

# Stan Lee and the Marvel Universe

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Welcome to the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* special section “Stan Lee and the Marvel Universe.” As Stan might exclaim: “Face front, true believer!”

Shelves have been filled with books about comic book history, Marvel and DC specifically, and the many writers, artists, and executives responsible for developing this uniquely American form of mass communication. Given the ubiquity and global reach of the Marvel and DC films over the past several decades and the aggressive release dates for superhero films well into the future, you can safely bet that comic books and superheroes will continue to be a popular source for a long, long time.

Jumping into the fray, the scholars that bring their ideas to life in the following pages take a critical look at Lee and the Marvel Universe in a manner that I feel deserves closer attention. And, make no mistake – this special section simply scratches the surface! I view this work as a jumping off point...perhaps a catalyst for others to join the hullabaloo. We simply cannot exhaust a topic with the kind of dark matter-like impact on contemporary popular culture around the globe.

What follows is a set of scholarly articles by Alan Jozwiak, Joseph P. Muszynski, and Peter Cullen Bryan that examine and assess Lee’s early work and its consequences for the history of Marvel Comics. These thoughtful and interrogative essays delve into the relationship that Lee established with readers, a key aspect of his efforts in beating “Brand Echh” (as he jokingly called DC Comics) and the relationship between Lee and eminent artist Jack “King” Kirby that produced the

The Popular Culture Studies Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1&2  
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groundbreaking *Fantastic Four*. Readers familiar with Marvel's early history will find much to enjoy in these articles, while "newbies" enter a world of insight and intrigue that will certainly set them on a course to comic book scholardom.

The centerpiece of the special section is a series of "think pieces" written by some of the – again in Lee style – "The World's Greatest Popular Culture and Comic Book Scholars!" We lead off with Arthur Asa Berger, a popular culture titan (see PCSJ Volume 1 for an in-depth interview with Berger), and one of the first scholars to study Lee and comic books as a serious art form. Then, Jeff Massey, Brian Cogan, Jeff McLaughlin, Joseph J. Darowski, John Kenneth Muir, Robert McParland, and me take on Lee and the Marvel Universe from a variety of perspectives, ranging from interactions with him and his work to examining his life as a writer, sometimes-actor, and creator of heroes.

"Stan Lee and the Marvel Universe" rounds out with a series of comic book, graphic novel, and television reviews of Marvel-related material. This section, which includes essays on the hit television shows *Agent Carter* and *Daredevil*, presents a different perspective that takes the Marvel Universe through and beyond Lee. The reviews also include assessments of the wildly-popular *Ms. Marvel* series and the ever-important *X-Men*, as well as Mark Millar's *Civil War*, one of the moments that utterly reformed Marvel and set the stage for the MCU on film. I want to thank Norma Jones and Kathleen Turner for their wonderful work on this section.

As mentioned earlier, my hope is that this special section ignites or re-ignites some people's interest in Lee and Marvel. Like much of contemporary scholarship, however, a great deal of comic book studies has gone the way of literature, history, and the social studies – focusing on postcolonial and non-Western subjects, as well as cultural studies topics based on race, gender, and sexual orientation.

From these vantages, Lee and Marvel might seem antiquated as topics for exploration. Yet, I believe that a great wealth of information still needs researched. Lee is a creative icon – one of the most significant writers in American history – and Marvel resides at the center of the Disney empire, releasing blockbuster after blockbuster film with no sign of slowing down.

Onward, friends! Excelsior!