

The Triumph of Vigilante Justice as Shown by Batman 1986-2011

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Introduction

It is easy to underestimate the social impact of comics. The dominant genre of comic books today is the superhero comic. The stories in these comics follow familiar formulae, and they typically draw a bright line between good and evil, and what people should do when the status quo is threatened. The stories require the reader to make sense out of a very limited text and a series of frames or captions. Nonetheless, the text and narrative work together with the symbols and images to weave a cohesive story that the reader is able to understand. Moreover, the artwork is arguably equally as important as the text of many if not most comics. It has been argued that comic books have been intrinsically tied to the times, and to an extent have provided a pulpit for preaching a moral code in keeping with the times. Notions of what is criminal, who are the criminals, and what should be done to address crime has been continually evolving in comic books. However, despite changing notions of justice and morality, certain moral imperatives appear to remain constant in comic books. One feature of comic books that differs from other media is their treatment of the police. Television news reports and newspapers rely heavily on police as sources of information about crime and in large part, for that reason they tend to show police in a positive light. Television and movies similarly tend to show police services as a whole to be very effective in solving crimes. In contrast to other media including other fiction, superhero comics tend to show police in a less positive light. While there may be exceptions to this general rule such as detective dramas featuring the so called "dirty cop", other media overwhelmingly tend to portray the police more positively than do superhero comics.

Given this background, the questions which comes to mind is how these messages and portrayals should be interpreted through sociological analysis?

It must be acknowledged that the majority of comics now deal with the adventures of imaginary characters whose stories arguably have little connection with reality. Accordingly, one could easily conclude that comics are the passing fancy of young males in their childhood and adolescent years. Before drawing such a conclusion, however, one needs to look at the extent of their readerships. In fact, comics are being consumed by virtually every demographic in society, they are the subjects of the most popular movies in theaters and they have made their way into households around the world. Sales in North America of comics in 2012 were estimated to be between \$700 and \$730 million dollars USD. Diamond, the largest distributor of comics in North America, alone had comic book sales of \$474.61 million. The estimated sales of comics in North America has more than doubled since 1997 when sales were estimated at between \$300 and \$320 million dollars (Miller, 2015). Although worldwide sales are substantially higher, no accurate estimates are available. Moreover, numerous feature length films have been based on comics such as Batman Begins, The Dark Knight, The Dark Knight Rises, Spider-Man 1-3, Superman 1-4, Superman Returns, Man of Steel, X-Men 1-3, Thor, The Avengers, Red 1-2, The Shadow, The Phantom, The Wolverine, Captain America and many more. Many of these films have attracted very large audiences and have earned extremely large revenues. In fact the top two grossing movies of 2012 were The Avengers and The Dark Knight Rises, both of which are based on comics (Box Office Mojo, 2013). Finally the demographics belie the stereotype that the readers are almost exclusively young males. It is estimated that approximately 25% of readers are female and the majority of readers are between 18 and 45 years of age (Polo, 2011). The above illustrates is that comics have for many years reached a large and growing audience directly and

more recently through feature films based on comics. From the humble detective stories, comic books have left their mark on modern pop culture, and while it may be impossible to evaluate their influence on societal norms and behaviours, the extent of their popularity suggests that some analysis of the messages they convey may be warranted.

Superhero comics tend to portray an environment where social order and the rule of law are either threatened or have broken down. The storylines frequently portray society in a time of heightened criminal activity, a situation which is not completely divorced from the reality in some U.S. inner cities. Bringing crime under control is frequently presented as a necessary prior condition to developing solutions to the social dilemma presented and protecting the status quo is portrayed as an overriding concern. While the exploration of the social processes is frequently limited to criminality and law enforcement, these stories do retain a connection to broader social processes. Hilary Chute, for example, outlines the history of Superman for the purpose demonstrating how the character has adapted in order to be aligned with the current issues of the time. The character of Superman which first appeared in Action Comics #1 in 1938, was depicted as a "champion of the oppressed" during a time when society was just beginning to emerge the hardship of the Great Depression (Chute, 2006, 1018). In this first issue he rescues a wrongfully accused captive of a lynch mob, saves a woman from spousal abuse, and finds sufficient evidence to free an innocent woman from death row. In later years, addressing poverty as an underlying cause of crime, Superman says to a young delinquent "It's not entirely your fault that you're delinquent-it's these slums-your poor living conditions" (Chute, 2006, 1019). According to Jason Dittmer, Captain America is an example of how politics finds its way into mainstream comic books. Embodying the moral consciousness and hegemony of a nation, he argues that the character is representative of America's position in the world (Dittmer, 2005, 626-

627). Dittmer further attempts to demonstrate how Captain America ". . . informs: "... the construction of a dominant American geopolitical narrative." (Dittmer 2005, 641). During the Second World War comic books depicted conditions in America for families and individuals during the so called war on the home front. In one issue, Wonder Woman becomes a secretary, to help the war effort on the home front, while the male members of her group (The Justice Society of America) go off to fight in the war (Pitkethly, 2009, 173). During this period, heroes such as Captain America and Superman were pitted against contemporary foes such as the Nazi's. Similarly, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, comics began vilifying the Japanese, a reality Japanese Americans were forced to endure (Phillips et al., 2013, 23). In the 1960's, comics were increasingly addressing current issues of the time, taking political stances on stories dominating the news such as such as the space race and the Cold War. Iron Man was depicted opposing the Vietnam War, while characters such as Green Arrow and Green Lantern were tackling issues of race and injustice. In the 1970's, the Captain America comics focussed on deconstructing the myth of "American Homogeneity" where the character not only aligned with the first African American superhero but also was dating a feminist (Dittmer, 2005, 632). During this time, the United States government hired Marvel to write a story about Spiderman tackling the issues of drugs which were seen as a national problem (Phillips et al., 2013, 29-30). After the events of 911, Captain America is portrayed fighting against terrorism (Dittmer, 2005, 638).

Comic books have throughout their history developed characters with unique abilities or powers that fight to defend particular moral values and the status quo when it is threatened. Although moral philosophies among characters vary, the knowledge of when society has failed to protect its people, when to act, and by what means has remained a common theme among

these characters. A review of the comic book literature (scholarly literature that analyzes comic books) reveals a number of articles related to the notion of justice. The focus of articles includes how these heroes and supporting characters differ in their concepts of justice and appropriate forms of punishment, how frustration with the legal system propels these characters to act, how these heroes' notions of justice are at times opposed to the law and how their sense of justice shifts over time. I discuss below several examples of how justice is portrayed in popular culture relating them to the main themes of this paper.

For the purpose of this research paper I have chosen Batman one of the two most iconic comic book characters (Superman being the other) and certainly one of the most, if not the most commercially successful comic book character. Another reason for choosing Batman is that he possesses no superpowers and as such he is more like a normal human being who is portrayed as taking on a vigilante role. For this reason he is more realistic and more plausible as a vigilante than a character with supernatural powers. The objective of this paper is to provide an analysis of the socio-political messaging contained in the comic book story arcs Batman: The Dark Knight Returns and Batman: The Court of Owls. Specifically, by analysing both quantitative and qualitative data from these two story arcs it is my hope to be able to provide a better understanding of the norms and values these two story arcs represent to their audiences about crime, law enforcement, vigilantism and the justice system. Also by comparing the narratives in these two story arcs which are separated by some twenty five years, I hope to determine whether the portrayal of law enforcement and criminal investigative techniques in Batman comics have evolved over time and whether comic book writers may be influenced by society's preoccupations. Through the presentation of this analysis this paper seeks to further build upon the existing literature directed at understanding comic book culture. The two Batman story arcs

are viewed in large measure through the lens of cultural criminology. Cultural criminology approaches the study of crime from a theoretical perspective that seeks to understand how crime is understood as arising from specific cultural and representational practices in societies.

As I describe below in the literature review, there is a growing amount of literature discussing crime and the media. Central to this discussion is the role of police in controlling crime. It has been noted that the news media rely heavily on police sources for information about crime (Sacco, 1995, 143-144). Accordingly police are frequently cast in a positive light and characterized as being effective in solving crime (Sacco, 1995, 143-144), (Robinson, 2011, 156-158). Similarly television and cinema crime dramas tend to show police to be effective in solving crimes in the majority of cases (Jewkes, 2009, 298). Occasionally news stories reveal cases of police misconduct which have the effect of undermining confidence in police services (Weitzer, 2002, 406), (Chermak et al., 2006, 273). Also public perceptions of crime are influenced by highly publicized crime stories such as serial killings and also incidents of vigilantism such as Bernard Goetz, the so called "Death wish" subway vigilante. Individuals in society continue to be divided as to whether or not they have confidence that the police are effective in protecting them (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 638). While there is growing interest in the literature regarding comic books there a limited number of authors who have addressed issues of vigilantism in comic books. Two authors who have are Dubose, 2007 and Weston, 2012. The former investigates the moral complexities facing comic book superheroes while the latter questions why comic book heroes have not inspired more real life vigilantes. My purpose in writing this paper is to add to this literature.

The hypothesis of this paper is that not only do the story arcs *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: The Court Of Owls* suggest the need for vigilantism to combat crime but in

demonstrating the competence of Batman to investigate and solve crimes as compared to the incompetence of police, they provide an underlying justification for vigilantism. Specifically this paper proposes to demonstrate through both qualitative and quantitative data that violent crime as portrayed in the two Batman story arcs is out of control, and that the police have shown themselves to be incapable of bringing criminals to justice either as a result of incompetence or corruption. Accordingly, this provides the necessary justification for vigilantism, a necessary evil in the person of Batman to combat evil, in the form of crime. This paper further proposes to demonstrate that the character Batman and the two story arcs which are separated by twenty five years are adapted to the socio/political environment of the times in which they were released.

The paper first provides a review of a number of articles from the field of cultural criminology. In addition the literature review includes the work of a number of authors who have opined on how the narratives contained within adventures of several of the more popular comic book superheroes fit within the socio/political landscape of society. The section following, Understanding Comic books, provides insight into how comic books are written and illustrated which enabled me to better understand and interpret the messages being conveyed in the two Batman story arcs studied. This is followed by sections that set out the theoretical framework and corresponding methodology I employ. The questions that my research attempts to answer, are identified. The theoretical framework is embedded in cultural criminology and draws on the theoretical approach and the analysis set out in the article (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008). A coding sheet is employed to record crime data from the two Batman story arcs and markers of vigilantism and law enforcement are identified. This is followed by a section where the results of the analysis are presented in textual and tabular form. A further section contains a discussion of the results of the analysis and what cultural meanings can be drawn from the results obtained.

This is followed by a section that explains the limitations of the present study and a concluding section explains the extent to which the hypotheses were validated by the results obtained.

Literature Review

This literature review covers two areas, comic book literature and cultural criminology. Cultural criminology involves the study of crime in relation to culture. Cultural Criminology can be defined as a study that ". . . focuses on situational, subcultural, and mediated constructions of meaning around issues of crime and crime control. In this sense cultural criminology is designed for critical engagement with the politics of meaning, and for critical intervention into those politics. Yet, broader enterprise of critical criminology engages with the politics of meaning as well; in confronting the power relations of justice and injustice, critical criminologists of all sorts investigate the social and cultural processes by which situations are defined, groups are categorized, and human consequences are understood." (Ferrell, 2013, 257).

Crime and crime control are believed to be shaped by the meanings assigned by cultural processes and representations: both official and those generated in popular culture. It has been demonstrated that the media in its many forms can have a considerable influence on this relationship influencing both perceptions of society toward specific events and as well as more generally attitudes toward crime. There is also evidence to suggest that the media have frequently distorted the manner in which crime, law enforcement and the justice system are characterized or presented in order to improve ratings or readerships. Crucially, cultural criminologists point to the fact that representations that arise in popular culture can use certain techniques that provide a sense of facticity (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008), thus creating understanding of crime that do not correspond with reality on the ground. The section on cultural

criminology covers Media Portrayals of Crime, Media Coverage of Police Misconduct and Support for vigilantism. It must be said that there is a certain amount of overlap between the two areas, as comic books focus predominantly on superhero vigilantism, law enforcement and criminal justice whereas the articles on cultural criminology address from a theoretical perspective, issues of crime within the context of culture in society. Comic books rely almost equally on a limited amount of text and visual images to tell its stories. The section Comic Book Literature covers, Nostalgia, Christianity and the Failure of Authority, Vigilantism in Comic Books, and Symbols and Politics.

Cultural Criminology

Media Portrayals of Crime

The article CSI and Forensic Realism provides an analysis of the popular crime drama CSI and how it ". . . has circulated and validated cultural meanings about crime ..." (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 35). The study focuses on the 2000 -2001 season of CSI, the show's first season (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 37). The authors' methodological approach was to use a code sheet to compile quantitative data regarding crimes and qualitative data regarding "police procedural elements or of scientific language" (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 38). The code sheet was divided into three sections, "(1) crime statistics...(2) crime genre...and (3) markers of forensic realism" (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 38). The analysis of section 1 and 2 data found that violent crimes such as murder and rape were overrepresented as were crimes against caucasians, women and crimes by assailants who were unknown to their victims. Important to the analysis of section 3 was the concept "strategic web of facticity" a term coined by Gaye Tuchman. This consists of using a set of presented facts in journalism or in this case fiction,

which when taken together validate the objectivity of the information presented (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 36). The CSI squad is shown to be very competent at solving crimes whereas regular police are portrayed as being incompetent (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 42). The lead character and head of the lab, Gil Grissom is portrayed as masculine on the basis of accumulated scientific knowledge rather than physicality (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 42). The cases appearing on the show are taken from real events and from the cases of the technical consultant to the show, Elizabeth Devine, ". . . a former criminalist for the L.A. County Sheriff's Department . . ." (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 43). Forensic investigations, are enacted using various markers of science. The crime scene investigators wear lab coats, use scientific equipment when analysing clues that show "science in action". and use scientific jargon (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 44). Luminol is also regularly used in conjunction with an ultra violet light to show traces of blood (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 46). The authors conclude that the markers of forensic realism are effective in creating a "web of facticity" which engages viewers in a realistic portrayal of the scientific means used to solve crimes. The use of science also brings closure to the viewers and validates police authority as being essential to social order (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 48).

The article Media Constructions of Crime, examines how the news media cover crime stories, how they construct narratives and then sell them to the public. The methodological approach was to analyse data on crime in regard to the information reported, the sources relied upon, the types of stories reported as well as the lexicon used to describe crime. The media predominantly report violent crime whereas other forms of crime are far more common (Sacco, 1995, 143). Police are portrayed as very effective in combating crime contrary to crime statistics.

This in large part is due to the fact that "policing agencies have become the principle suppliers of these stories." (Sacco, 1995, 143-144). As well, "routine crime stories" are uncomplicated, enabling reporters to meet tight deadlines (Sacco, 1995, 144). The "growth of cable stations, ... has increased the carrying capacity for news generally and for crime news specifically." (Sacco, 1995, 145). As such, more crime stories are reported, and stories considered "newsworthy" can be covered in greater length. Also, the rise in surveillance technologies has resulted in local crime having no national importance receiving nationwide coverage (Sacco, 1995, 145). News outlets were found to often "distort" crime stories because reporters have only a narrow window to report on stories and because the media has a habit of "engaging in problem construction" and advocacy about social issues (Sacco, 1995, 146-7). In reporting on crime, the media uses inflammatory language such as "a cancer" to make the problem seem worse than it is (Sacco, 1995, 147). Journalists frequently rely on the opinions of experts, however, it is often ". . . the problem advocate interested in advancing a particular point of view,..." who is relied upon (Sacco, 1995, 148-149). Also the media will frame social issues in a narrative giving legitimacy to a particular viewpoint while marginalizing others (Sacco, 1995, 149). Although most crime news is non local, fear among audiences is more prevalent with the increased reporting of local crime (Sacco, 1995, 152). The article concludes that "As news workers observe and influence each other, and as the line between news and entertainment becomes more confused, public discussion of crime problems reflects and reinforces this consensus, and ... relegates to the margins the search for alternative ways of thinking about crime and its solution." (Sacco, 1995, 154).

The article by Sacco identifies roles in constructing public stories and how these "resonate with existing cultural themes" (Sacco, 1995, 150). Greater analysis of hard data on

crime reports and markers of crime reporting trends would be beneficial in order to paint a clearer picture of how crime stories are constructed by the media and what is the motivation behind the narratives chosen. The methodology employed by Deutsch and Cavender was effective in demonstrating that certain types of crimes portrayed in this crime drama were overrepresented and that the manner in which science is used not only shows certain police officers as competent but actually makes the show appear as factual and veridical. This article is relevant to this paper in that it deals with how the media distorts reality in the interest of entertainment and attracting audiences. Further work testing how crime fiction affects public opinion of police effectiveness would be valuable in advancing our understanding of the influence of crime fiction. The methodology employed by Deutsch and Cavender was used as a model for analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the two story arcs for this paper.

Media coverage of Police misconduct

The article Incidents of police misconduct and public opinion analyzes telephone surveys of public opinion conducted by New York Times and the Los Angeles Times before and after highly publicised events of police misconduct (Weitzer, 2002, 397-8). The survey results were then graphically represented to show how opinions varied over time. Each newspaper asked a series of questions, dealing with how well their local police departments were doing their jobs, whether the use of excessive force was common place and whether the police were racially biased (Weitzer, 2002, 398). Both newspapers' surveys focused on major incidents, such as the shooting of Eulia Love in 1979, the Rodney King beating in 1991 and the Dorismond shooting in 2000 (Weitzer, 2002, 398 - 402). After the Rodney King video was released, approval of the

LAPD from 1988 to 1991 fell by "fifty percentage points" for Blacks, and "forty-nine percentage points" for Hispanics (Weitzer, 2002, 398). However, approval of the LAPD by 1994 rose to 61 percent for both Blacks and Hispanics (Weitzer, 2002, 398). The New York Times surveys similarly revealed that after well publicized events of police misconduct approval ratings for police dropped precipitously, particularly among minorities. However, as in Los Angeles, these usually rebounded within several years to levels that existed previously (Weitzer, 2002, 401-402). The article concludes that these survey results were consistent with previous studies showing that extensive media coverage had a considerable influence on public opinion but that this varied among racial groups. The study also showed that while low police approval ratings following incidents of police misconduct tended to rebound over time, specific incidents popularized in the media tended to remain in the public consciousness, and influence opinion particularly among minority groups (Weitzer, 2002, 406).

