

On the Front Line: Portrayals of War Correspondents in Marvel Comics' *Civil War: Front Line*

J. Richard Stevens
Assistant Professor
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Colorado at Boulder
Rick.Stevens@colorado.edu

Journalism displays its true nature in times of cultural stress. The events of September 11, 2001 dramatically altered the daily routines, expectations, and social contexts by which professional journalists draw in their production of news.

Since the establishment of their profession in the early twentieth century, journalists have striven to maintain a critical distance from the various sides in a conflict, but found maintaining critical distance difficult in the wake of the terrorist attacks on American soil. Robert W. McChesney argued that when it comes to crises of national and international security, media corporations exist within an institutional context that makes support for the establishment natural. These connections dramatically affect the ability of the press to cover war: "At its worst, in a case like the current war on terrorism, where elites and official sources are unified on the core issues, the nature of press coverage is uncomfortably close to that found in authoritarian societies with limited formal press freedoms."¹ These words are no doubt troubling for those who subscribe to the ideals of a free and open democracy, and the complexities of the shifting contexts of cultural power in times of crisis can make discussions about the relationships between media outlets, the establishment, and the public difficult for those outside the media industry to understand. Michael Schudson described three occasions when journalists willingly abandon their neutral stance (moments of tragedy, moments of public danger, and moments of threats to national security), and found that September 11 combined all three moments into a single event.²

Artifacts of popular culture enable cultural and critical conversations about complex topics across social class, economic status, and even levels of educational achievement primarily because they are constrained into taking recognizable and approachable forms. American comic book narratives give substance to certain ideological myths about their country of origin.³

Recently, Marvel Comics published a comic book series titled *Front Line* as a companion to its *Civil War* miniseries. Many of the themes, arguments, and actions performed in *Front Line* demonstrate the complexities faced by journalists during times of extreme stress (such as the stress of enduring a domestic event of mass destruction).

This article examines the depiction of the reporters in the *Front Line* comic books, finding many parallels with the events and themes of the journalistic coverage following the events of September 11, 2001. Additionally, the article consults previous examples of journalism pop culture and discusses the similarities and differences with the text under scrutiny.

Journalism in Popular Culture

Journalists have received much attention in American popular culture, most visibly in film. Newspapermen (and women) have served as a recognizable movie type since the beginning the talking era.⁴ Richard Ness surveyed more than 2,000 journalism-related films, noting, “while other types of screen characters have gone in and out of popularity, the journalist continues to be a highly visible commodity on screen”⁵

As Jack Hirschberg, publicist for *All the President’s Men*, observed: “Weathering changing styles in heroes and heroism, the newspaperman and his broadcast equivalent has remained a figure of popular fancy – solving crimes the cops could not handle, carrying out espionage and other derring-do, rooting out graft and injustice and in sundry other ways

being the selfless benefactor of humankind.⁶ Books about journalists predate film depictions, and the glamorization of war correspondents goes back at least to 1899 with the publication of Stephen Crane's *Active Service* and Rudyard Kipling's *The Light that Failed*.⁷

Gerald Stone and John Lee found that journalists were heavily represented in prime time television programs, making the profession popular in all forms of mass media entertainment.⁸ Drawing on his large survey of journalism films, Ness described the public's fascination with journalists as owing to the inherent contradictory forces that pull at the professional journalist, noting:

... conflict is generated by a basic concern with the notion of truth and how it is perceived by the press and the society it appears to serve. From this basic determinant, the other aspects of the genre fall into place. Milieu is determined by the nature of the news organization and society, with conflicts between those two general areas of operation often instigated by differences in the handling of truth; the character of the reporter is established by his or her attitude toward truth and how it affects the practice of the profession; the basic pattern of the films is developed in terms of what truth is being sought or suppressed in the film and how and by whom it is controlled⁹

Matthew C. Ehrlich found that movies portraying journalism tend to revolve around the obstacles journalists face when chasing a story, expressed through polar tensions (e.g., tensions between cynicism and idealism, between home life and work culture, between public interests and private interests, and between objectivity and subjectivity).¹⁰ Of particular note is the connection Ehrlich observes between the cynicism/idealism tensions and the objectivity/subjectivity tensions, finding that when journalists are portrayed as cynical they tend to also be objective, but when journalists yield to their idealistic urges they also yield to the subjective.¹¹

Although J. Herbert Altschull argued that media outlets themselves do not possess the power to shape public opinion but instead are merely agents of those with true power, general

society widely believes otherwise.¹² Because of this perception, Thomas H. Zynda pointed out that news media are “salient in the consciousness of the audience. At the same time, the audience lacks concrete knowledge about it as an institution, about how exactly it operates and what life in it is like. The press is hence clothed with an aura of importance and some mystery that lends it well to the dramatic requirements of popular art.”¹³ This lack of knowledge led Walker Lundy, executive editor of the *Tallahassee Democrat*, to observe that most citizens “get their impressions of us from Hollywood.”¹⁴

Joe Saltzman presented survey data that suggests Americans desire a free press but are suspicious about those within the industry, largely because of the mixed portrayals in more recent fictitious accounts. “These conflicting images of the journalist contribute to the love-hate relationship between the American people and their media that is at the center of the public’s confusion about the media in American society today.”¹⁵

An often-overlooked medium that portrays fictitious journalists is the comic book. Journalists have been depicted in superhero comic books since the genre’s birth in 1938 with the introduction of Superman, who posed as a reporter in order to be kept abreast of the latest news and information.¹⁶ Comic books have a history in the U.S. approximately as long as that of talking motion pictures, and yet have largely been considered the “bastard stepchild of the creative community,”¹⁷ leading at least one scholar to bemoan the lack of comic book scholarship.¹⁸

Jeffrey A. Brown described comic book fans as groups of highly motivated discussers of cultural knowledge.¹⁹ The culture that comic fandom creates was portrayed by John Fiske as a “shadow cultural economy” that reflects bourgeois standards.²⁰ As Bradford W. Wright pointed out in the introduction of his work on comic books and cultural history, “Few enduring expressions of American popular culture are so instantly recognizable and still so

poorly understood as comic books.”²¹

Comic Narratives as Open Texts

Despite the historic dearth of comics scholarship, recent works have examined comic book narratives to describe social developments over time, such as Will Brooker’s analysis of Batman comics and entertainment properties.²² Others have examined many themes in a particular era, like Mike S. DuBose’s examination of the *Dark Knight Returns*, *The Watchmen*, and the 1980s *Captain America* comics to uncover heroic themes during the Reagan Administration.²³ Finally, there have been several notable studies of representation in comics, including the portrayals of women,²⁴ homosexuals,²⁵ and Arabs.²⁶

