

ALSO OF INTEREST AND
EDITED BY JOSEPH J. DAROWSKI

*The Ages of Wonder Woman:
Essays on the Amazon Princess in Changing Times* (2014)

*The Ages of Superman:
Essays on the Man of Steel in Changing Times* (2012)

The Ages of the X-Men

*Essays on the
Children of the Atom
in Changing Times*

Edited by
JOSEPH J. DAROWSKI



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Days of Future Past: Segregation, Oppression and Technology in X-Men and America

CLANCY SMITH

The year is 2013. Amid the despair and ruin of the once glorious city of New York, the last remaining X-Men gather together for one final, desperate attempt to save a world on the brink of nuclear annihilation. In the shadows of a citywide concentration camp, a wheelchair-bound man emerges from the shadows, the leader of the X-Men: Erik Lehnsherr, the mutant known as "Magneto." It has all come to this. He whispers, gravely, "If there were an alternative... *any* alternative ... we would take it. But if we do nothing, by tomorrow, the world will be at war. And the day after tomorrow ... the world will be dead" (Claremont, "Days").

In 1981's "Days of Future Past," one of the most iconic storylines in the long history of the X-Men franchise and one of the most celebrated tales in comics history, writer Chris Claremont and artist John Byrne show us a glimpse of the future that awaits the X-Men should Professor Charles Xavier fail to prevent a war between humanity and mutantkind. It provides a definitive answer to the questions: what if the X-Men lost? What sort of world would be created if humanity's hatred and fear compelled them to commit the most horrific atrocities against mutantkind? Claremont creates a dystopian future where those few mutants who survive are confined to concentration camps in a world governed by the iron fist of an armada of robotic, mutant-hunting Sentinels created by humanity to provide the final solution to the mutant "problem."

Claremont presents two parallel narratives: the present (1981) and the future (2013). In the present, tensions simmer between the United States government and the perceived mutant "threat" as Xavier seeks to stem the rising

tide of anti-mutant legislation at a Congressional hearing. In the future, the Sentinel regime threatens to instigate a nuclear response from what little remains of humanity, heralding the potential end of all life on earth. Procuring advanced technology, the last vestiges of the X-Men, led by their one-time antagonist Magneto, send Kate Pryde's consciousness back in time to inhabit the body of her younger self in a desperate effort to avert an assassination by the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants at the very same Congressional hearing Xavier is attending. The Brotherhood's attack, the catalyst for increased aggression towards mutantkind, culminates in the dark future which our heroes experience in 2013.

Rather than exploring this theme through the eyes of one of the more established and iconic X-Men characters, Claremont makes a shrewd and ingenious choice: we get to see this narrative of horror unfold through the eyes of the innocent. Kitty Pryde, a wide-eyed neophyte, joins the team just prior to the events of "Days of Future Past." Naïve, idealistic and full of hope, the use of Pryde as the protagonist of the tale adds another dimension to Claremont's exploration of this dystopian future by directly juxtaposing Pryde's hopeful optimism as a child, and the jaded, battle-worn "Kate" Pryde of that future. We come to see the death of innocence itself.

Zeitgeist: Times They Are a-Changin'

"Come senators, congressmen / please heed the call / don't stand in the doorway / don't block up the hall / for he that gets hurt / will be he who has stalled / there's a battle outside / and it is ragin' / it'll soon shake your windows / and rattle your walls / for the times they are a-changin'" (Dylan, 1964). Written thirteen years prior to the publication of "Days of Future Past," Bob Dylan's iconic lyrics captured the zeitgeist of the age, a testament to the rapidly changing American political landscape. Chris Claremont was eighteen years old when it was written, beginning his degree in political theory at Bard College¹ in upstate New York in a socio-political atmosphere unlike any our nation had seen before. His background in political theory is manifest throughout every page of his dystopian vision in "Days of Future Past," combining relentless action with profound reflections on a variety of themes: otherness, discrimination² and technology. Claremont's run with the series, beginning in 1975 and lasting until 1991, breathed new life into this alternative corner of the Marvel universe and brought the X-Men into their own³ as one of the best-selling comic franchises of all time.⁴

Although the height of the Civil Rights movement had passed by the time of its publication, the title, itself, "Days of Future Past," may be read as

not only a reflection of the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality but, too, an ominous warning against the threat of the past repeating itself in the future. The concentration camps of Germany and the Japanese internment camps in America, are reflected in the dystopian future of Claremont's vision. And the battle in the Senate, the pivotal moment in the narrative, echoes the dire warning of Dylan's song as Senator Kelly stands in the way of equality, and the "battle," indeed, comes to him; the walls of the courthouse are quite literally "rattled" to the ground. It is a testament to the enduring struggle of any minority group fighting for equal rights within a legal system beyond their control. It is a timeless theme that provides *X-Men* with its timeless appeal. As Claremont says, "*X-Men* has always been about finding your place in a society that doesn't want you" (Claremont interview).

