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Superman's Dawn

Lois e Clark from New Deal to War 1941-1945

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ABSTRACT

The first Superman comics were published during the New Deal. The problems faced by the New Deal (financial speculation, corruption, poverty, unemployment, social security) can be found in the comics. Siegel and Shuster, like many comics authors, were American Jews, a social group that typically supported Roosevelt and his politics. In the years leading to the 1941-1945 war the United States slowly moved from isolationism to interventionism; Superman comics testify this evolution and indeed anticipate it. We then consider Lois Lane, its role of reporter and its narrative function, hinting at the evolution of the character.

Keywords: Superman, Clark Kent, Lois Lane, Comics, New Deal and Popular Culture.

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Fear itself

On March 4, 1933 in the United States awaited the inaugural address of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, elected president in November of the previous year. A Democrat after a series of Republican presidents, he had promised a new founding pact (New Deal) to solve the nation's economic problems.

It was the hardest period of the Great Depression that started with the stock market crash of 1929 and would last for more than ten years. The gross domestic product, in 1933, had plummeted to half the 1929 level; millions of people had lost their homes because they could not afford their mortgages; unemployment had risen to 25 per cent, about 13 million workers. Since the collapse of 1929, more than five thousand banks had failed, taking with them about \$7 billion of savers'.¹ Hundreds of thousands of Americans were deprived of any means of subsistence:

The bread-line! Its row of downcast, disillusioned men; unlucky creatures who have found that life holds nothing but bitterness for them. The bread-line! Last resort of the starving vagrant. With a contemptuous sneer on his face, Professor Smalley watched the wretched unfortunates file past him. To him, who had come of rich parents and had never been forced to face the rigors of life, the miserableness of these men seemed deserved, It appeared to him that if they had the slightest ambition at all they could easily lift themselves from their terrible rut.

It is the beginning of Jerry Siegel's *The Reign of the Super-Man*, published with Joe Shuster's illustrations on their fanzine SCIENCE FICTION #3 (1933), and which anticipated elements of their most famous character: Superman². The passivity observed by Professor Smalley is an established fact, which struck Roosevelt himself. Historian David Kennedy explains it in this way:

Indeed, contempt for the Depression's victims, ironically enough, often lodged most deeply in the hearts and minds of the victims themselves... The Depression thus revealed one of the perverse implications of American society's vaunted celebration of individualism. In a culture that ascribed all success to individual striving, it seemed to follow axiomatically that failure was due to individual inadequacy.³

The day that became the symbol of the collapse is October, 24 1929, the "Black Thursday" when panic led to the sale of about 13 million shares, although the following Tuesday, 29th, it

¹ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 162-163; Arnaldo Testi, *Il secolo degli Stati Uniti* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2017) 133.

² Brad Ricca, *Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster - the Creators of Superman*, 2013, 68-69.

³ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 90, 215, quotation from 174.

went even worse and more than 16 million shares changed hands.⁴ After listing the weaknesses of the American economy, Galbraith likened the effects of the Wall Street collapse to hail falling on a glasshouse⁵. More recent historiography is less categorical. For example, Patel states that “the collapse was not the only trigger of the Great Global Depression, nor was its main cause”.⁶

The memory of stock speculation persisted for a long time and we find it in the stories of Superman *Black Gold Oil Well*, (Action Comics #11, April 1939) and *The Economic Enemy* (Superman #4, Spring 1940).⁷

the only thing we have to fear is fear itself

said at the opening of his speech Roosevelt. He did not hide the seriousness of the situation, nor could it have been possible to do so:

Values have shrunk to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.

*More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return.*⁸

However, he was eventually able to proudly state that "The people of the United States have not failed"⁹ and had reaffirmed his confidence in democracy, in contrast to what had happened in Germany where, in the wake of the depression, the Nazis had gained a large following and Adolf Hitler had been appointed chancellor a few weeks earlier on 30 January 1933.

As the first measure of the 'Hundred Days', Roosevelt declared banks nationwide closed, while emergency banking relief legislation was prepared and passed by Congress (*Emergency Banking Relief Act*, March, 9 1933). The banks would reopen the following Monday 13th and on Sunday evening Roosevelt held his first Fireside Chat on the radio, conveying calm and

⁴ John Kenneth Galbraith. *The great crash, 1929*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009, 98, 111.

⁵ Ibid. 177-186.

⁶ Patel, Kiran Klaus. *The New Deal: A Global History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. We consulted the Italian translation: Kiran Klaus Patel, *Il New Deal: una storia globale* (Torino: Einaudi, 2018), 35.

⁷ Early Superman stories (Action Comics, Superman, World's Finest Comics) are reprinted in Jerry Siegel et al., *Superman: The Golden s Omnibus*. Volumes 1-6, (Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2013-2019). Some of the Superman stories were without title, later added by DC Comics in reprints, so a different title may be found in other studies. The books were published several months in advance of the cover date, to ensure greater visibility in the newsstand.

⁸ Roosevelt, Franklin D., e John Grafton. *Great speeches*. Dover thrift editions. Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1999, 29, 30.

⁹ Ibid. 33.

confidence: “I can assure you that it is safer to keep your money in a reopened bank that under the mattress.” When it reopened, deposits exceeded withdrawals. “Capitalism was saved in eight days.” the president's¹⁰ staff would later comment.

The relationship with the citizens through the radio contributed to the President's popularity. In 1930, radio was present in about 15 million households (about 29 million in 1940).¹¹ While Roosevelt was among the first to realise the possibilities, he was not the only one. Populist clergyman Charles Coughlin had a large following; the powerful conservative newspaper *Chicago Tribune* featured radio station WGN (an acronym from the newspaper's motto: The World's Greatest Newspaper). The *Chicago Tribune* hosted Harold Gray's strip Little Orphan Annie, which offered a vision of the world close to upper-middle-class values.¹² Superman had its own radio series that ran from 1940 to 1951¹³. With an average of 4.5 million listeners it was the number one program for young people¹⁴. The radio series appeared in the story *The Big Superman Broadcast* written by Don Cameron, (Superman #39 March-April 1946). Bud Collyer was Clark Kent/Superman, Joan Alexander - third voice from June 1940- was Lois Lane. At the beginning of each episode Superman was introduced with phrases that would later distinguish the character:

“Faster than a speeding bullet,” the narrator intoned. “More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound!”

Man: “Look! Up in the Sky!”

Second man: “It’s a Bird!”

Woman: “It’s a Plane!”

First man: “It’s Superman!”

