
Semiosis of Superman: From the American Way to a Better Tomorrow

By Jordan Bailey

Introduction

This paper is designed to investigate elements of the character “Superman” through different entertainment mediums, from a semiotic [[47]] perspective. Each section focuses on the semiotic components surrounding the character in a synchronic [[60]] fashion, besides the introduction and conclusion. Most sections will discuss Myth [[29]], Narrative [[30]], Code [[2]], and any necessary context [[7]] or ideology change during the period.

The second section of the paper, titled “The Creation of Superman”, will focus on why the character “Superman” was created, the denotative [[9]] and connotative [[6]] meanings behind his character during this time, and any significant sign [[51]] creation during and around his creation in the 1930s and 1940s. Hero Code will be heavily discussed, and the relevance of any historical happenings (World War 2).

The third section of this paper, titled “Superman in the 80s”, will focus on the four live action films released from 1978 to 1987. The history and context [[7]] of the era will be discussed to understand any relevant signifieds [[55]] or symbols [[58]] that are pertinent to the period. Any relevant philosophical movements or ideologies like Modernism[[28]] and Post-Modernism[[39]] are discussed.

The fourth section of this paper, titled “Superman in Highschool”, discusses the semiotics of the live action television show titled “Smallville”, which was on air from 2001 to 2011. Although the show was on air for 10 years, there are many changes to both superman’s character and backstory by altering the lens of Superman towards an inexperienced adolescent.

The fifth section of this paper, titled “Can Superman Kill?”, discusses how superman’s character changed, thus changing the meaning of him and what he embodies. The changes occur specifically in Zack Snyder’s first rendition of the character in 2013’s Man of Steel, and any changes to his narrative [[30]] or symbol [[58]] will be discussed. Peircean theory on Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness will be explored.

The sixth section of this paper, titled “Superman: Man, or God?”, discusses Zack Snyder’s second and third film interpretations of superman, and how his symbol [[58]] changes further through his narrative, and heavy changes . Allusions to other texts [[63]] are discussed in detail.

The seventh section of this paper, titled “Superman’s a communist now?” discusses the animated movie “Superman: Red Son” and how to effectively analyze an animated movie semiotically as opposed to a live action film. Ideas on Post-Modernism are flooded throughout the film and provides a significantly different conventional symbol for Superman.

The eighth section of this paper, titled “Superman: No longer the American way?” discusses the recent change to superman’s motto officially and any other recent announcements that will further change the character of Superman. What does Superman really symbolize?

The conclusion of this paper will summarize the semiotic ideas on Superman featured throughout the paper.

The Creation of Superman

In the town of Cleveland, Ohio in the heart of the Great Depression (1938), Jewish Immigrants Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created the beloved character we know today as “Superman”. What prompted the creation of the red and blue spandex wearing superhero? The historical context of the time period and the creator’s personal lives had a direct influence on why Superman is the way that he is, but there is also an underlying code [[2]] that create the building blocks for the character.

In the book “The Quest for Meaning: A Guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice”, by Marcel Danesi, he summarizes many aspects of semiotics, including codes [[2]] within section 4. Marcel describes codes as, “systems of signs that people can select and combine in specific ways (according to the nature of the code) to construct messages, carry out actions, enact rituals, and so on, in meaningful ways,” (1). He also mentions that codes can be both natural and conventional meaning not only can these codes be produced in nature, but also by culturally specific events or traditions. For Superman, a Mythic Code is used. More specifically, he takes on his traits from the ‘hero code’: The hero comes from another world (Krypton); The hero possesses superhuman strength (Superman can fly, is bulletproof, etc.); Most importantly, the hero has a flaw that renders him vulnerable in certain conditions (Kryptonite). This makes the original pop culture ‘Superman code’ an adaptation of the ancient hero code (1).

While mentioning code, it is important to reference the terms *opposition* and *markedness*, as they play a pivotal role in both code creation, but also subsequently character and narrative creation. Codes are characterized through opposition, which in many cases is binary, but isn’t always (1). For this particular example of a Mythic Code, some examples of opposition would be: Good vs Evil, Positive vs Negative, Light vs Dark, etc. For Superman, the ‘Good vs Evil’ opposition is used extensively. Markedness deals with which side of the opposition is considered the ‘default’ or ‘preferred’ form. For the Light vs Dark opposition, light would be considered the unmarked, while dark would be marked. Therefore, Superman himself as a sign would be considered a member of the ‘Light’, and his villain would be considered ‘Dark’. While this binary view on ‘Light vs Dark’ isn’t static within Superman’s long comic book and film career, it is important to note Superman’s coded roots (1).

