

POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON THE COMIC BOOK AND GRAPHIC NOVEL  
FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION TO THE PRESENT

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this paper to my Parents, Beth and Robert, my Siblings, Ashlee and Kristian, and all family and friends who have shown me constantly nothing but love and support. And to all of the legendary comic book writers and artists, past and present, for their continual inspiration.

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## ABSTRACT

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Graphic Novels and comic books have long since been seen as a child's play thing. Beginning with the Great Depression until the present, comic books and graphic novels have been directly influenced by the political settings of the day. Unless you really observe when characters came out you would not notice that for each major political event in American history the comic book has either flourished or have nearly died off. The purpose of this research is two-fold. The first is to show that during each decade there was a political event that directly influenced events in comic books, both good and bad. The other being that once it was well known that comic books were being read the Government used comic books for influential purposes.

## Chapter I: Introduction

It is the purpose of this paper to show that comic books and graphic novels have been influenced by political events, political cultures, and theories since its original inception starting with Superman in the 1938.

<sup>1</sup>Comic Books and <sup>2</sup>Graphic Novels have long been seen as a child's play thing, a novelty that no person over the age of 12 should really bother themselves with. Furthermore they have the negative connotation of only being read by lonely and overweight nerds.

To many observers, it is over-muscled and over-sexed men and women in brightly colored spandex uniforms fighting against the egomaniacal world-dominating villain with no real world connotations. However, this is far from the truth. The graphic novel is just the latest in storytelling ranging back to the paintings of the caveman to the epic storytelling of Greek and Roman gods fighting alongside men to the fables that showed child and adult alike the dangers of losing oneself. Graphic Novels, like any other media outlet, are influenced by the political nature of the world more than people may think. Comic books have been used from every aspect imaginable. They have been used as an armed forces recruiting tool, as icons for the civil rights movements, as well for the

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<sup>1</sup> A comic book is a narrative told through both text and art.

<sup>2</sup> A graphic novel is a long-form comic book or a collection of a comic book story arc or stand alone story. The term is usually used to distance itself from the term "comic book."

handicapped, feminists, minorities, and homosexuals. They have been used as teaching tools, and analogies for modern warfare.

Comic books have been influenced whenever there has been a change in the dynamic of politics in the world. In the Great Depression we see what would become the <sup>3</sup>Golden Age of comic books starting with the creation of Superman and Batman. They saw people were suffering and were facing hardships that the United States, up to that point, had not known.

When the United States entered into World War II the soldiers were going into battle with newly created patriotic characters such as Captain American and Wonder Woman. With the coming of peace and the American perception of the Communist Method we see these superheroes nearly disappear until the dawn of the Silver Age of comics and America once more enters into a new war both home and abroad. In the 1960s when Vietnam War started we see Tony Stark step into his Mach I Iron Man suit and Captain America revived to lead a new team of heroes, The Avengers.

The Flash and the Green Lantern, two <sup>4</sup>DC characters who had seen their titles cancelled in the 1950s get a new lease on life with new men carrying the mantle. Also, at this time the Green Lantern is now an Air Force pilot and thanks to our new fascination with space he now gets his power from a far away planet. At home America begins the space race against Russia while Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X start their

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<sup>3</sup> There are four ages of comic books. When these ages start and end is debatable. The Golden Age of Comics is usually referenced as the time period encompassing the Great Depression up until the Korean War. The Silver Age consists of the 1960's. The Bronze Age starts, for most, in 1970 and ends in the Mid-1980s. The final age is the Modern Age starting the same time the Bronze Age end and is currently going.

<sup>4</sup> DC Comics, alongside Marvel Comics, are considered one of the two main comic book companies. Other big comic book companies are Image and Dynamite.

movements. In the comics Reed Richards takes a team up into space that will become the Fantastic Four while a telepathic professor and his best friend become mortal enemies in the pages of *The Uncanny X-Men*. There is also the conception of Spider-Man, a nerdy high school student who wasn't the sidekick, but his own hero, and the Incredible Hulk, a tortured scientist on the run from the Army. As the Bronze Age continued into the 1970s, Watergate and other scandals sow seeds of doubt into the public and into comic books, so much so that Steve Rodgers gives up the mantle of Captain America. With the eve of blaxploitation come a slew of African –American characters, from Black Panther to Black Lightning to Storm to Luke Cage. We get comics with Lois Lane, a long time Superman character, transforming into a black woman to see how “it feels to be a black woman.”

The Modern Age of comic books started during the Reagan Era. Comics start to become slightly darker as companies began to ignore the comic code authority. DC Comics released *The Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* and are both social and political commentaries on Reaganomics. The nineties see the comic book code lose more of its authority with the “spandex” fad coming to an apex and anatomically disproportioned heroes. The X-Men addressed the AIDS epidemic throughout the decade while both Marvel and DC comics started to “out” certain heroes, but the nineties had pretty much been a governmentally quiet time and just like in the fifties, the necessity of certain characters started to be called into question, and just as in the fifties Captain America suffered again. This would all change though after the turn of the century.

September 11, 2001 made many people look at the heroes in our books and ask “why?” Why do we need these people? The comics became much more serious, much

more embedded in reality. We now live in a world where we as a people have seemingly become so cynical that when writer Ed Brubaker “killed” Captain America in his own comic, people asked “Was he even necessary now?” The sad thing is, as one follows comic books from their very beginnings to the present, there have been many characters that have become meaner and darker. Once again, as in World War II, our heroes who fought with the boys pick up this newer fight. Their input shows that there is nothing wrong with loving your country or being proud of where you come from. Furthermore it shows that while the people in government may be corrupt, the process of our democracy is what inspires us. We may become disillusioned but we should never lose sight of what is right and in the end there is not really anything wrong with “Truth, Justice, and the America Way.”

This paper will demonstrate, through the usage of various comic books, graphic novels, and other publications that the comic book medium has been influenced and shaped by the politics of the world around it. The various books used including *Comic Book Nation* and *Baby Boomer Comics* show both the political atmosphere at the time and the influence that comics had on people. The purpose Bradford Wright’s book *Comic Book Culture* and the reason that it was so helpful is that it shows how comic books reflected the culture of the time and that both writers and artists used comics to show the issues that were impacting the world around them. While these books reflected the culture, the purpose of this paper is to show how politics influenced the culture which then influenced comic books.

Chapter II: The Golden Age: Thirties to the Forties



## **Part 1: The Great Depression and the Advent of the Superhero**

Prior to the <sup>5</sup>Great Depression, many comic books were just reprints of the daily funnies put into a collection or a crime noir story. Most of the characters in these early days were “drawn from the working class, usually immigrants, and their humor was physical” (Nyberg, pg 2). However, coming out of the Great Depression we start to see the advent of more than human characters. Don Thompson writes in the forward to the Justice Society of America archive that “comic books came along around 1933 and super-heroes began starring in them in 1938. To start this off was the creation of the ultimate ‘more than human’ character, Superman.

Superman was created in June of 1938 by two Jewish men from Ohio, Jerry Siegel, the son of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, and Joe Shuster, who was born in Canada to immigrant parents, in Action Comics #1. Superman, in his first incarnation, fought corrupt organizations, the mob, etc. at a time when people were trying to come out of the Great Depression. It should come as no surprise that Superman, much like his creators, was an immigrant, only from another planet.

The planet Krypton, in a far away galaxy, is about to explode when two parents, Jor-El and Lara Lor-Van, place their newborn baby Kal-El into a rocket ship and jettison him off in hopes he is raised by good parents. When Kal-El comes to Earth, his rocket lands safely and he is discovered and raised by John and Martha Kent, a farmer and his wife, in Smallville, Kansas. They raise Kal-El as though he was their own. They would

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<sup>5</sup> The Great Depression describing the economic downturn starting in 1929 and lasting until the late 1940's.

name him Clark Kent as though he was normal Earth child, Clark being Martha Kent's middle name. However, the Superman of the thirties was drastically different from the Superman of today. As Clark Kent, he is a bumbling mild-mannered reporter. As Superman, his actions in the beginning were much more drastic and instead of just throwing the crook into prison he would sometimes just drop them. The artists would never show the villain meeting his doom, but he would also not be shown being rescued and one could assume that this was welcomed with those coming out of the Depression Era.

Superman would also demonstrate many political views that would now be considered liberal, fighting for social reform and government assistance for the poor. Superman was proactive, instead of reactive. The following shows a negative reaction towards big business occurring in Superman.

“In the second issue of *Action Comics*, Superman crushes a conspiracy involving a U.S. Senator, a lobbyist, and a munitions manufacturer who wish to embroil the United States in a foreign war. He then ends the fraudulent Latin American war by informing the belligerents that they have been manipulated by greedy American industrialists.”  
(Wright, pg. 11)

Superman would have a small supporting cast surrounding him through his adventures. There was Lois Lane, his love interest, his competition and nuisance, Jimmy Olsen, the bumbling photographer, and 'Chief' Perry White, his editor-in-chief. What made Lois Lane slightly different from the other women at this time is that she was an independent female character. In the 1940 issue of the *New York World's Fair Comics*, Lois Lane, after learning that Clark Kent was sent on an assignment with her, thinks to

herself I don't see why Taylor had to send Clark along – I could handle the story without his help! Anyway, this will give me a chance to show him up!” She was far from the feminist that would populate the comic book industry in later years, but she was a beautiful woman who put her work before love. Lois's main usage, however, was still to be the damsel in distress.

Following the success of Superman, DC Comics went forward with their next superhero, the Caped Crusader known as Batman.



Bob Kane and Bill Finger created Bruce Wayne in May 1939 in issue 27 of the comic book series *Detective Comics*. Batman is epitome of a child fed with a silver spoon. He does not act like the other playboys of his era were supposed to act and did not look down upon the poor and underprivileged he chooses to devote his life and the Wayne Fortune to defend those that cannot defend their own selves. His rogues' gallery

originally consisted of just small time mob bosses and crooks. He also was not the skilled gymnast or chemist that he would later become, but rather he “hopes” things turn out. Batman also killed which was a trait that his character would eventually vow never to do. At the same time, Timely Comics, which would later become Marvel Comics, and Bill Everett created and debuted their own superheroes in Namor the Sub-Mariner.

Many of the villains in these older issues were mob bosses and corrupted congressmen. While Superman and Batman were successful characters in the same universe they had never really met. Superheroes had never really met or interacted with one another. DC comics changed this in their off-shoot division *All-Star Comic's* series *Justice Society of America*. Consisting of characters ranging from the Flash (I), Green Lantern (I), Hourman (I), Hawkman (I), the Atom (I), the Spectre (I), the Sandman (I), and Dr. Fate (I). This group would go and fight for ‘America and Democracy.’

These heroes were heroes for average, blue-collar workers. They fought for the rights of the common man. They also were against the dangers of businesses getting a free pass when it came to public scrutiny and government regulations and that if businesses were not held accountable then, that is how they became dishonest and shady. In one story, the Original Green Lantern helps a working man who is being abused by a shipping industrialist who has been taking unemployed workers to an island in the Caribbean to be used as slaves. The worker in the story goes to the police and the media, but no one is willing to listen to him; no one, of course, but the Green Lantern who intervenes on the workers behalf and brings the criminal to justice. Once again the little man triumphs over the evil wealthy rich man. In another story Dr. Mid-Nite “protected

coal miners from an abusive mining company and ensured access for government safety inspectors.” (Wright, pg. 23)

Still, sometimes the heroes bit the hands that fed them and turned the light back on the reader. In a Batman and Robin story titled *Suicide Beat*, the Duo “investigates a crime-ridden neighborhood run by a mobster and a political boss whose goons routinely gun down police with impunity. The Murderers cannot be apprehended because the neighborhood people shelter them. The police tell Batman that “a crooked politician runs that street... and he’s a smart politician! He lends the poor people money, buys them food on Christmas, finds men jobs, etc... and asks in return that they vote for him and protect his jackals!” Only after Batman and Robin have caught the political boss in the act of stealing from the neighborhood people do the citizens recognize him for the criminal that he is. In the end, they reject the patronage of corrupt political leaders and accept the police and Batman as their true benefactors.” (Wright, pg. 25)

One could say that there were two kinds of comics, the adventure comic and the regular comics. The adventure comics were more your “spandex” costumed books. These were the ones where you have Superman lifting a car over his head while he is flying or Captain America jumping into a Nazi bunker while bullets are bouncing off of his shield. The regular comics were just that, regular. These were your Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny and Popeye and Archie, etc. The books would expand in the fifties to include such titles *Richie Rich*, *Baby Huey*, *Casper the Ghost*, etc.

