A Hero for a Good War: Captain America and the Mythologization of World War Two

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Introduction

In March, 1941, months before the United States would officially enter the Second World War, Adolf Hitler took a massive hit from American forces. The strike was orchestrated by two Jewish-Americans, and was witnessed by well over a million people. The event in question was not a military operation, nor was it strictly-speaking real, but it nonetheless helped shape the American perception of Hitler, Germany, and the war in Europe.

This historic meeting between Adolf Hitler and the fist of American heroism took the form of the publication of the first issue of Captain America from Timely Comics. The cover of issue one featured a star-spangled Captain America in a room full of Nazis, punching Hitler in the face hard enough to knock him over. At no point in the actual story does Cap actually encounter Hitler, much less punch him in the face, but this didn’t seem to be a problem to readers. This issue was wildly successful and sold over a million copies, securing Captain America’s existence as an American wartime staple before the war had even officially started for Americans.

Captain America #1 started a trend that would carry on past the war – the blurring of the line between fiction and reality when it comes to the major players of World War Two. Hitler, who was a very real human being, and a very real threat to western democracy, was made into a comic book villain, both literally and figuratively. Literally, Hitler and the Nazi party were the villains Captain America was fighting in each issue of the comics, but figuratively, and more

interestingly, Nazis are remembered as being something analogous comic book villains. “Nazi” is still an insult, despite the fact that World War Two ended seventy years ago, and the Nazi party hasn’t been a threat since. This phenomenon can be attributed, at least in part, to very successful indoctrination by way of propaganda, especially the propaganda directed at children, like comic books. By making the real-world major players of World War Two, especially America’s enemies, into fictional characters in a medium as easily consumed as comics, *Captain America* helped to mythologize the war and its participants.

When I say “mythologize,” I don’t simply mean that we remember the war as a narrative – people have a tendency to do that with most historical events. A narrative becomes a myth when public memory ascribes a morality to that narrative. American tradition remembers World War Two not as a multi-nation war fought between the Allies and the Axis, but rather as a moral conflict between Allied “good guys” and Axis “bad guys. In 1984, Studs Terkel coined the moniker that would stick: “The Good War.” The narratives that came out of World War Two, about duty, sacrifice, and heroism, played into American rhetoric and national identity, and these kinds of narratives created the “Good War” myth. Captain America is only one such narrative that lent itself to mythologizing the war, but it is an excellent example because the comics were purposely nationalistic, profusely distributed, and marketed to children.

In this paper, I will only be examining *Captain America* comics that were published in 1941, that is, before the United States was militarily involved in the war. From the very

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2 John Bodnar, *The “Good War” in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 7. Also according to Bodnar, public memory of the war relies on “mythical figures” in order to “rub out the remembrance of events and actions that threatened to undermine faith in a liberal creed or hold the political community accountable for its misdeeds.” In other words, without mythical figures, we would have to remember history as it happened, rather than as a moral myth. Bodnar calls this “memory without accountability and anguish” (Bodnar, 7).

3 Age is important when discussing the blurring of fiction with reality, because the line is much blurrier for children, who have not experienced as much reality as older people.
beginning of its run, the series was in a historically perfect place to be both very successful and very influential. For one, comic books offered the perfect for telling nationalist superhero stories, and the creators of Captain America caught the comics industry on an upswing. Secondly, World War Two had been raging in Europe for almost two years, but hadn’t yet started for the United States. The “yet” is operative here, since the climate of American politics was slowly shifting away from isolationism, which meant that politically (and propagandistically) the American public was receptive to a nationalist superhero to combat the fear of the war that was on America’s doorstep. Finally, since Captain America was a comic series, as opposed to being a series of novels or films, it was an inexpensive, easily-consumed way to tell stories en masse. Captain America comics therefore created a perfect storm to not only expressed the sentiments of their day, but reinforced them in the minds of the people (mainly children) reading them, and consequently mythologized the major players of the war by putting very real people, like Hitler, in the same realm as the mythical Captain America.

Background

a. The United States, 1939-1941

In order to understand where American comic books fit into the world in which they were created (the late thirties and early forties), it’s necessary to first have a basic understanding of the political and social climate in the United States during the beginning of the Second World War. After years of the Allies trying to appease Nazi Germany through diplomacy in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid another catastrophic war, World War Two officially broke out in Europe at the

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4 This was, after all, only about twenty years after the end of the First World War, which devastated the European continent; appeasement lasted as long as it did (through most of the mid-to late thirties) because nobody wanted to end up in another world war.
beginning of September, 1939. On the first of the month, Germany invaded Poland, and on the third, both Britain and France declared war on Germany.\(^5\) In response, America declared neutrality, which would remain its military stance for the next two years.

This is not to say, however, that the United States was truly neutral during the first two years of the war. Despite the fact that the both the American public and its government were in favor of remaining isolated, President Franklin Roosevelt recognized from the beginning that there was a chance that the United States would end up involved in some capacity or another in fighting the war, as expressed in the Fireside Chat he gave on September 3, 1939 (the same day that Britain and France declared war). If nothing else, the outcome of the war would have an effect on the future of the United States. The goal of the war, Roosevelt said, was peace, and America had an interest in working with Europe towards peace. As he told his audience, “Passionately though we may desire detachment, we are forced to realize that every word that comes through the air, every ship that sails the sea, every battle that is fought does affect the American future.”\(^6\) It is for this reason that Roosevelt did not expect nor encourage the American people to remain impartial in their opinions of the war, saying that, “[The United States] will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well. Even a neutral has a right to take account of facts. Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or close his conscience.”\(^7\)

This Fireside Chat basically sums up the approach America would take to the European war until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The United States would not be


\(^7\) Roosevelt, “On the European War.”
impartial, and it would do what it could to influence the course of the war without being militarily involved. The problem, from an interventionist standpoint, was that the amount of influence the country could exert was limited. The 1930s were freckled with Neutrality Acts that were intended to legally bar the United States from entering into the conflicts that European countries were already getting into.\(^8\) The Neutrality Act of 1935, for example, included an arms embargo, travel ban, and the prohibition of lending money to belligerent nations (that is, nations in conflicts). In 1937 the Neutrality Act was revised to include the “Cash-and-carry” provision, which allowed the United States to sell goods to belligerent nations, so long as those good were not weapons, and so long as said nations could pay for them and ship them. At the time, the 1937 revision seemed a reasonable compromise to both Roosevelt, who recognized the distinct possibility that America might end up in another European war, and the isolationist majority in Congress, who wanted nothing to do with a possible European war.\(^9\) After the Allies officially declared war on Germany in September 1939, the Neutrality Act was revised yet again. This time, the arms embargo was discarded, which meant that the United States could sell weapons to Britain and France.\(^10\)

This was the world in which Captain America was born: one of impartial neutrality, in which the government was selling weapons and supplies to its political allies (that is, other democracies), and in which eighty-four percent of the American public described themselves as pro-Ally.\(^11\) It really isn’t any wonder, then, that a patriotic superhero, committed to keeping the American Way safe in the face of fascism, would become such a smashing success.