Narrator: “Yes, it’s Superman! Strange visitor from another world...fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice and the American way!”¹⁵

Added in 1942, the last words affirmed the uniqueness of the American experiment. Henry Wallace, of the Roosevelt administration, published the article *The Search for the American Way*

¹⁰ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 135-137.

¹¹ USA e Bureau of the Census, *Historical statistics of the United States colonial times to 1970 1* (1975) (Brooklyn, N.Y: Revisionist Pr.), 793.

¹² White, David Manning, e Robert H Abel. *The Funnies: An American Idiom*. New York: The Free Press, 1967. We consulted the Italian translation: Robert H Abel e David Manning White, *Sociologia del fumetto americano* (Milano: Bompiani, 1966), 142-3, 148ff; Vrana, Eugene Dennis. «Comic Strips As Propaganda: The New Deal Experience». *Nature, Society, and Thought* 2, n. 4 (1989) 414.

¹³ Larry Tye, *Superman: the high-flying history of America’s most enduring hero*, 1st ed (New York: Random House, 2012), Ch.4. Some broadcasts can be listened to again here https://archive.org/details/superman_otr

¹⁴ Larry Tye, *Superman*, 83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 89.

in the July 1936 issue of *Scribner's Magazine*.¹⁶ Roosevelt spoke of "an American way of life" in his Acceptance Speech in Philadelphia on July, 27 1936.

Golden Age

Eastern Color Printing (Connecticut) took care of color printing for pulp and newspaper syndicates. In 1933 two employees, Harry Wildenberg and Max Gaines, came up with the idea of using existing printing plates to produce booklets to reprint comic strips. After a few runs given away as gifts with consumer products, comic books in the new cheap format were distributed on newsstands with the Famous Funnies series (1934). The comic book started a revolution in mass culture that not only provided escapes but also contributed to the construction of a shared identity.¹⁷

A few years later, a new strip by two young authors, Siegel (texts) and Shuster (drawings), which had already been submitted to the press agencies - "they submitted and resubmitted for several years"¹⁸ —arrived on the desk of Max Gaines, who had started an independent publishing activity. According to one version of the story, Gaines was not interested and, on the advice of the young Sheldon Mayer, suggested Superman to his associate Harry Donenfeld, who was looking for material for the new Action Comics series. In his biographical profile, Gaines later wrote "Originator of the comic book in its present form, he is also credited with discovering that super-streamlined hero for the young: Superman."¹⁹ In a leonine pact, Donenfeld bought all rights to the character for \$130, and Superman appeared on the cover of Action Comics #1 (June 1938).²⁰

The strips inside had been reassembled to fit the new format. Superman's origin story took up only one panel, so that the action developed immediately:

As a distant planet was destroyed by old age, a scientist placed his infant son within a hastily devised space-ship, launching it toward earth! When the vehicle landed on earth a passing motorist, discovering the sleeping babe within, turned the child over to an orphanage. The attendants, unaware the child's physical structure was millions of years more advanced of their own, were astounded at his feats of strength. When maturity was reached, he discovered he could easily leap 1/8th of a mile; hurdle a twenty-story building, raise tremendous weights, run faster than an express train and that nothing less than a bursting shell could penetrate his skin. Early,

¹⁶ Wendy Wall, *Inventing the «American Way»: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 42. See also: Patel, *New Deal* 336.

¹⁷ David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 21-22. Bradford W. Wright, *Comic book nation: the transformation of youth culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) 3-4, 11.

¹⁸ Brad Ricca, *Super Boys* 134.

¹⁹ David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague* 73.

²⁰ Bradford W. Wright, *Comic book nation: the transformation of youth culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) 5-9. For more details. Ricca *Super Boys* Ch.14.

Clark decided he must turn his titanic strength into channels that would benefit mankind. And so was created SUPERMAN, champion of the oppressed.

Superman #1 (July 1939) would tell the story again and each new version would enrich it. Clark Kent is a journalist at the *Daily Star* (becoming the *Daily Planet* from Superman #4 Spring 1940) where he meets his colleague Lois Lane from the very first issue. The sales of Action Comics (monthly - 900,000 copies) and Superman (bimonthly - 1,300,000 copies) created the Golden Age of comic books.²¹

Born in Cleveland in 1914, Jerome (Jerry) Siegel devoured science-fiction pulps, writing enthusiastic letters to them: “I buy every issue of Argosy, Weird Tales and our magazine [Amazing Stories]”. Siegel devoted much time to the high school newspaper in Glenville, a suburb of Cleveland. ²²

Joe Shuster was born in Canada the same year as Jerry. When the Shusters moved to Cleveland and enrolled Joe at the same school, the two met and shared a passion for pulps. In October 1932, they published the fanzine SCIENCE FICTION. Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson had founded National Allied Publication in 1934 to produce comic books with original content: Jerry and Joe collaborated with several characters. The major and Harry Donenfeld then teamed up to publish Detective Comics magazine; Detective Comics Inc. would be one of the companies that merged into DC Comics, along with National Allied Publication, which the major sold to Donenfeld in 1937.²³

From a faraway world

Joe Shuster was born to Jewish immigrants. His mother Ida, who had escaped from the Russian pogroms, had met Jacob Schusterowitz in Rotterdam and together they arrived in Canada, in Halifax, in 1912. They settled in Toronto and changed their surname to Shuster after arriving in the USA .²⁴ Jerome Siegel's parents were also Jewish emigrants from Lithuania.

*It wasn't Krypton that Superman really came from; it was the planet Minsk or Lodz or Vilna or Warsaw.*²⁵

Immigration to the United States traditionally came from north-central Europe, but towards the end of the 19th century it was overtaken by 'new immigration' from southern and eastern Europe, driven by a variety of economic

²¹ Bradford W. Wright, *Comic book nation* 13-14.

²² Ricca *Super Boys* 25 (lettera ad *Amazing Stories*), 39.

²³ *Ibid.* 41, 104, 118, 147.