Claremont, though born in London, was only three years old when he came to America in 1953. The political landscape around his early years saw rapid shifts in both race relations and advances in technology. Claremont's America saw the heights of the Civil Rights movement: the legislation enacted throughout the late 50s and early 60s aimed at the dissolution of racial segregation in America, bolstered by the march on Washington and King's iconic "I Have a Dream Speech" in 1963. So, too, did it see the horrors of hatred and racism that accompanied this battle, the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, the Watts Riots, and the assassination of King in 1968. Beyond racial discrimination and violence, the years leading up to the publication of "Days of Future Past" saw both the shootings at Kent State in 1970 and the assassination of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay politician to be elected in the state of California, in 1978.

At the same time, technology began to rapidly advance in terrifying and liberating ways. Space exploration took off in 1957 with the Russian launch of Sputnik and a year later with the founding of NASA. The world was becoming increasingly mechanized as computer and entertainment technology were becoming more affordable, entering into nearly every American household. Concurrently, nuclear weaponry continued to proliferate as east and west dug in for a long, cold war.

The year "Days of Future Past" was published was the same year Ronald Reagan became the 40th president of the United States. Reagan inherited the struggles of his predecessors, having to face both enduring discrimination and advances in technology that continued to push us to the brink of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Reagan's relationship with issues of racial discrimination was immensely complex and anything but clear. Though he was frequently cited as being a strong opponent of any form of racial discrimination in public addresses,⁵ historians have often associated some of his legislative policies as a subtle, subversive⁶ form of racial discrimination shrouded in the

language of economics.⁷ To what degree these specific events contributed to Claremont's "Days of Future Past" is a matter of speculation. What is *not* as speculative is the zeitgeist in which Claremont was raised and his degree in political theory, demonstrating both an interest in and ability to engage with, the preeminent socio-political issues of his age.

Otherness: Fighting for a World That Hates and Fears Them

No matter how valiantly the X-Men fight, ultimate victory ever eludes them. In essence they are undone by the very terms of their purpose, the very bind of their existence: they fight for a world that *hates* and that *fears* them. The greatest enemy the X-Men face doesn't wear a mask or a gaudy costume: their enemy *is* hate and their enemy *is* fear. Until the means of perpetuating hate and fear are dissolved, the X-Men can never fully achieve the victory they seek. As *X-Men* editor Marc Powers notes, "there's a certain darkness, because the X-Men's true enemy is hate, which is something that's never going to go away" (Claremont interview).

What *is* the "Other?" Traditionally, on the most fundamental level, the Other is all that is *not myself*. It is the resistance I encounter from outside myself that demarcates where *I* end and where what is *not myself* begins. As such, it plays a pivotal role in how I define myself, seeing myself as *I am*, seeing myself as what I am *not* (I am not the Other), and, important to our investigation here, seeing myself *through the eyes* of this Other, coming to know myself as I'm seen by the Other and attempting to reconcile that with how I see myself.⁸ For some, encountering the Other is necessary for growth and development, for it is only through productive dialogue that we, together, may move towards heightened realms of truth and understanding.⁹ For some, the Other represents an obstacle that must be overcome, a hindrance that foils my plans and threatens my subjectivity. For the villains in many of Claremont's X-Men stories, mutants are seen as this sort of obstacle, a challenge to the hegemony of mankind, and the individuation of each, specific representative of that mutantkind are reduced to the terms of bare Otherness. Senator Kelly does not see a difference between the X-Men and Brotherhood, hero and villain, simply the blanketing Otherness that represents, in his mind, a genuine threat to his own kind's hold on power. The term "freaks" (Claremont, "Mind"), for example, used by Senator Kelly to describe mutants, only has meaning at all in so far as it measured against what he perceives as "normal."