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\(^8\) Ronald E. Powaski, Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism, Internationalism, and Europe, 1901-1950 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1991), 73. These conflicts included the Anschluss, or German annexation of Austria, and the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

\(^9\) Powaski, 71.

\(^10\) Kennedy, 434.

\(^11\) Kennedy, 427.
b. Early comic books, 1938-1941

The most recognizable early comic strips, that is, ones that weren’t pictographic languages or single panel political cartoons, were first printed in newspapers in the late nineteenth century. These evolved from illustrations of the day’s news in magazines, which were popular among the urban working class that had grown large during the industrial revolution. Upon realizing “the commercial potential of pictures,” more and more newspapers started adding illustrations to their publications. Those that were captioned and humorous were particularly popular and they ended up evolving into sequences of pictures to tell stories. These are recognizable as the sorts of comic strips we see in newspapers to this day.

By the early twentieth century, successful runs of comic strips were being republished in bound collections in order to “cash in a second time on contents previously amortized in newspapers.” But, since these collections were fairly expensive (upwards of twenty-five cents), they were considered a middle-class luxury. This led to the introduction of comic pamphlets, which were smaller and cheaper reprintings of newspaper comics. At ten cents per pamphlet, this new format was much more accessible. Comic pamphlets and inexpensive pulp magazines were especially popular in the 1930s because the Depression left Americans with a desire for inexpensive luxuries.

As the success of the reprints grew, publishers became willing to take risks with original content. The first of these publishers was Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, a former army major.

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13 Gabilliet, 7.
14 Gabilliet, 10.
15 Gabilliet, 14.
who published the first comic magazine featuring original content, *New Fun Comics*, in 1935.\(^1\)\(^6\)

By the end of the 1930s, comic magazines had come into their own, featuring stories in all kinds of genres from mysteries, like *Detective Comics* (which is known today as DC), to animal cartoons, like Donald Duck.\(^1\)\(^7\)

The true turning point, however, occurred in 1938, when the first successful superhero took hold: Superman. *Action Comics #1* had originally pictured him on the cover, but their publisher, Harry Donenfeld, thought that the image of a flying caped hero was outlandish. Therefore, the first several issues of *Action Comics* did not feature Superman on the cover. The series did reasonably well, but it wasn’t really a massive success. But that changed when the seventh issue ended up with half a million copies in print, as opposed to the first issue’s two hundred thousand.\(^1\)\(^8\) This influx of sales prompted Donenfeld to launch a survey in order to continue *Action’s* success. As it turned out, children buying the comics were asking for “the magazine with Superman.”\(^1\)\(^9\) Since the superhero was apparently the reason for the magazine’s success, Donenfeld changed his tune, insisting that Superman’s name be on the cover of every issue.\(^2\)\(^0\) Not only did later issues of *Action Comics* often sell over a million copies, Superman became a franchise in his own right, with a radio show, toys and games, in addition to the comics.\(^2\)\(^1\) This massive success prompted the beginning of an onslaught of superheroes from practically every comics publisher.

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\(^{17}\) Gabilliet, 15.

\(^{18}\) Gabilliet, 18.

\(^{19}\) Gabilliet, 18.

\(^{20}\) Gabilliet, 19.

\(^{21}\) Simon, 15.
In 1939, the year after Superman proved that superheroes were the next big thing, publishers started putting out comic books that were named after their title characters.\textsuperscript{22} Prior to this, comics of different kinds would be bound together. An issue of \textit{Action Comics} would have featured a Superman story, along with stories about other non-superhero characters. Once comics proved that they were lucrative and non-risks to distributors, it became possible to market single-character comic books. Superman, of course, led the way with his own self-titled series, which was instantly popular.\textsuperscript{23}

The popularity of comic books was not welcomed by everyone, though; parents were often weary of allowing their children to read comics. In a 1941 issue of \textit{Parents} magazine, editor Clara Savage Littledale, offered advice as to “What to Do About the Comics.” Her readers had repeatedly written in, concerned that comic magazines were unsuitable for their children; she agreed that they were “lurid, fantastic, cheap, terrifyingly time-wasting and over-stimulating.”\textsuperscript{24} The conventional wisdom of the day told parents to simply take away their children’s comics and replace them with books, but Littledale taught her readers why this wouldn’t work: children would then simply read both books \textit{and} comics. Littledale recounted a story from a headmistress of a school:

\begin{quote}
She tried books as substitutes for comics and [reported] that while the children took the books and read them, they kept right on reading comics, too. The attempt to substitute good books for comic magazines is all very well, theoretically, but, practically, it doesn’t work. Yet mere prohibition, the forcible removal of whatever it is that we feel the young should not have, is not the answer.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Gabilliet, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Clara Savage Littledale, “What to do About the Comics,” \textit{Parents}, 16 (1941), 26.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Littledale, 26.
\end{itemize}
The problem, according to Littledale, was that since comics were so popular, even if parents were to take them away from their own children, the child’s friends would undoubtedly have comics to share. The solution put forth by Parents was to accept the medium of comic books as a necessary evil and create a true substitute for comic magazines: a comic magazine of their own. True Comics, put out by Parents, was just as colorful as those that already existed, but were written about history and real-world events. Parents and its reader believed that it would be more appropriate for children to idolize real heroes than it would be for them to celebrate fictional ones. True Comics premiered in February, 1941, and sold over three hundred thousand copies, though it is unclear how many of those issues were ever actually read by the children for whom they were bought.

d. Enter Jack Kirby and Joe Simon

The readers of Parents weren’t the only ones inspired to create their own comic book. Countless other comic book writers and artists were eager to capitalize on the success of Superman at the end of the 1930s and jumped on the superhero bandwagon. One such writer-artist team was made up of writer Joe Simon and artist Jack Kirby. Born Hymie Simon and Jacob Kurtzberg, they were both sons of working class Jewish immigrants and met while working at Fox Publications in 1938. Simon was working as the editor of the label and began working with Kurtzberg when he expressed an interest in taking on more assignments. The result was a partnership between them that began with sharing freelance work—extra hours, nights and weekends—on a superhero series called Blue Bolt.

