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Invincible: Legacy and Propaganda in Superhero Comics

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Abstract

Captain America and Iron Man are both iconic American heroes, representing different American values. Captain America was created during the Golden Age of comics and represents a longing for the past, while Iron Man was created at the height of the Cold War and looks forward to a new America. This paper will first establish the historical and cultural relationship between comic books and propaganda, beginning with the first appearance of Superman. It will pay special attention to the similarities and differences of Captain America and Iron Man, focusing on their representation of American values over time, and discuss how that aspect of the characters affects their ongoing titles today.

Comic Studies, Comic Books, Superheroes, Cold War, Iron Man, Captain America, Marvel Comics, Propaganda, Superman, Stan Lee, American Studies

Introduction:

The Iron Man movie premiered in 2008 and singlehandedly revived the superhero movie genre while laying the foundation for a series of movies called the Marvel Cinematic Universe. As *Entertainment Weekly* pointed out prior to the film's release: "To be clear, *Iron Man* isn't an ironclad blockbuster. For starters, the character lacks the bigger-than-comics profile of Spider-Man and Superman" (Jensen). While it is true that Iron Man has never been one of Marvel's most popular heroes, the movie was a wild success. Grossing over $100 million opening weekend, the film was also nominated for two Oscars and won the American Film Institute's award for Movie of the Year.

How is it that Iron Man has stayed appealing throughout the years? Much of it has to do with the updating of Iron Man from a Cold War hero into a War on Terror hero. Iron Man's origin story remained virtually unchanged from the 1963 premier comic book issue in the first movie, with the small exception that it occurred in the Middle East rather than Vietnam. This transition is one that occurs in modern comics as well as the films, especially in the Marvel Comics crossover event, *Civil War*, which was published in the aftermath of 9/11 and shows Iron Man as a highly conservative enforcer of a superhero version of the Patriot Act. In addition to fighting terrorism, however, Iron Man is still battling Cold War villains. In *Iron Man 2* Iron Man takes on Ivan Vanko, the son of the Soviet scientist and classic Iron Man villain, Anton Vanko or The Crimson Dynamo. In addition, former KGB spy Black Widow still plays a prominent role in both the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the comic books. It is clear that in many ways the Cold War never ended, at least not for Iron Man and the Marvel Universe. The Cold War still resonates with today's comic book readers. Unlike World War II, which saw all of the world's major powers in a military conflict killing millions, the Cold War involved no direct conflict

between any great powers. Although on the surface the Cold War took place between the United States and the Soviet Union, these two powers instead fought by proxy using other countries, through the threat of warfare, and through propaganda, espionage, and assassination. Occasionally the great powers sent in troops, such as in Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, but generally they avoided direct conflict. The Cold War was actually an attempt to suppress the opposing country's sphere of influence. By spreading their own economic and military influence, and by stocking up on nuclear weapons, each country hoped to gain an advantage over the other without ever engaging in a war which could potentially destroy the world. Although the U.S. believes that the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the recent conflict in Ukraine as well as Russia's continuing strategic partnerships with communist countries such as China and Cuba leave many wondering if the Cold War ever truly ended. In addition to this, the legacy of the Cold War survives in the U.S.'s War on Terror in the Middle East. The U.S.'s decision to fund insurgent groups in Afghanistan directly led to the formation of terrorist organizations such as the Taliban. In addition, both the Cold War and the War on Terror differ from previous wars because they are against the spread of ideologies rather than the imperialism of a nation. During the Cold War, America was fighting communism wherever it reared its head. The same is true of the War on Terror, which the recent rise of the ISIS terrorist group and President Obama's action against it proves. The similarities between the Cold War era and today's War on Terror make Iron Man not only an easy hero to update, but an appropriate vehicle for propaganda both then and now.

The popularity of Iron Man is more perplexing when considering the history of Captain America. Wildly popular during World War II, Captain America has never regained a large following; at least not until this past spring with the second *Captain America* film, *Captain*

America: The Winter Soldier, a movie based on the Ed Brubaker comic, with strong Cold War influences. Created during World War II for the express intention of fighting the Germans and the Japanese, Captain America had little to do after the war ended and was soon cancelled. In 1953, Marvel tried turning Captain America into "The Commie-Smasher" in an attempt to make Captain America relevant during the Cold War, but this run was cancelled after only three issues. It wasn't until 1964 that Stan Lee would revive Captain America again, this time ignoring the Cold War completely and instead emphasizing his anachronism. The appeal of Captain America in both the 1960s and today is that he is *not* easily transferred into the contemporary age. America has changed so much since the 1940s that Captain America does not quite fit with modern ideals. Stan Lee's revived Captain America in 1964 would appeal to a new generation of Americans who were deeply questioning if not outright against their government and the wars in which it was involved. Both Captain America and Iron Man have origins in propaganda and war, but Iron Man seems to have made the transition into the Modern Age with grace and ease whereas Captain America still struggles. What aspects of the characters allow them to maintain appeal in eras vastly different from their own? While Iron Man and Captain America are both embodiments of American ideals, they each operate as propaganda in modern society in vastly different ways. Though both were created to extol the benefits of American life, Captain America's virtues are virtues that the country longs to regain, while Iron Man's virtues represents the ideals of a future American. Captain America encourages the reader to look back fondly on the innocence and patriotism of the past, while Iron Man makes the reader look forward to a new age of wealth and technology.

Section I: Propagandist Origins in the Golden Age and World War II

Superman was created in 1933 by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, two young Jewish men from Cleveland, Ohio. Superman would not, however, find a publisher for another five years, in 1938, when he became the world's first superhero. During this time, America was in the throes of the Great Depression and Franklin D. Roosevelt had been elected that year by promising a "New Deal" for the American people. Superman's motto in *Action Comics #1* proclaims that he is "the champion of the oppressed. The physical marvel that had sworn to devote his existence to helping those in need!" (Siegel & Shuster, *Action Comics* 1:4). In his first appearance Superman lives up to this description by rescuing a woman from her abusive husband, saving a wrongly accused woman from death row, punishing a group of hooligans who harass Lois Lane, and stopping a criminal from corrupting a senator. There are no monsters or aliens or supervillains in this premier issue; instead Superman was battling societal ills. Superman helps those unable to help themselves, the oppressed and downtrodden – the victims of the Great Depression. Jeffrey K. Johnson writes in his book *Super-History* that Superman "would have all of the New Deal's goals but would be bound by none of its limitations" (11) and that "Superman's value was that he was one of the only people in late 1930s America that could help fix society. No politician, Supreme Court justice, city hall boss, or even the law itself could stop the Man of Steel from doing what was right" (13). Superman, unlike politicians and Wall Street bankers, was incorruptible; he was an indomitable force of goodness and morality unbound by the confines of the law. The Superman created by Siegel and Shuster acted as a political commentary on contemporary America, a trend that would continue even through modern day comic book superheroes.