The study - Media coverage of police misconduct and attitudes toward police, examined how media coverage of a "high profile trial of police misconduct" known as the "Downtown police brawl", influenced public perceptions (Chermak et al., 2006, 261). The methodology employed was to conduct a quantitative analysis data obtained from telephone surveys of this highly publicized incident (Chermak et al., 2006, 264). The incident involved a number of off-duty officers in Indianapolis who were accused of "being rowdy and intoxicated, using racial and sexist slurs, repeatedly hitting two males, one being African American and one white and then arresting them" (Chermak et al., 2006, 264). Telephone surveys were conducted prior to the incident, after it occurred but before heavy media coverage and then finally after the heavily publicized trial of the police officers. Ordinary least squares analysis was then applied to the

results to determine the significance of the findings. The study found in the first two surveys that the media did not have a significant effect on people's "General and specific attitudes toward police" (Chermak et al., 2006, 270). However, as the trial came to a close, people's opinions were significantly affected the more they consumed the news (Chermak et al., 2006, 271-2). Whites, who followed the news had a negative view only of the officers involved and did not generalize with respect to police as a whole. Blacks familiar with events from reading the news, however, seemed to hold an intensely negative view of the police as a whole (Chermak et al., 2006, 273). The article concludes that while the media coverage was found to have a significant effect on certain aspects of public opinion that other factors such as incidence of local crime, race, sex and age also had a significant influence.

These two articles on police misconduct successfully demonstrate the effect of media coverage on public perceptions of police among different ethnic groups and how these varied with the passage of time. While the methodology applied in both cases was appropriate there is some basis for believing that the survey questions on which the authors' analysis was based may have incorporated an inherent media bias. As such, the analysis of similar surveys with more neutral questions may yield somewhat different results. Nonetheless, both articles portray police in a negative light much like the two story arcs studied by this paper as we will see. Both articles also make clear that negative stories about police misconduct in the media had a significant influence on public opinion. While it is uncertain what influence superhero comics may have on public perceptions of police, it is an area that bears future study.

Support for Vigilantism

Public support for vigilantism: an experimental study, discusses a study done about vigilantism. While the legal system seeks impartial justice, vigilantism seeks to correct an "injustice gap", where the penalty for a crime does not match what is perceived to be appropriate justice (Haas et al., 2012, 389). Vigilantism, reflects a lack of faith in the justice system to carry out justice. The paper hypothesis is that public responses to vigilantism are dependent on the context in which the act occurred (Haas et al., 2012, 392). The study tests the support for vigilantism by the public, by conducting empirical research which ". . . (1) vary situational characteristics of an act of vigilantism, and (2) assess support for vigilantism as well as confidence in the criminal justice system." (Haas et al., 2012, 393). The researchers relied upon 1930 respondents from a Dutch household panel who were presented with three different stories, a cyclist attacked by vehicle as a result of road rage, a 9 year old girl hit by a drunk driver, and a child molestation (Haas et al., 2012, 394-395). The researchers then measured how differing vignette's affected outrage at vigilantism, empathy for the vigilante and desired punishment. In each case desired punishment rated higher than the other two results (Haas et al., 2012, 399). A second factor was then introduced, the sentence for the precipitating offender which varied from acquittal, lenient, normal and severe for the first two cases and lenient and severe for the last vignette (Haas et al., 2012, 395). The researchers then performed regression analysis on the results obtained to determine the strength of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable support for vigilantism (Haas et al., 2012, 400). Context was found to be at least as important as confidence in the judicial system in influencing support for vigilantism (Haas et al., 2012, 402). Notably it is highest for the case for the child rapist than the other cases, and support is lowest for the cyclist. In relation to the first two vignettes, moral outrage against the vigilante

is somewhat greater when the criminal received a harsh sentence (Haas et al., 2012, 402). Also, the desire for vigilante justice was high if the offender was acquitted of the crime (Haas et al., 2012, 402). The article concluded that people were more outraged with the child molestation case than the other two stories and the desire to punish the vigilante who attacked the sex offender was low. Specifically with the sex offender case, it did not matter if the offender was acquitted or not, support for vigilantism was unchanged (Haas et al., 2012, 404). The methodology applied by the authors is robust throughout and very effective in illustrating how context influences perceptions of vigilantism. This article is relevant to the subject matter as it deals with vigilantism and also because it provides a model for future study of the potential influence of superhero comic books and in particular, portrayals of vigilantism on cultural understandings.

The article The Rise of Vigilantism in 1980 Comics: Reasons and Outcomes, through an analysis of the development of three comic book heroes during the 1980's, illustrates "the degree to which the comic book industry reacted to vigilante themes" (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 634). The authors note that during the 1980's, crime rates in United States spiked to abnormal levels, citing various statistics regarding the surge in violent crime (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 637). A Gallop poll taken in 1989 reported that 50% of people interviewed felt that police were not capable of protecting them which reflected a growing fear of crime within society. As a result many took a variety of measures to protect themselves (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 638). Consistent with these trends was a rise in widely reported vigilante behaviour such as the so called "Death Wish" Subway Vigilante shooter, Bernhard Goetz, who shot four alleged assailants on a subway car. (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 640). Also during this period, Curtis Silwa,

formed the vigilante group called the Angels that attempted to prevent potential crime in and around the New York City subways. The membership spread rapidly to other cities such as Philadelphia and Atlanta among others (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 640-641). In response, popular films with Vigilante themes such as Die Hard and Robocop, expressed the widely held sentiment of the need to fight back against increasing crime (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 638). The methodology of the authors was to trace the development of three comic book heroes Vigilante, the Punisher and Green Arrow throughout the 1980's and demonstrate how they changed from simply apprehending criminals to becoming homicidal vigilantes (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 643-646). The authors then relate this to the increasing support for vigilantism. In this regard they point out the role played by the media in increasing people's fear of crime during this period, as well as influencing the belief of the need to take greater action against crime.

The two articles regarding support for vigilantism are quite instructive. The methodology applied by Haas et al is robust throughout and very effective in illustrating how context influences perceptions of vigilantism. While the conclusions drawn on the basis of the qualitative analysis employed by Scully and Moorman are quite broad, the article is nonetheless effective at illustrating the theme that the comic book industry attempts to capitalize on social trends in order to make "relevant social and political commentaries on American culture" (Scully and Moorman, 2014, 634). A more systematic analysis of the development of a greater number of comic book characters during the 1980's may be necessary in order to provide sufficient validation of the hypothesis of the authors.

Comic Book Literature

The section on Comic Book Literature covers Nostalgia, Christianity and the Failure of Authority, Symbols and Politics and Vigilantism in Comic Books. Each of the articles selected for this literature review relate to issues that reappear in many superhero comics and are directly relevant to this study. The first two articles point out that justice is seen as something universal beyond socially constructed laws, a fact highlighted by comics. They also see comics as providing insight into the failures of the legal system and a justification for vigilante justice. The articles on Captain America and Wonder Woman illustrate how images and symbols such as costumes and shields are interwoven with texts in order to communicate geo-political and symbolic meanings in popular culture. The final two articles deal with the issues of vigilantism in comic books which is the principal focus of this paper.

Nostalgia, Christianity And The Failure Of Authority

The article Cultural Criminology and Kryptonite: Apocalyptic and Retributive Constructions of Crime and Justice in Comic Books examines representations of crime and justice depicted in comic books and seeks to answer the questions "What is the crime problem addressed in the comic book? What is the desired social order in the community of the comic book? How is justice achieved, legally or extra-legally? What is the implied policy message of the comic book?" (Phillips and Strobl, 2006, 313). The authors note that "cultural criminology rejects the positivist notion of objectivity in favor of a focus on the meanings of symbols and styles within particular cultural and subcultural frameworks." (Phillips and Strobl, 2006, 305-306). Twenty different contemporary comic books were selected from ". . . the top 210 best-selling comic books and trade paperbacks released in December 2003 as recorded by ICv2." (Phillips and

Strobl, 2006, 311). The authors conducted a qualitative analysis of these titles by interpreting the "interaction between the language and graphics" which they suggest is necessary to understanding comic book themes and messaging (Phillips and Strobl, 2006, 313). The areas analysed include threats to society, who is death worthy, how effective is law enforcement, and Judeo-Christian ideals of Apocalyptic redemption. The study found that modern comics focus on organized crime and terrorism as threats to society, however, unlike other media, comics portray the police as corrupt or too incompetent to deal with crime thereby justifying retributive justice through extra legal means (Phillips and Strobl, 2006, 324-325). In comics ". . . the hero must be on the right side of the moral equation, but not necessarily on the right side of the law.", (Phillips and Strobl, 2006, 325). Also, in comics, evil is used against evil, in order to bring about good (Phillips and Strobl, 2006, 325). The article concludes that comic books push ". . . American values to their extreme in defence of status quo notions of preserving public safety in democracies and maintaining a Christian dualistic worldview." (Phillips and Strobl, 2006, 328).

The article "This is the Authority. This Planet is Under Our Protection" - An Exegesis of Superheroes' Interrogations of Law, analyses the concepts of law and justice in the context of superhero comics. The methodology employed by the author consists of an examination of the extent to which superhero comics describe pre-modern, modern and post-modern notions of justice. He notes that many superheroes fit the pre-modern concept of law in that they seek justice by acting outside the law to defeat villains (Bainbridge, 2007, 457-8). Batman is one of very few superheroes that fits the modernist concept of law in that he has a secret identity and no superpowers (Bainbridge, 2007, 457). The article departs somewhat from its original framework of analysis in order to focus on "explor[ing] the ways in which superheroes are involved in

postmodern interrogation of law" (Bainbridge, 2007, 457). It discusses how justice and law can live apart from each other, in that, justice transcends law and that law can be deconstructed (Bainbridge, 2007, 461). The article identifies three ways in which comics approach postmodern explorations of law (Bainbridge, 2007, 461). The first is that by having extraordinary powers "Superheroes Exist in Opposition to Rationality", and these comics attack notions of truth, which exist in law (Bainbridge, 2007, 462-463). Second, "Superheroes Operate Outside the Law", and due to an inept legal system they are "forced to become the law" (Bainbridge, 2007, 463). Third, superheroes can be proactive in order to prevent crimes from being committed rather than simply reacting to crimes that have already been committed (Bainbridge, 2007, 465-466). Bainbridge notes that the superhero Daredevil (Matt Murdock), attempts to "reconcile both his legal and extra-legal activities" (Bainbridge, 2007, 474). To that extent he is "a postmodern mix of the pre-modern and modern ideals of law, someone who is able to oscillate between these two ideals to see justice done" (Bainbridge, 2007, 476).

Both the Phillips and Bainbridge articles take the position that justice can be represented as something universal quite apart from socially constructed laws. The Bainbridge article sees comics as an important media form that provides insight into the gap between justice and law as well as the failures of the legal system. He acknowledges that many heroes understand the moral good necessitating vigilante justice in a pre-modern context, but stresses that superheroes in a post-modern context are faced with a Derridean aporia or impasse arising from a dilemma on how to act (Bainbridge, 2007, 461). In contrast, the Phillips article suggests that there is a religious element to carrying out justice in the superhero context, which has its roots in western Judeo-Christian morality.

Vigilantism in Comic Books

The article [Holding Out for a Hero: Reaganism, Comic Book Vigilantes, and Captain America](#) explains that the 1980's was a time when America had lost confidence in itself (Dubose, 2007, 915). It also discusses how Ronald Reagan created a public image of himself as a cowboy, and a heroic figure who would restore America's self-esteem (Dubose, 2007, 916-17). Reagan's influence was pervasive and he is seen as embodying "the culturally/politically dominant strands of American society" (Dubose, 2007, 917). The author's objective is to study the portrayal of vigilantism in comic books during the 1980's and he states his analytical approach as follows: "First, I will examine how the 1980's particular intersections between morality, politics, and conceptions of justice and order necessitate more specific definitions and labels for those who try to be heroes, whether within or outside the law in light of Reagan and Reaganism. Secondly, I will analyze Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and Alan Moore's *The Watchmen* (1988) to demonstrate two separate ways in which comic books in the eighties portrayed vigilantes, mainly based on the characters' relationship to the status quo. Finally, I will look at the Reagan-era portrayal of the World War II superhero, Captain America, to show how past norms of herodom reacted with the political climate of Reaganism" (Dubose, 2007, 916). During the 1980's there was a rise in vigilantism, most famously Bernard Goetz the subway shooter. The article points out that in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman becomes a vigilante working against a system that does more to protect villains than victims (Dubose, 2007, 923). It also shows how Ozymandias in the *Watchmen*, defies government authorities in order to save the world (Dubose, 2007, 924). The article then explains how Steve Rogers in the 1980's abandons his Captain America persona in favor of the vigilante identity Nomad, as he questions

America's authority while a new Captain America, becomes a true vigilante ultimately killing those who killed his parents (Dubose, 2007, 928-33). Through numerous examples the article illustrates the moral complexities facing superheroes in 1980's comics whether working "outside the system (thus becoming a vigilante) or within it (as a police vigilante)" (Dubose, 2007, 933).

The article Superheroes and comic-book vigilantes versus real-life vigilantes: an anthropological answer to the Kick-Ass paradox, analyses the paradox proposed by Mark Miller: why comic books have not motivated more readers to become vigilantes. The author uses an ". . . anthropological lens to examine a particular disjuncture ... between comic and real-world vigilantism." (Weston, 2012, 224). He explains that superheroes have a pro social mission which supports the justice system whereas real world vigilantes seek to replace it (Weston, 2012, 224-5). Weston employs an analytical framework articulated by Ray Abrahams: "dissatisfaction with present levels of order and justice; second, experience and awareness of such actions elsewhere; and third, a pre-existing social and cultural template" (Weston, 2012, 226). Regarding dissatisfaction with justice, the author acknowledges that comics may influence perceptions somewhat but he concludes that "inferring too much correlation here would imply an inability of the audience to distinguish between fantasy and reality" (Weston, 2012, 226). Regarding the second factor he concludes that comic books rarely depict real life vigilantism while the third, "a social or cultural template" differs little from the second (Weston, 2012, 226). The author states that "outlaws on the rural fringes of many societies, [are] considered to be heroes by the disenfranchised, poor or working-class masses because of their embodiment of popular resistance." (Weston, 2012, 227). He notes that unlike heroes in comics, real world vigilantes are not concerned for the safety of others (Weston, 2012, 229). Vigilantism only works in states with

a weak authority. By contrast strong states have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force (Weston, 2012, 231). The article concludes that consumers of comics are mainly from western middle class backgrounds. These readers recognize that comics are not realistic and they are disinclined to partake in vigilantism because of the danger involved (Weston, 2012, 231).

The articles by Weston and Dubose both deal with the issues of vigilantism in comic books. Dubose concludes that images of vigilantism in comics reflect the changing social landscape during a time where moral issues were seen to be more complex. Weston focuses on why exposure to comic book material has not resulted in more people becoming vigilantes. Dubose links the social landscape with comic books. He demonstrates how rogue behaviours were represented in comic books, during the Reagan years, a time when crime rates were rising which created a perception that the law was not doing enough to protect people. Weston also relies on his doctoral research to assert that vigilantes are typically disenfranchised individuals who are motivated "to act and search for fitting cultural models as [they] endeavour to right perceived social wrongs." (Weston, 2012, 232-233). While both articles are instructive, further research on how reading comic books influences attitudes toward vigilantism would be worthwhile. The Dubose article addresses the issue of vigilantism during the 1980's, the same time frame during which *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* was written and as such provides insight into the subject matter of this paper. The Weston article in addressing the issue of whether vigilantism is influenced by comic book narratives is likewise relevant to this paper.

Symbols and Politics

The article Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity Popular Culture, and post-9/11 Geopolitics, discusses how the comic book Captain America, communicates geo-political and symbolic meanings which allows readers to place themselves within boundaries associated with a collective national identity (Dittmer, 2005, 626). The character Captain America is seen as "embodying American identity" by connecting the individual with "the political projects of American nationalism" which the author describes as Gramscian hegemony (Dittmer, 2005, 627). He is representative of the ". . . changing meaning and symbolic shape of America as the region is continually (re)constructed.", and according to comic book mogul Stan Lee, Captain America ". . . represents the best aspects of American: courage and honesty . . ." (Dittmer, 2005, 629). The author deconstructs this character, identifying how visual icons such as his "star-spangled uniform" convey patriotism while his shield, "is important for the narrative of America that he embodies defense rather than offense" (Dittmer, 2005, 630). These and other visual images such as those depicting American territory are reinforced by the associated text which describes an idealized character who "is ultimately defensive of the status quo" (Dittmer, 2005, 633). The article points out that Captain America is a geo-political symbol of American territory while making the rest of the world and those who present a threat to American liberty the "other" (Dittmer, 2005, 631). It also shows how over time, Captain America has changed and evolved as the times have changed. This is demonstrated by his pro-American stance in World War 2, his independence of government during the 60's, his reaction to 9/11 and his thoughts on terrorism (Dittmer, 2005, 637). The article concludes that although the Captain America comics provide a framework of what it is to be American, since the 1960's there has been "this divergence between American ideals and American practice." (Dittmer, 2005, 641-642).

