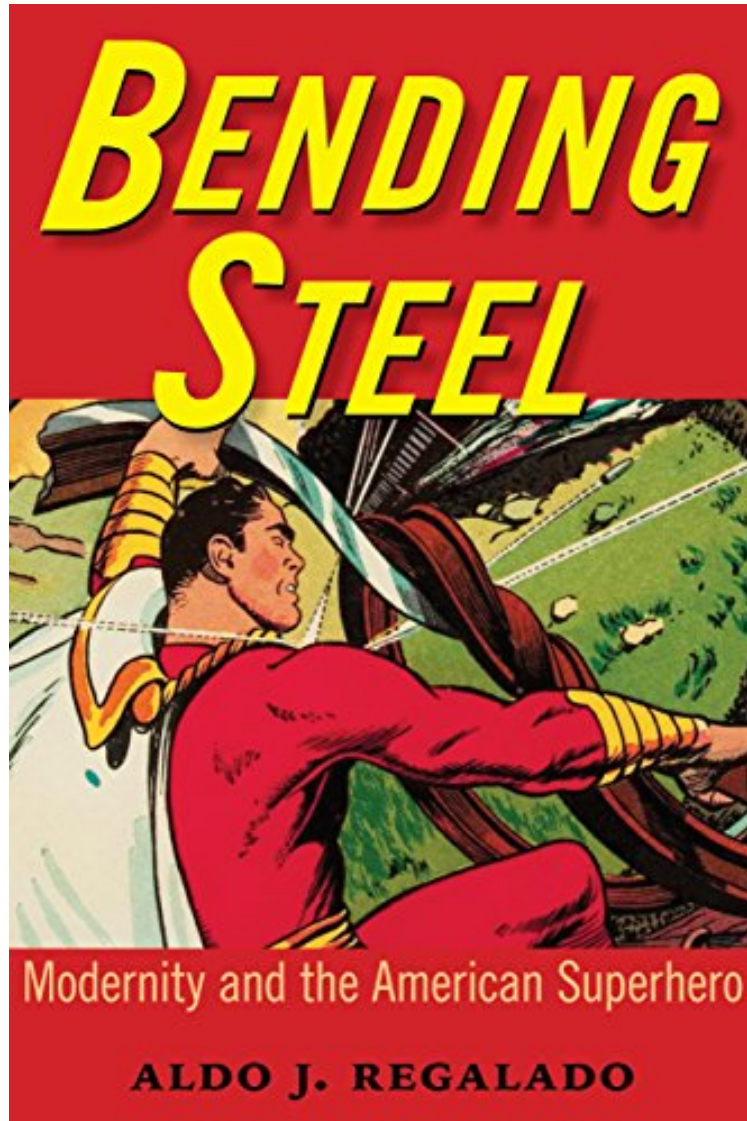


[Download pdf ebook] Bending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero

Bending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero

Aldo J. Regalado

*ePub | *DOC | audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF*



DOWNLOAD



READ ONLINE

#2471112 in Books 2015-07-16Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.02 x .81 x 5.98l, .0 #File Name: 1628462213288 pages | File size: 31.Mb

Aldo J. Regalado : Bending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. some familiar segments, but focus on modernity is insightful, other strong sections. Well recommendedBy B. CapossereBending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero, by Aldo J. Regalado, is another entry in the getting-crowded field of cultural analysis of superheroes/comics. I cant say Regalado offers a lot that is new here, especially in some of the examinations of specific well-plumbed comics, but Bending Steel still has a lot to offer as it is a well-organized, clearly and often sharply written exploration of the topic with