While adventure comics were entrenched deep in Germany and World War II, the regular comics were in a whole other world of fantasy. While Bugs Bunny and Mickey

Mouse were off searching for treasure, you have the Archie Comics that were just normal teenagers. In his series, you of course had Archie Andrews, the hero, who was always trying to decide between Veronica Lodge, the rich, “bad girl”, and Betty Cooper, the cute girl next door. Archie’s best friend, Jughead Jones, was always more interested in eating and food than girls. Of course, for every hero, you need the counterpart. In this case, his foil was Reggie Mantle.

As the thirties were winding down our heroes would go from defending the common man against ourselves to defending the interest of a nation.

## **Part 2: World War II, Flag Wavin', and Shield Slingin'**

As the Great Depression was going on and while our newly formed heroes were fighting their own war over here against corruption there was another war starting overseas. Hitler was using the Nazi party to take over Germany. This act would affect comic books not only for the next decade, but also would influence a comic book artist not even born yet. Art Spiegelman would write about his father's experience during the Holocaust in the 1970s graphic novel *Maus*.

As America entered World War II, the comic book industry created this boom of comic books ranging from new superheroes to comic book that followed soldiers. Unlike many wars afterwards, this had and continues to have the impression that it was a good and just war. As stated previously, comic books urged Americans, both young and old; to do all they could in the war effort. In the books, and in real life, those who did not join in, those who were distant and those who were involved in the war for selfish purposes were traitors, villains, and buffoons who did not know right from wrong.

More of the artists and writers that were working at this time were "both Jewish and liberal." (Wright, pg. 35) One example was Jacob Kurtzberg, better known as Jack Kirby. Kirby was born in 1917 on the Lower East Side of New York, a location that would be the "hub" of what would become the Marvel Universe. Kurtzberg changed his name because he wanted to have an American sounding name. Kirby's artwork was simple and direct which he saw as American.

Timely Comics introduced their answer to DC's Superman, in Captain America. Captain America was originally created as a tool to get people to enlist into the <sup>6</sup>Armed Forces. He was actually created a full year before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but the war had been well under way. Both creators of Captain America were Jewish and were very appalled at the actions taking place in Germany. The very first issue of Captain America could not have spoken loudly enough about how Timely Comics would handle the war. The first issue was of Captain America crashing through a window, with his original shield deflecting bullets and punching Hitler directly in the nose knocking him over his table. America would be pulling no punches. In Bradford Wright's book *Comic Book Nation* wrote "Writer/creator Simon later said, "The opponents to the war were all quite well organized. We wanted to have our say too." However, not everyone was a Captain America fan. Joe Simon would later say, "When the first issue came out we got a lot of threatening letters and hate mail. Some people really opposed what Cap stood for. (Wright, pg. 36)

This is a story that has been retold again and again because at the base of it there is this hope that we could all be Captain America. Born Steve Rodgers, he was born in New York in 1917 and when the war erupted tried to enlist only to be turned away due to his 4F status. The army saw something in him and signed him up for the experimental "Super Soldier" program. After the experiment that would transform weak Steve Rodgers into Captain America a Nazi spy kills the scientist responsible for the program and along with it any hope America had at re-creating the program. This effectively made Captain America one of a kind. Captain America's costume was a variation on the

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<sup>6</sup> He was created during America's first peace time draft.

American flag, i.e. red, white, and blue, as well as being armed with a shield made of an indestructible metal later known as adamantium that he would use as both an offensive and defensive weapon. The shield itself was painted in American colors. With World War II breaking out, we see our superheroes going overseas to try and win the war.

Captain America and Batman did not go into the battles alone. In 1940 Kane and Finger created Robin the Boy-Wonder. Robin was Richard "Dick" Grayson who was taken in as Bruce Wayne's ward after watching his parents murdered in front of him. Captain America creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby gave Steve Rodgers his own sidekick in the form of James Buchanan "Bucky" Barnes. Bucky also wore a costume and would go into battle with Captain America. As the war ended, Bucky was originally written as being killed off. This status has changed as of 2007 when Barnes was revived as a brainwashed Soviet assassin codenamed Winter Soldier. He would be un-brainwashed and, when Steve Rodgers was "killed" would take up the mantle of Captain America.

As American was being attacked at Pearl Harbor, DC Comics was introducing another character, Wonder Woman. Just like Captain America, Princess Diana Prince was draped in the American Flag and American symbols. Princess Diana, better known as Wonder Woman, was created by William Moulton Marston, better known for creating the lie detector. Wonder Woman was created with the intention of being a role model for Marston's young daughter and other young girls. She would later become a feminist icon in the seventies and was a role model for Gloria Steinem. While she was supposed to be a female role model she did fall in love with Major Steve Trevor, an air force pilot.

Captain America was an easy character to send to war. He was human, he could enlist, he could be killed, and he could be used as a symbol to inspire the rest of us to go to war. Superman, on the other hand, was not human. With Superman and his alter ego, there was no way he could enlist. You cannot have your flagship character being unpatriotic and DC knew this. To solve this, Sigel and Shuster made the decision to have Clark Kent try to enlist but have him

“use his X-ray vision during his eye examination to read through the wall into the next room and read the next chart, making him blind and forcing the doctors to find him unfit for service, much to Clark’s chagrin and Lois’s disgust. Superman shrugs off Lois’ disappointment, resolving to serve the American war effort by policing America’s home front and declaring that “the United States Army, Navy, and Marines are capable of smashing their foes without the aid of a Superman!” (Wright pg. 43)

There were a few other comic book companies that existed at that time other than just the “Big Two.” One company that lasted a couple of years was Quality Comics, who would later sell out to DC. Their big book during the war was simply titled *Military Comics* with Blackhawk who “was a lone Polish aviator seeking revenge on the Nazis for the invasion of his country and the slaughter of his family.” (The Golden Age of DC Comics)

Many covers during this time were directly associated with the war. The cover of *Captain Marvel Adventures* #8 published in March 6, 1942 by Fawcett Comics shows the title hero leading the army, marines, and the navy into battle. According to the book, *The Golden Age of DC Comics: 365 Days*, this cover also has a double meaning. The troops were following these superheroes in both the comics and in real life. During the war, the sales of comic books surged.

Seeing that comics were selling amongst a generation older than twelve year olds comic book companies started putting ads saying “Buy War Bonds and Stamps for Victory” on the cover of their comics, ranging from The Boy Commandos to Superman



to Captain America to Manhunter. An interesting side note is that many of the writers and artists during this time period were Jewish, including *Superman* creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster and *Captain America*, *Boy Commandos* creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, and *Batman* creators Bob Kane and Bill Finger.

War Comics became a popular genre during the war.

DC Comics, EC Comics, and especially Charleston Comics were the three most prolific companies to write war time comics. EC Comics had a series titled *Frontline Combat*. Charlton Comics produced *Fightin' Army* and *Fightin' Marines*. Many of these titles would last until the end of the Silver Age. DC Comics would start to merge their war titles into mainstream continuity around the late fifties. DC Comics also had *Sgt. Rock* which also ran reprints of *Our Army at War*.

During the war, the Superman radio series, and the comic, had Superman fighting the likes of Hitler and Mussolini. However, after that had ended Superman needed another true to life rogue to fight. In one example the Ku Klux Klan was that villain. In their book *Freakonomics*, Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner wrote, "During the war, the *Adventure of Superman* program had portrayed Superman fighting Hitler and Mussolini and Hirohito. But now he was in need of fresh villains. The Klan was a perfect target, and Superman turned his powers against them." (Freakonomics pg. 57) The show would give away information on the Klan to people who were listening to the program so that the average people would be dissuaded from joining them.

As hard as America and our comic books creators were on Germany we would allow racism to shine its ugly head toward the Japanese. While we were fighting the Japanese, Germany was always the number one enemy. Marvel, then timely, even made our number one hero Captain America's arch enemy the Red Skull, a devout follower of Hitler and the Third Reich. Prior to the bombing at Pearl Harbor, artists drew Japanese people with the stereotypical attributes. After the bombing, artists would make the Japanese even more ugly.

The Japanese army was depicted as unintelligent and unable to come up with any original weaponry, instead they just copied from the Americans. Japanese-Americans were shown as being forced to be un-loyal to America, so far as being written saying “I was born in American and I love this country... There are many more Japs like me... Unfortunately Imperial Japan has put pressure on us and we’ve been forced to work against Uncle Sam!” (Wright. pg 47) Germans, on the other hand, were treated as two sects. There was the smart military soldier or spy and the bumbling “Col. Klink” idiot. While the Japanese-Americans were viewed as traitors with no distinction between them and their homeland counterparts, there was a big distinction between the Nazis and German-Americans. German-Americans were portrayed in comics as patriotic to America.

Today in comics we view our allies as one and the same as us. Many of the writers and artists that work today are from other countries as opposed to during the war. The main difference back then was that while today our allies are our equals, in the war the perception was they were our sidekicks. In the comic books, Americans fought alongside the British and the Russians against the Germans, Italians, and the Japanese, but, except for a very few occasions, the Americans were always the main heroes.

As always, war and politics fuels all aspects of the country and the comic book industry was no different. “In November 1945 the weekly U.S. Army newspaper *Yank* reported that comic books at PXs across the nation exceeded the combined sales of the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Readers’ Digest* by ten to one” (Wright, pg 19). The only problem that some heroes and companies would face is that, as the war ended we would go from fighting one war of ideology to another war of ideology. From a war that was

being fought over seas to battles that were fought both overseas and in our congressional hearings. And after fighting alongside the troops, the comic book heroes that we had come to love and wish to be like would fight not against corrupt congressmen in a dark alley, but against Congress in Washington.

I interviewed comic book legend Joe Kubert, an artist who has been in the business since the Golden Age. Here is an excerpt from that interview:

**Robert:** What do you think? Ok, with World War II, before World War II, comic books were mostly for kids and WWII comes and you have the creation of Captain America, you have Superman and Batman saying “Slap a Jap, buy war bonds”. Do you think that was a turning point?

**Joe Kubert:** Umm. No. I think it was merely; actually, the books being put out at that time were I guess to a great extent jingoistic, that they were focused on an area where there was no argument; there were no debates about it. We were at war, they were the bad guys, we were the good guys and when it came out it, it was focused on that clear dichotomy as far as the subject matter was concerned. Today its different comic books are taking all sides of the political arena the approach is a lot more adult, sometimes a lot more insulting. It’s quite different than a few years ago.

World War II would be used to in many later comics during the Silver Age. One of the greatest villains that this event would produce was Magneto, arch-villain of Professor Xavier and the X-Men. Born Max Eisenhardt, he would later change his name to Erik Magnus Lehnsherr. He was a Holocaust survivor who, because of his experience, would become a megalomaniac who fought against Homo-Sapiens in the name of <sup>7</sup>Homo-Superior to make sure that what happened to him in the Holocaust never happened again.

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<sup>7</sup> Homo-Superior is the technical term used in the Marvel Universe for mutant.

### **Part 3: The Cold War, H.U.A.C., the Seduction of the Innocent, and Almost the Death of Comics**

After World War II ended there was a lull in comic books. Certain books did better than others. *Superman* flourished. It became a hit TV series with George Reeves, much like Batman had been a hit movie serial in the thirties and forties. *Captain America* and *Captain Marvel Adventures*, along with other war time heroes like Namor the Sub-Mariner, the Human Torch, the Green Lantern, and the Flash, on the other hand started to flounder and by the end of the decade had all been cancelled.

America would go from fighting a dictator who was massacring people to fighting against someone we considered an ally during the war and their ideals.

The main difference between World War II and the Korean War is that during the Second World War, nearly every hero that existed was fighting the war in some way shape or form. When the Korean War was in full swing there were not as many heroes going to fight. The only companies that were promoting any books were DC and Fawcett Comics. The other difference is that while we were in Germany we were fighting the “good war” and we were not retreating, whereas in Korea we were not. What once was allowable during World War II was laughable during the Korean War.

A side effect of World War II that directly influenced the comic books during the Korean War is that many artists and writers during this time had fought in World War II. So you have very different points of views from the soldiers. During World War II the soldiers were all gung ho and fearless. During the Korean War you see the treatment of soldiers, especially in the book *G.I. Joe*, on both a physical and mental aspect. In one of the issues, entitled *Fear*, a G.I., who has been recently shell-shocked, is ordered to scout

for enemy patrols. As the story continues, he encounters one and, out of fear, panics and fires uncontrollably into the enemy ranks. Once the firefight ended, the G.I. is shocked to find that he is still alive and all of the Communist soldiers are dead. At the end, the G.I.'s unit commends him for his bravery.

