to show V as the hero because he is fighting against a highly oppressive regime. In this way, Moore manipulates the reader to not see V as a terrorist, but as a freedom fighter and even a superhero. It seems that Moore is justifying terror as a legitimate tool to use against a system that is oppressive. While it seems that Moore only validates it as a response to state terror,

oppression is subjective and can be interpreted in many ways. Is a government oppressive if it bans the use of firearms? Is it oppressive when it restricts homosexuals from getting married? The main question posed by the text is when is a government being oppressive and when is it being oppressive to the point that terrorism is justified as a retaliatory act. Moore does not try to touch on whether it is justified as a preemptive act, but clearly tries to justify it as a method of reaction to a government that is obviously and overly oppressive.

Re-defining Post 9-11 Stereotypes in the Modern Superhero story



The debut of Simon Baz in Green Lantern #1, 2012.



Green Lantern #15



Green Lantern #14



On the cover of Justice League of America #1, Baz is never included in a popular hero team and is portrayed in an overly patriotic way.

In 2012, writer Geoff Johns introduced Simon Baz, the first Arab American Green Lantern. Green Lantern has been a series that celebrates diversity for decades now, but the inclusion of Baz is still a big step towards countering stereotypes.

Ironically, however, the cover of the first issue where Baz appears exploits Post 9/11 stereotypes of Arab people and Muslims in the United States rather than countering them. The artist and author decided to give the character a full hood, which resembles a balaclava or ski mask while other Green Lantern characters wear a small mask or no mask at all. The mask is similar to ones that terrorists as portrayed as wearing and a media savvy consumer is sure to draw the connection. He is also seen pointing a gun directly at the reader. This gives the impression that he is violent and possibly dangerous. He also has a visible tattoo in Arabic. This image reinforces these stereotypes that Arab people are violent and dangerous.

The same is true with issue 15 in which Baz's arms are seen in close up, highlighting his Arabic tattoo. His hands are cuffed. This reinforces the idea that Arab people are terrorists because the image suggests that Baz has committed a crime and should be imprisoned.

And on yet another issue's cover Baz is seen fighting the Justice League which includes popular American superheroes such as Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman. Seeing him fighting these defenders of the "American way" imply that he is counter to the American way.

However, after turning the covers, Johns writes a story that causes the

reader to rethink these stereotypes. Baz is accused of being a terrorist because of his ethnic background and an odd coincidence in which a bomb detonates in a building where he used to work. He is then on a quest to clear his name. Eventually, it is discovered that a middle aged white man is the real terrorist. This reminds the reader that terrorism exists in other forms besides Islamic extremism.

In a defining moment in the story arc, Baz is questioned by a skeptical Hal Jordan (the most popular of the Green Lantern heroes and Baz's predecessor). Baz eventually reveals to Hal that the Arabic tattoo on his arm translates to "courage". At this point, he is affirmed as a bona fide superhero by his predecessor. When the dialogue box says, "I've connected with his ring, it represents Baz's acceptance into this order of super heroes."



Simon Baz now appears in a new monthly comic book called, Justice League of America. This book features several second tier super heroes. He is still very much a new character in comic book mythology. It will be interesting to see how his character continues to develop.