Superheroes are a uniquely apt to voice political ideas. Johnson writes that "one of the most important attributes of popular culture is that it quickly changes to meet a society's needs. Popular culture often serves as both a mirror and a molder in society and is frequently one of the best gauges of a society's current hopes, fears, wants, and needs" (34). Superman appeared in American popular culture precisely when Americans needed him most, and serves as a reflection of the "hopes, fears, wants, and needs" of the victims of the Great Depression. Unlike the heroes who would appear during World War II, Superman was a true vigilante outlaw who answered to a higher authority of morality than the law. Johnson notes that:

> Before the war comic book heroes like Superman and Batman had been Great Depression social avengers that fought outside the law to right the wrongs that government could not. During World War II these same heroes quickly became law abiding patriotic citizens that encouraged Americans to support the war effort and to follow all new governmental mandates. Much like American citizens, during World War II superheroes voluntarily gave up many of their freedoms to support the greater good. Even the heroes that had previously been radical and uncompromising happily fell into that line. Comic book superheroes stories soon became a form of governmental war propaganda and began to provide a clean cut image suitable for young (and old) Americans to model. (37-8)

Unlike in previous years, when corruption and poverty abounded and Americans needed a hero to fight their own system, World War II saw a massive emergence of patriotism and an unquestionable loyalty to the American government. However, this created a problem that many superheroes would need to contend with in the coming years; where does a superhero like Superman, who theoretically has the power to end the war, fit into it? And should that story even

be told? *Time* magazine published an article in 1942 titled “Superman’s Dilemma” in which they discuss just that:

> Superman is now in a really tough spot that even he can't get out of. His patriotism is above reproach. As the mightiest, fightingest American, he ought to join up. But he just can't. In the combat services he would lick the Japs and Nazis in a wink, and the war isn't going to end that soon. On the other hand, he can't afford to lose the respect of millions by failing to do his bit or by letting the war drag on. (“Superman’s Dilemma”)

National Comics, which would later become DC, took a very conservative stance when it came to their superheroes and comics. While they made it clear that their superheroes supported the war effort by publishing propagandist covers, their heroes mostly stayed out of the war. Superman in particular was highly problematic because he was so powerful he could easily win the war single-handedly, and people expected him to do so. In a special two page comic created especially for *Look* magazine in 1940 titled “How Superman Would Win the War,” Superman does just that. He flies to Germany and picks up Hitler by the collar of his shirt, then stops over in Russia to pick up Stalin (who was not yet an ally of the U.S.), and delivers them both to the League of Nations for trial. Julian Darius points out:

> Because of where the story appeared, not to mention the title that suggested the speculative nature of the tale, the story was neatly out-of-continuity for Superman comics. In his own comics, even after Pearl Harbor’s bombing, Superman would be far less aggressive. He occasionally helped train troops, foiled Axis agents within the U.S., or transported supplies behind-the-scenes, and derogatory

> references were made to the Axis. But Superman did little else, and the same with DC's other characters. (10)

In another, more official issue, Clark Kent attempts to sign up for the army but is deemed F-4 (undraftable) after he accidentally uses his x-ray vision to read the eye chart in the next room, causing the doctor to believe he is practically blind. Not only does this cause Superman disappointment, but Lois looks at him with renewed disgust. Superman soon shrugs it off and decides that he is of more use on the home front, declaring that "the United States Army, Navy, and Marines are capable of smashing their foes without the aid of a Superman!" (Siegel & Shuster, "Superman").

One Superhero who not only took part in the war, but was created specially to fight it was Captain America. Captain America was first published in December, 1940 by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby with the express intention of spurring America's involvement in World War II. A full year before Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, *Captain America Comics #1*, cover dated March 1941 but actually available December 1940, premiered with a cover image of Captain America punching Hitler in the jaw. Captain America wasn't some rogue alien, like Superman, or a billionaire, like Batman. Steve Rogers was a young man from Brooklyn who grew up during the Great Depression and was desperate to do his patriotic duty, but prevented from doing so because of his skinny, sickly body. Although not Jewish himself, and in fact being drawn to resemble the ideal Aryan man with blond hair and blue eyes, Steve Rogers was from an area of New York where many Jewish immigrants had settled and he also embodied the frail, passive Jewish stereotype. More explicitly, an Einstein-inspired Jewish immigrant, Dr. Reinstein, is the scientist who invents the "super-soldier serum" that he intends to give to all of the American troops in order to boost their performance and give them an unquestionable advantage against the

Axis powers. After testing it on Steve, Dr. Reinstein is fatally shot and the recipe for the serum dies with him. This makes Steve Rogers the first and last recipient of the super-soldier serum, which grants him the super athleticism of Captain America.

Unlike Superman and other previous superheroes, Captain America's heroism hinges on his identity as a soldier. In addition to the patriotic loyalty required of a man in his position, Steve Rogers owes his Captain America powers to the United States government and military. Captain America could be anyone; he wasn't born great, but rather had greatness injected into his arm flu-shot style. A true American success story, Steve Rogers began his life as an underdog. Like most superheroes, he was orphaned by the time he was a teenager; and despite an overwhelming sense of patriotic duty, he was denied the opportunity to serve his country because he was physically unfit. Steve Rogers could be any young man who doesn't feel like he fits into the masculine requirements of the 1940s, and the super soldier serum could act as a metaphor for the transformation any young man would go through in military boot camp. Captain America is far more overt propaganda than many other superheroes at the time. In addition to wearing the American flag as his costume, it is also plastered onto his iconic shield. The shield is perhaps the most ingenious aspect of Captain America's costume because it appealed to isolationists of the time as well. It implied that America was only defending itself, not attacking. In addition to this, Captain America's unwavering sense of morality and justice make it easy to claim Captain America *is* America personified. Or, at least, what U.S. citizens want and believe America to be. Captain America represents strength, loyalty, tolerance, and an unwavering moral compass. Because of these traits, Captain America was the perfect hero to fight the evil Hitler and his Axis allies. Captain America was one of the best-selling superhero comics during WWII. Along with

his kid sidekick, Bucky, Captain America was fighting Nazis long before any real life American soldiers were.

Section II: Iron Man and the Cold War

World War II saw nearly all of the comic book superheroes taking part in the war. They were doing what superheroes did best and punching the bad guys. World War II had clear and obvious villains in Adolph Hitler and the Axis powers. But after the war ended, the superheroes had no one left to fight; the Axis powers had been defeated and America was no longer plagued by an economic depression. Johnson notes that

> Superheroes had transitioned from social avengers to patriotic super-citizens during World War II, and after the conflict the characters could not return to their previous incarnations. Superheroes had seemingly become socially irrelevant and creators and publishers were unsure how to react. Writers and artists provided numerous new external threats, including those of the social, nuclear, communistic, and space alien varieties, but there seemed to be little for superheroes to do. The U.S. had changed and Americans no longer needed superheroes as they once did….Postwar American society now reveled in its stability and demanded that nothing, not even superheroes, attempt to change it. (71)

For years after World War II the superhero would suffer. Captain America would be cancelled in 1950 because of poor sales. He was revived in 1954 as "Captain America…Commie Smasher!" but cancelled again after only three issues. The most successful superheroes in the coming years would not be the ones who fought outside villains, but the ones who extolled the values of American life. Numerous heroes would get married, form makeshift families, and live superhero versions of everyday life. Superman would be joined on Earth by his cousin, Supergirl, who would become his surrogate daughter. They lived an idyllic country life in Kansas together and

would even be joined by Krypto the Superdog. Johnson points out that "The underlying narrative seemed to be that if Superman chose to live as an American, then it must be the best possible society" (57).

The transitional period in the 1950s was one of fear. Fear of the bomb, fear of communism, fear of poverty, fear of change. The McCarthy trials and the Red Scare thrived on this fear, and it is in this era of fear that the Comics Code Authority was established. David Hajdu writes that:

> Comics were getting worse at the worst possible time. In the same weeks that legislators such as Carlino, Moran, and others were making speeches on their statehouse floors, urging action to protect young people from the insidious effects of comics…Joseph McCarthy was railing in Congress against the Communist subversion he imagined in the heart of the United States government. (209)

The Comics Code Authority, or CCA, was established in 1954 as an alternative to government interference. Fredrik Stro□mberg writes of Dr. Fredric Wertham's bestselling book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) that "The most all-encompassing and thoroughly effective propaganda campaign in the field of comics was not with, through, or even for comics – it was against the medium all together" (90). Following the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, which argued that comic books caused juvenile perversion and delinquency, a U.S. congressional inquiry was held. The results of this hearing were that if the industry did not begin to regulate itself, the government would do it for them. Not only did *Seduction of the Innocent* lead to heavily enforced censorship, but parents and schools held comic book burnings in an attempt to protect their children from these negative influences. The CCA demanded that criminals never appear sympathetic and crime must always be portrayed as sordid and unsavory, government officials

should never be disrespected or shown in a negative light, and good must always triumph over evil. In addition, the CCA banned all use of excessive violence, sexual themes and nudity, the words "horror" or "terror" in the titles, profanity, and the appearance of werewolves, vampires, zombies, ghouls, or cannibalism (Nyberg). Although the CCA focused on horror, crime, and romance comics, comic book sales plummeted across the board. Superhero stories became overly simplistic and boring, limited as they were in their portrayal of crime and violence.

