

Captain America was primarily created as pro-WWII propaganda targeting American society.

Captain America is a fictional comic book character created by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, first introduced to the world on March 1941 in '*Captain America #1*'. Kirby and Simon created Captain America as propaganda, with the primary intent to promote America on entrance to WWII. A constant theme throughout the Captain America comics is the idea of war and Americas involvement in war. This forced Americans who read the comic book to be exposed to the pro-war propaganda. Real groups and people, such as Nazi's were portrayed as villains in these comics. The hate harboured towards these villains was then able to be translated to real life. Captain America comics also promoted the conceptualisation that a perfect American was created from entering war, through the main character, Captain America. Those opposing war initiatives (mothers, youth) were targeted by the medium of comics, as they were vastly popular amongst children and teenagers. Kirby and Simon, also directly benefited from Americas entry to war, giving them motive behind creating a propaganda icon. However, patriotism and war were popular culture during this time in America, making Captain America the perfect product to sell rather than a character with a hidden agenda. It can therefore be argued profit was the primary objective of Captain Americas creation. This use of hijacking pop culture to spread propaganda was far more beneficial in promoting ideals of war to a society in which the topic of war was controversial at the time, and made war easier for society to accept.

Captain America was used as pro war imagery, actively glorifying the idea of war. Captain America was a vastly popular comic book across America as he was the definition of a perfect patriot going to war with the American flag brandished across everything he wore. This resulted in America feeling a sense of pride towards this character, increasing the popularity to enrol in the army. Captain Americas' origin was the premise of the first issue of Captain America. Through the injection of super serum he became a super soldier, only for that serum to then be stolen by Nazi spies (Kirby, Simon, 1941). This planted a seed in American minds, that although the war currently did not impact them directly, perhaps Nazi spies did exist inside America. Historian Nicholas Yanes said "With anxiety overcoming the country in regards to Europes expanding conflict, it seemed that Americans would choose security over labour rights" (Yanes N, 2009). Kirby and Simon used this anxiety and fear of the population to aid in promoting war by the use of real world situations in their comics. Therefore this left the impression on readers that the threat of Nazi spies in America could be a reality. This created fear and scepticism towards war, the readers questioning the governments decision to stay out of it, instead of joining the war to prevent America being directly targeted by the enemy (Yanes N, 2009). Captain America constantly flaunted the plans of Nazis and even Hitler, showing America that they should intervene to defeat Nazi Germany and be a hero like Captain America. Americans were in belief that if they joined the World War they could be the heroes of the world, and heroism is very attractive to most. As Captain America comics increased in sales, the perspective of the war by Americans changed. Making Captain America the perfect propaganda to promote war to America.

Although Captain America was fictional, his villains embodied real people and events. This acted as propaganda, changing the views of Americans. The 'villains' of the war from Americans perspective was Hitler, the Nazi's and the Japanese. These groups were depicted as villains or as humanoid monsters in the Captain America comics. For example the visual depictions of the Japanese within the comics, alien like with buck teeth and large heads (Kirby, Simon, 1941). This distorted the perception of Germans and the Japanese to Americans, promoting fear and hatred towards these groups. As the audience became attached to Captain America as a character, they sympathised for him when he experienced hardship inflicted by the villains. This hatred then translated to Nazis and the Japanese. This gave Americans a preconceived perception of who the world was fighting and built hatred within readers. This inspired men to join the fight. In relation to the Japanese and Germans, this propaganda created prejudice and promoted negative stereotypes of the people from these groups to American society. The idea of stopping these international enemies that had also been threats in the Captain America comics, could then be followed up by a logical solution; going to war. This prejudice created against the villains in the comics was a strategy used to push pro-war attitudes.

Captain America was seen as being the perfect American, which gave the conception that war creates real Americans. Eugenics is a concept aimed at creating a perfect generation of people in morals, way of life and looks, in hopes these traits will be passed down to future generations (Hack B, 2009). America had their own set of eugenics that they wished for their male population to be; strong, patriotic, masculine, brave, and also white. This was everything Captain America was, and stood for. However prior to becoming Captain America, he was Steve Rogers. Steve Rogers was a scrawny boy, with no friends, or potential, but through the super serum, transformed into a beacon of American eugenics and patriotism. This super serum was symbolic of the war. This symbol showed to the audience that war could turn a person from a nobody to a somebody, an idea that appealed to all. Therefore, the young boys and men reading this comic book were encouraged to enter war. The comics promised muscly bodies, swarming women and to become an all- American hero. This use of propaganda targeted each persons sense of pride in themselves and aided them to dream about what they could become if America joined the war.

