

Captain America
as
Historically Grounded Cultural Criticism

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At San Diego Comic Con 2012, Marvel Comics announced the next four films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Among the various *Avengers* tie-ins, the sequel to 2011's *Captain America: The First Avenger* is titled *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, prompting *Captain America* writer Ed Brubaker to tweet, "HOLY SHIT."¹ Brubaker wrote the Winter Soldier storyline in 2005, detailing how Russians captured Bucky Barnes, Captain America's sidekick from World War II, and brainwashed him into becoming their assassin. The popularity of the story, not limited to its forthcoming film adaptation, demonstrates the continuing cultural fascination with the Cold War. Following the end of World War II, Marvel Comics used Captain America to address the various issues of the Cold War, from the threat of communism, to the Civil Rights movement, and finally the legacy of the Cold War itself.

In 1936, Martin Goodman published *Ka-Zar*, a comic similar to Tarzan. Three years later, "Frank Torpey, the sales manager of a company called Funnies, Inc., persuaded Goodman to start publishing comics."² Goodman's company, Timely Publications, printed its first comic, *Marvel Comics* number 1, in October 1939. Two years later, in March 1941, writer Joe Simon and artist Jack Kirby debuted Captain America in the first of his self-titled comics. In the issue, frail Steve Rogers, declared unfit for service, impressed an army officer, earning the opportunity to join a secret project. Professor Reinstein, using the Super Soldier Serum, transformed Rogers into the pinnacle of human physical perfection. Just after transforming Rogers, Reinstein died by the bullet of a Nazi spy, taking his secret with him. The Army turned Rogers into the

¹ Josh Wilding, "Ed Brubaker's Reaction To Finding Out About CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER," ComicBookMovie.com, last modified July 15, 2012, <http://www.comicbookmovie.com/fansites/JoshWildingNewsAndReviews/news/?a=63910>.

² Tom DeFalco, ed., *Marvel Chronicle: A Year By Year History* (New York: DK Publishing, 2008), 10.

superhero Captain America. The issue also introduced Bucky Barnes, the Army camp mascot, who discovered Rogers' secret and became his costumed sidekick.³ The comic ran for the entirety of World War II and the latter half of the 1940s. In 1949, Timely rebranded *Captain America Comics* as a horror magazine, changing the title to *Captain America's Weird Tales* with issue 74. The first story “featured Captain America literally descending into hell, where he battled the Red Skull.”⁴ The final issue, *Captain America's Weird Tales* number 75, “contained four generic mystery-horror stories” without a single appearance of Captain America on the cover or within.⁵ Captain America was consigned to the past in favor of the new horror stories that had overtaken the popularity of superheroes.

The 1950s

In 1951, comic books “with a Korean War focus or an anti-communist agenda became all the rage.”⁶ In December 1951, “publisher Martin Goodman abandoned his distributor Kable News and launched his own distribution network, Atlas.”⁷ Atlas revived the heroes of the 1940s in the December 1953 issue of *Young Men* number 24. *Young Men*, later retitled *Men's Adventures*, was an anthology series containing stories about the original Human Torch, Namor the Sub-Mariner, and Captain America. The publishers “took great pains to explain the disappearance of the [Human] Torch, his sidekick Toro, and his allies Captain America and the Sub-Mariner for the past five years.”⁸ In the new

³ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 18.

⁴ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 41.

⁵ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 46.

⁶ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 48.

⁷ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 49.

⁸ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 55.

storyline, “Captain America had retired to live as a schoolteacher once the Nazi hordes were overcome.”⁹

Several recurrent themes appear in the Captain America comics from this period. First, with Korea representing the current fight against the communists, John Romita, the artist for the short run of *Captain America* during this time, transferred the racial stereotypes of the Japanese used during the 1940s to Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese communists, portraying them in a demonic, less-than-human manner. Second, Atlas’ writers were careful to portray any Americans who were unwilling to fight communists or actively aiding them as drugged, explicitly arguing that no true American could ever willingly support communism. Third, the writers connect Nazi fascism with the communists, allowing readers to easily conceive of communists as a continuation of the moral evils of Nazism. Each issue of *Captain America*, like nearly all Golden Age comics, contained several short stories rather than one long, issue-spanning, narrative, allowing every issue to tackle more than one of these themes.