In *The Role of the Reader*, Umberto Eco argued that Superman comic narratives are a closed text, because the mythic dimensions of the character embody timeless laws (in particular, the empowerment needed to overcome industrial era impotence), making his adventures predictable and formulaic.²⁷ Eco wrote this near the end of the Golden Age era²⁸ of the character, noting the paradox Superman’s creators faced when trying to interact with contemporary issues while holding to the timeless mythology.²⁹

The present work argues that many of the narratives contained in Marvel Comics products should be approached as open texts in the same way that Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott argue that James Bond narratives are open. Critiquing Eco’s analysis of Bond as a text possessing a mythic formula, Bennett and Woollacott effectively argue that because Bond novels, movies, and derivative works cover 30 years of history, the backdrop and permutations of the character’s exploits have made him a “sign of his times.”³⁰ This positioning of Bond allowed the authors to examine the ideology represented in different Bond texts and draw conclusions about the context in which those texts were produced.

The location and status of the text is important, as an open text narrative about

cultural conflict would more readily draw upon the social environment to feed its allegory, making the arguments within the text a time capsule of specific conflicts and specific eras within a society.

From its 1960s resurgence in popularity, Marvel Comics produced open textual narratives that wrestled with the politics of representation,³¹ and the company's success has been linked to its efforts to create characters who "talk like real people and react like real people."³² By linking its stories to events and locations in contemporary society, Marvel sought to create characters that seemed "as real, living, breathing people whose personal relationships would be of interest to the readers."³³

Marvel has made frequent use of journalism conventions in its books. Like DC's Superman, Marvel's Spider-Man (a character co-creator Steve Ditko based on the "romantic realism" philosophies of Ayn Rand³⁴) posed as a photojournalist, though he did so primarily for economic reasons.³⁵ Several minor characters in both publishing companies' offerings served as journalists for plot twists, but in 1978 Marvel introduced a character who has made more than 300 comic appearances as a hard-nosed investigative reporter: Ben Urich.³⁶

Since 1978, Urich has appeared across the Marvel books, but was featured most prominently in Spider-Man and Daredevil storylines. As a result of his journalistic efforts, several super villains were brought to justice, most notably the Kingpin of Crime and the Green Goblin. Through his dogged research and investigative efforts, he also discovered the secret identities of both Daredevil and Spider-Man, though Urich chose to keep each man's secret to allow them to continue serving the public good.

In 1994, Marvel advanced its theme of realistic representation by publishing a series titled *Marvels* that re-imagined several iconic moments from Marvel Comics through the memoirs of news photographer Phil Sheldon.³⁷ The street-level narrative portrayed the

reactions of average men and women as superheroes battled above their heads, focusing on Sheldon's struggle to frame the fantastic (and seemingly apocalyptic) events into journalistic stories.

Marvel had previously experimented with a comic about the career stresses of being a New York City police officer,³⁸ and following the events of September 11, the company published four short series titled *The Call of Duty*, which portrayed the everyday efforts of police officers and firefighters operating in a world of superheroes.³⁹ Along with these experiments, Marvel published a book titled *Deadline*, which depicted the struggles of jaded *Daily Bugle* reporter Kat Farrell to solve a murder that involves a previously deceased public figure who appears to have returned from the dead with supernatural powers.⁴⁰

In 2004, Marvel built on the popularity of *Deadline* with a series titled *The Pulse* that revolved around the production of a weekly superhero section of the *Daily Bugle*.⁴¹ The main character in the book was a former superhero named Jessica Jones who drew upon her experiences as a consultant to Urich and Farrell. The series used the journalist construct to explore the juxtaposition between the celebrity function of public figures (superheroes) with the realities of their private lives.

Reading Comic Books

As Bennett and Woollacott demonstrated with their analysis of Bond, text and context are not inseparable objects of analysis,⁴² and they contend that the best way to approach such narratives is “the text as a historically constituted object rather than a metaphysical essence.”⁴³ Because modes of representation contain ideological significance, examining a text's strategies yields much about attitudes relating to war and wartime culture.⁴⁴

This article represents an attempt to untangle the complexities of social conflict through literary critique by positioning Marvel's 2006 *Civil War* and *Front Line* narratives as

an intentional allegory for the news media's performance covering the events surrounding the September 11 attacks, the Patriot Act, and the War on Terror.⁴⁵

Civil War is not a direct depiction of these events, though the storyline directly frames the changes in American society that occur when laws are hastily passed in response to tragic losses of life. The premise of the series involves a conflict within the superhero community on whether to enforce a legislative act that requires super humans to reveal their identities to the federal government and accept governmental oversight on their activities. Following the deaths of more than 600 civilians and 60 schoolchildren in a tragic explosion at Stamford, Connecticut that occurred during a confrontation between young heroes and super villains, the Super Human Registration Act (SHRA) 6 U.S.C. § 558 was introduced and passed by the government with little discussion or dissent.⁴⁶

Heroes in the series rally around either Iron Man (Tony Stark), the architect of the SHRA and spokesperson for the pro-registration forces, or Captain America (Steve Rogers), erstwhile symbol of American patriotism, who refuses to abide by the act because he believes it violates the civil liberties of American super-human citizens.

A 12-issue companion to the seven *Civil War* books, *Front Line* presents the challenges faced by Urich and Sally Floyd of *The Alternative* as they struggle to frame and report the events unfolding in their society. Though published simultaneously with the *Civil War* books (*Front Line* was released bi-weekly, while *Civil War* was intended as a monthly book), *Front Line* depicted many of the same events of the *Civil War* books, but from a journalist's "behind-the-scenes" perspective. For example, the conclusion of the second issue of the *Civil War* series ends with Spider-Man hosting a press conference in which he reveals his identity as Peter Parker.⁴⁷ The second issue of *Front Line* (published the same month) begins with the media frenzy at the *Daily Bugle* and Ben Urich's efforts to entice Parker to

give him an exclusive interview.⁴⁸ Readers had to consume both texts to get the full story.

Zynda explained that narratives about the media in film tend to portray four aspects of the press as an institution: the “character of the reporter, the nature of the press organization, the social role of the press, and the character of the society in which the press functions.”⁴⁹

Front Line engages all four aspects, offering a critique of post-9/11 society.

War correspondents are often portrayed ferreting out the conspiracy behind propaganda,⁵⁰ and Urich and Floyd certainly fulfill that role. While virtually every other character (including those opposed to the SHRA) reacts to the issues as presented by the government, only Urich and Floyd dig deep enough to uncover the true purpose of the civil war.

