

**SUPERMAN V. TRUMP: THE POWER OF PERELMAN'S MODEL
AND ANTI-MODEL IN THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ARENA**

STUDENT NAME: Jonathan Evans
COURSE NAME: Introduction to English Studies I
DEPARTMENT: Department of English

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ABSTRACT

Superman has always been political. Superman has from the get-go involved himself in politics in America by standing in as a watchful warrior for justice against the evil and corrupt. This is Superman's true power, his greatest strength: to serve as an exemplar, a model for the behavior and ideals America seeks to project. Superman is a model for what is best in us and has filled that role for decades. By contrast, Donald Trump should be an anti-model. If a model inspires us, then the anti-model should repel us. Trump lies, manipulates, demeans others, and behaves "un-Christian," and yet he is not repulsive to some. To some, many of whom have political interests of their own, Donald Trump's anti-model behavior is papered over, excused, and blow off to the effect of making him a model for behavior some might deem un-American. Reconciliation of this dilemma requires a deeper examination of how such modeling resonates so strongly to be defined for generations by a fictional character from comic book.

INTRODUCTION

From his very first adventures in *Action Comics* #1, Superman has always been political. In his first adventure he fought for justice, often clashing with political figures and entities along the way. He broke into the governor's mansion to save an innocent woman and kidnapped a corrupt lobbyist who was trying to push through an arms bill. Superman's creators Jerry Siegel and Joel Shuster even wrote and created a story for *Look* magazine in 1940 entitled "How Superman Would End the War." In the story he accomplishes this by kidnapping Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia respectively and dropping them off at the League of Nations headquarters in the Hague, Netherlands to stand trial. Superman has also from the get go been a model of the behavior we should want to emulate. Chaim Perelman and Laurie Olbrechts-Tyteca, in *The New Rhetoric*, note that a model as "incit[ing] to an action" others for the positive (262), while an anti-model, say a Lex Luthor, should cause us to turn "away from his course of action" (367). Somehow, mainly by ascending to the presidency, Trump has perverted this paradigm of what constitutes a model vs. anti-model. More than ever, we need Superman to help set this perversion, this alternate version of America, from becoming the reality we will wish to undo every chance we get.