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The Superhero Archetype as an Auxiliary Class in Marvel's Avengers Movies

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ABSTRACT

The superhero is a much-maligned figure in contemporary culture. In what follows, I draw upon Plato's idea of the auxiliary class and Joseph Campbell's monomyth to read the superhero as a modern version of the auxiliary class. Focusing on the superhero archetype that is found in the MCU or Marvel Cinematic Universe movies, I argue that the superhero-auxiliary is underpinned by an ethos that privileges values like public service, teamwork, social cohesion, and self-sacrifice. The significance of this reading lies in showing how the MCU re-mythologizes Plato's auxiliary class for contemporary culture. As a corollary to that, I hope that the reading will ameliorate some of the negative reception that has plagued the superhero archetype in literary and media discourses.

KEYWORDS

Superheroes, monomyth, auxiliaries, heroism, public service

Introduction

The superhero film has become a staple of modern cinema since the turn of the century. The superhero itself has become a cultural meme. In fact, five of the top ten grossing films of all time are movies that revolve around superheroes. Despite its popularity and dominance in pop culture, many still hate the idea of a superhero movie. That is largely because critics feel that the superhero movie "speaks to nothing but its own kinetic effectiveness" (Bukatman 120). Importantly, they feel that "every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse" (Adorno 5). David Graber suggests that the superhero impedes progress because the superhero is a reactionary character who acts as if "there's nothing inappropriate if police respond by smashing protestors' heads repeatedly against the concrete" (The New Inquiry para 48).

In general, people hate superhero movies for the following seven reasons. The first is that superhero movies are for kids and that they do nothing to advance intellectual or artistic excellence. The second reason is that superhero movies glorify the use of violence to solve problems. Third, superhero movies, particularly Hollywood superhero movies, privilege the depiction of certain racial groups perpetrating violence against other groups. Menaka Philips notes that violence "is a resource differentially distributed within a caste system that polices how violence is deployed in constructions of the hero/villain, friend/enemy, patriot/seditionist" (472). Specifically, the straight white male is given more space and leeway to do violence to other people.

The fourth reason is that superhero movies perpetrate and reinforce gender and sexual prejudices and discrimination. Tim Hanley writes that "one clear constant across all of these superhero comics was the elevation of male fantasy [...] the men were male power fantasies [...] the women were male sexual fantasies, objects of desire for their heroes or for the creator themselves" (12). As a result, superhero movies reproduce and normalize a hierarchical relationship where physically powerful and muscled males dominate females, other kinds of masculinities and genders. The fifth reason is that superheroes valorize the concept of American exceptionalism and nationalism, which in turn valorize authoritarianism and militarism. Indeed, David Graber points that superhero movies normalize "a world in which fascism is the only political possibility" (The New Inquiry para. 26).

The sixth reason is that superhero movies are only concerned with visual spectacle. It is considered that this emphasis on the spectacle lowers the value of art and cinema as a whole. Celebrated graphic novelists like Alan Moore claim that superhero movies have "blighted" culture and cinema (Moore). Even filmmakers have called superhero movies "stupid" (Noe), "childish" (Pegg), and "ridiculous" (Campion). Martin Scorsese expresses what most critics

probably feel about superhero films when he says that they are merely "theme park" movies (Scorsese). Lastly, critics hate superheroes movies because they are movies that flaunt American power through cinema.

But not everyone is that pessimistic about the cultural value of superheroes or superhero movies. Annika Hagley and Michael Harrison note that the Avengers movies "are representative of the melding of various nationalist identities for a common cause and highlight the resilience of the American people after the September 11 attacks" (124). Indeed, Comic Con and other comic related events offer evidence of the communal experience and friendship that can be found amongst comic book fans and followers. To be sure, superhero movies are escapist fun and entertainment. But they also tap into what Carl Jung says about the collective unconscious - the idea that certain mythic archetypes are not only present in the stories of many human cultures and societies but "have universal meanings across cultures and may show up in dreams, literature, art or religion" (Mcleod para 18).

