



## A MAGAZINE OF FEMINIST, PROGRESSIVE THINKING

Search On The Issues:

Search the Archive

[Home](#)[Updates in the Cafe](#)[About Us](#)[Authors: 2012 Fall](#)[Archives](#)

*The Cafe at On The Issues Online Magazine is deepening the conversations by continually adding the insights of progressive writers, thinkers and artists on the topics we address. Check back frequently for new commentary. If you wish to contribute to the Cafe, email [cafe@ontheissuesmagazine.com](mailto:cafe@ontheissuesmagazine.com).*

We're now taking comments in The CAFE! Join the discussion.

[Back to Cafe Home](#)



## Wonder Woman Confronts a Makeover Moment: A Missed Chance

by Linda Stein

DC Comics had its chance, and it missed the moment. In wanting to give Wonder Woman a trendy present-day persona, it released her new look on June 30, 2010 in issue number 600, and passed on its opportunity to create the first non-objectified female superhero in contemporary pop culture.

DC could have done the right thing. Instead, it went for a replay of the typical male wish-list and the diminishment of women.

The comic book company claimed to [The New York Times](#) that it was modernizing Wonder Woman, bringing her “into the 21st century,” and it wanted to “be bold.” So what did it do? It catered to bottom-line male hunger and styled her as more trashy, more sexualized, more violent.

As an artist who has studied and written about [Wonder Woman](#), and referenced her in my [sculpture](#) for almost a decade, I've observed closely her beginnings as a peace-loving crime fighter, and followed her images, development and growth in the past 69 years. So it's hard to see her becoming more trappy and less focused on ethics and justice.

DC writer J. Michael Straczynski, in wanting to tackle “the wardrobe issue” and “toughen her up,” gave her a new costume, including heeled boots with spurs, bordello-red bustier top, lethal-looking biker gloves, shoulder-padded short jacket and a crop of disheveled hair that looks as if she's just been rushed from bed after a night of kinky sex. In the [Boston Herald](#) Lauren Beckham Falcone wonders how Wonder Woman could possibly fight crime in that outfit: “That’s a whole lot of costume to chase villains in.”

What’s more, the comic book company even changed her history and gave it a more violent twist, casting aside her peaceful Paradise Island upbringing and replacing it with the slaughter and destruction of her home by unknown forces, from which she is smuggled to safety -- no doubt, in the DC view, by an army of men like those who engaged in the “rescue” of U.S. soldier [Jessica Lynch](#), in a hyped and phony episode.

[Gloria Steinem](#) said in an email that she thinks DC Comics was “craziest for a) apparently not doing research with anyone who loves WW (Wonder Woman) about the re-design, and b) eliminating Paradise Island, which was always a kind of celestial C-R (consciousness-raising) group she could return to.”

In my mind, Paradise Island also made the case for women's colleges, where girls can learn and grow without worrying about the male ego and gaze. I guess the Wonder Woman team of modernizers felt left out of the sisterhood of Amazons.

In her essay for [Women's Media Center](#), Shelby Knox emphasizes the failure of DC Comics to make the modernized Wonder Woman into a feminist “win,” and questions whether the new Wonder Woman would attract the same female readership as the old: “a generation of role-model starved women, finally presented with a truly powerful heroine, proved themselves a reliable comic book fan base.” Is DC Comics primarily aiming for a male audience?

As a kid growing up, Wonder Woman was definitely my favorite role model. As I described in [On The Issues Magazine](#), she had the strength, power and *mobility* that I craved (it wasn't penis-envy that motivated me as a child; it was mobility-envy.)

Created by [William Moulton Marston](#) in 1941, Wonder Woman was the “invincible enemy of injustice” and the only female superhero of the day. I loved how she could reform the bad guys with her wit, without ever killing. Showing this peaceful presence was paramount for Marston, who thought women were more highly evolved than men and, therefore, had to lead the way toward a non-violent world. But, sadly, Wonder Woman changed after Marston died and she gradually became more and more of the bullet-breasted sex object and menacing killer that her current writers make her out to be.

What would have been my take on a modern female superhero, had DC Comics asked me? Extraordinary strength, yes. Supernatural power, yes. But strength and power combined with a calm, authoritative dignity and intelligence to bring peace and security through a gender-just society which values compassion, empathy, generosity, mutual respect, and, even if comy-sounding, “equal opportunity for all.” I'd have given Wonder Woman breast reduction, not enhancement; a sleek protective armor-like outfit, not skinny-dungaree tights. And if she's going to save the world, she'd better wear comfortable shoes.

View the new [Wonder Woman look](#), and the [author's graphic](#) take on it and [Wonder Woman's abilities](#).

July 7, 2010

[Back to Cafe Home](#)

 [ShareThis](#)

Linda Stein is an artist-activist and Art Editor for On the Issues Magazine. Her [sculpture](#) sources Wonder Woman, as does her current [blog](#) and exhibition [catalog](#).

Also see "[Wonder Woman: A Comic Book Character Shows the Way](#)" by Linda Stein in the Winter 2010 edition of On The Issues Magazine.

See "[Media Literacy: Piercing Content and Who Controls It](#)" by Jennifer L. Pozner in this edition of On The Issues Magazine.

## Comments

### Join the conversation. Leave a comment.

All comments will be reviewed before being published. This is a space for thoughtful and critical commentary; any personal attacks, abusive or offensive language, off-topic comments or comments that may be harmful to the conversation or to readers will not be published. \*All fields required.\*

Name:  Email:

Comment:




Type the text

[Privacy & Terms](#)



stop spam. read books.



[Print page](#)

[Bookmark site](#)



[RSS Feed](#)