In the article Recruiting an Amazon: The Collision of Old World Ideology and New World Identity in Wonder Woman, the author reviews Wonder Woman literature from her origins to the present day through the lens of cultural imperialism (Pitkethly, 2009, 165). The article discusses the mythology of Amazons and how it is used to represent "hostile otherness" which is overcome, thereby establishing a hierarchy which is communicated as man's dominance over women (Pitkethly, 2009, 165). The author discusses how there has been an age old interest in western civilizations of dominating the fabled Amazons as they represent a threat of "social inversion" and matriarchal rule (Pitkethly, 2009, 167). Wonder Woman first appeared in comics in December 1941 as a beautiful representation of a mythical Amazon who was both strong and courageous (Pitkethly, 2009, 167). The article discusses how Wonder Woman through imagery and narratives is represented as taking on a subservient role to men and doing whatever is necessary to support America's war effort. Wonder Woman is represented not only as a conquered Amazon, but by wearing a costume representing the American flag, she is seen as an ambassador for the American way of life (Pitkethly, 2009, 173). The author discusses how Wonder Woman surrenders her powers and identity to marry Steve Trevor, thus fulfilling the stereotype of female domination by men. The article concludes that America has joined the ranks of those who have tamed Amazons, and that Wonder Woman, as an ambassador for her adopted country, is symbolic of American cultural imperialism (Pitkethly, 2009, 181).

By deconstructing Captain America, Dittmer demonstrates how both words and images are used in communicating geo-political and symbolic meanings in popular culture. The Pitkethly article uses mythology and symbolism to represent the character of Wonder Woman as

an object of cultural imperialism. Although both articles show how comic characters are social instruments supporting the American status quo, they differ in important ways. The Dittmer Article demonstrates the continuous evolution of the narrative to fit the changing times while the Pitkethly article pushes the notion that comic books themselves are hegemonic and that Wonder Woman is a victim of patriarchy. Both articles make the point that the comic book is a medium which is known for advancing a social agenda, which can often be seen in the origins of comic book characters.

Understanding Comic Books

Images and narrative discourse are both critical to understanding comic books. Images depicted in comic books provide visual understanding and are intended to contribute to telling the story (Duncan, 2012, 44). According to Duncan there are three functions of images, sensory diegetic images which tell the superficial story, non-sensory diegetic images that represent an internalized reality of the characters thoughts and feelings, and Hermeneutic images, that are mainly part of the background and represent the subtext or meaning of the story (Duncan, 2012, 44-47). Colour and shape serve as hermeneutic images that represent basic feelings of the story, and are representative of people, periods in time and places (Duncan, 2012, 48).

Three forms of relationship have been identified to exist between story and discourse. The first is the order that the events of a story are presented in the discourse. Duration, is how events in the story are recaptured and made consistent with the discourse. Frequency is how events are repeated in relation to repetition in the discourse (Singer, 2012, 56). Since many panels of a story do not contain discourse, events of the chronological story are represented as "true time", and narrative discourse is secondary in this sense (Singer, 2012, 56). Although

comics do not always conform to the left right passage of time, through the use of images, it is clear that the time is the present (Singer, 2012, 57).

Mis en scene also plays an important role in the telling of the story in comics. The combination of the story, the art style, the arrangement of panels, how each panel interacts with other panels, and the page layout contribute to the narrative of the story. Unlike photographs, which depend heavily on ". . . tonal variation, surface contours, and cast shadows.", the particular art style of the comic book, the strong use of lines, ". . . communicate the essence of an object or a person.", through which emotions and feelings can be conveyed (Lefèvre, 2012, 72-73). In contrast to films that shoot 24 frames per second, comics can only show one frame depicting a scene in a particular light. Events occurring in these frames are communicated through the use of different perspectives and simplified settings (Lefèvre, 2012, 73).

Two techniques important to the superhero genre of comics, are semantics and syntactics. Semantics refers to the subject matter of the stories and the hero's adventures, while syntactics refers to "conventions [that] concern the structure of the story . . ." (Coogan, 2012, 205). While the majority of the story revolves around semantics, in the case of superhero stories we also have ". . . superheroes, supervillains, and the supporting cast (character); the city, the superhero's headquarters, the alter ego's workplace (setting) ; the costume, advanced scientific devices (icons)" (Coogan, 2012, 205). Syntactic elements typical for superhero comics are the heroes and villains of the story getting involved in a physical showdown (Coogan, 2012, 205). The dialectic is a means to connect the reader to familiar story formulas, that allow the reader to "know what they are getting into" with regard to the plot, the story, the characters, etc., but also creates room for the writer to create new and interesting stories using a similar formula (Coogan, 2012, 207). This serves a social function in two ways. First, it conveys norms through the portrayal of a

vigilante hero defeating a villain. Second the genre expresses a " . . . ritualized collective cultural expression." which dramatizes culture and cultural oppositions, as a way to systematically resolve such issues (Coogan, 2012, 207). The (syntactic) conflict is resolved once the hero physically engages the villain in a confrontation, and the social threat to the status quo is extinguished and social order is restored (Coogan, 2012, 207). Stated more simply, semantics is essentially the language of superhero comics, which consists of those elements that are always present and are well understood to be a part of every superhero comic. Syntactics is simply the final battle between the hero and the villain that restores order. Together these contribute to the dialectic or logical discussion/sequencing of superhero comics with which readers are familiar.

Scott McCloud, defines an icon as, " . . . any image used to represent a person, place, thing, or idea." (McCloud, 1993, 26). In his book, he discusses that non pictorial Icons (signs and symbols) are more "fixed and absolute" whereas with pictures the "meaning is fluid and variable according to appearance. They differ from "Real-Life" appearance to varying degrees" (McCloud, 1993, 28). As such, the more simplified a character's face is, the more one is able to see oneself in the character and become more involved in the comic "we see ourselves in everything . . . and we make the world over in our image" (McCloud, 1993, 33-36). Another important concept according to McCloud is what he refers to as "closure", that being the audience's willingness to make sense of the words and images presented on paper and to " . . . connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality." (McCloud, 1993, 67). McCloud argues that closure is a result of a person's willingness to make sense of the images and text on the page from the need to have the story unfold (McCloud, 1993,65). This continual interpretation by the reader is important to the process of decoding the socio/political

messages being communicated. The reader knows through the use of speech bubbles, the portrayal of sound and how time is read from left to right, that one event happens after the other (McCloud, 1993, 94-96). Each panel encases a moment in time and the flow of time is indicated by a series of panels, or images encased in boxes with lined borders. Whether words are used in a panel or not indicates whether there is motion or whether time is frozen (McCloud, 1993, 97-98). Motion can be conveyed across panels or within a single panel. Motion can not only be described through portrayal of sound but can also be drawn using motion lines or streaks (McCloud, 1993, 108-111, 112). A character can also be shown as being in motion by blurring the background and motion in the background can be portrayed by blurring the character or object. This is referred to as subjective motion (McCloud, 1993, 113-114).

With respect to the way characters are drawn, McCloud suggests that modern comic books are meant to evoke feelings and moods, as well as convey meaning through symbolism with the strategic use of lines (McCloud, 1993, 123-125). Art in comics draws heavily upon the art work of Wassily Kandinsky, who attempted to bring together the five senses. His method referred to as Synaesthetics was to have art appeal to each sense in a different way, thus giving art a life of its own (McCloud, 1993, 122-123). Comic book art can be seen to shape feelings and moods as well as provide a degree of character portrayal. For example, the character Dick Tracy was drawn with thick angular lines to suggest a tough character living in a dangerous world, (McCloud, 1993, 126). Different feelings and moods can be depicted through the way characters are drawn. The changing of characteristics such as the eyes and mouth, as well as movement in and around the character can express a change in mood of the character. The way word bubbles are drawn as well as the way words are written can be symbolic of particular moods or particular states of mind (McCloud, 1993, 131-134). Once again, closure comes into play by encouraging

the reader to make sense what is being conveyed by the changing symbols in and around the character in the comic.

Another source upon which the paper relies is Geoff Klock's book How To Read Superhero Comics And Why. Klock provides unique perspectives on how to interpret stories and characters through understanding the use of symbolism and creative intent. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Klock notes that Batman's Batmobile is now a Bat-Tank, Arkham Asylum is no longer a dungeon where criminals are kept but an actual working mental hospital with doctors and staff, and the superhero is an aged Batman in his mid fifties, a line that has never been crossed before in comics (Klock, 2002, 29). Klock also points out, that the way Gotham City is depicted represents what a contemporary New York would look like, with twin towers in Gotham's skyline mimicking New York City's World Trade Center (Klock, 2002, 29-30). As well, Klock notes that in every other Batman comic preceding *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman is never seen as being tired or injured. In Frank Miller's version, Batman can be seen tired and injured in certain instances. As well, Batman's batarang has been reconfigured into throwing stars; a weapon that would once knock a gun out of an enemy's hand, now can slice and maim an enemy. Klock emphasizes that these elements put Batman in a more real world setting (Klock, 2002, 30-31). Klock also notes that the villains appearing in this book are chosen with a clear understanding of how each major Batman villain is a reflection of that main protagonist. In reference to Two-Face, from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, the author builds upon how both characters have two personalities as a result of a trauma (Klock, 2002, 35). The author points out that when Batman responds to Two-Face's question of "what he sees", Batman replies "I see a reflection, Harvey. A Reflection." (Klock, 2002, 36). In a similar vein Nickie Phillips

comments ". . .very little separates the psyche of the villain from that of the hero.", noting that both are fragile and psychotic (Phillips et al., 2013, 34), (Phillips et al., 2013, 37-38).

With respect to the culture of criminality, images and narratives associated with crime, are created and re-used for the purpose of conveying messages that fit with the popular conceptions about how crime is perceived. As such, the media uses these expectations to better entertain its audience. Thus a ". . . story of crime becomes a commodity for communicating information and entertaining consumers in ways that reproduce ideological content." (Kort-Butler, 2012, 53). In comic books, Superheroes not only uphold the status quo, but in many ways act as champions of the oppressed. As such, superheroes are tasked to not only ensure law and order, but to regulate criminal behavior (Vollum and Adkinson, 2003, 104). Although heroes are depicted in various forms, villains are drawn and portrayed to show that they are not only sinister, but that they fit Lombrosso's notions of "born criminals" (Vollum and Adkinson, 2003, 102-103). As a result, criminals are drawn according to Lombrosso's vision of criminality, being manifested physically, as having "asymmetry of the face or head, large monkey-like ears, large lips, receding chin, twisted nose, excessive cheek bones, long arms, excessive skin wrinkles, and extra fingers and toes." (Vollum and Adkinson, 2003, 103).

Theoretical Framework

Cultural criminology scholarship has shown that society cannot necessarily rely upon crime reports in the media or official statistics in order to formulate a clear understanding of crime. As demonstrated by Vincent Sacco, media reports frequently over-represent violent crime such as murder and rape in order to attract larger audiences whereas it is clear from published crime

statistics that the majority of crime is non-violent. Another important fact is that because the media relies heavily on police sources for information about criminal justice, law enforcement authorities tend to be portrayed as being much more effective in solving crimes than they are in reality. While crime statistics do provide baseline information, they can lead to superficial conclusions about the perpetrators of crime, its victims and its underlying causes. Although reported crime rates are higher among certain minority groups, the cultural criminology literature suggests that the treatment of these groups by the justice system may have an influence on outcomes. Articles by Ronald Weitzer (2002) and Steven Chernak et al (2006) which chronicle cases of police misconduct shed light on this issue and cause one to view these circumstances more in the context of their sociological causes.

Popular culture is also an important source of information regarding crime and the justice system. Advances in the science of criminal investigations and its portrayal in the media which is the subject of an article by Sarah Deutsch and Gray Cavender (2008) have had an important role in advancing society's understanding of evidence in criminal proceedings. Similarly, entertainment sources such as movies, video games and comic books regarding law enforcement provide insight into the subject. Comic books in particular provide a different perspective from other media sources regarding issues of morality and legality. Jason Bainbridge for example explores how the law and justice are portrayed as diverging in superhero comics whereas Nickie Phillips and Staci Strobl (2013) discuss different paradigms of justice in superhero comics. Comics also provide cultural insight into our understanding of the limitations of the law and the judicial process as well as its shortcomings of those of investigative authorities. As such they can be seen as making a valuable contribution to our understanding of crime and culture.

As I will demonstrate below I employ both qualitative and quantitative data to test whether the hypotheses articulated above are valid. The article "CSI and Forensic Realism" by Deutsch and Cavender (2008) was in large measure used as a model for analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the two story arcs for this paper. In essence, the approach I decided on was to use qualitative data in order to cross check the analysis of the quantitative data collected. In particular, I used the data collected to test whether crime was represented as being out of control or alternatively beyond the control of the authorities. Secondly, the data collected was used to test a related issue, whether police in these two story arcs were portrayed as being ineffective or incompetent or guilty of using excessive force (as in the case of the articles regarding police misconduct). Specifically, quantitative data was recorded of events of police incompetence and examples were selected from the text of both story arcs illustrating whether police were thorough in their investigations, whether they missed clues or demonstrated incompetence. This could then be compared to data regarding investigations by Batman as well as his efforts to bring criminals to justice. This enabled me to determine whether there was a need for Batman's intervention in controlling crime. In order to determine whether Batman was a vigilante in the true sense as discussed by Weston in his article or whether Batman was more an adjunct to or part of law enforcement, it was also necessary to assess how Batman dealt with criminals. The term vigilante is defined by the Oxford dictionary as: "A member of a self-appointed group of citizens who undertake law enforcement in their community without legal authority, typically because the legal agencies are thought to be inadequate." (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). While the portrayal of Batman fits this definition, the analysis conducted was also necessary to determine if Batman's behaviour in fighting crime fits Weston's characterization of true vigilante behaviour. Batman's success in combating crime as opposed to

the lack of success by the police provides the basis for validating the hypothesis that these two story arcs portray a need and a justification for vigilantism in the person of Batman. Finally, Dubose (2008), asserts that comics adapt to the social landscape of the time. Scully and Moorman (2014) take a similar view suggesting that comics are influenced by the times in which they are written. In order to test whether the two story arcs are adapted to the times in which they were written, I decided an appropriate approach was to analyze data regarding the techniques employed by Batman in investigating crime. In particular, if the methods employed by Batman in *Batman: The Court of Owls* involved techniques not in use at the time *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* was written, this would validate the hypothesis.

Methodology - Quantitative Data

The analysis employed in this paper was informed by a number of questions regarding how crime law enforcement and vigilantism were portrayed in the two Batman story arcs chosen for this analysis. First I felt it was important to have a more complete understanding of the crimes portrayed and whether these were representative of criminal activity in society. This was achieved in part by identifying in the pages of individual comic books the type of crime portrayed and the number of each different type of crime. The methodological approach I take in this paper is similar to that used by Deutsch and Cavender (2008) in their article "CSI and Forensic Realism" which appears in the literature review. The approach I followed was to compile a number of statistics regarding crime from the pages of the two story arcs studied in order to make more objective observations. I then analyzed the data assembled for the purpose of testing the hypotheses set out above. In following this approach I first looked at a limited number of comics from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* in order to identify various categories of

crime appearing in these issues. This list of crimes was then added to as I proceeded through other issues. This exercise enabled me to put together a code sheet that I then used to assemble quantitative data regarding the crimes portrayed. The exercise then became one of recording the number of each category of crime in the two story arcs. My use of coding enabled me to ensure that the quantitative results obtained were accurate and it further enabled me to complete the exercise in a timely fashion. After completing this exercise I recoded each story arc and revisited the results to check for accuracy. I then compiled the results in a table that showed the results for the two story arcs. I was then in a position to compare these to official crime statistics. The crime statistics that I drew from were from various authors from the U.S. Department of Justice, and data from the KBI database (Bush, 2013). The purpose of this exercise was to determine if these story arcs fairly represented criminal activity in society or if they presented a skewed picture of crimes committed. By collecting crime statistics from both *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: The Court of Owls* it was possible to compare the portrayal of crime in the two story arcs and to distinguish any significant differences in the way crime is portrayed.

In order to develop a clear understanding of how crime is portrayed in these two Batman comic books, it is important to identify all the elements of how crime is represented including demographics. In particular, it is key to determine if the comics presented an inherent bias regarding demographics and if so what this bias is and what if any reason is behind it. The importance of this data is to determine how closely these two story arcs represent reality which as noted is a major theme of this paper. In terms of race and ethnicity, as noted elsewhere published crime statistics reveal that offence rates and rates of victimization are higher among Blacks and Hispanics than whites. However, the data collected from the two story arcs studied almost exclusively identifies whites as both perpetrators and victims of crime. While this data

did not yield meaningful results in terms of the hypotheses of this paper, it was nonetheless important to collect this data to ensure data collection was as complete and unbiased as possible.

This exercise was repeated for criminals and victims of violent crimes. In each of these cases the code sheet identified the race or ethnicity and the gender of the perpetrator and the victim of the crime. Again by going through individual issues of the two story arcs it was possible to record the number of offenders and victims falling into each of the identified characteristics. The data was predominantly collected from visual images in the two story arcs. In some cases it was not possible to identify the race or ethnicity and gender of the criminals or victims and these were entered as "unknownn". The results were then recorded in tables for the gender of criminals and ethnicity of criminals as well as the gender of victims and ethnicity of victims. The collection of this data enabled me to compare the results to official crime statistics and determine if the crimes portrayed in these story arcs were consistent with reality.

Another code sheet was used to construct a table regarding the role played by police in solving crimes in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: The Court of Owls*. Since the role of the police is secondary to the main character in these comics, the objective was to determine the relationship between the police and Batman and to understand how the police were characterised in the two story arcs. The ultimate purpose was to determine if the police were portrayed as solving crimes or contributing to solving crimes by working with Batman or if they were portrayed in a negative light. In constructing the code sheet and table in this case it was necessary to interpret both the narrative, speech bubbles and the visual images.

