

# Political Theory in Popular Culture

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POSC 3421

Summer 2023

Professor Nicholas Tampio

Online MTWR 6-9 pm, Synchronous from 6:00-8:00 pm in

<https://fordham.zoom.us/my/tampio>

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The Marvel Universe has provided the basis for several of the most popular movies and television shows of the past decade, including The Avengers, Iron Man, X-Men, Thor, Captain America, Guardians of the Galaxy, Black Panther, Doctor Strange, Punisher, Daredevil, Jessica Jones, M.O.D.O.K., Loki and WandaVision. Are these movies and shows teaching liberalism, conservatism, socialism, anarchism, fascism, multiculturalism, populism, or something else entirely? How does the Marvel Universe reflect our time, and how does it express utopian and dystopian visions? Why are these movies and shows popular around the world?

Before class, students will watch two videos on Panopto about a political ideology and a Marvel character. In the first half of our synchronous meeting, we will discuss the political ideology, and in the second half, the Marvel universe. It is serious course about political ideologies and a fun opportunity to talk about the Marvel Universe.

## Learning outcomes:

- Understand the “isms” that shape how we think about politics
- Perceive how popular culture influences how people look at politics
- Communicate effectively and confidently

## Required texts

- Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (Palgrave 2021), ISBN-10: 9781352011838
- *The Politics of the Marvel Cinematic Universe*, ISBN-10: 9780700633883

### Grading

First character presentation and leading class discussion	10
First character PowerPoint	10
Second character presentation and leading class discussion	10
Second character PowerPoint	10
Midterm	20
Final exam	30
Class participation	10

Students will be responsible for (co-)leading discussion of two Marvel characters. Students will upload a 10-15 minute PowerPoint presentation at least 24 hours before they lead discussion. The PowerPoints and presentations should describe

- who invented the character;
- the character's origin story;
- academic and popular articles on the character;
- academic and popular articles on related topics;
- a question to start a discussion.

Early in your session, show a 3-6 minute YouTube clip to prompt discussion.

Begin your research at the Fordham University Library [homepage](#). Find sources on your character and broader issues. For instance, if you are presenting on Ms. Marvel, you could also research issues related to Muslim American politics, Muslim American representation, religious freedom, interreligious dating, etc.

Please sign up for 2 characters on the [Google document](#) for the presentation schedule.

### **Schedule**

July 5 – Defining Ideologies + Fantastic Four

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 1
- What role do ideas play in politics? What is ideology? What is the difference between the political left, right, and center? Do we still live in an ideological age?
- Chapter 1. An Introduction to the Politics of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Nicholas Carnes and Lilly J. Goren*
- Robert Gentner, "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility": Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 40, no. 6 (2007): 953-978.

- How the Cold War saved Marvel and birthed a generation of superheroes, AV Club (2016).

#### July 6 – Liberalism + X-Men

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 2
- John Dewey, Liberalism and Social Action
- What are the origins and development of liberalism? What do liberals mean by individualism, freedom, reason, justice, and toleration? What is the difference between classical and modern liberalism?
- Dante A. Ciampaglia, How Stan Lee's X-Men Were Inspired by Real-Life Civil Rights Heroes (2021)

#### July 10 – Neoliberalism (or Libertarianism) + Spiderman

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 2
- F.A. Hayek, Why I am not a Conservative
- What are the origins and development of liberalism? What do liberals mean by individualism, freedom, reason, justice, and toleration? What is the difference between classical and modern liberalism?
- Antonio Pineda and Jesus Jimenez-Varea, “Popular Culture, Ideology, and the Comics Industry: Steve Ditko’s Objectivist Spider-Man,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 46, No. 6 (2013): 1156-1176.

#### July 11 – Conservatism + Iron Man

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 3
- What are the origins and development of conservatism? What do conservatives mean by tradition, human imperfection, organic society, hierarchy and authority, and property? What is the difference between paternalistic conservatism and libertarian conservatism?
- Chapter 3. Tony Stark and the Classical Heroism of the Marvel Cinema Universe, *Ari Kohen*

#### July 12 – Socialism + Any Defender (Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Iron Fist, Luke Cage)

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 4
- What are the origins and development of socialism? What do socialists mean by community, cooperation, equality, and class politics? What is the difference between socialism, communism, and social democracy?