It is here that I argue that superhero movies do offer people more than just escapist fun. Indeed, I contend that they do two or three things to and for people. Firstly, they offer people a vision of possibilities and potentials, the possibility and potential of everyone to be more than what they are, to overcome their own conditions, and more importantly, to do something of value for other people, such as protecting and defending them from the evils of the world. The second thing is that superheroes tap into our innate sense of justice, of the idea that it is not okay for the strong to bully the weak, and at the same time, that the weak are deserving of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness on this Earth. The third and last thing that superheroes do offer people is the hope that there is, however slight, someone or some people looking out for the well-being of the community. In other words, superheroes speak to an innate and communal idea of the auxiliary type.

This idea, as spiritual and religious as it may sometimes be construed by critics to be, nonetheless speaks loudly and close to our collective world soul. In what follows, I argue that the superhero archetype is important because it is a modern version of the auxiliary class. And it represents societal desires of hoping and wanting to be protected by a group of people who exist to serve and protect the well-being, safety, and security of everyone in their community and/or society. To make my case, I examine the superhero archetype that is found in the MCU or Marvel Cinematic Universe movies. The objective of doing so is twofold. The first is because the subject of superheroes is too big and diverse a subject to talk about without getting lost in the literature. Hence, the focus on the superhero archetype as seen in the MCU. The second reason is that the superhero archetype as seen in the MCU exemplifies how Plato's auxiliary class is repackaged and re-mythologized for contemporary society through popular culture.

The auxiliary archetype and the superhero

The superhero is a heroic archetype that is a modern take on the idea of the auxiliary class in society. An auxiliary class is a class of people that protects and regulates the everyday functioning of a society. This idea is particularly prominent in Plato's *The Republic* where the Greek philosopher divided society into three classes. They are the philosopher-kings or guardians, the auxiliaries (warriors), and the producers (artisans). Auxiliaries are warriors who are responsible for defending the city from invaders, keeping peace at home, enforcing the guardians' will, and keeping the producers in check. So, if we were to extrapolate this idea and put it into a modern context, auxiliaries are basically people who work as security guards, police officers, and soldiers in real life. And while some might not find security guards, police officers, or military personnel particularly attractive as heroic figures, the fact is that they are fundamentally auxiliaries of the state. A superhero is just a flashier variant.

Now, it is true to say that the superhero figure, as we know it, was made popular by American comic books and Hollywood movies. But this phenomenon does not mean that the superhero is uniquely an American thing. To be sure, the way in which superheroes are presented, such as Superman or Batman, are American creations. But the story pattern of the superhero can be found across and amongst the stories and myths of different cultures and societies. Indeed, the monomythic nature of the superhero archetype closely follows Joseph Campbell's notion of the monomyth and the mythic story patterns of what he calls the hero's journey. Joseph Campbell describes the classical monomyth as follows: "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (30).

While Campbell's work on the monomyth and the hero's journey centers on religious and spiritual myths and stories, we, nonetheless, can find parallels in the narrative journey of the superhero as well. Specifically, we can see how superheroes are often compelled to leave the comfort of their previous lives (departure), and enter into a situation where they use their special powers to stop crime, terrorism, or other atrocities from happening (initiation), and they usually return to their own lives as a changed person. But the superhero myth, although sharing some principles of Campbell's monomyth, has additional narrative features.

These narrative features are (a) a protagonist struggling with two identities (one real-life and the other an alter-ego or costumed persona), (b) the struggle between hiding their real and fake identities (c) the struggle of using their powers to benefit other people or themselves, (d) the struggle to overcome doubts about their place in the world, and (e) the struggle to convince others that they have good intentions. Adapting Joseph Campbell's monomyth to elucidate the

American monomyth and the America-centric superhero, John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett suggest that while the classical monomyth reflects rites of passage or initiation, the "American monomyth derives from tales of redemption" (6). Specifically, the American monomyth is about restoring "paradise":

> A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity." (Lawrence and Jewett 6)

Indeed, this redemption myth plays a big role in the story of the American superhero. It is about trying to recover "paradise" or in less romantic terms, to return to the status quo. While Lawrence and Jewett's idea of the monomyth of the American superhero seems to be grounded more by religious undertones, I argue that this idea of "recovery" or redemptive power of the American-centric superhero translates nicely to the function of auxiliaries (that is to say, the function to protect, defend, and regulate everyday life). As a result, the superhero, inasmuch as they have a hero's journey and that they seek to recover paradise, are people who live and exist to perform auxiliary duties.