²⁴ Voloj, Julian, e Thomas Campi. *Truth, Justice, and the American Way: The Joe Shuster Story*, New York : Papercutz, 2018. We consulted the italian translation: Julian Voloj e Thomas Campi, *Joe Shuster: la storia degli uomini che crearono superman*, trad. da Leonardo Favia (Milano: BAO, 2018)

²⁵ Jules Feiffer quoted in Paul Levitz e Josh Baker, *The Golden Age of DC Comics 1935-1956*, 2013 97.

and political factors.²⁶ These were often unskilled manpower: the kind that the new industrial system based on automation and division of labour required.²⁷

In the Superman stories we find immigrants such as the miner Kober, injured in *The Blakely Mine Disaster*, and the slum boy Marello from *Superman in the Slums* (Action Comics #3, #8). These figures are portrayed as victims of exploitation and poverty.²⁸

Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, particularly in Tsarist Russia, generated restrictive laws and savage pogroms and drove many Jews to the United States. Four million arrived between 1880 and 1924, half of them settling in New York, on Manhattan's Lower East Side.²⁹ Like the immigrants of Little Italy, these enclaves of different religion and culture were considered a threat to the true nature of the American people, according to pseudo-scientific eugenics³⁰ theories. In response, Congress passed strict laws in 1921 and 1924 restricting unwanted immigration to a trickle, with annual quotas divided by nation.³¹

That Siegel and Shuster were Jews and comic writers was no coincidence. Even in the United States there were prejudices and many jobs were forbidden to them. In Hollywood, Jew was a connotated word: in the movie *The Mortal Storm* (Frank Borzage, 1940), which also denounces anti-Semitism, it is replaced by non-Aryan. Non-Aryan appears in one of the plates of "How Superman Would End the War".³² In *To Be Or Not To Be* (1942) Ernst Lubitsch had to remove 'Jew' from Shylock's monologue (Merchant of Venice, III,I).³³

²⁶ Stefano Luconi e Matteo Pretelli, *L'immigrazione negli Stati Uniti* (Bologna: Mulino, 2008) 82-83. Katz, William Loren. *The Great Migrations, 1880s-1912*. Austin, Tex.: Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 1993.

²⁷ Giovanni Borgognone, *Tecnocrati del progresso: il pensiero politico americano del Novecento tra capitalismo, liberalismo e democrazia*, 2015, Chapter 6. Taylor, Frederick Winslow. *The principles of scientific management*. Norcross, GA: Engineering & Management Press, 1998.

²⁸ David J. Cross, «Historical and Visual Rhetorical Analysis of Superman Comic Books, 1938-1945», 2011, <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A182821/>, 26-27, 37.

²⁹ Stefano Luconi e Matteo Pretelli, *L'immigrazione negli Stati Uniti* 84-85; Katz, *The Great Migrations, 1880s-1912*, 32.

³⁰ Kline, Wendy. *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom*. Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2005; Giovanni Borgognone, *Tecnocrati del progresso*, Ch.4; Dijkstra, Bram. *Evil sisters: the threat of female sexuality in twentieth-century culture*. 1st Owl book ed. New York: Henry Holt, 1998, 45, 181.

³¹ Dinnerstein, Leonard, e David M Reimers. *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*. New York; London: Harper & Row, 1988, 75ff; Stefano Luconi e Matteo Pretelli, *L'immigrazione negli Stati Uniti*, 113-115.

³² Jerry Siegel e Joe Shuster, «How Superman Would End the War», *Look Magazine*, 27 February 1940.

³³ Ludvine Bantigny, *Cinema in guerra, guerra al cinema* in Robert Frank e Alya Aglan, Editors, 1937-1957. *La guerre-monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 2015, of which we have consulted the Italian translation: *La guerra-mondo, 1937-1947* (Torino: Einaudi, 2016) 1740; Joel Rosenberg, «Shylock's Revenge: The Doubly Vanished Jew in Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be*», *Prooftexts* 16, n. 3 (1996): 209-44.

Often self-taught artists, they turned to comics as a means of survival.³⁴ A list of some famous authors - several of whom Americanized the original name - and publishers is revealing: Stan Lee (Stanley Martin Lieber), Jack Kirby (Jacob Kurtzberg), Joe Simon, Gil Kane (Eli Katz), Will Eisner, Harry Donenfeld, Jack Liebowitz, Mort Weisinger. .³⁵

The origin of Superman is somewhat similar to the story of Moses being laid down in a basket and then adopted, or it can be summarised as follows: a father sends his only son to Earth to save it; "Being the sons of Orthodox Jews, Jerry and Joe were certainly curious about Jesus and his place in the scheme of things".³⁶

Champion of the oppressed

"Champion of the oppressed" was a periphrasis used by Jerry Siegel in the Superman stories. Millions of electors who re-elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt with a 60.8% majority in 1936 thought the same of the president.

American Jews were generally supporters of Roosevelt and his policy:

Superman's values would have been recognized at the time of his debut as very much those of a New Dealer... That generation [of American Jews] recognized in the New Deal what they saw as traditional Jewish ethical values, and Superman's costume was cut from that same cloth..³⁷

New Deal themes are present in series with other superheroes. Wright identified, among others, several Green Lantern stories.³⁸

In the story *Superman in the Slums* (Action Comics #8, January 1939) Frankie Marelo, a member of a youth gang, is tried for assault with intent to rob. Although his mother defends him - "he's only like all other boys in our neighbourhood...hard, resentful, underprivileged...he might have been a good boy except for his environment". - the judge sentences him to a reformatory. Among the audience, Clark Kent immediately sympathises and, in the role of Superman, sets to work in his own way. Eliminated the shady fence who was profiting from the boys, a demonstration of his powers convinces them to return to the right path. After learning that the government is rebuilding residential areas in the devastated areas, Superman destroys the ghetto after evacuating the inhabitants. The National Guard opposes him in vain: in this, as in other stories, the hero does not hesitate to clash with the representatives of the system. A new, clean neighbourhood is born.

³⁴ Arie Kaplan e ProQuest (Firm), *From Krakow to Krypton Jews and Comic Books*. (Philadelphia: JPS, 2010) xiv.

³⁵ Larry Tye, *Superman: the high-flying history of America's most enduring hero*, 1st ed (New York: Random House, 2012) 74, 79.

³⁶ Ricca *Super Boys* 132.

³⁷ Harry Brod, *Superman Is Jewish?: How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way* (Simon and Schuster, 2012) 13.

³⁸ *Superheroes for the Common Man* in Wright, *Comic book nation* 22-25.