Moving back to the history of Superman, the character himself was most definitely the product of the time he was created. The appearance of Superman was inspired by Siegel himself, and his alter-ego ‘Clark Kent’, the reporter, was the dream job Siegel had as a child. Some of the earliest sketches of Superman depict him saving a man at gunpoint that physically looked like Siegel’s real father, who coincidentally had died during a robbery in 1932. Jerry Siegel’s wife, Joan, was also used as the visual inspiration for Louis Lane’s character (4).

After Superman had officially released in 1938, the success of the comic was based on the written material being based on real issues happening both locally and world-wide. While it first started as local accidents within Ohio, eventually Superman had to face off against World War Two’s Nazi Germany in the edition titled, “How Superman Would End the War” (4). As both creators are Jewish, it makes sense that they wanted a hero to face off against a regime with anti-Semitic rhetoric and negative stereotypes on Jewish people. Cassandra Burris mentions in her article that, Siegel and Shuster would often portray Superman protecting the weak and mistreated, and that Superman was the hero the world needed as World War II began in order to cheer people up as the world looked hopeless (4). Another important change made to Superman was his initial inability to fly. As a response to Superman, Captain Marvel was created, who could fly, and began rivaling Superman in popularity. Not too long after the release of Captain Marvel, Superman was able to fly, and the rest is history (3). Because of competition, war, the Great Depression, and many other cultural events, Superman gained his motto first in the 1940s war effort overseas, and eventually in the 1950s television show as “Truth, Justice, and the American Way” .

How does Superman 'mean' "Truth, Hope, and the American Way?" First, it is necessary to dive into the semiotician Charles Peirce's ideas on the conception of a sign, and the act of sign creation with firstness, secondness, and thirdness events. Charles Peirce believed a sign had three parts: The *representamen* [[44]], the physical part of the sign; The *object* [[33]], what the sign refers to; And the *interpretant* [[22]], the meaning we get from the encoding of the representamen on the object. With Superman as the representamen, the motto as the object, we get meaning from encoding these two together, which in turn gives us an interpretant, which also constitutes a 'derived' sign in itself (1).

Lastly, it is important to discuss Peirce's concepts of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. These are all concepts pertaining to steps of sign creation, and how specific types of signs are created. Firstness [[14]] describes the first level of meaning which is derived from sensory processes and bodily processes, or in other words, within the realm of isolated 'feeling'. Secondness [[46]] describes the second level of meaning which is derived from relating signs to one another or to other elements. Thirdness [[64]] is the third level of meaning which is derived from symbolic processes, and are signs used in conventional ways. While firstness and secondness are important aspects of meaning within sign creation, thirdness will be the basis of discussion on the semiotics of Superman, considering the vast conventional meanings given to him throughout history. The signs created as a result of thirdness are known as conventional signs [[8]] or more specifically symbols [[58]] (1). Specifically, for the 1930s, 40s and 50s, Superman is of course known as a superhero, and more specifically, an American superhero. However, when diving into the realm of thirdness for Superman, we realize what it truly means to be Superman. Superman symbolizes America's ideologies throughout World War Two, with taking down Fascist regimes, and helping out the little guy, whether that be the Jewish community, or any American civilian.

The Perfect Superman

One of the most influential superhero film franchises of the 20th century was the first live action Superman film directed by Richard Donner, and the three follow up films ending in 1987. While not all of the films in the franchise were critically acclaimed, they set the precedent for any further live action adaptations of Superman and did a fantastic job of transferring his character onto the screen. It is important to understand that not only the story and the character can change the signs and codes dealing with Superman, but also how the film itself is shot/made.

The first Superman film was titled simply, "Superman", and is known as one of the best Superman movies to date, and for good reason. The film accurately portrays Superman and transfers the aspects of his heroic code perfectly on screen. Superman's backstory is correct, coming from an alien planet as a child, landing in Kansas, and eventually leaning his powers and saving others. He captures jewel thieves, robbers, rescues a cat from a tree, saves air force one, and eventually stops evil mastermind Lex Luthor and save Louis Lane. Not only is this an accurate representation of his comic book characteristics, but it also perfectly fits his 'hero code' mentioned in the previous section (1). Matt Reeves also did a phenomenal job trying to replicate both the look, and personality of Clark Kent, and set the standard for future actors. Other film making techniques such as the score from John Williams, and the witty script helped form Superman into the Masculine and American symbol [[58]] we know and love today.