Simon ended up leaving Fox to become the editor for Timely Comics under the company’s publisher, Martin Goodman. Timely was a fairly new company, one of many labels

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26 Gabilliet, 27.
27 Simon, 40.
trying to capitalize on the success of superheroes like Superman. *Daring Mystery Comics* and *Mystic Comics* were two of Timely’s first titles.\(^{28}\) The high turnover rate of unsuccessful heroes in these titles (who would often not last more than one issue) shows the difficulty of creating a classic. For example, one of *Mystic’s* most successful heroes was the Blue Blaze (not to be confused with the Blue Bolt, which Simon and Kurtzberg worked on in 1938), which lasted only four issues.\(^{29}\) Most of the less successful characters came from freelancers, so Goodman decided to create a bigger, more permanent comics-producing staff. Among the artists he hired was none other than Jacob Kurtzberg, who was back to work with Joe Simon once again.\(^{30}\)

It was during this period of time, around 1940, that Jacob Kurtzberg became Jack Kirby. According to Simon, freelance work was, “for a guy without responsibilities.”\(^{31}\) Kurtzberg still did work for Fox Publications; that job was, after all a steady fifteen dollars per week, which was a decent wage for the time. But this frustrated Simon, who reminded Kurtzberg that their work at Timely was much more lucrative than what Fox was paying, and that he shouldn’t be “afraid to use [his] real name.”\(^{32}\) And Kurtzberg used several: from Kirby to Curtis to Cortez, though Kirby ended up being his favorite.\(^{33}\) But in addition to protecting his identity from his boss, changing his name to Jack Kirby would offer Jacob Kurtzberg some protection against the anti-Semitism that was so prevalent in the United States in the 1940s. Part of the reason Kurtzberg liked the name Kirby was because “it had a good Irish ring to it.”\(^{34}\) As Simon wrote in his

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\(^{29}\) Daniels, 33.

\(^{30}\) Daniels, 33.

\(^{31}\) Simon, 41.

\(^{32}\) Simon, 41.

\(^{33}\) Daniels, 33. Daniels also suggests that one of the reasons Kurtzberg (and others) used multiple pen names was that it helped give the impression that an art department of a newspaper or magazine was larger than it really was.

\(^{34}\) Simon, 41.
autobiography, “Many of our heroes had Irish names. They were ‘in’ at the time, in movies, radio, and fiction. James Cagney, Gene Kelly, Ronald Reagan. Irish actors were the most gallant, most swashbuckling, most popular.” And the year after Jacob Kurtzberg legally changed his name to Jack Kirby, the Simon-Kirby duo began writing their most successful Irish-named hero: Steve Rogers.

d. The Creation of Captain America

Simon and Kirby were two of many comic-creators who wanted to ride the coattails (or perhaps, cape-tails) of Superman’s success. Most early superheroes relied on pseudoscience as the source of their powers, and attempts not to plagiarize other works led to some downright absurd characters. The Whizzer, for example, who made his first appearance in USA Comics (another Timely title) in 1941, had the super power of being able to run extremely fast. The source of these powers came from an injection of mongoose blood, which was, for some reason, used in the comic as a treatment for African “jungle fever.” This may have been a crazy concept, but it was not an unsuccessful one: The Whizzer appeared in Timely Comics until 1947.

In terms of realistic heroes, The Batman had created a successful formula that had not been successfully imitated. Rather than a superhuman fighting straw man villains, Batman was a mortal (albeit exorbitantly wealthy) man who fought villains that Simon would later describe as “colorful” characters that “had character and intelligence.” The problem with most comic book villains was that they didn’t seem real enough. They lacked the depth and the color that Batman’s villains had. But Simon would find his inspiration:

In Europe, the Nazis were marching. Hitler and his Storm Troopers splashed across the headlines daily. News dispatches of the persecutions, the concentration camps, the incredibly cruel Gestapo tactics, seemed to Americans an ocean away more like a grade
“B” movie than reality. Then the idea struck home: here was the arch villain of all time. Adolf Hitler and his Gestapo bully-boys were real.38

This description was written some forty-five years after the end of the war, so it should be taken with a grain of salt; the amount of information that the general public had about what the Nazis were doing in their own borders may be somewhat exaggerated. That being said, Simon and Kirby were both the sons of Jewish immigrants – Simon’s father came from England and both of Kirby’s parents were Austrian.39 Since they both had familial ties to European Jews, they were likely in a position to know more than non-Jewish Americans about the persecution Jews were facing in Europe.

It is interesting to put this excerpt in conversation with the goals of Parents magazine’s True Comics. The readers of Parents were concerned about the fantastical nature of comics, and were inspired to create True Comics to combat that fantasy. They believed that injecting a dose of reality into the comic book industry would serve to make comics less outlandish and far-fetched and, as a result, educate their children and bring them back down to earth. Simon, on the other hand, brought real-world antagonists into his comics because the real world seemed more fantastical than anything he would be able to come up with on his own. He would later write:

There never had been a truly believable villain in comics. But Adolf was live, hated by more than half of the world. What a natural foil he was, with his comical moustache, the ridiculous cowlick, his swaggering, goose-stepping minions eager to jump out of a plane if their mad little leader ordered it. (After a stiff-armed Heil Hitler salute, of course.) I could smell a winner. All that was left to do was to devise a long underwear hero to stand up to him.40

Again, one has to wonder how much of an effect time had on Simon’s recollection of wartime events. Simon remembered Hitler as always having been something out of “a grade ‘B’ movie,”

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38 Simon, 42.
40 Simon, 42.
but since he was responsible for the production of propagandistic comics, he played a very real role in securing Hitler’s place in history as a comic book villain. Maybe the writers at Timely Comics thought that Hitler was ridiculous, and could be defeated by a “long underwear hero”, but in 1941, he was a real threat. By that point of the war, Nazis had already taken over a large part of the European continent, and were going strong.

What the world needed was a hero that was able to hold his own against the combination of ridiculousness and terror that the Nazis presented to the world. The answer? A super American. But, according to Simon, “there were too many ‘Supers’ around.” “Captain America”, on the other hand, “had a good sound to it.” 41 He ended up sketching a basic design for the new character – a muscular superhero type with blond hair, a red and white striped torso and a star on his chest. But that wasn’t enough. Cap needed a sidekick. As Simon put it, “A comic book hero without a henchman would be talking to himself throughout much of the action.” 42 Without giving their hero someone to talk to, the writers and artists would be forced to rely on thought bubbles, which Simon felt would slow down the action of the story. Perhaps more importantly though, by 1941 it was clear that children made up a large proportion of comic book readers. In order to better access this market, many comic book writers were including children in their serials. 43 In order to capitalize on the success of young costumed characters like Batman’s Robin, and so that Cap would have someone to talk to, Simon created Captain America’s teenaged sidekick, Bucky Barnes.