A code sheet was also used to record techniques used by Batman to solve crimes. In order to do this it was necessary to rely heavily on narrative, speech bubbles and visual images. From this code sheet a table was constructed which identifies techniques used by Batman in solving

crimes as well providing insight into his relationship with police. In a number of cases a particular event involved for example both detective work and use of technology. In these cases I recorded the incident under both categories. By collecting data from both the two story arcs it was possible to compare how the techniques employed by Batman changed in the twenty five year period separating the two stories which is relevant to part of my hypothesis.

Methodology - Qualitative Data

The methodological approach I take in the paper with respect to qualitative data is again similar to that used by Deutsch and Cavender in their article CSI and Forensic Realism. In following this approach I went through each issue of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: The Court of Owls* in order to identify events of some significance which I then grouped under headings relevant to my hypothesis for the paper. Specifically, the premise is that police are portrayed as incompetent. For each story arc I identified markers or events that I felt gave a representative picture as to how police were portrayed in these comics. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* I differentiate between the portrayal of the police under Commissioner Gordon and the police under Commissioner Yindel in the interest of accuracy as the portrayal differed. Similarly in *Batman: The Court of Owls*, I treated Commissioner Gordon separately from the Gotham City Police Department for the same reason.

This paper questions whether the portrayal of police incompetence provides justification for vigilantism, a necessary evil in the person of Batman to combat evil, in the form of crime. As a result I grouped events involving the three most evil and prominently featured criminals in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (Two Face, The Joker and The Mutant Leader) under the heading "Evil Is Necessary to Defeat Evil". Similarly in *Batman: The Court of Owls*, I grouped

events involving the two most evil and heavily featured criminals, Lincoln March and The Talon, under the heading "Evil Is Necessary to Defeat Evil". The purpose here is twofold, first to identify how Batman deals with these criminals, whether he is simply acting as an agent of the police or whether he carries out extrajudicial punishment more in true vigilante form as exemplified by the subway vigilante, Bernard Goetz. The second is to determine whether the actions of Batman are portrayed as being justified in the circumstance.

Finally, The paper identifies the methods used by Batman to combat crime in both story arcs. The purpose is to determine whether there is an identifiable difference in the way Batman is portrayed as combating crime in the two story arcs. If these differences are significant it would suggest that the narratives in the two Batman story arcs are influenced by the events of the time. Specifically, if it is found that the methods identified as markers in *Batman: The Court of Owls* are significantly different and arguably more modern and reflect more up to date investigative techniques, then this would support the hypothesis, that the two stories are adapted to the socio/political environment of the times in which they were released, since *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* predates *Batman: The Court of Owls* by approximately twenty five years.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

The following tables track the various crimes, perpetrators, victims of crime, role of police and the techniques employed by Batman in solving crimes as portrayed in the two Batman story arcs. The first table records the race and ethnicity of criminals. In both story arcs the criminals are predominantly males and they are predominantly white. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, out of 182 criminals only two are female. Similarly, 179 of the criminals are white, only 3 are black and there are no other criminals of another race or ethnicity. In *Batman: The Court of*

Owls, 129 male criminals are identified as compared to 21 female criminals and all of the criminals that it was possible to identify were white. In some cases it was not possible to identify the gender or race/ethnicity and these were placed in the category identified as unknown. It is noteworthy that the crime rates by ethnicity and race portrayed in these two story arcs do not reflect reported crime statistics for society as a whole. Based on U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Blacks and Hispanics make up a significant percentage of the prison population in the U.S. (Carson, 2014, 8). With respect to the gender of criminals, men offend much more frequently than women. It is also noteworthy that women are far less likely to be perpetrators of violent crimes (Carson, 2014, 3). Whereas the proportion of criminals who are male as compared to female portrayed in *Batman: The Court of Owls* falls within the range of reported crime statistics, in the case of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, males are significantly overrepresented.

Table 1		
Criminals	Batman: Dark Knight Returns	Batman: The Court Of Owls
Male	180	129
Female	2	21
Black	3	0
White	179	124
Asian	0	1
Hispanic	0	0
Unknown	0	25

The following table records the various crimes portrayed in the two Batman story arcs. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* there are 244 murders and 45 attempted murders. Together these crimes account for over 72% of the crimes portrayed in this story arc, while murder alone represents 61% of all crimes. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* 29 murders and 38 attempted murders were identified. Together these account for approximately 47% of total crimes recorded,

while murder alone represents approximately 20% of the crimes portrayed in *Batman: The Court of Owls*. Based on Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics, murder in the United States is a very small percentage of reported violent crimes which is well below figures for aggravated battery, property crimes, burglary, robbery and even forcible rape (FBI, 2012). In each story arc murder and attempted murder are the most frequently portrayed crimes. Once again the crimes of murder and attempted murder are not representative of the frequency of these crimes in society.

Table 2		
Crimes	Batman: The Dark Knight Returns	Batman: The Court Of Owls
Robbery	4	3
Vandalism	1	3
Destruction of Property	14	4
Attempted Robbery	6	0
Assault	61	13
Battery	10	16
Aggravated Battery	4	4
Murder	244	29
Attempted Murder	45	38
Resisting Arrest	4	0
Kidnapping	3	2
Sexual Assault	1	0
Other	3	30
Total	400	142

The following table records the weapons used to commit crimes in the two story arcs. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* 40 of the crimes are committed with guns, 5 with a knife and the rest a variety of different weapons. This paints a violent and chaotic picture of how the crimes were committed. The predominant weapon of choice is of course the hand gun which is consistent with random street crime. What is striking about the weapons used in *Batman: The Court of Owls* is that no guns are used. Instead the most commonly used weapons are the knife (17) and the sword (18). This use of weapons suggests an approach to crime that is consistent

with organization and stealth unlike the chaos that is portrayed in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*.

Table 3		
Weapons Used to Commit Crimes	Batman: The Dark Knight Returns	Batman: The Court Of Owls
Gun	40	0
Knife	5	17
Baseball bat	2	0
Metal pipe	2	1
Sword	0	18
Bottle	1	0
Other	38	42

The following table records the victims of murder portrayed in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: The Court of Owls* story arcs. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* 42 male victims and 12 female victims can be identified. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* 22 male victims and 9 female victims can be identified. Based on U.S. crime statistics the ratio of male to female homicide victims is roughly 1 to 1 (Truman and Langton, 2014, 6). As a result the ratio of male to female victims of homicides is more in line with published statistics. It is noteworthy that all of the victims that are identifiable in both story arcs are white. There are no identifiable victims from other racial/ethnic groups. Published homicide statistics for the U.S. for 2013 reveal that there are roughly an equal number of black and white murder victims while there is a much smaller number from other racial/ethnic groups (Smith and Cooper, 2013, 4). A large number of other victims are murdered in the theatre in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and in various other instances, however, it is not possible to identify the gender or race/ethnicity of these victims. There are 212 of these victims and their number is recorded under unknown.

Table 4

Murder Victims	Batman: The Dark Knight Returns	Batman: The Court Of Owls
Male	42	22
Female	12	9
Black	0	0
White	54	31
Asian	0	0
Hispanic	0	0
Unknown	212	0

The following table records the activities of police in the two story arcs with a view to determining how they are portrayed in terms of effectiveness in bringing solving crime and bringing it under control. In neither story arc are they shown to arrest anyone although in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* they attempt to arrest Batman 6 times. In addition, they are portrayed as being incompetent 11 times in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and 5 times in *Batman: The Court of Owls*. This is done both through the speech bubbles as well as the visual portrayals. The police are shown to do detective work 3 times in *Batman: The Court of Owls* and not at all in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. They are portrayed as assisting Batman three times in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and two times in *Batman: The Court of Owls*, however, it must be noted that in each case this involved Batman's good friend, Commissioner Gordon or Harvey Bullock. On two occasions in each story arc, Batman is shown to be taking the lead in the investigation while the police are shown to be standing around instead of assisting Batman. On three occasions in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* the police are shown to be interfering with Batman's attempts to apprehend criminals. On these occasions the police are shown to threaten Batman that account for the majority of 19 threats issued by police. In attempting to apprehend Batman in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, the police physically

attack (battery) Batman 7 times and discharge their weapons 43 times, wounding him once (aggravated battery). One murder by police is recorded in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and this is the case of Commissioner Gordon who shoots someone in self-defense.

Table 5		
Police Activities in Relation to Batman	Batman: The Dark Knight Returns	Batman: The Court Of Owls
Incompetence	11	5
Detective work	0	3
Assisting Batman	3	2
Not assisting	2	2
Interfering with Batman	3	0
Threats	19	0
Battery	7	0
Aggravated Battery	1	0
Discharge weapons	43	0
Making arrests	0	0
Attempting to Arrest Batman	6	0
Murder	1	0

The following table records the techniques used by Batman in attempting to apprehend criminals and control crime. In each story arc Batman is seen to cooperate with police on three occasions, however, in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* he resists arrest 6 times and in order to avoid being captured uses violence against police 11 times. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* Batman is not pursued by police. Instead when they are present, they are seen to cooperate with him or they stand aside while he is seen to do detective work. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* Batman relies more heavily on violence, committing assault twice, battery 26 times and aggravated battery 49 times. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* he commits battery 24 times and aggravated battery 31 times. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* he makes more extensive use of weapons and stealth using them 51 times and 16 times respectively as compared to *Batman: The Court of Owls* where he uses weapons and stealth 7 times and 3 times respectively. Batman's greater use

of violence as a technique in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is also reflected in Damage to Property (17 events) and Use of Intimidation (8 incidents). The comparable numbers from *Batman: The Court of Owls* are much lower at 6 and 3 respectively. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* Batman makes much greater use of advanced techniques, technology and detective skills than in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* Batman uses technology 26 times, advanced software 16 times, advanced weapons 12 times and detective skills 17 times. The comparable figures for *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* are four, zero, nine and two. There is one more important difference in the statistical data between the two story arcs. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* although Batman is extremely violent, he does not kill. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* Batman commits 7 murders.

Table 6		
Techniques Used By Batman	Batman: The Dark Knight Returns	Batman: The Court Of Owls
Cooperation with the police	3	3
Violence against the police	11	0
Resisting Arrest	6	0
Assault	2	0
Battery	26	24
Aggravated Battery (breaking bones, etc.)	49	31
Use of Weapons	51	7
Use of Stealth	16	3
Use of Tools	9	7
Use of Technology	4	26
Use of Advanced Computer Software	0	16
Use of Advanced Weaponry	9	12
Use of Detective Skills	2	17
Use of Intimidation	8	3
Use of Interrogation Methods	3	3
Damage to Property	17	6
Theft	2	0
Vandalism	3	0
Murder	0	7

Discussion of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data regarding criminals in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* reveals that men are significantly overrepresented. According to U.S. government statistics men are significantly more likely to offend than women. Moreover, men are more likely to commit violent crimes whereas criminal activity by women is more likely to involve a misdemeanor such as shoplifting or petty theft. The disproportionate number of male criminals portrayed in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* although consistent with the data collected regarding violent crimes, is inconsistent with U.S. national crime statistics regarding the gender of offenders. The most likely explanation for this is the one given by Vincent F. Sacco that violent crime is more interesting to the consumer. Furthermore the number of criminals on the streets committing violent crimes that are identified in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* suggests that these criminals are able to act with impunity and that crime is out of control. It further implies that the police have not done an adequate job in bringing these criminals to justice. The proportion of female criminals to male criminals portrayed in *Batman: The Court of Owls* is more representative of national crime statistics. As such few conclusions can be drawn from this data. Nonetheless, the number of criminals identified within a narrow time frame is also very large suggesting that there is a crime problem in *Batman: The Court of Owls* that is not being addressed by the authorities. Like *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, in *Batman: The Court of Owls* whites make up all of the identifiable criminals that is inconsistent with U.S. national crime statistics. It is unclear whether the motivation for this is based on political sensitivity, readership or some other reason is unclear. It does not, however, affect the results of this study that lends credence to the hypothesis that violent crime is portrayed as being out of control and beyond the reach of law enforcement due to the incompetence of police.

The data from the table regarding crimes in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* similarly paints a picture of crime that is out of control. It is also noteworthy that the number of violent crimes portrayed as being committed in Gotham, within a very short space of time is very large. If one were to extrapolate this number of violent crimes over a year, the number of violent crimes would exceed by many times over, the violent crime figures for the City of New York, which Gotham is intended to represent. This is particularly true for the number of murders at 244 and the number of attempted murders at 45. The overall picture this data paints is a city experiencing violent crime that is completely beyond the control of law enforcement. This level of criminal activity also throws into question the competence of the police. It is also worth noting in this regard that the 45 attempted murders recorded would have been homicides had the vigilante Batman not interceded. This data reinforces the messaging that Batman's intervention is necessary to save the citizens of Gotham from the criminals who prey on them. The data for the crime portrayed in *Batman: The Court of Owls* reveals a lesser number of crimes than in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* but it is still significant. Notably, there are no recorded incidents of robbery, sexual assault and resisting arrest, three of the most common reported crimes according to FBI statistics. As in the case of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* the attempted murders recorded would have been homicides but for the intervention of Batman. Once again this promotes the notion that the vigilante Batman is the only one who can protect the citizens of Gotham. As later recorded data shows, the police play virtually no role in controlling crime in *Batman: The Court of Owls*.

A wide range of different weapons are used to commit crimes in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* including a bottle, metal pipes, baseball bats, knives and guns. This paints a picture of chaotic and random violence perpetrated by individual or small groups of criminals

who are not organized or sophisticated. By contrast the only two weapons identified in *Batman: The Court of Owls* are the knife and the sword. Conspicuous by their absence are guns, the weapon of choice in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. This paints a picture of an insidious hidden threat, criminals who operate by stealth and quietly prey on their victims. This particular limited choice of weapons also suggests that certain criminals are acting in concert as part of a more sophisticated criminal organization that is made clear by the qualitative analysis.

Of the identifiable murder victims in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, there are slightly more than three times as many male victims as female victims, whereas national crime statistics indicate that the ratio is close to being even. This differs from portrayals in movies and television crime dramas which typically portray the majority of victims as female. In this respect at least the portrayals are more realistic than other media fictional portrayals. It is noteworthy, however, that in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* there are 212 unidentified victims, the majority of whom were murdered by the Joker in the theatre. This raises the spectre of random crimes where the victim does not know the perpetrator and mass murders. With the exception of serial killers and terrorists, the vast majority of murderers are known to their victims (Bush, 2013). These numbers reinforce the chaotic scene in Gotham where mass murder is seen to exist. This is consistent with a portrayal of circumstances where no one is safe from crime. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* the number of crimes depicted is much less and there are no unidentified victims. These smaller numbers of victims in this story arc, portray crime of a different character than the crime in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. These smaller numbers suggest more targeted murders and more organized criminal behaviour. The ratio of male murder victims to female murder victims is closer to two to one, still within a realistic range. The data on murder victims tends to support the hypothesis that crime is out of control in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*

and that crime is beyond the reach of the police and their methods in the case of *Batman: The Court of Owls*. This portrayal of police incompetence reinforces the need for vigilantism, in the person of Batman.

The Table recording the activities of police paints a grim picture of police competence in both story arcs. There are 11 examples of police incompetence identified in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and 5 in *Batman: The Court of Owls*. This data, while the result of some interpretation, nonetheless lends support to the hypothesis that police are portrayed as incompetent in both story arcs. The police do no detective work in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and there are only three instances of the police doing detective work in *The Court of Owls*. The fact that the police do no detective work in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* lends further support to the hypothesis that the police are portrayed as incompetent inasmuch as they are never shown to do basic investigative work. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* the police interfere with Batman while he is attempting to apprehend criminals on three occasions. On one of these occasions this results in the death of over two hundred people. In addition, the police attempt to arrest him 6 times, they threaten him 19 times, physically assault him 7 times, discharge their weapons at him 43 times wounding him once (aggravated battery). This level of police misconduct is reminiscent of two articles in the literature review of this paper, (Weitzer, 2002) and (Robinson, 2011). This data portrays that the police are focused almost entirely on apprehending Batman while ignoring the real criminals. Importantly, like the situations addressed in the two articles referenced above, the police are portrayed as misguided, overzealous and guilty of using excessive force. In addition, they are shown to be incompetent in bringing to justice criminals who represent a real threat to the city. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* the police are seen to assist Batman twice and on two occasions seen to do little more than

stand around while Batman does detective work. The above data supports the hypothesis that police are portrayed as guilty of gross incompetence which by implication suggests that vigilantism is justified to protect the status quo.