It is important to note the importance of the letter 'S' on Superman's chest, as it is described in the film as being the coat of arms for the house of "El" (Superman's real last name is 'El'). On face value, this means the symbol on his chest not only means "Superman" but his bloodline, and family. While the 'S' on his shirt is clearly indexical, it begins here to dive into the realm of symbolism (2).

Symbolically throughout these films, it is no doubt that Superman is attributed to being 'christ-like' or a God. In other words, Superman's character alludes to the Bible. While this movie wasn't the first portrayal of Superman having that connotative quality, it was the first movie people really saw what Superman could do through the live action spectacle. If you think of Superman in a conventional way, or as a symbol, he most definitely shares attributes to Jesus Christ. He came from above with extraordinary abilities and wants to help those that aren't able to help themselves. On the other

hand, symbolically, Superman is portrayed as the embodiment of America. The Red and Blue spandex correspond with the American Flags colors, and his actions represent what America believed its core values to be, "Truth, Justice, and the American Way". In other words, Superman/Clark Kent was Americas superhuman boy scout that everyone loved to love.

Even though the subsequent films began declining in quality with each new release, Christopher Reeves' rendition of Superman stayed intact, and the same American charm stayed with each film. One important note however would be the change in Superman IV: The Quest for Peace, where the story clearly promotes nuclear disarmament. During the 1980s the Cold War was still rampant, and the Arms Race was a definite fear for every American citizen involved. This push for nuclear disarmament is a clear political motive, reinforcing the idea that Superman is a symbol of American Ideals.

Superman's a Kid?

While there were many changes to how Superman was portrayed between the first Richard Donner film and the TV show Smallville, the early 2000s interpretation of Superman was widely popular and landed 10 seasons, with multiple different character arcs. This specific television series was the first television show to look at Superman through the lens of an adolescent, and all of the possible problems a child with incredible abilities would have to go through.

The reason this show is important and why it varies so differently, is because it focuses on Clark Kent and his abilities, but not the Superman counterpart. At this point, we know the character, and what he represents traditionally: America, Truth, Helping Others, Justice, etc. This show turned those expectations of Superman on its head and gave a relatable teenager who wants to be a hero but isn't quite there yet. What the show did well was illustrate to the audience that the suit isn't what makes the hero, and that pain is a part of everyone's journey.

Rather than look through every possible meaning given from each Season's arc or specific episodes, it is important to look at the show in a syntagmatic [[62]] way. The show, as a whole, is showing us what it takes to be a hero. Sure, he will eventually grow into the symbol of Superman, but the fact that the character *isn't* yet, shows *how* the character became the amazing figure. So, what does Clark Kent 'mean' within the scope of the show Smallville? Well, he is no longer the "Boy Scout of America", but rather *potential* to be a true hero and the symbol of Hope we all traditionally remember.

The show itself also changed in overall tone from the lighthearted Superman films from the 70s and 80s and took darker subject matters and tones. For example, the episode "Tomb", where the spirit of a woman is released after Clark finds a corpse in the walls of an apartment building. These dark episodes show a different side of being a hero that previous installments didn't cover. By slightly altering many aspects of what we know about Superman yet keeping many of the same morals (He still believes in justice and truth, wants to save others), it becomes far more intriguing and relatable, especially for young adults who are also growing up around this time period.

One of the most interesting and important changes made to Smallville from previous installments is the "Red and Blue Blur" story arc which takes place within the show. Rather than have Superman immediately come out as a hero figure, he is first seen as a "Red and Blue Blur" on cameras and at scenes of crimes and is seen as a vigilante in some cases. While keeping the color scheme similar to the original Red and Blue spandex, his identity is still hidden, in order to both keep his identity safe, but also those around him. So, what does this do to his characters meaning? Yet again this shows that it doesn't matter what you are wearing, who you are, what you look like, how old you are, that you can still be a hero, and do the right thing.

By the end of the show, the very last shot is Clark Kent unbuttoning into his traditional costume for the first time, completing his arc by turning him both physically and now symbolically into Superman. While he ended the show as Superman, the show allowed Superman's character to change drastically, which hadn't been done for Superman to this scope.

Can Superman Kill?

After 2006's *Superman Returns*, many audiences felt that the movies play-it-safe attitude towards the plot and character of Superman made it stale, and more of an homage to previous installments. Many films are split between the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 era tonally, with many afterwards having much darker tones. So how in the world do you make the story or character of Superman interesting and dark, but still keep the general same Heroic Code, and Superman Code? By having other characters directly combatting the morals and code of the character is one possible way. In 2013, another rendition of Superman was created and titled, "Man of Steel". Since the next three films discussed are all directed by Zack Snyder, it is important to discuss his directorial style and how it affects Superman's symbolism as well.