Many of these stories leapt off from the Korean War, not only due to chronological proximity, but also to American’s mindset regarding that conflict. H.W. Brands suggests that, following the failure of the nationalists to defeat the communists in China, American were looking for “the next opportunity to get involved in an Asian civil war.”¹⁰ Brands suggests that “the Korean fighting reinforced American perceptions of a monolithic communist conspiracy against world peace” especially in the wake of China’s friendship treaty with Moscow in 1950.¹¹ The *Captain America* comics from the 1950s

⁹ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 55.

¹⁰ H.W. Brands, *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28.

¹¹ Brands, *The Devil We Knew*, 28-29.

feed upon this sentiment, condemning Asian communists and suggesting that they form part of a larger plot to control the world. Of the nine stories published in the three *Captain America* issues published during the 1950s, four feature Asian communists, two feature spies in America, and three feature Soviets. The spy- and Soviet-themed stories have much more subdued plots than those about Asian communists, possibly due to American fears about the Soviet nuclear threat. As a result, the storyline “His Touch is Death” in *Captain America* 78, though a Soviet-themed issue, pits Cap against the Golden Age version of Electro and is more akin to later Silver Age stories than to other Captain America stories from the 1950s.

In every issue of *Captain America* from the 1950s, the Asian antagonists appear dusky, a pale yellow, have the barest slits for eyes, and either buck- or fanged-teeth. John Romita, the primary artist during Atlas Comics’ *Captain America* series, created an icon to represent generic Asian antagonists. Scott McCloud defines a comic icon as “any image used to represent a person, place, thing or *idea*.”¹² In this sense, in portraying the Asian antagonists as cartoonish rather than lifelike, the reader can easily identify them as inhuman villains. *Men’s Adventures* 28, from July 1954, features a short story about Captain America and Bucky on assignment in Korea. While there, the North Koreans capture Cap and Bucky. The commissar of the North Korean guerillas, though wearing a red star on his hat, looks almost exactly like the racialized depictions of Hirohito from the 1940s, linking America’s current enemy with a previous one. *Captain America* 76, from May 1954, features a story in which Cap and Bucky infiltrate a communist base in Indochina. Not only are the Vietnamese soldiers portrayed as racially inferior, but also

¹² Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1994), 27.

lacking in intelligence. The communist leader never thinks twice when Cap and Bucky leap in a window and declare their desire to help the communists. The Vietnamese leader crows, “What a triumph! What a victory! This is wonderful! Imagine if *you’d* broadcast to America! It would be like winning a war!”¹³ In his hubris, the Vietnamese leader gives Cap and Bucky full rein of the base, allowing them to handily defeat his plans.

The Chinese communists appear twice, first in *Captain America 77* and then in *Captain America 78*. In the first story, “The Man with No Face,” the “long arm of the Chinese communists, reaching from the homeland clear over to haunt and threaten the loyal Chinese Americans in New York’s Chinatown.”¹⁴ Captain America and Bucky aid Wing, a Chinese American police officer, in tracking down the titular Chinese assassin. The story’s unknown author takes great pains to state through the officer, “Chinese Americans are *loyal* Americans, but they’re being threatened by the Reds back in China!”¹⁵ Furthermore, the Chinese communists attack Chinese Americans by “forcing the Chinese here to contribute money for China by threatening their relatives back there!”¹⁶ After tracking the Man with No Face, Captain America discovers him to be Wing’s twin brother. The assassin kills himself since Wing will not support the communists. Cap, in order to prevent Wing from losing heart and joining the communists, withholds the assassin’s identity. Romita, though depicting Wing in the same pale yellow as the earlier Koreans and Vietnamese, downplays nearly all other racial characteristics in Wing, even portraying him with a greater measure of facial

¹³ Cory Sedlmeier, ed., *Marvel Masterworks: Atlas Era Heroes, Vol. 2* (New York: Marvel Publishing, Inc., 2008), 75.