But the superhero is not just someone who is merely doing a job. Instead, the superhero archetype is fundamentally a moral and prosocial person who wants to serve humanity in whatever capacity they are allowed to serve it. According to Peter Coogan, the superhero is someone whose "mission is to fight evil and protect the innocent; this fight is universal, prosocial, and selfless. The superhero's mission must fit in with the existing, professed mores of society, and it must not be intended to benefit or further the superhero" (3). Indeed, Chris Yogerst argues that superheroes are fundamentally people who are underpinned by moral agency and people who exercise qualities such as "courage, humility, righteous indignation, sacrifice, responsibility, and perseverance" (27).

Now, of course, some might say that superheroes are not a homogenous bunch. But there are generally five types of superheroes. The first type is aliens with special powers (e.g. Thor). The second type is humans who somehow are imbued with superpowers through either accident, endowments, or acquired skills (e.g. Spider-Man, Captain America, or Doctor Strange). The third type is ordinary humans with high intellect and resources (e.g. Black Panther or Iron Man). The fourth type is supernatural or magical figures (e.g. Shazam). The fifth type is robots and artificial intelligence (e.g. Vision). But while they might be different in terms of their powers, race, or

even origins, it is actually more accurate to say that they are different only in terms of being different variants of the same archetype.

Indeed, all of them, despite their different powers or origins, are fundamentally people who seek to protect other people from harm. In relation to the idea of superheroes as being a prosocial and moral group of beings, I shall apply this framework to the superhero group that is the Avengers. Specifically, I argue that the grouping that is the Avengers re-orientates our view to seeing superheroes as being an auxiliary class of people as opposed to vigilantes or "freaks". To be sure, superheroes do operate outside the law. But they do so because, usually, the police or military are unable to defeat or apprehend the super-powered villains. Hence, they need someone who is their match to recover or restore the status quo.

Now, what this means is that we can say that superheroes are, in a way, working for the police or military. But that is not really true in the sense that while we can say that superheroes, for example, like the Avengers are a "militarized" group (Pardy 110), they are not a part of any recognizable wing of the police or military. In that sense, the Avengers are not a state instrument. Rather, they are a pro-government militia. The term pro-government militia or PGM refers to "armed groups" that are "loosely and informally linked to the government, operate with relative autonomy, and perform irregular tasks such as intimidation" (Böhmelt and Clayton 199).

These functions are actually alluded to in Nick Fury's words when he said: "[t]here was an idea called the Avengers initiative. The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people. To see if they can become something more. To see if they can work together when we need them to fight the battle we never could." Indeed, superheroes are independent contractors who can choose what to do with their powers. They are heroes because they choose to use their powers for the betterment of humanity. But choosing to regulate and advance the security and safety of humanity comes with other choices as well. This includes choosing to put aside their own pride and arrogance to work in a team and to work in such a way that privileges the health and safety of humanity over their own.

Teamwork, work ethic, and multilateralism

Working well with others or teamwork is one of the greatest values that is promoted by the Avengers. In *The Avengers* (2012), Nick Fury unites the discrete members of The Avengers to fight not only Loki but also his army from outer space. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), the Avengers fight as a team to defeat Ultron, an artificial intelligence. In *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), the Avengers put aside their differences to defeat Thanos and undo his cosmic genocide. In all four films, the Avengers choose to give up their own selfish ways and learn to work together for the sake of the common good. The importance of teamwork

is demonstrated with the death of Agent Coulson. The reason is that Coulson died because the team was busy quarreling amongst themselves when they could have actually used their energies to work together and to protect the people around them. Granted, they were under the spell of the mind stone, but Coulson's death highlights the importance of what can go wrong when team unity is undermined by self-interests and narcissism.

Work ethic is a value that underpins the ethos of the Avengers. In fact, superheroes have to be on standby, twenty-four hours, seven days a week. This is evidenced by how conflicted each character feels in terms of balancing their personal and professional lives in such a way that does not destroy their well-being. For example, Tony Stark's obsession with finding new ways to protect Earth is a constant source of tension between him and Pepper Potts. Indeed, Steve Rogers' sense of duty causes him to give up the idea of romance and marriage. It was only later that Rogers decided to go back in time to spend his life with his true love Peggy Carter. Even Thor's sense of self-worth is tied to work. As shown in *Endgame*, Frigga had to tell Thor not to let the label of "superhero" limit him. But the Avengers are not workaholics who have nothing better to do with their lives. Instead, they serve because they feel that it is their responsibility and duty to serve and to ensure that people are safe and protected from evil forces.