Man of Steel keeps most of the same aspects of the Hero Code and Superman's live action Code transparent throughout the film. Superman is rushed to earth from a dying krypton, he lands in Smallville, Kansas, and throughout the portion of the film where we see Clark as an adult, he embodies Superman both physically and characteristically. However, many of the film's conflicts lie within Clark Kent's own mind and morals. First, Clark needed to learn to control his powers, or else he would have sensory overload with all of his enhanced sensory capabilities. However, Clark still maintains his weakness of Kryptonite/Krypton's Atmosphere, which is still consistent with his Hero Code. The larger conflict within the film revolves around another Kryptonian, General Zod, who wishes to Terraform Earth into a new Krypton. The problem is, Zod is just as powerful, if not more powerful than Superman himself and Superman knows this. Clark's mental battle on whether or not to kill is evident throughout the film, especially near the end of the film where he realizes Zod will never stop fighting. Superman is forced to kill General Zod because he knew Zod would never stop otherwise. So, what does it mean for Superman's character?

One of Superman's main aspects of his character's moral 'code' is that he doesn't kill another person. The reason the exception was made within this movie was in order to humanize Superman in that moment. No person knows what it is like to be Superman or use his powers. However, the movie is able to put the audience member into the shoes of Superman and think, "what would I do in that situation?". This scene lets the viewer think for themselves, "was that morally okay to do?" or "Is Superman allowed to do that?". What makes the scene humanize Clark Kent is his moment of pain for having to do something he swore against. Allowing the audience to see the pain and exhaustion in Superman shows us how difficult it really would be to walk in the shoes of a Superhero. The symbol of Superman was meant to change by the end of the story from Hope, to possibly the same, or maybe something different, depending on each viewer's specific moral beliefs.

The letter 'S' on his chest is explicitly referenced within the movie as meaning hope rather than the house of 'El' in previous installments. While it is still indexical in referring to 'Superman', it also now connotatively means "hope". By wearing a symbol of hope on his chest, Superman himself is becoming a symbol of hope (7).

During the death scene of Zod, it is important to look at both how to analyze the scene, and specifically how to make sense of Zack Snyder's directorial style. StudioBinder lists five common techniques within Zack Snyder's directing style as: Comic books becoming storyboards, speed ramping, snap zoom, avoiding unnecessary cuts, and Zack Snyder's extensive use of color (5). Many of these techniques are used throughout the movie, and give it a dark, atmospheric tone rather than previous Superman film depictions. During Zod's death scene specifically, snap zoom is used often, color is used to depict the greyness of both the scene and the morality of the decision, and Hans Zimmer's sound design is used alongside well-timed, not overdone cuts. Zack Snyder takes many aspects of German

Expressionism into his film and emphasizes the inner thoughts and feeling of characters and moments through his stylistic elements.

Was this change necessary for Superman? It most likely depends on who you ask. However, messing with the moral compass of the viewer is no stranger to film and is often depicted in more recent films starting from the post-structuralist [[40]] and post-modern [[39]] era of cinema. Overall, because of this film, the live action Superman's code moved towards a morally grey area that many viewers don't have the answer. Superman is no longer viewed symbolically as America's Boy Scout, but rather a complex humanized character that has to fight his own moral compass, while still adhering to the Good side of the 'Good vs Evil' opposition.

Superman: Man, or God?

As a follow up to "Man of Steel", in 2016, Zack Snyder created "Batman vs Superman: Dawn of Justice". Narratively, this film dives further into messing with the moral compass of both Superman and Batman, while also making heavy biblical allusions. The main conflict within this film is that Batman hates Superman for the destruction he caused Metropolis when general Zod came, and all the collateral damage and lives that were taken because of his actions. Eventually Batman learns of Superman's morality and teams up to fight both Lex Luthor, and his creation, Doomsday. Much of the movie's conflict revolves yet again around Superman's moral code, and openly alludes to Superman being a Godlike/Christlike figure. Philosophical questions are even explicitly asked on whether or not Superman is a godlike figure, or just a "guy trying to do the right thing". The biggest question the movie poses is "how would a world with superheroes react to Superman"? In the end, Superman ends up proving himself to the world that he would give his life to save humanity and sacrifices himself to defeat the final enemy in the film, Doomsday.