The war books also presented war with a much grimmer outlook. One example is the cover of *G.I. Joe* where you have a portrait of an All-American G.I. holding a little puppy in one arm and in the other arm he is firing a Thompson sub-machine gun while a very stereotypical Korean soldier runs away in fear. Another example of a grim story is one entitled *The Road Back*, where you follow a soldier and his unit. The soldiers are unshaven and dirty with low morale. Towards the end of the book the G.I. learns that he can actually go home, but instead reenlists because this is all he knows.

After the Korean War ended in 1953 with the signing of the armistice, there was no more war and what does a soldier do without a war? Marvel Comics tried to revive their World War II heroes, Captain America, Namor, and the Human Torch to battle communist Russia. However, as stated above, this would last only a few issues. Steve Rodgers would eventually be thrown into suspended animation. Marvel Comic would keep Steve Rodgers in suspended animation until his revival in the 1960s. The company would try and bring back the character, but with different people under the mask, along with the original Human Torch and Namor the Sub-Mariner but with very little success. DC comics had a similar occurrence with their heroes such as the Flash and Green Lantern.

The superhero was slowly drawing less and less of an audience. In Issue 122 of *Superman*, Clark Kent goes to Korea to do a report on a G.I. that suddenly has powers, with no explanation of how this G.I. gained these super powers. The G.I. did not have full control of his powers, so Clark Kent had to keep changing into Superman to prevent the errors of the G.I.

During the fifties many comics that had been popular during the war fell out of popularity and books such as westerns, crime novels, romance, and horror books became more popular. A few titles that were being published were *Pop Teenagers*, *Tales from the Crypt*, and *the Vault of Terror*, the last two being published by EC Comics. Timely Comics would also change their name to Atlas Comics and publish their own array of non-superhero books.

While America was at war there were very little controversy over comics because they were all for “our boys.” Once the wars had ended people started looking for their next target. “Criticism by educators and some academics attracted only intermittent public attention in the 1930s and early 1940s. Not until the end of the war would attacks on comics lead to a public demand for action.” (Nyberg pg. 17)

While this occurring, America was going through the second Red Scare which took place in between 1947-1957. The second red scare’s main proponent was Senator Joseph McCarthy. Senator McCarthy’s communist hunt reached into all aspects of America, from politicians to Hollywood to comic books. The result of the red scare was an influx of science fiction movies and stories about aliens coming to earth. This also bled into comic books.

The Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) established the Comic Code Authority in 1954 due to the violence and gore that was predominantly in the horror and crime comic books during the fifties. The Comic Code had to be established because of two main factors. The first was the publication of *The Seduction of the Innocent* by Fredric Wertham and the second being the United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. Fredric Wertham wrote in his book that comic books were influencing children in a negative fashion. Wertham, in his book, claimed that “the Batman stories are psychologically homosexual” and that “the Batman type of story may stimulate children to homosexual fantasies, of the nature of when they may be unconscious.” Unlike the creation of the F.C.C. and Wertham’s best tries, the subcommittee did not “recommend any legislation for the problem of comic books, instead calling on the industry to self-police itself.” (Nyberg, pg. X Introduction)

He believed that the homosexual nature stemmed from the relationship between Batman and Robin, writing “Only someone ignorant of the fundamentals of psychiatry and of the psychopathology of sex can fail to realize a subtle atmosphere of homoeroticism which pervades the adventures of the mature ‘Batman’ and his young friend ‘Robin.’” (*The Seduction of the Innocent*)

This view would affect Batman when, twelve years later, ABC made the *Batman* television show. In the show, to offset the gay tones the show introduced Aunt Harriet so that there would be a female person in the house.

Other characters that were attacked by Wertham and his book were Wonder Woman, whom he claimed had a bondage subtext and because she was strong and

independent was a lesbian, Archie Comics, who were over sexed, and also the entire lineup of EC Comics. EC Comics at the time boasted comics that tackled horror, crime, and corruption while tackling subjects such as racism, sex, drug use, and murder. The titles that are most commonly known, and ones that were later shut down, were *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Vault of Horror*, and *The Haunt of Fear*. Surprisingly enough, the one title that survived the downfall of EC Comics was the magazine *Mad Magazine*.

The guidelines that were set forth were broken up into sections. The first general section was on how comic books were to deal with crime. Crime was not to be in the title or glorified and people in high ranking areas, such as political officials, or those who uphold the law, such as cops. When criminal acts are performed, the manners in which they are performed were not to be shown and good must always triumph over evil. The second general section dealt with horror and terror acts. No gruesome or lurid acts were to be shown or illustrated. These included excessive blood, murder, lust, sadism, or gory scenes. Also, stories containing zombies, werewolves, ghouls, cannibalism, or torture were strictly prohibited. The third general section dealt with dialogue, religion, marriage and sex, and the costume. Religion was not to be mocked or ridiculed. There was to be no cursing and slang/colloquialisms were allowed, but proper grammar should be used at all times. The costumes should be dressed reasonably, contain no nudity, and all bodies should have no exaggerations. The sanctity of marriage, when talked about, will be protected while divorce shall not be shown in a humorous manner. Also, illicit sex acts, sexual perversions, seduction, or rape shall not be shown or discussed.

I asked Mister Kubert about the Comic Code. Here is another excerpt:

**Robert:** Jumping back in time a little bit, in the 50's when the comic book code was created through congress, when congress came down on *Tales from the Crypt* and comic books of that nature. Did you feel as an artist, were you scared at all about the comic book genre with congress trying to step in?

**Joe Kubert:** Not at all, not at all, not an iota and that's maybe because I was so naive and perhaps too young to be scared. I know a lot of guys who had been working along side of me, did feel that and that's happened time and time again where they felt that the comic book business was going to fall through the floor. That has happened a number of times and for different reasons, the senate hearings they felt that that was the end, when comic books started not selling after the war, during the war they were extremely successful and for any number of reasons, but subsequent to that, there were lulls and every once in awhile you would hear guys crying this is the end, I'm not going to be able to get any work, the whole business is going down and so on and so forth. my feeling is that with TV coming and movies being so popular that as long as people want to see a magazine or read a magazine and hold it in their hands and feel that tactful sense in your hands as opposed to working a computer or watching TV or a movie I feel that comic books are going to keep coming out and in fact if you look at a book, a comic book today, any comic book look at the quality, and the artwork and the coloring as opposed to what was being put out 40-50 years ago the difference is incredible the change is absolutely incredible. I still think that it lacks as far as story content is concerned but the physical look of the comic book is something that most of us who were in the business 40-50 years ago never dreamed it would look like today.

The strengths of the Comics Magazine Association of America were limited, but their weaknesses were many. The Comic Code Authority strengths came because it was written during a time when there was fear and paranoia running rampant due to when some thought rock and roll posed a threat to the youth of America along with the increasing pressure of numerous congressional hearings. The main weakness of the group grew out of the same reasoning behind its strength. It was built up during a time of fear and it lasted mainly due to the fact that many of the people who continued to run the comic book industry were still people from that era.

Because of the Comic Code, many characters went from being semi-dark characters to almost overly sunny characters. One example who has fluctuated from dark to sunny and back is Batman. Created in 1939, Bruce Wayne was an eight year old who saw his mother and father gunned down in crime alley by Joe Chill. The Batman grew a bit sunnier towards the end of the 1950s as a result of HUAC and the Comic Code.

Another outcome was the introduction of teenaged sidekicks for Batman, other than just Robin. Many of his stories during this time were very sci-fi related. This time coupled with the Batman television series would actually eventually hurt Batman and it wasn't until the Silver Age Batman that he started to swing back to the "Dark Knight" title.

One example of a comic book company that succeeded was Harvey Comics. After the comic code, they dropped all their horror and crime titles and published friendlier titles such as *Baby Huey*, *Little Dot*, *Hot Stuff*, *Casper*, and *Richie Rich*. Charleston Comics would continue to publish romance and war stories and Archie Comics would continue to be published with very few problems from the comic code.

While America dealt with comics in a more regulated way two of our allies actually banned comic books. The French National Assembly, in January 1949, passed a measure "prohibiting the publication and circulation of all children's periodicals that glorified "banditry, lying, stealing, laziness, cowardice, hatred or any acts of crime." Almost a year later in December, the Canadian Parliament passed laws that set "a maximum sentence of two years in prison for anyone who made, printed, or sold publications that "exclusively or substantially" compromised "matter depicting pictorially the commission of crime, real or fictitious." (Nyberg, pg. 101) Both countries felt that if you stopped it at a young age you would curb crime when they became older. Superman at one point had been compared to the "Nazi Superman" by the Communists. The reason that comic books, despite there being comic book burning, bans, public criticism, and a lot of bad publicity, never became banned was because it was argued that since adults read comic books it was then protected by the First Amendment.

In 1956, DC Comics editor Julius Schwartz tried with success to revive on the World War II heroes, the Flash. Only this time, Barry Allen was a forensic police officer who was struck by lightning and chemicals prompting him to move at super speed. The character re-launch was a success. In 1959 he decided to re-launch almost all of the original heroes, this time with an otherworldly approach instead of just magic. The new Green Lantern is air force pilot Hal Jordan who receives his power ring from the planet OA to join the Green Lantern Corps. It would be his job to patrol Sector 2814, Earth. Barry Allen and Hal Jordan were then followed by the new Hawkman, Hawkwoman, and the Atom. This time Hawkman and Hawkwoman are police officers from the planet Thanagar. The Atom now is Ray Palmer, a scientist who figures out a way to shrink himself down with a belt.

When the Golden Age of comics ended is very difficult to pinpoint. Some people see the end of the Golden Comics when Timely Comics cancelled *Captain America* in 1950 right after *Marvel Mystery Comics* and *Sub-Mariner Comics* had been cancelled the year before. Another theory of when the Golden Age died was the introduction of what is known as the Atomic Era and



with the western comics. Many comics switched much of their production from the superhero genre to westerns, even changing up the name of the comic. An example of this is when, in 1951, when *All-Star Comics* became *All-Star Westerns*. Yet others believe that with the onslaught of the crime and horror genre killed the Golden Age. While the heroes of the Golden Age were not as pure as we may believe, it was still more pure than the crime and evil that was being made in the fifties. Comics went from glorifying heroes fighting the good fight to stories about husbands and wives cheating on each other and killing each other. These were stories that we see on a daily basis today, but back then it was a tainting of something more innocent.

As the fifties came to an end, so did the Golden Age of Comics. This era had seen the rise and fall of the Great Depression, World War II, Nazis, Pearl Harbor, the Cold War, Communism, and the Comic Code Authority. The comic code had ended an entire genre of comics, the superhero genre had all but faded from existence, and the heroes that did exist were a watered down, science fiction, version of their previous selves. There is a metamorphosis of the villains as well. The comics go from crooked politicians and mob bosses into war time villains to thugs with superpowers. However, the sixties were right around the corner and the Silver Age of comics would come along with them.

Chapter III: The Silver Age: 1956 – Early 70's



#### **Part 4: End of the Fifties and all of the Sixties**

DC Comics has sometimes been credited with bringing about the Silver Age with the reintroduction of the Green Lantern and the Flash, but Marvel brought about the comics that would change the way people saw these books with the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man. The silver age only lasted from 1957 to 1970, but in those fourteen years America saw the space race, civil rights, Vietnam and Anti-War protestors, revolutions, sex, drugs, and rock n' roll, the death of a President, and the "British Invasion." Whereas DC Comics set their heroes in cities such as Metropolis or Gotham City, Marvel Comics made themselves much more "realistic" by setting themselves and their stories in New York City.

As the fifties were coming to a close, the world saw the advent of the Space Race with the United States and Russia vying to be the first one into space. In comic books we saw the rebirth of the superhero Green Lantern and the creation of what would become known as Marvel's First Family, The Fantastic Four. This title was in direct response to DC Comic's *Justice League of America*. Stan Lee was a not a big fan of superheroes. He believed that those heroes were too perfect, so he attempted to connect with the new generation of readers, by making all his heroes slightly flawed.

These heroes broke away from previous hero stereotypes. The Fantastic Four were comprised of brilliant scientist Dr. Reed Richards who was slightly boring and very scientific, his girlfriend Sue Storm who was not just the girlfriend or damsel in distress but an important part of the team, her brother Johnny Storm who was not just another

sidekick but one of the team and Reed's best friend air force pilot Benjamin J. Grimm who was very much from Brooklyn.

