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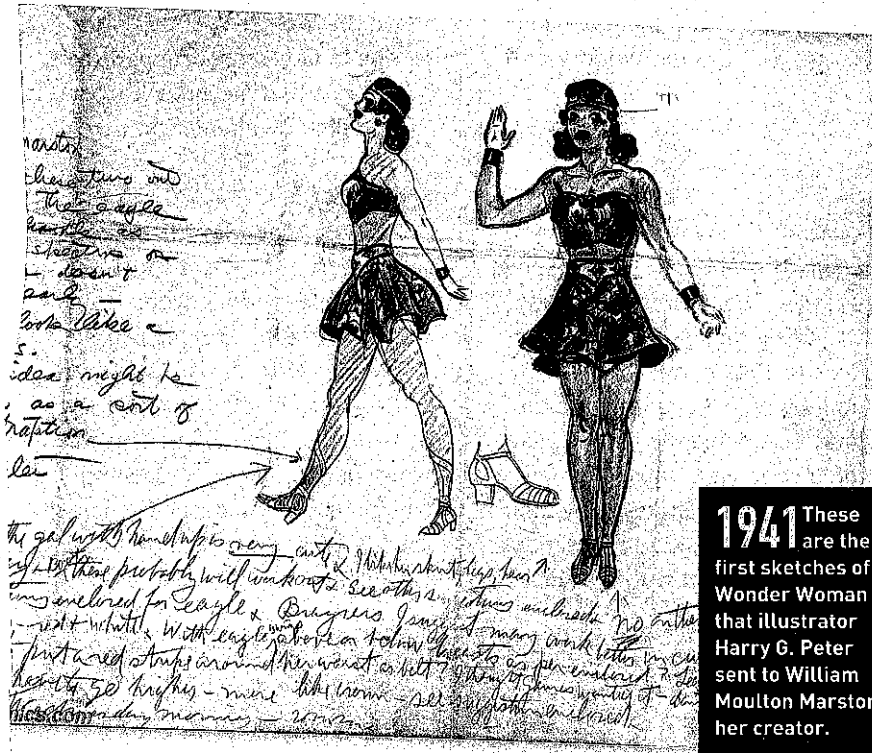
Like any superhero should, Wonder Woman came along at just the right time. She made her first appearance in the fall of 1941, when World War II had been raging in Europe for two years. The United States had managed to stay out of the fighting—so far.

When *All-Star Comics* No. 8 hit American newsstands that fall, the kids who grabbed it off the racks had no idea that in just a few weeks, the U.S. would join the conflict. What they quickly realized, though, was that something new and exciting was going on in a nine-page story called “Introducing Wonder Woman,” which appeared near the back of the 76-page comic book.

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HER WOMAN

The story behind the most popular female superhero of all time



1941 These are the first sketches of Wonder Woman that illustrator Harry G. Peter sent to William Moulton Marston, her creator.

By the end of that story, a powerful Amazon warrior princess named Diana has adopted the U.S. as her new home. Clad in a superhero costume that incorporates an American eagle and the red, white, blue, and stars of the U.S. flag, she is ready to help America defeat the evil force that is threatening Europe and the world: the Nazis.

Wonder Woman was an immediate hit with boys and girls alike. Along with Superman and Batman, she remains one of the most recognizable superheroes worldwide. They are the only three comic-book superheroes to have been pub-

lished almost continuously since their first appearance.

"To Inspire Girls to Self-Confidence"

Wonder Woman was the brainchild of William Moulton Marston, a psychologist from Rye, New York. Marston's previous claim to fame was developing one of the first polygraphs (lie-detector machines).

Marston entered the comics business in 1940, when the publisher of Superman comics hired him as an adviser. Comic books were new at the time, but they were already under attack by adults

who feared that comics were a bad influence on children. Marston, however, believed that comics could help impart positive values to kids. Not satisfied with just giving advice, he soon came up with a new character: Wonder Woman.

Then, as now, most comic-book characters were male. The few female characters were minor players with limited powers. The first Hawkgirl, for instance, was the girlfriend of Hawkman. Sometimes she would wear a spare set of his wings and his anti-gravity belt to trick bad guys into thinking that she was him. But she had no power or authority of her own.

Marston had been a supporter of women's rights since his college days. "The only hope for civilization is the greater freedom, development and equality of women in all fields of human activity," he wrote in 1942, when he revealed himself as Wonder Woman's author. (He published her adventures under the pen name Charles Moulton.)

Marston's Wonder Woman was the equal of any male superhero. Her superpowers were her great strength, speed, and smarts, plus the ability to fly. She wore bracelets that deflected bullets and a tiara that could be used as a boomerang. Her magic lasso forced anyone caught in its grip to tell the truth.

continued on p. 16

Marston said his goal was “to set up a standard among children and young people of strong, free, courageous womanhood; and to combat the idea that women are inferior to men, and to inspire girls to self-confidence and achievement in athletics, occupations, and professions monopolized by men.”

Those ideals may not seem unusual today, but they were far from common at the time. In 1941, few women worked outside the home. The 19th Amendment, which guaranteed women’s right to vote, had been in effect only 21 years.

