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Matt Yockey. Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe. Austin: U of Texas P, 2017.

Kevin Degnan
El Camino College, kdegnan@elcamino.edu

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Matt Yockey. *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2017.

Abstract

Review of Matt Yockey. *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe*. Austin: U of Texas, 2017.

Keywords

Superheroes, comics, film, history

Matt Yockey. *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2017. 350 pp.

Make Ours Marvel argues that Marvel's flexibility and desire to reflect, inspire, transform, and be transformed by its fans is what makes it special and sets it apart from its more serious and sometimes one-dimensional competition at DC Comics. This is why Peter Parker exists as the eternal Spiderman and the 1930s Depression-era Spiderman Noir, yet Marvel's (multi)verse also includes Miguel O'Hara as Spiderman 2099, Miles Morales in Ultimate and Marvel Now storylines, Spider Gwen, and Gwenpool. White male billionaire Bruce Wayne, however, is the only one who can say, "I'm Batman." This book is particularly timely, to reference Marvel's name (Timely Comics) before it became Marvel, in that this collection addresses, catalogues, and analyzes Marvel's more flexible, character-centered, and socially aware sensibility at a moment when Marvel has been bending and flexing its characters to be even more reflective of contemporary populations and issues. In editor Frederick Aldama's introduction, he states that the collection's intention is "to chart some key points of the fluid borders of the Marvel Universe in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of how and why the Marvel brand has been so dependable and changeable" throughout its lifetime. The collection succeeds in that endeavor and presents a range of historical information and valuable contemporary criticism of that Marvel history.

Comics scholarship has been a rapidly evolving field in the last twenty years, with particularly explosive growth in the last decade. However, that rapid evolution has come with some blind spots. There are a number of reputable historical texts on comics (see *The Ten-Cent Plague* and *The Comic Book History of Comics*), but these lack the depth of academic analysis. Academic books examining genres within comics are now available (see *What Is a Superhero?*), but these are often a study of a single genre or trope rather than of a single producer or myth-maker that transcends any one trope. *Make Ours Marvel* divides its attention between comics and screen-based media, which is fitting because, while Marvel may have been built on comics, the empire now runs on film and television.

The first half of the essays primarily concern themselves with Marvel Comics' comic books—paper texts created by a changing, evolving staff of writers, pencillers, inkers, and letterers. It is laudable that the essays range from historical perspectives on Marvel Comics from its inception in 1939 to the contemporary comics of the Nu Marvel and MarvelNOW! lines rather than rooting the book's analysis in either a distant and often-forgotten comics history or the myopic praising or condemnation of only Marvel's current work. Anna Peppard's "'This Female Fights Back!' – A Feminist History of Marvel Comics" offers a full, critical historical analysis of female characters and creators in Marvel Comics from The Cat in 1972, Marvel's first female character written and drawn by women, to She-

Hulk jumping rope naked in *The Sensational She-Hulk* no. 40. Peppard finishes her analysis with the contemporary Captain Marvel/Carol Danvers being dressed practically and the new Ms. Marvel/Kamala Khan, a Pakistani-American teenage girl as the main character, written by G. Willow Wilson, a Muslim woman. The other essays in this first half are also quite valuable in deconstructing Marvel's history, for example focusing on specific characters like Daredevil or tropes like the superhero team and Avengers. Marvel's work in comics is amazing, astonishing, uncanny, and even spectacular, but is also not without wart or blemish and the essays of *Make Ours Marvel* acknowledge this in fair measure.

The second half of this edited collection turns its focus to a discussion of Marvel's more contemporary work in film and television while revisiting comics as the origin of Marvel's approach to narrative. The essays analyzing the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) focus on the intertextuality and broad-reaching nature of Marvel's cinematic endeavors, which create and adhere to a continuity between themselves and comics-based story lines. Casual consumers of the MCU might simply marvel at the task of keeping events straight between *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and *Avengers*, but these texts find and explore meaning in unexpected corners. Dru Jeffries' "Spotting Stan: The Fun and Function of Stan Lee's Cameos in the Marvel Universe(s)" examines the surprising authorial implications of Stan Lee's cameos throughout the various Marvel films and television shows. Jeffries argues that via Lee's appearances, he continues his huckster role that began in the comics, which presented and present Lee as the primary author despite the contributions of Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and various writers, directors, cast, and crew of the film and TV texts. Lee's cameos are as playful as they are serious, inserting Stan Lee as eternal author of Marvel. However, Jeffries might have further explored why and how Kirby, Ditko, and so many other creators have allowed and worked alongside Lee's hucksterism and cameos, which often overshadowed their roles as authors. Certainly, this part of Marvel is highly contentious, as Jeffries admits. *Make Ours Marvel* ends with a fitting contemplation of the Marvel multiverse and its inspiration, quantum physics, and the very real possibility of the multiverse in William Proctor's "Schrodinger's Cape: The Quantum Seriality of the Marvel Multiverse."

Make Ours Marvel's analysis of Marvel's present and past is important now as Marvel characters and stories dominate television, film, and comics, when Jane Foster is (a) Thor; a biracial African-American & Latino teen is (a) Spiderman; and a Pakistani-American Muslim teen is (a) Ms. Marvel. This anthology is not shy of confronting that Marvel, while arguably more flexible and progressive in its characters and creative staffing choices than its "Distinguished Competition" at DC, has often been just as dominated by white male interests and desires as any other publisher. Those iterations of characters also highlight a major part of *Make Ours Marvel*'s critical focus—the weaving together of Marvel's transmedia

continuity and what their coherent multiverse means for narrative theory. *Make Ours Marvel* is a well-timed anthology that fairly and critically examines Marvel's long history as one of the great myth-makers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Kevin Degnan
El Camino College