41 Simon, 43.
42 Simon, 43.
43 Gabilliet, 23. Once again, Superman was first; the sixth issue of *Action Comics* (Nov. 1938) saw the debut of Jimmy Olsen, who acted as Superman’s juvenile helper, and was the first child featured in a superhero comic. That being said, it wasn’t until *Detective Comics #38* that a true sidekick emerged, that is, a costumed companion who is constantly at the hero’s side. The true pioneer was Dick Grayson, who became Batman’s ward and sidekick, Robin.
Simon's idea came just in time to pitch it to Martin Goodman, the publisher of Timely Comics who was looking for new characters to publish in their own title magazines. The only titles Timely was putting out consistently at that point were monthly issues of *Marvel Mystery Comics*, and quarterly issues of *The Human Torch*, so Goodman was ready for another series and was open to anti-Nazi rhetoric.\(^{44}\) Goodman and most of his employees were Jewish, which meant that the concern felt by the people working at Timely over Hitler’s aggressions in Europe was evident in the kind of content that was being produced by 1940. Both of Timely’s biggest heroes had already entered the war; in the fourth issue of *Marvel Mystery* (which was published February 1940), The Sub-Mariner got into a fight with a Nazi submarine, and in the first issue of *The Human Torch Comics* (Fall 1940), The Torch fights Nazis.\(^{45}\)

The thing that set Captain America apart was that his narrative centered completely on the war and fighting Hitler. Goodman thought that Captain America was a good candidate as a title character, but he was unsure of the idea of using Hitler as the main baddie. Goodman “was entranced with the idea of using Adolf Hitler as the heavy, but he also had a problem with the idea. ‘The bastard is alive and in the center of a very explosive situation,’ he said. ‘He could get killed – even when our book is on the presses. Then where would we be?’”\(^{46}\) When Simon asked if this meant scrapping the idea, Goodman said no, but the idea had to be put out as soon as possible, in case Hitler died before their hero got to punch him. To meet their deadlines, Simon intended to assign two artists, Al Avison and Al Gabriel, to the project, in addition to Jack Kirby. But Kirby insisted that he could do the artwork himself and still meet Goodman’s deadline. As

\(^{44}\) Daniels, 36.  
\(^{45}\) Daniels, 36.  
\(^{46}\) Simon, 43.
Joe Simon would later write, “There might have been two Als, but there was only one Jack Kirby.”

Simon and Kirby set up shop to get their first issue done by their deadline. Simon, the writer, would pencil in basic figures, backgrounds, and speech bubbles, and Kirby would “tighten up” Simon’s work and add details to the figures. Then Simon would do most of the final inking. Al Liederman, the “Fighting Cartoonist from upstate New York,” who worked on newspaper cartoons at the time, had approached Simon about doing some freelance work while Simon and Kirby were working on the first issue. After proving his coloring capabilities, Liederman did the inking of the book, and thus issue one was born. Captain America proved itself to be a hit, selling over a million copies of the first issue alone. The series became a major production for Timely Comics, which meant the label hired more artists to lighten the burden Simon and Kirby had taken on. The massive success of the first issue also paved the way for the Simon and Kirby name to become synonymous with profit.

e. Real-World Impact

This was of course, the same first issue of Captain America that featured a stars-and-stripes-clad hero punching Hitler in the face. He was the first big superhero to be written with a purely political motive. That is to say, Steve Rogers was fighting Nazis and protecting the United States as a whole instead of fighting crime and unrealistic villains like other superheroes. With the European war seemingly at America’s doorstep, it’s unsurprising that Captain America was such an instantaneous success. As Simon put it, “it was natural that the adventures of our new

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47 Simon, 43.
48 Simon, 44.
49 To put this figure into perspective, Time magazine was selling about 700,000 issues per month in 1941 (Daniels, 37).
50 Simon, 52.
red, white and blue hero would have the advantage over the others who were still challenging mad scientists or the hoodlums robbing the corner candy store.” Captain America was fighting in a real conflict, and that made him supersede other heroes.

The other side of this success was an inevitable backlash from people who weren’t interested in seeing a symbol of American patriotism pitting himself against Nazis. There was a fairly substantial proportion of the American public who had no interest in supporting American involvement in what they saw as a European affair. Others were admirers of Hitler, and they weren’t pleased with the way he and his followers were portrayed in the comics. “No matter how hard we tried to make him a threatening force, Adolf invariably wound up as a buffoon,” wrote Joe Simon. “[He ended up being] a clown. Evidently, this infuriated a lot of Nazi sympathizers.” One of the most prevalent Nazi sympathizer groups was the German American Bund; it was popular and well financed, and its members staged big public rallies, including one at Madison Square Garden in New York. The German American Bund (and other Nazi-supporting Americans) made “obscene” phone calls and sent hate mail to the Timely offices. Initially, the people at Timely thought little of the threats being made towards them, but the people working in the offices started seeing “menacing looking groups of strange men in front of the building on 42nd street” and were afraid to leave the building for lunch. The threats and loiterers were reported to the police, and the office ended up with its own police guard in response.

There were also people within the comic book industry who were not pleased with the success of Captain America. The Shield, a series that was published by M.L.J. Publications

51 Simon, 44.
52 Simon, 45.
53 Simon, 45.
54 Simon, 45.
starting in 1940, was not a particularly profitable superhero comic, but it was similar to Captain America in its commitment to American nationalism. The design of the torso of The Shield’s costume was almost identical to Cap’s original shield. To avoid a law suit, Captain America’s artists changed the shape of the shield to a circle. This design change ended up being an advantageous narrative decision, because it made Cap’s shield into a discus-type weapon as well as a method of defense.

Finally, there were the qualms of Cap’s own creators. Joe Simon had made a deal with Timely, which secured him 15% of Captain America’s revenue, but this agreement was never put into writing. When his check came in, the amount of money was “disappointing” given the success of the comics. The bookkeeper for Timely told him that the discrepancy came from overheads and the costs of salaries for the production of Captain America, and there wasn’t anything Simon would be able to do to change it. But Simon struck back by contacting Detective Comics. By that point, the Simon and Kirby name was synonymous with successful comics, which meant that Simon had more leverage than his Timely bosses recognized. After meeting with Jack Liebowitz, who co-owned DC with Harry Donenfeld, Simon and Kirby secured a lucrative deal – a year-long contract, during which time they would earn $500 a week between them.