¹⁴ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes, Vol. 2*, 85.

¹⁵ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes, Vol. 2*, 86.

¹⁶ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes, Vol. 2*, 86.

expression, reinforcing the assertion that Chinese Americans are loyal to the American cause.

The second story, from *Captain America* 78, “The Green Dragon,” follows Captain America and Bucky as they track a Chinese communist spy who stole war records behind enemy lines and into red China. Romita uses every racial stereotype in his depiction of the Chinese and the unknown author plays on cultural tropes as well, presenting the Chinese as superstitious and cowardly. Cap and Bucky walk openly through Shanghai in their costumes due to a local festival in which everyone wears outlandish costumes. Somehow, Captain America’s costume fails to draw attention to himself and Bucky. Cap decides to use the Green Dragon float and a Chinese superstition to convince the Chinese that their god has turned against them. Directing the float with Bucky to drive it, Cap looses it upon the grandstand near the Great Wall. Cap tells the people, “People of China! Now you know who your *enemy* is! Your Green Dragon has come to life to rid you of the scourge of the reds! They are your enemies and the foes of all honest men!”¹⁷ When Bucky climbs out, he reveals that a swinging part of the mechanism knocked him unconscious and the dragon really did come to life to fight the communists. Americans reading this story could rest assured in their racial and ideological superiority, knowing that they appeared more “human” and were not swayed by such exotic superstitions as the Chinese.

Communists drugged any Americans who actively aided them or refused to fight the during the 1950s *Captain America* run. The theme occurs in *Men’s Adventures* 28, where P.F.C. Tim Potter, a released POW in Korea, no longer shows interest in the war. Cap and Bucky easily discover that the communists drugged him and, once the effects

¹⁷ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, 116.

wear off, he rejoins the fight, leading Captain America to close out the story with the moral, “Let’s just say we *all* did our part in fighting those Reds...as every American must do!”¹⁸ The Indochina story in *Captain America* 76 contains not only racialized Vietnamese, but drugged Americans as well. The drugged American soldiers had been broadcasting radio messages in favor of communism, but Cap and Bucky switch out their drugs for water. As the drugs wear off, the American prisoners fight back and aid Captain America and Bucky in breaking out as Cap says, “Now we’re going back home...and you can tell the world the truth...*real Americans never turn Red!*”¹⁹ The issue closes with a warning, “Beware, Commies, spies, traitors and foreign agents! Captain America, with all loyal, free men behind him, is looking for *you*, ready to fight until the last one of you is exposed for the yellow scum that you are!”²⁰ The writers’ message rings clear: no true American would aid or refuse to fight the communists unless they were drugged.

H.W. Brands, in *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War*, posits, “If Stalin was simply Hitler with a better mustache, Americans had merely to transfer to the former their demonstrated loathing for the latter.”²¹ Captain America reflected the trend in conflating communism with fascism in order to equate America’s new enemies with those of old. Furthermore, “treating communism as ‘red fascism’ served an additional purpose” in providing “a persuasive rationale for thoroughly overturning the longest-established and most cherished principle of American international relations: nonentanglement in the peacetime affairs of foreign countries.”²² During the end of the Korean War, Americans needed reassurance that their involvement in the Korean conflict

¹⁸ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, 42.

¹⁹ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, 77.

²⁰ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, 77.

²¹ Brands, *The Devil We Knew*, 20.

