



Consumerism, Corruption and Capitalism in The Boys

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Abstract

This article aims at exploring capitalism and consumerism, along with elements of corruption embedded in corporations. The primary role of commercialism is to make profit through supply and demand. The present-day youth often fall prey to the machinations of brand and their merchandise. This article analyses the inclination of adolescents towards consumption. The comic book series *The Boys* written by Garth Ennis and illustrated by Darick Robertson, sheds light on the portrayal of superheroes as the poster child of consumerism. Corruption, when left unchecked and unaccounted for is a dormant threat to society, as is bowing down to capitalism. The research concentrates on how conglomerates egg on corruption and the effects that befall the contemporary generation as a result. By juxtaposing the two, the comic further explains and underlines how corporations have been putting up façades of various kinds to deceive the public. The article intends on unveiling conglomerates for what they truly are, using the superheroes from the comic as conduits.

Keywords: *consumerism, capitalism, corruption, corporation, superheroes, consequences*

Introduction

Garth Ennis, an Irish-American writer, is well known for his representation in comics. Ennis started out at the young age of nineteen reading British comics that instilled in him a love for superheroes; but the love quickly turned into a strong dislike. He has worked for both Marvel and DC comics, and his specialty seems to be superhero satire. Many of his comics have been adapted into motion pictures and series. His intricate characterization is oftentimes the showstopper in his works. His most celebrated works are *Preacher* written along with artist Steve Dillon and *The Boys* co-designed with illustrator Darick Robertson. Ennis's revolutionary work paved the way for a different perspective as opposed to the conventional comic industry that lauds superheroes by always placing them on a pedestal.

The Boys with its seventy-two issues and three spin-off series delves into the lives of superheroes in the time period between 2006 and 2008. The comic throws a curveball by showing superheroes as being fallible and corrupt. They are reckless in their actions, and they are led by an even more corrupt organization. The gore confrontations, along with the violent interactions contribute to the gruesome visuals, providing a platform for Ennis to satirize superheroes and their trivialities.

A quick glance through the comic

The Boys in simple terms, revolves around consumerism and capitalism and shows superheroes as how they truly are. The social issues and violence that ensue are the aftermath of their interactions. They abuse power and they are abusers of themselves. Ennis uses superheroes as a medium to bring out the ingrained corruption of corporations. This in turn reveals the true colors of the superheroes or supes as they are often mentioned in the comics. The corporation named *Vought American* provides the supes with protection. This group of superheroes are famously known as *The Seven* and each time a supe is introduced or removed from the group, *Vought* organizes campaigns and fundraisers to favor the corporation. There is also an immense line of merchandise following *The Seven's* fanbase. When all hope is lost, a group of furtive nobodies, along with leader and former CIA agent *Billy Butcher* plan a heroic quest to expose the all-powerful supes. They take down the corporation along with them as well. Their atypical journey of taking matters into their own hands and restoring justice makes up the rest of the comic series.

The rapid expansion and manifestation of consumerism

The present world has been viewing consumerism under variegated lights. It goes hand in hand with society's incessant need to procure and own goods. Majority of the people are aware of this phenomenon that looms over their shoulders but this is often neglected. There is also another group that are alien to the condition. The comic very clearly advertises the aspect of consumerism in conglomerates. The foremost role of a corporation in the present world is marketing and this is effortlessly done with the help of strategies. The brilliance of the work lies in its ability to mask corruption through the oddity of their characters and their ill humor. It is meritorious and deserves special attention. Superheroes, when put in everyday situations start to act and behave like normal human beings and their decisions almost always have repercussions of their own. Ennis portrays the superheroes as supervillains and they are backed by the greatest of all villains, *Vought American*. Consumerism is more than just a byproduct. It seems to be its driving force and the comic consistently oscillates between the good and evil sides.