This didn’t mean that they abandoned their work at Timely, though. Simon and Kirby worked in secret for a while, spending nights, weekends, and lunch breaks in a hotel room they’d made into their own office working on a Sherlock Holmes series for DC. When they started taking their lunch breaks to their makeshift office, they stopped sending the office gofer out for

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55 Daniels, 49.
56 Simon, 52.
57 Simon, 53.
sandwiches. This gofer, Stanley Liebowitz (who would later be known better as Stan Lee) ended up tagging along for a few days, “getting in the way, running errands, and marveling at the sketches and ideas [Simon and Kirby] had prepared.” Kirby, Simon recalls, didn’t trust Liebowitz, and perhaps for good reason. Although it is unclear who ratted them out (Simon suspected it may have been people from DC), it wasn’t long after Liebowitz’s discovery of their secret work, that the bosses of the Timely office reprimanded Simon and Kirby. The duo agreed to finish Captain America’s tenth issue, and then left Timely to work for DC full time.

Without his creators, Captain America would continue to be successful until the end of the war. In 1944, Republic Pictures produced a motion picture serial version of the series. In it, Steve Rogers, renamed Grant Gardner, was a district attorney instead of a private in the army, and he donned a costume to fight his villain, The Scarab, using a gun instead of a shield. After the war, though, the hero created to fight the Nazis was left without any Nazis to fight. For a while, in the late forties, Cap and Bucky fought street crime. Bucky ended up dying and was replaced by Betty Ross (AKA “Golden Girl), Cap’s long time love interest. From 1949 to 1950, Captain America also included horror stories and was published under the title Captain America’s Weird Tales. The last issue came out in 1950 and did not feature Captain America. The 1950s showed a general shift away from the superhero genre. Timely’s biggest heroes—Captain America, the Human Torch, and the Sub-Mariner—all saw their ends in the postwar period.

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58 Simon, 53.
59 Daniels, 53.
61 Daniels, 55.
62 Daniels, 60.
The Comics

Superhero comics came into their own in the early 1940s, and for good reason. By the time *Captain America* came out, most of the world had already plunged itself into World War Two, and it seemed undeniably likely that as time went on, the United States would only become more involved in the conflict. Nationalist superhero comics were a way to combat the fear of war. The characters in a serial comic are relatable, both because of the attachment formed over the course of several issues and, perhaps more interestingly, because of the style of the medium itself.

According to cartoonist and comics theorist Scott McCloud, drawing comics in a simplistic cartoon style allows for “amplification through simplification.” This means that as a drawing becomes less detailed, the viewer is allowed to focus more on the important features of the picture, rather than becoming distracted by unimportant details. As McCloud writes, “when we abstract an image through cartooning, we’re not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential meaning, an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can’t.”\(^6^3\) Simplicity, especially in drawing faces, also allows for a greater extent to which the viewer can identify with the image. Cartoon faces are simple, and therefore can represent and be relatable to lots of people.\(^6^4\)“When you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face,” McCloud explains, “you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon, you see yourself…We don’t just observe the cartoon, we become it.”\(^6^5\)

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\(^6^4\) McCloud, 31.

\(^6^5\) McCloud, 36.
By this logic, Captain America comics (as well as other nationalist superhero comics) achieved the success they did, not because their readers wanted a costumed hero to burst from the pages to fight Hitler, but because readers could project themselves onto the characters into the comics. Captain America’s readers were not waiting for Cap and Bucky to come save them; rather, they were looking for their opportunities to be Cap and Bucky. This type of projection, which is so integral to comics as a medium, when combined with the real-world threats portrayed in the stories, made Captain America comics an ideal form of propaganda.

a. “Introducing Captain America”: The Rhetoric of Cap’s Origins and Heroism

Captain America made his first appearance on the cover of Captain America #1 in March 1941, in the aforementioned image in which he literally punches Hitler in the face. [See Fig. 1] The hero is front and center, the stars and stripes on his hyper-American costume appear in stark contrast to the swastikas on the arms of the Nazis who are closing in around him. But Captain America is unafraid of the Nazis and their guns, charging into the room fist and face first with his shield low, ignoring the bullets that are somehow not hitting him. In the background, one Nazi has his back to the frame; he is speaking into a microphone, presumably giving the order to blow up the exploding building, labeled “US Munitions works,” on the screen in front of him. Off to the lefthand side is a map of the United States, and a pamphlet that reads “Sabotage plans for U.S.A.”

This image is striking for a number of reasons. First and foremost, Captain America is punching Adolf Hitler in the face. It’s important to remember that, at the time of this publication, the United States was not a military presence in the war, and yet, a very American nationalist

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superhero made his first-ever appearance by performing an openly violent act on the German Führer. Despite the fact that America was overwhelmingly pro-Ally during this period, and that other superheroes were getting into conflicts with the Axis powers, it must have been shocking that a brand new character, whose whole identity was related to American nationalism, was making his debut in such a way. The fact that the hero was introduced in such a way meant that the readers of the comic knew exactly what they were getting – a hero whose sole purpose was to defend American democracy against fascism. Furthermore, the screen in the top center of the frame, though not as colorful or detailed as the action-packed scuffle between Cap and the Nazis, offers an explanation for what is at stake for Americans in the war: industry, and the opportunity to aid the Allied war effort.

The threat of Nazi spies to the American war effort carries on into the stories within Captain America #1, but Hitler does not.67 The plot of the first story, “Introducing Captain America,” is Cap’s origin story. After a “wave of sabotage and treason” by Nazis and their supporters “paralyzes the vital defense industries” of the United States, the United States government decides to put a new secret formula to the test.68 The unnamed inoculation is injected into Steve Rogers, a scrawny young man who was unable to meet the Army’s physical requirements. The injection is successful, “building his body and brain tissues until his stature and intelligence increase to an amazing degree.”69 The creator of the inoculation, Professor Reinstein, dubs the newly-statuesque Steve Rogers, “Captain America… because, like [him] America shall gain the strength and the will to safeguard our shores.”70 [See Fig. 2]

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67 Hitler doesn’t appear until issue 2. We’ll get to him. Don’t worry.
68 Captain America #1, 3.
69 Captain America #1, 6.
70 Captain America #1, 6.
Unfortunately, Professor Reinstein is shot and killed by a saboteur, ensuring that the serum will never be recreated, and that Steve Rogers will remain the only Captain America.

The first thing to note is the obvious fear of Nazi sabotage being expressed by the writers; it’s clear that the threat posed by a potential fifth column within the United States is real, given that the reason the government goes through with the plan to create Captain America. This gives the modern-day reader some idea of how important the war industry was to Americans. After all, it isn’t just any government official that okays the super-soldier project – a fictional Franklin Roosevelt is the one who gives the order to go through with testing the injection.