In the original storyline, Reed Richards was in a hurry to be the first man into space in order to study the cosmic rays above the earth. Due to a miscalculation they were bombarded by these same cosmic rays that they went up there to



study. Because of the rays they were transformed into the Fantastic Four. Reed Richards became Mr. Fantastic with the ability to stretch his body, Sue Storm became the Invisible Girl (later Invisible Woman) whose powers were not only turning herself invisible but also turning other individuals and objects. Johnny Storm was transformed into the Human Torch with the powers to become light enough to fly but also throw fire balls. Finally, Ben Grimm who became the orange rock, ever lovin' blue-eyed Thing. They

also were not afraid to come out publicly with their secret identities. This also played an important part when, instead of being lauded as heroes, they were able to be sued because people knew who they were.

Much like the superheroes that came before in the Golden Age, many characters created during this silver age do not have the same personalities that we know now. Much like Superman and Batman in the past, The Thing rips up manhole covers to get away and bursts through the streets proclaiming, “Bah! I cannot delay! I’ll MAKE an opening!” and when a car hits him because he just popped up out of the street he gets mad at the driver yelling “Fool! Did you not see me in time?” Now the Thing is much more conscious of what he does. He originally does not have the same attitude towards Johnny Storm as he would later in the series. The Thing was also important because you have a man who went from being an American hero in being a fighter pilot to being an outcast because of his appearance due to the transformation.

The Cold War had an impact on comic books. The country lived in a perpetual state of fear and unknowing. America was fighting a war of ideology with the U.S.S.R. while also dealing with Cuba and Vietnam. The Vietnam War started in the early 1960’s and lasted beyond America’s departure in 1973, ironically almost the same duration as the Silver Age of Comics. During that time a large influx of characters and character driven books were introduced.

As a weapons manufacturer, Anthony ‘Tony’ Stark was on top of the world during Vietnam, until a botched kidnapping in Vietnam damaged his heart forcing him to create a suit of armor to keep him alive. Created in 1963 in *Tales of Suspense* #39 Tony Stark

was created by Stan Lee on a self bet four years into the Vietnam War. Lee wanted to create a corporate capitalist businessman who, under normal conditions, people would hate. Iron Man was created to explore Cold War themes, military operations, and such. Iron Man has since been used as an allegory for nuclear proliferation, with the Armor Wars, and the war in Afghanistan and his current <sup>8</sup>ret-con, but those two topics will be discussed at a later chapter. Tony Stark's communist adversaries have been Crimson Dynamo and Titanium Man, both Russians, and the Mandarin, who came from China. His first enemy was a Vietnam warlord who was killed when Tony Stark was escaping.

The Crimson Dynamo has always been in the red and white colors of the U.S.S.R. flag, except for the first Dynamo armor which was completely in red.

While Iron Man worked in concordance with the army, *The Incredible Hulk's* main enemy at the beginning was this same army. While working on a gamma based experiment, Dr. Bruce Banner was subjected to an overdose of the radioactive material transforming him into The Hulk. The Hulk's main adversary in the army was General Thaddeus "Thunderbolt" Ross. The Hulk was a take on the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde story.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> issue of *The Incredible Hulk* there was already tension between Dr. Bruce Banner, in his Pre-Hulk days, and General Ross. While Dr. Banner is constructing the gamma bomb, General Ross keeps telling Banner to hurry up. When Bruce warns him that they are building a very dangerous bomb, Ross yells back, "Powerful forces! Bah! A bomb is a bomb! The trouble with you is you're a milksop! You've got no guts!"

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<sup>8</sup> Ret-con, which is short for retroactive continuity, is the deliberate changing of previously established facts in a work of serial fiction. Ret-conning is seen often in comic books, especially in Marvel and DC Comics because of their long histories.

Later on, Banner is caught in the blast protecting a teenager who wandered onto the blast sight transforming him into The Hulk. In *Comic Book Nation*, Bradford Wright wrote

“the Hulk stood as a creature of Cold War preoccupations and scientific progress gone horribly wrong. His very existence pointed to the failures of modern civilization, and so the Hulk proved immune to society’s controlling forces. A Southern Illinois University student was cited in an *Esquire* magazine article saying that students “identified with the Hulk because “he’s an outcast against the institution.” (Wright, pg 223)

While gamma radiation transformed Dr. Bruce Banner into the Hulk, it also transformed two other heroes. In the pages of *Daredevil*, an accident involving a splash of gamma isotopes into teenager Matt Murdock’s eyes blinds him while also heightening his other senses transforming him into the hero Daredevil.

The problem that arises during the Vietnam War was the same problem that arose during World War II and all Post 9/11 military operations. How do you have these characters that are more powerful than an entire army and not have them win the war once and for all?

At the same time that both the Vietnam War and the Space Race were occurring, the Civil Rights movement was also picking up speed. During this time you had two main factions in the African-American Culture, those who followed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and those who followed Malcom X. Each side was for the betterment of the African-American Culture; however both were coming from two separate angles. Marvel Comics also took on the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1964, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed to stop segregation. The inclusion of sex was added as sort of a joke by Representative Howard W. Smith of

Virginia as a way to throw a wrench into the bill with the idea that the other men in Congress would never actually vote on a bill giving women equal rights.

In the Marvel Universe you have a new race of humans emerge in the form of Mutants, genetically altered people, or *homo-superior*. While being persecuted by the Government and the general population there were two sides in the Marvel Universe. There was Professor Xavier and his X-Men and on the other side was the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants led by Magneto. Professor Xavier was for the equal treatment of Mutants while Magneto thought that Mutants should rule over the homo-sapiens.

During a meet and greet at the University of Texas at Austin on October 29<sup>th</sup> 2003, Stan Lee was asked by a member of the audience if he meant for Professor Xavier and Magneto were meant to be metaphors for Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X. Stan Lee replied, "You're damn straight." While the X-Men were originally a comic that was just about "good vs. evil," it would later stand for racism and intolerance. Magneto would later be revealed to be a Holocaust survivor giving some insight into his hatred of humanity.

Between 1960, when Marvel's Silver Age started, and 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was enacted, a number of female characters were introduced into the Marvel Universe. Despite these females being created to show that women could be heroes they were not on the same level as their male counterparts. While Spiderman and Iceman were teenagers they still had the moniker of "man" at the end of their title. The females had "girl" at the end of their title. Marvel Girl and the Invisible Girl were supposed to be

strong females, but still had damsel in distress qualities. Sue Storm had to be rescued repeatedly and Jean Gray would faint if she pushed her powers too hard.

With the Vietnam War also comes the Avengers and with that the return of Steve Rodgers as Captain America. Steve Rodgers would also play an important role in the Seventies and the Bronze Age. In *The Avengers*, the Sons of the Serpent were introduced as an organization who vowed to rid the United States of “foreigners, different creeds, and heritages.” They were later revealed to be a communist front, effectively connecting them to communism.

In the DC Universe, The new Green Lantern is now an air force pilot named Hal Jordan whose best friend is a police officer by the name of Barry Allen, otherwise known as The Flash.

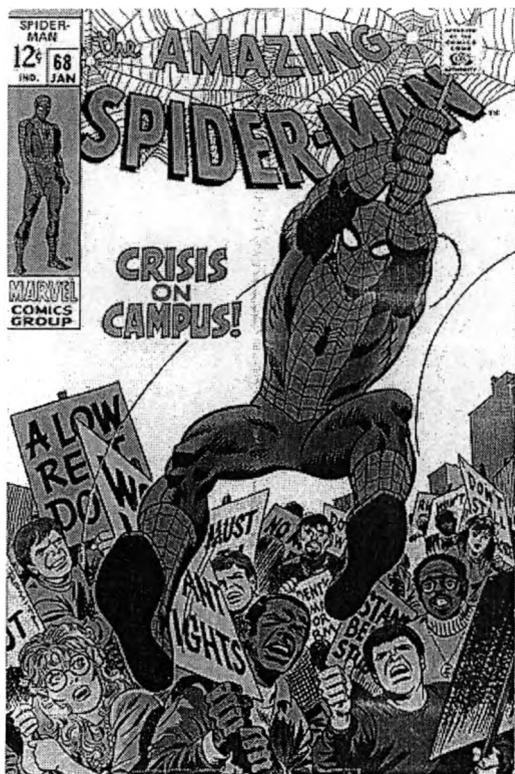
You have the Marvel universe acknowledging the riots and protests that were occurring on college campuses by having Spiderman swinging over college students while they are protesting. The Fantastic Four introduced one of the first main African-American superheroes, the Black Panther. King T’challa was the king of the African nation of Wakanda.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963, in Dallas, TX President John F. Kennedy was fatally shot while he was in his motorcade. Earlier that year, the President’s staff was approached and later approved of the President being featured in an April 1964 issue of *Superman*. In the issue Superman praises the President for being in shape. After the assassination President Lyndon B. Johnson allowed the issue to be published, but with a slightly different storyline.

Marvel Comics were very jingoistic at the beginning of the Cold War and had some of its main heroes fighting against the evil Communists in South Vietnam, Thor and Iron Man being counted among them. However, Stan Lee would later state that he was actually embarrassed by Marvel's "hawkish" attitude saying, "most of us genuinely felt that the conflict in that tortured land (referring to Vietnam) really was a simple matter of good versus evil" and that "since that time, of course, we've grown up a bit, we've realized that life isn't quite so simple, and we've been trying to extricate ourselves from the tragic entanglement of Indochina." People would write into Marvel asking why Captain America was not in Vietnam while others asked that Captain America be kept out of the war.

As America became more and more divided over the war and politics, Stan Lee felt that it would be best for Marvel to keep more centrist and moderate in their position, so as to not distance themselves from the left or right side of the political spectrum.

Created in 1962, Peter Parker was a nerdy teenager who, once again thanks to gamma radiation, gets bitten by a spider and gains its powers while also inventing his own form of webbing and web-shooters.



In *Comic Book Nation* the question is posed as to why Marvel comics were so popular. Once again citing the September 1966 edition of *Esquire*, a Stanford student responded in a questionnaire that Spiderman was his favorite because he was a hero that “was beset by woes, money problems, and the question of existence. In short, he was one of us.” *Esquire* also conducted a poll in 1965 that showed student radicals put Spider-Man and the Hulk next to revolutionary icons such as

Bob Dylan and Che Guevara.

In 1969, after the Civil Rights movement and right before the end of the Silver Age, DC editor Julius Swartz decided to enter DC into the social commentary fray. He hired writer Dennis O’Neil and artist Neal Adams, both of whom were under thirty and would be able to bring a new perspective to the comic book medium. Dennis O’Neil brought a very socio-political view point to the comic book *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*.

In *Comic Book Nation*, Bradford wrote how when the Green Lantern was reintroduced a decade earlier he brought along a sense of optimism and a very “can do” attitude, but as the decade went on the with war and the different movements his sales began to decline. “The Green Lantern sees an assault in progress. A Crowd of angry young men have surrounded a middle-aged gentleman in a business suit. Outraged by this disdain for law and order, the hero rescues the gentleman and teaches the young

people “a little respect.” Then another superhero, the bearded Green Arrow, emerges from the nearby tenements and tells Green Lantern that this affair was none of his business. Confused, the Green Lantern asks his costumed colleague why he is defending these “anarchists.” Green Arrow asks him to look around. This is a slum, and the businessman whom Green Lantern has assisted is the “fat cat landlord who owns this dump... the creep who hasn’t spent a cent in repairs in years” and now plans to evict the tenants so that he can convert their homes into a parking lot. (Wright pg. 226) Right here the dialogue between Hal Jordan, the Green Lantern, and the Green Arrow, Oliver Queen, mirrors the same plight that forced the creation of Superman during the Great Depression. As the story continues, “Visibly shaken, Green Lantern defends his position. As an enforcer of law and order, he was only doing his duty. Green Arrow retorts,

“Seems like I’ve heard that line before...at the Nazi war trials!” An elderly black man approaches Green Lantern and asks why, in all of his efforts on behalf of governments and peoples of this and other worlds, he has never made an effort to help black people. Green Lantern has no answer and can only hang his head in shame.” (Wright pg. 227)

As the decade, and at the same time the Silver Age, came to an end Dennis O’Neil and Neal Adams immersed their *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series into both social and political issues.

