

Superman – Champion of the Oppressed



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The following essay contains spoilers for My Adventures with Superman. However, the series may still be emotionally investing should you watch the show after reading this piece.

Any piece of media having social commentary is met with some resistance from viewers, feeling it detracts from the story, especially within high concepts. Art is meant to entertain, is it not? All stories, however, in some form or another, are based in the author's background, reconfiguring their experiences into a world that reflects reality with more fantastical elements to ease people into the themes and understand their viewpoint. Not only is all art analytical, but commentary can also make for greater conflicts and emotional resonance. None of this is new, as 1938 would see the debut of a staple in American iconography – Superman, a champion of the oppressed and to reflect the struggles of those in need.

Jewish immigration, largely from Eastern Europe, increased rapidly [between 1900 and 1924](#), with most American Jews now being born under the Star-Spangled Banner. Such a rise met increased anti-Semitism, labeled as [dangers to the American establishment](#), blamed for economic failures beyond their control, and used as scapegoats for aspiring dictators i.e., Adolf Hitler. Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, coming of age during this worldwide discrimination, created Superman by infusing their religion and experience as second-generation immigrants into comic book panels. Reworking Moses from a child escaping slavery in a basket to an alien on an escape pod from a doomed planet. Superman takes on an American identity, Clark Kent, just how Jews would adopt more commonly American names to integrate. His biological family would be referred as the House of El, common for Jewish lineage i.e., the House of David. In early stories, he'd often reminisce having never seen his homeland, Krypton being a stand-in for Israel. Some of his

first enemies were cruel landlords and exploiting businessmen, none of which were stereotypical Jews.

Judaism and immigration are essential to Superman's core, though these aspects reduced in following comic runs and adaptations, often framing Superman as Jesus figure while neglecting or even rejecting his alien heritage. With rising xenophobia in the 21st century, however, Superman as a literal, illegal alien has resurfaced, with Clark Kent facing prejudices from humans as relentless as his rogue's gallery. One such adaptation, *My Adventures with Superman*, places its central focus on the hero's struggles for identity and purpose while facing toxic elements from both Earth and Krypton. A series centered on acceptance, *My Adventures with Superman* is a layered, beautifully told immigrant story of how earnestness and a supportive community can strengthen oneself and pass on greater care to anyone escaping oppression.

Raised by Kansan farmers, Clark Kent, as a child, thinks of himself as a normal American, a view challenged upon learning his origin. When his powers first develop, Clark is confused and terrified, unsure of himself and how to live among humans. The one person who can provide guidance is Jor-El, his biological father who's conscience uploaded electronically upon his death. Due to the language barrier between them, Clark gets overwhelmed: the culture shock, referred to by his birth name Kal-El, and realizing he's not human causes him to bury the program. Refusing to embrace his origins results in a lack of understanding of himself, keeping distance from peers, and fearing everyone's safety and judgement. He becomes desperate for normalcy, when really needing acceptance both from his community and himself.



Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster applied their Jewish background when creating Superman.

Such self-isolation makes Clark introverted and socially awkward in ways that invoke neuroatypical behaviors. His struggles to control his powers prevent him from really connecting with people. Social anxieties lighten, however, upon meeting Jimmy Olsen, who recognizes Clark's oddities but also his good nature, becoming best friends. When they're hired by the Daily Planet in Metropolis, he's both challenged and supportive of fellow intern Lois Lane. His cautiousness and her bold attitudes conflict at first but soon form romantic feelings with their shared sense of integrity, wanting to report any important but overlooked conflicts in the city. They help bring Clark out of his comfort zone while accommodating for his abnormalities, even appreciating them. Although good for his human persona, his friends create anxiety for his alien side as Lois and Jimmy seek out a mysterious, super-powered being saving them from robots and supervillains. Lois especially wants full disclosure not sure what to make of this Superman, given his differences; she seeks what Clark is afraid to look any deeper.

Making matters worse, a branch of the U.S. military marks Superman as a threat, sending out highly trained soldiers or taking in his growing rogues gallery to capture the literal illegal alien. The source of such bigotry stems from attack by another Kryptonian, despite occurring too long ago for Clark to have taken part in. They aim for safety, yet they fail to account for real threats from individuals within their borders with their bigotry and short-sightedness indirectly causing more harm that Superman must prevent. This external factor prevents Clark from being transparent with his friends, especially when Lois grows frustrated with Superman's non-answers on his origins. Lack of communication results in feelings of betrayal when Lois discovers his secret identity, nearly destroying their relationship.



Superman and his support group – Lois and Jimmy.

