

Captain America

A Visual Representation of America Identity

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For thousands of years, we as human beings have created beings, greater and strong than ourselves to give us hope in times of crises. Mythology of every culture around the world, contains god like and super human creatures that protect the common man when monsters and evils plague the world. However, the United States of America, a young nation with a mixing pot of cultures, lacked her own unique cast of protectors to turn to when wars threatened the nation. With the Second World War brewing in Europe, just twenty years after “the War to End all Wars” ravaged the world and the Great Depression left society struggling to make ends meet, the United States dreaded being dragged into yet another large global conflict. But with Hitler spreading the dark clouds of Nazism over Germany and other surrounding countries, the United States recognized she could not maintain an isolationist view. In order to prepare the American people for yet another hardship, the United States looked to heroes, greater than mankind, to not only protect the nation and the men fighting to defend it, but also to promote liberty, democracy and American Nationalism in times of doubt for the American people. Thus the Superhero phenomenon was born.

In an article titled “American Superheroes and the Politics of Good and Evil” Jiri G. Ruzicka examined why “a nation needs superheroes.” He notes that the United States lacks ancient history or mythology; super heroes became the solution that would fill the void of the United States mixing pot culture. Comic books, a 1800’s creation, did not become popular in the United States until the 1930’s which was the beginning of the birth of Superhero popularity. (Ruzicka) “Super heroes are the saviors of all that is good, and the guardians of a better future, they always fight in the name of good, in the name

of honest citizens, and they are always victorious” (Ruzicka). Times of crisis lead people to crave hope and Superheroes could be this hope thus making them popularized during the Second World War.

In 1941, as America prepared herself to enter yet another conflict that was tearing Europe apart, Marvel Comics created and released the comic book character that would act not only as a fictional Superhero for entertainment purposes, but also a man who would represent and promote American ideals and goals during the war time. The only superhero to have the Nation’s name as a part of his title, Captain America comic books soon filled the hands of children, and adults at home and abroad, urging people to join the army, support their troops, and aid the Allies in any way possible. Superhuman Steve Rodgers, a Private in the Army, lead a double life as the star and stripped clad hero fighting Nazis and terrorism when the Nation desperately needed it. Comic books, and uncensored form of media, depicted good Old American Cap punching Hitler, thwarting Red Skull and Hydra (supervillains who attempted to penetrate democratic America with Nazi ideals and plots), ultimately creating very strong pro-American messages that would support the war.

So how did Superheroes, not quiet gods, but hardly normal mortal men, stick around past their time of creation and remain popular figures in contemporary culture today? How did Captain America, a Nazi punching, liberty defending superhero, resurface from forgotten comic books, into the swoon worthy film action hero topping the box offices in the 2011 film *Captain America The First Avenger*, the 2012 film of *The Avengers*, and the most recent 2014 sequel to The First Avenger, *Captain America the*

Winter Solider? In a contemporary culture, so different than that of World War II, how does Captain America not only survive, but thrive?

The answer lies not so much in what has change, but rather what has stayed the same. Captain America was created to be a visual depiction of Nationhood for the United States; he was an identity for the American people to rally behinds as he stood up to Hitler and Nazism, and promoted and protected liberty, democracy and freedom as he defended the United States, and helped fight to free Europe. And today, though the United States no longer finds herself in the throes of World War II, she still identifies with the same ideas that Cap was created to represent, protect, and promote.

Regardless of his settings, Captain America manages to represent this iconic American identity, even though he is no longer a piece of patriotic propaganda. Despite his greater entertainment value the 2000s Captain America, still promotes liberty, democracy, fighting evil that plagues the nation in whatever villainous form it may take, while embracing his red, white, and blue uniform. Though the physical villains may change from comic to comic and decade to decade, the character of Captain America remains timeless and classic depicting American ideals and identity visually.