What constitutes normativity is in large part culturally conditioned but always reflects the traits of this power class. These are the traits of what Martin

Luther King, Jr. called "the power majority" ("Letter"), forming what scholars like George Yancy have called "the transcendental norm" (3) of human experience, against which all else is judged, specifically, the traits that power minorities do not share with those of the majority: "whiteness," "maleness," etc. The power majority utilizes a two-fold method of ensuring their enduring dominion over society: they use legislative means to ensure the Other has no say in the governing of that society, and they proliferate the belief that the Other is *essentially* (by their nature) somehow inferior. Both tactics played key roles in the struggle for Civil Rights throughout Claremont's life. King responded to segregation statutes by defining them as unjust laws, "a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal" ("Letter"). The proliferation of a false and artificially constructed self-identity, what scholars often refer to as an "imago," an "an elaborate distorted image" (Yancy, 110), helped convince minorities of their essential inferiority. This sense of inferiority was both in the eyes of the majority (seeing the Other as essentially inferior) and, far more devastating, instilling a sense of inferiority in the minorities themselves whenever they see themselves through the eyes of the majority. As Frantz Fanon once noted, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon, 110). As Claremont notes, "The X-Men are hated, feared and despised collectively by humanity for no other reason than that they are mutants. So what we have here, intended or not, is a book that is about racism, bigotry and prejudice" (Godoski).

The imago for mutantkind seems clear enough: mutants are dangerous, criminal, and threaten mankind through their very existence. The proliferation of that imago, the engine for the perpetuation of the hate and fear that the X-Men fight so desperately to overcome, can be seen throughout "Days of Future Past." Consider, for example, the language that humans use in referencing mutants throughout Claremont's tale. During the pivotal courtroom scene, as Senator Kelly delivers his pitch for mutant registration to his fellow Congressmen, we hear whispers from the reporters and camera crew as they discuss "muties" (Claremont, "Days"),¹⁰ a derogatory term for "mutants" (even more so than the word "mutant," itself, which contains plenty of negative connotations without any further help). When the Brotherhood bursts into the courtroom, Senator Kelly responds angrily by saying "this is monstrous! How *dare* you freaks turn the United States Senate into a battlefield?! How dare you threaten me! Marshals, arrest those ... people!" (*The Uncanny X-Men*, #142 [Feb. 1981]). The word "people" may as well have been spat upon the courtroom floor and the term "freak" is aimed both at the Brotherhood and the X-Men who arrive just in time to foil the Brotherhood's assault. The Senator is incapable of making such distinctions, despite Storm's protest that "mutants,

like people, are both good and bad. You would do well to remember that, Senator, before you seek to condemn us *all*" (Claremont, "Mind"). Kelly sees mutants in their pure Otherness, they are *all* alike, essentially villainous, and universally seen as antagonists to the human race. Rather than demonstrating his gratitude towards the X-Men for saving his life, he responds: "if there were no mutants, period, my life wouldn't have been threatened at all" (Claremont, "Mind").

Consider, too, the heart of his speech in favor of mutant registration. He says, "there is no place for *ordinary* men and women" in world of mutants who have "abilities which set them apart—some would say *above*—the rest of humanity" (Claremont, "Days"). Humanity fears allowing the Other the recognition the Other desires, for if left free, the Other may rise past humanity, enslave it, perhaps, as Kelly fears, even destroy it. In short, he fears allowing mutantkind to do to humanity what humanity is already doing to mutantkind.

The X-Men, as ever, fight for a world that hates and fears them. But why do this? The X-Men and the Brotherhood share the same goal: a world where mutants live free from the fear of human persecution. The Brotherhood believe they can force this outcome by teaching humanity to fear mutants *even more* than they currently do, to instill so much fear that humanity would never dare to challenge mutant autonomy. This is why Xavier is key to the X-Men's project, not simply because he was the founder and former leader of the group but, far more importantly, his vision, which is referred to as "Xaver's dream" throughout the long run of the comic, is uniquely situated against the Brotherhood's agenda. If hatred is based on this fear of Otherness, to increase that fear (as the Brotherhood plans) will only increase the hatred that is fueled by it. To dissolve the fear that founds humanity's hatred, for Xavier, is the only way to achieve mutant equality, and this requires means directly contrary to the Brotherhood's reliance on forceful coercion.