Urich and Floyd also serve the role of investigative reporters. Howard Good offered the following description of contemporary investigative journalism narratives:

The investigative reporters in more recent films may have a hard, glossy overcoating of professionalism, but beneath it the heart of the old detective reporter still beats briskly. They are portrayed as a rare breed, rugged individualists in an increasingly bureaucratic profession. Over the opposition of corrupt or cautious editors, they probe a sensitive issue like nuclear power and learn that supposedly legitimate institutions are hives of vast, sinister conspiracies.⁵¹

The fact that the two reporters in *Front Line* vacillate between the portrayals of the war correspondent and the investigative reporter (a situation created because the war occurs within New York, making the environment alternatively civilized and war-torn) allows the text to embrace both functions of social critique. This vacillation also characterizes the peculiar status of the American War on Terror as both a foreign war and a domestic threat.

This article looks at the performance and behavior of these journalists operating in their professional capacity to uncover truth (a central text of Ness’ analysis of journalism pop

culture texts) and examine what forces lead the press as an institution to become more authoritarian in function during times of social stress. In addition, the article looks at the role of the individual journalist in society by analyzing how the reporters struggle to overcome obstacles keeping them from the story they seek. Looking for Ehrlich's tensions between cynicism and idealism, between public and private interests, and between objectivity and subjectivity provides insight into how Marvel's presentation of twenty-first century journalism compares with earlier popular culture expressions of twentieth century journalism.

By identifying key narrative arguments that intersect with Zynda's four aspects of journalism narrative, key frames of journalism are identified within the text. These frames are presented below as "key findings," where additional literature is engaged to deal with the specific arguments presented through the constructed frames.

Civil War: Front Line

The story begins as journalists gather to remember a fallen comrade, a photojournalist who had covered the Stamford superhero fight and perished in the resulting explosion. Urich and Floyd commiserate and begin to discuss the implications of the upcoming vote on the SHRA. Floyd initially opposes the act, while Urich appears to support its passage. Later, Floyd considers their disagreement in an internal monologue:

Ben was probably right. This was put into motion the day that some angry extremists decided to fly a couple of planes into some tall buildings in Manhattan. We jumped into fighting mode then, and we were ready to do it again now.

All of a sudden, journalism was going to take a back seat to jingoism, and the fight for a nation's sentiment would be on. This was civil liberty versus civil comfort; wiretapping versus terrorism; Fox versus CNN. It was me in my little corner of heck. Ready to tell the world about the injustice of the Registration Act.

It was good old Ben Urich – best news reporter I ever met – going to bat for his publisher on the premise that the act was clean and anyone who disobeyed it was

a dirty little monkey.

The sad thing was, Jonah Jameson – publisher of the right-wing New York toilet-rag known as the *Daily Bugle* – knew better than anyone the way this was going to go. Nothing sells newspapers like a good, old-fashioned disaster.⁵²

Through inner dialogues like the above, Floyd and Urich provide access to their perspectives on the social effects of government policy and its enforcement. Floyd initially plays the part of the cynic, while Urich maintains a cautiously idealistic approach. As in the real world, the politicians and heroes are often oblivious (or at least silent) about the ramifications of their actions on society, leaving the journalists to frame the significance of events over which they have little control.

The next day, following a *Daily Bugle* editorial meeting, Urich chafes at his assignment to cover a press conference. Editor-in-chief Joe Robertson tracks Urich down and tries to convince him to follow the managing editor's lead:

Our circulation is about the same as that of a seventy-year-old with emphysema. We're constantly fighting low numbers and the online thing is cutting into us day by day. We never circumvent the truth, Ben – you know that. But Pulitzer Prize-winning pieces are our secondary concern right now. Your primary job is to help us sell newspapers. How hard is that?⁵³

Throughout the series, Urich and Floyd express discontent at press conference assignments because of the control officials hold over the flow of information. What separates the efforts of Urich and Floyd from those of the other reporters covering the conflict is the information the duo uncovers through intensive background research and the unflinching inquisition of sources in one-on-one settings.

The Robertson scene also establishes a key tension of the book: Urich and Floyd's desire to uncover and report deeper truths, which often comes into conflict with their respective media outlets' desire for increased circulation and profit. Both complain about not

having the time and resources to properly dig into the root causes of the conflict because of the expectations that come from the editorial strategies publications employ to consistently and efficiently report news and frame the significance of scheduled events. This tension can be categorized as a tension between public interest and private interests, defined as situations in which “journalism’s public service responsibilities are subordinated to market considerations and dominant political and economic concerns.”⁵⁴

The majority of the reporters in the narrative are constrained from discovering deeper truths because they are kept busy covering governmental press events, such as a public funeral for the victims of the Stamford blast, press conferences in which Iron Man and Spider-Man publicly reveal their identities to show support for the SHRA, and press conferences designed to present the political depictions of the passage of the SHRA.

These portrayals argue along the lines of McChesney’s critique of the media’s behavior during the early years of the War on Terror. The routines needed to produce a constant flow of content create an emphasis on an efficiency of operation that prevents stories from becoming too divergent from or critical toward the scheduled statements given by official sources.

None of the distractions offered by the governmental media events compare to the chaos that erupts when Iron Man and Captain America’s forces begin to battle one another in the street, turning Manhattan into a war zone. Urich and Floyd venture into the conflict (though many of their colleagues do not) and are nearly killed on more than one occasion as the effects of super-human conflict are felt by the city.

Good described the journalism film as possessing three subgenres:

1. A war correspondent losing his bearings in an orphan country of bombed out buildings and mass graves;

2. A reporter destroying innocent lives while madly chasing scoops;
3. An investigative journalist unraveling a far-reaching conspiracy.⁵⁵

The events depicted in *Front Line* show Urich and Floyd blending the first and third constructs, portraying the horror of watching their city transformed into swatches of fire and rubble by individuals of great power while simultaneously seeking the hidden causes behind the SHRA and the resistance movement.