Jacob Riis had reported on life in New York's slums as early as 1890.³⁹ Cleveland, one of the most populous cities in the United States, and residence of the authors, was not exempt from the problem.⁴⁰ The *Wagner-Steagall Housing Act* of 1937 established a housing program for the poor, although underfunded relative to need. Unlike in Europe, many saw this approach as anti-American and intended to create a welfare class, preferring government incentives to build private homes.⁴¹

In *The Blakely Mine Disaster* (Action Comics #3 August 1938) Superman saves the miners from a collapse. He returns as Clark Kent and, talking to Stanislaw Kober at the hospital, realizes that the prevention and rescue systems are inefficient or completely absent. He interviews the owner Thorton Blakely who replies "I'm a businessman, not a humanitarian!". -In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge had said "The business of America is business!"⁴² Later, Blakely throws a party for his rich and spoiled friends 'whose sole activity in life is searching for new ways to escape boredom' and takes them to visit the mine. Dressed as an ordinary miner, Superman guides them, causing a new collapse. Unable to use the safety devices, they all lack air and only then does he save them. In the end Blakely informs Clark that he will install the necessary devices: the latter is skeptical and promises to check again in the future.

Actually, oil and electricity were replacing coal, a historical source of energy, and the mines were in crisis: sold in the mid-1920s for \$4, by 1932 a ton of coal was no more than \$1.31.⁴³ To cut costs, the owners had cut wages to the bone and worsened working conditions. John L. Lewis, president of the UMW -United Mine Workers complained that "the miners diet is actually below domestic animal standards."⁴⁴ As one of the first measures of the New Deal, the NIRA (*National Industry Recovery Act*) included in section 7a regulations to support trade union bargaining. The charismatic Lewis handed out leaflets: "President Roosevelt Wants You To Join the Union!". During the second phase of the New Deal, in 1935, the *National Labour Relations Act* was passed that contained even stronger regulations on union rights; eventually, the UMW became the "largest and strongest union in the country."⁴⁵ "Labor's awakening also secured a broad working-class constituent base that would help to make the Democrats

³⁹ Jacob A Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Pub., rist. 2004)

⁴⁰ «PUBLIC HOUSING | Encyclopedia of Cleveland History | Case Western Reserve University», consulted 1 November 2018, <https://case.edu/ech/articles/p/public-housing>.

⁴¹ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 369-370, Patel, *Il New Deal : una storia globale* 272.

⁴² Arnaldo Testi, *Il secolo degli Stati Uniti* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2017) 106; White, William Allen. *Calvin Coolidge: the man who is president*. New York: The Macmillan company, 1925, 218.

⁴³ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 169.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Boyer, Richard Owen, e Herbert M Morais. *Labor's Untold Story*. New York: United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America, 1975, 277, 312.

the majority party for a long time to come.”⁴⁶ In *Terror in the Truckers' Union* (Superman #4 Spring 1940) Superman foils a racket's attempt to infiltrate the union.

In the story *Black Gold Oil Well* (Action Comics #11, April 1939) Clark Kent investigates a case of suicide at a stock exchange. He soon learns that two brokers, Meek and Bronson, had cheated the suicide, along with many others, by selling shares of the oil company "Black Gold". He goes to the site as an unemployed worker and discovers that there is no work because no one has ever drilled there: "The promoters have found stock selling so profitable they haven't even bothered to really go after oil." With some ultra-drilling, Superman finds oil and the well starts producing a thousand barrels a day! Meek and Bronson try to buy back the shares from the old buyers: a certain Homer Ramsey has bought them all and will only sell them for a million dollars, the value of everything the two own. Ramsey is none other than Superman, who, after completing the sale, destroys the well and apostrophises the two swindlers as follows: "I'd advise you to quit selling stock or I'll pay you another visit — From now on, stick to selling shoe-laces!"

In *The Economic Enemy* (Superman #4, Spring 1940) Clark interviews Paul Dorgan, an eminent sociologist. "I am about to print documentary evidence that will prove sinister persons or forces plan to deliberately stave off the return of national prosperity," says the scholar, later found dead. The person responsible is the financier Joe Curtis who, in the pay of a foreign power, wants to cause a new depression by acting on the stock market. "A few more minutes and I'll telephone the order to my brokers that will plunge the country into economic chaos!" he says before Superman eliminates him.

In his inaugural address, Roosevelt had pointed out the responsibilities of the 'unscrupulous money changers' and then said in a biblical tone

*"The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths."*⁴⁷

The Emergency Banking Relief Act, mentioned above, was followed by the *Glass-Steagall Banking Act* (June, 16 1933), which ordered the separation of commercial and investment banks, and established a federal guarantee on bank deposits.⁴⁸ The opacity about the real situation of listed companies had been instrumental to speculation. In order to remove this opacity, was created in 1934, a new supervisory body, the *Securities Exchange Commission* (SEC), and mandatory transparency of information on financial statements and boards of directors of companies listed on the stock exchange. In addition, independent *auditing* firms had to audit the information.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 291.

⁴⁷ Roosevelt and Grafton, *Great speeches*, 30.

⁴⁸ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 366, Patel *New Deal* 72.

⁴⁹ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 367-368.

The *Daily Planet*, with truth and civility, contrasts with the Yellow Press, such as the *Morning Herald*, whose reporter and editor are accomplices in blackmail (Action Comics #18 November 1939). In *Campaign against the Planet* (Superman #5 Summer 1940) Alex Ewell, 'an opportunist of the lowest rank', threatens to buy the Morning Pictorial to support his political action. He would like to do the same with the *Planet*. When that fails, he sends his gangsters to block the distribution until Superman stops him. In the story *Superman Cleanup Campaign* (Superman #7 November-December 1940) Corrupt politicians and public officials, including a prosecutor, infest Metropolis. In Action Comics #16, a corrupt police commissioner supports the gambling racket. The Comics Code (1954) would later prevent such allegations:

*Policemen, judges, Government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.*⁵⁰

From isolationism to interventionism

In the story *The War in San Monte* (Action Comics #1-2 1938) Superman supports pacifist ideals against warmongers. The munitions magnate Norvell, through the astute lobbyist Alex Greer, corrupts Senator Barrows:

—*Do you think you'll succeed in pushing the bill thru?*

—*There's no doubt about it! The bill will be passed before its full implications are realized.*

Before any remedial steps can be taken, our country will be embroiled with Europe.

—*FINE! We'll take care of you financially for this!*

Meanwhile, a war broke out in San Monte, a small South American republic, and Superman transports Norvell to where the fighting rages. The weapons manufacturer experiences what it is like to be under the bombs he makes. By a similar means, Superman forces the leaders of the two opposing armies to sign peace. In *Superman Champions Universal Peace* (Superman #2 Autumn 1939), munitions manufacturer Lubane speculates on the civil war in Boravia and does not back down from murder to get the formula for a new gas. Superman stops him and convinces the two factions to armistice.

