

MEMORANDUM

Privileged and Confidential

TO : ANTI-VIGILANTE TASK FORCE (GROUP)
FROM : AGENT DALE PETEY
DATE : SEPTEMBER 8, 2019
SUBJECT : “AMERICAN HERO STORY”

The subpoena worked. I have seen the first two episodes of *American Hero Story: Minutemen*. And I am deeply disturbed.

It alarms me that the media has praised this program. Are journalists these days not taught to research the subjects they write about? Or is the truth as boring to them as it is to J.T. March III, the pretentious provocateur (and suspiciously reclusive) writer who has authored this corrupt entertainment? Instead of leaning solely into documented and verified events to tell the origin story of the masked vigilante culture that is our jurisdiction to police, *American Hero Story: Minutemen* relies on sensationalistic fabrications that are more interested in advancing a political agenda than educating or entertaining an audience. The liberties taken by March and his collaborators (including Edwina Taylor, a director of dubious pedigree) are extreme and unabashedly prejudicial. I am dismayed by the prospect of impressionable viewers filling their heads with the show’s willful revisionism and spurious role models; it’s not just alt-history masquerading as real history, it’s that most tired and problematic of things, an anti-hero drama. And I hurt for the real people who suffered or inherited the horrors “dramatized” here — including a very esteemed colleague of ours — and are being made to suffer them all over again, albeit in warped form that adds insult to injury by misrepresenting the traumas that made them or defined them.

What is the point of this *American Hero Story*? Why must it even exist?

At another time, I shall produce an itemized fact-check of the show’s aberrations and a detailed threat assessment of potential cultural influence. (Sneak preview: It’s Bad. Really, really bad.) For now, here’s an overview of its wrongheaded creative strategies.

The Treatment of Hooded Justice

While masked vigilantism is an ancient practice, the modern phenomenon began in 1938 with a never-identified mystery man who dressed up as a fanciful medieval hangman and patrolled the meaner streets of Queens, New York, targeting street thugs, local gangs, stick-up crews and mob racketeers. We know little about the historical Hooded Justice; he was so mysterious and feared, some criminals who had the misfortune of crossing his path — and lived to tell the tale — told police they were certain he had supernatural abilities. The evidence we possess indicates a man who was, in fact, a mere mortal, albeit one of uncommon physical strength, and who acted out of deeply felt principles and a clear-eyed moral code. He disappeared in 1955 after refusing to testify before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee and reveal his identity to a sitting senator from his home state.

There is an additional body of lore attached to Hooded Justice derived entirely from gossip, hearsay, and conjecture. No responsible scholar of masks takes this tawdry Apocrypha seriously, and no ethical storyteller would bring it into the main of popular culture. But for the misguided “auteur” of *American Hero Story: Minutemen*, the mythology of Hooded Justice is all that matters: March uses these illegitimate and

extra-curricular tales to craft his very weird, almost incoherent Hooded Justice to the near exclusion of anything else.

Many of the dubious legends about Hooded Justice come from the spotty memory of Hollis Mason, the first Nite Owl and a founding member of the battalion of “costumed adventurers” that gives this season of *American Hero Story* its title. In *Under the Hood*, his sloppy and sentimental 1963 “memoir” (a designation that gives it license to take license), Mason reported that Hooded Justice was heard “openly expressing approval for the activities of Hitler’s Third Reich.” It’s a mere aside, and a reckless one, too, as it’s presented without contextual dating or elaboration. Nonetheless, Mason’s glibness has inspired a considerable amount of cynical speculation over the years. Was Hooded Justice anti-Semitic? Was he a Nazi? Was he a secret agent of the Soviet Union? (The U.S.S.R. had a non-aggression pact with Germany from 1939 to 1941, the early years heyday of the Minutemen.) Mason clearly favors the latter possibility in his memoir. A political conservative infected to some degree by the period’s Red Scare paranoia (he was an avid reader of *New Frontiersman*), Mason suggests, in a seemingly innocent ‘just thinking aloud’ sort of way, that Hooded Justice was a communist subversive named Rolf Muller who was conveniently found murdered shortly after Hooded Justice disappeared. There is no proof to support this claim; it’s akin to the imaginative “fan fiction theorizing” that fills so many pop culture ‘zines. Furthermore, Mason made it clear in subsequent interviews that he believed Hooded Justice to be same-gender-attracted and enmeshed in a relationship with Nelson Gardner, aka Captain Metropolis, a relationship Mason designated as deviant, exposing either his own homophobia or his own sexuality. I say this not because he costumed himself in a tight pair of trunks with cleanly shaved legs, but because Mason was never known to be with a woman and died a bachelor.

