

Did You Say “Variation”? (II)

Color Variations: When the same covers have different shades of the same color, does that constitute a legitimate variation?...in 99.9% of the cases...No! There can be any number of different reasons for various shades on otherwise identical covers. The two biggest factors are 1) the position of those covers in that particular run during the printing process, and 2) fading (we’re basically talking about the background colors here). I’ve seen some pretty obvious shade differences in similar covers (i.e., dark brown as opposed to light brown), but such differences are usually due to the ink running low during the printing process. Thus the cover near the beginning of the run comes out ‘normal,’ while the cover towards the end comes out light.

The same can be said of many shade differences in text, but there are some other factors when we get to the color of text. Probably the most common culprit here is discoloration, and the most obvious examples are older covers in which text printed in either gold or silver has tarnished to such an extent that the text you actually see now is black!

Also, it should be noted that on many of the older covers, the heavier, more absorbent paper stock was also a factor in producing different shades of the same color. Depending on how much of the background color was absorbed into the paper, yellow text printed on a dark brown background, for example, could appear as various shades on brown.

None of the above would qualify as legitimate variations, but, as usual, color errors would. For example, a cover which exhibits missing colors, misplaced or off-center colors, smeared colors, etc. would be a distinct variation.

Size Variations: We don’t normally see size variations on otherwise similar covers, since sizes are standardized. For example, a businessman ordering a reprint in 2001 of a run of covers that was originally produced in 1999 could expect some minor color differences, perhaps, but a 20-strike from Atlas in 1999 would be the same size as a 20-strike reordered from Atlas in 2001. The same would hold true if the cover in question had originally been ordered from Diamond and then reordered, say, from Universal.

On the other hand, you could point to a few exceptions. Theoretically, at least, the most obvious example would be the size difference between, say, that Diamond cover above and the same cover reprinted by D.D. Bean, a company which has been notorious for producing shorter-than-normal 20-strikes (i.e., just look at how they’re always falling out of your slotted album pages!). You might also notice, as a further example, that the same 30-strike manufactured by Monarch was a little wider than the Universal version. Similarly, a cover printed by Crown compared to the same cover produced by Match Corp. would be quite noticeably slimmer.

But, that’s all neither here nor there. About the only legitimate size variation you’re going to run across is the same cover produced both *before* the advent of vending machines and *after* the advent of vending machines (1937). That’s when the changeover took place from the ‘tall’s’ or ‘XL’s’ to the shorter lengths we have today. The vending machines necessitated the shortening of the matchbook. Thus, there are some nice variations to be seen in the same covers when looking at earlier Federals compared to later Federals, earlier Stars compared to later Stars, and so forth.

Error variations in size would include something like non-parallel sides.

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