There was a current of opinion that the US participation in the First World War was a mistake, which had enriched financiers and arms manufacturers. Books such as Ernest Hemingway's 'A Farewell to Arms', Erich Maria Remarque's 'All Quiet on the Western Front' (Im Westen nichts Neues, 1929) and above all 'Merchants of Death', an analysis of arms companies, reinforced pacifist⁵¹ sentiment. Dorothy Detzer, Secretary for the United States of the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (WILPF), lobbied tirelessly to set up a senatorial committee to investigate the arms industry.⁵² The committee, known as the Nye Committee after its president, Senator Gerald Nye, worked from 1934 to 1936, raising

⁵⁰ Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of approval: the history of the comics code*, Studies in popular culture (Jackson [Miss.]: University Press of Mississippi, 1998) 166.

⁵¹ Helmuth Carol Engelbrecht, *Merchants of Death; a Study of the International Armament Industry*, by H. C. Engelbracht ... and F. C. Hanighen; Foreword by Harry Elmer Barnes ... (Dodd, Mead & company) 1934.

⁵² Dorothy Detzer, *Appointment On The Hill* (Henry Holt And Company, 1948).

the unproven doubt that the arms⁵³ industry was behind the United States' entry into the First World War. Roosevelt initially supported the commission: among other things, Du Pont, the country's largest munitions manufacturers, were political opponents of the president.

The difficulty of collecting war debts and the economic crisis contributed to the strong American isolationism of 1934-1938.⁵⁴ In his inaugural address Roosevelt had said:

*Our international trade relations, though vastly important, are in point of time and necessity secondary to the establishment of a sound national economy.*⁵⁵

Congress passed the Neutrality Acts, designed to prevent US involvement in European conflicts. It was only with an increased awareness of the European situation and Roosevelt's skilful action that the United States slowly moved towards interventionism.

The Superman stories testify to this evolution and even anticipate it. In fact, in July 1941, 79% (86% a year earlier)⁵⁶ were against entering the war against Germany and Italy. Jewish comic creators were sensitive to the situation in Europe and Jews, as a group, "were conspicuous among identifiable demographic groups for their vigorous support for both a domestic social justice agenda and wholehearted U.S. enlistment in the war against the Nazis."⁵⁷

Look Magazine of February, 27 1940 contained an article on Superman, "a character who combines the best talents of a Robin Hood and a god." The photos and biography of the authors were followed by a two-part story *How Superman would end the War*. After taking Hitler by the neck — "I'd like to land a strictly non-aryan sock on your jaw but there's no time for that!" — he takes him, along with Stalin, to the tribunal of the League of Nations which condemned them for war crimes.⁵⁸

Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's Captain America was punching Hitler from the very first issue.⁵⁹ Simon later remembered "when the first issue came out we got a lot of . . . threatening letters

⁵³ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 388; Matthew Ware Coulter, «Beyond the Merchants of Death: The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s and Its Role in Twentieth-Century American History», Thesis or Dissertation, Digital Library, May 1996, <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc279357/> 274-275.

⁵⁴ Mario Del Pero, *Libertà e impero: gli Stati Uniti e il mondo, 1776-2016* (Roma: GLF editori Laterza, 2017) 245-258; "The 1930s and the Height of Isolationism" in Chalberg, John. *Isolationism: Opposing Viewpoints*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1995, 92ff.

⁵⁵ Roosevelt and Grafton, *Great speeches*, 31-32.

⁵⁶ Surveys Gallup of 20 July 1941, 7 July 1940 <http://ibiblio.org/pha/Gallup/>

⁵⁷ Harry Brod, *Superman Is Jewish?* 68. See also Nicholas Yanes, «Graphic Imagery: Jewish American Comic Book Creators' Depictions of Class, Race, and Patriotism», 2008, <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A175721/> 26-28.

⁵⁸ Brad Ricca (*Super Boys*, 183) wrongly indicates Hitler e Mussolini.

⁵⁹ *Captain America Comics* #1 March 1941.

and hate mail. Some people really opposed what Cap stood for... [yet we] felt very good about making a political statement . . . and taking a stand.”⁶⁰

Superman's powers were so great that DC later found it inappropriate to show him in direct combat, and the hero merely acted against the Fifth Column. To explain this and answer readers' doubts, editor Murray Boltinoff found a solution. Clark shows up for his visit to enlist, but is reformed: "You're physically superb, except that you're obviously blind as a bat." Clark, with his x-ray vision, had mistakenly read the optometric sign in another room!⁶¹ On the covers, however, often appeared war⁶² themes and the invitation to buy war bonds.

In the story *The Fifth Column* (Superman #8, January-February 1941) Clark collaborates with the counterintelligence service to identify elements, in the service of a foreign power preparing propaganda and sabotage in the arms factories. Nazi greetings and a cross as a symbol⁶³ leave little doubt about the affiliation of the spies who, in a hidden valley, even deploy a small army with artillery and aviation. Superman will have to destroy them and clear Clark Kent of a murder charge.

In *The Phony Pacifists* (Superman #9, March-April 1941) Lois, returning from the cinema with Clark, notices strange movements on a pier. Always searching for new scoops, she drives Clark away with an excuse to return later. — “Doggone Clark! If it hadn't been for him, I could have been investigating that wharf long ago!” — She is actually followed and protected by Superman, who destroys a submarine that was torpedoing a merchant ship loaded with valuable raw materials for the war economy. Later we meet the "Committee against militarism", a pacifist organization sympathized with by Senator Galsworthy. Their leader is in the pay of a totalitarian government and the real purpose of the fake pacifists is to obstruct the rearmament of the United States and prevent any aid to the democracies at war. Superman eliminates the conspirators and shows Senator Galsworthy how naive and harmful he has been to the country.

In his Fireside Chat of December, 29 1940 Roosevelt had warned:

Let us no longer blind ourselves to the undeniable fact that the evil forces which have crushed and undermined and corrupted so many others are already within our own gates... Their secret emissaries are active in our own and in neighboring countries... There are also American citizens, many of them in high places, who, unwittingly in most cases, are aiding and abetting the work of

⁶⁰ Carole Kalish, interview with Joe Simon, “The American Dream...Come True,” Comics Feature 10 (July 1981) quoted in Wright Comic Book Nation 36.

⁶¹ Superman Daily Strip del 16-19/2/1942, Tye, Superman 59, Wright Comic Book Nation 43.

⁶² David J. Cross, «Historical and Visual Rhetorical Analysis of Superman Comic Books, 1938-1945» 94-110, 113-130.