All that changed with the arrival of comic book icon Stan Lee. In collaboration with several artists, including Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, Stan Lee co-created some of Marvel's most popular superheroes and superhero teams including Spider-Man, The Hulk, The Fantastic Four, Daredevil, Doctor Strange, Thor, The X-Men, and, of course, Iron Man. Stan Lee also successfully revived long cancelled Golden Age heroes such as Captain America and the Sub-Mariner. Stan Lee revolutionized the comic book industry in many ways, but most notably by making his superheroes more flawed and human, while still adhering to the strict guidelines of the Comics Code Authority. His first creation, *The Fantastic Four*, debuted in 1961 and was unique in that it was about a family of superheroes and focused on the relationships within that unit. Partially influenced by popular team-up comics like *Justice League*, *The Fantastic Four* was also very modern and contemporary. Inspired partially by the Space Race between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., The Fantastic Four gain their superpowers during a scientific mission to outer space, during which they are exposed to cosmic rays and become Mr. Fantastic, The Invisible Woman, The Human Torch, and Thing. The transformative power of radiation would become a regular resource for Lee, who used it as an origin story for other characters such as Spider-Man, Daredevil, and the Hulk. This trope was a typical move for Cold War comics, which turned the destructive force of the atomic and nuclear bombs into a source of power. Much as Captain

America's super-serum served as a metaphor for the transformative power of America's military establishment, radiation served as a metonymic figure of American nuclear power. But not all of Lee's superheroes would have their origins in nuclear power. Some, like Thor or Dr. Strange, owed their powers to magic, while the X-Men achieved their powers through genetic mutation. Still rarer within the Stan Lee canon is an "unpowered" superhero, such as Iron Man.

Tales of Suspense #39, conceived by Stan Lee, scripted by his brother, Larry Lieber, and illustrated by Don Heck, premiered in March, 1963 and is filled with anti-communist propaganda and xenophobic imagery. The story follows Tony Stark, a weapons manufacturer and future Iron Man, while he is in Vietnam showing an army general his newest invention: "tiny transistors…so powerful that…--they can increase the force of any device…a thousandfold!" (Lee & *Tales of Suspense* 39:2). Only two pages later, Tony Stark is injured by a booby trap, which leaves shrapnel in the area around his heart. One communist North Vietnamese soldier remarks, "Bad! Much shrapnel near his heart! Impossible to operate! Cannot live longer than one week!" (*ToS* 39:4). Stark is kidnapped by guerrilla forces, who tell him that if he builds them a powerful new weapon, they will have a surgeon save his life. Stark knows they are lying, but, with the help of fellow genius prisoner Professor Yinsen, uses the technology they provide him with to build a mini transistor-powered chest piece to save his heart and power the famous Iron Man suit. Iron Man goes on to defeat the guerrilla general who imprisoned him, calling him a "heartless man of evil who is about to pay for his misdeeds!" and identifying himself by saying "this is Iron Man who opposes you, and all you stand for!" (*ToS* 39:10).

The pro-war propaganda and anti-foreign imagery packed into just this first appearance is staggering. Our hero is a military industrialist, in many ways a war profiteer, who makes money from the invention of weapons. Although Stark does not invent a gun or a bomb, he tells the

general that he is confident that his tiny transistors "are capable of solving your problem in Vietnam" (*ToS* 39:2). With the help of Stark's transistors, the American armies are capable of carrying mortars and other heavy weaponry through the dense jungles of Vietnam, giving them a distinct advantage over the guerrilla army. The reader is also never permitted to forget that these are communist troops that they're battling; nearly every reference to the North Vietnamese refers to them as "reds." The North Vietnamese are also portrayed as savage and greedy, in the broken English of the unnamed guerrilla soldier and the callousness of the Vietnamese general. The way the North Vietnamese are drawn is also caricaturizing, emphasizing the yellow skin, narrow eyes, and large teeth common in portrayals of Chinese and Japanese of the times as well. Nathan Vernon Madison points out that:

> Whereas the portrayal of the European Communists relied heavily upon demonization of the actual Marxist ideology, as opposed to physical abnormalities or deformities, imagery depicting Communist Asians often relied on bodily characteristics. These were the same characteristics that the pulps of the 1920s and 1930s utilized, and the war-time comic books of the 1940s. Also, as was the case during World War II, distinctions were drawn between the "good" Asian and the "bad" Asian. The "good" inherited traditional American values and ideologies, and the "bad" was demonized using standard depictions attributed to Asians in the past. (178)

Professor Yinsen is portrayed as a "good" Asian. Although he possesses stereotypical physical features as well, his appearance is far more frail and kindly than that of the North Vietnamese soldiers. Though his home country is never mentioned, it is possible that Dr. Yinseng comes from the America-friendly South Vietnam and was kidnapped by the "reds" (*ToS* 39:6), a fate he

says is worse than death, for the same reasons that Tony Stark was kidnapped. Not only does the world famous genius physicist claim that helping Stark build Iron Man would be "the crowning achievement of my life!" (*ToS* 39:6), he also sacrifices himself in order to provide a distraction for the white male hero's escape. If Tony Stark represents the power of American ingenuity and capitalist enterprise, this sacrifice implies that the South Vietnam are willing to sacrifice themselves for American ideals, rather than what they believe or are capable of building themselves.

The bulky, grey iron suit of Iron Man's origin would not last even two issues. Midway through *Tales of Suspense #40*, Iron Man paints his suit gold after hearing cries of "Oh how dreadful looking he is!" and "Ugh! He looks like a creature in one of those science-fiction films!" (*ToS* 40:5) as he saves a circus from various escaped big cats. At the suggestion of his date, Stark paints the Iron Man suit a bright, garish gold so that "when people see his golden armor, they won't panic! They'll know he has a heart of gold and an appearance to match his golden deeds!" (*ToS* 40:7). Of course, the color gold has other associations as well—those of wealth and status. Tony Stark is in the top one percent and is in many ways a model of the American Dream. Like Steve Rogers, Tony Stark represents the American ideal, albeit in different ways. Where Captain America represents courage and morality, Iron Man represents all the benefits of American capitalism. Michael J. Costello points out that "Of the many geniuses who populate the Marvel universe, none are academics. All are independent scientists whose autonomy makes their scientific breakthroughs possible" (66). Iron Man's wealth is the result of individualism, hard work, and ingenuity, and he uses his wealth for good. Iron Man fights on the side of America. In addition, Iron Man is the first and only member of the Avengers who has a paying job in the private sector as a sort of superhero for hire. Part of Iron Man's cover story was that he was

employed as a body guard at Tony Stark's weapons factory, which would explain why he was always around when Stark or the factory was attacked. The gold suit would only last for eight more issues, changing to something similar to today's more streamlined suit in issue #48. The changeability of Iron Man's suit is a key component of his character, and representative of the adaptability of American capitalism. Iron Man's suit will change many times over the years and is still changing today, unlike other superheroes whose iconic costumes are rarely changed. One message is clear: unlike stagnant communism, capitalism encourages change and ingenuity.

