

Successful comic book superheroes from the Golden Age of the industry generally used their superior sense of morality to diffuse the evil intentions of criminals from different backgrounds. These criminals, who changed from issue to issue, demonstrated a pattern of similar social background in the stories of Superhero conflicts during this era. As the reader develops disgust toward the character traits of such criminals, the association of cultural identity with these traits may distort their perception of existing social entities reflected in the literature. In perpetuating a particular social class in the criminal identities of an entire volume of superhero comics, publishers of these issues show evidence of deliberately nudging readers to perceive contemporary socio-cultural personas under a biased lens.

I would like to examine the social and cultural backgrounds of criminals in the original volumes of Superman and Batman and discuss the way these backgrounds are being assessed by their writers with consideration of historical context. I would also like to discuss the role of the Eugenics movement from the early 20th century as a major influence and source of scrutiny against certain demographics in the characterization of the superhero genre as it began gaining traction in the comics industry.

Siegel and Shuster created Superman in the 1930s under the influence of science fiction, which adapted contemporary science into more creative explanations in the fields of chemistry, physics, and biology. I believe that perceptions aroused from the eugenics movement are distinctly nested in the science fiction that boosted Superman into existence. Although the identities of criminals do not reflect the targeted demographic facets of eugenics literature, I argue that Superman depicts the ideal result of eugenics as it was advertised before World War II. The depiction of the targeted demographic population, such as the poor, mentally unstable, sexually delinquent, and ethnically dissimilar, is seen frequently in identities of criminals in the Batman comics that met the industry in 1939.