The violence has a dramatic effect on both reporters, but its implications are felt even before the first close call occurs. As the world waits for the deadline for registration to arrive, and Urich and Floyd are on-hand to witness Iron Man and government agents show up and take down Prodigy, the first hero who publicly refuses to register, Urich internally reflects on the scene:

At precisely midnight on Deadline Day, a few citizens of New York – myself included – witnessed the very first act of the coming Civil War. Most people didn't even know it at the time. Some of us were for the Registration Act. Some of us voiced our dissenting opinion. All of us watched in awe as our newest law was violently, efficiently enforced. People could debate forever the reasons for this. But nobody questioned the enforcers. People never do until it's too late. I remember Sally Floyd, yelling up at the sky like a banshee. I remember the sound of ambulances and the smell of ozone mixed with cordite. I remember seeing a dark mass of troops move silently and efficiently back into the sky, like bats. And I kept thinking to myself, "You know who's going to pay for all of this? We are."⁵⁶

From the beginning, Urich and Floyd experience the events in the superhero civil war as merely the superficial layer in a story of cultural change. They feel powerless next to the heroes, whose conflict is deciding the fate of their society. This portrayal displays the character of post-9/11 American society. Locked in a violent conflict with an inaccessible and powerful-seeming enemy, the general populace defers to the government forces to act on their behest. The relative powerlessness of the average citizen undermines the civic virtues and critical discourse that are hallmarks of a Western democracy.

This powerlessness is also displayed in how reporters uncover truth. Because of the different leanings of their publications, the two protagonist reporters take different tactics. The *Daily Bugle* possesses right-wing editorial tendencies and chooses to endorse the SHRA, so Urich follows his publication's directives and begins his inquiry from the top with the pro-registration officials and the architects of the SHRA. *The Alternative* is committed to offering points of view divergent from the mainstream press, so Floyd follows her publication's directives and begins her pursuit of the truth from the bottom with interviews from resistance fighters who refuse to register. Early on, the two commit to meeting regularly to compare notes about their findings. These information meetings between the two allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of events they witness. These meetings also provide opportunities to exchange viewpoints and personal support and to discuss the norms of journalism ethics.

For example, at one such meeting Floyd expresses with exuberance her growing suspicion that the public is being manipulated, leading to a rebuke by Urich:

Floyd: The Pro-registration forces got what they wanted, didn't they? Nothing better than a few corpses to get people looking the other way, and another explosion just big enough to make people remember Stamford. Try telling me they didn't salivate into their steak dinners when they found out a law-abiding hero got killed by an unregistered combatant. I was *there*, Ben. I saw Bantam get killed! Geoffy Criswell took photos. It was like some kind of staged event, all wrapped up in a nice, neat package. It wouldn't surprise me if someone placed that gas tanker there on purpose –

Urich: Sally, it's your job to look at this objectively. You're a whole different class of hack when you start imagining the news instead of reporting it ...

Floyd: Ben, you know as well as I do that they're making a mockery of the Constitution. We have a duty to make people see that, no matter which news organization we work for.

Urich: Don't take the situation personally, Sally. Make a judgment based on what you see – not what you EXPECT to see – because this job will eat you up and spit you out if you let it.⁵⁷

Through dialogues like these, Urich and Floyd critique each other's strengths and weaknesses. Urich, a seasoned newspaper reporter for more than 20 years, continually encourages Floyd to support her assertions with verifiable evidence and critical distance. Floyd, a younger paranoid counter-cultural voice, continually encourages Urich to see the broader implications of individual events and to demonstrate a greater skepticism of official sources. Together, the two help each other find truth, and each eventually is persuaded to adopt the other's views as a valid companion to their own knowledge (and the increasingly obvious constraints of their own worldview leads each to perceive the degree to which their efforts are hampered by their respective news organizations).

Early on, an internal monologue by Floyd demonstrates her cynical distrust of the voice of official sources:

The problem with war is that it's so big. And yet the ideas behind it are always so small. War is just a diversion. We're so busy watching ugly pictures on TV that we lose sight of what's really going on. The hurt doesn't seem real. All those injuries seem far away. We're more concerned with fixing dinner than fixing the problem. Which suits the warmongers just fine. Because while there are millions of us watching ... we're all looking in the wrong direction.⁵⁸

Floyd's thoughts are interrupted by the approach of a disguised hero who warns her to drop her story. When she returns to her office, she is confronted by a federal agent and arrested for "conspiracy to commit terrorist acts and harboring the identity of an unregistered combatant."⁵⁹

After enduring intensive questioning and intimidation tactics, she is unexpectedly set free when a conservative congressman arranges for her release and demonstrates to her that many of her views and assumptions are those of a knee-jerk reactionary, a realization that shakes Floyd to her core. As a result, when Floyd finally gets a secret interview with the

elusive Captain America (Cap), she gets angry five minutes into the conversation when Cap's responses seem to mirror her earlier reactive positions, and she storms out.

After the conflict's conclusion, Floyd (this time accompanied by Urich) gets another chance to interview Captain America. This time, Cap begins with an eloquent statement of his positions that led him to oppose the government:

I believe in the fundamental freedoms accorded us by our constitution, Ben. I believe we have a right to bear arms, a right to defend and right to choose. I have sworn an oath to defend America from external forces, and from within. If that means standing against the government, rejecting a bogus law passed by my own superiors, then I suppose that's what it means . . . I saw the possibility of a Registration Act as a basic violation of our rights as Americans.⁶⁰

The reporters question Cap further, but Floyd quickly loses her temper and launches into an accusatory tirade:

Floyd: Let me ask you something, sir: do you know what MySpace is?

Cap: I'm not sure I understand the relevance of the *question*, Sally –

Floyd: No. You just don't understand the question, sir. I'm trying to illustrate a point here, so bear with me. Do you know who won the last World Series, or who was the last America Idol? When was the last time you actually attended a NASCAR race? When was the last time you watched *The Simpsons* or logged onto YouTube to watch a stupid video? Answer? Exactly, never. You hold America up as some shining beacon of perfection but you know next to nothing about it. . . . Your problem is that you're fighting for an ideal – It's all you know how to do. America is no longer mom and apple pie . . . it's about high cholesterol and Paris Hilton and scheming your way to the top. The country *I* love treats its celebrities like royalty and its teachers like dirt. But at least I walk its streets every day, at least I know what it *is*. You've *broken* that country, Captain America. What are you going to do to *fix* it?⁶¹

This speech represents the destination of Floyd's journey. Having begun as an ardent supporter of the civil rights of heroes, she was shamed into recognizing her biases and finally embodies the social critique against resisting the regulation of super-human activity that poses a security threat to the civilian population. Though still subjective in her approach, her

cynicism gives way to idealism.