⁶³ The cross (balkenkreuz) was the symbol of the Wehrmacht v. the covers of Action Comics #40 e Superman #13.

*these agents. I do not charge these American citizens with being foreign agents. But I do charge them with doing exactly the kind of work that the dictators want done in the United States.*⁶⁴

Superman #9 was on the newsstands on January, 3 1941 and was a perfect anti-isolationist propaganda operation.⁶⁵

We find another 'pacifist' organization, the "Volunteers for peace", in *The Enemy Invasion*, (Action Comics #36, May 1941). Lois Lane attends one of their meetings and when the leader Stuart Pemberton declares "Shout your disapproval for rearmament in this Country! We're not actually menaced by war...I'll wager that the reason Metropolis newspapers are supporting national rearmament is because they're receiving secret pay-offs!" Lois screams "Of all the filthy untruths—!" A scuffle results, from which Superman saves her. Lois doesn't give up on her story: "Why do you treat me as tho I were a child—?? One of these days...!" The danger is imminent: a powerful air force is heading for the city and Pemberton is preparing sabotage actions. No problem for Superman, who, like Clark, also scores a new scoop.

Meanwhile, with Hitler's attack on Poland (September, 1 1939), followed by declarations of war by Britain and France, the conflict had begun. On 4 November 1939, Roosevelt signed an amended *Neutrality Act* lifting the embargo on arms sales to the belligerents. The *cash-and-carry* clause of 1937 remained: not only had they to pay in cash, but transport had to be arranged. The president described this and subsequent measures as defensive and preventive, while avoiding entry into the war (the so-called *short-of-war strategy*). Re-elected for the third time at the end of 1940, Roosevelt could have been more clear: "we must have more ships, more guns, more planes-more of everything...We must be the great arsenal of democracy." (*Fireside Chat* of December, 29 1940).⁶⁶ In his message to Congress at the beginning of the year, Roosevelt introduced the new *Lend-Lease Bill*, which would allow supplies on credit. His political action, he wrote, was intended to assure everyone four freedoms: freedom of speech and religion and freedom from want and from fear. The cry of "Kill Bill 1776, not our sons!" was opposed by isolationists in Congress and outside: newspapers such as the popular *Chicago Tribune*, the *America First* committee and the pro-Nazi *German-American Bund*. It was in vain; the *Lend-Lease Bill* was passed on March, 11 1941. Before the end of 1941, military spending was increased to \$13.7 billion (it was only \$2.2 billion in 1940).⁶⁷ The development of the war industry brought the country out of the depression and started a long period of growth. On December, 7 1941, "a date which will live in infamy", the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii made the conflict worldwide.

⁶⁴ Roosevelt and Grafton, *Great speeches*, 86.

⁶⁵ David J. Cross, «Historical and Visual Rhetorical Analysis of Superman Comic Books, 1938-1945» pp 59-60, <https://www.comics.org/issue/1295/>; in 1924 William Randolph Hearst observed that only ten per cent read the editorials, while seventy-five per cent read the strips, quoted in Eugene Dennis Vrana, «Comic Strips As Propaganda: The New Deal Experience» 405.

⁶⁶ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 433-434, 468-469.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 471, 476.

Lois Lane

Lois Lane shows her character right from the first issue of Action Comics. She accepts "for a change" an invitation from Clark to the nightclub, where, putting aside her career woman's outfit, she shows off a breathtaking evening dress:⁶⁸

Clark — Why is it you always avoid me at the office ?

— Please Clark! I've been scribbling 'sob stories' all day. Don't ask me to dish out another. [The bully Butch Mason asks her to dance and Clark does not object.]

— You can stay and dance with him if you wish but I'm leaving NOW! [So Lois, slapping Butch in the face, and while in the taxi adds, addressing Clark:]

— You asked me earlier in the evening why I avoid you. I'll tell you why now: because you're a spineless, unbearable COWARD!

Lois is extroverted, brave to the point of recklessness, there is nothing she won't do to get a scoop. It is precisely this character that is functional to her role as a damsel in distress who is saved by Superman.⁶⁹ In this story, kidnapped by the revengeful Butch, the hero is needed, whom Lois meets for the first time. Ricca claims that Lois "may be the key ingredient to the success of the Superman idea."⁷⁰

Lois is in charge of following sentimental stories, showing the 'feminine side' of a story or answering the heart mail. She is a *sob sister*, "A woman news reporter who appeals to readers' sympathies with her accounts of pathetic happenings".⁷¹ Wonder Woman - at one of the lowest points in her career - also served as Romance Editor, writing a column of sentimental advice (Sensation Comics #97 May-June 1950).⁷²

However, Lois is always ready to follow up on any news that might prove important, going so far as to 'steal' some of Clark's services. Thus in *Superman and the Dam* (Action Comics #5 October 1938) when the director searches for Clark for an assignment.

— But why not have me handle the assignment?

— Can't! It's too important! — This is no job for a girl!

— No job for a woman, eh? [Lois thinks] I've half a mind to...

⁶⁸ Lois does not wear the first thing she finds; just look at her different hats. In Superman #23 (July-August 1943) she spends \$150 (today it would be ten times as much) on a designer dress.

⁶⁹ Reference text is Tim Hanley, Investigating Lois Lane: The Turbulent History of the Daily Planet's Ace Reporter, 2016.

⁷⁰ Ricca, Brad. Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster - the Creators of Superman, 2013, 136.

⁷¹ Term used since 1925, as attested by Harold Wentworth e Stuart Berg Flexner, The Pocket Dictionary of American Slang: A Popular Abridgement of the Dictionary of American Slang (New York: Pocket Books, 1977). For the origin of the term v. Ross, Ishbel, Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism By an Insider (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1936), 65.

⁷² Paul Levitz e Josh Baker, The Golden Age of DC Comics 1935-1956, 2013, 344.

Lois tricks Clark by showing up in his place. She does the same in *The Superman Phony Manager* (Action Comics #6 November 1938). In *The Black Gang* (Superman #7 November-December 1940) turns blonde to infiltrate a shady club. When she has a bombshell news story, she is often beaten by Clark who delivers her article first thanks to his Superman powers. However, the competition was high: one day when Clark arrives late at the office Perry White tells him —Lois gets the assignment, and as for you, Clark, you can handle the lovelorn column!⁷³ Lois never gives up, getting more and more scoops over the years, until (Action Comics #85, 1945) we read:

Lois — Aren't you going to give the little girl a big hand for doing it again, Clark?