On December 7, 1941—soon after Wonder Woman’s debut—Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. The next day,

We Can Do It!



1942 During World War II, Rosie the Riveter called on women to keep America running by taking on jobs held by men before the war.

Congress declared war on Japan and, three days after that, on Germany and Italy. By the time Wonder Woman appeared on the cover of the January 1942 *Sensation Comics* No. 1, the U.S. had entered World War II.

Real Women at War

While Wonder Woman was busy

outsmarting and overpowering bad guys in the comics, real women were doing their part for the war effort. In 1942 alone, more than 2 million women poured into the workforce, doing the jobs of men who’d gone off to fight. Women ran farms and factories; they built ships, planes, tanks, and weapons.

With still more workers needed,

an ad campaign targeted women. The most famous poster showed a character called Rosie the Riveter flexing a Wonder Woman-like muscle and declaring, “We Can Do It!”

In May 1942, a new law created the nation’s first military unit for women. More than 150,000 women joined the Women’s Army Corps, serving in noncombat support roles. Other armed service branches soon created their own female units.

Losing Her Powers

In 1945, World War II ended, and American men came flooding home. Many working women lost their jobs to the returning GIs.

Wonder Woman also lost power. Marston died in 1947, and the new writers and editors didn’t have the same commitment to symbols of “strong, free, courageous womanhood.” Wonder Woman spent less time fighting bad guys and more



2014 Meet the new Ms. Marvel, a Muslim teenager from New Jersey.

Count Us In!

Other female superheroes have made their way onto the pages of comic books over the years. Many were based on established male characters—Supergirl from Superman, for instance. Some were members of male-dominated teams, such as the Fantastic Four’s Invisible Girl (later Invisible Woman). But no female characters ever became as popular as Wonder Woman, and publishers did little to develop them.

These days, though, comics are big business. Hollywood is mining them for movies, and more women and girls are saying, “Hey, what about us?” DC and Marvel, the two biggest comic-book publishers, are finally listening.

A new raft of female superheroes has arrived, but gender isn’t the only change you’ll see in today’s comic books. The superhero universe is now more diverse than ever. Take the new Ms. Marvel (*left*). Her secret identity is Kamala Khan, a Muslim Pakistani-American teenager. After Peter Parker died, the role of Spider-Man was taken over by Miles Morales, who’s half-black, half-Hispanic. Captain America is also African-American. There are Asian superheroes too, including Yukio, a Japanese martial-arts expert who’s in a wheelchair. What kinds of superheroes would *you* like to see?

time in her regular-person identity, Diana Prince. In 1968, the writers did away with Wonder Woman's powers completely and kept her in her Diana Prince role full-time.

But with the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, women were demanding stronger female role models. In 1972, a new feminist magazine called *Ms.* turned to an old ideal: Wonder Woman as she used to be. The cover of the first regular issue of *Ms.* portrayed her as huge and powerful, striding under a headline that said WONDER WOMAN FOR PRESIDENT. Eventually, Wonder Woman's powers were restored in the comic books as well.

What Kind of Hero?

Today, there's a new wave of debate over how female superheroes should be portrayed. Some people say that too much emphasis is placed on physical beauty, skimpy outfits, and sexy poses, and not enough on smarts and strength. As Bryony Gordon, a journalist, puts it: "Why do all female superheroes have to do cartwheels in corsets and skin-tight catsuits?"

But others say that Wonder Woman can still be a positive role model. Psychiatrist Jean Kim recalls how playing Wonder Woman gave her confidence as a kid.

"[The boys] would play Batman or Spider-Man, and I could be a perfect Wonder Woman, kicking like I had tall red boots on. I even made my own perfect magic lasso," Kim wrote in *Psychology Today*. "Her influence on my self-esteem and my future aspirations cannot be undervalued; sometimes these pop cultural images and role models matter." —Kathy Wilmore

Super Facts

SUPERMAN, THE FIRST SUPERHERO, WAS CREATED BY TWO TEENS FROM CLEVELAND IN 1938. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster had no idea he would be a huge hit and spawn countless imitations. They sold the rights to Superman to the company that became DC Comics for \$130.



CAPTAIN AMERICA STARTED OUT FIGHTING NAZIS. In his 1941 debut, he knocked out Adolf Hitler with a mighty punch! Marvel stopped publishing Cap in 1950 but brought him back in 1964—and he's been popular ever since.



REPRESENTATIVE COMIC BOOK COVERS CRIME, HORROR & WEIRD VARIETY



CONGRESS INVESTIGATED COMIC BOOKS. Some parents and educators saw comic books as a bad influence on kids. Protests led the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency to investigate the industry in 1954. In response, publishers established the Comics Code Authority to set new ethics standards for comic books.

COMIC BOOKS ARE HOT AGAIN. After years of flagging sales, adults raised on comic books started buying them again. In 1970, a group of fans organized a comics convention in San Diego, California. With conventions now held all over the world, Comic-Con brings together comics creators, movie and TV stars, and thousands of fans—with many dressed as their favorite characters.