In contrast, Urich's initial support of the SHRA is challenged when his sources within the establishment begin to yield evidence that Tony Stark might be profiting from the events leading up to the passage of the SHRA. Independent of each other, Urich and Floyd both arrive at a startling conclusion about the true purpose behind the passage of the SHRA and the events that followed. Urich's discovery compels his decision to quit his position at the *Daily Bugle*, because he fears his story, even backed by hard evidence, will not be printed. Urich's announcement of his resignation to publisher J. Jonah Jameson serves as a critique of media dependence on economic success:

Urich: The thing is this: I think I might be sitting on the biggest story that ever came by this newspaper. I mean “blow-the-lid-off-the-whole-thing, call-the-army-and-hide-the-silver” BIG! That's no exaggeration ... it's the truth.

Jameson: WHAT story?

Urich: It doesn't matter what the story is, Jonah. With all due respect to you, it's a story the *Bugle* would never publish. And because of this, I'm going to have to resign my position at this newspaper, effective immediately.

Jameson: What makes you think I wouldn't publish this “story” of yours?

Urich: Twenty years of experience, boss. It's not your fault – the *Bugle* just isn't set up something like this. We've always told a different *kind* of story. I want you to know, I hold you and your senior editorial staff in the highest regard. You've always been fair with me. But when the truth has to be compromised because by telling it we jeopardize the newspaper, then the system itself is flawed.⁶²

Urich and Floyd's departure from their employers is caused by their judgment that journalists employed by corporately held media outlets cannot uncover deep truths that contradict the fundamental assumptions of society. As their continued digging leads them to conclude that Stark has manipulated international relations (by creating a false conflict with the nation of Atlantis in order to galvanize support for registration in the U.S.) and used the SHRA to

justify sweeping economic and social reforms that result in large profits for Stark's corporate holdings, they realize that corporate media cannot deliver such messages to the public without economic consequences.

After quitting their jobs, Urich and Floyd form the online publication *frontlines.com* in order to garner the independence needed to tell their shocking story. When they confront Stark with their findings, Urich informs Stark that he and Floyd have decided not to print the story, since the harm to the U.S. would be too great. Stark is left to brood over his actions and the final scenes of the series show him emotionally breaking down as a result of the rebuke by the journalists.

Key Findings and Discussion

Most scholars presenting historical perspectives of journalists and the profession of journalism in film (including the Barris, Good, Ehrlich, Ness, Saltzman, and Zynda works cited here) have pointed out that film portrayals draw heavily from insider understandings of the profession, largely because newspaper publishers historically infiltrated the Hollywood studio structure.

Such is not the case with comic book renditions. Fiske argues that comic books represent bourgeois perspectives, largely because they are written by and for non-elites.⁶³ Certainly, the writers of the *Civil War* text do not claim inside understanding of the journalism industry,⁶⁴ yet their text offers several interesting external statements about the character of the reporters, the nature of the press organizations, and the social role of the press and the character of the American society.

Because non-elites struggle to understand how journalism works and what understanding they do have is largely informed by popular culture (as Lundy and Saltzman pointed out above), a critique located within the *Civil War* and *Front Line* text would appear

to be situated as a time capsule originating within the pre-existing bourgeois understanding of media culture produced for the understanding of the bourgeois consumers who purchase comics. In some ways, the characters reaffirm the classic portrayals of reporters in popular culture, but in other ways they break with convention in lending interesting insight into the framing of the press in post-9/11 American society.

While individual journalists may continue to serve as the social conscience of American society, the industry of journalism cannot achieve the critical distance necessary to serve in the social conscience role. Like their film counterparts from the early and mid-twentieth century, the *Front Line* reporters solve mysteries and reveal hidden structures of power. Urich and Floyd are the only two individuals who discover Tony Stark's hidden agenda and they alone take on the role of social conscience and confront Stark with his deeds. That the other journalists in the narrative cannot challenge the establishment serves as a critique of post-9/11 journalism. Paul H. Weaver portrayed the historic attitude of journalists (in comparison with the Watergate era heroes⁶⁵) as "very close to, dependent upon, and cooperative with, official sources."⁶⁶ Most of the media outlets portrayed in *Front Line* merely repeat the information presented to them at press conferences.

In times of tragedy, the press seems largely unwilling to criticize or question the established governmental authority. Schudson found this when looking at the coverage of the September 11 attacks and the *Civil War* and *Front Line* creators affirm this observation by making it a central feature of the journalistic environment.

Urich and Floyd uncover truth only because they pursue the public interest by investing large amounts of time and energy in independent research, efforts discouraged by their own news organizations. Market pressures influence production activities to the detriment of independent reporting activities (the forces comprising these pressures are

discussed below).

Journalists who collaborate are more successful than those who work independently. Urich and Floyd uncover the SHRA conspiracy only because they meet on a regular basis and share information gathered from their legwork. Each reporter approaches truth from different points on the objectivity/subjectivity and cynicism/idealism spectra, and each reporter has been assigned to cover the conflict from a different angle, driven by their respective news organizations. It is only through cooperation and free exchange that either reporter is able to see broader trends and the significance of small details that lead to breaks in the story.

The other journalists in the text are unwilling or unable to match the tandem of Urich/Floyd largely because they see themselves competing with one another (succumbing to private interests), whereas Urich and Floyd see the pursuit of truth (striving to serve the public's interest) as a higher calling that transcends market competition.

Individual journalists working within the context of their news organization's culture would be hard pressed to gather enough evidence and perspective to write a story about sweeping social changes occurring outside the public view. One of the themes of the text is the struggle by each reporter to dig deeper into the "real story" while still fulfilling the tasks required to create the more superficial content of a daily publication.

Competition among media outlets would seem to keep many journalists from sharing their notes with their colleagues, isolating the reporter from alternative perspectives and information not personally encountered. *Front Line* promotes the teamwork of Urich and Floyd as heroic.

Economic concerns and predetermined story frames prohibit most journalists from reacting critically to establishment voices. Urich and Floyd uncover the truth largely

because they defy the norms of their profession, a theme consistent with previous fictitious journalism narratives. Good pointed out that in contemporary journalism narratives, "... truth is dug up by a renegade reporter, not the institution of the press. The journalist establishment is part of a larger corrupt Establishment. Its interests mesh with those of a varied collection of villains" ⁶⁷ These achievements celebrate the power of committed individuals, a resistance to the social control of their profession and their society. This theme is also consistent with previous narratives. Timothy Melley pointed out that conspiracy theories tell "how the 'postindustrial' economy has made Americans more generic and less autonomous than their rugged forebears and about how social structures – especially government and corporate bureaucracies, control technologies, and 'the media' – have become autonomous agents in their own right." ⁶⁸

As the editorial staffs of Ulrich and Floyd's publications struggle to balance their social function against the need to generate enough revenue to survive in the marketplace, it becomes apparent that twenty-first century economic interests continually conflict with the watchdog function of the press. The *Bugle*'s staff in particular makes a good show of supporting Ulrich's work through policies, but at several points in the storyline, Jameson refuses to print shocking details Ulrich has uncovered when they conflict with responses by public officials.

