*The Dark Knight* critical articles

**CONSIDER:** Can the movie be characterized as neo noir? Could the trilogy be considered neo-noir?

**SOURCE 1:** “Showdown in Gotham Town-THE DARK KNIGHT**,”** *New York Times***,** [MANOHLA DARGIS](https://www.nytimes.com/by/manohla-dargis) JULY 18, 2008

… Instead, like other filmmakers who’ve successfully reworked genre staples, Mr. Nolan has found a way to make Batman relevant to his time — meaning, to ours — investing him with shadows that remind you of the character’s troubled beginning but without lingering mustiness. That’s nothing new, but what is surprising, actually startling, is that in “The Dark Knight,” which picks up the story after the first film ends, Mr. Nolan has turned Batman (again played by the sturdy, stoic Mr. Bale) into a villain’s sidekick…That would be the Joker, of course, a demonic creation and three-ring circus of one wholly inhabited by [Heath Ledger](http://movies.nytimes.com/person/268296/Heath-Ledger?inline=nyt-per).

A self-described agent of chaos, the Joker arrives in Gotham abruptly, as if he’d been hiding up someone’s sleeve. He quickly seizes control of the city’s crime syndicate and Batman’s attention with no rhyme and less reason. Mr. Ledger, his body tightly wound but limbs jangling, all but disappears under the character’s white mask and red leer. Licking and chewing his sloppy, smeared lips, his tongue darting in and out of his mouth like a jittery animal, he turns the Joker into a tease who taunts criminals ([Eric Roberts](http://movies.nytimes.com/person/108473/Eric-Roberts?inline=nyt-per)’s bad guy, among them) and the police ([Gary Oldman](http://movies.nytimes.com/person/53946/Gary-Oldman?inline=nyt-per)’s good cop), giggling while he-he-he (ha-ha-ha) tries to burn the world down. He isn’t fighting for anything or anyone. He isn’t a terrorist, just terrifying.

Like almost every other character in the film, Batman and Bruce included, Harvey and Rachel live and work in (literal) glass houses. The Gotham they inhabit is shinier and brighter than the antiqued dystopia of “Batman Begins”: theirs is the emblematic modern megalopolis (in truth, a cleverly disguised Chicago), soulless, anonymous, a city of distorting and shattering mirrors.

From certain angles, the city the Joker threatens looks like New York, but it would be reductive to read the film too directly through the prism of 9/11 and its aftermath. You may flash on that day when a building collapses here in a cloud of dust, or when firemen douse some flames, but those resemblances belong more rightly to our memories than to what we see unfolding on screen. Like any number of small- and big-screen thrillers, the film’s engagement with 9/11 is diffuse, more a matter of inference and ideas (chaos, fear, death) than of direct assertion. Still, that a spectacle like this even glances in that direction confirms that American movies have entered a new era of ambivalence when it comes to their heroes — or maybe just superness.

**SOURCE 2:** “No Joke-The Dark Knight,” Slate.com**,** [Dana Stevens](http://www.slate.com/authors.dana_stevens.html), July 17, 2018

There's an undeniable sense of one-upmanship at work in this sleek, luxurious-looking production—a subtext of "Oh yeah? Top this." But for all The Dark Knight's occasionally bombastic excess, it sort of does top them all, and not only in star power and sheer number of things blown up. Nolan turns the Manichean morality of comic books—pure good vs. pure evil—into a bleak post-9/11 allegory about how terror (and, make no mistake, Heath Ledger's Joker is a terrorist) breaks down those reassuring moral categories.

The first images of the movie include huge clouds of smoke billowing from an unknown source and the sheer face of a glass-and-steel skyscraper suddenly torn open by an explosion. Granted, what we're witnessing is only a bank robbery in progress, but once the association has been put in place, it stays: Just as the United States can never get back to what it was before those hijackings, Gotham will never be the same after the appearance of the Joker. The bank job is a success, thanks to this initially masked madman's simple criminal strategy: Get five guys to help you rob a bank, agree to split the take six ways, then shoot each man in the head as soon as his part of the job is done.