In addition to producing iconic characters such as Iron Man, Stan Lee also headed one of the most successful character revivals in comic books—that of Captain America. In *Avengers #4*, written by Stan Lee and illustrated by Jack Kirby, the original Avengers, Iron Man, Thor, The Wasp, and Ant-Man, discover the frozen body of Captain America. Rather than simply transplanting the original Captain America into the tumultuous 1960s, Stan Lee takes the anachronistic Captain America and turns him into one of his complex, naturalistic heroes. Captain America becomes a man from the uncomplicated Golden Age of World War II, during which the enemy was clear and all he had to do was sock him in the jaw, and is forced to contend with the more complex and convoluted politics of the Cold War. In addition to the shock of waking up like Rip Van Winkle after twenty years of sleep, he must also contend with the death of his kid sidekick, Bucky. Captain America, both today and in the 1960s, serves to evoke a nostalgia for the "good ole days." Being frozen for years saved him from the corrupting influence of the Cold War, and he still has faith in the American way of life.

Beginning in issue *#58* (1964), Iron Man would share the pages of *Tales of Suspense* with Captain America. Aside from this issue, however, in which Iron Man fights Captain America, the two would rarely team up or even meet on the pages of that title. When they did interact, it was

in the pages of other titles such as *The Avengers*. The pairing, however, is an interesting one. Both Captain America and Tony Stark represent different aspects of American ideals that other heroes, such as Spider-Man or Thor, do not. The sharing of a title by, say, Iron Man and the Hulk would not have had the same patriotic effect as such sharing by Iron Man and Captain America. Captain America also lends Iron Man a more patriotic and propagandist tone. While many of Captain America's tales are flashbacks to his World War II days, Iron Man stays firmly rooted in the present, fighting many communist villains. While Jason Dittmer claims that "counterpointing Captain America with communism or other "real world" threats to the United States would be unpalatable to vast swaths of the young, radical audience" (97), the juxtaposition of Nazis with communists and Captain America with Iron Man does lend the book a manipulatively comparative nature. Just as Captain America represented America during the Golden Age (of WWII), Iron Man represents a new America, one founded on the pursuit of wealth and scientific advances. The comparison of Nazis to communists makes the communists that much more insidious and blatantly evil, despite the massive differences in ideologies. The comparison, however, is an apt one. Just as the Nazis were difficult to "other" in the 1930s because many Americans were of German descent, the Russians were also similar to us in appearance. Additionally, the threat of the enemy within and communist spies meant that anyone could be a communist or communist sympathizer. Iron Man's constant victory over the communist scourge reinforced the superiority of American capitalism over the spread of communism, and the presence of Captain America served as a reminder that Iron Man was the good guy.

Section III: The Red Scare and the Communist Scourge

Nearly all of Iron Man's arch nemeses were communist or directly affected by communism. This narrative strategy is not unique to Iron Man, as Captain America's villains are nearly all Nazis. Iron Man and Captain America are uniquely suited to battle these sorts of political enemies because, unlike Spider-Man or The Hulk, the comic series in which they appear are primarily propagandist in nature and represent various American ideals. Where the Nazis were intolerant and reprehensible, Captain America is tolerant of nearly everybody and has an unwavering moral compass. Where the communists are portrayed as restricted and greedy, Iron Man is free and generous. Both Captain America and Iron Man represent everything their enemies are not.

One of the first communist villains Iron Man readers were introduced to was The Crimson Dynamo. The Crimson Dynamo is an Iron Man-like suit worn by various Russian or Soviet scientists. Though the man inside the Crimson Dynamo has changed over the years, he is always defeated by Iron Man. The first Crimson Dynamo was a Soviet scientist named Anton Vanko, an Armenian born Soviet scientist who specializes in electricity. His suit has the power to generate and control electricity in all of its forms. He is tasked by the Soviet Union to defeat Iron Man, but fails. Out of fear for his life following his failure, Vanko defects to the United States and serves as one of Stark's leading scientists. This story is simplistic in its propaganda and its antagonist is typical of most of the villains Stark will face in the future. It features a jealous Soviet Union, eager to produce its own Iron Man so that they can defeat America, but even the Soviet's best scientists cannot recreate Stark's armor because communism limits creative ingenuity. Stark always defeats the Soviet copycats because America allows for greater creativity and enterprise. The communist fears punishment for his failure and defects to the U.S.,

falling in love with capitalism and the freedom it allows him to work to his full potential in Stark's laboratory. Matthew J. Costello writes that:

> The veneration of individualism in the Marvel Cold War story generates a logic to the ideology of the books. Because the core value is defined as liberty, the central evil of the communist system is its trampling of individual freedom. The books suggest there is an inherent desire among all humans for such freedom, even among communist agents. (67)

Anton Vanko will later sacrifice his life, just as Dr. Yinsen did, to save Stark when the second Crimson Dynamo comes to kill him. Before he is killed, Vanko reaffirms his newfound patriotism and declares "I would dare anything for this country…which has been so good to me!" (*ToS* 52:13). Storylines such as these suggest that the communists would be capitalists if only given the chance. This possibility of defection and redemption is one not seen in typical Captain America story arcs, as the Nazis are seen as irredeemable.

A common trope in both early and modern Iron Man comics is the copycat suit. In addition to the Crimson Dynamo, Iron Man was often pitted against Titanium Man. The first Titanium Man was created by Boris Bullski, a former KGB agent and high ranking Soviet official, who was demoted to running a labor camp after displeasing his superiors. Calling to mind images of the Russian bear, Bullski is large, with a square head and a thick scar running down the side of his face. While at the labor camp, Bullski commissions various Soviet scientists to build him a suit similar to Iron Man's, but made of titanium, using Anton Vanko's laboratory. As one scientist remarks after being told the plan, "Titanium! It will be stronger than Iron!" (*ToS* 69:4). In an attempt to return to his former glory, Bullski comes up with the idea of publicly challenging Iron Man to a three round fight in front of a worldwide television audience. The

story unfolds over the course of three issues, *Tales of Suspense #69-71* (1965). Of course, the defeat of Iron Man is only the secondary goal in a challenge like this, the first being a propaganda victory over the US in front of the world. Seeing Soviet technology and strategy defeat an American hero would be beneficial in many ways to Soviet morale, and detrimental to the Americans. The reader is told that "A special telestar satellite hangs in orbit, to beam the battle throughout the world!" (*ToS* 69:9), indicating that not only is this battle important to the Soviet Union and the United States, but that the entire world cares about the outcome. The winner of this battle would prove to the world that they have better technology and better men to wield that technology, and were therefore the superior world power. This acknowledgement of the power of propaganda is particularly fitting given that this series is itself blatant American propaganda. Though purely fictional, the victory of Iron Man over Titanium Man is representative of many things. Titanium Man was designed in many ways to be similar to Iron Man, but more closely resembles the early, bulky grey and gold suits. Bullski sees this as an advantage, as his suit, being larger, is significantly more powerful than Iron Man's. However, the battle plays out much like a battle between David and Goliath. Though Iron Man appears to be losing, he makes a comeback in the final round and uses a new invention to win. Though Russia is larger and has similar, if unpolished, technology at its disposal, America will always win because the technology is superior and the capitalist system allows for more freedom to experiment and try new things without the fear of being punished for failing. Undaunted by his loss, Bullski makes improvements to his suit and challenges Iron Man to an impromptu rematch above Washington DC. Once again defeated, Bullski attempts to retreat to a Soviet submarine in the Atlantic Ocean, but discovers that he has been abandoned by his country. Both Bullski and

Iron Man refuse to surrender, reflecting their respective country's own persistence and ongoing tension.