²² Brands, *The Devil We Knew*, 22.

had been just. *Captain America 78* features a story linking communism with fascism and justifying American involvement in international politics. In the story, “The Hour of Doom,” Captain America and Bucky must prevent a communist spy from blowing up the United Nations building in New York City. The spy, youth idol to American boys Chuck Blayne, seeks to destroy “the faith of the youth in world cooperation as exemplified by the United Nations.”²³ Captain America and Bucky, not knowing Blayne’s intentions, wish to meet him while he visits the United Nations building. When they arrive, they discover that he has set into motion his bombing plan and quickly rush to find the explosive. They find the first device, but must get Blayne to publicly refute communism and divulge the location of the second bomb. Blayne hid the explosive in the clock in the General Assembly and Captain America must hold the clock hands steady to prevent the bomb from detonating. At the end of the story, after Cap and Bucky disarm the bomb, Bucky asks Cap who Blayne had reminded him of. Captain America responds, “Hitler! Same words ‘strong minds in strong bodies’ and ‘play to win’! Americans play not to win, necessarily, but for the sake of *good sportsmanship* and *fair play*... which Nazis and Reds know nothing about at all!”²⁴ The story fits into a larger trend in Atlas Comics of portraying the United Nations as an extension of American diplomatic goals while simultaneously associating Nazis with Communists, thereby making it easier for readers to equate communism with the worst evils in human history. Finally, the image of the clock echoes the Doomsday Clock used to indicate the threat of nuclear war. Captain America, in holding back the clock to literally prevent an explosion, represents the efforts of America to prevent the Soviet Union from starting a nuclear conflict.

²³ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, 125.

²⁴ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, 129.

Through all of the Atlas Captain America revival, the writers portray the United States as reactionary, never starting trouble with the communists, but always ready to finish it. This allows the United States to appear consistently innocent in world affairs and indoctrinates readers into believing communists are untrustworthy and determined to undermine not only American, but the United Nations', efforts to spread peace around the world. A line at the end of "His Touch is Death" in *Captain America* 78 warns readers, "You can't afford to miss the next thrill-packed issue of 'Captain America'! It's full of surprises and danger!"²⁵ The greatest surprise of all was that Atlas never again published an issue of Captain America. John Romita, the artist for the entire Atlas run of *Captain America*, "said Stan [Lee] once told him the *Captain America* title was cancelled 'because of the backlash of the Korean War.'"²⁶ Romita himself "felt Cap had become virtually a 'dirty name' for those who opposed that 'police action.'"²⁷ Captain America did not appear again for another decade.

The Silver Age

Atlas Comics floundered in 1957, effectively ending so that, "by 1960, the company that would call itself Marvel had dropped the umbrella name of Atlas Comics from its covers."²⁸ In 1961, publisher Martin Goodman "told editor Stan Lee to produce a team of Super Heroes for Marvel."²⁹ Rather than recycle the Golden Age heroes, Lee created the Fantastic Four. Over the next two years, Lee co-created or oversaw the creation of the majority of the Marvel superheroes. In September 1963, in an effort to

²⁵ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, 110.

²⁶ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, vi.

²⁷ Sedlmeier, *Atlas Era Heroes*, Vol. 2, vi.

²⁸ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 78. At the end

²⁹ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 80.

compete with rival DC's Justice League of America, Lee directed the creation of the Avengers. In March 1964, Marvel resurrected Captain America in the pages of *The Avengers* number 4. Unlike the previous Atlas revival which sought to explain Cap's absence, Marvel ignored "his brief 1950s resurrection in the Atlas Comics" and the Avengers found Cap "frozen in ice where he had been since the death of his partner Bucky Barnes at the end of World War II."³⁰ In November 1964, "after guest-starring in the Iron Man story in *Tales of Suspense* #58, Captain America was awarded his own regular series by Stan Lee in a split book" beginning with "a ten-page story in *Tales of Suspense* #59."³¹ Unlike the jingoistic stories from the early Cold War of the 1950s, Marvel's more liberal attitude from the 1960s forward allowed Captain America to feature stories that avoided contemporary geopolitics. Despite this change, Captain America began to tackle issues such as race, representing ideas of what America could be rather than what America currently was.