Clark — Please don't rub it in! The boss has already warned me to wake up or hunt for a new job!

In 1930, women were less than a quarter of the labour force (10.57 million out of a total of 48.8 million).⁷⁴ They were usually unskilled secretarial or service jobs, and the average wage was 57% of men's.⁷⁵ When Norman Cousins proposed to solve unemployment by firing all women and hiring men he was ridiculed: “[Do men] pine to slave in somebody's kitchen, to work in beauty salons?”⁷⁶ In journalism, a woman could aspire to a professional career, even if it was in a male environment.

There had been a blizzard. It was a stormy night. The country was coated with ice. The wind whistled through the stripped trees. Miss Hickok wore her taxi driver's overshoes and kept tripping at every step. ... Lorena's legs were slashed by the under-brush. ...Miss Hickok went down on her hands and knees in the snow and crawled as close to the house as she dared. ...They got lost in the woods and wandered about for hours. They both took flu and it was weeks before Miss Hickok recovered her voice.⁷⁷

Lorena Hickok was a reporter who, like Lois Lane, didn't back down from anything: in this case she was reporting on the Lindbergh kidnapping.

—Are you forgetting, my esteemed fellow journalist that when there's nothing important to write about, a good reporter sallies forth and digs up a story somewhere, somehow?⁷⁸

Hickok resigned from the Associated Press in June 1933: the Roosevelt administration had assigned her to describe the social condition of the country. She set off in her "Blulette", a car purchased with the help of Eleanor Roosevelt, with a portable typewriter, and travelled from the coal districts of the Appalachians to New England, from the farms of the

⁷³ *Canine and crooks*, Superman #19 November-December 1942.

⁷⁴ USA e Bureau of the Census, Historical statistics of the United States colonial times to 1970 134.

⁷⁵ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 230.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 256.

⁷⁷ Ross, *Ishbel, Ladies of the Press*, 203.

⁷⁸ So Lois to Clark in Superman #6 September-October 1940.

Midwest to the cotton states in the south. Hickok delivered a report in early 1935 showing the Depression as statistics could not.⁷⁹

During the war women found work as photographers and print and radio journalists.. "By war's end, at least 127 American women had secured official military accreditation as war correspondents, if not actual front-line assignments."⁸⁰ So did Lois in Superman #23, July-August 1943.

The idea to create the character of Lois Lane came from the popularity of the films of those years featuring women journalists. In *Front Page Woman* (by Michael Curtiz, 1935) Bette Davis played Ellen Garfield, a journalist working at the *Daily Star* - the same name as Lois and Clark's newspaper, before it became the *Daily Planet*. Jerry Siegel later wrote

*Glenda Farrell, the movie star who portrayed Torchy Blane, a gutsy, beautiful headline-hunting reporter, in a series of exciting motion pictures. Because the name of the actress Lola Lane (who also played Torchy) appealed to me, I called my character Lois Lane.*⁸¹

Lois was a tribute to Lois Amster, Siegel's high school crush.⁸² Ricca has discovered an *Astounding Stories* story - pulp of which Siegel and Shuster were fanatics - from April 1934 with a character named Lois Lane.⁸³ Lois Lane's features are those of Jolan Kovacs, a young woman from Cleveland who was beginning her career as a model.⁸⁴

As Hanley points out, Lois Lane is more independent than these screen journalists, who, although career women, still have their marriages on the line, whereas Lois has no links at all.⁸⁵ Says Clark in the story "Lois Lane, Actress" —Come down Lois! You know you'll be back at the *Planet*. Why, you've got printer's ink in your veins!⁸⁶

In the Golden Age comic books we find female journalists such as Penny Wright,⁸⁷ Gail Porter,⁸⁸ Brenda Starr (from 1947, drawn by Dale Messick, "She's one of the very few

⁷⁹ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 160-177, 215.

⁸⁰ «War, Women, and Opportunity - Women Come to the Front | Exhibitions (Library of Congress)», web page, 27 July 2010, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/wcf0002.html>.

⁸¹ Letter to Time, 30 May 1988 quoted by Ricca *Super Boys* 139.

⁸² Tim Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane* 4-5, Ricca *Super Boys* 136-137.

⁸³ Ricca *Super Boys* 139.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 140ss.

⁸⁵ Tim Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane* 6.

⁸⁶ Lois Lane, Actress in Alvin Schwartz, Joe Shuster *Superman #43* 1946, the last story of Superman credited to Shuster.

⁸⁷ Mike Madrid, *Divas, Dames & Daredevils: Lost Heroines of Golden Age Comics*, 2013 105-106.

⁸⁸ Hope Nicholson, *The spectacular sisterhood of superwomen: awesome female characters from comic book history* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2017) 30-31.

successful women cartoonists in the world.”⁸⁹) while in 1927 the strip of the reporter Jane Arden was published.

Things would improve for Lois in the animated series produced by Paramount and made at Fleischer Studios (1941-43).⁹⁰The opening lines and the voices of Bud Collyer and Joan Alexander were taken from the radio series. In these films of about ten minutes - but each one took six months to make and cost \$50,000⁹¹ - it is usually Lois who opens the action. She exposes herself and faces bandits, mad scientists, and prehistoric animals; Superman then follows and solves everything, and Lois' article appears on the front page with Clark congratulating her.⁹²

The cartoon series is mentioned in *Superman Matinee Idol* (Superman #19 November-December 1942). One afternoon Clark invites Lois, who insists on a Superman cartoon, to the cinema.

—*Are you positive you wouldn't prefer a different show?*

—*Absolutely! Don't tell me you're carrying your silly jealousy of SUPERMAN to the point where you don't want to see him in an animated cartoon!*

The Action Comics and Superman comic books appear in the opening headlines, and Lois comments: “I don't believe I've ever seen those magazines!” The on-screen story occupies most of the boards and is a sequel to the first "Superman" cartoon from September, 26 1941; the plot reminds one of the second cartoon *The Mechanical Monsters*. When Superman rescues Lois in the film, in the hall Lois stands up:

—*YEA, SUPERMAN!*

Clark —*Sit down Lois! You're a grown woman and besides it's unseemly to cheer for yourself!*

In the end, the on screen Lois delivers her scoop, just like in real cartoons.