Multilateralism is a concept from international relations. But it is something that is highly valued in the stories of the Avengers. Multilateralism prioritizes consensus, compromise, and community above self. This concept is perhaps embodied by the work done by the United Nations in fostering dialogue and cooperation between nations around the globe. According to Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "global cooperation based on agreed rules" lowers the risk for "the law of the jungle, where problems don't get solved" (Security Council para 2). Indeed, UN Secretary-General António Guterres "underscored that the world requires a multilateralism that is more effective, more networked, and more inclusive, saying "we need to combine the strengths of existing institutions to deliver together on humanity's most pressing challenges" (Guterres para 22).

Multilateralism can be seen by how the Avengers submit themselves to the authority of S.H.I.E.L.D. By doing so, the Avengers show that super heroing is not some ego-trip but a job that is about how to serve society in the best possible way. The events of *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) encapsulate the dangers of unilateralism and the benefits of multilateralism. The following scene expresses this point.

Tony Stark: There's no decision-making process here. We need to be put in check! Whatever form that takes, I'm game. If we can't accept limitations, if we're boundary-less, we're no better than the bad guys.

Steve Rogers:	Tony, someone dies on your watch, you don't give up.
Tony Stark:	Who said we're giving up?
Steve Rogers:	We are if we're not taking responsibility for our actions. This document just shifts the blames.
James Rhodes:	I'm sorry. Steve. That - that is dangerously arrogant. This is the United Nations we're talking about. It's not the World Security Council, it's not S.H.I.E.L.D., it's not HYDRA.
Steve Rogers:	No, but it's run by people with agendas, and agendas change.
Tony Stark:	That's good. That's why I'm here. When I realized what my weapons were capable of in the wrong hands, I shut it down and stopped manufacturing.
Steve Rogers:	Tony, you chose to do that. If we sign this, we surrender our right to choose. What if this panel sends us somewhere we don't think we should go? What if there is somewhere we need to go, and they don't let us? We may not be perfect, but the safest hands are still our own.

It is notable that while Steve Rogers disagrees with the Sokovia Accords, he does not seek to undermine, change or overthrow the government. Rather, he chose to respect the decision and chose to go into self-exile. But choosing to do so does not mean that Rogers is blindly loyal to or naive about the government. As Del M. N. Bharath argues, “Captain America’s loyalty does not lie with the government; instead, he puts his faith in the people” (397). Indeed, Steve Rogers chose to accept the decision of the elected officials of the people, and chose to step down and step aside, leaving politics and policy to the officials elected by the people. This is important because it shows the difference between villains and heroes; the former who sees themselves as above or beside society and the latter who sees themselves as serving the desires of society.

Superheroes are public servants

Superheroes are often criticized for being one-dimensional characters. Specifically, they are criticized for being only interested in fighting bad guys and nothing else. But we have to remember that superheroes do not actually have to do such things in the first place. The fact that super heroes choose to use their powers to help people says a lot about their character. By choosing to help people with their powers, superheroes show that serving the greater good is not about self-gratification or seeking material rewards. Instead, they show public service is about serving the interest of the people. To be sure, there are many examples of corrupt politicians or public servants and egregious cases of corruption in politics and government. But not all

government officials and not all government agents are corrupted or are involved in corruption. There exist many hardworking and honest officials and agents doing their best to serve the public. The concept of superheroes is thus a reminder that there are good people in the world who are constantly trying to do right by the people.

To be sure, superheroes are not perfect beings. They have their own flaws and weaknesses. But they are heroes because they choose to serve the public interests even though they are not paid and even though they usually have to risk their own personal well-being for the sake of the greater good. This particular quality can be seen in the way in which Steve Rogers and Tony Stark settle their arguments and differences in *Civil War*. While many enjoy the sport-like rivalry between Team Captain America and Team Iron Man in *Civil War*, we must remember that their fight was not about subversion or revolution. Rather, their argument was about what is the best way to serve humanity. For Rogers, the best to serve humanity was to be an independent force that could act according to their own conscience and not because of political agendas. For Stark, it was about obeying the mandate of the United Nations.