Titanium Man and Crimson Dynamo are very similar villains. Both use Soviet technology to try to copy and improve upon the Iron Man suit in order to defeat him and prove that the Soviet Union is the better country. The propagandist implications of this are that the USSR, like its hero Bullski, wants to steal American technology and use it to win the Cold War. A common belief about communism is that it limits creativity and inventiveness, so that the communist scientists cannot conceive of their own weapons against America. Instead they must steal American technology and alter it in ways they believe will make it more powerful, in the case of Titanium Man, for example, by making it physically larger and stronger. However their lack of creativity in the lab is replicated in the field. Bullski lacks strategic creativity and ultimately loses the battle against Iron Man. In addition, Bullski is repeatedly abandoned by the very country he serves so devotedly after both of his encounters with Iron Man, indicating a lack of loyalty in communists. This is also a common theme in Iron Man's villains, and causes some, such as Anton Vanko, to defect and others, such as Boris Bullski, to try even harder to defeat Iron Man and thus be allowed back into the Communist Party.

One of Iron Man's most popular villains is the Black Widow, Natasha Romanoff. Although today Black Widow is reformed and working to atone for her past, the Black Widow was originally a KGB spy whose mission, like that of our other Russians villains, was to steal Iron Man's technology for use in Russia. In her first appearance in the 1964 issue *Tales of Suspense #52*, Black Widow's main power is her seductiveness. On the cover and title pages of this issue, she is described as "the gorgeous new menace" and introduced as "the breathtaking beauty." She manages to secure a tour of Stark Industries for herself and her partner, the second

Crimson Dynamo Boris Turenov, by her beauty alone. Stark is so taken with "Madame Natasha" (*ToS* 52:4) that he offers to let Boris show himself around the factory so that he may take Natasha out on a date. This is a rare failing on Stark's part and makes the point that the communist scourge could be attractive, even to those trained to defeat it. Natasha successfully distracts Stark while Boris kills Anton Vanko and raids the factory. Stark soon gets a message detailing the events at the factory and takes off as Iron Man to defeat the new Crimson Dynamo. Though Black Widow does not take part in the battle physically, she once again distracts him at a critical point by pretending to be helplessly trapped under some machinery. When Iron Man turns to help her, he is blasted with a jet of water, which short circuits his suit and gives Crimson Dynamo the upper hand. The new Crimson Dynamo is, of course, defeated, but the Black Widow is forced to flee. The final panel shows Black Widow in a foggy street, looking over her shoulder and thinking "I must keep moving…I know too well the penalty for failure!!" (*ToS* 52:13).

Black Widow would go on to appear in several more issues, each time operating in the same way and being touted as irresistible and seductive, just as communism may appear at first glance. Stark is distracted by her many times, but always remarks on her coldness as a fundamental flaw. The coldness of women is one associated specifically with Russian women in comics, who are in many ways so seductive because they are unfeeling and manipulative. Black Widow later uses this power to manipulate Hawkeye, another villain, into attempting to defeat Iron Man. "Fortunately, opportunities for redemption abounded" Peter Lee writes, "Women who rediscovered their capacity for love and romance inevitably found their way to the Western powers" (39). In *Tales of Suspense #57* (1964), we see Clint Barton, before his Hawkeye days, performing trick bow and arrow shots on Coney Island. Hawkeye soon decides to become a

superhero like Iron Man, using his superior archery skills to fight crime. However, his plan goes awry when, after catching a jewel thief, he is caught with the jewels and thought to be the thief. Black Widow comes to his rescue, and the reader is told that "thus, smitten by the Black Widow's fatal beauty, the man called Hawkeye enters into a dramatic alliance which is to change the course of both their lives, and Iron Man's as well!" (*ToS* 57:7). During the course of their romance, Black Widow hides her status as a red spy, and supplies Hawkeye with his trademarked trick arrows. Black Widow's beauty, as well as her seemingly endless supply of arrows, convince Hawkeye to do things he would normally find abhorrent, such as fighting for the communists and helping them defeat Iron Man. With the help of Black Widow's technology, Hawkeye nearly defeats Iron Man. But at the last second, Black Widow is injured and Hawkeye chooses to save her, crying out "She has to live!! She has to be mine!! She's the only one I've ever loved!!" (*ToS* 57:17) as he runs into the mist.

The love story between Hawkeye and Black Widow is a complex one. Though based in lies and manipulation, Hawkeye and Black Widow do come to genuinely love each other. While Hawkeye is manipulated into fighting for the Soviets by Black Widow, in many ways representing those strong men who are seduced by communism itself, Black Widow also comes to fall in love with Hawkeye, representing her eventual defection to the West. Only seven issues later, in *Tales of Suspense #64* (1965), Natasha has gone from thinking "It is fortunate that he is taken with my beauty! I will be able to twist him around my little finger!" (*ToS* 57:8) to telling Hawkeye that "I had to come back…to see you once more!! To feel your strong arms around me!" (*ToS* 64:3). Although the reader might be tempted to believe it is just another trick, it appears that Black Widow has genuinely fallen in love with Hawkeye, and it is this love that causes her to tell her communist superiors that "I'm through serving your evil purposes!" (*ToS* 64:3). Black

Widow goes on to reveal that after her previous failures and new found morality, the Soviets threaten to harm her parents if she doesn't don a new, powerful costume and enter into a rigorous training program. After becoming forcibly separated from Black Widow, Hawkeye comes to his senses and joins the Avengers. Understandably, the Avengers are hesitant to let Hawkeye join them, but he tells them that he always wanted to be a hero until Black Widow seduced him. He goes on to assure his new friends that "I'll make up for what I've done! I'll devote my life to making amends!" (*Avengers* 16:7-8). Hawkeye's monologue reveals many things about his transition from good to evil [and back again to good?], and foreshadows Black Widow's own defection, later. It is Iron Man who officially announces the addition of Hawkeye to the Avengers, symbolizing his ultimate forgiveness of and newfound trust in Hawkeye, though others would remain suspicious of Hawkeye's true intentions. Hawkeye's redemption is unique among the communists because he started out with good intentions, but was lured into fighting for the reds by Black Widow. His seduction by Black Widow serves as a warning that communism can be alluring and may seduce even a would-be hero into doing its dirty work. Even in America, constant vigilance is needed. Of course, in the case of Hawkeye and Black Widow, the side switching goes both ways, though Black Widow would never return to her Soviet masters. Once Black Widow truly falls in love with Hawkeye, she falls in love with America and attempts to defect. Unlike the Avengers, however, the Soviets are much less understanding, and force her to continue fighting for them by making her a weapon. One tactic the Soviet communists often use in comics is brainwashing. After one such instance, Black Widow comes back to America to fight the Avengers (*Avengers* #29), but after seeing Hawkeye, the brainwashing wears off and she helps him defeat her communist comrades (*Avengers* #30). However, Black Widow's redemption arc is not as simple as Hawkeye's. Black Widow would

not join the Avengers until 1973, eight years after Hawkeye's own initiation. She would, however, be a powerful ally for not only the Avengers, but other heroes such as Spider-Man and Daredevil as well.

Black Widow ultimately defects to the United States, but her sordid past makes her an anti-hero rather than a true hero. She uses her unique skillset to work for the United States and its heroes using tactics that they are uncomfortable using themselves. Despite the Avengers having a strict no killing policy, for example, Black Widow, as an ally but not a full member, is able to kill for them in cases where it may be necessary but unsavory. As an ex-KGB spy, her moral compass has been permanently skewed, but she works with people and agencies she believes are "good" so that she never has to rely on her own crooked view of the world in order to redeem herself. Unlike Anton Vanko, who simply begins working for Stark and is so patriotic that he dies in an attempt to protect his country, Black Widow will constantly be working to redeem herself of her past, implying that female communists have far more to overcome than their male counterparts. However, this story arc suggests that communist spies like Black Widow can be useful to American organizations, particularly if they continue to act in the same ways for their new leaders. American organizations like The Avengers cannot officially endorse killing, but they are only too happy to allow former communists to kill for them.