Dennis O’Neil transfused comics with political ideologies at the same time. He transformed Oliver Queen into a leftist while Hal Jordan turned into the moderate/conservative and used their differing views in order to show both sides. The title *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* would cross over from the Silver Age into the Bronze

Age with their commentary. In the issue “No Evil Shall Escape My Sight” Green Arrow chastises Hal Jordan and reminds him that he is needed on Earth and, with images of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, reminds him that good people have died for beliefs and that he should

“Listen... Forget about chasing around the galaxy!  
 ... And remember America... it’s a good country...  
 beautiful... fertile... and terribly sick! There are children  
 dying... honest people cowering in fear... disillusioned  
 kids ripping up campuses... On the streets of Memphis a  
 good black man died... and in Los Angeles, a good white  
 man fell... Something is wrong! Something is killing us  
 all...! Some hideous moral cancer is rotting our very  
 souls!” (Wright pg. 228)

There is debate as to when the Silver Age actually ended. There are multiple thoughts on when it ended. In *Baby Boomer Comics*, DC and Marvel Writer as well as BOOM! Editor in Chief Mark Waid believes that the Silver Age came to an end with *Jimmy Olsen* #132, which came out in September of 1970. His reasoning is that during this time period Jack “the King” Kirby had just left Marvel Comics, a company that he had helped build by co-creating Captain America, the X-Men, Avengers, the Fantastic Four, along with others, to go take up artist duties at DC comics. He is quoted as saying, “By that time, a lot of the silver had been badly tarnished.”

**Sub-section: Religion and Comics**

Religion has its own effect on comic book characters. It does not get touched on with every character. The characters that are of Catholic faith include Marvel's Daredevil, Nightcrawler, Ghost Rider, The Punisher, Dum Dum Dugan, Banshee and Siryn. Dark Horses' own Hellboy is Catholic. In the DC Universe, characters like Green Lantern IV, Guy Gardner, is Catholic, but is lapsed. Many other big characters are Protestant. Marvel's Captain America, Spider-Man, and Cyclops are protestant. Marvel Comics the Thing and Shadowcat and DC Comics' The Atom are Jewish. Superman is Methodist.

Frank Miller stated in an interview that he decided to make Daredevil a Catholic was because he loved the idea of a vigilante lawyer being a Catholic and having to deal with what he called "Catholic Guilt." Matt Murdock's faith played a large role when his title was revamped in the 1999 Marvel Knights *Daredevil* when his faith was used against him when the Spider-Man villain Mysterio, used his belief against him and his girlfriend Karen Paige.

Superman went from being a Moses figure in his creation to being Christ like. An alien from the planet Krypton sent to Earth as a baby to dying and being raised from the dead. Although in comics nobody really stays dead for long.

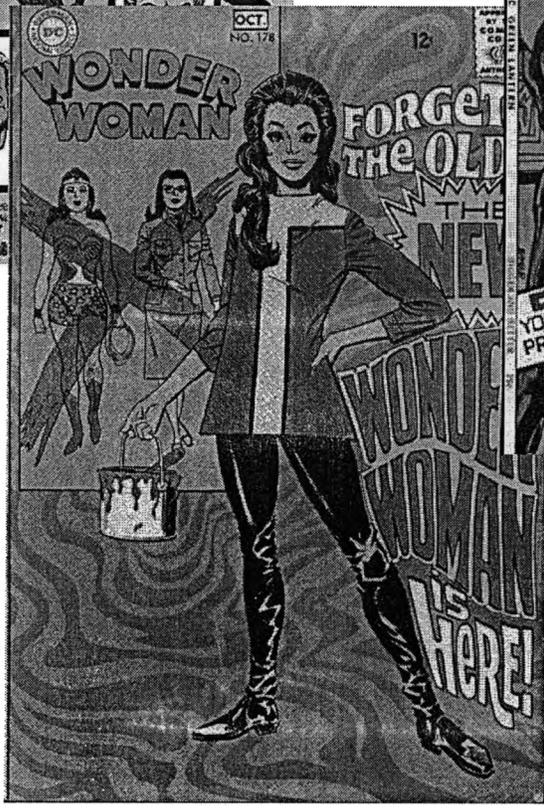
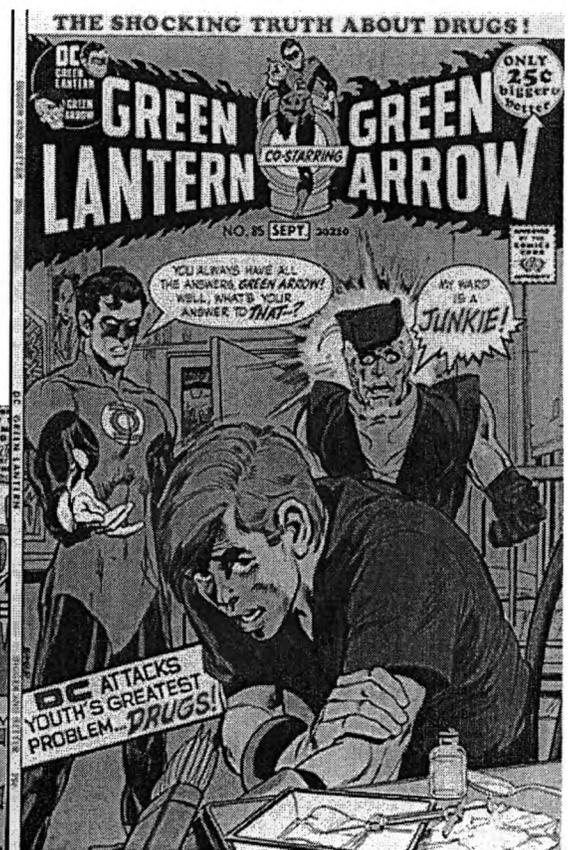
The Thing of the Fantastic Four was slightly based on Jewish comic book artist Jack Kirby in attitude and religion.



The X-Men were sometimes used as an extension of religious tolerance in comic books. In a Marvel Comics Christmas Annual from the late nineties X-Man member Kitty Pryde, codenamed Shadowcat, relays the story of Hanukah to a small child and relates how being Jewish in many times of history has lead to persecution and hateful acts, but out of those hateful acts she has learned to be a stronger person. While

explaining that story she relates the same issues to being a mutant and being persecuted simply for being different.

Chapter IV: The Bronze Age: Early 70's – Mid 80's



## Part 5: Cynicism in America... Thank you Nixon and Blaxploitation

In 1971, because of changes in both political and cultural attitudes, the comic code got revised. What might have been illegal in the original code was now a little more lax. Certain actions were now permissible. Certain items, like the depiction of ghouls and vampires and the undead were now allowed, but only in the classic sense such as Frankenstein, Dracula and other works by Edgar Allen Poe, Conan Doyle, and the like. Drugs were also allowed, but only under certain restrictions. Other articles in the code were kept the same. Those articles pertained to marriage and divorce, dialogue, religion, and costumes.

In *Reflecting Culture: The Evolution of American Comic Book Super Heroes*, Gail Stavitsky writes that,

“having successfully tapped into adolescent desires for more believable, morally ambivalent, and complex characters, Marvel supplanted DC as the center of the super hero comic book movement at this time. Nevertheless, Neal Adams and Dennis O’Neil’s ground-breaking DC series, **Green Lantern/Green Arrow** (1970) immersed its super heroes in the social and political issues of the time: racism, poverty, political corruption, the “generation gap,” drug abuse, the plight of Native Americans, pollution, overpopulation, and religious cults.” (Stavitsky, pg. 29)

After Vietnam ended DC and Marvel both launched comics that either dealt with Vietnam or the reverberations of the war. In 1971, the H.E.W. asked Stan Lee, who was then Editor-in-Chief at Marvel Comics, to write a three part comic on the dangers of drug abuse. The United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was established

in 1953 and lasted until 1979. It was later renamed the Department of Health and Human Services.

The United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare would be later split into two separate groups, the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. The reason these two departments are used is because they coincide with each other and cannot be separated for this particular issue.



In 1971, prior to the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare becoming defunct, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief Stan Lee was approached to do a comic book on the dangers of drug abuse. Stan Lee agreed and wrote a three issue arc. In the arc Peter Parker/Spider-Man stops a young kid who is extremely stoned from falling off a building after he thinks he can fly. As the story arc continues, the ramifications of Mary Jane Watson breaking up with Harry Osborn start to take a toll on him and he begins popping pills and taking LSD. All the while Norman Osborn, Spider-Man's arch-enemy the Green Goblin, is shown to be having brain damage from his use of

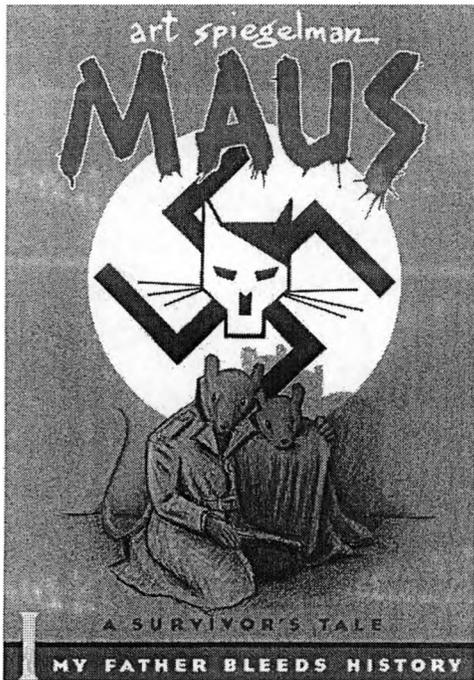
his own drugs. Lee wrote this arc to show that drug use was not as glamorous as had been seen in other media forms.

Before it could be published it had to pass the approval of the Comic Code Authority who, under the direction of Archie Comics publisher John L. Goldwater, refused citing that it did not follow in step with the code. Despite this, the Marvel Publisher at the time, Martin Goodman, gave Stan Lee permission to publish the arc since the reason behind the arc was at the government's request. The storyline was acknowledged in a very positive manner while the Comic Code Authority and their denial came across as counterproductive. Stan Lee, in a 1998 interview discussed this decision, said this,

“I could understand them; they were like lawyers, people who take things literally and technically. The Code mentioned that you mustn't mention drugs and, according to their rules, they were right. So I didn't even get mad at them then. I said, 'Screw it' and just took the Code seal off for those three issues. Then we went back to the Code again. I never thought about the Code when I was writing a story, because basically I never wanted to do anything that was to my mind too violent or too sexy. I was aware that young people were reading these books, and had there not been a Code, I don't think that I would have done the stories any differently.” (Comic Book Artists, May 1998)

DC Comics and DC head Carmine Infantino criticized Marvel Comics and Stan Lee for going against the Comic Code and reaffirmed that they would still stand by the Comic Code in all of their books. Because of the code many comics had to be published in independent magazines. Some of these comics, such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, would be published in graphic novel form and would later win awards for their content.

In 1972, the effect of World War II reared



its head again in the form of Art Spiegelman's award winning story graphic novel *Maus*.

Because of the code, certain stories had to be published in magazines, where the code did not matter. Art Spiegelman was co-founder and editor of *Raw*, which was an acclaimed magazine for avant-garde type comics and graphics. The story was a collection of Art having multiple conversations with his father about his time

before, during, and after the Holocaust. These included when his father met his mother, the death of his Father's first child, Art's mother's suicide, Art's release from a mental hospital, and Art's own relationship with his wife. The stories were collected in 1992 into two books that went on to win multiple awards including a Harvey and Eisner Award.

The political scene was very jaded and this was being shown in both Marvel and DC Universes.