Operation Rebirth: An Origin Story

In order to understand the American identity that Captain America promotes, one must comprehend the origins of the character himself. 1941 brought about the release of the first Captain America comic book, which, in correspondence with the 2011 film of *The First Avenger*, tells the origin story of the beloved Superhero. Civilian Steve Rodgers, a New York native with one year of art school, is turned away time and time

again from enlisting in the United States army because he is too small, scrawny, and unhealthy enough for the army to take him. Steve is desperate to go overseas and serve his country so he is more than willing to do anything it will take for the army to accept him-even if it means altering himself genetically in a scientific experiment to become a super-human



Captain America. Paramount Pictures, 2011. DVD.

soldier. He willingly participates in an undercover, government sponsored super soldier experiment titled “Operation: Rebirth” that injects him with a serum that alters his DNA to make him a genetically perfect, a superhuman with “very high intelligence as well as

agility, strength, speed, endurance, and reaction time superior to any Olympic athlete who ever competed.

The Super-Soldier formula that he had metabolized had enhanced all of his bodily functions to the peak of human efficiency. Most notably, his body eliminates the excessive build-up of fatigue-producing poisons in his muscles, granting him phenomenal endurance.” (Marvel Universe) Simpleton no more, Steve Rogers is accepted into the army as a patriotic superhero and a representation of America.



Case No. 1 Meet Captain America
Simon, Joe, and Jack Kirby. Captain America: The Classic Years. New York: Marvel Comics, 1998.

The very “birth” of Captain America acts as a symbolic reference to the creation and birth of the United States herself. Originally colonies of Great Britain, the dominating Empire and World Power until the Second World War, the United States of America was the small underdog who sought out freedom from oppressive rule. While Great Britain was hardly a supervillain to the American colonies, she was everything the colonies were not: a monarchy, oppressive, and ridged rule. With the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the United States stood up against the great World Empire of Britain, boldly asserting the ideals of liberty and equality for all men, and a democratic form of government. Steve Rogers, small and scrawny, just like the thirteen colonies, took the Super Soldier Serum, in order to do his duty to the war effort and go and fight Hitler who was taking over Europe and threatening everything America stood for. The small thirteen original colonies stood up to the big bully empire on the block just as small Steve Rogers sought to stand up to stand up to Hitler who was terrorizing Europe. It could hardly be an accident that Marvel writers chose an underdog beginning for Captain America that correlated with the humble beginning of the great nation that he confidently represented. It drew upon the history that Americans were proud of and could identify with; humble beginnings were the foundation of America and thus a foundation for the superhero to rally behind and inspire them to support the war in Europe.

Captain America’s origins further connect with those of the United States beyond his physical presence and extend through to his strength of character as well. It is often recognized that he is a great superhero because of his persona; something that many Americans themselves, both during the Revolution and throughout the years, have

identified with. “It was strength of character that led the Army to choose him for the super soldier program, Project Rebirth, in the first place. We see this in the stories of the scrawny, pre-treatment Steve Rogers...who was turned away at every enlistment office he applied to-but was still brave, still strong of heart, and still principled.” (White, 32)

Early American colonists tried time and time again to reason with Great Britain and her oppressive taxations, before bravely standing up to the Empire that was treading on their rights. Steve Rogers embraces the super soldier serum just as Americans embraced revolution as a means of protecting what was theirs; the principles that made them Americans.

Mark D. White, a Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at the College of Staten Island/CUNY seeks to explore Captain America the lessons that a 1940s creation can teach modern day Americans about ethics and virtues in his book titled *The Virtues of Captain America, Modern-Day Lessons on Character from a World War II Superhero*. White combines philosophy, history and comics to create a commentary on American culture and character both during the 1940's and now. Combing through years' worth of comics, White finds a Cap quote in which Captain America says that “he had become ‘the embodiment of [his] nation...its living symbol,’ and the narration in another issue described ‘his mission to give America an enduring symbol of its highest virtues: freedom, justice, dignity, and opportunity for all.’” (White, 25) With in this chapter titled *Captain America as a Moral Exemplar*, White is arguing how Captain America is ultimately setting an example of not only how to be a good person, but he is identifying himself with what is good and true in the American identity. Here White is discussing just how much Captain American himself views himself as a

symbol of what it means to be classically American, identifying with the values that Americans have held dear to culture since her founding in 1776. 1940s Steve Rogers is able to embrace these values that were established as a part of American Identity in 1776. The values themselves are what make up the American identity, not the decade, thus, no matter if Steve is living in 1940's New York or contemporary times, he will forever be a symbol of American identity because of the values he embraces.