It is not until Clark expresses his anxieties that his friends understand him; he wants to be normal but can never obtain it. Lois and Jimmy, then, help him reframe his thinking:

his background doesn't define him, it's the choices he makes. As Superman, he develops new abilities whenever his friends or Metropolis' residents are in danger. They become his support system. As Superman faces off with an energy-absorbing foe, Parasite, the reporters use their news platform to direct power away from him, giving Clark the strength to save the city. When discovering Krypton was a militant nation, colonizing planets, Clark thinks of himself and his powers as a weapon meant to conquer earth. Yet, Lois assures him that's not who he is and to not let negative stereotypes define him. However, he goes to the opposite extreme when returning to his biological father and denounces his heritage, writing it off as inherently toxic and believing him to be a warmonger. This decision he lives to regret.

That same day, Jor-El saves Clark from the lethal Kryptonite despite his son's rejection. Later the program learns English, finally able to communicate to Kal-El. Admitting his nation fell due to their own making, he explains how he and his wife sought to save their son from their empire's mistakes. Jor-El then begins to connect with his son, rescuing Lois and Jimmy from the military infiltrating the space craft that brought Kal-El to Earth. Time with his biological father starts to make Superman more accepting of his culture, proclaiming to the intruders, "This is my ship, and you're trespassing." Unfortunately, their reunion is cut short, as Jor-El, like any loving father, sacrifices himself to save Clark from Kryptonite once again, a consequence for Clark not embracing his heritage sooner. Yet before his second passing, Jor-El reveals a new opportunity to connect with his culture – his cousin, Kara.



Jor-El reconciling with his son in his final moments.

As sympathetic as his friends and parents may be, they can never be empathetic; his sense of loneliness derives from his differences and background, just as any immigrant maintaining their ethnicity in a different country. Lack of relatability becomes more apparent when his support group starts to dissolve. After Superman helps Lois reconnect

with her estranged father, she unknowingly neglects his needs, saddling her dad with him, and failing to follow up on contacting his cousin. Not helping is Clark's reluctance to further explain his needs. They grow distant, letting external factors distract them. She fails to be open with her emotions, not telling Clark when her dad runs off again, sending her into a more fragile state. Jimmy meanwhile encourages an ex-intern named Lex Luthor, and unintentionally creates a new nemesis for Superman. Lex, being the racist entrepreneur, as he's generally portrayed across media, vilifies Superman over fears of unpredictability, how he may disagree with American policies, and convinces the Pentagon to develop weapons against the immigrant. The shame takes a toll on Jimmy, to the point of ghosting his best friend. This sense of isolation makes Clark desperate, reaching out to Kara without their consent in the hopes of not being alone...only for his cousin to be a world-conquering patriot who kidnaps him.

On the surface, Kara appears to be everything Superman is not: commitment to Krypton's sense of superiority in both culture and territory, seeing any act of mercy to be a form of weakness. Clark initially writes her off as a lost cause, echoing his original sentiments to Jor-El, only agreeing to accompany her when learning there may be someone else to talk to. Any attempts to connect with her are brushed off by her rigid personality, not wanting to address any of her insecurities. She not unjustifiably addresses intolerance of Kal-El's adopted home, given his breakup with Lois but fails to accept him for who he is, wanting a warrior of a cousin. Kara is like a thick wall that Clark can't get through, until he realizes she has a mad crush on Jimmy completely decimating that wall.



Jimmy and Kara on a date, where he sees her softer side.

Prior to their meeting, Kara encountered Jimmy and essentially went on a date. It is here where she displays her hidden self: fun-loving, naïve, occasionally rebellious, and wanting to go beyond her father's restrictions. She's a first-generation immigrant: more attached to her heritage, struggling to find a new home. A few traits are also neuroatypical:

social naivety and sensitivity to loud noises, like that of Clark. Her allegiance to the empire stems less out of malice, more for purpose and to gain her father's acceptance. Clark builds off this by encouraging her own decision making and pursuing her passions. For example, he recognizes her affinity for other planets, so he gives her a chance to show her impact there. The relationship is mutually beneficial. Kara provides greater insight to Krypton's culture and their powers, intriguing Clark. Withstanding Kal-El's strength, she provides a sense of normalcy, wherein throwing hydrogen asteroids at each other to him is an ordinary snowball fight. They validate each other. Yet, like any healthy relationship, it addresses negative elements, such as the planets within the empire were not brought into prosperity but complete decimation. There Kara realizes the man, no, machine, her father truly is.