The parallel with King's role in the Civil Rights movement is immediately clear and profoundly compelling. Acting as the "gadfly" ("Letter"), a term he took from Plato's iconic protagonist Socrates, King's project was to shake America free from the passive acceptance of such imagos and the unacceptable status quo of inequality. King's method was one of nonviolence, not wanting to add to the false imago of the essential brutishness, aggressiveness and irrationality of black Americans, he appealed, instead, to compassion, education and civil disobedience in the idiom of one of his greatest influences, Mahatma Gandhi. As Andrew Godoski notes, like King, Xavier does not advocate proactive violence for it "only serves to further divide humans and mutants and drive the fear that brings about his brethren's persecution. That's not to say he doesn't believe in violence, but only when necessary and usually in the form

of protecting humanity from other mutants seeking to harm it" (Godoski). Consider the team that Claremont assembles for the story, itself a vibrant display of diversity.¹¹ For the most part, their powers are uniquely designed for non-lethal combat.¹² Only Wolverine violates this pattern: his entire comportment, from his training to his razor sharp adamantium claws, is designed, specifically, to take lives, which, in "*Days of Future Past*," becomes a point of a great contention in the narrative. Storm (the field leader of the X-Men at this point in the narrative) not only insists that the only acceptable form of violence is the defense of Senator Kelly,¹³ but she even prevents her ally from taking the life of one of the Brotherhood in the ensuing melee. A few moments later, Storm, again, confronts Wolverine, his claws thirsting for blood: "sheathe them—or use them on *me*... you should not need your claws except in the most extreme of situations and most powerful of foes" (Claremont, "Mind").

Thus, in sharp contrast to the Brotherhood's agenda, Xavier quite closely followed the non-violent path of King who dreamed of a world where "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood" ("I Have a Dream"). A world where "children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" ("I Have a Dream"). Indeed, the association between King and Xavier is anything but coincidental, as Claremont himself notes in an interview with Alec Foege for *New York* magazine: "To use Martin Luther King's idea," says Claremont, "judge them by the content of their character, not the color of their skin." He pauses. "Or the number of arms they have" (Claremont Interview).

Concentration Camps: The X-Men's Dark Future, Our Dark Past

As the situation in Congress continues to deteriorate, Moira MacTaggart turns to Xavier, whispering ominously, "registration of mutants today, gas chambers tomorrow" (Claremont, "Days"). Xavier, however, knows how to combat this discrimination: "be charitable, Moira," he replies, "he's scared. We must teach him that his fear is unfounded" (Claremont, "Days"). Xavier has lived through the Second World War and knows all too well the horrors of an authoritarian power that demands the annihilation of the Other. The horror of the mutant holocaust comes to mirror our own dark past, as shades of Auschwitz and the memory of Japanese internment on American soil are visible on every page of Claremont's foreboding dystopia.

In the future portion of the narrative, the scene opens with our protagonist, Kate Pryde, a jaded, hardened warrior making her way through New York City, now barely more than an abandoned wasteland, doubling as a city-wide concentration camp for those few remaining mutants. "...A slum abandoned, derelict, dying—much like ... the country, the planet around it" (Claremont, "Days"). The decay of the future city parallels the decay of our protagonist herself.¹⁴ Every member of society is forced to have a single letter emblazoned on their clothing, "'H' for baseline human—clean of mutant genes, allowed to breed," "'A' for anomalous human—a normal person possessing mutant genetic potential, forbidden to breed," and "'M,' for mutant, the bottom of the heap, made pariahs and outcasts by the Mutant Control Act of 1988" (Claremont, "Days"). The use of such branding was likely a calculated move by Claremont, reflecting the badges emblazed on the prisoners' clothes in Nazi concentration camps.¹⁵ Humans and mutants alike become enslaved to the technology forged of humanity's hatred and fear.

The parallels between the mutant concentration camps in "Days of Future Past" and the concentration and internment camps during World War II have profound thematic ramifications for this story and the X-Men franchise as a whole. Consider, for example, the X-Men's most iconic antagonist, the mutant known as "Magneto." Before he became "Magneto,"¹⁶ Erik Lehnsherr was born to a relatively affluent German Jewish family just prior to World War II.¹⁷ Ultimately, Erik's entire family was slaughtered by the Nazi regime and "Magneto" was born, forged in the fires of bigotry and hatred unlike anything the world had seen before. It can be argued that Magneto's entire motivational spectrum stems from his early experiences with Nazi occupation and his desire to ensure that mutantkind does not suffer the same fate as his Jewish people. As such, his role as "villain" has become increasingly problematized. No longer numbered among the sociopathic, costumed lunatics clamoring for power and world domination for the sheer, one-dimensional glory of villainy, Magneto is the product of mankind's ultimate moment of hatred and intolerance. He embarks upon a quest to ensure, at any cost, that history does not repeat itself with the incarceration or eradication of mutants, that the days of the future do not come to repeat the days of the past. Magneto, born of these horrors, adopts a more cynical attitude towards the potential realization of Xavier's dream. Magneto, lacking faith that mankind will ever embrace equality without forceful coercion, finds a more plausible solution in the violent suppression of humanity. Although I maintain it is easier to draw parallels between Xavier and King than it is between Magneto and Malcolm X, certainly in their distinct attitudes towards the use of violence in the fight for equality, some productive comparisons may be drawn.