The United States is a country that was founded on immigration of those who were seeking a better life from poverty, oppression and other social and economic limits that were encountered in countries across the world. America opened her ports to waves of immigrants, welcoming them to the land of opportunity where they could get a job, an education and a new start to be anyone they wanted to be. Captain America is an embodiment of this iconic "American Dream" as he too started from nothing to become something. White notes that Steve Rogers is a "product of Roosevelt's rebuilding of the country's spirit, enhanced by World War II patriot spirit; he believes deeply in the ideal of America, the things they taught us all in school about why this is the greatest country on Earth..." (White144) Steve Rogers grew up in the Depression Era with very little, only to rise up and become a famous iconic symbol because of his drive and persistence. He found opportunities in a time where America struggled to pull herself out of a depression, and through his opportunity, he reminded Americans of the traits that they held dear, despite the tragedies of an economic depression and an impending war. He was a symbol of what one could be-starting from humble beginnings to becoming someone of great influence and leadership.

Dress for the Job you want: Captain America's Attire and Title

Quite possibly the most obvious connection of Captain America as a visual representation of the United States, comes from the character's name and uniform. The 1930's, 40's, and 50's saw a rise in the creation of Superheroes, with everyone from Batman and Superman, to the Fantastic Four and the Avengers. However, of all the great, iconic superheroes to fill comic books at the time, none of them share a name



The Origin of Captain America
Google Images

with the nation they took it upon themselves to protect; except for Captain America. The title of Captain is one of higher rank in the military, giving him authority, while America embodies the entire nation as a whole; thus asserting a dominate presence that the United States found herself growing into with the beginning of the Second World War. Finally, his uniform contains both the colors as well as the patterns of the flag of the United States.

Cloaked in red white and blue, with a star on his chest and his shield, and strips across his muscular abdominals, Captain America all but wears one of the most iconic symbols that depict America: her flag. As noted in *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, “to help him become a symbolic counterpoint to the Red Skull, Rogers was given the red, white and blue costume of Captain America.” (Gruenwald and Sanderson, 110) It was no riddle to readers, that the star-spangled hero was the living symbol of patriotism and liberty for the American people.

Comic books and cartoon characters in general are famous for the artist's over exaggerated depictions of the human form. Captain America was hardly any different, always depicted with clearly defined muscles, a finely sculpted body and highly defined features and facial expressions; it gave readers a grandiose sense that the good guy was in fact the top dog because he could take on anyone. Strong, larger than life Captain America was the perfect depiction to take on Hitler and Nazism because he could physically win any fight. Over drawing the form of the beloved superhero connected with the growing presence the United States had in global politics at the time. All of Europe held their breath to see what the America's would do with the war; either enter on the side of the Allies, or stay out of the conflict. Either decision would act as a tipping point in the war, and influence who would win. And when the war ended, the United States would emerge as one of the two Super Powers to influence global politics. By drawing Captain America as a buff, strong, very vividly masculine man who could win any fight with super human strength, never tire, and act as the protector and provider of safety, democracy and liberty for his country, alluded to the growing identity of global strength and superiority that American's were beginning to possess as an identity in the eyes of the rest of the world.

Villains: the contrast to Captain America

Similarly, the creators of the Captain America comics depicted their super villains in a very intentional *un American* way, contrasting the good things that Cap stands for and making it very clear to readers who the enemy is. In the comics, Captain America takes on a number of villains both at home and abroad some of whom are the obvious enemies such as Hitler himself, while others such as Red Skull is not so clear.