But no matter who we might support in that argument, *Civil War* show that bad things can happen when superheroes choose to do things in their own way. Indeed, in the film, you can see that, even though they kept their fighting amongst themselves, damage was done not only to each other but to public property as well. It is thus a curious note that critics of superhero movies seldom raise this point whenever they suggest that superheroes should use their powers to usher in revolutionary or radical changes to society. Umberto Eco, for example, seems to suggest that it is frustrating that instead of "exercising good on a cosmic level, or a galactic level" and enacting "the most bewildering political, economic, and technological upheavals in the world," superheroes are "forever employed in parochial performances" and "obliged to continue [their] activities in the sphere of small and infinitesimal modifications of the immediately visible" (Eco 22).

But I argue that it is precisely because superheroes only concern themselves with security and safety matters and not with societal, economic, or political problems that makes them heroic characters. Otherwise, they are just people who are activists or politicians. To be sure, socio-political and economic issues are important topics. But the job of an auxiliary is not to get involved such matters. That is because their job as auxiliary is simply to make sure that the people are safe and secure from external or internal threats. At the same time, superheroes, like most auxiliaries, are not really qualified, be it training, education, or job experiences, to deal with socio-political issues and problems. In fact, to ask or expect superheroes to interfere or solve complex socio-political problems is the equivalent of asking athletes to debate fiscal policies or asking mathematicians to win the World Series.

Superheroes have a job to do and it is best that they stick to it and let others do theirs. As a corollary, Steve Rogers objects whenever S.H.I.E.L.D. or any members of the Avengers appear to be transgressing and going beyond their remit as a security force. Indeed Steve Rogers constantly resists the idea of unelected officials meddling with policy and politics. This resistance can be seen in two moments in the movies. The first occurs when Rogers argues with Tony when it is discovered that he had created Ultron. The second instance is when Rogers argues with Nick Fury about the dangers of using predictive technologies to target perceived enemies of the state.

Thanos' actions in *Infinity War* and *Endgame* encapsulate the horrors that can occur when super-beings decide that they know best and that they are the only ones who can solve complex problems that are plaguing society. To be sure, Thanos' goals of protecting the environment and enhancing living standards are laudable goals. But his actions or policies are totally irrational, abhorrent and misanthropic. The reason is because his solutions are predicated upon death and destruction. And if one's solution to any problem is simply to just kill people and destroy families, societies, and civilizations, then by logic, one should always just resort to death and destruction to solve any kind of problems.

Thanos' plan is not only immoral but it is also illogical. The reason is because life itself is filled with all sorts of problems. And if one keeps thinking that death or destruction is the solution, then the most logical solution is to simply not to have life in the first place. In fact, Thanos should just totally wiped out life itself. Then there wouldn't be any problems in the first place. But the more important point is that both *Infinity War* and *Endgame*s how that having good intentions, while commendable, is not enough. One must also have proper and relevant solutions to problems. The story of Thanos is thus a cautionary tale of what can happen when a super-being decides to make unilateral decisions for the rest of us. Thanos is also a cautionary tale of the horrors that can ensue when tyrants or super-beings make decisions on behalf of society without going through consulting and working with the people.

But the Avengers movies, on the whole, are also cautionary tales of what can go wrong when people who are successful in one field of work think that their success can be transferred or is relevant to another field. This idea is best encapsulated by the Dunning Kruger effect. It is a cognitive bias whereby people with low ability, experience or expertise overestimate the ability, experience and expertise involved to do things. The consequence of this can result in negative or fatal consequences. In Thanos' case, he not only overestimated his ability and intelligence to solve something as complex as overpopulation and resource exhaustion, he also underestimated the ability and intelligence of people to solve complex problems. And this is what differentiates a superhero and a villain, which is the idea that the former knows what he or she is good at and

they stick to it (namely, security and safety), whereas the latter often think that they know best and thus seek to overturn, subvert or radically change the status quo.

The Monomyth of the Superhero as an Auxiliary Class in the MCU

It is here that I turn to a particular member of the Avengers, Tony Stark a.k.a. Iron Man. It is with him that we see the ideas of Plato's auxiliary, Campbell's monomyth, Lawrence and Jewett's American monomyth, and Coogan's idea of a superhero combine and come to life. Tony Stark was a fairly narcissistic and self-indulgent "billionaire, genius, playboy, philanthropist" who had no qualms designing, manufacturing, and selling weapons for money (Ordinary World; Campbell's monomyth stages are mentioned here and henceforth in this manner). But after he was captured and forced to use his skills and knowledge to escape from his captors, Stark realized the harm his weapons were causing the world and decided to use them to protect and defend society from harm (Call to Action).