The story arc of Superman in this film is very clearly a biblical allusion to Jesus Christ. A superhuman sent his son to earth to protect us, some people believe in him as a Christlike figure, some do not, but in the end, he sacrifices himself for humanity. There is still a heavy sense of opposition within this film, and a definite clear Good vs Evil, Light vs Dark, however the storyline still plays at the moral grey area of the characters in order to humanize them. Batman has to deal with understanding Superman's morality, while Superman learns what it takes to become a true hero and symbol of hope for the people.

While the movie is packed full of symbolism and countless scenes that change Superman's character, Superman's death should be focused on as a turning point for his characters code. Prior to his death, Superman's internal battles dealt with following his fathers wishes of being a hero for the world, and the opposition, the fact that not everyone agrees with him and his abilities. In many of the characters eyes, including Batman for a majority of the film, Superman is actually seen as Evil, or at least morally incorrect. How does Superman possibly become a hero for these people if he isn't accepted for trying his best? By sacrificing himself, he is able to become a savior and a martyr, and finally the symbol of hope he wished to become for the people, while at the same time becoming the symbol of a Christlike/sacrificial character at the same time.

Many of Zack Snyder's directorial techniques are used within Superman's death scene, especially through his use of darker red and orange for the surrounding fire which is an example of Peirce's firstness tendency in sign creation. The scene also depicts action sequences that rely on Zack Snyder's Comic Book style storyboards, and of course, he refrains from too many jump cuts to be able to feel what is happening on screen (5).

It is important to note that in the very last scene, the camera is fixated on Superman's coffin, and cuts to black right after dirt is seen rising above his coffin, hinting at his "resurrection" in the next film. This ending also alludes again to Superman being a savior or christ-like figure because Jesus Christ was also resurrected from the dead.

Overall, Superman kept his basic heroic code but played deeper into the moral code of Superman's character by portraying Superman on both sides of the Good vs Evil opposition. So, what is Superman? Is he a God? Is he a man? Is he Truth, Justice, and the American Way? This movie doubles down on challenging Superman's moral compass and proves to the viewers that Superman deserves the title as a symbol of hope.

Superman's a Communist Now?

There are countless animated features with Superman as a pivotal character, but one of the most recent animated movies that departs from Superman's typical code would be "Superman: Red Son", directed by Sam Liu and Written by J.M Dematteis. While it is based on the graphic novel published in 2003, the timing of the film's release is definitely influenced by political and cultural events, and conventional signs/norms [[8]].

The director Sam Liu described many of the character differences in an interview with DC and mentions the difficulty of centering Superman's character around communism. Superman's motto used to be, "Truth, Justice, and the American Way," and in this movie is changed to "As the champion of the common worker who fights a never-ending battle for Stalin, socialism, and the international expansion of the Warsaw Pact,". His values now directly line up with a historical enemy of the United States, and in return, becomes an enemy within the movie.

The actor Diedrich Bader (Voice Actor of Lex Luthor) mentions the complexity of the characters when he said,

'It's a morally complex tale. That's what's so fascinating about it. Usually, we know who the good guys and bad guys are, but in the real world it's much more complex than that. Everybody has their own interests, and their own perspective. This is a journey in animation into the moral complexity of real life,' (6)

Having both the protagonists and antagonists reside in morally grey areas, it plays with the traditional hero code and general tendency to sway towards one opposition or the other. Is Superman all of the sudden bad now that he was born in the Ukraine under Soviet Russian rule rather than Kansas? This film tries to play with audiences understanding of morality and the meaning of what Superman and the symbol of Superman actually means.

It is important to discuss in more detail the concept of post-modernism and why this film is a perfect example of a post-modern film. The Post-Modern movement was a reactionary movement to the Modernist era, where there was a general distrust in grand theories/ideologies, and characteristics such as pessimism, playfulness, and ambiguity are all prevalent. Some characteristics of Post-Modern film specifically would be: Intertextuality, Multiple interpretations, challenging basic beliefs in life, use of pop culture, and the use of hyperreality in sequences (8). Under these criteria, Superman: Red Son would definitely be considered to have Post-Modern ideologies throughout the film, considering the challenging of basic beliefs and the multiple interpretations of the characters.

Rather than break down any particular scene in this movie, it is sufficient to understand that most characters and their subsequent signs and codes for each hero in this film (Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, etc), are all flipped to the opposition in order to move away from the general push towards capitalism and understand the morals behind

the opposing side. However, each character in the film is still redeemable, and has justifiable motive rather than being all good or all evil.