Created to support the war effort, Captain America needed to fight for the same ideas that soldiers were fighting across Europe for. Taking on Hitler was very clear propaganda-Allied forces would do anything, at any cost to stop the spread of Nazism and Hitler's power. Beating up Hitler was clean and clear war message to the American people of what was being tackled over in Europe. However taking on Red Skull would require more creativity from Marvel creators because he was not a real life villain that the American public could identify as a threat to their identity. *Bring on the Bad Guys*, a comic book released in 1976 by Stan Lee, one of the Marvel comics geniuses, tackles the specific villain of Red Skull and why he was a popular choice for Cap to fight because he was Hitler's own perfect creation and a model Nazi officer (The Fantastic Origin of The Red Skull). The perfect foil for Captain America, Red Skull is the exact opposite of Cap as he was the products of the Nazi's failed attempt to create a super

solider (resulting in his evil mannerisms and red skin). Lee

writes

"I ask you to note, the sophisticated restraint, the subtle underplaying, the lack of ornamentation on his jaunty little jumpsuit. Except for the symbol of the swastika, sewn on his costume for the purpose of preventing our younger readers from mistaking him for a good guy, he could be any airline maintenance man or service station mechanic-until we see his face...the reason the rest of his garb is so subdued-to call attention to the scarlet skull mask which makes him so unique in the annals of burgeoning badhood..." – Stan Lee, *Bring on the Bad Guys*, Scourge of the Master Race!

Just as Captain America is cloaked in the most iconic

symbol of the country he represents, Red Skull too dons the



Captain America and the Riddle of Red Skull
Simon, Joe, and Jack Kirby. *Captain America: The Classic Years*. New York: Marvel Comics, 1998.

most iconic symbol of Nazism and Hitler himself—the swastika. Paired with his vibrantly red head, a color often associated with anger, blood, and evil, Red Skull becomes the perfect fictional villain for fictional Captain America to fight because he represents all the evils of Nazism in one cartoon character. This perfect contrast of good and evil and villainy and heroism, contributes to the identity of Captain America as a visual representation of the United States because it is so clear what he represents and what he fights against.

In a collection of original 1941 comics titled *Captain America the Classic Years*, Joe Simon and Jack Kerby compiled a number of adventures of Captain America and his sidekick Bucky Barnes. One comic, *The Return of Red Skull*, has the infamous Nazi-affiliated villain talking about his evil master plans to “rip [the United States] wide open... [he’ll] even make Hitler shake with fear!” (Simon and

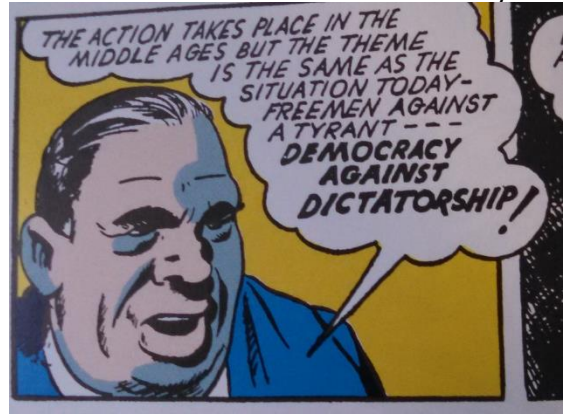


Captain America and the Return of Red Skull
Simon, Joe, and Jack Kirby. *Captain America: The Classic Years*. New York: Marvel Comics, 1998.

Kerby) Here the Marvel comic writers are very openly acknowledging the fears that Americans were experiencing during World War II; fears that Captain America would calm as he beat Red Skull. The writers were using comics as subconscious propaganda as they showed their readers of all ages what was being fought over in Europe with their vivid depictions of what Villains and Heroes represented in their comics.

Another Captain America comic titled *The Hunchback of Hollywood and the Movie Murder*, which at first glance seems to have no connection fighting Hitler and the Nazi's

in Europe, further acts as American identification and pro American war propaganda, as Captain America and Bucky save the production of a film that has a plot of “freemen against a Tyrant---Democrat against dictatorship.” (Simon and Kerby) The filming is halted by random killing of stars and it is up to



Captain America
The Hunchback of Hollywood and the Movie Murder
Simon, Joe, and Jack Kirby. Captain America: The Classic Years. New York: Marvel Comics, 1998.

Captain America and Bucky to solve the Mystery of the killer Hunchback who is terrorizing the sets. By creating a comic where Captain America defends a movie about democracy, the writers at Marvel feed into the identity of Captain America as a defender of American ideas that do not change, regardless of the setting they are in.