Role of conglomerates in promoting consumerism

Vought American is the creator and the promoter of a long line of goods and services, ranging from feature films to personalized merchandise. It holds the key to a whole other gamut of products as well. *The Seven* comprise: *The Homelander*, *A-Train*, *The Deep*, *Queen Maeve*, *Black Noir*, *The Lamplighter* and *Jack from Jupiter*. The corporation's sole interest lies in its increment of its Television Rating Point or TRP and procuring sponsors. This is the fuel that runs the show and the company. *Homelander*, the leader of *The Seven*, mentions *Live+3* ratings that are critical for the success of their programs and *Vought American* craftily utilizes its superhero assemblage to their advantage. *Starlight*, the replacement for *Jack from Jupiter* and the newest addition to *The Seven*, advertises *V-Fidelity Speaker Systems* and has her own line of skincare products named *Wish*. *A-Train* has an exclusive commercial featuring the *A-Train Turbo Rush Energy Drink* and other products such as *Speeding Bullet Ale Beer* and *Frosted A-Trains cereal*. *Queen Maeve*, or as her food product line is called, *Brave Maeve Pride*, offers *Rainbow Pop*, *Instant Coffee*, *Pride Bars* and *Instant Mashed Potatoes*. This way, *Vought* has licensed their supes to various companies. In addition to this, they have two luxury rehabilitation centers under the name, *The Global Wellness Retreat* and superhero themed restaurants called *Planet Vought* spread across the globe. The corporation also has *Vought Petroleum* and a *Voughtland Theme Park* based in US. *Voughtronics* is their electronics range, and *Vought Fresh Farm* is their grocery line. The list is endless and the entire world seems to be living in *Vought's* carefully crafted bubble. From the *Rainbow Pop* that a child eats to *Vought-a-Burger*, their fast-food chain the company manages and controls everything. The company believes in an EBITDA margin that stands for earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization. Despite the multitude of products and institutions under their name, their quality standards seem questionable.

Damage control, corruption and burying of evidence by corporations

Being a multinational corporation, there is bound to be collateral damage, especially when it is a company that deals with superheroes with superpowers. The comic has an orphanage that goes by the name of *Red River*. It houses super-abled children who had accidentally killed their parents upon realising their superpowers. There is *Vought Special Services* that does the job of a cleaning unit by covering up the company's dirty tracks. Their prime intention is to align the mindset of the public with their own. This is evident in their *Vought Rifle Association*, which teaches children about the happiness of using firearms. This helps to justify their use of the same. *Association of Collateral Damage Survivors* is an emotional support group formed for those people harmed by superheroes during their rescue operations. To top it all off, they control the news and the media through *Vought News*, *Vought Studios* and *Voices on Voughtify*, a podcast, which could be seen as a satire on *Spotify*, the modern-day music app. Right from basic necessities to out of the world luxuries, the company holds full control. By managing streaming platforms such as *Vought+*, the company is able to keep up its value and reputation in the eyes of the public. They even have tracking chips on their superheroes and this directly puts them on top of the corruption chain.

A Company that capitalizes

Vought American is the perfect example of capitalism in all its aspects, be it economic or political. They have already taken over the market in terms of their merchandise and produce and monetary gain seems to be their focal point. The EBITDA margin is the percentage of the company's revenue that can be measured as profit and *Vought* serves as its front. The governing body is the company itself and they are the lawmakers and the law. They have *Room 42D* confinement cells for supes for when they go out of control. The complete control of trade rests in their hands. The company intends on perfecting a supe army that would technically be infallible and this would directly shift power into the hands of *Vought*. The supes are the company's solitary link to catching hold of the market. Captivated by the ostentatious representations of *The Seven*, the public, especially the youth, find themselves running behind these trivialities. This fan base is thoroughly exploited by the company to promote their social standing, thereby gaining the trust of the general public.

Conclusion

The comic paints a vivid yet transparent picture of capitalism and consumerism, combined with the corruption happening inside the corporation. It outlines how a company should not function. The readers, knowingly or unknowingly, are always kept on the edge of their seats. The nail-biting and gruesome visuals portrayed are oftentimes violent but also hard to look away from. This is a very peculiar feature of Ennis's comics that require further exploration. The unwinding of an institution begins at its root level and superheroes seem to be the cornerstone of the company. Attacking the very idea of superheroes and crumbling the corporation from the inside out is highlighted all through the comic. The conglomerate is stripped of its masks and shown for what it truly is. The supes supporting the endless corruption and the blind public following suit, promotes the growth of the company. The hero worship in turn generates a massive fan following for the brand and the supes seem to be on the forefront. Fanbases then and fanbases now are known for their limited-edition custom merchandise. The corporations then focus on small-scale production and this in turn increases demand. This leads to a tremendous boost in sales and a surge in consumerism. As is evident throughout the comic, the three C's of Consumerism, Corruption and Capitalism hold the upper hand, and they find their expression through conglomerates like *Vought American* and the public.

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