lucid, thoughtful points well supported by frequent concrete examples. The focus, as the title states, is on modernity and what the superhero genre tells us about the cultural response to it. He opens by defining his terms, with modernity described as the allegedly more liberalizing arrangements that found expression through rationalism, capitalism, representative government, technological innovation, industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and the rise of modern societies. This was, as he says, a lengthy process, and his book is organized around its various changing phases: Market Modernity: the rapid development that occurred during the nineteenth century Industrial Modernity: which saw its fullest expression in the years leading to WWII Atomic Modernity: modernity's suburban, Cold War phase Postmodernity: the period from 1980 to the present While the superhero as we think of him/her did not arise until the Industrial stage, when Superman leapt onto the stage of Action Comics, Regaldo sees the nineteenth century's heroic fiction, as exemplified particularly by James Fennimore Coopers Natty Bumppo, as an important precursor stage, both for how they helped define the contours of modernity but also helped set the boundaries for later heroic fiction, including the genre spawned by Superman: The Man of Tomorrow began his career confined in a cultural cage forged from the stuff of nineteenth and early twentieth-century heroic archetypes, and ideologies regarding race, class, gender, and nationalism are counted among its bars. If Superman, however, was born in a cage formed of the prior century's worldview, Regaldo is quick to point out that it is difficult, as many a villain has learned, to keep a good superhero down: Superman, however, was originally imagined by young men who stood at the margins of society. Consequently, he struggles against his cultural confines, promising to overcome them just as he bends steel with his bare hands This sense of a push-pull appears regularly throughout Regaldo's exploration. For instance, in his first section, he contrasts Coopers triumphalist views of heroism and modernity with those of writers working the American Gothic form, who suggest that the nation was doomed as a consequence of the violence and corruption that accompanied slavery, westward expansion and other unsavory aspects of America's modern enterprise. He points as well to the increasing popularity of dime novel writers, who created working-class heroes that openly challenged the legitimacy of elites. Most authors who look into the superhero antecedents begin with the pulp heroes such as Doc Savage and The Shadow, so it was a bit refreshing to have Regaldo not only go back further in time but also explore the impact of literary fiction, which far too often is treated as if it was wholly separate from the hero/superhero world (even today). And while Natty Bumppo seems a relatively direct connection in terms of heroism and derring-do, I found Regaldo's analysis of the American Gothics (particularly Poe's) conflicting narrative (especially on masculinity) and the impact of the dime novels such as Deadwood Dick with their focus on working class views newly insightful. In section two, dealing with Industrial Modernity, Regaldo focuses his attention on Edgar Rice Burroughs John Carter and Tarzan characters, both of whom presented an imaginative escape from modern urban society . . . a rejection of cities, technology, bureaucracy, and business culture, as well as a celebration of white, male Anglo-Saxonism over others defined by gender, class, race, and ethnicity. Lovecraft is another focus of this segment, a contrasting one as he views modernity through a different prism, though like Burroughs he too is blinkered by his racist views (some of the quotes will make you want to shower) The superhero proper makes his/her appearance in chapters three and four as Regaldo covers the cultural transition to heroes like Superman, Wonder Woman, and others who tackled modernity head on accepting the city as a reality of modern life and treating the industrial landscape as a space to play in and triumph over. One of the big shifts here as well was in the creators, who came from different immigrant and ethnic backgrounds (especially Jewish at this point), which as Regaldo points out, informed the ways they engaged the use of race in crafting heroic identities. He doesn't exaggerate this broadening, however, explaining how whiteness remained operative in superhero fiction failing to bend the bars that confined women in cages of sexism and objectification. Here is where we start to move into well-traveled territory, and while Regaldo's cultural analysis is always incisive, much of the base information, such as how Superman was created, will be pretty familiar to those with more than a passing knowledge of comics history. The same is true of some of the more basic analysis, such as idea of Superman as an immigrant or the contrasts between Superman and Batman. Chapter Five covers the anti-comics crusade, rooted in the ethos of an atomic modernity in which the suburban home was thought of as a vanguard against internal and external threats. Here, Regaldo I thought does an excellent job in not simply covering the crusade itself, but offering up perhaps the most balanced presentation of the face of that crusade, Fredric Werther, that I've ever seen. Too often presented as a near-caricature of villainy, prudishness, and conservative paranoia, here Regaldo begins by making clear that Werther came out of a very socially liberal mindset, detailing for instance his career-long stance against racism not just in the arts but in real life, as when he used his own money to fund an affordable clinic in Harlem. I greatly appreciated this more full view of Werther, even if some of his well-known attacks on comics, such as the homoerotic influence of Batman/Robin on children, remain so laughably over the top from our modern sensibility. This chapter, even if moving through well-covered ground, is nicely detailed, offering up a slew of quotations rather than putting words in critics' mouths. He also does a nice job of detailing the impact of the anti-comic crusade beyond the obvious imposition of the Comics Code. The big shift in the 1960s led by Marvel's introduction of not just a new cast of superheroes but a whole new type and style, one which captured the alienation that Americans felt in Cold War America [and] responded to the countercultural movements of the 1960s, is the focus of chapter six. Although again, Regaldo doesn't exaggerate this more transgressive kind of superhero, acknowledging that Marvel's corporate/business needs allowed