King and Malcolm X often placed themselves in opposition to one

another, despite the fact that they seemed to share a common goal.¹⁸ In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," for example, after King makes abundantly clear that "nonviolence" has become "an integral part of our struggle." Though not referencing Malcolm X by name, he ominously notes that "if this philosophy had not emerged, by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood" and that "if our white brothers ... refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies—a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare." In direct response to this ideology, Malcolm X said that "concerning nonviolence: it is criminal to teach a man not to defend himself when he is the constant victim of brutal attacks" ("A Declaration of Independence") and that one ought to "be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery" (*Malcolm X Speaks*, 12).

These diametrically opposed positions are at the forefront of "Days of Future Past." Kate Pryde reveals that the catalyst for the dystopia is the assassination of Senator Kelly, Moira McTaggart and Professor Xavier by the Brotherhood "to teach humanity to fear and respect the power of *homo superior*. Their plan backfired. Mutants became objects of fear and *hatred*" (Claremont, "Days"). Quite simply, Claremont demonstrates that the Brotherhood's method *cannot*, on principle, attain the goal it sets out to achieve. If the hatred humanity feels towards mutants is based upon fear, and if that fear is fueled by the exertion of violence, violence will only further perpetuate that fear and, with it, increase humanity's hatred of mutantkind.

Nevertheless, the Brotherhood remain convinced of the efficacy of their course of action and attack the Senate, a powerful image of their anti-authoritarian position, destroying the very site, a symbol, of human law. Note, especially, what the Blob, a member of this Brotherhood, says as he disrupts the proceedings: "you been babblin' a lot about the mutant menace, Kelly. We're here to teach ya the error o' your ways" (Claremont, "Days"). It is interesting to note here that both Xavier and the Brotherhood used the word "teach" in response to Kelly's form of discrimination. For Xavier, it was the promise of enlightenment through peaceful dialogue. For the Brotherhood, it was a thinly veiled threat of force and coercion to set an example of Kelly and to demonstrate that mutants would not passively accept humanity's intolerance. Intriguing, then, to see Magneto's role in the dark future portion of the story: he has become the leader of the X-Men, even coming to mirror Xavier's physical comportment, bound to a wheel-chair, an image that Claremont and Byrne use to complete the reversal of Magneto's fundamental ideology.

Rise of the Sentinel: Technocracy and Dystopia

This world that hates and fears them fights back against a threat they feel they can no longer deny: the first attempt, the Mutant Control Act, was struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional, so “the administration responded by reactivating the Sentinels” which were “given an open-ended program, with fatally broad parameters, to ‘eliminate’ the mutant menace once and for all” (Claremont, “Days”). In a familiar horror trope,¹⁹ the creation rebels against its creator and brings about a world that no one, not even their human masterminds, could have ever desired. “They destroyed not only mutants, but non-mutant super-beings—both heroes and villains. By the turn of the century the North American continent was under their complete control” (Claremont, “Days”).

In very broad strokes, the relationship between humanity and technology has long been viewed in two often opposing ways. On the one hand, it is seen as a means of emancipation from toil and the eradication of scarcity to bring about a free, flourishing future for mankind. On the other, it has been seen as the realm wherein mankind was not meant to venture far, invariably leading to enslavement or annihilation. In the post-industrial world, this dichotomy has remained at the forefront of philosophical thought. Some saw technology’s emancipatory potential: machines that can eliminate the scarcity that fuels war and can free us from our endless labor to pursue loftier goals of self-cultivation and the betterment of mankind. Others saw the potential for further indoctrination and alienation: weapons of greater destructive force and the technological means of proliferating the propaganda of hate and fear. Critical theorists of the Marxist school, for example, saw technology’s advance as complementary with the advance of authoritarianism, not merely through the creation of weapons of mass destruction, but through the insidious ways in which technology infiltrated every aspect of our waking lives. Herbert Marcuse, for example, one of the most iconic critical theorists during the Civil Rights movement, noted, “technology ... as the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances which characterize the machine age” has become “a mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patterns, an instrument for control and domination” (Marcuse, 110–111).