The long, intricately braided story that follows will include vast wiretapping networks, suicide-bomb threats, and moral clashes over torture and prisoners' rights. In short, Chris Nolan does more nuanced thinking about the war on terror than we've seen from the Bush administration in seven years. And despite a falsely heroic closing speech from Gary Oldman's character, police Lt. Jim Gordon, the movie seems to arrive at much the same conclusion about Batman as Americans have about Bush: Thanks to this guy, we're well and thoroughly screwed.

…[The Joker is] He's indifferent to money, power, and his own survival; he just wants, in the words of Batman's butler Alfred (Michael Caine), "to watch the world burn."

A colleague with whom I saw the movie felt that Nolan's use of 9/11 references was exploitive, that he was tapping into our deep cultural anxiety about terror just to spice up his blockbuster. After a second viewing, I vigorously disagree. The use of 9/11 would be exploitive only if Nolan didn't care about thinking through 9/11 for its own sake, as he clearly does. The Dark Knight was co-scripted by Nolan and his brother Jonathan (a fiction writer who also wrote two earlier Nolan films, [***Memento***](http://www.slate.com/id/102536/) and [***The Prestige***](http://www.slate.com/id/2151861/)). The Nolans' closing vision of the state of Gotham City—a pessimistic landscape of corruption, chaos, and fear—may not be to every viewer's taste. But at least it's a vision, one that, as Sept. 11 draws near again, looks disturbingly familiar.

**\*After watching clips from *The Dark Knight Rises***

**SOURCE 3**: “CHRISTOPHER NOLAN’S BATMAN: A HERO FOR THE ONE-PERCENT?” *Newsweek*, [WILL BROOKER](http://www.newsweek.com/authors/will-brooker), 7/16/12

Four years after his last outing, Christian Bale returns to his bat suit in *The Dark Knight Rises* (in theaters July 20), the final installment of director Christopher Nolan’s trilogy. The buzz around the highly guarded film is that Nolan has shifted his political messages (which are, to his credit, never black or white, red or blue). Just as he demonstrated that caped vigilantes could still be relevant post-9/11—that they could not only echo a changed world but reveal something new about it—he’s now reflecting the fractured culture of our new decade back at us.

Batman’s new nemesis, Bane (Tom Hardy), is literally a mass of muscle, a one-man mob, but his real threat is that he’s the charismatic leader of a collective. He leads a crowd; he inspires and commands followers. By contrast, Batman/Bruce Wayne starts to look like a privileged 1 percenter, a bourgeois capitalist facing an angry city. There’s a storm coming, Selina Kyle warns him, “and when it hits, you’re all gonna wonder how you could live so large and leave so little for the rest of us.”

And so Batman himself will have to change, to attune himself to the new mood and new language of the city and its crowds, if he’s going to survive. Sound familiar? It was perhaps easier terrain for Nolan to navigate when real-world concerns began to overlap with the film. News broke that Nolan was shooting footage around the Occupy Wall Street protests last year, and in November 2011 Occupy protesters shone a Bat signal at a New York skyscraper, replacing the familiar insignia with “99%” and consciousness-raising slogans.

The world really did change, in the space of a few seconds, on Sept. 11, 2001, and for a while superheroes almost seemed redundant, pointless, even tasteless. How could we watch costumed characters swinging around skyscrapers and knocking down city blocks when real-life horror had hit New York?

Somehow Nolan managed to do it with a deft touch. His Gotham City is New York or Chicago shifted a little into comic-book territory, but still recognizable and real. Gotham takes the good and the bad of our major cities, digs into our hopes and worries, and throws them up on a big screen. And, sometimes, the figure projected from our shared cultural concerns is a mob (Bane’s army) or a monster (Joker).

In 2008’s *The Dark Knight*, Joker, played by Heath Ledger, was a terrorist, and the key question became: how far can we go to fight terror with terror? Are we justified in taking the gloves off—as Batman does when he has Joker locked in an interview room—and beating a suspect in a ticking-bomb scenario, brutalizing one person to potentially save the lives of others?