Those who were against World War II were mostly mothers and youth. Captain America comics were therefore the perfect medium to infiltrate these groups and shape their perception of war (Yanes N, 2009). Initially, Captain America was mostly read by children, but quickly spread across the wider population. Using the medium of comic books gave a cheap easy, and entertaining method to spread pro-war propaganda to be spread. It gave a character that was bound to be loved by kids, due to his heroic nature and praise he received. On top of this, certain initiatives were put in place through the Captain America comics for kids involvement in the war effort. Eugenics was utilised to increase pro-war opinions, as kids were easily deceived and spread their opinions for pro-war. One initiative was the Sentinels of Liberty, its advertising tagline invited kids to "*Join Captain America in his war against spies and enemies in our midst who threaten our very independence*" (Kirby, Simon, 1941). This not only made children feel special and included by Captain America, but allowed children to be mobile forms of propaganda themselves, as they wore badges to signify their involvement in the Sentinels of Liberty. Not only did the medium of comics aid pro war but the propaganda easily reached families by targeting the attention and involvements audience of children, turning these children into pro-war propaganda themselves.

Jack Kirby and Joe Simon (the creators and writers of Captain America) were Jewish Americans, so therefore had motive behind America joining the war. Their intention to stop the genocide of Jewish people by Germans. In 1940, Roosevelt endorsed selective service for National Defence, the Jewish wanted to be selected for service, economically impoverished Jews were placed in high ranking roles (Yanes N, 2009). If America went to war, American Jews in high positions would be combatting those who oppressed the German Jewish people, inflicting justice. This is one reason why Kirby and Simon thought war was necessary, going to the lengths of creating a character to promote war to the American people. If America went to war it was almost certain Germany would lose. Kirby and Simon therefore saw that American society had to become pro-WWII. This gives motive behind why Captain America was created as propaganda to promote the war as the Jewish authors relied on America to prevent the genocide of Jewish people.

It can be argued that the creation of Captain America was for profit. Americans were very proud of their country and how it had come to be, having a very strong sense of nationalism and patriotism. Captain America represented the ultimate American patriot. The authors undoubtedly played into the American ideals on patriotism in order to earn significant profits. This is why it could be considered he was in fact created from a profit perspective. The entrance of America into WWII appeared inevitable, so Kirby and Simon used the propaganda tool to make a profit. During the war, Marvel sold approximately 1 million copies of Captain America per month. By 1944, 41% of men between ages 18 – 30 had read more than 6 comics per month (McNamara C, 2015). As war also causes the economy to boom, more money ended up in American pockets. Therefore more money was spent on purchasing comics. At this time Americans were more likely to spend money on luxury items that supported the idea of American success in conflict, linking back to their sense of patriotism. As Captain America was an American hero that bravely exploited enemy plans, the comics became especially popular. Although their primary intent could have been making money off of the popularisation of patriotic culture at this time; the focus on American patriotism and war themes, signify overwhelming evidence that the Captain America comics mostly created as a propaganda tool.

Prior to America entering the war the idea of war in American society, was a topic of debate and uncertainty. Captain America was used to promote these pro-war ideals to American society. This was achieved by displaying pro-war imagery across every page of Captain America comic books, that then became wide-spread across America. Kirby and Simon made their villains allude to real groups of people, to give rise to the hatred towards these people. Captain America was the 'perfect American' created through war, his story promised to all readers who went to war. This was that they would be heroes. The comic book medium was utilised to target families and children, as they were cheap, easily accessible and enjoyable to engage in. These target groups were also those who were typically against war therefore the comics were and attempt to promote war to those against it. While Kirby and Simon directly benefitted from Captain America economically they also wanted America to go to war to stop the oppression and genocide of the Jewish in Germany. In order for America to enter the war, American society needed to be convinced. Captain America was the perfect symbol to present the positives of war and promote enrolment to the population. Captain America made an impact on society, and changed the American perspective on war. This all was performed without the American society actively being aware of Kirby and Simon's true intentions, which was primarily to

promote war. As historian Brain Hack said “Captain America was a new champion, a new defender, born in an hour of need destined to be a living symbol of the glory that is America” (Hack B, 2009).

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