Over time, this technology begins to take on a life of its own. No longer in the direct control of its creators, it begins to dictate the direction of our entire culture. It takes on a terminal momentum all its own, dictating how we take our leisure, the purpose of higher education, the jobs we must get in order to have money enough to engage in a standard of living itself determined by technological innovation, even determining the means with which we engage

in social interaction. Technological innovations have become “independent of the purpose for which they are employed. Our tools have become the environment in which we live; increasingly, we are incorporated into the apparatus that we have created, and we are subordinated to its rhythms and demands” (Feenberg, 214).

The Sentinels were initially an instrument of human hegemony, the final solution to the mutant “problem,” but the momentum of the Sentinels’ “open-ended program” comes to enslave even their human masters, bringing the world to the brink of nuclear annihilation. Humanity, incapable of overcoming mutantkind through sheer force of might, turned to technology as leverage in the confrontation, ultimately dooming them all to the same horrific fate.

Hope

Claremont presents a potential solution in the form of going back into the past to alter the present (the present, that is, for the future narrative). At first, this may seem naïve and deeply problematic: as a social commentary, we, in our world, cannot go back into the past and alter the trajectory of the time leading up to the present. But a more charitable reading (and, I believe, a more interesting one) does not advocate the impossible task of returning to the past but, rather, offers a cautionary tale about avoiding such events in order to prevent that future from ever unfolding. We see the signs: as technology advances, the language of hate and discrimination, sometimes overt, sometimes couched in the language of economics and politics, continues to proliferate and continues to objectify Otherness, marginalizing and criminalizing it. And yet still we fight: we know where hatred comes from, we know the source of this fear, and with this knowledge, perhaps, we can avoid this potential dark future. Avoid it not by *altering* the past, but by *remembering* it, and ensuring that it never repeats itself; that the days of the past never become the days of the future.

There will always be outsiders, those who are different, and those who struggle and fight for recognition and equality in a world that seems stacked against them. And the X-Men will always represent those of us who don’t fit neatly into the norm. Xavier’s dream will never die, a “dream” that parallels King’s own. To never abandon the fight for genuine equality and a world free from the fear of persecution regardless of the color of your skin or, as Claremont said, the number of arms you have.

“Looking at the story again from years ago when I was thinking about finishing it, I suddenly realized: How can you have a hero who’s helpless?” [Claremont] asks with a knowing smirk. “What the X-Men were about ten years ago was being against forces beyond their control. What they’re about

now is transcending that—finding a way to win no matter what. Even in the face of the greatest adversity, the key is to never lose hope, never lose sense of the dream that drives you. That whatever happens, we'll find a way to win" (Claremont interview).

NOTES

1. Claremont graduated from Bard College in 1972. The town where Bard is located, Annandale-on-Hudson, features in multiple issues of *Uncanny X-Men*, *X-Men*, *X-Men Origins* and others. I graduated from Bard College precisely 30 years after Claremont graduated.

2. Noel Murray notes that Claremont's work dealt heavily with the theme of "bigotry" and that even "his multicultural team was itself an understated plea for tolerance" (Murray, 2013).

3. As Alec Foege notes, Claremont "transformed a single underachieving comic into the best-selling superhero franchise of its time. From 1975 to 1991, Claremont wrote bimonthly and then monthly installments of an edgy, ambitious, often grandiose epic that eventually spawned eleven continuing related series" (Claremont interview, 2000).

4. "Under Claremont's stewardship—aided by a string of young artists who also made their reputations on the book—*The Uncanny X-Men* became a chart-topper, spinning fan-favorite story lines that have since been adapted into the various animated "X-Men" cartoons, and nodded to in the recent blockbuster "X-Men" movies" (Murray, 2013).

5. "We need unity, not divisiveness to see us through. If we're to remain strong and free and good, we must not waste the talents of one mind, the muscle of one body, or the potential of a single soul. We need all our people—men and women, young and old, individuals of every race—to be healthy, happy, and whole." Ronald Reagan, remarks at a White House Reception for the National Council of Negro Women (July 28, 1983).