The techniques used by Batman to fight crime in *Batman: The Court of Owls* differ markedly from those he uses in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* he is portrayed as using stealth to advantage against criminals 16 times and intimidation 8 times. The comparable numbers for *Batman: The Court of Owls* are 3 and 3 respectively. The data from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* suggest a much greater use of violence than in *The Court of Owls*. He uses violence against police 11 times whereas there are no instances of violence against police in *Batman: The Court of Owls*. The data for other indicators of violent behaviour by Batman such as battery, aggravated battery, use of weapons and damage to property are all substantially higher than the equivalent data for *Batman: The Court of Owls*. This is consistent with the methods Batman uses in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* as described in the narrative of this story arc. The data collected identifies many more markers of modern methods of forensic investigation in *Batman: The Court of Owls*. There are 26 instances of the use of technology, 16 of the use of advanced computer software and 12 cases of the use of advanced weaponry. The equivalent numbers for *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* are 4, 0 and 9 respectively. This data appears to support the hypothesis that the two story arcs are adapted to the times in which they were written. *The Dark Knight* was adapted to respond to the 1980's, an era where society seemed obsessed with high crime rates and the media portrayals featured police or vigilante anti-heroes who relied on violence to combat crime. By contrast *Batman: The Court of Owls* contains many markers of modern forms of police investigation notably forensic

investigation markers such as those portrayed in forensic crime investigation television programming. In this respect I would refer to the article by Deutsch and Cavender.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

The Analysis of Qualitative Data section is organized into a number of sections for the purpose of identifying events or markers which are relevant to the particular issues addressed by the data. The concept "strategic web of facticity" a term coined by Gaye Tuchman would appear to have application to the two Batman comics being reviewed. This consists of using a set of facts presented to the reader which when taken together tend to validate the objectivity of the information presented (Deutsch and Cavender, 2008, 36). Like other media including fiction this provides a unified set of events which makes the story believable to the audience. In order to introduce the qualitative data I felt it necessary to provide a short narrative providing a background and setting to each storyline. Following this section in each storyline is a section on how police are portrayed which is directly relevant to the hypothesis that the police are portrayed as incompetent which provides an underlying justification for vigilantism. The next section in each story deals with the worst criminals threatening Gotham. The purpose of this section is to provide data which goes to the issue of the extent of the threat portrayed and whether vigilantism is necessary in the context. To expand on the issue, the question is whether Batman is simply assisting police or whether he is engaged in the commission of criminal acts (evil) and if so are these necessary or justifiable in order to combat a potentially greater evil. Again this is relevant to the hypothesis that these comics portray the need for vigilantism in the person of Batman. The final section deals with the techniques used by Batman to combat crime. The purpose of this section is to determine if the methods used by Batman to combat crime in *Batman: The Court of*

Owls reflect more up to date investigative techniques. If so then this would support the hypothesis, that the two stories are adapted to the socio/political environment of the times in which they were released, since *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* predates *Batman: The Court of Owls* by approximately twenty five years.

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, takes place in an imaginary 1980's America, one still facing the cold war and with a Ronald Reagan like figure as the U.S. president. In terms of artistic style, the setting of Gotham is dark and gloomy, a place where the sun is shown to seldom shine, and where the skyline is colored in moody grey's, blues, and blacks. More than any previous depiction of Gotham City, this Gotham is shown to be filthy and covered in trash, with graffiti art in full display on the walls of buildings and in subway cars. The city is shown to be worn and old, with out of date street lamps which have a 1930's quality to them. This is reinforced by the faded coloration of the characters in black, white, and yellow reminiscent of early Dick Tracy Comics. Background characters are drawn with less distinctive faces than the main characters depicting that they are part of the setting and lack importance. Major characters such as Batman, Two-Face, Gordon, Ellen Yindel and the Joker are drawn with distinctive jaw lines and sculptured faces presumably to illustrate strong character traits. They have square muscular physiques that show a sense of purpose as well as to portraying them as a force to be reckoned with. By contrast the criminals are physically drawn to fit Lombroso's notions of born criminals with distorted facial features (Vollum and Adkinson, 2003, 103). All characters in the story are drawn with rough edges to reflect the harsh and violent environment in which they live. The coloration of their costumes is dark echoing the mood of the world they inhabit. This visual

portrayal is meant to go hand in hand with what the reader is told in the text. Gotham City is on the brink of complete chaos and its future is uncertain. This sets the stage for Batman, the central character in this story to come out of hiding and take it upon himself to restore order in an otherwise hopeless situation.

The Stage is Set for the Return of the Vigilante Batman

At the beginning of the comic Gotham is portrayed as being overrun with crime and in virtually a hopeless state. Bruce Wayne is depicted returning to the spot in the city where it is intimated that his parents were murdered. As he walks down the road he reveals how disgusted he is with society saying "I walk down the streets of this city I'm learning to hate, the city that's given up, like the whole world seems to have." (Miller et al., 1986, 12). These words highlight what is depicted visually on the page. Bruce Wayne looks down as he is walking along as if to avoid seeing Gotham for what it is, a city in utter chaos. Smoke rises and the wind picks up debris that flies around him suggesting a forthcoming disaster. A sense of despair is illustrated by people on the street nearby who can be seen holding signs that say "We are damned" (Miller et al., 1986, 12). After a close call with some hoodlums Bruce Wayne falls to his knees and says in frustration that the criminals of today are " . . . a purer breed . . . and the world is theirs." (Miller et al., 1986, 14). He is surrounded by garbage, emphasizing the desperate situation that Gotham is in. Shortly thereafter he is seen watching television by himself. He first watches the weather channel that warns that a cold front is moving into Gotham which can be seen as a premonition of greater anguish and upheaval yet to come. On another channel, he sees The Mark of Zorro, the film that he went to see with his parents on the night of their murder. Again turning the channels he sees reports of kidnappings, rapes, murders and mutilations that he then runs outside to escape. Later

he returns to his study where he sees the beast within him return, taking the form of an enormous bat which crashes through his window, signifying that he must return as the Batman as he is the only one who can save Gotham (Miller et al., 1986, 21-26).

How Law Enforcement is Depicted

The relationship of the police with Batman early in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* tends to be positive in part based on Batman's friendship with Commissioner Gordon. Older officers having past experience with Batman are also seen to hold him in high esteem. Despite their cooperative relationship early in this compendium, the police are portrayed as allowing Batman to take the lead in combating crime. This speaks to the competence of the police and their ability to control crime. After Ellen Yindel becomes Commissioner of Police, however, Batman is pursued by the police as he is seen as a vigilante acting outside the law. Although under Commissioner Yindel, the police are seen to be taking a more active role, rather than fighting crime in their misguided attempts to stop Batman, they actually facilitate crime. As such, the police are portrayed as incompetent and misguided in that they allow crime to flourish.

The Police Under Commissioner Gordon

At the beginning of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Commissioner James Gordon goes for drinks with Bruce Wayne to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the retirement of Batman. It is obvious from this interaction that they are close friends (Miller et al., 1986, 11-12). After Bruce Wayne returns as Batman, he and Gordon discuss the possibility that Harvey Dent is on the loose again as Two-Face and they share information and discuss how Two-Face is likely to commit his next crime (Miller et al., 1986, 46). Later, Batman asks Gordon for a favor in order to control the

mutants "It's the only way, Jim, I'm counting on your help" (Miller et al., 1986, pg 97). In the next frame, Gordon opens the mutant leader's cell and lets him go, luring him into a confrontation with Batman (Miller et al., 1986, pg 98). While Commissioner Gordon assists Batman in attempting to keep Gotham safe, this is done in secret and his role is passive and one of supporting Batman's efforts to combat crime.

Similarly, early in this story arc an older police officer is portrayed as taking a more passive role allowing Batman to take the lead in combating crime. In this sequence Batman is depicted as involving himself in a high-speed chase between the police and criminals. After the criminals' car crashes, they flee into a construction site where Batman follows them, in turn being followed by the police. Batman turns and shouts to the police, "These Men are Mine!". The older officer exclaims to his younger partner " . . . You heard the man." later warning his partner not to follow him (Miller et al., 1986, pg 35-36). As Batman defeats the criminals, the younger of the two police officers threatens to shoot Batman. In reaction, the older officer exclaims "Don't try it kid. He's being patient with you as it is. Nice to have you back, Bats." (Miller et al., 1986, pg 40). In this portrayal the older officer who is familiar with Batman is content to take a passive role in pursuing the criminals and not interfere with Batman's efforts to apprehend them.

The Police Under Commissioner Yindel

The new Commissioner Ellen Yindel is someone put in place to re-establish the authority of law enforcement in Gotham. In a TV interview, she exclaims that her first duty as Police Commissioner is to " . . . issue an arrest warrant for the Batman on charges of assault, breaking and entering, creating a public hazard . . ." which she reinforces when she is sworn in as

commissioner (Miller et al., 1986, 72) (Miller et al., 1986, 116). Later in the story, the criminal, the Joker makes an appearance on a popular syndicated late night talk show. Ellen Yindel and the Gotham City Police Department (GCPD) who intend to monitor the potentially disastrous situation, do so from the top of the building in which the syndicated show is being filmed. In one series of frames, Batman glides down to the top of a building in order to stop the Joker from harming people inside. The police shout from a megaphone "Batman, you are under arrest . . . Do not move". He ignores these orders and attempts to fight his way through the police but fails to get to the Joker and save the people trapped inside the building. Due to the interference of the police, the people in the building are all murdered and Batman is forced to escape (Miller et al., 1986, 123-128). Instead of taking steps to prevent the massacre caused by the Joker inside of the building, Commissioner Yindel and the GCPD focus all their attention on Batman (Miller et al., 1986, 121-130). Later Batman disguises himself as Lieutenant O'Halloran in order to obtain information. Once the police finds him out, they shoot at him repeatedly to prevent him from escaping (Miller et al., 1986, 134). At one point when the GCPD chases Batman and Robin down to Kyle Escorts, Batman radios Ellen Yindel to tell her to save the governor because he " . . . doesn't have the time to save him . . ." (Miller et al., 1986, 138). Later while Batman is seen chasing the Joker, it is broadcasted that Ellen Yindel saved the governor from " . . . literally strangling himself with red tape . . ." (Miller et al., 1986, 145). Later we see the police chase Batman and the Joker in an amusement park. After the Joker's dead body explodes into flames in a trap set by Batman, one officer exclaims "Blow that bastard's head off - - " whereas another says "If it's not a cop - - - shoot it." (Miller et al., 1986, 156). After Batman defeated the Joker, Ellen Yindel leads the charge to arrest Batman. She is depicted sneaking up on Batman from behind only to be knocked out by him and her gun taken from her (Miller et al., 1986, 156).

Much later, while street riots break out during a citywide power outage, Batman and Robin along with the sons of Batman attempt to maintain order. Commissioner Yindel and Officer Merkel are depicted hiding by the corner of a building, watching the commotion. When Officer Merkel asks if they should interfere, she responds "No. No. He's . . . too big . . .", a reference to a conversation she had with Jim Gordon earlier in the comic (Miller et al., 1986, 176), (Miller et al., 1986, 96). This ironic sequence suggests that she is now content to see the police again play a passive role, leaving control of the riots to vigilantes.

Commissioner Yindel's decision to either arrest or kill Batman is portrayed as misguided. When she is sworn in, she refers to Batman as a menace to society that needs to be hunted down. In every instance that Batman does do good, Ellen Yindel with the GCPD is there to stop him. Later, even after Batman tried to reach out to Commissioner Yindel she persists in her determination to capture or kill him and Batman is forced to treat her like the obstacle that she has become to him. It is not until Commissioner Yindel's last appearance that she gives up trying to apprehend or kill Batman.

These examples show how the police are more focused on arresting Batman than dealing with the real problem, stopping crime. In doing so they inhibit Batman in his quest to stop crime reinforcing the narrative that the police are either incompetent or misguided. Commissioner Yindel, in particular, is portrayed as lacking judgment through her attempts to identify Batman as a criminal and arrest or kill him. By impeding Batman in his attempt to stop the Joker, she costs the lives of many people.

Evil Is Necessary to Defeat Evil

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns portrays Batman as a vigilante who is needed by Gotham to combat crime and restore order as the police are incapable of doing so. In his pursuit of justice Batman resorts to extreme violence, committing numerous crimes, damaging property and violating individuals' rights. In doing so, he not only investigates crimes but he also carries out extrajudicial punishment. The message conveyed by the storyline is that it is necessary to resort to evil to combat evil. This image of evil being necessary to fight evil is also reinforced by the Bat monster within Bruce Wayne. Although the monster within Batman empowers him to fight crime it remains a reflection of evil which is made clear by the narrative.

Two Face

Batman is represented as having a certain level of understanding and empathy for the criminal Two Face (Harvey Dent). Bruce Wayne is seen reliving a traumatic childhood event where he dreams that he encounters a bat beast after falling into a cave (Miller et al., 1986, 19). After waking, he is told by Alfred that his mustache that he has had for ten years is missing. Batman has no idea what happened to it, suggesting that like Harvey Dent, he has two different personas (Miller et al., 1986, 20). During a news interview Bruce Wayne says that he feels it is a good thing that Harvey Dent was being released into society after he had been rehabilitated, saying "We must believe that our private demons can be defeated . . .". This comment makes allusion to the bat demon which is portrayed to be inside Bruce Wayne (Miller et al., 1986, 16). Struggling with Harvey Dent's admission that he was responsible for planting bombs in Gotham's twin towers, Batman exclaims "Harvey, if it is you -- you've had every chance there is." (Miller et al., 1986, 50). Determined to find out if it is indeed Harvey Dent, Batman exclaims on two occasions

"I have to know", and is shown chasing Harvey's helicopter and rescuing him from death to satisfy this curiosity (Miller et al., 1986, 51-54). When Batman determines that Harvey is indeed the masked bomber, Harvey exclaims that he was the butt of a joke for believing that he could have been cured of his disfigurement. In response, Batman replies ". . . I see . . . a reflection, Harvey. A Reflection" (Miller et al., 1986, 55). We see during this conversation that Batman sees Harvey not the way he appears with his face fixed, but by the way he is deep down, a disfigured monster, Lombroso's notion of a "born criminal" (Vollum and Adkinson, 2003, 102-103). We also see Batman's true nature, that of a Bat beast that has tormented him over the years (Miller et al., 1986, 55). There is a realization at this point that the reason Batman understands so much about Harvey Dent is because Batman also cannot suppress his own demon. As a person possessed by his own monster, he knows that Harvey Dent, like himself will not change and it is utterly hopeless to try to change him. We see that Batman's relationship with Harvey Dent is one of understanding. It is revealed that Batman is able to see Harvey's beast, and sees Harvey as a kindred spirit in that they both possess a beast deep down inside that they cannot lock away. The beast that controls Harvey Dent to do harm, however, is the mirror image of the beast inside Batman that compels him to relentlessly fight crime.

The Joker

The Joker is illustrated with green hair, chalk colored white skin, a distorted smile that is ever present on his face with lips heavily painted with red lipstick. This representation of the Joker identifies him as a maniacal criminal. The text identifies him as a genius and criminal mastermind and a cold calculating killer. His long lasting rivalry with Batman is supported by the Joker's choice of the word darling which also reflects Joker's sense of irony. When Batman is

dismantling the bombs planted by Harvey Dent, he is impressed by the bombs' design, and exclaims "Brilliant Design -- Worthy of The Joker." (Miller et al., 1986, 50). Batman is depicted in one situation expressing his sense of guilt for not having stopped the Joker sooner. After a building explosion caused by a doll that turned out to be a bomb, Batman says "I'll count the dead , one by one. I'll add them to the list Joker. The list of all the people I've murdered by letting you live." (Miller et al., 1986, 117). This point is later emphasised when Batman discovers a beaten up Selina Kyle and asks himself how many horrendous crimes must he let happen until " . . . I finally do it? ", which implies murdering the Joker (Miller et al., 1986, 136). When Batman chases the Joker down to the amusement park, he exclaims "From the beginning I knew, that there's nothing wrong with you that I can't fix with my hands . . ." (Miller et al., 1986, 142). Ultimately Batman decides to paralyze him by snapping his neck (Miller et al., 1986, 148), (Miller et al., 1986, 150). Although Batman does not kill him, knowing he is now a quadriplegic, the Joker later finishes the job himself. This is an extreme representation of vigilante behaviour on the part of Batman.

The Mutant Leader

The Mutant Leader is described in the text as being savage and evil, and because of his sheer size, youth, and physicality, a worthy adversary of Batman (Miller et al., 1986, 77). Through his physical appearance he is depicted as a monster. He is bald with an irregular shaped head, he has sharpened teeth and claws, an irregular nose, and pointy ears. As such he also fits Lombroso's notion of a "born criminal" (Vollum and Adkinson, 2003, 102-103). In the Mutant Leader, Batman not only sees a villain, but someone that is also evil incarnate. When first approaching the Mutant Leader in the mud pit, Batman describes him as " . . . A kind of evil we never

dreamed of . . . " (Miller et al., 1986, 77). During the first fight, after breaking the mutant leader's nose, Batman exclaims " - - The idiot - - starts laughing - - insane . . . " (Miller et al., 1986, 80-81). After his first unsuccessful encounter with the Mutant Leader, Batman devises a plan to lure the Mutant Leader out of prison and into a mud pit for the final encounter. He taunts him and treats him like a child twice using the words "Good boy". He also cautions him not to eat any rats because "rats carry disease", treating him like the wild animal that he considers him to be (Miller et al., 1986, 98). As a result, Batman is able to lure the leader into a trap that the Mutant Leader carelessly falls into. Batman demonstrates extreme vigilante behaviour in this fight breaking both the Mutant Leader's legs among many other body parts severely maiming him (Miller et al., 1986, 101). As such, Batman is again portrayed as acting extra-judicially by finding the mutant leader guilty of his crimes, deciding he deserves punishment and applying his own brand of justice.

How Batman Combats Crime

Batman's Use of Fear and Intimidation

In carrying out justice in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* Batman deliberately attempts to instill fear in the villains he pursues not only to give him an immediate advantage in a conflict, but also to further perpetuate his legend across the criminal underworld. As he pursues criminals from a car chase into an old building, he stalks his prey, taking them out one by one to instil fear. At the beginning of this confrontation, with his eyes glowing from below, Batman drags a man through the floor as he utters "Welcome to Hell.". This spooks the other criminals enough that they start firing their guns wildly down the dark hole into which Batman has just dragged their comrade (Miller et al., 1986, 38). We then see one of the men who is still standing next to the

hole, being dragged down through the hole by his neck with the use of a rope. With the last thug Batman exclaims "The last one's usually the one to lose it. So I let him, and let him come to me . . . I play in the shadows, forcing the hood to come close" (Miller et al., 1986, 38-39). Batman later catches up with one of the criminals he took down in the abandoned building, this time the criminal has a cast on his leg and a neck guard and walks with crutches. The criminal walks into his apartment and finds the door left open. We see Batman, with his eyes glowing white, lurking in the darkness behind the door which he slams to startle the criminal. Batman, appearing as a black shadow, questions the criminal about his boss. The criminal becomes so spooked by his presence after having been maimed during his last encounter with Batman that he falls backwards into a glass window and severely cuts himself (Miller et al., 1986, 44-45). The criminal who is now severely wounded insists: "-- I got rights --". In response Batman reminds the criminal that if he does not tell him what he wants to know, that he will allow him to bleed to death (Miller et al., 1986, 44-45). In another encounter, he takes a mutant thug and hangs him upside down from the top of a building, threatening him with death if he does not tell Batman where the mutants got their weapons, emphasising "I'm the worst nightmare you ever had . . ." (Miller et al., 1986, 67-68). Batman reveals the terror below that is in store for him if he does not cooperate. As the criminal looks down in utter terror, Batman emphasises "You're not in a position to negotiate." (Miller et al., 1986, 67-68). In this instance, with the use of fear, Batman is able to obtain the information he wants (Miller et al., 1986, 67).

