

The Conservative Movement's Impact on Women in the 1980s

During the 1980s, conservatism in the United States became a driving force in politics, law, education, and society. While researching for my timeline topic, I saw that the conservative movement was especially concerned with changing abortion rights law to roll back the advances the feminist movement made during the 1960s and the 1970s. I plan to research further into this topic to see the other impacts the Conservative Movement had on women and the public's perception of women during this decade, examining the idea of "welfare queens," working mothers, and women who chose not to have children. My main investigative question will be: How did the Conservative Movement in the 1980s attempt (successful or not) to influence the public's opinion on how women were viewed and the way that women should act?

This investigation into the Conservative Movement's efforts to change the way that the public and the government conceptualizes women will give greater insight into how this Conservative Movement operated. Additionally, it will show the different avenues that the Conservative Movement worked to get out the message, either through government, religious leaders, or the courts. This inquiry would show the effectiveness of the methods that the Conservative Movement employed by tracing their ideas and effects of their actions to the present day to see what has lasted and how powerful their message still is. Finally, by reading and examining the way that authors, like Margaret Atwood, deal with the ideas and events in society would show how extreme views could manifest in society if they are allowed to gain credence and momentum.

My method for pursuing this investigative question is to take a historical look at the conservative movement and its goals, impacts, and activities concerning abortion rights and other feminist issues during the 1980s. Aside from the 80s novel I chose, *The Handmaid's Tale*, I am

going to look at other texts written at the time about the Conservative Movement's ideals and its backlash against women's rights. In addition, I will look at the issues of feminism from a political and legal standpoint, and examine the effects made through the courts, public policy, and speeches made by Ronald Reagan at the time. Lastly, I will look into conservative groups, like the Moral Majority, to see if their religious messages concerned women's rights, too. All of these aspects will focus around reproductive rights and the way that women were perceived at this time.

The first resource that I am going to use is the 1986 novel by Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, because this novel was constructed on the absolute extreme of the ideas put forth by the Conservative Movement in the United States. I would also need to find historical articles chronicling the Conservative Movement's actions during the 1980s, including cases brought before the courts and related public policy, and also speeches made by its leaders, especially Ronald Reagan. Finally, I need to search for other texts that dealt with abortion issues and how the Conservative Movement attempted to negatively paint certain groups of women in the 1980s.

Politics of Superhero Comics Books in the 1980s

In the 1980s, and especially in the United States, the looming threat of nuclear extinction, a failing economy, an epidemic of a new and terrible immune disease, and a dozen other problems, all coupled with strong disapproval of a very right-wing federal government, led to artists of all fields breaking away from the status quo, from tradition, and from any kind of artistic restriction or constraint. Different ways to stimulate the mind had to be discovered to counter all of the political tension. New options were explored. This break from modern art (postmodernism, if you will) occurred just as obviously in literature as it did in the visual arts. Some artists, however, discovered a fringe medium, a medium once relegated to newsstands and designed for children, which let them combine the best elements of literature with a strong visual element that film and television couldn't capture. This led to a decades-long revolution in how comic books are viewed by artists, critics, and the public at large. For my final paper, I intend to ask a simple question with a very complex answer: In what ways did mainstream comic books in the 1980s, especially Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, demonstrate a clear and deliberate departure from comic books prior to this era, and how is this related to both the sociopolitical climate (which I'll define here as the general state of world politics, especially Reaganism and the Cold War, and the various social changes during this era, including but not limited to the AIDS outbreak and its associated homophobia) of the United States and the development of postmodern literature outside of the field of comic books?

The purpose of this investigation is to show that comic books of the 1980s developed the medium to a level where they could be considered alongside prose literature in terms of artistic value, political commentary, and social critique, and how this is essential to the ideas of the 1980s. To really understand a world of entertainment where superhero movies are not only the

most profitable films to be released each year, but are being nominated for Oscars, we must ask when our society began to really take the medium of comic books and the genre of superheroes seriously enough to invest millions upon millions of dollars into distributing these stories worldwide. I intend to show that the best example and one of the main impetuses to this artistic revolution was Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen*.

My primary method of approach will be to analyze the work closely, taking into account the political and social context in which it was written and published, in order to demonstrate clear parallels in concepts, genre, and tone between *Watchmen* and the literature we have read in the class. The themes and ideas found in art of the 1980s are not only apparent in that literature, but in *Watchmen* as well: Crime, The Cold War, drugs, and a society that is drowning in its "looking out for number one" attitude. I will also be comparing *Watchmen* to other comics, so as to show how comic books changed in the 1980s and why that change occurred during that time rather than any other.

Aside from *Watchmen* and the books from class readings, I've dug up some interviews and such, and I'm sure comicvine.com and EBSCOhost will be great deals of help. I'll have to have contemporary reviews of *Watchmen* and our class literature, some words from Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons (the creators behind the book), and the opinions of other influential comic books writers and artists of the time. It will also be helpful if I were able to find interviews or writing from creators before this era, such as Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, or Bob Kane, so as to establish why comic were how they were before the exponential maturation that occurred in the 80s.