That’s right. Franklin Delano Roosevelt shows up in Captain America to approve of human enhancement. This is interesting for two reasons. First of all, he was the actual president of the United States; he is (yet another) a real-world figure put into the comics, granting an air of realism to them. When two generals tell him that they fear giving confidential reports because of the risk of spies getting a hold of information, the president replies, “What would you suggest, gentlemen? A character out of the comic books? Perhaps The Human Torch in the army would solve our problem!”[See Fig. 3] Though Roosevelt is speaking facetiously, he goes on to reveal that that is precisely what the plan is – a superhero for the army. This whole sequence supplies the comic with the tangibility that Joe Simon wanted the comic to have; there is not only a recognizable real-world person (in this case, FDR) featured in the comic, but he is pointing out the fact that comics exist; because The Human Torch is a comic book character in the Captain America universe, Simon has effectively made Captain America less fictional than The Human Torch. Therefore, Cap exists in an in-between space; it’s still a comic book, but it’s not as fictional as other comic books.

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71 Captain America #1, 3.
There’s another significance to the fact that FDR is in the first issue of the comic – his presence draws attention to the fact that Steve Rogers is somewhat analogous to the president. Roosevelt famously suffered from polio and, though he did his best to hide the extent of his paralysis from the American public, it was well known that he had fought the disease and was a proponent of research for a vaccine cure.72 Steve Rogers ailments are unnamed in the comic, but whatever they are, they prevent him from serving in the military, making him an ideal test subject for Professor Reinstein’s inoculation. The serum, which can be interpreted as a symbol for American nationalism and militarism, turns Steve, who can be interpreted as symbolizing FDR and the American government more generally, into a force that can protect democracy from fascism.

The creation of Captain America also invokes a sort of American idealist version of eugenics. In this time period, the concept of trying to create a better human race was still a very real goal, and German propaganda was actively constructing the necessity to create a German Aryan Übermensch.73 The way the Nazis were doing this was through racial cleansing, eliminating the people who didn’t fit the mold for the master race. Joe Simon took this concept and put an undeniably American spin on it.74 Meek and mild Steve Rogers, who would certainly have not been included in Hitler’s vision of a master race, volunteered be genetically modified to become a literal superman.

73 Literally “Superman”. Interesting.
74 It is worth noting, however, that eugenics did have a strong following in the United States at this point, even what historian Wendy Kline calls “negative eugenics,” that is, preventing the “unfit” from reproducing (as opposed to “positive eugenics,” which is encouraging the “fit” to reproduce). Eugenics was an extremely popular concept in the 1930s, at which point medically sterilizing the “unfit” and “sexually promiscuous” women was happening at a greater rate than ever before. The number of sterilizations per year was almost ten times the average from the 1910s. (Wendy Kline, Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Postwar Baby Boom (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010), 3.)
Furthermore, the person who created the injection was Professor Reinstein, a Jewish scientist. This throws another wrench into Nazi rhetoric, which was based on extreme anti-Semitism. It is also worth noting that Simon and Kirby, Captain America’s real-life creators, were Jewish, as were most of the people working at Timely Comics; the fact that the scientist who makes Steve Rogers into Captain America in the fictional world is Jewish is not an accident. Even if it wasn’t a political statement, giving Reinstein a Jewish name was undoubtedly a subtle self-insert.

As if inserting themselves into the comics wasn’t enough, Simon and Kirby also insert the reader into the comic. When Reinstein is injecting the serum into Steve Rogers, the panel is drawn such that it looks like the reader is being inoculated with the syringe. [See Fig. 4] This image makes it clear—regardless of comics theory (which states that people will project themselves onto simply-drawn faces), the reader is supposed to be Captain America.

b. “Trapped in the Nazi Stronghold”: Portrayal of Hitler, Nazis, and Other Europeans

Even though he made his first appearance on the cover of Captain America #1, Adolf Hitler is not actually featured in the stories of the comics until the second issue, in “Trapped in the Nazi Stronghold.” In this story, an American financier named Henry Baldwin, who intends to give money to the British war effort, is kidnapped and taken to Europe. Captain America and Bucky disguise themselves as an elderly woman and a child, respectively, and make their way from the United States to Portugal by plane, then to France and finally Germany by train. As it turns out, the Nazis have kidnapped Baldwin to replace him with an imposter in order to sabotage the meeting between Baldwin and the British government. Cap and Bucky make their

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75 There was, of course, anti-Semitism in the US at this time, so making naming the genius scientist Reinstein may also have been a subtle attempt to fight American anti-Semitism.
way to a concentration camp\textsuperscript{76} in the Black Forest, where the real Henry Baldwin is being held. And there, in a back room, cowering behind a desk, the heroes find none other than Hermann Goering and Adolf Hitler. They make quick work of the Nazi leaders and leave them unconscious while they go find Henry Baldwin. In the end, the RAF flies by and gets Cap, Bucky, and Baldwin out.\textsuperscript{77}

It is never made clear why exactly Captain America and Bucky disguise themselves the way they do; it is, after all, somewhat shocking that such a hegemonically masculine character would dress in drag as a disguise. Steve Rogers is a tall person, as evidenced by any frame in which he’s standing next to another person, so surely a six-foot-something grandmother wouldn’t have fooled anyone. However, posing as an elderly woman is, as disguises go, a pretty good disguise, because elderly women are not particularly threatening figures. Given their age, people are unlikely to question them; Cap would have been able to move about fairly freely. He also would have been able to pass Bucky off as his grandson, which makes them less suspicious as a pair. But then there’s the matter of their clothing [See Fig. 7]. It’s strangely Edwardian and outdated, which might make sense for the character Cap is playing (an old woman), but for a boy to be dressed in a wide brimmed hat and a ruffled collar definitely draws attention to the oddity of their outfits. The imagery that’s being invoked here is definitely European, symbolizing the role that Cap and Bucky are defending the old world.

It is in a rather excellent frame [See Fig. 7 again] that we see our dynamic duo in their disguises, very seriously walking hand-in-hand through Nazi-occupied France. Although it’s a little bit ridiculous, given what they’re wearing, the imagery in this frame is rather striking.

\textsuperscript{76} And it is referred to as a concentration camp, not a prison camp.
Pretty much everything outside of the circle containing Cap and Bucky is blue, set against a light pink background. This creates a sort of ghostly effect, making the images of soldiers, tanks, and civilians look almost dreamlike. The citizens of France have been subdued, and it will take bold heroes (as evidenced by their bright yellow background) to break them free.

The most important part of this story is the portrayal of Hitler. Let’s start with the title page for this story [See Fig.5]. It is somewhat reminiscent of the cover of *Captain America* #1[See Fig. 1], but with even less dignity afforded to Hitler. Cap has apparently pushed Hitler, so that he’s tripped over Bucky (who is on all fours, so as to act as a human obstacle) and fallen into a wastebasket. The biggest difference between this image and the first issue’s cover is the level of violence. On the cover of issue one, as previously discussed, Captain America has apparently valiantly charged into a room full of Nazis shooting at him and punched their leader directly in the face. The title page for “Trapped in the Nazi Stronghold,” on the other hand, makes it clear that not only does Cap have the upper hand against Hitler, but the match is so uneven that it’s comical. Compared to the prowess of American nationalism, Hitler is literal trash, even with a few cronies protecting him.