them to only go so far so as not to offend the market. Toward the end of this chapter, he examines how Marvels wholly different type of superhero itself evolved into a superhero with a postmodern sensibility characterized by fluidity, plasticity, alienation, freedom, and a free reign of possibility . . . [and] increasingly cynical expressing disgust and disdain for the meta-narratives of American society. Here is brings in Alan Moore and David Gibsons Watchmen (how could he not?) and Frank Miller, particularly The Dark Knight Returns. Once again, I cant say there is a lot new here in this section, from Stan Lees early influence in the creation of The Fantastic Four, The Hulk, Spider Man and their accordant contrast to earlier heroes to Moores deconstruction of the genre. But if theres nothing new (and to be fair, it would be tough to add much new to ground that has been so stomped over), it is all handled quickly, efficiently, and clearly, and the points and connection being made are hard to argue with. The most original section in here, and my favorite details, involve an examination of the shifting presentation of the Black Panther and how those shifts mirror what is happening in the wider culture with regard to race.Regalado closes with some reference to the explosion of superhero-related media, but doesnt go into much detail, which is too bad as based on the clarity and insight of the book, I would have liked to have seen him tackle film and games in much more detail in terms of what they say about the post-post modern sensibility. But perhaps thats for another book. This one, however, serves just fine and makes for an easy recommendation.(originally appeared on fantasyliterature.com)0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A history of superheroesBy Phillip SchultzDisclaimer: I received a free ecopy via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.I enjoyed this book a lot. It starts out slow and can be a bit dry at times. There is a lot of material that introduces the comic book superhero. Once the author gets through that and into the meat of the book, things get interesting quick.This feels like it was approached similar to an academic paper to some degree. It starts out by looking at early American adventure stories. He examines character tropes, themes, and cultural influences that shaped these stories and ultimately led to the creation of superheroes. The book benefits from this because it is very thoughtful and thorough. But it has the potential to turn off readers that are more interested in the later periods discussed.The payoff to this slow buildup is worth it though. The author is able to draw comparisons between those earlier pieces and their creators with the superheroes that came out in comic books and those creators. He does give a good overview of the history of comic books as well. That information might not be as useful to diehard fans that are familiar with it. I felt like it was well presented and gave me a lot of knowledge that I didn't already have.There is a bit of focus on major comic book series from Marvel and DC. This works well to establish the tone of the books and eras discussed. I would have liked some mention of independent comic books that follow along the path that he creates through the book. Overall this is a great read for anyone that has an interest in comic books, specifically superheroes.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A critical and fun analysis of golden/silver age comic heroes often through the ...By Daniel CaseyA critical and fun analysis of golden/silver age comic heroes often through the lens of critical race theory that gets at how we imagine heroes and thus core cultural values. Great read for comic fans and an excellent one for non-comic folks.

Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound . . . Its Superman! Bending Steel examines the historical origins and cultural significance of Superman and his fellow American crusaders. Cultural historian Aldo J. Regalado asserts that the superhero seems a direct response to modernity, often fighting the interrelated processes of industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and capitalism that transformed the United States from the early nineteenth century to the present. Reeling from these exciting but rapid and destabilizing forces, Americans turned to heroic fiction as a means of explaining national and personal identities to themselves and to the world. In so doing, they created characters and stories that sometimes affirmed, but other times subverted conventional notions of race, class, gender, and nationalism.The cultural conversation articulated through the nations early heroic fiction eventually led to a new heroic typethe brightly clad, super-powered, pro-social action heroes that first appeared in American comic books starting in the late 1930s. Although indelibly shaped by the Great Depression and World War II sensibilities of the second-generation immigrants most responsible for their creation, comic book superheroes remain a mainstay of American popular culture.Tracing superhero fiction all the way back to the nineteenth century, Regalado firmly bases his analysis of dime novels, pulp fiction, and comics in historical, biographical, and reader response sources. He explores the roles played by creators, producers, and consumers in crafting superhero fiction, ultimately concluding that these narratives are essential for understanding vital trajectories in American culture.

Aldo Regalado offers fresh insight into the origins of the American superhero. In particular he traces how the interconnected racial and gendered concerns embodied in superheroes played out in the early years of comic books. The depth of scholarship and the quality of writing are top notch and this will be a go-to work for scholars in the field.Ian Gordon, associate professor of history at the National University of Singapore, author of *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, and coeditor of *Film and Comic Books* (University Press of Mississippi)Much discussion of the superhero figure focuses on what superheroes are, who wrote, drew, published, and read them, when and where, and even how the market, legal, and cultural conditions of the New York publishing world laid the groundwork for the

creation of the superhero genre, but rarely do scholars address the most difficult question of why the superhero arose specifically in late Depression-era urban America. Regalado's answer: a response to modernism and the superhero's ongoing engagement with the changing nature of modernism and postmodernism in America presents a cogent, deeply sensible, and convincing answer. Regalado takes into account consumers, creators, and producers of superhero comics and the conversation between them that shaped the genre's ongoing response to modernism and its changes and discontents. This work is ever sensitive to the humanity, needs, drives, and concerns of those involved in the production and consumption of superhero narratives.

Peter Coogan, director of internal operations, Institute for Comics Studies

About the Author Aldo J. Regalado, Homestead, Florida, is a teacher of history and American studies at Palmer Trinity School, an adjunct lecturer through the American Studies Program at the University of Miami, and an adjunct lecturer in US history at Florida International University.