Unlike the *Captain America* comics of the 1950s, "Captain America's relationship with the American military took a curious and notable lapse during the Vietnam War."³² Rather than send Captain America to Vietnam as the Atlas writers had done with Korea in the 1950s, Marvel's writers kept him busy "instead with his classic World War II foes such as the Red Skull and Baron Zemo, and a collection of new opponents with few real world political ties such as Doctor Faustus, Batroc, the Super-Adaptoid, and the Trapster."³³ Despite Captain America's uninvolved, "Marvel

³⁰ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 99.

³¹ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 103.

³² Shawn Gillen, "Captain America, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and the Vietnam Era," in *Captain America and the Struggle of the Superhero*, ed. Robert G. Weiner (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 104.

³³ Gillen, "Captain America, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and the Vietnam Era," 105.

published – and Stan Lee wrote – many comics that took on Communism and Vietnam throughout the 1960s, and sometimes they seemed as propagandistic as the Captain America comics of the 1940s and early 1950s.”³⁴ Instead, Shawn Gillen argues, Marvel’s writers portrayed Captain America as experiencing a type of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, possibly reflecting the national attitude of “the greatest generation” as it struggled to make sense of “cultural, global, and military shifts that occurred during the Korean War and particularly during the Vietnam Era.”³⁵ Bucky’s death at the end of World War II serves as the trigger for Cap’s despair, but his uncertainty easily stands in for that of America as it tried to redefine itself in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1965, *Strange Tales* 135 borrowed from the popularity of *Dr. No* and *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, debuting the Supreme Headquarters International Espionage Law-enforcement Division, or SHIELD, which was lead by Nick Fury, a veteran of World War II and sometimes-partner with Captain America. Marvel’s writers also debuted “SHIELD’s evil counterpart HYDRA, a subversive organization dedicated to world domination.”³⁶ HYDRA quickly appeared in other Marvel comics, standing in as a multinational terrorist organization for the previous communist threat of the 1950s and allowing Marvel to capitalize on the spy genre without becoming entangled in current politics. Following *Strange Tales* 135, Captain America partnered with Nick Fury and SHIELD repeatedly over the years and aided in their fight against HYDRA.

³⁴ Gillen, “Captain America, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and the Vietnam Era,” 105.

³⁵ Gillen, “Captain America, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and the Vietnam Era,” 106.

³⁶ DeFalco, *Marvel Chronicle*, 109.

Following the 1950s, *Captain America* “comics became slightly less racist through the 1960s and 1970s.”³⁷ Marvel “boosted sales when they introduced a watered down blaxploitation in the form of an African American partner, the Falcon.”³⁸ Beginning in *Captain America* 117 from September 1969, Captain America and the Falcon partnered so often “that for several years the title of the book was *Captain America and the Falcon*.”³⁹ Ora McWilliams writes, “The Falcon was introduced at a transitional point for comic books” in that “comics in the early 1970s were taking a turn to the less fanciful and more realistic.”⁴⁰ McWilliams argues, “The Falcon’s place in this book is often as an intermediary of communication between the black world and the white world.”⁴¹ Despite Marvel’s attempts to appear less fanciful and highlight the issue of race, the Falcon in these early years continually refers to his Harlem heritage while battling villains, such as the Nazi-themed, and therefore Aryan-supremacist, Red Skull, who wish to enslave him. McWilliams concludes, “It seems that, at times the Falcon was used as an excuse to tell a story regarding black characters.”⁴² Despite this, though these comics “may have contained blaxploitation, ...they also exposed a reality to an audience that would have no other exposure to these types of social problems.”⁴³

Marvel codified Captain America’s stance on world and domestic politics in *Captain America* 250 from October 1980. In the story, the New Populist Party wants

³⁷ Ora C. McWilliams, “Not Just Another Racist Honkey: A History of Racial Representation in Captain America and Related Publications,” in *Captain America and the Struggle of the Superhero*, ed. Robert G. Weiner (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 66.