A discussion of Iron Man's villains would not be complete without mentioning The Mandarin. The Mandarin is Iron Man's primary arch-nemesis, a fitting opposition given that The Mandarin's powers derive from magic while Iron Man's come from science. The Mandarin, however, is not a communist, and in fact, like Iron Man, hates the communists. His origin, however, also serves to denigrate communism in a unique way. Written by Stan Lee, the title page of the 1965 *Tales of Suspense #62* notes that "this tale was specially produced by Mighty

Marvel in answer to more than 500 requests for Mandy's origin!" It goes on to inform the reader that The Mandarin is a direct descendant of Genghis Khan, that his parents died shortly after his birth, and that his family had been one of the wealthiest in China. However, after the rise of communism in that country, his palace and riches were seized by the government, rendering him no better than a peasant. However because of his training and pride, The Mandarin still considers himself noble and refuses to work. Instead he finds the "valley of the spirits" (*ToS* 62:3) and a spaceship that contains ten rings of power. Using the rings, The Mandarin returns to China, where he begins to conquer various small villages. He then tells Iron Man that his plan is to give the Chinese a missile to be test fired, and unbeknownst to them the missile will land in Formosa, starting World War III. Iron Man escapes The Mandarin's clutches and manages to reverse the missile's trajectory, causing it to explode in China and The Mandarin to be called a traitor.

This origin story is intricate in its detail, from The Mandarin's nefarious ancestry to the Cold War conflict between China and Formosa. Though not a communist himself, The Mandarin is an example of what communism creates. Though The Mandarin was probably never an ideal leader, it was the communists' interference that caused his transformation into a truly evil and powerful figure. Though communism is what caused his descent into super-villainy, The Mandarin hates America, as well, because it lacks an aristocracy. His desire to cause World War III is an attempt to destroy both nations, as Formosa was an American defended province now known as the sovereign state of Taiwan. By sending a missile into Formosa, The Mandarin would be sparking a war between China and the United States, a war that many other countries in the world would be involved in, essentially setting the Cold War on fire. The Mandarin serves as a warning to Americans about the effects of communism; rather than ushering in the rise of the proletariat as communist theory claimed, the introduction of communism was likely to have

precisely the opposite effect—it would enrage the wealthy classes who would retaliate and seek the destruction of both democratic and communist states.

Section IV: Hail Hydra, the Winter Soldier, and Civil War

Superhero comic books are unlike most other forms of literature in large part because they are not owned by their creators. In the case of a novel, for example, every aspect of writing is usually controlled by a single author. A new author cannot take the characters of the old and continue the story without the original author's permission. In the case of superhero comics, however, this is the norm. A character like Superman, created by Siegel and Shuster, is sold to a major company like DC and then passed along to various writers and artists. When Siegel and Shuster stopped writing and drawing Superman, DC assigned new creators to the title. In this way, superheroes are passed along from writer to writer, artist to artist. Different creators will inject their own vision of what a certain superhero is or represents into their stories, but core values and traits follow the character from its inception into the present day. Iron Man, for example, remains a "billionaire genius playboy philanthropist" in all of his comics, despite being passed along between dozens of creators. The archetypal values of Iron Man and Captain America were originally created as a response to the Cold War and World War II respectively, but modern creators have taken these characters and forced them to contend with current events, while still maintaining their original virtues.

In modern comics, both Captain America and Iron Man are still fighting the wars of their times in many ways. Captain America's biggest enemy is still the Red Skull, a Nazi agent. Though German Nazism was destroyed in 1945, the Red Skull works for Hydra, a terrorist organization with neo-Nazi goals. Hydra, like the monster from Greek mythology after which it is named, represents the difficulty, if not impossibility, of utterly eradicating the Nazi threat. The original Hydra was a many headed monster that Hercules was tasked to kill. He does so eventually, but he discovers in the process that for every head he cuts off of the monster, two

more grow immediately in its place. Largely funded by Nazi plunder, the Marvel Hydra seeks to establish a fascist new world order through subversive and terrorist means. Hydra first appears in *Strange Tales* #135 in 1965, which features Nick Fury, agent of law enforcement and espionage agency S.H.I.E.L.D., and Tony Stark, who is in charge of the special weapons division at S.H.I.E.L.D. In this issue, Tony Stark tells Nick Fury that Fury is going to be made head of S.H.I.E.L.D. and that his primary mission will be to destroy Hydra. Hydra, the reader is told, has its arms all around the globe and is a dangerous terrorist organization. Before the issue ends, however, a panel showing a man in a Hydra mask proclaims "But, Hydra is immortal! 'Cut off a limb, and two more shall take its place!'" (*ST* 135:12).

Hydra is similar in many ways to Cold War communism. Though various countries have communist leaders, such as Joseph Stalin in Russia and Mao Zedong in China, the American view of communism is that it is an infiltrating and insidious idea the world over. Even in America the McCarthy trials proved that communism was believed to be everywhere, especially in politics and Hollywood, and capable of manipulating even the most patriotic of men. Hydra is not aligned with any one country, as Nazism was with Germany, but rather is an organization unto itself. The inclusion of Iron Man in the first appearance of Hydra makes these similarities even more striking. Though previous attempts to make Captain America a Cold War hero by transforming him into "the commie smasher" were unsuccessful, the invention of Hydra allowed Marvel to modernize and update the hero while retaining the elements of Nazism which made it such a fitting villain for the hero.

The 2014 release of the film *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, a sequel to 2011's *Captain America: The First Avenger*, moves beyond Ed Brubaker and Steve Epting's brilliant, Eisner Award winning comic book series by including Hydra. This inclusion ties the two films

together, but it downplays the blatant Cold War references in Brubaker's story. Indeed, the title *Winter Soldier* refers to the Winter Soldier Investigation, an event that took place in 1971. The Winter Soldier Investigation was sponsored by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) and its intention was to expose American war crimes and atrocities that occurred during the Vietnam War. In both the comic book and the movies, the Winter Soldier is a highly trained Russian assassin, but he's also more than that. The Winter Soldier was once an American soldier, who had been brainwashed by the Russians and forced to commit atrocities. Nick Fury calls him "A Cold War myth that's turning out to be true" and says that he is "supposed to be the KGB's secret weapon. A guy who could pass for American and slip behind enemy lines" (*WS* 8.9). Even worse, by the end of the comic it is revealed that the Winter Soldier was not just any American soldier, but the sidekick of Captain America himself; Bucky Barnes.

Before 2005, it was widely believed by fans that there were certain comic book characters whose deaths could simply not be undone. Batman's parents, for example, can never walk back through the doors of Wayne Manor because it would undo Batman's motivation to be Batman. The brutal neck snapping of Gwen Stacy in Spider-Man has always been a major event in the Spider-Man universe. The death of Bucky Barnes was among those iconic deaths. The loss of Bucky is what made Captain America such a complex character when Stan Lee resurrected him in the 1960s. It turned him from a character who fought in World War II simply out of patriotic duty into a tragic figure, haunted by the death of his pseudo-brother. Ed Brubaker took a major risk when he brought Bucky Barnes back to life, but it was one that paid off immensely and once again made Captain America a popular character. In addition to bringing Bucky back to life, Brubaker changed the nature of his character. In a flashback of their final battle together, Captain America tells the reader:

> The official story said he was a symbol to counter the rise of the Hitler Youth…And there was **some** truth to that, but like all things in war, there was a **darker** truth underneath. Bucky did the things I **couldn't.** I was the **icon**. I wore the **flag**…But while I gave speeches to troops in the trenches…He was doing what he'd been trained to do…And he was **highly** trained (*WS* 5.11).