These examples illustrate Batman's frequent use of fear as a psychological weapon against his enemies. By using fear he reduces the potential danger to himself and makes dispatching the criminal a much easier task. As well, he uses fear to negotiate on his own terms and obtain what he wants. Batman is able to effectively use fear as he embodies the demon

which is represented by his costume. Appearing as a wraith or a shadow he is able to accentuate his physical power, and to play with the imaginations of his victims to emphasize the potential harm he can bring to them. His reputation as a monster also perpetuates the cycle of fear amongst the criminals. Batman's use of fear is also reinforced by his outfit and news reports in which he is described by the people he has saved as "a large, Bat-like creature . . ." while others describe him as ". . . a huge man dressed like Dracula . . ." (Miller et al., 1986, 32).

Batman's Use of Stealth

In this story arc, Batman is portrayed as embodying the spirit of the bat monster within him and like his namesake, he uses the darkness to hunt. In his first mission as Batman, he stalks a criminal hiding in the shadows who plans to kill a woman returning home in the rain with her groceries. As the crazed man is about to deliver a fatal strike to his victim, a hand breaks through a window in a doorway behind him, clutches the man's mouth, and drags him through the broken window in the door and then disappears (Miller et al., 1986, 27-28). In another instance, as if appearing out of nowhere, Batman makes short work of a pimp and then disappears (Miller et al., 1986, 29). In another instance Batman appears out of nowhere and saves the future Robin Carrie and her friend from Mutant thugs. We see from the shadows Batman raising his hand in the rain with what appear to be claws on his hand but which turn out to be throwing darts in the form of Batarangs (Miller et al., 1986, 31). In another sequence referred to earlier, a criminal who was previously injured by Batman is seen returning to his apartment. The criminal walks into his apartment and finds the door left open. Batman is depicted with his eyes glowing white, lurking in the darkness behind the door which he slams startling the criminal (Miller et al., 1986, 44-45). In many of these sequences the whiteness of Batman's eyes is emphasized, and he is illustrated as

a wraith like figure up until the point when he attacks the criminals that again underlines his use of stealth. The above examples are reinforced by the quantitative data that identifies the frequency with which he relies on stealth to surprise criminals.

Batman's Use of Violence

Batman uses extreme violence in fighting crime that emphasizes his vigilante image. Batman's size, physicality, and dark qualities are accentuated by the artist to show the reader how scary and brutal he can be to the criminals he encounters. His use of violence is for the purpose of rendering his victims harmless so that they do not act as criminals for the foreseeable future. In one instance, in order to save a prostitute in the back of a taxi cab from her pimp, Batman must disarm her pimp. Batman smashes the man's hand through the passenger window by stomping on it, which forces the pimp to release his hold of the gun (Miller et al., 1986, 29). In another instance, Batman uses his Batarangs on a mutant thug who is about to attack the future Robin and her friend at an arcade. We see the mutant criminal come out of the shadows only to be illuminated as he is attacked by Batman. The mutant is shown screaming in pain as he has four razor sharp throwing darts lodged in his right arm. Batman then picks up the other mutant thug and throws him into the Arcade sign. In the next frame the mutant is shown screaming and glowing as the electricity is presumably now coursing through him (Miller et al., 1986, 31-32). In another instance, Batman is depicted shattering a criminal's pelvis with a swift kick that the reader presumes from the loud crack sound. As he is approached by a cop telling him that he has "crippled" the perpetrator, Batman exclaims "He's young. He'll probably walk again. But he'll stay scared - - won't you punk?" (Miller et al., 1986, 39). He uses the Batmobile to severely maim the mutant thugs without killing them (Miller et al., 1986, 74-76). During Batman's final

confrontation with the Mutant Leader, as Batman gets the upper hand, he decides to break both of his legs, exclaiming "Something tells me to stop with the leg. I don't listen to it." (Miller et al., 1986, 101). We see on the next page Batman standing over a mangled and broken Mutant Leader laying in the mud (Miller et al., 1986, 102). In the final showdown with the joker, Batman exclaims "Tonight I'm taking no prisoners" as he throws Batarangs that slice the Jokers shoulder and leave him blind in one eye (Miller et al., 1986, 144). As the battle ensues, Batman decides to use his hands to snap The Joker's neck, leaving him a quadriplegic as Batman does not normally kill. However, the Joker continues to snap his own neck to finish the job (Miller et al., 1986, 150-151).

In each of the above examples Batman's brutality has a purpose. When he attacked and paralyzed the thug in the abandoned building, this was meant to deter the thug from committing future crime and to send a message to other criminals. When Batman left the mutant leader severely mangled and broken this was to send a message to his followers that the group was disbanded (Miller et al., 1986, 93). Also, paralyzing the Joker was a way to stop the Joker from ever killing again (Miller et al., 1986, 126).

Batman: Court Of Owls

In *Batman: Court of Owls*, the art style and illustrations were chosen to convey a certain image of the setting. There are very few modern looking buildings. The majority of the buildings are of older architectural design, arguably harkening back to the 1930's when Batman's originally appeared in comics. The skyline of Gotham city is depicted with smoke and steam from the buildings, suggesting that Gotham is an industrial town. This also emphasises the rather gloomy depiction of Gotham. Other parts of the city are old and run down, and in certain sectors of the

city, buildings appear almost ready to collapse. Throughout the issue, Gotham appears constantly under the cover of darkness, with the sky covered in blues and reds, suggesting that the mood is dark. These gloomy images are like a metaphor that makes allusion to the pain, suffering and torment to which Gotham is being subjected. There are very few instances where the series takes place during the day. Even during daylight, the light almost looks like dawn, suggesting that light is only beginning to penetrate Gotham, a city that may slowly be reaching salvation but not quite yet. The character illustrations vary with the importance of the character to the story. The more central the character is to the story, the more dominant, handsome, and masculine the character is. For example, the characters Batman and Lincoln March are both handsome and have strong facial features such as square jaws depicting that they are both more important characters in the story. The less masculine and weaker looking characters are of lesser importance. As is typical of comics, the illustrations of character's are not fully detailed, particularly in the case of lesser characters. Despite the sense of gloom conveyed by the illustrations, the environment and characters are colored in a way that is crisp and clear. This is done seemingly to demonstrate that this world is nonetheless very much alive, but also by giving the reader a sense of being a part of this gloomy environment and the storyline. The Gotham police are portrayed as being ill equipped and using methods to fight crime that are dated and ineffective. Like the people of Gotham they are depicted as being all too aware of the crime around them but incapable of doing anything about it. By contrast Batman is portrayed as having advanced equipment and methods that make him effective in solving crimes. The suggestion that Batman is needed, may be subliminal but it is nonetheless very clear because his methods are effective whereas those of the police are not. As such, *Batman: The Court of Owls* story arc, like *Batman: The Dark Knight*

Returns, promotes the notion that vigilantism is a necessary and desirable adjunct to police enforcement.

How Law Enforcement is Depicted

The relationship of the police with Batman in *Batman: The Court of Owls* is generally positive in part based on Batman's friendship with Commissioner Gordon. The role of the police in this story arc is quite limited but the police are generally portrayed as having a cooperative relationship with Batman. The police are for example seen to provide information to Batman to assist him in investigating crime. Despite their cooperative relationship with Batman, the police are portrayed as allowing Batman to take the lead in combating crime. He is portrayed as using more advanced technology that enables him to more effectively investigate crimes and identify important clues. All of this speaks to the competence or effectiveness of the police to investigate crime. It also speaks to the need for this vigilante that the police under Gordon support through their efforts to provide him with information. The narrative of this story arc like *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is therefore one that promotes a favourable view of vigilantism.

Commissioner Gordon

Batman is portrayed as being a comrade of Commissioner Gordon but a comrade on who Gordon is heavily dependent. In their first encounter in this story arc, Batman tells the Commissioner the particulars of the recent attempted breakout of Arkham Asylum, one that Batman stopped.

Batman informs Gordon that the breakout was an inside job involving a guard at Arkham who needed money (Batman #1, 2011, 7). Gordon is not only portrayed as smaller than Batman, but disheveled looking whereas Batman has a sleek look by comparison. Gordon is also portrayed as

desperate for answers that Batman is able to provide. The panel also suggests a power differential between the two. Gordon is smaller and slumped over, with a pot belly whereas Batman is tall, and very much in peak physical condition. Gordon also suffers from a vice, which is smoking, whereas Batman appears to not suffer from any vice or affliction. Gordon is portrayed as human and a character who is flawed whereas Batman appears to live up to the myth that he is super human (Batman #1, 2011, 7-8). The next meeting between the two occurs in the morgue where Gordon expects Batman to meet him to simply examine a body. However, Batman uses a high tech security camera that he has installed inside the room, and uses it as a tool to examine the body after which he speaks with Gordon. As a result of clues Batman is able to discover, Gordon is ultimately able to determine the identity of the victim (Batman #2, 2011, 7-9). There is a juxtaposition between the two characters. Gordon takes a limited hands on approach whereas Batman operates with advanced state of the art equipment with touch screens and technology that can do much more than any hands on approach (Batman #1, 2011, 7-9). We see in a later comic, Batman looking down on Gordon from a rooftop and in an inner monologue he says he has to go as "I have a lead to follow up on." (Batman #4, 2012, 16). Batman is portrayed as doing what is necessary to combat the criminals, while Gordon is shown waiting for Batman to produce results for him (Batman #4, 2012, 16).

Although Batman and the Commissioner work together to solve cases, Gordon is shown to be physically weaker, less resourceful and ultimately less competent than Batman. The Commissioner depends on Batman to appear to be doing his job effectively. Gordon, in essence, acts as a symbol showing the public that the GCPD is working, whereas in reality it is Batman who is solving crimes. Although Batman uses police information and resources, he is depicted as working alone when bringing criminals to justice. In some respects Gordon acts as an inside man

within the GCPD that allows Batman access to GCPD information and resources as well as allowing Batman to influence the GCPD through Gordon.

The Gotham City Police Department

At the beginning of the story Batman goes to a crime scene and meets detective Harvey Bullock, a character reminiscent of Colombo from the television series. Bullock tells Batman that the victim, who is pinned to his apartment wall with throwing knives, must have died six days ago. He also reveals that the knives in the body missed every major artery in order to make the victim suffer. Batman notices a few things missed by Bullock, that being the skin he finds under the victim's finger nails whose DNA he analyses with a device on the back of his glove, and paint thinner left on the wall, which when ignited tells them both that Bruce Wayne is to be assassinated the following day (Batman #1, 2011, 19-21). During this scene Batman is able to recognize that the throwing knives are antiques of very high quality, one of which he pockets to examine later. During this investigation, he is dismissive of Harvey Bullock, paying more attention to the task at hand than bothering to converse with him (Batman #1, 2011, 19-21). The illustrations depict a sharp contrast between these two characters. Harvey Bullock is sloppy in his attire and appears almost obese. His hair is disheveled and he is smoking a cigar. We see a man who is too relaxed and not as focused or sharp as Batman (Batman #1, 2011, 19-21).

In another scene we see that Batman uses high-end technology to review an autopsy of the same victim. As the coroner leaves before Batman shows up, he tells Gordon, "I'm afraid there's little more to relay than the obvious. Our John Doe was stabbed multiple times, likely in an act of torture." (Batman #2, 2011, 6). After Batman enters the picture, using a camera that allows him to view the victim with a 3D image he is able to deduce that not only was this man

tortured, but that the man in question was a high end trainer, judging by the " . . . extensive scar tissue around the ribs and abdomen . . . calcification at his brow, side of skull." He also observes that "There are scars along his forearms. Common injuries from swordplay." (Batman #2, 2011, 7). Batman also discovers a tooth with an owl crest on it, something that the coroner obviously missed (Batman #2, 2011, 7). The coroner, is illustrated as a short, stout older man with a round face who apparently does not take any particular joy from his work, as he appears to rush the autopsy as if it was standard procedure which is implied by his choice of words. In contrast, Batman is more invested in the case judging by his serious expression and focussed eyes as well as the effort he goes to using his tools to view the body. The equipment Batman uses is depicted as being very advanced by the colorful 3D images of his operating mechanism that seems to surround the character as he works (Batman #2, 2011, 6-8). Later on the reader is told that the lifeless body of Alan Wayne, the great great grandfather of Bruce Wayne was discovered naked and had drowned in a sewer. While analysing his bones with his equipment after the body is exhumed, Batman discovers puncture wounds that would suggest that his grandfather was stabbed to death (Batman #4, 2012, 6-8). This suggests either incompetent police work or a cover up by the police and coroner and reinforces the narrative that the police cannot be trusted to do their work properly. Whereas the police did not follow up on Alan Wayne's murder, Batman is shown venturing into the sewers beyond where Alan Wayne's body was found in order to find the location of his assassin and solve this crime. Unlike the police, he is undeterred by danger or disagreeable situations if it means solving a crime (Batman #4, 2012, 17).

In *Batman: The Court of Owls*, Batman participates in police investigations and willingly works with certain police figures to investigate crimes. During these investigations, Batman is able provide greater insight into events and uncover clues that the police have missed. Batman's

access to advanced technology allows him do a more thorough analysis of the evidence and also allows him to be more precise in terms of conclusions. By implication police methods are portrayed as being inferior. This provides the justification for Batman to interfere with police investigations where necessary.

Evil Is Necessary to Defeat Evil

Like *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, in *Batman: The Court of Owls* Batman is portrayed as a vigilante who is needed by Gotham to combat crime and restore order as the police are incapable of doing so. In this story arc he is also portrayed as a victim of crime and experiences the kind of extreme fear victims of crime experience. In his pursuit of the Court of Owls, Batman resorts to extremes of violence that represent a departure from behaviour he is traditionally associated with. In doing so he breaks his own moral code of never killing. This form of extrajudicial punishment is justified as the Talons (agents of the Court of Owls) are undead zombie like characters who are portrayed as having the ability to come back to life. The message conveyed by the storyline is even more pointed than *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* that it is necessary to go beyond behaviour that is by most standards unacceptable and resort to behaviour which is truly evil to combat a greater evil. This image of evil being necessary to fight evil is also reinforced by the insidious evil threat the Court of Owls represents, which the police and the justice system are incapable of dealing with.

Lincoln March (Thomas Wayne Jr.)

Lincoln March is Bruce Wayne's brother, a rival and a truly evil figure, facts which Batman does not fully realize until the end of the story arc. Bruce Wayne's first encounter with Lincoln March,

candidate for Mayor, is at a benefit at Wayne Manor to discuss how to revitalize Gotham (Batman #1, 2011, 15-17). At the end of their discussion, Bruce Wayne has Alfred set up an appointment with Lincoln March to have lunch to discuss their potential roles in reshaping Gotham (Batman #1, 2011, 15-17). In the next issue, when Bruce Wayne and Lincoln March meet at Old Wayne Tower for lunch, Lincoln March tries to win Bruce Wayne's confidence but Wayne questions his motives. When Lincoln exclaims ". . . I see a friend in you." Bruce replies "A Cynic would say you see an opportunity." (Batman #2, 2011, 11-13). Lincoln is portrayed as trying to reach out to Bruce Wayne saying that he lost his parents at a young age and felt bitter toward the world, but the city later saved him. Lincoln also states his belief that the city also saved Wayne and he says "When I look at you, I see an ally. A real one." (Batman #2, 2011, 11-13). At this point, Lincoln forewarns Bruce about the Court of Owls, saying "Something bad has come back to Gotham, Bruce. Something ancient and powerful . . . and evil." (Batman #2, 2011, 11-13). In this segment, there is an obvious and intentional juxtaposition between Lincoln March and Bruce Wayne. Although the characters look very much alike, Bruce Wayne is depicted as being slightly smaller with messy hair and a black blazer (Batman #2, 2011, 11-13). Lincoln March is somewhat taller and more muscular with cleanly combed hair and a white blazer. Bruce's smaller stature and black clothing is representative of the totem animal of the Bat that he adopts. Lincoln March in the white blazer and being physically bigger represents the white owl that can be found in the maze of the Court of Owls later on. As such, his outfit is representative of the Owl persona that he adopts at the end of the story. Lincoln March is thus the owl waiting to prey on the bat (Batman #2, 2011, 11-13). After Lincoln and Bruce Wayne are attacked by a Talon, an agent of the Court Of Owls, Bruce Wayne visits Lincoln in the hospital. They discuss the possible existence of the Court Of Owls and Bruce Wayne tells Lincoln that he will vote for

him in the upcoming elections suggesting that Lincoln has been successful in winning Wayne's confidence. During the conversation Lincoln gives Bruce a warning " . . . sometimes we become so concerned with little dangers that we don't see the big one, right beneath our feet." (Batman #3, 2012, 10-13). In a later scene, Bruce Wayne as Batman, finds a mortally wounded Lincoln March who before dying, asks Batman to pass a message to Bruce Wayne, asking him to tell Bruce that Gotham "can be a good place" (Batman #9, 2012, 15-18). In this scene, Batman is depicted as showing concern for Lincoln and asking him to save his breath until an ambulance arrives. As Lincoln passes, a very angry Batman looking down on the city swears vengeance against the Court of Owls (Batman #9, 2012, 15-18).

