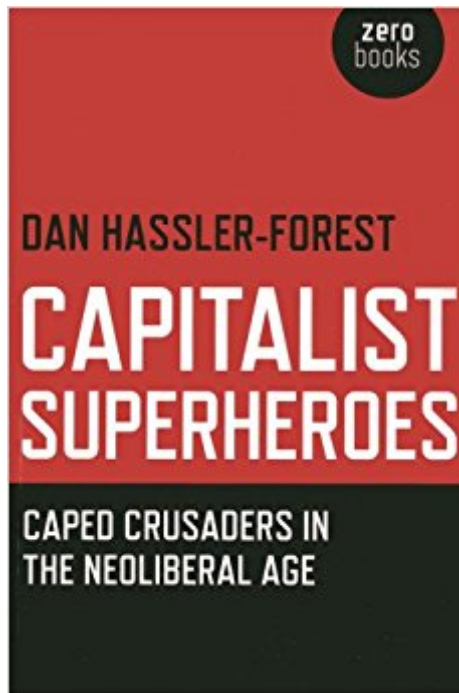




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# Capitalist Superheroes: Caped Crusaders In The Neoliberal Age



## Synopsis

In the same way that Stallone and Schwarzenegger played film heroes who came to embody the values of Ronald Reagan's aggressive conservative agenda in the 1980s, the 21st-century film narratives of Batman, Spider-Man and Superman reflect the policies of the Bush Doctrine after 9/11. This book offers a groundbreaking study of the relationship that exists between post-9/11 American politics and the contemporary superhero movie phenomenon. No other Hollywood subgenre was as consistently popular during the George W. Bush presidency, as films such as Spider-Man, Superman Returns, Iron Man, and The Dark Knight embodied the key contradictions that inform the cultural and political life of the post-9/11 years. By combining in-depth analyses of numerous major superhero films from this era with astute readings of contemporary critical theory, this book offers accessible and academically potent insight into the complex interplay between politics, ideology, and entertainment in the 21st century.

## Book Information

Paperback: 285 pages

Publisher: Zero Books; Reprint edition (December 16, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1780991797

ISBN-13: 978-1780991795

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #514,417 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #157 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Comics & Graphic Novels](#) #190 in [Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > History & Price Guides](#) #2198 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles](#)

## Customer Reviews

Dan Hassler-Forest is assistant professor of film and literature at the University of Amsterdam. He publishes widely on comics, American cinema, popular literature, and critical theory. He is originally from New York but has lived most of his life in Netherlands.

"Capitalist Superheroes" by Dan Hassler-Forest offers a fresh, multi-layered analysis on the superhero movie genre. Dr. Hassler-Forest is a respected academic who is noted for his

groundbreaking work on the popular arts. This thoughtful and well-written book helps us understand why superheroes have figured so prominently in post-9/11 cinema; and what this says about our place in history. Dr. Hassler-Forest considers several of the superhero origin stories that seem to resonate well with post-9/11 audiences. For example, Dr. Hassler-Forest contends that 'Superman Returns' (2006) features a heroic existential struggle against evil that is not unlike an innocent America that has suddenly found itself under siege by terrorists. The author asserts that the movie's narrative of triumphant American values prevailing over evil seeks to transform the real history of 9/11 into fiction, thereby intending to reassure anxious movie audiences through uncertain times. Dr. Hassler-Forest discusses how live media amplified the horrific events of 9/11. This kind of shared, traumatic cultural experience is replicated in 'Batman Begins' (2005) through the use of flashbacks to highlight Batman's tragic childhood. However, the author goes on to criticize both 'Batman Begins' and 'V for Vendetta' (2005) for the films' lack of political sophistication as the superheroes seek resolutions to the respective social crises that plague their communities. On that point, Dr. Hassler-Forest talks about how superheroes inhabit both utopian and dystopian urban landscapes that represent differing perspectives on life under capitalism. Dr. Hassler-Forest helps us view Superman's tireless efforts on behalf of law and order as an attempt to achieve the utopia of capitalist socio-economic perfection; whereas Batman often seeks to merely limit the chaos that seems inherent to life in an deeply stratified and dystopian city. Yet, both of these superheroes possess powers of perception that seem to mimic the cutting-edge surveillance technologies of the national security state, allowing them both to contain disruptive social threats and thus keep democracy safe for capitalism. Dr. Hassler-Forest goes on to discuss a number of related themes. Throughout the discussion, Dr. Hassler-Forest draws on a broad knowledge base of postmodern thinkers and philosophers such as Foucault, Lacan and Žižek. On the whole, the author is persuasive in the assertion that the superhero genre today tends to legitimize late capitalism as an organizing force but squanders the opportunity to engage in a more meaningful critique. I highly recommend this excellent book to everyone.

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