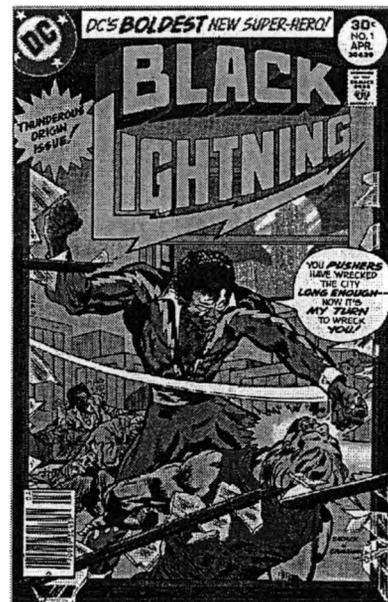
In 1970, Captain America was presented with the dilemma of the path that America was on, including the Vietnam War and the social revolts of the previous decade. In the 1970 *Captain America* comic titled "The Sting of the Scorpion", issue 122, Captain America is walking along questioning his role in this new America that he has awoken to. He thinks to himself



“I’m like a dinosaur – in the Cro-Magnon Age! An anachronism – who’s out-lived his time! This is the day of the Anti-Hero – the age of the rebel – and the dissenter! It isn’t hip – to defend the establishment! -- Only to tear it down! And, in a world rife with injustice, greed, and endless war – who’s to say the rebels are wrong? But, I’ve learned to play by today’s new rules! I’ve spent a lifetime defending the flag – and the law! Perhaps – I should have battled less – and questioned more!” (Wright pg. 246)

In 1973, President Nixon became involved in the Watergate scandal and the “Saturday Night Massacre.” In 1974, President Nixon resigned from the Presidency due to the political fallout. In a *Captain America* storyline Steve Rodgers watches as a high ranking Government official is actually leader of terrorist organization known as the Secret Empire. The comic insinuated that the high ranking official was President Nixon. Disenchanted with the corruption of his government, Steve Rodgers decides to retire as Captain America and give up fighting. It was not until Clint Barton, who was the under the guise as the Golden Archer, shows Rodgers that he could not give up a life of heroism. Rodgers dons the guise of Nomad, the man with no land. His costume draped in a new dark blue and yellow costume with no country markings on it. This shift is just for 4 issues before Rodgers realizes that he is in fact Captain America and he can be that man and serve his country without serving the corrupt government.

After the civil rights movement, a lot more minority superheroes began to not only have a bigger role in comics but also began to have their own titles. One example is Marvel’s Luke Cage: Hero for Hire.



Luke Cage's origin stems from him being a "child of the streets of Harlem" who was falsely imprisoned. Ironically, Luke Cage's best friend was a Caucasian wealthy business man named Danny Rand who was a martial artist superhero by the moniker "Iron Fist."



Other African-American heroes that emerged during this time were DC Comics Black Lightning and Marvel Comics Storm.

In 1971, Amazing Spider-Man tackled racism head on, not with the title character, but with his supporting cast J. Jonah Jameson and Robbie Robertson.

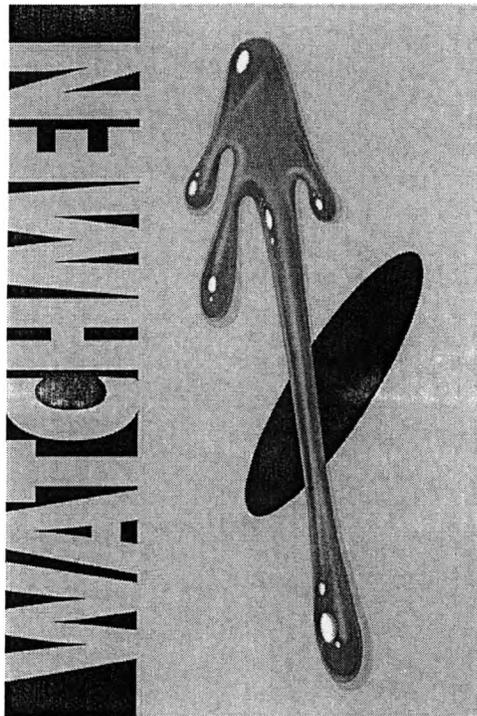
Storm was introduced in the Marvel superhero team the X-Men which had just been re-launched after having previously had just been reprints. The all new X-Men team, created by Len Wein and Dave Cockrum, consisted of an almost all international team. They were Logan/Wolverine from Canada, John Proudstar/Thunderbird from an Apache reservation in Camp Verde, Arizona, Sean Cassidy/Banshee from Ireland, Ororo Munroe from Africa, Peter Rasputin/Colossus from Russia, and Kurt Wagner/Nightcrawler from West Germany. This new team was lead by the original X-Men's field leader Cyclops.



A change from previous comics, this new Marvel team consisted of a Russian that was from communist Russia, but did not conform to its way of life.

There is no real definitive end to the Bronze Age of comics and the actual timeframe is debated. Some peoples argue that the end of the Bronze Age might not have occurred. Others argue that DC Comics ushered in the end with Frank Miller's work on *The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen* while Marvel Comics had their end with the *Secret Wars* Mini-series. Either way, the Bronze Age ended and the Modern Age of Comics began with a bang and has seen its share of tragedy.

Chapter V: The Modern Age: Mid 80's - Present



## Part 6: The Eighties and Reaganomics and the Nineties and AIDS

In the mid-eighties, the comic book genre itself goes counter revolutionary against themselves. After dealing with the social issues of the Golden and Silver Age comic books then took a look in on itself. Comic books get darker with *The Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, and underground comic books, *Iron Man and the Armor Wars* which was an allegory for nuclear proliferation.

In 1989, the code was once again revised to show a shift in the political and cultural attitudes. Violence was now acceptable within the context of the story. Substance abuse was changed as well. The code stipulates that “*healthy, wholesome lifestyles will be presented as desirable. However, the use and abuse of controlled substances, legal and illicit, are facts of modern existence, and may be portrayed when dramatically appropriate.*” Frank Miller’s run on *Daredevil* is the perfect example of the change in the code. In his run, *Daredevil*’s girlfriend, Karen Page, becomes a heroin addict who disclosed Matt Murdock’s secret in order to get more drugs.

After Jimmy Carter lost the election to Ronald Reagan there was a swing to the right side of the political ideology. Comic book writer John Byrne saw and understood this. This clarity is why he was able to be so successful with the titles he took over. Much like Reagan’s idea of “going back to the basics” he used the same idea when working on revamping titles like *The X-Men*, *Fantastic Four*, *Teen Titans*, and *Superman*.

In *Comic Book Nation*, Wright wrote that, “Byrne’s back-to-basics approach meshed nicely with the cultural politics of President Ronald Reagan and the ascendance

of New Right. According to the conservative worldview of the 1980s, the cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s were unfortunate developments that badly hurt American morale, undermined patriotism, left society fragmented, and weakened the nation in the Cold War.” (Wright 266)

The *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* were a response to the “cheeriness” of superheroes. “Once confident symbols of hope, superheroes now spoke to the paranoia and psychosis lurking behind the rosy veneer of Reagan’s America.” (Wright pg. 266)

The 1986-1987 DC Comic mini-series titled *Watchmen*, written by Alan Moore with art by Dave Gibbons introduced the idea of not only “Who watches the Watchmen?” but also how having people with superpowers would affect the political nature of the world around them. The *Watchmen* mini-series is a great way to show how the political effects of the twenty years prior to the books shaped the writer. How the wars and the Presidents and the movements shaped his mind.

The mini-series takes place in the mid-eighties with Richard Nixon still serving as acting President, but has flashbacks back to the seventies, sixties, and the fifties.



One of the heroes in the book goes by the name of Dr. Manhattan when, in 1959, his alter ego Jon Osterman gets caught in an atomic test mishap that completely disintegrates his body only to have it reborn in a new atomic body. He slowly starts to lose his touch with humanity as he is able to see time in a linear fashion. Jon receives his codename “Dr. Manhattan” from the government. Dr. Manhattan laments that,” they explain that the name has been chosen for the ominous associations it will raise in America’s enemies. They’re shaping me into something gaudy and lethal... it’s all out of my hands.” (Issue 4, pg. 12)

In the book the John F. Kennedy assassination still happens. Dr Manhattan remarks that, “It’s September, 1961. John Kennedy is shaking my hand, asking what it’s like to be a superhero. I tell him he should know and he nods, laughing... Two years later, in Dallas, his head snaps forward and then back. Two shots fired...” (Issue 4, pg. 12) Dr. Manhattan, because of his powers, is sent to Vietnam by President Nixon to end the war and after two months the war is ended with most of the Vietcong surrendering to him.

At the end of each issue are extras, like a newspaper article or police reports discussing what is occurring in that particular issue. At the end of Issue 10, the extra comes from the desk of superhero “Ozymandias who is actually billionaire Adrian Veidt who made the decision to come forward to people and unmasking himself. In the letter, he is replying to a mock up of his line of action figures. He writes “...my study of recorded sales figures in a historical context suggests an increase in the sale of soldiers and action figures in times immediately prior to a period of anticipated war or bloodshed, and we should take advantage of this syndrome for as long as it lasts.” (Issue 10, pg. 30)

In the series, America and the Soviet Union are close to starting a war where a nuclear holocaust is very close to happening. Ozymandias sees that the only way to end the conflict is to unleash an alien squid onto New York killing millions. The TV stations in the comic book series relate how, because of the damage, Russia and America decide to come to a decision to end the war talks and instead talk about peace while Russia also pulls out of Afghanistan.

Dr. Manhattan makes a remark on human nature after the events of the comic book that even though peace was achieved now, human nature is to always lean towards aggression.

In Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* we see an aged Bruce Wayne who has since retired as the Dark Knight only take up the Playboy lifestyle he had once only pretended to have. The storyline takes place in a disenfranchised United States during the eighties where Ronald Reagan is still President, but the superheroes have all but



vanished. The only superhero that survived the fall out was Superman who is now working with the government and is not just a vigilante.

In this Elseworlds story America and Russia, much like in the *Watchmen*, are in a heated conflict.

In the mutant titles of the X-Men and all other titles with 'X' in the title, they were facing their own version of the AIDS virus labeled "The Legacy Virus."

During the mid to late nineties, with no real war going on certain characters were going through certain storylines that was damaging the title. In Captain America, Steve Rogers was now suffering from the super soldier serum and has to fight within an armored suit to keep himself alive.

Spider-Man was dealing with "The Clone Saga" that was turning off more readers then turning them onto the book and by the end of the decade, Marvel Comics was now bankrupt.

DC Comics used the nineties to either kill off or revamp their characters.

Superman was killed off by the super villain Doomsday while Batman had his back broken by a member of his rogues' gallery, Bane.

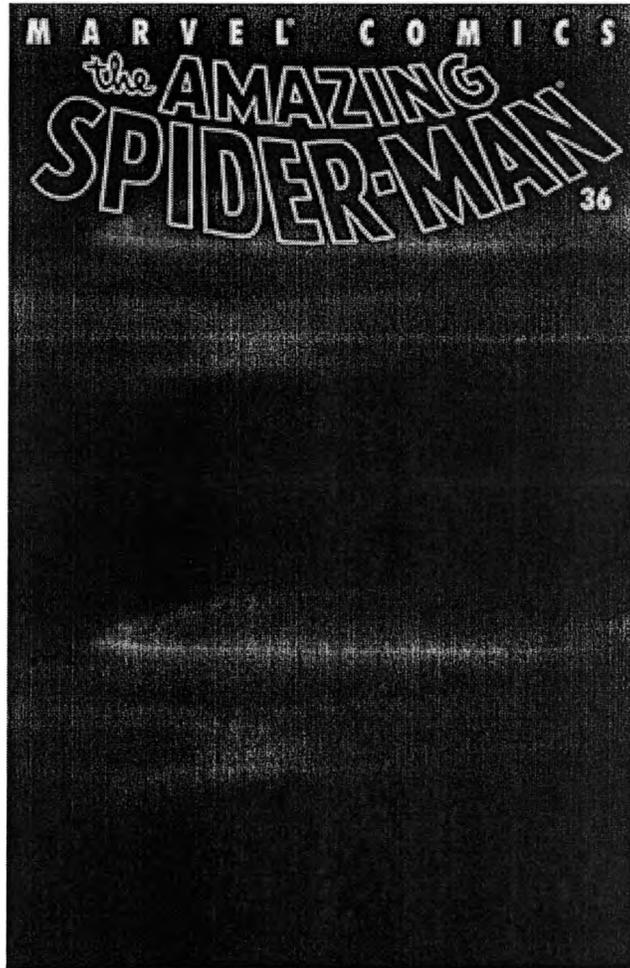
### **Part 7: September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and the Present**

Prior to 9/11, comics had been dwindling, but after the terrorist attacks and war and famine and other global hardships comics take another step towards realism.