It is in this issue that Hitler is made out to be not just a comic book villain, but a *bumbling* comic book villain. While the guards at the concentration camp are trying to fight off Cap and Bucky, Hitler and Goering are hiding behind a desk in some back room [See Fig. 6]. They’re cowards. Furthermore, when the Nazi leaders do charge the heroes, they both declare that they’ll “Get the little guy,”78 by which they mean Bucky, even though they are both much bigger than he is. This is likely a jab at the Nazi’s political and military strategies – picking on

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78 *Captain America* #2, 76.
the “little guy,” whether that be the minorities within Germany (Jews and other victims of persecution), or less powerful European countries (like Poland). In short, they’re bullies.

c. “The Dragon of Death”: The Japanese Plot in Hawaii

The Germans were not the only antagonists to be portrayed in Captain America; the Japanese get their turn at being villains too. Despite the fact that the attack on Pearl Harbor had yet to happen, the distrust that Americans felt towards the Japanese is made apparent in “The Gruesome Secret of the Dragon of Death,” a story from Captain America #5, from August, 1941, four months before the attack. This story is about a Japanese plot to destroy the Pacific fleet of the US Navy. Their plan differs somewhat from the actual events of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, though; instead of dropping bombs, Captain Okada (“The Oriental Master of Evil”) intends to fill a Hawaiian volcano with dynamite and cause an eruption that will bury the Pacific fleet.79

The science of this plan seems a bit iffy, but it is a comic book – villains have to be a little more creative than just dropping bombs. And besides, “The Dragon of Death” (which is a reference to the Japanese submarine [See Fig. 9]) expresses an obvious anxiety over the proximity between Hawaii and Japan. The bulk of the Pacific fleet had been moved to Hawaii from San Diego in the first months of 194180, and it would seem that it was apparent, even to the public, how devastating a blow to Pearl Harbor would be.

This story is particularly interesting, not only because it practically predicts the event that would later get the United States into the war, but because the portrayal of the Japanese enemy is so different from the way the Germans are portrayed in “Trapped in the Nazi Stronghold.” The
Germans are afforded much more realism; Cap and Bucky fight Nazis in Germany, and there’s nothing all that comic bookish about the concept of sabotaging a business exchange (even if wearing a mask of someone’s face might be kind of a far-fetched way to do it). The Japanese on the other hand, not only have an outrageous plan [See Fig. 8], but an outrageous mode of transportation. Their submarine is literally shaped like a dragon. No self-respecting military would commission that, making this story seem much more fictional.

There is also a noticeable difference in the way the Japanese were drawn [See Fig. 8 again] as opposed to the Germans in the comic. In comparing the images of Hitler in Captain America #2 to the images of Captain Okada in #5, there is a definite difference in the way they are drawn. Granted, different races look different, so it isn’t surprising that a German would be drawn differently than a Japanese person. But Hitler still looks more or less like the Americans in the comic, even though he isn’t drawn to be particularly attractive. That is, Hitler looks more like Captain America than either of them look like Okada.\(^1\) Okada is not only literally yellow, but he is subjected to physiognomic tropes that denote badness: he has small eyes, a weak jaw, and a stubby nose, all of which, in the western tradition, indicate a weak, usually effeminate character. He is also seen smoking with a cigarette holder, which were typically women’s accessories. These features are also part of a long tradition of negative imagery used by anti-Japanese propaganda, portraying them as “apes, lesser men, primitives, children, madmen, and beings who possessed special powers.”\(^2\) This imagery is definitely apparent in “The Dragon of Death.” The combination of the impossible plan to blow up a volcano with dynamite, the

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\(^1\) This also lends itself to the idea that Germans are remembered as a bigger threat than the Japanese because Germans are white; western history takes whiteness more seriously than non-whiteness.

ridiculous dragon-submarine, Okada’s apish features and his subtle femininity suggests that the Japanese were not viewed as being as dangerous as the Germans.\textsuperscript{83}

d. “Killers of the Bund”: Timely’s Defense of German-Americans

\textit{Captain America} #5 also features a story called “Killers of the Bund,” in which the comic draws a clear distinction between German-Americans and Nazi sympathizers. In this story, Nazi sympathizers, who are clearly meant to be members of the German American Bund (a real-life group of Nazi sympathizers), try to recruit Heinrich Schmidt, a German-American to their ranks. When Schmidt refuses, the Bund attacks him and he ends up in the hospital. Steve and Bucky are informed of this by Schmidt’s son (who is friends with Bucky), just as they’re about to have a conversation about how “very nice” German-American people are \textsuperscript{[Fig. 10]} the three of them go to the hospital and Schmidt explains what happened. As a result, Captain America and Bucky break into “Camp Reichland” to beat up some Nazi sympathizers \textsuperscript{[Fig. 11]}.

This story draws a line between Nazi-supporters and German-Americans. This was a radical thing to do in a country that was watching the German government take over the European continent. Anti-German sentiment was high, and would only continue to get higher as the United States got more involved with the war effort. (11,507 people of German descent were interned in the United States after Pearl Harbor.\textsuperscript{85}) For Captain America, a blatant symbol of American nationalism, to say that he’s “found German-American people to be very nice” might be a bit heavy handed, but 1940s entertainment was never known for its subtlety. The writers seem to be targeting children especially here; Heinrich Schmidt isn’t just a nice German-

\textsuperscript{83} According to Dower, the war with the Japanese was a race war, whereas the war with the Germans was a national war (Dower, 5).
\textsuperscript{84} Captain America #5, 215.
American man, he’s somebody’s dad. That gives him more humanity than he might otherwise have had, especially from a child’s perspective.

e. The Sentinels of Liberty

The Sentinels of Liberty are a group of children that, though invented by the comic book, existed both in fiction and in real life. In the very first issue of Captain America, and in every subsequent issue, there was an advertisement featured in the back, telling readers that, for a dime, they would be sent a Sentinels of Liberty badge, as well as a membership card that read, “I solemnly pledge to uphold the principles of the Sentinels of Liberty, and to assist Captain America in his fight upon the enemies who attempt treason against the United States of America” [See Fig. 12] As Jack Kirby would later say, “We were stirring up the population. We weren’t making any money on it, but the kids were taking an oath to defend the Constitution.”86

In addition to being a real-life fan club, the Sentinels of Liberty also appeared in the comics. Their first appearance as a fictional group was in Captain America #4, in a two-page text story inserted between comics. By the summer of 1941, Timely Comics released The Young Allies, a comic book all about the Sentinels of Liberty. The group was led by Bucky and was made up of his friends, Knuckles, Jeff, Tubby, and Whitewash (take a look at Fig. 13 and guess which one is Whitewash. He may be a stunningly offensive stereotype, but he was the first black character in Marvel comics).87 Their first appearance in the comics stories of Captain America was in August 1941, in which they act as spies for Captain America. In Captain America #6, in a story called “The Camera Fiend and his Darts of Doom,” the Sentinels appear again, this time more actively helping Cap, who initially underestimates their abilities as legitimate assistants.