³⁸ McWilliams, “Not Just Another Racist Honkey,” 66-67.

³⁹ McWilliams, “Not Just Another Racist Honkey,” 70.

⁴⁰ McWilliams, “Not Just Another Racist Honkey,” 70.

⁴¹ McWilliams, “Not Just Another Racist Honkey,” 71.

⁴² McWilliams, “Not Just Another Racist Honkey,” 73.

⁴³ McWilliams, “Not Just Another Racist Honkey,” 74.

Captain America as their candidate for President. The overwhelming media attention and politicking forces Captain America to take a stand and he says,

“I have worked and fought all my life for the growth and advancement of the American dream. And I believe that my duty to the *dream* would severely limit any abilities I might have to preserve the reality. We must all live in the real world...and sometimes that world can be pretty grim. But it is the dream...the hope...that makes the reality worth living. In the early 1940s, I made a personal pledge to uphold the dream...and as long as the dream remains even partially unfulfilled, I cannot abandon it! And so I hope you can understand that in all fairness, I cannot be your candidate! You need to look within yourselves to find the people you need to keep this nation strong...And, God willing, to help make the dream come true!”⁴⁴

Marvel’s writers formally divorced Captain America from contemporary politics, allowing him to represent what America could be and avoid any political entanglements. The issue closes with a quote from John F. Kennedy, “The courage of life is often a less dramatic spectacle...but it is no less a magnificent mixture of triumph and tragedy. A man does what he must – in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers, and pressures – and *that* is the basis of all human morality.”⁴⁵ This quote further drives home the point that, whatever domestic troubles America faces, and, despite the Cold War continuing, Captain America serves as an example for Americans for the good of which they are capable.

The Modern Age

During the Modern Age, freed from proximity to the Soviet threat, Marvel repeatedly looked back on the Cold War, either in characters’ origins or retcons to reincorporate the 1950s version of Captain America into the Marvel canon. Ed Brubaker’s “Winter Soldier” storyline in *Captain America* served to resurrect his long-dead partner Bucky and to refocus on the cultural memory of the Soviet Union. The story

⁴⁴ *Captain America*, Volume 1, No. 250 (October 1980), 30-31.

⁴⁵ *Captain America*, Volume 1, No. 250 (October 1980), 31.

retcons Buck's character, recasting him not only as Captain America's partner in World War II, but as a special operations trained soldier who fought behind the scenes in ways Cap could not be seen doing.

Rather than dying in battle with Baron Zemo, a Nazi-themed villain, as writers had traditionally written him off, a Soviet stealth submarine found Bucky's body and, kept alive by the freezing waters, the Russians were able to revive him. Soviet General Karpov replaced Bucky's lost arm with a bionic prosthetic and the Soviets reprogrammed him to serve as an assassin around the world, in West Berlin, Algeria, Mexico, and even the United States, giving him the moniker "Winter Soldier." Bucky's handlers place him in stasis between missions in order to prevent his aging, maximizing his performance and allowing them to freshly reprogram him before every mission. The story contains all the elements of spy fiction, including Soviet sleeper agents in the United States during flashbacks. Brubaker continues the fascism-communism link through General Lukin, a former Soviet officer who disappeared after the Soviet Union's collapse due to differences of opinion with the Russian Federation and who inherited the Winter Soldier, among other Soviet weapons, from Karpov. The story begins with Lukin attempting to obtain the Cosmic Cube from the Red Skull, another Nazi-themed villain, and ends with their respective consciousnesses sharing Lukin's body. Through Brubaker's writing, fascism and communism literally share one body, rather than the earlier transference of ideals in the American mind.