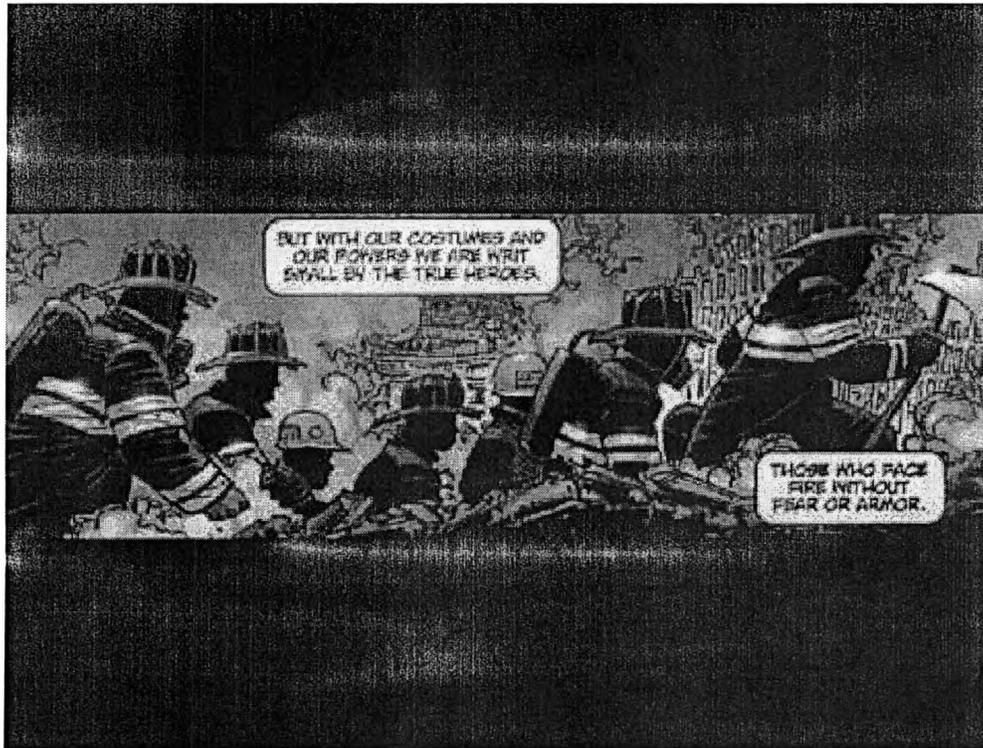
In the DC Universe, instead of George Bush winning the election, Superman nemesis Lex Luthor wins the election.

On September 9, 2001 two planes piloted by terrorists were flown into the World Trade Center Towers while another plane was flown into the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania 5 brave men take the fourth plane down prematurely. In the real world these are the heroes but the the question must be asked, how does one deal with this real world situation in comic books? The Marvel Universe contains comic books that deal with the farthest reaches of the universe, but the main headlining superstars are all based in New York. Marvel Comics decided to face this tragedy head on and no comic book character is more closely related to New York than Spider-Man.

*Amazing Spider-Man* Issue 36, simply titled "The Black Issue," was a direct response to the tragedy.



The cover was black as a sign of mourning and the first page was black with just the script “We interrupt our regularly scheduled program for this...” In the issue, artist John Romita Jr. draws a very realistic view of Ground Zero with many of the firefighters and police officers and EMAs rushing into the chaos while Spiderman can only stand in shock as his city is brought to its knees.



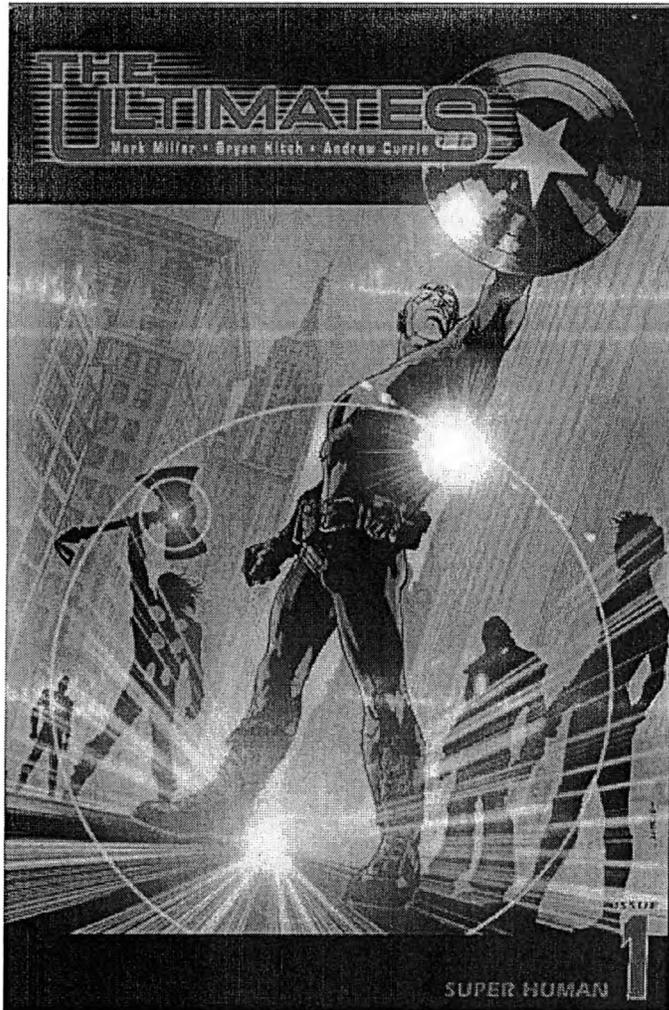
The heroes of the Marvel universe do what they can to help the real life heroes, but it is too late. Writer J. Michael Strazinski explains why these superheroes were unable to stop this atrocious act and he does it by explaining that not even the most evil of villains that they had fought could even, in the wildest dreams, conceive of such a horrific act.

In the newly revamped *Captain America* series, the very first issue takes place just a few days after the September attacks. The story takes place in the present with Steve Rodgers digging through the wreckage hoping that he isn't too late again, hoping that maybe he can save someone who has just precious minutes left to live, while at the same time shows New York just the day before, but the colors are much more vibrant while the present time is in black and white.

The story arc, entitled *The New Deal*, also deals with the political theory of “yes, we attack soldiers because they are dangerous but do we attack those that make war components?” The terrorists Al-Tariq, who are supposed to represent Al-Qaeda, attack a small town in “Anywhere, America for this very reason. The head terrorist, Faysal Al-Tariq, broadcasts that they are not the terrorists, but that America is the true terrorist.



This is also a very important distinction as well. We are now dealing with a new form of villains. They are not the over embellished cartoonish Germans or Japanese or Italians from World War II or the evil communists from Russia or China, but these new



villains are real. They are not these cartoon figures that are drawn to create a voice of jingoism in the readers. This is not to say that the Nazis or the Japanese in the World War II comics were not just as deadly, but they were fought on a battlefield where this new form of terror was brought onto our doorsteps.

In 2000, newly minted Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada created a new universe

simply called “The Ultimate Universe.” Under this title writers were encouraged to create a new vision of the Marvel Universe, one that was more edgy and closer to reality. One such creation was *The Ultimates*, by Scottish writer Mark Millar and British artist Bryan Hitch.

In this alternate reality, the Avengers are created by the President as the Ultimate weapon. They are the new millenniums atom bomb, able to amass a large amount of damage. As opposed to the regular Marvel Universe, dubbed the 616 Universe, this ultimate universe is a lot darker. The set up of Millar’s and Hitch’s overall story arches were split into two sections, each section containing twelve issues. In an interview with

popcultureshock.com, series co-creator Mark Millar stated that the difference between the Marvel 616 Avengers and the Ultimates is that in Ultimates Volume 2 there is “an exploration of what happens when a bunch of ordinary people are turned into super-soldiers and being groomed to fight the real-life war on terror.” (popcultureshock.com)

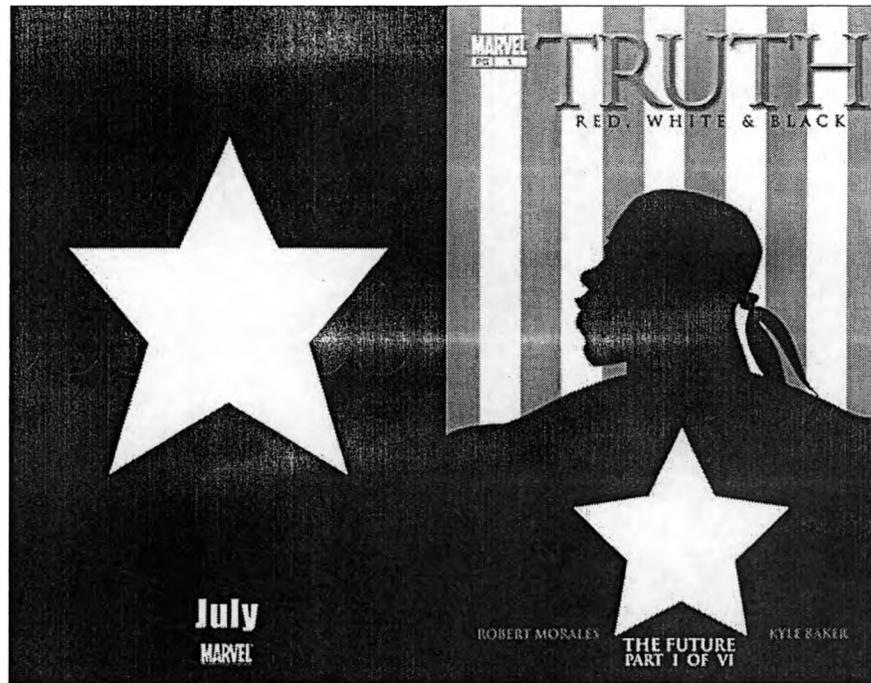
The first twelve issues contain the origins of Captain America, the creation of this universe’s Hulk, and an alien invasion.



Unlike the 616 Universe’s Thor, who is very much the Norse god, this universe’s Thor is a hippie who would rather not lift his hammer, but rather lead peace circles. We do not see the same kind of Thor and Iron Man as the ones who were written in the sixties amid the Vietnam War. The second story arc was influenced more by the outside politics of the Iraq War.

The story arc opens with a traitor trying to get information on each member of the group and the Ultimates in the Middle East as a deterrent to fighting. As the story progresses you learn that Captain America was just the beginning and that the European Union has in fact created a “Captain” for each state, i.e. Captain Britain, Captain Spain, Captain Germany, etc. Events are placed into action that culminates with team member Clint Barton, code name: Hawkeye, having

his family assassinated and then being kidnapped by the traitor for the information in his head while setting up Captain America as the patsy. Once Captain America is in custody the traitor and the real villains reveal themselves. The “Liberators” are revealed to be a group of terrorists from the Middle East, China, North Korea and Russia all lead by the Norse god Loki. The group’s members consist of Chang Lam/The Abomination and Alex Su/The Crimson Dynamo from China, the Hurricane from North Korea, the Swarm from Syria, Reun and the Schizoid Man from Russia, and Abdul Al-Rahman from the Middle East who was put through the same process that Steve Rodgers was put through. The traitors to the Ultimates were Natasha Romanov/the Black Widow, a Russian spy, and Dr. Hank Pym/Giant Man, both of whom had been with the team since the very beginning. The Liberators were financed by a secret organization based out of France. Their whole goal was to topple the United States and as the character Abdul Al-Rahman says to Captain America, all they wanted was to keep America from “invading other countries.”



In 2003, Marvel Comics released a mini-series titled *Truth: Red, White, & Black*. In this story, as opposed to the Captain America origin that has always been written, the super-soldier program was much like the Tuskegee Program, only this one used black soldiers as the guinea pigs before using the serum on a white male. The story concludes with Steve Rogers, ashamed at what his country had done without his knowledge, goes to talk to the man who was the original Captain America, Isaiah Bradley.

The mini-series *Secret War* proposes the question “if we knew if an attack were to come, would we stop it?” Published from February 2004 until December 2005 and written by Brian Michael Bendis, the story revolves around S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Colonel Nick Fury and a war with the fictional nation of Latveria. When evidence arises that proves that Latveria, despite on-going diplomatic peace talks with America, is funding all of the super-villains with the high-tech armor that is being used. When Col. Fury approaches President Bush for permission to attack, the President denies his request

stating “we are still in communication with their Ambassador.” Upset that another 9/11 could indeed occur Fury recruits a secret team of superheroes, including Captain America, Spiderman, Daredevil, Wolverine, Luke Cage, and the Black Widow, to go on a secret mission, one they are brainwashed into forgetting.

Between the years 2006-2007, Marvel Comics released the mini-series *Civil War*, written by Mark Millar and drawn by Steve McNiven, which pitted two sides of the superheroes against each other. The civil war starts after a group of heroes calling themselves “New Warriors” try and capture a band of villains for their reality TV show. During the battle one of the heroes engages a bad guy named “Nitro” whose power goes into overdrive and creates an atom bomb affect that blows up a small community and a school.