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86 Daniels, 38.
87 Daniels, 45.
The multi-racial fighting
[See Fig. 14]. But when they successfully help him take down the Camera Fiend and his cronies, Cap changes his tune. The comic concludes with him thanking them, “for helping Sentinels of Liberty all through our great and glorious land! All boys and girls are Sentinels of Liberty whether they wear the badge or not. America is safe while its boys and girls believe in its creeds!” [See Fig. 15].

Unlike the other real-life people and groups in Captain America, the Sentinels occupy the interesting space of being a real-life group of people that was created by the comics. The Sentinels of Liberty couldn’t exist without Captain America, even though Captain America doesn’t exist outside the pages of the comic books. He became an idea that could transcend the page and inspire a generation of children to pledge themselves to uphold the constitution. And not only that, but Cap actually thanked the Sentinels of Liberty for being such a great help, and assured his readers that all of them, even those of them who hadn’t bought the badge to make it official, were important.

Legacy and Conclusion

After the 1940s run of Captain America fizzled out, there were attempts to reboot the character. In 1953, Cap got the tagline, “Captain America: Commie Smasher.” Unsurprisingly, given the fact that the country was in the throes of the Cold War, he fought communist villains. Unfortunately, the series didn’t sell well and was discontinued.

In 1964, however, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby brought Cap back again, and changed the story to give a canonical reason for the character’s hiatus: In 1945, Cap and Bucky had to stop an

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89 Cronin.
armed, unmanned Nazi plane. Bucky ended up detonating the bomb onboard in his attempt to defuse it, and the duo was presumed dead as a result. The beginning of the 1964 reboot finds Cap frozen in suspended animation in the Arctic; after being thawed out, he becomes part of the Avengers. The “Commie Smasher” era was written off as being the result of Captain America impersonators.\textsuperscript{90} This reboot was successful because it understood that what had made Cap successful was having Nazi antagonists.

Of course, by the 1960s, Nazis no longer posed a real threat to the world. This meant that the Red Skull, a character who had made a three appearances in the first run of Captain America\textsuperscript{91} (from 1941-1949) was chosen to be Cap’s arch nemesis. The Red Skull was basically a fictionalized and amplified depiction of a Nazi villain. He was a murderous Nazi with a red skull mask that he wore to intimidate people – the perfect foil for Captain America’s heroics. Protecting American values was once again his main concern.\textsuperscript{92} That being said, the new Captain America did not blindly serve his country the way he did during World War Two; in a 1970s run of the comic, during the time of the real-world war in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, the (comic book) American president is involved in a conspiracy, which causes Cap to question what it is he stands for – not America as a nation, but the ideals on which the country was founded.\textsuperscript{93}

This gets at the heart of what Captain America symbolizes. He is a relic of World War Two, and he doesn’t make sense if he’s taken out of that context (as evidenced by 1950s Captain “Commie Smasher” America). Cap didn’t survive the war, and as such, he will always be

\textsuperscript{90} Cronin.
\textsuperscript{91} Captain America Comics, Comic Vine, last updated Feb. 15, 2015, \url{http://www.comicvine.com/captain-america-comics/4050-1628/object-appearances/4005-2250/}.
\textsuperscript{93} Chambliss, 112.
associated with that period of history. The war itself is still a source of great nostalgia, even though most Americans don’t remember it. World War Two was America’s last successful moral war; it was a clear-cut battle between Allied Democracy and German Fascism. Captain America no longer represents the military prowess of the United States, as he did in the 1940s, but instead represents the morality Americans associate with that time.

Captain America began as an ordinary long-underwear hero in 1941 – a muscley he-man hero, who solves problems with violence. But he ended up being more than that. He was not just a product of a barely-isolationist America, teetering on the edge of entering the Second World War, but a tool that might have helped smooth the transition between isolationism and warfare. There was a great amount of realism interspersed throughout the comics. There were appearances by real people, like Franklin Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler, and the Sentinels of Liberty, and there was a recognition of real-world problems, like the threat posed by the Japanese in the Pacific. Because of this air of realism, combined with the accessibility of comics as a medium, Captain America helped to turn the war into myth, and he is now part of the myth he helped to create.

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94 This is something he has in common several real-world figures from the war; Franklin Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler, and Benito Mussolini all died in 1945, and Winston Churchill was ousted from the position of Prime Minister the same year because he was no longer politically relevant.

95 The Cold War was also a war about the morality of allowing political extremism to spread (in this case, it was Communism), but the conflict was not as clear-cut to the American public, making it difficult to inspire anyone to rally around the cause. Furthermore, the style of warfare changed after World War Two to one that relied on guerilla tactics and napalm, rather than tanks. There was no heroism left.
Bibliography


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Figure 1

**Figure 2**
Little does he realize that the serum coursing through his blood is rapidly building his body and brain tissues, until his stature and intelligence increase to an amazing degree!

It is working! There's power surging through those growing muscles...millions of cells forming at incredible speed!

We shall call you Captain America, son! Because, like you...America shall gain the strength and the will to safeguard our shores!

The hand of democracy's enemy reaches deep into the ranks of America's high officials...one of the army men witnessing the demonstration is in the pay of Hitler's Gestapo!

I'm afraid this is one experiment that must never reach its final test!
Figure 3

Captain America #1, 3.
Figure 4

Captain America #1, 5.

SIDE DOOR OPENS... AND A FRILY YOUNG MAN STEPS INTO THE LABORATORY...

DON'T BE AFRAID, SON... YOU ARE ABOUT TO BECOME ONE OF AMERICA'S SAIORS!

CALMLY THE YOUNG MAN ALLOWS HIMSELF TO BE INNOCULATED WITH THE STRANGE SEETHING LIQUID...

THERE... IT IS DONE! NOW TO WATCH THE REACTION...
Figure 6

*Captain America #2, 76.*

Figure 7

*Captain America #2, 68.*
Figure 9

Captain America #5, 207.
Figure 10

Captain America #5, 216.
Figure 11

Captain America #5, 218.
Figure 12

Figure 13

Captain America #5, 220.
Figure 14


Figure 15

*Captain America* #6, 17.