The "Winter Soldier" storyline also refocuses attention on the portrayal of Captain America in the 1950s through Jack Monroe, Cap's one-time partner under the name

“Nomad.” Through a flashback, Brubaker takes the audience into Monroe’s memories, where he writes,

Captain America... Steve Rogers. Even Now when I think of him, I can’t help but think of *my* Steve Rogers... the teacher I met in the early ‘50s. The guy who worshipped Captain America so much he tracked down the formula that had made him and recreated it. Who changed his name, then changed his face so he’d look just like the *real* Steve Rogers. How strange to look back on those days now... Korea, the early days of the Cold War, the HUAC hearings all over the radio and television. And there we were, trying to be the new Captain America and Bucky. Not realizing we were slowly going crazy. That the serum in our veins was tainted. Making us see enemies where none existed. I guess we should be grateful we were only placed in suspended animation until they found a cue, and not put in some secret military prison.⁴⁶

Monroe’s flashback addresses the overly jingoistic portrayal of Captain America during the 1950s as well as its relatively short print run. Along with the insane Captain America that Monroe fought alongside as Bucky, Brubaker introduces two other retconned Captains America from the late 1940s and early 1950s. One, William Naslund, began his career as The Spirit of ’76 and replaced Cap after he disappeared. The second, Jeff Mace, began as The Patriot and replaced Naslund after his death, finishing “the job Naslund started [the day he died], and because of them, Kennedy lived long enough to become president.”⁴⁷

During Marvel’s “Civil War” crossover event, Captain America stood for individual liberty, opposing the Superhero Registration Act and standing against Iron Man who supported it. The stance of individual liberty, even in violation of federal law, distinguishes the Silver and Modern Age portrayal of Captain America from his overly patriotic, propagandistic appearance in the 1950s. At the end of the event, when an assassin shot Cap dead on the steps of the Federal Courthouse, the various superheroes on both sides of the issue came together to strike a peace in his memory. In an interesting

⁴⁶ Ed Brubaker, *Captain America*, Volume 5, No. 7, reprinted in *Captain America: Winter Soldier Ultimate Collection* (New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2012).

⁴⁷ Ed Brubaker, *Captain America*, Volume 5, No. 4, reprinted in *Captain America: Winter Soldier Ultimate Collection* (New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2012).

twist, following Cap's death, Bucky, who had regained his memories as Captain America's sidekick, took up the shield and became the new Captain America. In comics, almost no death ever lasts, so Marvel later resurrected Steve Rogers, eventually returning him to the role of Captain America. Before he regained the shield, Bucky combated the 1950s Captain America, William Burnside, in the "Two Americas" storyline. Burnside, leading a right wing militia group known as the Watchdogs, represents the hard-line jingoism of the 1950s against which Brubaker contrasts the liberal American dream of Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes. When Burnside attempts to recruit Bucky to be his right-wing sidekick, he tells Bucky that he's "just spent too much time with the *hippies* and the *commies* to know what a *true* patriot looks like."⁴⁸ The story ends with Bucky killing Burnside in order to prevent him from blowing up the Hoover Dam, symbolically allowing Marvel to kill the last edifices of Cold War patriotism and use Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes to further redefine American patriotism, as Captain America did during the Silver Age.

Marvel repeatedly returns to the Cold War through Captain America due to the ease with which writers can define their work in a bipolar world. In the 1950s, Captain America represented the ideal American, staunchly fighting communism without question. In the Silver Age, Captain America reflected new cultural values about race and Vietnam. Furthermore, the comics capitalized on the success of other spy genres through the creation of a fictional multinational terrorist organization. In the 1980s, Marvel clearly stated that Captain America represented what America stood for rather than what

⁴⁸ Ed Brubaker, *Captain America*, Volume 1, No. 604, reprinted in *Captain America: Two Americas* (New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2010).

it was, allowing them to keep his character relevant after forty years of publication.

Finally, in the Modern Age, Captain America remains relevant, with writers like Ed Brubaker reinventing him while reflecting back on the Cold War to present new challenges and redefine Captain America against the hyper political rhetoric that permeates modern popular culture.

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