Comic Books: Secret Weapons of Propaganda

Paul Hirsch, a postgraduate research associate at the Center for Cold War Studies and International History at the University of California, Santa Barbara tackles the issue of comics as a means of wartime propaganda in his article “*This is Our Enemy*”: *The Writer’s War Board and Representations of Race in Comic Books, 1942-1945*. World War II was fought through “total warfare”; a term applied to wars that involve the home front just as much as then men fighting on the lines. Home fronts were the support and the feeding force for the front lines as people at home sent men and supplies overseas to stop Hitler from taking over Europe. The United States government took the use of propaganda to a whole new level in order to convince the American people that it was necessary to not only enter Europe’s conflict on the side of the Allies, but to do everything they could to support the Allied efforts. Hirsch’s article looks at how

the government used comic books as a means of communication to fight the war because it was one of the few forms of uncensored media that could communicate ideas—a very useful weapon. EVERYONE read comic books, from children at home, to the men on the front lines. This made comic books incredibly brilliant secret because

“Writers’ War Board (WWB) members concluded that the core traits of the comic book form—its broad popularity, comprehensibility, emphasis on raw emotion, and distinct lack of subtlety—marked comic books as a potentially useful delivery system for propaganda and education...unlike most other major forms of media, [comics] were not subject to internal censorship...writers could freely utilize clear, unambiguous images and language; they did not need to obscure opinions beneath layers of allegory or abstraction.” (Hirsch, 450-451)

This lack of censorship, made it very possible for very heavy themes to be spread to Americans of all ages in a clear way. In terms of Captain America, this meant spreading very American ideals and identity to the masses, reminding everyone who they were and what they were fighting for—freedom, liberty, and democracy.

Despite the fact that Captain America never actually appeared in Pro War Effort Films or on propaganda posters for the Second World War as was seen in the 2011 film *Captain American the First Avenger*, Captain America comics were a useful propaganda tool none the less. Heroes of American comics found themselves pitted against Germans, the very real enemy over in Europe, who were fictionally “depicted...either as buffoons or bloodthirsty



Trapped in the Nazi Strong-Hold
Simon, Joe, and Jack Kirby. *Captain America: The Classic Years*. New York: Marvel Comics, 1998.

criminals...while specific Nazis were more evil than others, not all Germans were inherently aggressive or vicious. Allied heroes fought against evil in the form of individual opponents; the enemy was person rather than an ideology or a nation.” (Hirsch, 461) Almost every villain that Captain America fights against, in the comics and in the contemporary films, connects back to the Nazis or Hitler-but more specifically the threat that Hitler and the Nazis posed to the very American ideals of liberty and freedom. Ultimately Captain America is not fighting bad guys just because he is a superhero; he is fighting to preserve the identity that he represents.

Contemporary Cap

One must ask them self, why a character created in the 1940's could suddenly resurface in popularity some seventy years later? The release of the 2011 film *Captain America the First Avenger*, seemed to revive more than just a forgotten hero, rather it seemed to awaken a whole new superhero culture that has contemporary society wrapped around its finger. Though he is no longer used for pro American propaganda messages, Captain America has much of contemporary culture swooning from a sense of adventure and heroic deeds.

Marc DiPaolo, an assistant professor of English and Film at Oklahoma City University, sheds light on contemporary feelings of superheroes in his book *War, Politics and Superheroes*



Captain America The First Avenger
 Captain America. Paramount Pictures, 2011. DVD.

ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film. In his preface DiPaolo attributes the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to the resurgence of popularity for Superheroes. “Superhero stories bill themselves as tales of courage and friendship, representing American ideals at their best while attempting to pass on a strong moral code to impressionable children who read comics books, play Superhro video games and watch superhero films.” (DiPaolo, 5) These traits that superheroes teach are what Americans lean on in times of crises. America, as a nation, has only been attacked from outside forces twice in her history as a full fledge country; the first time was the December 7, 1941 attack on the United States naval base of Pearl Harbor Hawaii which resulted in America’s rapid commitment to the War over in Europe. The second was the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Centers in New York and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. In both cases, Americans found themselves stunned and in need of a moral boost—a boost that would come from a character that reminded them who they were—defenders of liberty, freedom and democracy.