Near the end of the story arc, Batman discovers that not only is Lincoln March is alive and well, but has resurrected as a member of the Court Of Owls, which is shown through his pale and veiny complexion. In this sequence, it is revealed that Lincoln killed the top members of the Court of Owls of Gotham City and that he sought to control Gotham for himself (Batman #11, 2012, 10-15). As Batman struggles to get free from the trap he is placed in, March also reveals that he is the long lost brother of Batman "Your brother, Bruce. I'm Thomas Wayne, Jr. Your brother that never was. From the other side of the mirror." (Batman #10, 2012, 16-21). As this is revealed to Batman, he states emphatically "I don't have a brother!" (Batman #10, 2012, 16-21). As Batman frees himself from the trap, Lincoln, dressed up in an Owl costume, challenges him to a conflict (Batman #10, 2012, 16-21). As the conflict ensues, Lincoln March flies around the city dragging Batman with him, torturing him by slamming him into buildings. As the fight enters its final stages, Lincoln March is shown holding up a near lifeless Batman in a building that Lincoln has rigged to explode, emphasising the Owl's dominance over the bat (Batman #11, 2012, 10-15). As the scene comes to an end, Batman manages to narrowly escape Lincoln March

and run out of the building which then explodes. Lincoln stands there certain that as a result of his advanced anatomy that he will survive the catastrophe (Batman #11, 2012, 16-17).

From their first meeting Lincoln March is shown to gain Bruce Wayne's confidence. Through the text and images the reader also learns that Lincoln March has for a long time been watching Bruce Wayne from a distance. Ultimately, the character Lincoln March is portrayed as everything that Batman is not, and as a mirror reflection of Batman, a fact March remarked many times throughout the story. Through both words and images, it is suggested that while Lincoln March has been watching Bruce Wayne, he has been planning his attack, like an owl waiting on his prey, the bat. It is noteworthy that March's costume which represents an owl is similar to and a reflection of Batman's outward appearance. By the end of the story Batman has determined that while Lincoln March was pretending to be Bruce Wayne's friend, he was in fact a former member of the Court Of Owls who murdered the Gotham chapter of the Court of Owls and had been plotting for some time to kill Bruce Wayne (Batman #10, 2012, 16-21). As such, Lincoln March is portrayed as the embodiment of evil and a mirror reflection of Batman.

The Talon

In his encounter with the Talon at Old Wayne Tower, Bruce Wayne states that he is unfamiliar with this new enemy remarking how strong his foe is. Bruce Wayne decides that he must be on "Some kind of venom?", a drug used to amplify strength (Batman #2, 2011, 15-16). Unlike Batman, the Talon is faceless, his costume colored in black leaving only the eyes for the reader to see. This emphasis on the eyes is presumably to convey that the Talon, like an owl, is always watching. We see during the next frame, an image of a weakened Bruce Wayne standing in front of a window, with the Talon's reflection looking back at him from behind. This is presumably a

reference to how the Talons have operated in secrecy, all the while watching Bruce Wayne, planning their attack on him, whereas he was unaware of them (Batman #2, 2011, 16).

Afterward, as the Talon kicks Bruce Wayne out of the window, jumping down to the street below and fighting him during the fall, he exclaims, "How I love killing Waynes" (Batman #2, 2011, 16-17). Bruce Wayne saves himself by grabbing a ledge on the building while the Talon continues to plummet to the street below. The Talon is next seen being picked up by paramedics and covered as if he is presumed dead. As he is driven away in an ambulance he gets up and murders the paramedics (Batman #2, 2011, 19-20).

Later while discussing the incident with Alfred, Batman suggests ". . . Whoever he is, this man wants me to believe that he isn't just a killer, but that he's The Talon." and adds "I'm assuming the "Wayne Killing" he's referring to involves some incident from the past. Something to give credibility to the bedtime story." (Batman #3, 2012, 7-8). As the issue ends, Batman discovers multiple "nests" for Talons across Gotham in buildings built by a fund created by his great great grandfather, Alan Wayne. In amazement he declares that his ancestor Alan Wayne was right about the Court of Owls, and exclaims "They're in Our Homes". At this point he trips a wire which sets off an explosive, blowing up the nest, while the Talon is looking on from the top of another building (Batman #3, 2012, 15-20). Each time Batman discovers a new Talon nest, the monocle of the Talon is illustrated on the building the nest is in, suggesting that Batman is being followed by the Talon. In one Talon hideout, Batman looks at a glass case with a Talon costume inside it. He sees his reflection in the glass, but also in both lenses of the Talon's eyepieces. This suggests that the Talon is a step ahead of Batman and has him in his sights, which is emphasised as the Talon watches from below as the building blows up (Batman #3, 2011, 15-20).

In the next issue, while in a discussion with Dick Grayson, Batman declares that he still does not believe in the Court Of Owls because he investigated them as a child and found nothing, adding "I needed there to be a Court of Owls. Some great evil behind my parents' murder." (Batman #4, 2012, 9-15). Later, while trapped in the Court of Owls' labyrinth, he comes upon a wall of portraits of victims of the Court of Owls which is a testament to their evil (Batman #5, 2012, 12), (Batman #5, 2012, 15). As Batman progresses through the maze, the Talon is depicted watching him through the reflection of the Talon's eyes, in the portrait of the tormented Alan Wayne, and from the shadows. At the end of the issue we see the Talon finally catching up with Batman and putting a knife through Batman's back (Batman #5, 2012, 6), (Batman #5, 2012, 12), (Batman #5, 2012, 17). As Batman is confronted in the maze, the Talon tells him that the court will keep his body ". . . in the labyrinth, forever -- a monument to a valiant enemy." (Batman #6, 2012, 2). On the next page, the Talon holds up Batman's almost lifeless body to the court asking them how they would like to see Batman die (Batman #6, 2012, 3). As the issue continues, Batman is seen gaining his strength back fueled by his anger. As Batman gets up, the Talon exclaims "Do you know what owls do to prey that --" (Batman #6, 2012, 9). At one point, Batman sees the image of his great great grandfather who was killed by the Talon. This appears to unleash the evil bat monster within him which enables Batman to beat the Talon to death (Batman #6, 2012, 9-15). When later Batman returns to the Batcave, he is terrified upon seeing the covered body of the Talon in the cave and cries in fright "No . . . No" (Batman #7, 2012, 8-9). The figure of Batman, who is usually un-phased by his enemies is depicted as desperately clutching his butler in terror, still afraid of the lifeless body of the Talon. In the illustration an image of a terrified Batman is reflected in the Talon's broken monocle intimating that Batman is

still in the Talon's sights. The implication is that although dead, the Talon can come back to life and strike again (Batman #7, 2012, 8-9).

When the Talons invade his residence, Batman climbs to the roof and stabs a Talon with a weathervane pinning him to the roof (Batman #8, 2012, 11). Later in the Batcave, Batman breaks the wrist of another Talon to obtain an wrist bracelet that contains the targets of the Court Of Owls (Batman #8, 2012, 15). In this same fight Batman smashes one Talon, electrocutes another, and freezes three others with batarangs that cause their bodies to shatter. Later when Batman is pinned down by the Talons, he uses a full scale model of a dinosaur in the cave to stomp on Talons in and around him (Batman #9, 2012, 5-6). As Batman escapes the Batcave, he is shown driving the Batmobile over a Talon on his way out, saying "He's got a healing factor. Let him heal." (Batman #9, 2012, 13). The presumption created is that Batman has killed many of the Talons that attacked his home.

The comment of the Talon that he loves killing Waynes suggests that this particular Talon's mission is to hunt and kill members of the Wayne family, which he has been doing for quite some time. The next victim from the Wayne family is Lincoln March after which the Talons attempt to kill Bruce Wayne (Batman). The portrayal of the Talon as enjoying killing, together with their great strength and immortality makes them a special kind of evil. In order to combat the Talon and save himself, Batman unleashes the Bat monster which represents a form of evil within Bruce Wayne. He also later resorts to evil by ruthlessly killing Talons when they attack him in the Batcave. The subliminal message conveyed is that the vigilante Batman is needed in order to protect Gotham from the Court of Owls because the police are incapable of protecting anyone. In order to ensure the city's safety, Batman must resort to evil to succeed in defeating this new form of evil.

How Batman Combats Crime

Batman's Use of Fear and Intimidation

The emphasis on Batman's use of fear and intimidation is much less in *Batman: The Court Of Owls* than it is in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. The explanation for this may lie in the fact that in *Batman: The Court of Owls*, Batman is both a predator and a prey or stated differently, both a criminal and a victim of crime. Nonetheless, he is seen to use fear and intimidation as an investigative tool. In one scene, Batman is portrayed interrogating a man in the subway by holding him out in front of oncoming trains, then pulling him out just in time before the train hits him. After pulling him out of harm's way, Batman continues his interrogation by smashing the man's face against a wall in a continuing bid to obtain information from him about the Talon (Batman #3, 2012, 3-6). Much later in the story arc Batman breaks into the apartment of the Powers family, the head of the Court of Owls in Gotham. During this time Batman finds Mrs. Powers, locks her in an elevator compartment and questions her in order to learn her husband's location. It is evident in this situation that Batman's goal is to terrify Mrs. Powers to the point that she can be easily questioned so he can obtain the information he is looking for (Batman #10, 2012, 1-3). In this sequence Batman is depicted as very tall and overbearing as he appears through the bars of the elevator. Mrs. Powers cowers back in fear, raising her hand to protect herself. Mrs. Powers' hand appears claw like to signify that she is a member of the Court of Owls. After she refuses to comply with Batman's request, Batman walks away, leaving her locked in the elevator as though she were in a birdcage, which is reinforced by the bars of the elevator gate (Batman #10, 2012, 1-3).

Batman is portrayed as being able to effectively use intimidation as an investigative tool. He is depicted as a very large presence in his bat inspired outfit that gives him the appearance of a monster. As noted he also is portrayed as embodying a demon which is personified by his costume. Appearing suddenly out of the shadows he is able to accentuate his physical size and power, and to play with the imaginations of those he interrogates by emphasizing the potential harm he can bring to them. His reputation as a monster also perpetuates the cycle of fear amongst the criminals.

Batman's Use of Violence

Much like *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, in *Batman: The Court of Owls*, Batman is portrayed as using extreme physical violence to combat criminals and in effect committing numerous crimes in the process. As the story begins, Batman is depicted in Arkham Asylum trying to stop a riot. After shooting smoke pellets into the room where the mob is, Batman knocks out Two-Face with a blow to the face, and then breaks Killer Croc's left leg, after which he subdues him by punching him in the back. Batman then shatters Mr. Freeze's mask which exposes Mr. Freeze to normal temperatures which could kill him (Batman #1, 2011, 3-4). In another series of frames, Batman is depicted pursuing art thieves riding in a helicopter. Batman follows them on a motorbike which he jumps from a train through the windshield of the helicopter bringing it down (Batman #1, 2011, 4-5). In another conflict, Batman is seen to throw the Joker (Dick Grayson in disguise) at another criminal, after having body slammed a bigger heavier criminal. As the scene ends, Batman and the Joker are shown beating their way through the mob. Batman's mask is shown to be covered in the blood of the prisoners, in order to graphically depict the brutality of the fight (Batman #1, 2011, 5-6). In another scene, the

Whisper Gang is shown coming to rescue one of its members that Batman is interrogating. Batman is first depicted physically fighting the gang after which he attaches a magnet to a passing train, which carries the gang members off as they are all wearing steel masks (Batman #3, 2012, 3-6). Much later while Batman is trapped in the Court of Owls labyrinth he beats to death the Talon who was attempting to kill him (Batman #6, 2012, 9-15). Later in the story arc as the Talons attack Batman at his home, he stabs a Talon with the weathervane, pinning him to the roof (Batman #8, 2012, 11). Once he is back in the Batcave, Batman is depicted breaking the wrist of the Talon to obtain an wrist bracelet that contains the targets of the Court Of Owls. As the Talon screams "Aaaaarrgh! You're . . . you're breaking *koff!* breaking my arm!" Bruce Wayne shows no mercy responding "correct" (Batman #8, 2012, 15). In this fight Batman smashes one Talon, electrocutes another, and freezes three others with batarangs that cause their bodies to shatter. As Batman escapes the Batcave, he is shown driving the Batmobile over a Talon on his way out, saying "He's got a healing factor. Let him heal." (Batman #9, 2012, 13). It is implied that Batman has killed most or all of the Talons that attacked his home.

Batman's Use of Detective Skills

In *Batman: The Court of Owls* Batman is shown to make much greater use of his detective skills than in the *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* which are shown to be very effective. Early in the story Batman meets detective Harvey Bullock at a crime scene. Batman notices things missed by Bullock, that being the skin he finds under the victim's finger nails whose DNA he analyses with a device on the back of his glove, and paint thinner left on the wall, which when ignited tells them both that Bruce Wayne is to be assassinated the following day (Batman #1, 2011, 19-21). At one point in the story, Batman operates on a hunch to discover the Owl Nests across Gotham

city. Knowing that these buildings were erected with funds from his grandfather's trust, and that because of superstition there was no 13th floor in these buildings, he realizes that there is a space in between the 12th and 14th floors to "make good on the superstition". Batman cuts a hole in the 14th floor of these buildings to find the hidden nests of the talons, as Owls "invade an enemy's territory . . . and build nests inside his home." (Batman #3, 2011, 13-19). Later on the reader is told that the lifeless body of Alan Wayne, the great great grandfather of Bruce Wayne was discovered naked and drowned in a sewer. While analysing his bones after the body is exhumed, Batman discovers puncture wounds that would suggest that his grandfather was stabbed to death (Batman #4, 2012, 17). In the same scene in a later frame, Batman is shown investigating the sewers at the spot the police found Alan Wayne's body, thinking that the entrance to the lair of the Court of Owls must be somewhere in the sewers which he later finds (Batman #4, 2012, 17-18). Later in the story, Batman determines through DNA testing the identity of the Talon whose body is tied down in the Batcave. When Batman discloses to Dick Grayson that the body is Grayson's great grandfather, he goes hysterical. In this sequence Batman is seen knocking a tooth out of Grayson's mouth, that bears the emblem of the Court of Owls, indicating that Dick Grayson was intended to become a Talon (Batman #7, 2012, 11-18). In this segment Dick Grayson becomes increasingly aggressive, as he comes to the realization that he and the Talon are indeed related, and that Batman took his DNA without asking him or telling him that he had done so. Although this incident reflects solid detective work, Batman's mode of operation is diligence rather than inclusiveness, which suggests that he trusts his investigative skills more than those of others (Batman #7, 2012, 11-18).

Batman's Use of Technology

At the beginning of the series, we see Bruce Wayne slumped over in his chair in the Batcave testing out a new technology, one that allows him to access Batcave information with the use of a contact lens (Batman #1, 2011, 10-11). In the second comic of the series Batman is depicted using high end technology to review an autopsy. The coroner tells Gordon, "I'm afraid there's little more to relay than the obvious. Our John Doe was stabbed multiple times, likely in an act of torture." (Batman #2, 2011, 6). Later, using a hi-tech camera that allows him to view the victim with a 3D image, Batman is able to deduce that not only was this man tortured, but that the man in question was a high end trainer (Batman #2, 2011, 7). Batman also discovers a tooth with an owl crest on it, something that the coroner apparently missed (Batman #2, 2011, 7). The equipment Batman uses is depicted as being very advanced by the colorful 3D images of his operating mechanism, giving the reader the impression that Batman's technology is more advanced than what the police have (Batman #2, 2011, 6-8). Later when asking a criminal about the assassin that Batman believes was let into Old Wayne Tower, the man denies any knowledge. Using a retinal scanner Batman was able to determine that the man was telling the truth (Batman #3, 2012, 6). In another scene Batman once again uses an advanced computer scanner to examine the exhumed body of Alan Wayne, the great great grandfather of Bruce Wayne who apparently spoke a lot about owls up to the time of his death (Batman #4, 2012, 6), (Batman #3, 2012, 8-9). While analysing his bones, Batman discovers puncture wounds that would suggest that his grandfather was stabbed to death " . . . most likely by throwing knives.", and that he did not drown as reported but was most likely murdered by the Court of Owls (Batman #4, 2012, 17).

In another scene the body of William Cobb (The Talon) is depicted tied to an upright examination table, unmasked, showing his pale and veiny face. It is explained that what prevents

the Talon from reviving are tubes connected to the Talon's body that run a freezing solution through it (Batman #7, 2012, 11-13). Earlier in the series, Grayson challenges Bruce Wayne inquiring whether Batman had already seen the surveillance footage of a crime in question. Looking sincerely at Dick Grayson, Batman responds "Dick, you know me better than anyone, except perhaps Alfred . . . of course I checked the surveillance footage." (Batman #2, 2011, 9-10). Batman is also shown to do DNA testing on two occasions in the storyline, one of flesh he finds under the finger nails the body he and Harvey Bullock find pinned to the wall with knives and the second when he compares the DNA of the Talon to Dick Grayson (Batman #1, 2011, 19-21), (Batman #7, 2012, 11-18).