After this act the United States Congress passed the “Superhuman Registration Act.” This act forced all heroes to register with the United States Government through the agency S.H.I.E.L.D. The two sides of the argument were whether or not freedom or security is more important. On one side was Tony Stark/Iron Man and on the other was Captain America/Steve Rodger. Newsarama’s interview with Mark Millar was published on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007 on the newsarama website. In that article, Mark Millar is asked

about the Civil War storyline and was asked if he could describe the event. Mark Millar responded by saying “a story where a guy wrapped in the American flag is in chains as the people swap freedom for security.” Much of that is a response to President Bush’s Patriot Act and how many Americans were willing to give up some of their freedoms in order to feel safe.

Just as America was in the midst of wars and was enduring protest after protest on two separate fronts the symbol of America in comic books was killed off in an assassination attempt by an arch-enemy. While this would be reversed in the mini-series *Captain America: Reborn* many people saw this as an analogy for America itself.

Beginning in early 2009, after President Obama took office, a nationally organized group started to protest against taxes. Calling themselves the “Tea-Party” in reference to the Boston Tea Party, these people gathered to protest on select days. These days include April 15, 2009, otherwise known as Tax Day, over the July 4<sup>th</sup> Weekend, and on September 12, 2009 as a tribute to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. These protests were covered most by FOX News.



Marvel Comics received ire from the Tea Party Association when in Issue 602 of *Captain America*, in a storyline “Two Americas,” the tea party is portrayed in a negative light. In the storyline, a fake Captain America has joined forces with an Anti-Government movement called “The Watchmen ”

## **Chapter VI: Conclusion**

The paper set out to prove that politics has and will continue to influence the comic book and graphic novel medium. It was the intent of this paper to show that politics pushes comic books and graphic novels. This is not to deter from the writers or artists. Great writing and artwork will always be the catalyst behind a good book, but sometimes even the best need a little extra push.

The purpose for using the comic books themselves over other second-hand books was so this paper could read directly what was written and not someone else's viewpoint or possibly someone else's opinion.

The past sixty years have shown that political strife has been a driving force in comic books and graphic novels throughout the four ages. The four ages of comics, informal in their titles as they may be, were decided on what occurred.

In the Golden Age the first comic books were published amidst the Great Depression and World War II. The definition and prototype of the Superhero was established. This included the creations of Superman, Batman, Captain America, and Wonder Woman.

The Silver Age is defined as the period after the Golden Age and slump in comic book sales that saw a revitalization of the comic book. The Vietnam War, the Space

Golden Age saw rebirths during this age. This included writers Stan Lee, Gardner Fox, Edmond Hamilton, and Robert Kanigher, and artists Jack Kirby, Gil Kane, Steve Ditko, Carmine Infantino, John Buscema, and John Romita Sr. The Silver Age was also the first era to print comic books under the newly created comic code authority.

The Bronze Age of comics is typically defined as the Silver Age, but only darker. This era was influenced by President Nixon and governmental scandals, the height of the Feminism movement, various Social Movements, and Reaganomics. It also saw more mature themes tackled or addressed such as drug abuse and racism.

The Modern Age of Comic Books, which we are in right now, has been the era where our heroes have become more complex and in some instances darker. The creators have become more well-known and, unlike previous eras, more hands on with the creations. This era also saw its own version of social movements, the Tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the conflict in the Middle East and the election of President Barack Obama.

By following the order of this paper, it can be deduced that comic books and graphic novels are the reaction to the events in the world and the politics surrounding that world. The writers and artists can be seen as “The Watchers” who chronicle the important events of their time, the moments that changed and shaped the course of history as we know it. From the wars and conflicts we have faced to the way media has changed and evolved, to the Social Movements.

Out of these creations have come symbols. Symbols that maybe even their creators did not know they were creating and if they knew possibly not the extent that

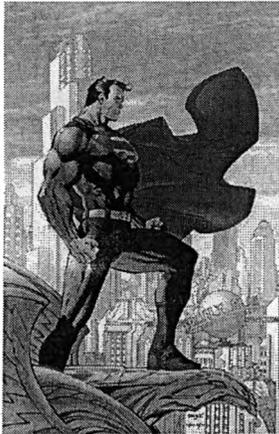
they (the characters) have become. These creations have become symbols behind which people have used, for both good and bad, for something bigger.

The argument can be made that politics influences everything, from television to music to movies. This paper shows that without the outside influence politics comic books would not be the same. With the digital age upon us, the future of comics has come into question, but as long as there is good storytelling and conflict, comics will not disappear.

The future of comic books is ever changing. Even now as the Obama Administration enters into its second year comic books are already starting to change their appearance. After the darkness of DC's mini-series *Blackest Night* and Marvel Comic's *Siege* they are about to enter both *The Brightest Day* and the *Heroic Age*, respectively.

In the end, comic books will continue to be influenced by the politics of the world and of both past and future generations because they are the recordings of the times. They will continue to fluctuate, both good and bad, throughout the times, but they will continue. There are limitations to my research, mainly the sheer number of comic books that are out there and limited financial funding. The same factors that are limitations are the same reason that it is possible to take other avenues in the future. There are enough books that it is possible to tackle each issue through the decades. Each era of comic books also offer plenty of data to expand.

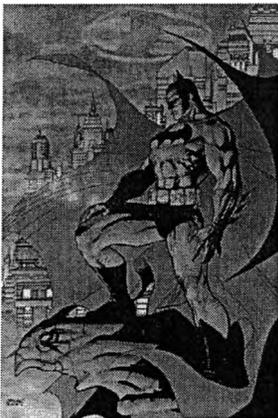
## DC APPENDIX:



Superman:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Action Comics #1*, June 30, 1938

Cancellation Date and Issue: N/A



Batman:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Detective Comics #27*, May 1939

Cancellation Date and Issue: N/A



Wonder Woman:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *All-Star Comics #8*, December 1941

Cancellation Date and Issue: N/A



Captain Marvel:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Whiz Comics* #2, February 1940

Cancellation Date and Issue: *Captain Marvel Adventures* #150, November 1953



The Flash (Jay Garrick):

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *The Flash* #1, January 1940

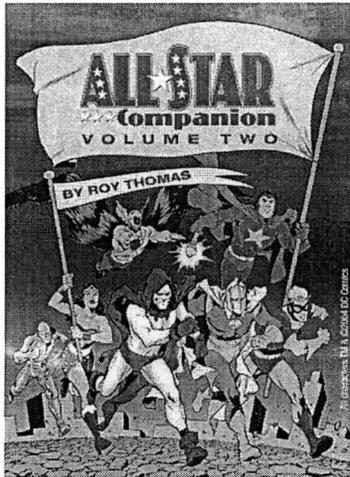
Cancellation Date and Issue: *Flash Comics* #104, 1949



Green Lantern I (Alan Scott):

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *All-American Comics* #16

Cancellation Date and Issue: *Green Lantern* #40, October 1949



Justice Society:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *All Star Comics* #3, Winter 1940

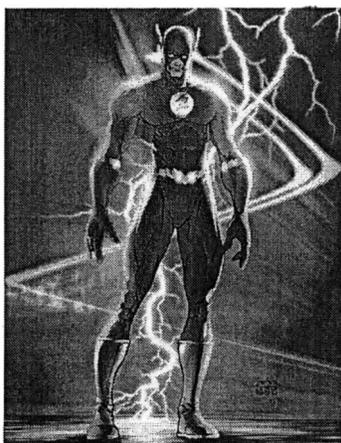
Cancellation Date and Issue: *All Star Comics* switched to *All Star Westerns* in issue #57, February to March 1951



Green Lantern II (Hal Jordan)

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Showcase* #22, October 1959

Cancellation Date and Issue: Issue 104, September 1978



The Flash II (Barry Allen)

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Showcase* #4, October 1956

Cancellation Date and Issue: Issue 104, September 1978

1<sup>st</sup>

Plastic Man:

Appearance Date and Issue: *Police Comics #1*, August 1941

Cancellation Date and Issue: 1956 with the end of *Quality Comics*



The Spirit:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Spirit Section #1*,  
June 2, 1940

Cancellation Date and Issue: October 5, 1953

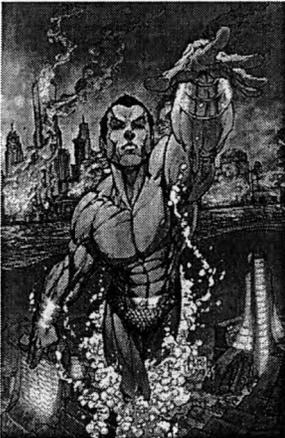
## Marvel Appendix



Captain America:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Captain America #1*, March 1941

Cancellation Date and Issue: *Captain America #78*, September 1954



Namor:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly* No Issues Stated, April 1939

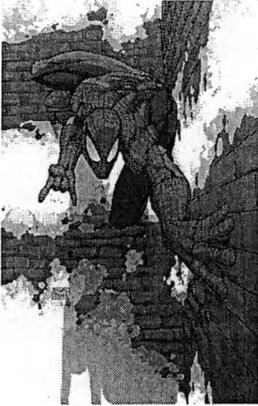
Cancellation Date and Issue: 1955



Human Torch:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: *Marvel Comics #1*, October 1939

Cancellation Date and Issue: *Marvel Comics #38*, August 1954



Spider-Man:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: Amazing Fantasy #15, August 1962

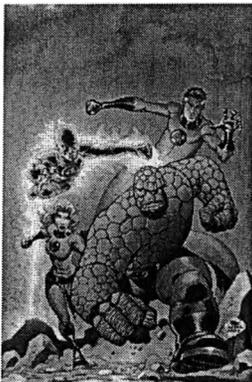
Cancellation Date and Issue: N/A



The Incredible Hulk:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: The Incredible Hulk #1, May 1962

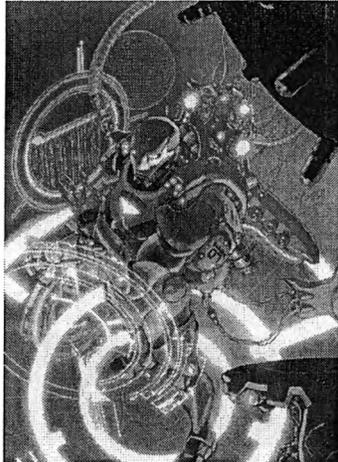
Cancellation Date and Issue: N/A



Fantastic Four (Mr. Fantastic, Invisible Girl, The Human Torch, and the Thing)

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: The Fantastic Four #1, November 1961

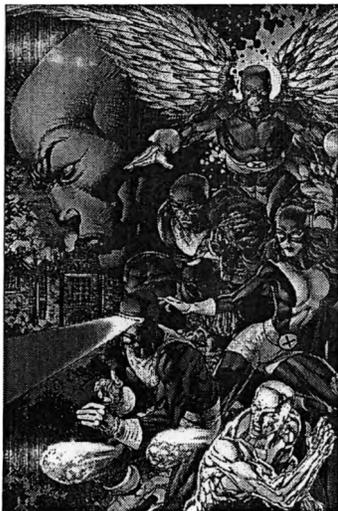
Cancel Date and Issue: N/A



Iron Man

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: Tales of Suspence #39, April 1963

Cancellation Date: N/A



The X-Men (Professor Xavier, Cyclops, Jean Grey, Angel, Beast, and Iceman)

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: The X-Men #1, September 1963

Cancellation Date: N/A



The Avengers (Captain America, Iron Man, Wasp, Giant-Man)

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance and Issue: The Avengers #1, September 1963

Cancellation Date: N/A



New X-Men Class (Wolverine, Banshee, Nightcrawler, Storm, Thunderbird, and Colossus)

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance and Issue: Giant Size X-Men #1, May 1975

Cancellation Date: N/A



Black Panther:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: Fantastic Four #52, July 1966

Cancellation Date and Issue: N/A



Nick Fury:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos #1, May 1963

Cancellation Date and Issue: #167, December 1981



Luke Cage:

1<sup>st</sup> Appearance Date and Issue: Luke Cage, Hero for Hire #1, June 1972

Cancellation Date and Issue: #125, September 1986

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## VITA

Robert John Bexar II was born in Austin, Texas on March 17, 1982, the son of Bethanie G. Bexar and Robert John Bexar. After graduating from St. Thomas High School in Houston, Texas in 2000 he was accepted to the University of Texas at Austin. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in May 2006. Between his graduation from the University of Texas at Austin and his acceptance into Texas State University-San Marcos he worked for Baker Botts L.L.P. as a file records clerk. In June 2008, he entered into the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos on provisional status and was granted full-time status in January 2009 while also working as a Graduate Instructional Assistant.

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