DiPaolo also highlights the idea that we as contemporary American’s still look to Superhero’s as larger than life beings to represent something for us.

“Children see superheroes as the adults they hope one day to grow up to be, people looking for religion in a secular age sometimes see superheroes as replacements for gods and angels, while other look to superheroes as moral and / or physical paradigms to live up to. Some enjoy the romanticism of superheroes adventures and wish they themselves could perform feats of heroism instead of living through their unremarkable day-to-day lives studying in an awful school or working long hours in a cubicle in a dead-end middle management job” (DiPaolo, 15)

At the end of the day, American’s still enjoy a classic, good versus evil story, which is a void that the growing superhero franchise is able to fill. Captain America, a 1940’s propaganda comic has been able to maintain a steady stream of support for this need of

heroism despite the fact he is no longer needed to spread pro American feelings in a time of war.

Mark White's chapter titled *Principles and Politics* seeks to discuss how this World War II Superhero still fits in with contemporary times despite the changing political atmosphere. White writes that Cap is not "a flag waving 'America first' puppet in the service of American interests," rather he is a man devoted to his country because "of principles and ideals upon which [America] was founded, not its policies at any point in time, and [Captain America] regularly holds his government accountable to those same standards which he interprets as inclusive and cosmopolitan, applying to the world outside America as well as everybody with in it." (White, 143) The change in time and politics is a constant wrestling match for Captain America, but because he is the symbol of what it means to be American, he acts as a reminder of the ideas that need to be upheld even as the times change. White, just as Captain America's writers at Marvel comics, describes Captain America as a patriot with an ethical compass and a belief in the American dream of humanity, freedom, liberty and justice. Regardless of how time progresses, Cap embodies these ideas, preventing them from getting lost in time and politics.

The 2011 film of *The First Avenger* was not the first time that Captain America resurfaced in a time period different than his own. Stan Lee, of Marvel Comics helped to bring Cap back to the comics as



Captain America. Paramount Pictures, 2011. DVD.

on the Avengers by freeing him from being frozen on a downed mission. This same plot line is embraced at the end of *The First Avenger* film as a jumping off point for the 2012 release of *The Avengers*, as well as the 2014 release of *The Winter Solider*, all of which allow Captain America to function in contemporary society. But it is more than just function in society that is necessary to create a successful story. Captain America still needs to fit in with contemporary times just as much as there needs to be an explanation as to why he lives there.

The First Avenger, brings the beloved comic book hero to life in human form as the film establishes the back story of Captain America, placing him in his 1940 time period origins. In the film, viewers follow Cap through his humble origins as scrawny Steve Rogers to the strong Captain America. Because he is the only successful experiment of the Super Human Serum, Captain America is at first limited to the propaganda piece we perceive him to be. He attends rallies, gives speeches, and “fights Hitler” in order to rally the America people and the troops abroad to support the war. However when his best friend James Buchanan “Bucky” Barnes goes missing serving over in Germany, Cap really embraces his identity of being a defender of freedom, not just a figurehead. After leading a successful rescue mission, Captain America personally goes after Red Skull, the head of Hitler’s scientific research and the leader of Hydra, a Nazi terrorist group who seeks to “free” people from the freedom they cannot handle and seeking to create submission of the entire human race. As Cap fights Red Skull for control of the last of Hydra’s bases, Red Skull points out

“Red Skull: You could have the power of the gods! Yet you wear a flag on your chest and think you fight a battle of nations! I have seen the future, Captain! There are no flags!

Captain America: Not my future!" –*Captain America, The First Avenger* 2011 (IMBD Captain America. Paramount Pictures, 2011. DVD.)"



Captain America The First Avenger
IMBD Captain America. Paramount Pictures, 2011. DVD

Here Captain America shows his loyalty to his country and the ideals that they stand for. He embraces that he is still a mortal man with super human powers that should not be abused and

rather his Superhuman powers should

be used for the greater good and protection of the ideas he stands for. This is a very strong statement to be made in a movie theater and it really rings home with the ideals that Captain America embodied when he was first created. He embraces his identity of an American icon through his stars and stripes uniform for modern audiences.