6. As *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert notes, "the truth is that there was very little that was subconscious about the G.O.P.'s relentless appeal to racist whites." He argues that, motivated by "an opportunity to renew itself by opening its arms wide to white voters who could never forgive the Democratic Party for its support of civil rights and voting rights for blacks," Reagan, "opposed both the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of the mid-1960s" (Herbert, 2005).

7. Lee Atwater, for example, said in 1981, the same year "Days of Future Past" was published: "You start out in 1954 by saying, 'N____, n____, n____.' By 1968 you can't say 'n____'—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, 'We want to cut this,' is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than 'N____, n____'" (cited in Herbert, 2005).

8. George Yancy, taking a cue from W.E.B. DuBois' conception of a "double-consciousness," grants a phenomenological experience of being seen, as a black man, through

the eyes of a member of the white power majority: "despite what I think about myself, how I am for-myself, her perspective, her third-person account, seeps into my consciousness. I catch a glimpse of myself through her eyes and just for that moment, I experience some form of double consciousness" (Yancy, 5). He sees himself as he believes himself to be and, simultaneously, he sees himself in his Otherness through the eyes of a member of the racial power majority.

9. King championed this idea, saying, "I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. The purpose of our direct action program is to create a situation so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue" ("Letter from a Birmingham Jail," para. 9).

10. The same term is used in the future portion of the story by the villainous human underground known as the "Rogues" when they encounter Kate Pryde (*The Uncanny X-Men* #141 [Jan. 1981]).

11. The team is comprised of Storm, Colossus, Wolverine, Nightcrawler, Angel and Kitty Pryde. Storm is of African descent, Colossus is Russian, Wolverine hails from Canada, and Nightcrawler is a blue-skinned German, Angel is a white American, and Kitty Pryde is Jewish American.

12. Angel has wings, Storm controls the weather, Colossus is impervious to harm with his metal skin, Nightcrawler can teleport, and Kitty Pryde can turn intangible.

13. "If you mean to harm Senator Kelly, Mystique ... you'll have to go through us to get to him," says Ororo (*The Uncanny X-Men* #141 [Jan. 1981]).

14. My thanks to Gilbert Huerta for this keen insight. Along with Tim Elliot, he produces a podcast on *X-Men* comics called "CrossX."

15. Perhaps the most elaborate system of badges was used at the Dachau concentration camp, an intricate and complicated set of multicolored triangles demarcating the individual's supposed "offense" and letters indicating their nationality, reminiscent of the system Claremont depicts.

16. The character's origins have evolved over time, but this is the common, contemporary tale as it is presented today.

17. See *X-Men: Magneto Testament #1*

18. Malcolm X said: "Dr. King wants the same thing I want—freedom!" Malcolm X with Louis Lomax on Cleveland television station KYW, aired April 4, 1964.

19. Similar to that of the Judaic golem legends, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, science fiction plotlines akin to the *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Terminator*, *The Matrix*, and so forth.

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"Mutant hellspawn" or "more human than you?" The X-Men Respond to Televangelism

JACOB RENNAKER

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the rapid increase in popularity and power of televangelists—pastors emphasizing "that old-time religion" embraced modern media, resulting in droves of Americans tuning in religiously to view their sermons. This was the golden age of Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Jerry Fallwell, and Pat Robertson. It was in this milieu that Chris Claremont and Brent Anderson produced the graphic novel *God Loves, Man Kills* (1982). In a rare story where the superhero team known as the X-Men does not fight a costumed villain, *God Loves, Man Kills* focuses on the threat posed by Reverend William Stryker, whose vitriolic anti-mutant message mobilized Americans against mutants. In a revelatory moment, Reverend Stryker turns out to be the father of a mutant, introducing an element of both hypocrisy and irony. Such a storyline highlighted the potential dangers of televangelists wielding substantial religious and political power by warning of its abuse. This story turned somewhat prophetic when in the late 1980s a number of prominent televangelists were exposed for committing the very acts against which they had been preaching. By identifying intersections between the graphic novel and public opinion during the 1980s, it will become clear that *God Loves, Man Kills* was an active participant in the discussion of televangelism in the United States as well as its possible future. In spite of its sometimes skeptical view of televangelism, *God Loves, Man Kills* responded to this complex situation with a heroic sense of hope that ultimately empowered its readers to make positive, lasting changes in the world.