#### July 13 – Anarchism + Deadpool

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 5
- What are the origins and development of anarchism? What do anarchists mean by anti-statism, utopianism, anti-clericalism, and economic freedom? What is the difference between collectivist anarchism and individualist anarchism?
- Benjamin Triana, “Deadpool: When Our (Anti)Heroes Do Less and We Reward Them More,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 51(4), 2018.

July 17 – Nationalism + Captain America

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 6
- What are the origins and development of nationalism? What do nationalists mean by the nation, organic community, and self-determination? What is the difference between liberal, conservative, and postcolonial nationalism?
- Chapter 5. Captain America vs. James Madison, *Christopher J. Galdieri*
- Chapter 7. Nostalgia, Nationalism, and Marvel Superheroics, *Lilly J. Goren*

July 18 – Midterm

July 19 – Fascism + Punisher

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 7
- What are the origins and development of fascism? What do fascists mean by anti-rationalism, struggle, leadership and elitism, and ultranationalism? What is the relationship of fascism to the state and racism?
- Menaka Philips, “Violence in the American Imaginary: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Superheroes,” *American Political Science Review* (2022) 116, 2, 470–483

July 20 – Populism + Loki

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 8
- What explains the rise of populism? How do populists define the people and the elite? Is populism an extreme form of democracy or a reaction against democracy? What is the difference between left and right populism?
- Ezra Klein, “The best book about the 2016 campaign is a Marvel comic about Loki,” Vox 2016

July 24 – Feminism + WandaVision

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 9
- What are the origins and development of feminism? What do feminists mean by the political, patriarchy, sex and gender, and equality and difference? What is the difference between liberal, socialist, radical, and third-wave feminism?
- We Live in the World of “WandaVision” | The New Yorker
- What ‘WandaVision’ Gets Right (and Wrong) About Female Superheroes, New York Times

July 25 – Green Ideology + Avengers

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 10
- What are the origins and development of ecologism? What do ecologists mean by ecology, holism, sustainability, and environmental ethics? What are the differences between modernist, social, and deep ecology?
- First casualty of 'Avengers: Infinity War' - environmental understanding,” Yale Climate Connections, 2018.

July 26 – Multiculturalism + Guardians of the Galaxy

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 11
- What are the origins and development of multiculturalism? What do multiculturalists mean by the politics of recognition, culture and identity, minority rights, and diversity? What are the differences between liberal, pluralist, and cosmopolitan multiculturalism?
- Wilson Koh, “More Than Friends from Work: The Guardians of the Galaxy, Families, and Resilient Placemaking for Millennials,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 55, no. 8 (2022):

July 27 – Religious fundamentalism + Ms. Marvel

- *Political Ideologies*, Chapter 12
- What are the origins and development of religious fundamentalism? What do religious fundamentalists mean by modernity and religion as politics? What are the similarities and differences between Islamic and Christian fundamentalism?
- Shenila Khoja-Moolji, “Comics as Public Pedagogy: Reading Muslim Masculinities through Muslim Feminities in Ms. Marvel,” *Girlhood Studies* 8, no. 3 (2015): 22-39.

July 31 – African-American political thought + Black Panther

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Case for Reparations, *Atlantic*
- Christopher Lebron, ‘Black Panther’ Is Not the Movie We Deserve | *Boston Review*
- Melvin Rogers, *The Many Dimensions of Black Panther* | *Dissent Magazine*

August 1 – Latinidad + America Chavez

- Melissa Castillo Planas, “Superheroine Latinidad: The Diasporic Identities of America Chavez & La Borinqueña,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* Volume 54, Issue 5, October 2021, Pages 1012-1030.
- Chapter 22. Who Watches the Marvel Cinematic Universe? Race, Sex, and the Audience for Onscreen Diversity, *Bethany Lacina*

August 2 – Militarism and Captain Marvel

- Reuben Baron, “The MCU's Relationship With the Military, From Iron Man to Captain Marvel” (2019): <https://www.cbr.com/captain-marvel-mcu-military-relationship/>
- Chapter 11. Civilian Control of Superheroes: Applying What We Know from Civil-Military Relations, *Stephen M. Saideman*

August 3 – Intersectionality and the leads of Black Panther: Wakanda Forever

- Jane Coaston, “The intersectionality wars,” <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>

- 23. Geopolitical Representations of Africa through the Marvel Cinematic Lens, *Meghan S. Sanders*

August 7 – Final exam