A year after the release of *The First Avenger*, Marvel proceeded to release their blockbuster film *Marvel's The Avengers*, a superhero movie of epic proportions that connect with DiPaolo's argument about the rise of superhero culture due to the attacks on September 11, 2001. In this film, New York is attacked by Loki unleashing an extra-terrestrial army and then Avengers on behalf of S.H.I.E.L.D and Nick Fury are slotted with the task to protect the city from Loki's attempt to take over the world, and the United States's army's attempt to stop these attacks with Nuclear missiles. The only formally trained soldier, and possessing the title of Captain, Steve Rogers the leader of the force on the front lines to wipe out evil, yet this time, he is wrestling with more than just villains threatening the liberty of the United States. Captain America is also

struggling with the time change from when he was born to the world he wakes up in. This struggle is a very defining moment for him as a character and a symbol of America.

In the very beginning of the film as he and the rest of the Avengers are assessing the threat that Loki poses to the United States, Captain America and Black Widow exchange a conversation about Loki, Thor, and Iron Man. Iron Man and Captain America are looking to subdue Thor and Loki, and Black Widow advises human Captain America to let the mechanic genius of Iron Man fight the two brother gods who are tearing up landscape in a vicious fight for control.

“Natasha Romanoff: I'd sit this one out, Cap.

Steve Rogers: I don't see how I can.

Natasha Romanoff: These guys come from legend. They're basically gods.

Steve Rogers: There's only one God, ma'am, and I'm pretty sure he doesn't dress like that.” –*The Avengers 2012 (Marvel's The Avengers. Distributed by Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2012. DVD)*

This humble statement on behalf of Captain America shows his origins from a god fearing society that placed an emphasis on humility and religion. With the progressiveness of contemporary society, Captain America is unaware of society's liberal views with the Christian God. This is more of a defining moment for his character rather than that of him as an American Icon depicting that Steve Rogers is a man with a moral compass that can anchored in humble values.

The struggling Captain America, is further unprepared for the iconic legend that he has become in contemporary times. Still his ever humble self, Captain America joins the Avengers project simply out of duty to his country, not out of want or desire to be a superhero. S.H.E.I.L.D Special Agent Coulson paints a picture for views as to what Cap has become:

“Agent Phil Coulson: He's like a smart person. I gotta say, it's an honor to meet you, officially. I sort of met you, I mean, I watched you while you were sleeping. I mean, I was... I was present while you were unconscious from the ice. You know, it's really, it's just a... just a huge honor to have you on board.

Steve Rogers: Well, I hope I'm the man for the job.

Agent Phil Coulson: Oh, you are. Absolutely. Uh... we've made some modifications to the uniform. I had a little design input.

Steve Rogers: The uniform? Aren't the stars and stripes a little... old-fashioned?

Agent Phil Coulson: With everything that's happening, the things that are about to come to light, people might just need a little old-fashioned.” – *The Avengers 2013 (Marvel's Avengers. Distributed by Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2012. DVD)*

Here contemporary viewers are shown just what type of icon that Captain America not only still is, but what he has become. Agent Coulson is fawning over Captain America as though he is a celebrity, yet Cap is more important than a simple icon of the media because Coulson says it is an honor to have him on board. Honor is a word, generally saved for someone great, someone like Captain America who defends liberty and justice. Furthermore, when Captain America admits to his struggles with being old fashion, Agent Coulson embraces this saying that it is that good old fashion American spirit that people need to be reminded of now in the time of crisis. Captain America is a legend that defends the States and the Allies during the Second World War and people need to see the symbol of that once again as extra-terrestrial armies surge forward to threaten the United States once again. Here Coulson is showing



The Avengers
Captain America. Paramount Pictures,
Pictures, 2011. DVD.

Captain America that he is the symbol people still need because even though the times have changed, because what America stands for has not. While the villains might change, they still threaten the same values that American's continue to hold dear to their hearts since the revolution in 1776. The values are historic, so they need a historic (and in Cap's eyes "old fashioned") symbol to help fight the war they will be partaking in.