Nolan has always made us find our own answers, and the ambiguity could be what made the trilogy such a success. With the presumed end of his Dark Knight, we’ll have to turn back to films that rely more on CGI spectacle than introspection. His Batman is a complex hero—walking the border between law and order, terror and counterterror, the people and the privileged. That’s why we keep coming back to his stories, to tell us something about our world and all its dilemmas. He’s no clean-cut Superman, but he’s the hero—and sometimes anti-hero—America needs.

**SOURCE 4:** “DONALD TRUMP MAY SEEM LIKE BANE, BUT BATMAN WOULDN’T SAVE US,” Newsweek, [SRECKOHORVAT,](http://www.newsweek.com/user/23825)1/23/17

Just after [Donald Trump's inauguration speech](http://europe.newsweek.com/trump-team-welcomes-alternative-facts-assault-media-546091) many [noticed](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70hIxu4WCmM) how Trump's claim that “we are transferring power from Washington DC and giving it back to you, the people” had an uncanny echo of those spoken by Bane, the masked villain played by Tom Hardy in Christopher Nolan’s 2012 film [The Dark Knight Rises.](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jul/16/the-dark-knight-rises-first-review) “We take Gotham from the corrupt! The rich! The oppressors of generations who have kept you down with myths of opportunity, and we give it back to you… the people,” Bane declares in the movie.

But besides this direct link between Trump and Bane’s words, the Christopher Nolan-directed Batman films are a surprising source of political reflection. The references to Bruce Wayne’s elite status and the way in which Bane plays on populist fears both have parallels in the real world.

The scene that best sums up the universe of Nolan's [Batman](http://europe.newsweek.com/why-ben-affleck-no-hurry-make-batman-standalone-movie-531362) takes place during a gala charity dinner for Gotham’s elite. Catwoman, jewelry thief extraordinaire, confronts our hero, whispering in his ear, “There’s a storm coming, Mr. Wayne. You and your friends better batten down the hatches, because when it hits, you’re all gonna wonder how you ever thought you could live so large and leave so little for the rest of us.”

If The Dark Knight (2008), which confronted the ethics of concealing the truth for the sake of a “higher good,” [perfectly painted](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQNeqeVpHF0) Bush's era and the world after 9/11, then The Dark Knight Rises served as an illustration of the world to come: the Trump era. If The Dark Knight showed that eavesdropping on citizens was for their own good when Batman created a huge surveillance network in order to find the Joker, then The Dark Knight Rises revealed that Batman’s real power is actually based on the stock market speculation. Without that, Batman is nothing.

This is why the Joker in The Dark Knight intended to stop only when Batman took off his mask and revealed his true identity: the person underneath the mask is not a genuine philanthropist who cares about the welfare of his fellow citizens. Batman cannot be separated from Bruce Wayne, the man who made his fortune on the stock market.

In this sense, Batman is a member of what the Occupy Wall Street movement called the 1 percent, wielding power and representing the existing order. Isn't that precisely the establishment Trump was opposing? Didn't Bane also [attack the stock exchange](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAjEW2zgs_o)when one of the traders shouted, “This is a stock exchange! There’s no money you can steal!” and Bane retorted in Trump style: “Really? Then why are you people here?”

But what was the “storm” referred to by Catwoman at the beginning of the film? Was the real storm to be found in the [Occupy Wall Street](http://europe.newsweek.com/wall-street-lawyer-arrested-talking-occupy-wall-street-protester-lawsuit-273337) movement—happening at the time Nolan was shooting his movie—or was it that the rage of 99 percent against the 1 percent was instrumentalized by Trump, rather than transforming itself into a real force able to tackle the establishment?

The true lesson of Nolan's film for the Trump era is the following one: there is no Batman to get us out of the current deadlock, because Batman is already part of the problem. And Bane is just the other side of the coin.