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## The US culture as exposed by Comics, not simply shaped.

Comics started off as an underground movement. They fought to be acknowledged as a medium that isn't simply meant for children. They won, however, with the growing acknowledgement of comics as literary medium there has been a fall out of certain elements of comics. The accessibility that comics have received has also brought with it an amount of cultural censorship. In the many articles, the influence of comics on culture is consistently brought up. People continue to be worried about how comics shape our culture-- promoting violence, or sexual promiscuity or deviancy-- but no one ever looks at what comics reveal about that culture (without censorship).

We review books this way, what does *The Great Gatsby* Say about the U.S Society of the 1930's? So why is it we don't review comics this way? In fact, I think we have every right to-- given a fictional narrative comic that is set in present day.

In example, the web comic *TJ & Amal* (written and drawn by, E.K. Weaver) we are given a fictional narrative about two boys, and their lives. There is nothing "thrilling" or "fantastical" about these characters, they aren't any different than someone you might meet on the street- but that's what makes them so incredibly unique.

TJ is a white boy born in California, and involved in the drug culture that is a huge part of US (and also a hugely neglected or demonized part of the US).



Amal, on the other hand, is Seattle born and Middle Eastern; he attends Berkley and comes from a family that he coins "Traditional" (as the whole story starts up with him cancelling his arranged marriage, coming out as homosexual, and being disowned).

Together these two are a mix of the cultural and economic diversity found in the US. Weaver avoids having the typical "white-wash" of only Caucasian main characters, or shoving ethnic characters to the sidelines & stereotypes-- while also showing that there is a culture all its own to people who are Caucasian and that being white is simply not a "catch all".

While both protagonists are young American men in their 20's, they come from radically different backgrounds. Together they represent the cultural confusion or differences that we find in our modern society. In fact, we even see these differences within their interactions—there are times where TJ is uncertain of Amal's dietary habits because of the other man's ethnic heritage. (as seen in the Pizza ordering scene in Chapter 13, page 11).

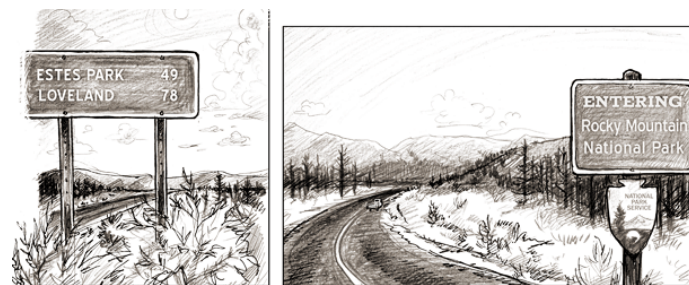


This comic provides a lot to say about society as a whole, about the diverse experiences and people, as well as the cultural aspect of the United States that tends to be forgotten or overlooked as important in our media. We see how rock 'n roll and fast food and hotels affect our protagonists-- as they have greatly carved the US in to the shape it is today. We not only see the boys traversing the US by car in the good ol' road trip fashion—but we also have them listening to iconic songs such as “Graceland” by Paul Simon, “Blister in the sun” by Violent Femmes, and Weaver goes on to add in other iconic tributes to just growing up in the United states. (References to Bruce Lee, Stevie Wonder, Back to the future, Saturday Night Live, and even the

presidential election-- which at the time was Clinton, Obama, & McCain!)

The telling of their story is the telling of modern U.S. In fact Weaver careful creates an image of our world that reflects the things culturally unique to the United States while also letting the story move smoothly through piece to piece in a very natural way. She writes in music and movies, restaurants and hotels, and even direct street signs to fully place her narrative in the U.S.

It's not simply an element of setting, but also an underlining thread for the whole story. We see how the U.S. has been shaped by its history, how it has come into its own, and how it is still being shaped. It is a comic world that at once acknowledges the faults and flaws of our current society through its narrative.



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## Annotated Bibliography

Beatty, Bart. "High Treason: Canadian Nationalism And The Regulation Of American Crime Comic Books." *Essays On Canadian Writing* 62 (1997): 85. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 5 May 2013.

This article is a little older, and reviews a law put into effect in Canada in the 40-50's that bans American crime comic books because of their "influence over children" and in order to generate more Canadian work's and culture. This article sheds interesting light on how censorship in the comic world can affect culture, just as culture can be show or fabricated within comics (and other mediums.)

Crawford, Philip Charles. "AMERICANA POPULAR CULTURE And The COMICS." *Knowledge Quest* 35.1 (2006): 50-53. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 5 May 2013.

The use of comics as teaching resources is the argument made within this article. The author acknowledges a few different comics used as teaching material in the past, and even gives his own ideal criteria for what makes a comic teaching worthy.

Dennis, Jeffery P. "Gay Content In Newspaper Comics." *Journal Of American Culture* 35.4 (2012): 304-314. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 5 May 2013.

The visibility of gay characters in primarily newspaper comics is the focal point of this article. They take a look further into what is about homosexuality that makes it so elusive in comics, where race and gender have become to be more fluid and politically correct.

Gardner, Jeanne Emerson. "She Got Her Man, But Could She Keep Him? Love And Marriage In American Romance Comics, 1947-1954." *Journal Of American Culture* 36.1 (2013): 16. *Biography Reference Bank (H.W. Wilson)*. Web. 5 May 2013.

This article provides a review of the beginning of romance comics as being geared towards woman, and having a considerable shorter plotline and less plot points then other comics available at the time- ie super hero comics. It further goes on to argue the way romance comics were used to further establish, and reinforce gender stereotypes and roles of the fifties- rather than exposing what was truly happening at the time and allowing it to be without judgment of morals.

Gustines, George Gene. "The Superhero as Society's Mirror, From World War II to Iraq." *New York Times* 14 July 2007: B7. *MasterFILE Premier*. Web. 5 May 2013.

This articles argues that through the ages superhero comics display the major themes of the time period they were written in. It shows us how the villains to many popular super heroes make the change from Nazi's to cold war Soviets; and it poses the question of where super heroes are going now- who is the new villain.