These fears are hardly unfounded. In times of cultural stress, the public is far less willing to tolerate dissidence. In the aftermath of September 11, at least two small-town journalists were fired for politically incorrect expressions, and the ABC program *Politically Incorrect* lost advertisers, was pulled from some ABC affiliates, and was eventually cancelled after host Bill Maher described U.S. military policy as "cowardly." ⁶⁹

The constraint of worrying about how a journalistic outlet can survive making a

devastating critique of the government in times of tragedy cripples the press's ability to seek truth. It is only when Urich and Floyd formally join forces in their small startup enterprise (in which they have little to lose) that their stories begin to open eyes.

Institutions and organizations have often struggled to support voices of dissension in times of extreme cultural conflict, largely because of the increased need for solidarity within the society. George Orwell described this phenomenon as the reason he wrote *Animal Farm* in his unpublished preface to the 1945 edition:

Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban. ... At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question. ... Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness. A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing, either in the popular press or in the highbrow periodicals.⁷⁰

Yet, one of the pervasive themes found in fictitious journalism narratives is the ability to resist social control. Ehrlich writes that fictitious journalism narratives suggest that the journalist can see through lies and hypocrisy, stick up for the little guy, uncover the truth, and serve democracy – or that if those things are no longer true because the journalist and the press have lost their way, they were true once upon a time and someday could be true again.⁷¹ *Front Line* argues that only smaller publications (and notably online outlets) can truly present critical stories that serve democracy in times of national tragedy.

Journalists cannot tell the public deep truths during times of crisis, particularly when those truths could irreparably damage the status quo. Though they manage to see through the conspiracy and public manipulation, Urich and Floyd decide not to publish their masterpiece because the damage to the country would be greater than the injustices performed in the establishment of the new social order. Several months later, in *New*

Warriors #6, Urich gets a chance to answer for his decision when he is confronted by a detective named Harry Givens, who has just discovered Tony Stark's duplicity through other means:

Givens: He staged the assassination of the Atlantean delegation. And was ready to start another world war so he could create the impetus for his precious Initiative.

Urich: Breathe easy, Harry. It never got that far.

Givens: That's not the point, Ben. Don't you get it?

Urich: Look, no one knew what this civil war might cost, except for Stark. He made some scratch for himself. So what? But he did what he had to do to save the world from what amounts to super-human W.M.D.s.

Givens: And you sat on this? You sat on this while he hatched some harebrained scheme to turn the whole country into a superhuman police state?

Urich: That's not fair, Harry. If this had gotten out, what would people have said?

Givens: I don't know. Maybe they wouldn't have liked it. But at least they would've known the TRUTH, Ben. Doesn't the truth count for anything anymore?

Urich: And where would that TRUTH have led us? Destruction? Seeing the country burn to the ground like Rome at the hands of unrestrained superhumans? I don't think so.

Givens: What happened to you, Ben? You used to believe in something. You'd have never let this go down back in the day. You had faith in the system.

Urich: I wised up. You should, too.⁷²

Through this admission, Urich's principles keep him from disclosing damaging information, believing that his duty to the public supersedes his duty to the truth. He now employs the same restraint (for different reasons) that led him to leave the *Daily Bugle*.

This restraint echoes the chill felt through the journalism industry in the wake of September 11. Columnist Ellen Goodman reflected on the behavior of the press less than three months after the terrorist attacks:

When terrorists struck on Sept. 11, there was only one side. No editor demanded a quote from someone saying why it was fine to fly airplanes into buildings. No one expected reporters to take an "objective" view of the terrorists ... Being neutral on terrorism was as absurd as being neutral on lynching.⁷³

This attitude, common among journalists in the aftermath of the attacks, explains why the profession was not more critical of the Patriot Act or of specific announced initiatives in the War on Terror. Criticizing the government in a time of war can be (and often is) interpreted as aligning oneself with the enemy. And when the enemy has been dominantly framed as threatening the public good or social order through violence, maintaining critical distance leads a reporter to appear to be open to supporting the harm perpetrated upon the public.

Unlike in previous war correspondent incarnations, the reporters struggle and succeed in not taking sides in the conflict. In war correspondent narratives (particularly in the 1980s), a common theme of covering civil struggle is the abandonment of objectivity to take sides in the conflict.⁷⁴ Good portrayed the transformation as follows:

What he sees are bombed-out cities, ragged refugees fleeing down highways, living skeletons behind barbed wire of the concentration camps, bodies tangled in mass graves. If he is going to remain human, he must shed his professional calm, stop treating the tragedy of war as just another news story, and take sides. This is the last chance for a reprieve. History is sleeping with death, and the correspondent must understand, and make others understand if he can, war as it really is, a nightmare of the lord of night, mad king of the universe, now and forever.⁷⁵

The reporters in *Front Line* invert this tendency. At the beginning of the story, both reporters begin by taking sides in the conflict, not despite its coverage as "just another news story," but rather because such coverage is normalized. The narrative suggests that twenty-first century media outlets are ideologically driven, at least in terms of how they cover public events.

As the conspiracy unravels and both reporters see greater complexity to the underpinnings of the conflict, they each initially become more subjective before achieving a

greater form of objectivity. The evolution is caused by the realization that in the super-human civil war, neither side truly represents the will of the American people.

Schudson argued that objectivity originally developed as a defensive measure, a method to record the world independent of the political and social forces that shape it,⁷⁶ and this protection is what Urich and Floyd seek to pursue unpopular truths.

Part of the underlying reason for this evolution also takes into consideration an imbalance of power: the actors driving the events of the civil war are much more powerful than the human populace, and Urich and Floyd come to see the conflict in broader terms, as being about the relationship between those who have great power (the super humans) and those who have little (humans).

Urich moves from supporting the SHRA to digging out its true motives and confronting Tony Stark with the evidence. Floyd moves from supporting the resistance movement to criticizing Captain America for not ending the conflict sooner.

Both reporters come to realize that their own power of the press is being co-opted by the super-human actors in the conflict. Once they see that serving humanity is their higher duty, they begin to challenge both groups of heroes, while protecting the public from the dirty truth of their heroes' schemes.