Brainiac Primus, an AI war strategist created by Krypton, upholds Kryptonian sense of superiority to an extreme, seeing any deviance from such as betrayal. An allegory for real life dictators that perpetuate negative stereotypes of immigrants and what they try to escape from. Serving as a sort of Ramesses to Superman's Moses, he purged Kal-El's kind to stay online and enslaves Kara via brainwashing. He forces her to destroy worlds resisting his rule, erases her memories, and suppress her individuality. Such manipulation is applied to Superman, as Brainiac takes advantage of Lois and Jimmy's failings, heightening Clark's negative memories while warping positive ones. Xenophobic messages are delivered by a projection of Lois, reinforced by their breakup, eradicating his support system. As Brittany Spears would put it, "When she's not with him, he loses his mind." Such anxiety forces Clark into a simulation where he forgets his life, as Brainiac takes control of his body. Yet the program makes one miscalculation: a chance for redemption.



Brainiac psychologically tormenting Superman.

Lois and Jimmy seek out the cousins to rescue Clark, though they have different methods in approaching Kara. While Jimmy saw her softer side, Lois takes her at face value

as irremediable, who would've immediately struck her with Kryptonite had Jim not talked her out of it. She's a case of how a good person can still be prejudiced, seeing Clark as "the good one," and apprehensive to any more of his kind coming to Earth. It's only when she spends more time with Kara where she gains insight to her situation, noticing the familial resemblance. Kara's awkwardness with Jimmy invokes her early days with Clark, and she selflessly protects them from the Brainiac-controlled Superman. As Brainiac's mental abuse turns physical against Kara, Lois understands Kara wasn't a criminal but a victim; a situation Lois is determined to rescue Clark from by venturing into his mental prison.

Trapped in a simulation of Krypton, Clark suffers from amnesia but retains his kindhearted personality. Lois uses this to her advantage, giving her chances to talk with him before projection of his alien parents interfere. Brainiac may give Kal-El the representation he's desired, yet it's one where his family demeans his good nature and still separated from his cousin. It's the machine's ideal world of Krypton, not Clark's. Illusions are so strong, Lois can't appeal to Kal-El logically, so she must process her own feelings, reemphasizing her acceptance of him. Meanwhile, Kara suffers from an identity crisis, coping with the harm she's caused, and rejection from her father. Solace is found within Jimmy and other Metropolis citizens, citing her cousin's resilience to help her forge her own path. Regaining confidence, she becomes something of a Miriam-figure, seeking to prevent the trauma of slavery from a family member, stopping Brainiac from destroying Earth, willing to sacrificing herself had Clark not regained control of his body. Lois and Kara prove they can go beyond their original sentiments.

The cousins' reunion is cut short, however, as Brainiac attempts to eradicate Kara's mind and forces another fight between them. Wherein their previous battle, Superman was overwhelmed by the shock of Lois' rejection and Kara's brutality, here he powers through having Lois' acceptance and an understanding of his cousin. Kara then gets the warrior of a cousin she wanted albeit untraditional, cleverly nonviolent with graceful force. Not having to hold back, he hugs her with his super strength, his first normal hug since his powers kicked in. His support group (Lois and Jimmy) is extended to her and is assured that even without their birth nation, they can share this experience, and find home within each other. Empathy and acceptance save Supergirl.



The House of El reunited.

The final battle against Brainiac encompasses all the show's strengths with thrilling action fueled by emotional moments made possible by the immigration allegory. Clark and Kara's symbiotic relationship is best encapsulated as they counter everything Brainiac throws at them: Superman for emotional stability, Supergirl for her attentiveness, and both displaying incredible powers to protect their community. Their costumes change to reflect more traditional Kryptonian clothing yet maintaining the primary color scheme, showing how they'll respect their culture while rejecting its toxic elements. They outmatch the empire, hurtling Brainiac into the sun and coming home to their chosen family. For the first time since Krypton's destruction, the House of El is made whole.

Real-world commentary is an important story device not just for representation but can deliver greater character drama. *My Adventures with Superman* is an endearing, anime-inspired series with all the escapist fun needed from a superhero story while keeping true to the character's roots. Whether it's protecting Metropolis from elites turned supervillains, combatting the worse of the U.S. Government, or saving someone from pain he shares, this Clark Kent is a champion of the oppressed; not unsimilar to Siegel and Shuster's vision, while applying to modern times. Such resilience will be necessary as the xenophobic Lex Luthor is set to be the main antagonist of the next season. Superman's struggles can be relatable to anyone who has felt like an outsider, but his immigrant status provides for greater potential in resonance, telling stories needing to be heard all while providing the joy that comes with the man who can fly.