The panels accompanying these words show Bucky sneaking up on enemy soldiers, stabbing them in the back and slitting their throats under the cover of darkness while Captain America and the accompanying American soldiers hide in the bushes. Brubaker here acknowledges the previous view of Bucky as a counter to the Hitler Youth, but tells the reader that there is more to the story. While the front of both Captain America and the United States is one of honor and ethics, men like Bucky will always be needed to get their hands dirty. Captain America, as the face of the United States military, must always be an upstanding soldier, but he is surrounded by men like Bucky who are willing to stoop to fight fire with fire.

The story arc of *Captain America: Winter Soldier* begins with the mysterious assassination of Red Skull in an empty apartment. Symbolically, this kills the last Nazi enemy Captain America has. Convinced that Red Skull is not really dead, Captain America begins to investigate. The investigation leads to the discovery of the Winter Soldier, a Russian superspy and assassin who has, within the realm of this comic, been seen intermittently over the years since the end of World War II. Through the course of the story arc, Steve Rogers discovers that Bucky had been kidnapped, not killed, in their final adventure together. The Soviets had brainwashed him and altered him physically, both with a super-soldier serum similar to Steve's and a metal arm made of the same indestructible material as Captain America's shield. In many ways, especially for Steve, this is worse than Bucky dying. Steve remembers Bucky as a hero

who gave his life for the greater good. In reality, Bucky was broken apart by a fascist government and rebuilt to be a weapon of mass destruction. The Winter Soldier has no memories of being Bucky, of being Captain America's sidekick, of being anything. He only remembers the mission--the face of the man he is supposed to kill next. In addition to the pain of seeing his friend tortured, and the monster he's become, Steve is also forced to acknowledge that it could have easily been himself who had been turned into the Winter Soldier. At the end of the *Captain America: Winter Soldier* collection, Bucky begins to get his memories back. He goes off in search of them, ultimately regaining his heroism, though like Black Widow he has too much to atone for. Following the events of the Marvel Event *Civil War*, Brubaker and Epting created an 18 issue story arc (*Captain America* volume 5, issues 25-42) known as *The Death of Captain America*. Steve Rogers is assassinated, and Bucky, believing it is Tony Stark's fault, attempts to kill him in retaliation. Immediately, the reader is faced with the stark contrast between the upstanding Steve Rogers and the corrupted Bucky Barnes. During his confrontation with Stark, however, Stark offers to make Bucky the new Captain America. Bucky agrees, so long as he doesn't have to take orders from anybody; he will agree to the assignment only if he can act as an independent agent. Though Bucky's role as Captain America was only meant to last six issues, Bucky remained Captain America for years due to the popularity of the character.

The Marvel event *Civil War* took place from 2006-2007, after *Winter Soldier* and before *The Death of Captain America*, and is vital to understanding the implications of both texts. *Civil War* was a crossover event built around the mini-series created by Mark Millar and Steve McNiven. The story begins with a group of amateur superheroes who accidentally blow up a neighborhood, killing 600 people and prompting the government to enact "The Superhero Registration Act." The Superhero Registration act would require all super-powered humans to

register with the government, making their identities known, and superheroes would be subject to the same kinds of regulations as other public servants, such as police officers. The superheroes of the Marvel Universe divide, with one side led by Iron Man and the other by Captain America. Iron Man, burdened by the guilt he feels after speaking to the mother of a little girl who was killed in the explosion, is in favor of the Registration Act while Captain America strongly feels that superheroes should not be required to register. Marc Di Paolo observes:

> By and large, the *Civil War* storyline portrayed the faction represented by Tony Stark (a.k.a. Iron Man), which favored national security over civil liberties in the style of John Ashcroft, as the villains. The group led by Captain America, which opposed the government's initiatives to limit the rights of the individual, in the spirit of Susan Herman, was portrayed as the story's heroic underdogs. (98)

It is a story of a frightened populace who choose to exchange their freedom for security. The story arc is a direct comment on the Patriot Act, which was quickly passed following the events of 9/11. After continued escalation and some betrayals, a final battle takes place between the followers of Iron Man and the followers of Captain America. During the course of the battle, city blocks are decimated, possibly injuring countless numbers of people. The non-superpowered citizens attack Captain America just as he's about to deal a final blow to Iron Man, prompting Captain America to turn to Falcon, drop his shield, and say "Oh my God. They're right. We're not fighting for the people anymore, Falcon…look at us. We're just fighting" (*Civil War* 7:21). Captain America surrenders to Iron Man and orders his troops to stand down as he's led away in handcuffs. He is then assassinated while in custody, and the events of *The Death of Captain America* take place.

The Death of Captain America is an analogy for the death of America's golden age ideals in the face of the Cold War. Bucky, a Cold War agent, becomes the new Captain America and represents America's new ideals. Costello writes

> Where Steve Rogers had become increasingly a paragon of American virtue, an idea to emulate but impossible to replicate, Bucky as Captain America offers a more flawed, less virtuous ideal. Where Rogers had slept through the deepest dark of the Cold War, Bucky is an agent of America's enemy. Rogers brought World War II values to the late twentieth century; Bucky upholds those ideals, tempered by the reality of four decades of Cold War transformations. Where Steve Rogers stood as an example of the America could be and a condemnation of the failure of others to be that (although he himself was never one to condemn), Bucky is one of the people, an everyman trying to do his best. Where Steve Rogers's constantly questioned whether his values still mattered in a changed world, Bucky assumes that those values matter wholeheartedly, but also knows he will probably never live up to them (240).

It is important that this change occurs after the events of *Civil War* because *Civil War* is a contemporary, post 9/11 story. Captain America is faced with this new world in which he cannot survive, in which his morals and virtues are no longer wanted or needed. Instead, the American people want heroes like Iron Man and Bucky. Iron Man is willing to enforce regulations on superheroes, refusing to trust them absolutely as was once possible. Iron Man even becomes a part of the government, just as big business in America has substantial influence over various government agencies. Bucky is willing to do whatever is needed to be a protector; he attacks and defends.

Captain America's death itself echoes a political assassination like that of John F. Kennedy rather than a superhero death. Captain America is shot on live TV and dies on the steps of a courthouse. Compared with the death of Superman, who is pummeled by a villain Doomsday in an epic battle that levels several city blocks (*Superman* vol. 2 #75), Captain America's death seems almost mundane. Superheroes die often of super deaths, at the end of brutal battles with other super beings. They do not die like normal people; they do not die from being shot. The underwhelming scene does, however, reinforce the image of Captain America as a political leader, a slightly larger than life human rather than a titan. His death is not the result of a grand battle, but a political assassination, the goal of which was to finally kill the American ideals that Captain America represented. But as Costello observes, "The dream has not died with Steve Rogers, but has indeed been revealed to be a dream, an aspiration rather than a description" (241).