Conclusion

Front Line serves as a sophisticated yet approachable critique of the role of journalism in the post-9/11 environment and during the passage of the Patriot Act. In the wake of the crisis of 9/11, journalists quickly drew back from their position of critical distance and rallied around the establishment. The small number of voices that offered dissension quickly found that the freedom of expression one enjoys within a democracy does not protect one from the reactionary forces of a re-nationalized market.

Looking back at the news coverage generated about the 9/11 attacks, there is little to suggest that any debate existed in any meaningful form regarding whether a military response was necessary or who should be the target of such a response. Official sources quickly outlined a plan of attack and a list of suggested social and legal changes largely uncommented upon by the press.

The immediate consequences of the suspension of critical distance by all of America's institutions were that Congress passed, by a near-unanimous vote, an act that allowed the executive branch to create and sustain a global war effort with little oversight from the legislative or judicial branches of government. In that same debate-free environment, Congress increased national security and military spending, and introduced broad changes in the balance of power between the civil liberties of individual citizens and the security needs of the state.

Historians will debate for ages to come whether or not these legal and social reforms were for the benefit of American society or the world at large. Unfortunately for those who value the tenets of a democratic society, those debates will almost exclusively occur as a retrospective exercise.

Artifacts of popular culture have always been subjects of interest for those with social and political power,⁷⁷ but their true value lies in their aforementioned reach across lines of social class, economic status and even intellectual ability and training. As George Lipsitz wrote:

For all of their triviality and frivolity, the messages of popular culture circulate in a network of production and reception that is quite serious. At their worst, they perform the dirty work of the state. At their best, they retain memories of the past and contain hopes for the future that rebuke the injustices and inequalities of the present. ... Perhaps the most important facts about people have always been encoded within the ordinary and the commonplace.⁷⁸

Marvel's *Front Line* digs into many of the relevant issues, forces and paradoxes of identities that led the American press to lose their objectivity in times of crisis and presents them in a way that can be understood by those within and without the profession of journalism. Though it portrays the events of 9/11, the War on Terror, and the passage of the Patriot Act through superhero allegory, the themes capture the mood of their age to inform the present readership and serve as an artistic expression for future generations to consider.⁷⁹

Comic books continue to be a narrative space where relevant cultural themes and ideologies are presented, critiqued, and evaluated. As in many entertainment media forms, comics have presented portrayals of working journalists from every era since 1938. Though comics have been historically marginalized, the increase in recent scholarship should continue to open a relatively accessible but largely untapped resource of cultural significance.

Endnotes

¹ Robert W. McChesney, "The Structural Limitations of U.S. Journalism," in *Journalism After September 11*, eds. Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 95.

² Michael Schudson, "What's Unusual About Covering Politics as Usual," in *Journalism After September 11*, eds. Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 41.

³ Richard Reynolds, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1992), 74.

⁴ Alex Barris, *Stop the Presses: The Newspaperman in American Films* (South Brunswick, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1976), 12. However, Ness points out that newspaper reporters were the subject of (or prominently featured in) silent films and lists nearly 300 feature films and more than 100 silent short films that used journalists as key characters. Richard Ness, *From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997).

⁵ Ness, *From Headline Hunter to Superman*, 1.

⁶ Jack Hirshberg, *A Portrait of All the President's Men* (New York: Warner Books, 1976), 41.

⁷ Stephen Crane, *Active Service* (London, William Heinemann, 1899); Rudyard Kipling, *The Light That Failed* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Fredonia Books, 2001).

⁸ Gerald Stone and John Lee, "Portrayal of Journalists on Prime Time Television," *Journalism Quarterly* 67:4 (1990): 697-707.

⁹ Ness, *From Headline Hunter to Superman*, 6.

¹⁰ Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 10-11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹² J. Herbert Altschull, *Agents of Power: the Media and Public Policy* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1995), 155.

¹³ Thomas H. Zynda, "The Hollywood Version: Movie Portrayals of the Press," *Journalism History* 6 (Spring 1979): 23.

¹⁴ Walker Lundy, "Why Do Readers Mistrust the Press?" *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* (March 1982), 5. Cited in Good, *Outcasts*, 7.

-
- ¹⁵ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Los Angeles: Norman Lear Center, Annenberg School for Communication, 2002), 143-144.
- ¹⁶ Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, "Superman," *Action Comics* 1:1 (April 1938).
- ¹⁷ Peter Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain Books, 2006), vi.
- ¹⁸ Ronald Schmitt, "Deconstructive Comics," *Journal of Popular Culture* 25:4 (1992): 153-161.
- ¹⁹ Jeffrey A. Brown, "Comic Book Fandom and Cultural Capital," *Journal of Popular Culture* 30:4 (1997): 28.
- ²⁰ John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 30.
- ²¹ Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xiii.
- ²² Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (New York: Continuum, 2001).
- ²³ Mike S. DuBose, "Holding Out for a Hero: Reaganism, Comic Book Vigilantes, and Captain America," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 40:6 (2007): 915-935.
- ²⁴ Janice Hume, "Changing Characteristics of Heroic Women in Midcentury Mainstream Media," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34:1 (2000): 9-29; Mitra C. Emad, "Reading Wonder Woman's Body: Mythologies of Gender and Nation," *Journal of Popular Culture* 39:6 (2006): 954-984.
- ²⁵ Valerie Palmer-Mehta and Kellie Hay, "A Superhero for Gays?: Gay Masculinity and Green Lantern," *Journal of American Culture* 28:4 (2005): 390-404.
- ²⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, "Arab Images in American Comic Books," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28:1 (1994): 123-133.
- ²⁷ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 109.
- ²⁸ Although there are a variety of opinions about the designated ages of comic books, it is generally accepted that the "Golden Age" of comic books began with the introduction of Superman in *Actions Comics* #1 (June 1938) and gave way to the "Silver Age" in October 1956 with the introduction of the modern Flash in *Showcase* #4. A "Bronze Age" is thought to have begun in the early 1970s when several of the prominent creators retired

and the Comics Code that regulated comic content was relaxed to allow greater freedom of control for authors. Authors have identified several subsequent ages, but the boundaries are heavily disputed.

²⁹ Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 111.

³⁰ Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 19.

³¹ Robert Genter, “‘With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility’: Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 40:6 (2007): 953-978.

³² Saul Braun, “Shazam! Here Comes Captain Relevant,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 2 1971, 41.

³³ Stan Lee and George Mair, *Excelsior! The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* (New York: Fireside, 2002), 114.

³⁴ Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2007), 161.

³⁵ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, “Spider-Man,” *The Amazing Spider-Man* 1:1 (March 1963).

³⁶ Roger McKenzie and Gene Colan, “Betrayal,” *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear* 1:153 (July 1978).