Lois is very sensitive to social issues. In *Superman and the Runaway* (Superman #3 Winter 1939) she visits an orphanage with Clark and notices fear and possible signs of beatings in the little guests. Unable to sleep, she goes to investigate in the middle of the night. On the spot she meets Superman and together they solve the case. In the story *Brentwood home for wayward youth*, (Action Comics #27 August 1940) Lois discovers that not only are the Brentwoods exploiting child labour, but they have set up a telephone fund-raising racket. After Superman intervenes, Lois finally gets a front-page article. “Not MY scoop, Clark! After all, it was your suspicion that got us on the right trail!” Lois replied to Clark, who congratulated her.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Brenda Starr, #13, June 1955 Charlton Comics, 2.

⁹⁰ Advertising posters and documents in Paul Levitz e Josh Baker, *The Golden Age of DC Comics 1935-1956*, 2013 241-243.

⁹¹ Larry Tye, *Superman 94ss*.

⁹² This was the case at least for the first nine episodes produced in the Fleischer studios; in the eight episodes produced after the acquisition of the studios by Paramount, Lois' role was reduced. Tim Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane* 32.

In *The Slot Machine Racket* (Superman #5 Estate 1940) Lois faces the head of the racket:

—*This is to warn you that if you don't pull up stakes and leave town, the Daily Planet will blast you so sky-high you'll think you're in a stratospherical ballon!*

In *The Life Insurance Con* (Action Comics #29 October 1940) Lois, with the help of Superman, solves the murders of elderly people involving a local district politician. The *Social Security Act* of 1935 gave many workers the chance to build up a pension without the need of insurance.

The *Lois Lane Girl Reporter* series was included in Superman from #28 (May-June 1944) to #40 (May-June 1946). Superman does not appear, and Lois always solves her cases alone. At the beginning of the stories her colleagues, including Clark, tease her with sexist comments.

Kathleen McLaughlin worked at the New York Times from 1935

*“Many years later, Kathleen told a young interviewer from the Columbia University Oral History Project what it was like in the Times city room in 1935: “At the time that I arrived I was the only woman in the newsroom. And if I may say so, and I will say so, you could have cut the ice with a sword. I can remember only one reporter on the staff, whose name was Marshall Newton, who was nice enough to come over to me and say, ‘We’re delighted you’re here and welcome.’ Because for the rest of them, I just wasn’t there, for months on months.”*⁹³

Lois doesn't give up, and gets her scoops through wild adventures. In Superman #33 Lois is given the very modest assignment of following the robbery of a piggy bank; while investigating, Lois tracks down jewel thieves and gets the front page. So in Superman #40 Lois has to follow a kite race which leads her to arrest a gang of thieves. While the opening credits mention "by Jerry and Joe" these stories are written by Don C. Cameron (Superman #28-31, #35) and Whitney Ellsworth (#32-34, #36-40).

By the time Lois Lane had her own *Lois Lane Superman's Girlfriend* series (#1 March-April 1958 - #137 September-October 1974), comic books had entered the Silver Age (1956). The anti-comics crusade of the early 1950s had prompted the adoption of a code to which every conic book had to conform.⁹⁴ The popular horror and crime titles had disappeared from the newsstand, opening the way for a return of superheroes, eclipsed after the war. Their world would be different from that of the pre-code era: ubiquitous aliens, super-villains, strange planets and dimensions - distant and forgotten real-world problems and social issues.

⁹³ Nan Robertson *Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men, and the “New York Times”* (New York: Random House, 1992) 61, Tim Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane* 11.

⁹⁴ Comics Magazine Association of America - Comics Code (1954) in Nyberg, Amy Kiste. *Seal of approval: the history of the comics code*. Studies in popular culture. Jackson [Miss.]: University Press of Mississippi, 1998 166-169; Pyle, Kevin C, e Scott Cunningham. *Bad for You: Exposing the War on Fun!*, 2014.

“The 1930s social justice warrior who could leap an eight of a mile had been replaced by a Boy Scout of Steel who could manifest just about any power he needed” comments not without bitterness Paul Kupperberg.⁹⁵

For Lois Lane, her career gave way to two new priorities: marrying Superman and proving that he and Clark Kent were one and the same. After all, the code of the comics said

“The treatment of live-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage...Divorce shall not be treated humorously nor represented as desirable.”⁹⁶

*So Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane entirely embodied the values of the time. It was written, illustrated, and edited by men who had no interest in questioning the societal norms of the day. They crafted simple stories that were subconsciously informed by their own experiences of the world as men in midcentury America..*⁹⁷

Some stories were so sexist that women readers wrote letters like this one:

*“I think it's awful the way you insult women, and particularly the way you heap abuse upon Lois. You're always saying she's snoopy, inquisitive, curious, a pest, and can't keep a secret. Well, men aren't angels, either!”*⁹⁸

According to Hanley's analysis, the audience for *Superman's Girlfriend* was no different from other Superman series, with a majority of male readers. Only the Wonder Woman comic book - also softened by the code - had a majority of female readers (66%).⁹⁹

The Bronze Age of comics (1970-1984) began with the publication of *Green Lantern #76* (April 1970). In one famous story - which included “probably the most reprinted panels from any DC story”¹⁰⁰ — DC albums became more aware of ethnic minorities. The lesson was not lost on *Superman's Girlfriend*, and in issues #106 (November 1970) and #110 (May 1971), the stories discussed the problems of blacks and Native Americans. Very effective was the cover of #110 in which Lois stands up to Superman in defending an infant. During the period in which Dorothy Woolfolk edited the series, Lois was more independent and other female characters were introduced; *Superman's Girlfriend* closed in 1974.

The film "Superman" (by Richard Donner 1978) showed a Lois Lane who combined a strong career commitment with a sentimental side.

⁹⁵ Siegel, Jerry, Don Cameron, e Bill Finger. *Superman the Golden Age Omnibus Volume 6*, 2019, 9..

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 168.

⁹⁷ Tim Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane* 91.

⁹⁸ Judith Stevens in *Lois Lane Superman's Girlfriend #16* April 1960 — quoted in Tim Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane* 92.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 58-60.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Levitz e Josh Baker, *The Bronze Age of DC Comics, 1970-1984*, 2015, 26.

An actress can also take a sidekick character and make her an icon of female empowerment—Margot Kidder's Lois Lane being a perfect example. The tenacious Daily Planet reporter had for too long been devalued...But Kidder's feisty femme in 1978's 'Superman: The Movie' provided a new, more empowered version of Lois.

Margot Kidder was the most memorable Lois. The women's movement, the idea of choosing who to become, played a role in her performance.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹Interview with Kidder in Jennifer K. Stuller, *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010) 140-141.

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