Winter Soldier, *Civil War*, and *The Death of Captain America* all take place in a post-9/11 world and feature both Captain America and Iron Man. Ideal candidates for their roles in these stories, Steve Rogers remains the freedom fighter and sentinel of liberty while Tony Stark is willing to sacrifice that freedom for collective security, as many who grew up in the midst of Mutually Assured Destruction and McCarthyism, as well as in the aftermath of 9/11, also would. In all of these story arcs, Captain America represents an ideal, what we believe America is. Iron Man represents the gritty reality, what America really is and is becoming. While Captain America's love of freedom and hatred of tyranny is a nice ideal and one Americans are often nostalgic for, it has no place in this post 9/11 world. Cold War heroes and antiheroes like Iron Man and Winter Soldier are far more appealing because we live in similar times. World War II and the heroes it created are far too simplistic in their world views. To heroes like Captain

America, there is good and there is bad and there is no in between. Characters like Iron Man and the Winter Soldier are far more aware of the sacrifices necessary to ensure the greater good. They question America's authority while maintaining it. In order for Captain America to survive in this new world, Steve Rogers had to die. Bucky Barnes, who had seen and done evil, is the new Captain America, a post 9/11 Captain America. Where Steve Rogers carried only his shield, Bucky Barnes carries a pistol and a combat knife. The world wherein America was isolated and only defended itself, used its shield as its greatest weapon, went out the window during the Cold War, when America intervened in other countries' politics in order to prevent the spread of communism.

Iron Man, however, has translated well over the years into a war-on-terror hero. Unlike many golden age heroes like Captain America, he was never truly innocent and simple. He was born in the middle of the Vietnam War, the height of the Cold War, a time when the American people were divided in their patriotism. Stan Lee has said in numerous interviews that Iron Man was created because

> I was drunk with success and power, because our other characters were doing so well. Once I decided I wanted a guy in a suit of armor that would be able to do almost anything, I figured *I'm gonna make him the kind of guy that normally young people would hate.* Obviously, young people hated war – and I don't blame them – they were all in favor of peace. So I figured, *I'm gonna make the hero a guy who manufactures war materials and weapons, and things like that. On top of which, I'm gonna make him a member of the military industrial complex. He's a big businessman, he's a multimillionaire.* And I said, *I'm gonna make them like*

him! Because he'll still be brave and inventive and we'll make him likeable. (Mangels 6)

Stan Lee's goal in creating Iron Man was to make him a Howard Hughes type character, a man the young people, especially those in the counter-culture movement that would reach its peak just a few years later, would want to hate. Iron Man stood for all the things about America that young people hated: imperialism, war, big business, capitalism, and Stan Lee succeeded in making him "likeable." Stan Lee made these attributes appealing to his young readers, and Iron Man became very effective propaganda for these new American virtues. Today, Americans, and especially American youth, are still conflicted over these same issues. The wars in the Middle East are every bit as controversial as Vietnam. The recession that began in the early 2000s led to an increased criticism of the capitalist system that allows Iron Man to make his profits. In addition to all of these things, the social justice movement has made America's youth more aware of Tony Stark's privilege as a wealthy white male. And yet when *Iron Man* debuted in theaters in 2008, it was a critical and box office success. The self-described "genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist" (Favreau, *Iron Man*) spoke to a generation of youth who identified with Iron Man's desire to do good for his country, but constant betrayal by the very establishments he was trying to serve.

Iron Man's origin translated easily into the 21st century. In the 2008 film, all that was needed was to turn Vietnam into Afghanistan and mini-transistors into mini arc-reactors; nothing else was changed. Afghanistan and American presence there mimicked the controversy surrounding the Vietnam War, while the change to nuclear arc reactors are a comment on clean energy. It is one of the most faithfully updated adaptations of all time and one that has changed the least. Marvel's decision to adapt the Iron Man story to film speaks volumes to the character's

continued appeal. Unlike comic books, which are read by only a small population, movies must appeal to a much wider audience. If a film were to receive the same sales numbers as a comic book, it would be considered a colossal failure. Choosing Iron Man as the hero through which to introduce the Marvel Cinematic Universe implies that he is just as relevant to today's audience as he was in 1963.

Over the course of the movie, Stark learns that the weapons he designs exclusively for use by the U.S. military are being sold to terrorist organizations by someone in his own company. His decision to don the suit comes from his desire to right that wrong. His selfishness and willful ignorance led to innocent people getting hurt and his goal is to make amends for that. W. Bryan Rommel Ruiz notes that:

> Favreau's film is thus a provocative story about contemporary American foreign policy in the aftermath of September 11th, and the longstanding debate regarding advancing American interests or American ideals in global geopolitics. Where interests and ideal can work simultaneously, at times they conflict in the international arena, particularly in the case of American business and foreign policy interests. *Iron Man* chiefly focuses upon the role of American capitalism, and the ways its imperatives corrupt those who seek profit above the ideal that the United States is a force for moral good in the world. (257)

Ruiz goes on to point out that Stark's philosophy of "peace is having a bigger stick than the other guy" (*Iron Man*) is reminiscent of Reagan's policy during the Cold War when the United States accelerated its weapon production, forcing the Soviet Union to do the same, as well as Teddy Roosevelt's foreign policy: "Speak softly and carry a big stick!" Of course, these two points in

our nation's history are linked, since America sold weapons to insurgent groups in the Middle East, essentially funding terrorist organizations like the Taliban.

In movies following the first *Iron Man* film, Iron Man and Captain America would butt heads again, especially in Joss Whedon's film *The Avengers*. A freshly unfrozen Captain America is still largely ignorant to the corruption that has infiltrated American politics, and demands unquestionable loyalty from the rest of the team. Iron Man, however, has been fooled before and takes a closer look at S.H.I.E.L.D.'s classified files, discovering plans to amass high technology weapons. In the movie *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Captain America has learned from Iron Man and experience not to trust S.H.I.E.L.D. or any government agency, and instead relies on his own moral compass. One of his rules that he sticks to is to not kill anyone. In one instance where Captain America and Black Widow have captured a Hydra agent, they are threatening to throw the agent off the roof if he refuses to give them information. The Hydra agent says "Is this little display meant to insinuate that you're gonna throw me off the roof? Because it's really not your style, Rogers." To which Captain America responds, "You're right. It's not. It's hers." And allows Black Widow to kick the man off the roof (Russo, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*). This seemingly simple interaction speaks volumes to the nature of Captain America. Captain America doesn't kill people, but he's surrounded by people who are willing to do the dirty work for him like Black Widow and Bucky Barnes. Captain America must remain clean and sanitized and uncorrupted for public consumption, but there are things that he acknowledges must be done in order to win and protect the American people. Iron Man, however, is able to do his own dirty work because he is not an agent of the United States military or government, but an independent businessman who occasionally uses his super powers to help the

government or military. He is an agent unto himself who, unregulated and unforced by any outside agency, still uses his wealth and power to do good works and save people.

Iron Man and Captain America have interacted on the page and on the screen countless times since their inception. The two characters complement each other in ways other heroes do not because they represent American Ideals and American Interests. Captain America is the morally upstanding, incorruptible sentinel of liberty who looks out for the little guy. Iron Man is the ultimate capitalist success story, a genius who uses his intellect and wealth for good. Captain America represents what America wants to be, whereas Iron Man is much closer to what America is becoming. Both heroes are constructed for propagandist purposes; they personify the ideals of a nation in a way that encourages readers to rally behind them, even if those ideals are outdated or corrupt. While the heroes never quite move beyond their respective times, those times become relevant to today's world in a variety of ways. While we no longer believe Nazis and Commies are a risk to our way of life, the threat of terrorism, nuclear war, and the recession still loom large. Despite comics being a serial media subjected to the various thoughts and ideas of many creators over time, the core values of these heroes and the ways they express these values remains similar to the incarnations present during the Cold War. The political nature of these heroes means that while Iron Man is easily converted into a modern hero, Captain America's appeal is that he is a lost ideal. One that the audience looks back on with fondness, but worries is gone forever. He must repeatedly be corrupted, first by the Cold War and now by current affairs, in order to teach the reader that even if Captain America is an impossible standard, it must still be strived for. Both heroes, however, still endorse the American way of life and stay true to their propagandist origins.

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Vita

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