³⁷ Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross, “A Time of Marvels,” *Marvels* 1:1 (January 1994).

³⁸ Larry Hama, Joe Jusko and Mike Harris, “Cops: The Job,” *Cops: The Job* 1:1 (June 1992).

³⁹ Chuck Austen, Bruce Jones and David Finch, “Call of Duty,” *The Call of Duty: Brotherhood* 1:1 (August 2002); Bruce Jones and Tom Mandrake, “Another Day in Paradise,” *The Call of Duty: The Precinct* 1:1 (August 2002); Chuck Austen and Danijel Zelzej, “The Call of Duty: The Wagon,” *The Call of Duty: The Wagon* 1:1 (October 2002); Chuck Austen and Pat Olliffe, “Whatever Doesn’t Kill You ...” *The Call* 1:1 (June 2003).

⁴⁰ Bill Roseman and Guy Davis, “Deadline,” *Deadline* 1:1 (June 2002).

⁴¹ Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley, “Spider-Man: Murderer?” *The Pulse* 1:1 (March 2004).

⁴² Bennett and Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond*, 260-261.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁴ Evelyn Cobley, *Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 15.

⁴⁵ George Gene Gustines, "The Battle Outside Raging, Superheroes Dive In," *NYTimes.com*, 20 February 2006, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/20/arts/design/20marv.html>>; Larry Holmes, Jonathan O'Beirne and Glenn Perreira, "Shocking Event for Captain America," *CNN.com*, 7 March 2007, <<http://www.cnn.com/2007/SHOWBIZ/books/03/07/captain.america/index.html>>; "Mark Millar's Civil War Post-Game Show," *Newsarama.com*, <http://www.newsarama.com/marvelnew/CivilWar/millar_final.html> 26 February 2007.

⁴⁶ Mark Millar and Steve McNiven, "Civil War: Part One of Seven," *Civil War* 1:1 (July 2006).

⁴⁷ Mark Millar and Steve McNiven, "Civil War: Part Two of Seven," *Civil War* 1:2 (August 2006).

⁴⁸ Paul Jenkins and Kei Kobayashi, "Embedded, Part Two," *Civil War: Front Line* 1:2 (August 2006).

⁴⁹ Zynda, "The Hollywood Version," 17.

⁵⁰ Barris, *Stop the Presses*, 96.

⁵¹ Howard Good, *Outcasts: The Image of Journalists in Contemporary Film* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 124.

⁵² Paul Jenkins and Ramon Bachs, "Embedded, Part One," *Civil War: Front Line* 1:1 (August 2006), 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁴ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 11.

⁵⁵ Good, *Outcasts*, 5.

⁵⁶ Paul Jenkins and Ramon Bachs, "Embedded, Part Two," *Civil War: Front Line* 1:2 (August 2006), 13-14.

⁵⁷ Paul Jenkins and Ramon Bachs, "Embedded, Part Four," *Civil War: Front Line* 1:4 (August 2006), 2.

⁵⁸ Paul Jenkins and Ramon Bachs, "Embedded, Part Five," *Civil War: Front Line* 1:5 (October 2006), 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁰ Paul Jenkins and Ramon Bachs, “Embedded, Part Eleven,” *Civil War: Front Line* 1:11 (April 2007), 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., 14, 16.

⁶² Paul Jenkins and Ramon Bachs, “Embedded, Part Ten,” *Civil War: Front Line* 1:10 (March 2007), 5.

⁶³ Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” 30.

⁶⁴ “Mark Millar’s Civil War Post-Game Show.”

⁶⁵ Good, *Outcasts*, 120.

⁶⁶ Paul H. Weaver, “The New Journalism and the Old – Thoughts After Watergate,” *Public Interest* 35 (Spring 1974): 68. Quoted in Good, *Outcasts*, 121.

⁶⁷ Good, *Outcasts*, 144.

⁶⁸ Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Cultural Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 12.

⁶⁹ Celestine Bohlen, “Think Tank; In New War on Terrorism, Words Are Weapons, Too,” *New York Times*, September 29, 2001
<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B04EFDA163DF93AA1575AC0A9679C8B63>>.

⁷⁰ George Orwell, “The Freedom of the Press,” *Animal Farm: The Centennial Edition* (New York: Random House, 1993), 98-99.

⁷¹ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 1.

⁷² Kevin Greivoux and Paco Medina, “Defiant, Part Six,” *The New Warriors* 4:6 (January 2008), 14.

⁷³ Ellen Goodman, “Post-Sept. 11 Dilemmas for Journalists,” *Boston Globe*, December 7, 2001, B12.

⁷⁴ Howard Good, “The Image of War Correspondents in Anglo-American Fiction,” *Journalism Monographs*, no. 97 (June 1986): 6.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁶ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

⁷⁷ John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 1.

⁷⁸ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 20.

⁷⁹ This article was hardly an exhaustive analysis of every argument and subtext presented in the *Front Line* books. Many side issues, cultural perspectives, and images of representation are embedded within this text and that of the main *Civil War* miniseries. Sally Floyd defies many of the classic portrayals of female reporters listed by Good. A comprehensive analysis of her actions and behavior might shed interesting light on how female professionals in the journalism industry are portrayed in recent popular culture. Unlike in previous journalist incarnations, alcohol and vices are not widely depicted as determinants of the profession of journalism. However, in *Front Line*, Floyd is portrayed as a recovering alcoholic. As she struggles to cope with the physical danger confronted in the streets and the emotional trauma suffered as she begins to unravel the Stark conspiracy, Floyd is often tempted to turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism. Ulrich continually tries to hold her accountable, though he confesses to her his own bout with drinking years before when he was introduced to the realities of super-human violence.

In the second issue of the series, the *Daily Bugle* struggles with the fallout from Spider-Man's revelation that he is secretly photographer Peter Parker (who has made his living selling photos of himself as Spider-Man). The staff is split over how to react and Jameson views Parker as "just another newsman wannabe who made up lies an' got caught." The obvious allusion to reporters like Jayson Blair of the *New York Times* creates dissonance in the existing narratives of journalistic fraud. Spider-Man is a recognized hero by readers, if one often caught in circumstances that force him to make tough decisions.

In 2007, Marvel launched a second *Front Line* series, this one as a companion to the *World War Hulk* miniseries. Though many of the themes of the second series echoed the first series, the Hulk's return was portrayed as a force of nature run amok. Throughout the second *Front Line* series, allusions to the press reaction to Katrina (both overt and implicit) are scrutinized, as is the ability of small alternative media outlets to compete with larger corporate media outlets when the city's infrastructure is impaired.