And yet, *American Hero Story: Minutemen* treats Mason’s masturbatory musings as meaningful seed. The first episode begins with a cryptic flash-forward to the discovery of Muller’s corpse, suggesting that this will be the final destination of the season. (The scene shows police fishing the body out of Boston Harbor; he was actually found washed ashore. Whatever.) But then, it appears that March is obsessed with every fringe perspective on Hooded Justice: the use of voiceover to get inside the character’s head (abandoning all trust that an audience would understand the imagery without it being explained to them verbatim) would have us believe Hooded Justice suffered from a multiple personality disorder. How preciously novel. And what garbage.

The Treatment of the Comedian

The fairness owed to *American Hero Story: Minutemen* is that Edward Morgan Blake, aka the Comedian, was a public figure, as he was a controversial agent or “super-soldier” of the United States government. Most of his missions remain classified. The few we know about — such as his successful rescue of American and Canadian hostages taken by anti-Manhattanite jihadists in Iran in 1979 — are disturbing because of Blake’s notoriously violent methods. (The individuals he brought back alive suffered from PTSD for years, mostly from witnessing the sadism Blake inflicted upon their captors.)

One can imagine a serious artist wanting to dissect such an extreme personality using informed fiction as a scalpel. Yet *American Hero Story: Minutemen* isn’t interested in an educated exploration of Blake’s pathology. Instead, it turns the Comedian into a polemic about mid-century “toxic masculinity.” March has invented an origin story montage – set ironically to “You Gotta Eat Your Spinach, Baby” by Shirley Temple — in which a teenage Blake exacts vengeance against bullies by aping the brutal behaviors of wisecracking tough guys depicted in comic books of the period, and then becomes a bully himself. The montage continues. Inspired by newspaper coverage of Hooded Justice, Blake breaks into a costume supply store, steals a domino mask and a yellow jumpsuit, and starts roaming the waterfront sections of Depression-era New York at night, addressing even the smallest spot of trouble with a shocking degree of ultra-violence, whether it’s clearing an underpass of a homeless encampment or stopping a sexual assault behind a roughneck bar, cracking terrible, corny one-liners at every turn.

Again: these scenes are fiction, as March himself admits during one of the show's post-credits behind-the-scenes segments. the Comedian of *American Hero Story: Minutemen* is merely a construct of March's dim regard for his own gender. (And, perhaps, his grievances with Blake? March's grandfather was James Trafford March, a renowned science fiction writer and political activist who was "nasty number 69" on the previous president's notorious enemies list. He disappeared in 1985; does his grandson believe that the Comedian was responsible?)

Now let me be clear. In standing up for the historical Comedian, I am in no way condoning his worst aspects. On the contrary! I fully subscribe to the critiques of machismo in so many of our better, more prestige pirate movies and TV shows, and I have always been concerned that these kinds of anti-hero characters romanticize the very archetypes they deconstruct. My concern here is for accuracy. As a scholar of history, I must always take the position that truth is more compelling than anything anyone can make up.

The Treatment of Silk Spectre

Of course, one can't speak of how *American Hero Story's* depiction of the Comedian's ultimately short stint with The Minutemen without also addressing the show's treatment of Sally Jupiter (nee Juspezyk), aka Silk Spectre, given the horrific crime that binds them, as well as their living legacy who now works among us. I wish to be sensitive to Agent Blake, given the regard she had for her late mother. But the regrettable fact is that the show embraces the specious rumors of decades that there was nothing authentic about Jupiter's expression of costumed adventuring. The second episode depicts her as a celebrity-seeking hustler, conspiring with her agent and an underworld associate to stage choreographed street fights with burlesque actors paid to pose as costumed criminals. It also shows her all too willing to exploit her sexuality in degrading ways for fame and fortune. The characterization is sympathetic; Jupiter's choices are presented in the context of a sexist society that demeans her and leaves her with no good options for empowerment and self-realization. Still, the show implicitly and explicitly pits Jupiter against the Minutemen's only other female member, Ursula Zandt, aka Silhouette, in an unfair study of contrasts between a pair of proto-feminists; the show's admiration is clearly for Zandt. In short, Sally Jupiter deserves better. And she won't, not from this show: the previews for the weeks to come indicate that March intends to dramatize "the incident." Shame on him.

My condolences, Agent Blake. You deserve better, too. I wouldn't advise watching; but as you do not read these memos nor know I exist, I have every reason to believe you will tune in with millions of others as every airship and bus in America is demanding that you do.

Maya Angelou once said, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again." It would appear she was unfamiliar with reruns.

I have suffered through two episodes of this dreck... I am not looking forward to the third. But I will watch. For if no one stands up for history, then why write it in the first place?

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dale Petey". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Special Agent Dale Petey

Anti-Vigilante Task Force/Research Unit
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