Captain America
 Captain America The Winter Solider. Performed
 by Chris Evans, Samuel L. Jackson, Scarlett
 Johansson. United States, 2014. DVD.

In the second Captain America film, *Captain America the Winter Solider*, Cap's "old fashion uniform" gets revamped to a bit more of a militaresque attire. Still cloaked in blue, with a white Star on his chest, Cap's uniform resembles armor more than it does a patriotic costume meant to inspire hope and nationalism. As the movie progresses and Captain America drifts away from the government, he sheds his new uniform for his old patriotic costume to take his final stand in taking down Hydra at the end of the film. This symbolic change of new uniform to old shows that while the times may have

changed, Captain America and what he represents has not. He embraces his classic uniform as one that stands for who he is and it ideas that he has sworn to protect. As Hydra closes in and attempts subdue humanity by eliminating a vast portion of the human race, Captain America steps in to take down Hydra in stars and stripes, not in some armored uniform. While they tried to make a contemporary Captain America fit

contemporary times, Steve shows people that he still fights for what American truly represents, not contemporary politics by donning his old uniform in the end. He does not wish to be an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D and a glorified politician, rather he wishes to be a soldier who fights for this country protecting the ideas that she was founded upon and seeks to represent to the world. By putting on his old stars and stripes uniform, he reminds people of the ideas of liberty and justice because it is what is associated with when the flag is seen.

Different Villains Same Threats

Both *Marvel's The Avengers*, and *Captain America the Winter Solider*, take place in the 2000s, yet the villains are drastically different. In *the Avengers*, Captain America is taking on an army from another planet, while in *The Winter Solider* he takes on the old comic book foe, Hydra. In the comics, Hydra was an organization that rose from the wreckage of World War two, a multi-headed monster where “each time a head was lopped off, another would grow back to replace it.” (Lee,167) Hydra was the foe of S.H.I.E.L.D and their “sole objective is complete and unchallenged mastery of the world!” (Lee, 174) In the film, Hydra represents an idea that will not die, despite Red Skull being destroyed in the first movie, and Hitler committing suicide as the World War II drew to a close. Yet the threat to liberty remains the same, as Hydra seeks to take out anyone who could potentially act as a leader. And as New York is threatened by Loki in and the forces he unleashes from other worlds, fear and violence is spread through New York and Loki seeks dictatorship of the human world. Though neither of these threats actually happened in real life such as the struggles in the Second World War, they are the same threats, just in different forms. No other country steps in to save the

day, no every day human steps in, rather it is the figure head and idol of American Ideals, Captain America, cloaked in stars and stripes, who ends up defending liberty and saving people from the vicious dictatorship of Loki and the violence of Hydra.

In 1814, Francis Scott composed the lyrics to “The Star Sparkled Banner” a commemoration of the Battle of 1812, which would later become the United States’ national Anthem. The title alone is enough to know that the song is about the nation’s flag, yet the lyrics are most descriptive. He describes the flag as possessing “broad stripes and bright stars” bringing to mind the icon of the country. He continues to conclude the song with the description of “that star-spangled banner [waving] o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave...” connecting the symbol of the American people to the ideas that the American people embraced with the first created their country. Just as Francis Scott created an identity for Americans through their flag and their ideas, Marvel created a comic book hero, Captain America, clothed in that same symbol as he protects those same ideas.

Though he may seem nothing more than a myth, a superhuman story created to spread hope to the masses in a time of great threat to liberty, justice, and human rights (both at home and abroad) Captain America is an immortal icon of the America people. Forever wearing the stars and stripes of his country’s flag, in both the old comics and the contemporary films, Cap steals the hearts of American people reminding them what it means to be American and fight for what is right.

No longer an overtly obvious political icon, good old Cap continues to capture the hearts and the minds of people around the world as they wait in breathless anticipation for the second Avengers film and the third Captain America film. With his humble

beginnings like those of his motherland, to the villains he fights, Captain America is an embodiment of ideas that create an identity that the American people have rallied behind through the decades since the nation's founding. Today, Americans continue to embrace these values and look to Captain America as an iconic American symbol to stand up against oppressions of freedom and justice.

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