

# [The adventurers throughout the 1940s. after they](https://assignbuster.com/the-adventurers-throughout-the-1940s-after-they/)

The novel unfolds in the United States in 1985 in analternate history.  The social group fromthe novel that will be analysed in this response is the pivotal body within theentire story and forms its title – costumed adventurers, commonly known assuperheroes, vigilantes dressed in elaborate clothing that battle crime. In thenovel, there are two distinct teams that comprise this social group withinAmerican society. There are the Minutemen and the Crimebusters. The Minutemenare the premier team of costumed adventurers throughout the 1940s. After theyare disbanded in 1949 they are replaced by the new masked crusaders whom they haveinspired, the Crimebusters. These are the main characters, consisting of theComedian, Nite Owl, Ozymandias, Silk Spectre, Rorschach and Dr.

Manhattan. The first generation of superheroes is looked upon favourably, as it is usualin comic books. They are applauded by the general public and often seen asheroes to the cause of criminal justice. However, by the time the secondgeneration picks up where the previous one leaves off, costumed adventuring hasbegun to lose much of its appeal as society begins to shift radically, especially during the 1960s when social unrest becomes much more prominent. Peoplegrow to fear and resent the masks. In 1977, the rise of lawlessness anddisorder, coupled with the perceived threat to job security that vigilantes poseto police force escalates into national police strike and subsequent widespreadriots in major cities. Following this crises, the United States Congress passesthe Keene Act that outlaws costumed adventuring and superheroes either have toregister and work for the government or retire.  Although the world of Watchmen is a fiction it isintentionally created to simulate the real world to large extent and thereforethe same laws and rules apply there.

Superheroes are dedicated to fight crimeand to protect the people (“ from themselves”, as the Comedianclaims). However, they often use coercion as means to accomplish these noblegoals and operate outside the purview of due process of law. There are variousgroups out there that perpetrate acts of violence but regardless of thejustification offered, these acts remain illegitimate.

There is only one groupwhose use of violence is considered as legitimate and  that is the state as Max Weber; a German sociologist claims in his essayPolitics as a Vocation. According to him, the state is the “ onlyhuman community/ Gemeinschaft that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order. Thedifference lies not in the act, but in the authority.  The Keene Act is a clear attempt on the partof ordinary citizens to emphasize the authority of the state over the coercivecapacity of the superheroes. However, the legitimacy of authority has never beensuch an issue and the superhero genre has taught the readers to believe theirliberty is more likely to be protected by heroes, who are above and beyond thestate, than by the bureaucrats who compromise it.  In order to better understand why charactersthat are customarily known for protecting truth, justice, and the American wayare presented as uncanny and dangerous it is needed to shed a light on thestory’s heroes. The readers are presented with a hypertrophicdevelopment of classical superheroes archetype.

With Rorschach they are givenan extreme version of the archetypal “ hard-nosed detective” character. 1Rorschachis basically Batman if he were a complete dick. Rather than being anintimidating but charming Dark Knight, he is a psychotically troubled, hideousjingoist, whose use of any means necessary is not employed against superpowered bad guys, but against ordinary people, including the poor and the old. AdrianVeidt is a megalomaniac who reduces the most basic division in internationalpolitics to a simple Gordian knot and then commits mass murder for the greatergood.  Even the heroes that work thegovernment are not any better and it is suggested in the novel that even underthe state’s aegis, superheroes are not necessarily what would be expected andcertainly not something that should be emulated. The Comedian’s behaviour inVietnam, on behalf of the state, is anything but heroic.

He is a violentpsychopath who has committed war crimes such as torture and raping women. Dr. Manhattan, the only hero possessing superpowers, ends the Vietnam War, but hedoes so with no concern for the lives he has saved or taken. These are the superheroes in Watchmen. People who become heroes to please their mothers, becauseof traumatic childhoods, repressed homoerotic urges, naively absolutist worldviewsor fetishes for costumes, equipment and night-patrols. Rather than stereotypical fantasy images of good people who act outsidean incompetent criminal justice system these heroes are disturbed, lonely, outcast, vain, shy, abused, dealing with paranoia, insanity, rape, war andnuclear holocaust amongst many other things. These realistic portraitschallenge the way the readers look at superheroes. They are not just real  within the context of comic but they are real characters, in the realworld, dealing with real issues.

If these characters are the ones who should bethe people’s watchful protectors then the public in the novel certainly have rightto be highly concerned and Juvenal’s satirical question posed centuries agoremain relevant. Heroes of Watchmenare precisely developed in order to deconstruct the very idea of the hero, overloadand thereby shatter the idealized reflection of humanity and encourage thereaders to reflect upon its significance. Traditional heroes are extendedbeyond their limits to the point where the readers come to understand thatthese fantasies, realized, become nightmares. Thus, as long as superheroesremain in fantastic realms they are not problematic but once they are placed inreality, once one imagines what the world would be like if they were among theordinary people, superheroes stop being such a comfortable concept and the readerare asked the question whether they would not in fact be better off withoutheroes. 1