Discussion of Qualitative Data

In both *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: The Court of Owls* it is clear that the police are portrayed as incompetent by means of a series of events in which they are either seen relying on Batman to bring criminals to justice, behaving recklessly or putting the public at risk. An example of the former in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is Commissioner Gordon's willingness to give Batman the lead in capturing The Mutant Leader. Another is the case of an older police officer proposing to a younger officer that they take a passive role and not to interfere with Batman as he pursues and then captures the criminals. Under Commissioner Yindel the police in their determination to capture Batman, interfere with his attempts to save the people in a theatre which results in many deaths. At no time in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* are they shown to successfully combat crime and Commissioner Yindel only goes to save the Governor after Batman tells her the Governor is in danger. The police are portrayed as being guilty of reckless behavior characterized by the statement of one officer "If it's not a cop - -

- shoot it.". In this comic the portrayal of the police can be compared to the articles of police misconduct (Weitzer, 2002) and (Robinson, 2011) that address incidents where police were found to be guilty of using excessive force much like the police under Commissioner Yindel in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. These articles like both story arcs cast the police in a very negative light. Finally, the police are portrayed as doing nothing to control riots and instead allowing vigilantes to control the situation. The portrayal of police incompetence or possibly corruption is continued in *Batman: The Court of Owls* although the predominant portrayal is one of the police stepping back and allowing Batman to solve crime. This portrayal of police incompetence in these two Batman comic book story arcs is at odds with the portrayal of police in media news-reports that typically construct narratives of police effectiveness. This exaggerated reporting in the media of police competence in solving crime and the reasons behind it are discussed in the article by Vincent Sacco. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* when Batman goes to the scene of a murder he discovers skin under the fingernails of the victim that detective Harvey Bullock has missed. Similarly, he is able determine facts about the same victim that were missed during the autopsy of the man. Although Alan Wayne's death was ruled a drowning by police, after examining the bones of his exhumed body, Batman is able to determine that he was stabbed to death. These examples demonstrate that police are portrayed as incompetent particularly as in each of these events the police are juxtaposed to Batman's competence in solving crimes. As such, these examples support the hypothesis that these story arcs portray that vigilantism is needed which is also consistent with the subliminal message in the riot example in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*.

In the section "Evil Is Necessary to Defeat Evil" the criminals Two Face, The Joker and The Mutant Leader are portrayed as serial murderers and for that reason pure evil. Although in

the case of Two Face he appears to turn him over to the authorities, it is not the case with the other two. In order to put an end to the Joker's killing spree Batman paralyzes him by snapping his neck and it is noted that Joker finishes the job killing himself. In the case of the Mutant leader Batman lures him into a fight breaking both his legs and inflicting numerous other injuries on him to prevent him from committing any further crimes. These portrayals of Batman's behaviour are in keeping with the true nature of vigilantism discussed by Weston in his article in the above literature review. In *Batman: The Court of Owls* Lincoln March and the Talon are portrayed as equally evil. Lincoln March is portrayed as first befriending Bruce Wayne and then stalking him. As emphasized in the articles by Dittmer and Pitkethly, symbols play a key role in supporting the narrative and telling the story in superhero comics and this is the case in both story arcs, particularly in *Batman: The Court of Owls*. Bruce Wayne is representative of the Bat that he adopts as his symbol. Lincoln March dressed in a white blazer represents the white owl waiting to prey on the bat. These symbols in effect define the relationship of these two characters. In the end Batman escapes from a building that blows up presumably killing Lincoln March who believes he will survive because of his newfound immortality. In the case of the Talons Batman is seen to kill a number of them which goes against his moral code but is justified presumably because they are undead. Batman is portrayed as having to resort to extrajudicial punishment, committing crimes including murder in order to combat evil that threatens Gotham and indeed his life. This representation of Batman meeting out justice is consistent with the discussion by Phillips and Strobl of how comic book superheroes carry out justice extra judicially. This portrayal also illustrates, as discussed by Bainbridge, how justice and law can live apart from each other, in that, justice transcends law. This is represented as being necessary in the circumstances particularly given the portrayal that the police are incapable of dealing with these

threats. Once again these examples provide support for the hypothesis that these story arcs portray the need for vigilantism in the person of Batman.

In the section "How Batman Combats Crime" numerous examples are provided regarding the techniques Batman employs to combat criminals. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* Batman makes considerable use of fear and intimidation, stealth, and extreme violence. The techniques employed to combat crime in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* are more consistent with the genre of crime shows on television and in films in the 1980's such as such as Hill Street Blues, Miami Vice and Dirty Harry. In *Batman: The Court Of Owls* he again uses fear and intimidation as well as extreme violence. However, the techniques Batman employs in *Batman: The Court of Owls* include a number examples of his use of high tech equipment in combination with investigative skills that were effectively not present in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. For example Batman uses a retinal scanner to determine if a man is lying, a body scanner in conjunction with his investigative skills to determine that a corpse was a trainer in life, scanning equipment to determine that Alan Wayne was stabbed to death and investigative skills to determine that his body was transported to the sewer where it was found. In addition, there are two examples of Batman using DNA testing to determine the identity of people. These high tech markers in *Batman: The Court of Owls* are similar to high tech markers found in many modern day crime related television programs such CSI, Bones and NCIS among others. The high tech markers depicted in *Batman: The Court of Owls* are analogous to the scientific markers portrayed in the television program, CSI, which markers represent the science of forensic police investigation as discussed by Deutsch and Cavender. It is also noteworthy that DNA testing was not even used in evidence until the late 1980's whereas it has since become a staple in court and in modern crime shows. This data supports the assertion of Dubose that comics adapt to the

social landscape of the time. It is equally consistent with the view expressed by Scully and Moorman that comics are influenced by the times in which they are written. This data also provides considerable support for the hypothesis, that the two stories are adapted to the socio/political environment of the times in which they were released, since *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* was produced in the 1980's whereas *Batman: The Court of Owls* was produced approximately twenty five years later.

Limitations of the Present Study

The present study conducted an in depth analysis of two story arcs for one comic book character, Batman. Although Batman is one of the two most iconic comic book characters, the results obtained cannot be extrapolated beyond the character Batman or beyond these two story arcs. In order to determine whether the promotion of the notion of vigilantism is more prevalent in comics, it would be necessary to broaden the study to other comics and other comic book characters. Although the data obtained from these two story arcs paints a very clear picture of notions of crime, police incompetence and vigilantism, it is nonetheless a fairly limited data set and one that is necessarily subject to interpretation given the nature of the data.

It was noted at the beginning of this paper that comics have grown tremendously in popularity and are consumed by a diverse demographic. Their readership can be counted in the many millions and movies based on comics are among the most popular movies in theatres today. Although comic books and their offshoots are a social phenomenon, no attempt was made to measure the social impact of comics or even these two story arcs. The impact this media may have on values, norms or the views of society are well beyond the scope of this paper but would

be an area worthy of study. The article by Haas et al takes a scientific approach to the analysis of public opinions/values and may provide a model for future research.

Conclusion

As noted earlier, there is a growing amount of literature discussing crime and the media, however, there is a limited amount which has addressed issues of vigilantism in comic books. The principal hypothesis of this paper is that the story arcs *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: The Court Of Owls* portray that vigilantism in the person of Batman is needed to combat crime which is represented as being beyond the control of the police. A second premise of the paper is that the two story arcs which are separated by twenty five years are adapted to the socio/political environment of the times in which they were released. In order to validate the principal hypothesis I employed both quantitative and qualitative data, taking inspiration from existing literature on the subject of crime fiction. The quantitative data collected regarding the nature and amount of crime in both story arcs was recorded using code sheets. This data revealed that crime was predominantly committed by males, that the crimes almost exclusively violent crimes dominated by murder and that these almost always involved deadly weapons, although the type of weapons used differed between the two story arcs. While it could be argued that the nature of crime was chosen for entertainment value, the quantitative data collected is inconsistent with national crime statistics and it paints a clear picture that crime is out of control thereby providing support for the principal hypothesis. Moreover, there are 11 examples of police incompetence identified in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and 5 in *Batman: The Court Of Owls*. In addition, in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* the police make 6 unsuccessful attempts to arrest Batman, issue threats against him 19 times and discharge their service revolvers 43

times at Batman and no one else. Once again this supports the theory that the police are portrayed as incompetent, being incapable of controlling crime, misguided and guilty of reckless endangerment and attempted murder.

The qualitative data collected from these two story arcs paints a similar picture. In the case of the qualitative data, I used events as markers in order to assess whether crime was portrayed as being out of control or beyond the control of authorities, how the police were portrayed, and whether Batman was portrayed as an agent of the police or more as a violent vigilante figure. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* the "mise-en-scène" at the beginning of the book showing the desperation of the people clearly communicated the notion that crime was completely out of control. This portrayal of crime being out of control was reinforced by means of numerous markers showing criminals committing crimes including mass murder with impunity. Under Commissioner Gordon, the police take a passive role assisting Batman but not interfering with Batman as he pursues and then captures the criminals. Under Commissioner Yindel the police in their determination to capture Batman, prevent him from saving the people in a theatre which results in many deaths. At no time in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* are the police shown to successfully combat crime. Instead they are shown in numerous events to be either passive, misguided in pursuing Batman instead of the criminals or reckless with the use of their firearms. Early in the book Batman is seen to turn criminals over to police which could suggest he is acting with the cooperation or under the authority of the police. However, he is repeatedly portrayed as acting alone in numerous scenarios, violating individuals' rights, committing crimes, destroying property and carrying out extra judicial punishment. These actions are all carried out in his pursuit of criminals and are all markers of vigilantism. Moreover, in bringing killers such as Two Face, the Joker and the Mutant Leader to justice he is

depicted as resorting to evil in order to combat a greater evil. This then provides support for the principal hypothesis.

In *Batman: The Court Of Owls* the police are again portrayed as incompetent as they are neither aware of the nature or the extent of the threat faced by Gotham. They also are portrayed as not possessing the tools or the investigative skills possessed by Batman. As a result, they are portrayed again as taking a passive role, and on occasion assisting Batman. Moreover, the competence of Batman to investigate and solve crimes is juxtaposed to the incompetence of police, which provides an underlying justification for Batman's role as a vigilante. Examples include the investigation of a crime scene by Batman with Harvey Bullock, the examination of the body in the morgue and the examination of the exhumed body of Alan Wayne. In each case Batman is depicted as using superior methods or investigative skills that enable him to discover clues missed by police. Once again in *Batman: The Court of Owls*, Batman is portrayed as acting outside authority of police, committing crimes, destroying property and carrying out extra judicial punishment. In fact, in this story arc he goes further than he does in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, violating his moral code and killing a number of Talons. Again he is depicted as resorting to evil in order to combat a greater evil, in this case the justification presumably being that the Talon and Lincoln March are both undead. The markers identified in the qualitative data are consistent with the quantitative data and very clearly provide support for primary hypothesis; Both story arcs promote the notion of police incompetence and crime being out of control, thereby justifying the intervention and actions of the vigilante character Batman.

There are a number of indicators showing that the two story arcs are adapted to the socio/political environment of the times, such as the presence of undead characters mimicking the proliferation of zombie shows on television in recent years. Nonetheless, this paper has

focused on the techniques employed by Batman in combating crime. Both the quantitative data and the qualitative data (markers) paint a similar picture. The tools employed by Batman in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* are primarily stealth, intimidation and violence. This type of portrayal is very similar to crime shows of the era such as *Dirty Harry* that highlighted the need to use violence to combat crime. Also, in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* there is very little reliance placed on technology which again is similar to television shows and movies of the 1980's regarding crime and law enforcement. In *Batman: The Court of Owls*, Batman again employs stealth and intimidation but to a much lesser extent than in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. In both story arcs Batman regularly uses extreme violence to combat crime. For example he commits aggravated battery (breaking bones etc.) 49 times in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and 31 times in *Batman: The Court of Owls* and battery 26 times and 24 times respectively. The principle difference here is that Batman commits murder in *Batman: The Court of Owls* that is arguably justified by the fact that the victims are undead characters. In terms of investigative techniques there is an even more significant difference between the two story arcs. Unlike *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, in *Batman: The Court of Owls*, Batman is seen to repeatedly use technology such as video scanners, DNA testing and computer programs to investigate crimes. Much of this technology was not in general use when *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* was produced, however, they are now a regular feature of police investigations and real life as well as fictional courtroom dramas. As such, both the qualitative and quantitative data support the second premise of the paper that the two story arcs are adapted to the socio/political environment of the times in which they were released. It is noteworthy that this data regarding techniques used by Batman reinforces the principal hypothesis that the two story

arcs promote the notion that vigilante behaviour in the person of Batman is necessary to combat crime.

As noted the data supports the conclusion that this messaging is being passed to the consumer of comics. As discussed earlier in this paper comic books and their offshoots such as movies and television programming are a social phenomenon that has only grown in popularity in recent years. While there is no evidence to suggest that this has inspired vigilante behaviour on the part of readers, the messaging in the two comics studied is clear. At this point we do not know what effect for example the portrayals in these two story arcs may have on readers but it is certainly an area worthy of study. Perhaps an approach similar to the one by Haas et al could be applied to this area in order to determine what if any impact comic book portrayals may have on attitudes.

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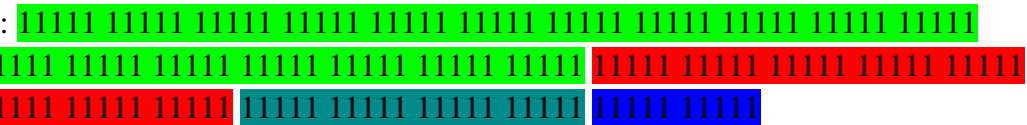
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Coding Sheet


Criminals

Dark Knight Returns

Male Criminals: 

Female Criminals: 11

Black: 111

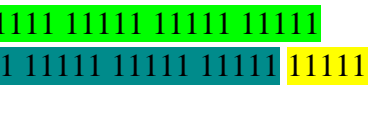
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Asian:

Hispanic:

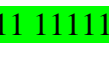
Other:

Court Of Owls

Male Criminals: 

Female Criminals:

Black:

White: 

Asian: 1

Court Of Owls

Robbery: 111

Vandalism: 111

Destruction of Property: 1111

Attempted Robbery: 0

Assault: 11111 11111 111

Battery: 11111 11111 11111 1

Aggravated Battery: 1111

Murder: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 1111 1111

Attempted Murder: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 111

Resisting Arrest: 0

Kidnapping: 11

Sexual Assault: 0

Other: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111

Weapons used to commit crimes

Dark Knight Returns

Gun: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111

Knife: 11111

Baseball bat: 11

Metal Pipe: 11

Sword: 0

Bottles: 1

Other: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 111

Court Of Owls

Gun: 0

Knife: 11111 11111 11111 11

Baseball bat: 0

Metal Pipe: 1

Sword: 11111 11111 11111 111

Bottles: 0

Other: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11

Murder Victims

Dark Knight Returns

Male: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11

Female: 11111 11111 11

Black: 0

White: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 111

Asian: 0

Hispanic: 0

Unknown: ██████████
██████████
██████████
██████████ 11

Court Of Owls

Male: ██████████ 11

Female: ████████ 1111

Black: 0

White: ██████████ ██████████ 1

Asian: 0

Hispanic: 0

Unknown: 0

Police Activities in Relation to Batman

Dark Knight Returns

Incompetence: ██████████ 1

Detective work: 0

Assisting Batman: 111

Not assisting: 11

Interfering With Batman: 111

Violence: ██████████ ████████ 1

Threats: ██████████ ████████ 1111

Battery: 11111 11

Aggravated Battery: 1

Discharge Weapons: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 111

Making arrests: 0

Attempting to Arrest Batman: 11111 1

Murder: 1

Court Of Owls

Incompetence: 11111

Detective Work: 111

Assisting Batman: 11

Not assisting: 11

Interfering With Batman: 0

Threats: 0

Battery: 0

Aggravated Battery: 0

Discharging Weapons: 0

Making arrests: 0

Attempting to Arrest Batman: 0

Murder: 0

Murder: 0

Court Of Owls

Cooperation with the police: 111

Violence against the police: 0

Resisting Arrest: 0

Assault: 0

Battery: 11111 11111 11111 11111 1111

Aggravated Battery: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 1

Use Of Weapons: 11111 11

Use of Stealth: 111

Use of Tools: 11111 11

Use Of Technology: 11111 11111 11111 11111 11111 1

Use of Advanced Computer Software: 11111 11111 11111 1

Use of Advanced Weaponry: 11111 11111 11

Use of Detective Skills: 11111 11111 11111 11

Use of Intimidation: 111

Use of Interrogation Methods: 111

Damage to Property: 11111 1

Theft: 0

Vandalism: 0

Murder: 11111 11

Notes:

- yellow means 5, dark blue means 10, teal means 20, red means 50, green means 100, maroon 200
- counted gang members as criminals
- had hard time discerning scenes that seem repetitive and the criminals involved
- for crimes like kidnapping, I counted the incidence more than once based on the many individuals involved
- counted race and criminality in cases of seeing someone's hand and not a face
- assumed for the most part that mutant gang members were male because they were very seldom female
- repeating criminals I did not count
- other can refer to varying other felonies like selling weapons to mutants, etc.
- murder also covers manslaughter
- robbery also includes stripping cars
- Superman also under category of crimes
- did not account for trespassing or breaking and entering when looking at crimes
- survey accounts for what you see, not the crimes that were mentioned in the news and in passing, only news story counted was the death toll that of audience members by the Joker that you see but can't count
- Batman only a victim of a crime when he is Bruce Wayne
- victims were counted once in each case
- car fits under other weapons, bombs also fits under other weapons, poison also fits
- do not count criminals as victims when preyed upon by Batman
- victims under unknown are those who are not seen
- counted the robot with poisonous gas as one weapon while I counted the cotton candy with poison killing the kids as multiple weapons, slingshot and lasso and bat tank also under other
- counted the joker using a gun to kill multiple people
- the tunnel of love seen, counted amount of victims as numbers said it was, counted male/female victims individually
- technology refers to the use of advanced software and weapons
- tools can refer to vehicles
- resisting arrest is counted by instance and not by individual officers trying to make the arrest
- court of owls an older organization, all members are white