Most importantly, this movie is attempting to show that just because someone or something is within the 'marked' realm of the opposition of a sign, doesn't mean they are entirely morally corrupt or evil. Villains are not black and white, but rather grey, as are some of our favorite heroes.

Superman: No Longer the American Way?

Superman was given his motto "Truth, Justice, and the American Way", in the height of World War Two when the 'American Way' was deemed the ideal. Is this still the case for today? America's values have changed drastically from the 1940s, and Superman's symbolic and connotative changes directly correlate to America's changes.

Eventually, the 'American Way' didn't seem to be the ideal anymore. For example, in Frank Miller's 1986 epic "The Dark Knight Returns", Batman needs to fight Superman. However, Superman is portrayed as a compromised figure fighting on the behalf of President Regan and now stands for nothing. Another example of a comic book artist critiquing Superman's motto would be the 775th issue in which Superman needs to fight a violent vigilante group that are willing to kill. When Superman is confronted by the leader of the group, the leader says, "Years of 'Truth, Justice, and the American military-commercial-right-wing way', and in the end, you're a spastic twitching to death for my amusement" (10).

Eric Francisco, writer for Inverse describes how throughout history, it has never been a good time for Superman, and his morals were always outdated. Eric said,

'Superman was outdated in 1938 when America was in the throes of the Great Depression and a new war loomed large. Superman was outdated in the 70s when his movie arrived in the era of Vietnam and Watergate. He was outdated in the 80s, 90s, and throughout the war on terror. He is outdated now, when the "American way" stands for income inequality, for-profit prisons, the politicization of medical science, the militarization of police against Black and brown communities, and entertaining false conspiracy theories as "balanced views";' (10).

While "Truth, Justice, and the American Way" worked as a symbol for Superman in the beginning of his creation, his character has since evolved, and it is a good thing that his motto is changing. Rather than focus on giving hope for individuals within one border, Superman is becoming a symbol of hope for the world and needs to change according to that.

Recently, in 2021, Superman's new motto has been changed to "Truth, Justice, and a Better Tomorrow". Rather than an act of political correctness or virtue signaling, this change in the motto reflects the ideals of more than the American people, but all people. Superman has always reflected how the people and Americans feel. In the world described by Eric Francisco, A Better Tomorrow is exactly what we need today rather than "The American Way".

Conclusion: A Better Tomorrow

Superman has always been one of the most influential Superhero's in historic and modern-day pop culture and is mixed well within the Semiosphere [[48]]. From Superman's creation until now, his connotative meaning and symbol has changed constantly with new political or cultural events. The beginning saw Superman as the American man doing what is right, "Truth, Justice, and the American Way", was his motto, and he perfectly embodied the mythic hero code previously seen in many other heroes. Through Peircean Semiotics, Superman's sign creation, and more specifically, the conventional signs and symbols created are described.

World War 2 and the Cold War had massive impacts on the connotative meaning of Superman, and what he represented. The people needed a hero figure to defeat Hitler, defeat KKK members, and fight in the war for nuclear deterrence. However, over time, his symbol needed to change. By the early 2000s, Superman became a role model for adolescents, and his character moved beyond the typical adult superhero lens and gave us a character in need of development and change, rather than having static characteristics.

Superman's changes through a cultural lens and through biblical allusions in Zack Snyder's cinematic universe allow for the humanization of an otherwise alien and godlike character. Picking at the morality of the characters allows for Superman's character to change conventionally, depending on the viewer's interpretation, and their own personal understandings of the moral dilemmas. Both "Man of Steel," and "Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice", pick at Superman's morality, and his moral code that makes him who he is. Throughout the films, he becomes more than a symbol for "Truth, Justice, and the American Way", but a symbol for hope, love, life, sacrifice, and even a god like figure or savior.

The most recent pushes with Superman's semiosis have had many Post-Modern depictions in film including most notably "Superman: Red Son", directed by Sam Liu. Post-Modern ideals such as ambiguity, multiple interpretations, and challenging life beliefs are all present within Sam Liu's adaptation, and give complex moral compasses for even the villains. Nothing in this new world of Superman is black and white, but rather a grey moral area.

Lastly, the importance of the 2021 motto change to Superman is important by looking at the historical context of Superman. While Superman always represented good, and justice, he was also needed at one point to promote American ideologies in a time of war, both World War Two and the Cold War. In a post 9/11 world and with a *world* that needs hope, "The American Way" was far too outdated. Superman's symbol of hope is also finally turning into a symbol for "A Better Tomorrow".