He was initially aided by Ho Yinsen, a fellow scientist and prisoner, who encouraged him to build the original prototype Iron Man suit (Mentor). After escaping and surviving the ordeal, Stark's decision to save the world then turned into a dangerous obsession after Thanos' attack on New York (Great Ordeal). The attack drove him to develop more and more sophisticated weapons (Crossing the threshold). But his obsession then led to Ultron, a genocidal artificial intelligence which caused great harm to the world. Later Stark found himself fighting against an equally obsessive Thanos who wanted to end half of the population in the universe (Challenge). These events and antagonists test not only Stark's abilities, skills, and knowledge but they also test his determination, resolve, and moral strength.

While many question and doubt his commitment to the cause, and in spite of his many personal flaws and mistakes in life, Stark ultimately chose to give his life to save the universe. As he puts it, "every journey must have an end" (source?). Tony Stark's journey started with him stepping away from his "old world" of weapons manufacturing and into a "new world" of super heroism. He then became the unofficial leader of the Avengers. That is, he uses his wealth and scientific knowledge to arm the Avengers, including helping out with the building of the Heli-carriers. In fact, while Doctor Strange was the one who came up with a plan to defeat Thanos, Stark was the one who chose to give up his life to do so.

At the end, Stark showed his true colors as a prosocial and moral person by giving the fullest measure of himself to protect and defend humanity as he chose to place the safety and security needs of society over his own. Tony Stark exemplifies the idea and ideal of a superhero; one who puts his own needs below the needs of society. The key takeaway from the superhero archetype is that while it is true that superheroes and comic-books were made initially for kids

(they are usually depicted as wearing bright costumes, frequently stress the spectacle of superpowers, and use violence to solve problems), the superhero archetype is fundamentally underpinned by adult themes of societal and community security, safety, and protection. And these themes are embedded within their roles as auxiliaries. But the superhero-auxiliary is not someone just doing a job. Rather, they are fundamentally prosocial and moral people who embody and practice an ethos of public service, teamwork, moral rectitude, and multilateralism.

Whither the superhero archetype

It has been argued here that the Avengers is an auxiliary and security force that is underpinned by values of public service, teamwork, and social cohesion. But critics tend to ignore these aspects of the Avengers. Instead, they chose to focus on the superficiality of the superhero archetype such as their origins, commercialism, and visuality. Indeed, this resistance towards superheroes as a whole can also be found in discussions regarding Marvel movies. Specifically, critics argue that the MCU reflects the greed of filmmakers "racing to find the next comparable big-budget blockbuster home run" (Katz) and that it "masks the need for cathartic discussion about complex problems facing the United States, such as economic challenges eroding the middle class" (Frantzman). From a sociological perspective, critics feel that superhero movies promote not only violence (Muller et al. 1-10), racism (Hunt 86-103), sexism (May), martial culture and fascism (Weldon), but they also normalize the desire for surveillance "at the expense of individual privacy" (Schänzel 259).

But other scholars have pointed out that movies like *Black Panther* (2018) have helped to subvert "stereotypes found in Hollywood movies by "presenting characters that embody complex intersectional identities" (Bucciferro 169). Additionally, the MCU movies show that heroism is less about vigilantism and vanity and more about "the ability to contribute through one's affiliations meaningfully" (Acu 197). While superhero movies are certainly not bastions of cinematic, cultural, or moral excellence, they nonetheless show that heroism is more than just about superpowers or using violence to solve problems. Instead, the MCU movies show that heroism is about protecting and upholding the safety and security of society.

While critics will continue to criticize superheroes, one is compelled to say that superhero fans watch superhero movies not because they are fascists or sociopaths. Rather they watch superhero stories because they allow us to celebrate values such as duty, public service, self-sacrifice, and the work done by the auxiliary class. It is perhaps a sign of troubled times that superhero movies are popular with audiences around the world. But unlike critics who hold that audiences are passive and undiscerning; I argue that audiences are actually actively voting with their money and time by supporting superhero movies. But their support comes from an innate desire and appreciation for the auxiliary class and the good that such a class of people do for society.

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