

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

**Comics and their role in American
Popular Culture**

Bakalářská práce

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Role komiksu v americké populární kultuře

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Tomáš Hruška

Abstract

Throughout the American history of American culture comic books is medium, which reflect the state of American nation. This work's aim is to investigate these features and describe them within the bounds of popular culture and ideology. The development of this specific media and its influence on readers will be also discussed. This work is therefore mainly focused on confronting the quality of content and its presentation in comic books.

Abstrakt

Komiks je v americké kulturní historii médiem, které reflektovalo stav amerického národa. Tato bakalářská práce si klade za úkol popsat tyto prvky v mezích populární kultury a ideologie. Dále se zabývá vývojem a vlivem tohoto specifického média na samotné čtenáře komiksů. Cílem této práce je tedy spíše konfrontace obsahové stránky komiksů a samotná prezentace těchto prvků na komiksech do této práce zahrnutých.

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1. Introduction

Comics, comic books and graphic novels can be called an American cultural phenomena as well as jazz. It is a distinctively unique American art form, which is reflecting and shaping the national character of Americans. Its influence not only on adolescent Americans is significant especially in comic books during the world war times in America. Although comics are not American specialty, American publishers and authors managed to enhance this form to the art.

The aim of this work is to present comic books in a view of popular culture and ideology. It is wrong only consider comic books as a juvenile art form although comic books are mainly focused on children. First part of this work briefly introduces history of this media in America. Next part, much more important is about Comic books and their reflection of American society and its development which is presented on several comic books mentioned in this work. Hence, the aim of this work is not to develop on artwork and its quality, which can be sometimes disputable, but it is mainly concerned with the content of comic books.

Popular culture of the twentieth century has introduced new types of characters that were meant to be admired - those were the new characters, superheroes, meeting the contemporary taste in society. Opinions on superheroes are quite different, for example Jules Feiffer calls them "junk", but many other authors regard them as new myths of technocratic society (Kummerman 1975). Mass expansion and popularity of superheroes is just outcome of the twentieth century. New, modern, and more powerful superheroes replaced old heroes because of changes in more anonymous and consumer society. Superheroes who usually came from different worlds were now immigrants and aliens who

fight for American dream, which was so distant during great depression.

Introduced comic books selected for analysis were chosen for their relevance concerning popular culture or ideology and because each character provides a unique viewpoint for examining comic books within American culture.

To illustrate all mentioned features I will demonstrate some visual passages from comic books. All illustrations will be found following the conclusion in the Appendixes. The references from illustration will be labelled in the form "see Appendix No.X".

2. Brief Comics history in the USA

Comics definition: juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey and/or to produce an aesthetic response to viewer

-Steve McCloud, Understanding Comics

Comic book history is often divided in three main parts: The Golden Era - which is dated from 1938 to 1945, The Silver Era - which is dated from 1956 to 1969 and The Bronze Era - dated from 1970 - 1984. In these periods many classical comics work appeared and all considerable characters were introduced. The current "mainstream" comic books benefits from these times till now and new stories of such characters as Superman, Batman, Spider-Man still belongs to favourite even now.

Nevertheless, an object of this work is not to describe the history of the comic books but to explore an impact of comic books on the American culture and public. Therefore, the introduced history is very brief and concise.

Comic books as a publication format originated in 1933 as anthologies of popular newspaper comic strips. "The first ongoing monthly comic to be sold as an independent newsstand periodical was M.C. Gaines's *Famous Funnies*, which premiered in May 1934" (Gordon 1988).

By the early 1940s, a lucrative market of comic books for children and adolescents existed with a variety of genres: adventure, action, mystery, superhero, teen, romance, and jungle queen. In 1938 Action Comics #1 introduced Superman (see Appendix 1), the first comic book superhero. Disney entered the market with Donald Duck in 1938, while the teen character Archie had his own comic book by 1942. "Comic books aimed at women appeared with *Sheena: the Queen of the Jungle* in 1939,

Wonder woman in 1941 (see Appendix 2), followed by such comic book as *Tessie the Typist*" (Lopes 2005).

From this time comics has developed into medium with great influence on its readers and generations of young Americans. Development of comics can be compared to the development of film. Both these media were evaluated as demeaning and marginal over a literature and novels. "But it is worth remembering that the major modes of artistic expressions of this century, the novel and the cinema, were both at first scorned as vulgarities until serious artists demonstrated their potential" (Witek 1989). Now film, novels and graphic novels are considered to be at the same level as for a cultural expression. Film and graphic novel are closely connected because a graphic novel usually serves as a story theme for film screenwriters.

Comics in America can be divided in three main parts as to the publishing groups. These are mainstream comics, underground comics and alternative comics. These three subdivisions have characteristic topics and features, which will be mentioned later in this work.

"As Lopes claims, the early 1940s saw a comic book market with sales of 25 million copies monthly, 125 different titles were published regularly, and annual sales at nearly 30 million dollars" (Lopes 2005). The most popular comic book, *Superman*, reached average sales of 1,250,000 per issue. During the war, comic books were distributed to soldiers as cheap and exchangeable entertainment. In these comic books, we can greatly observe penetration of ideology and propaganda. Portraying Hitler and Japanese as subhuman and supporting determination, nationalism, and American identity of soldiers were welcomed topics by American government and in fact by American society as well. There is also the intriguing question of what these comics showed about American society during the war years.

Concerning the ideology and national identity, one comic book heroine must be mentioned. It is Captain America. "Captain America was created in 1940, prior to the entry of the United States into World War II, but after the war had been ongoing in Europe and East Asia for some time" (Dittmer 2005). As can be clearly seen in appendixes it is a symbol of America and therefore he offers great opportunity to analyze symbols during different periods in America and symbols used in this comic book.

In the post-World War II periodic comic books continued to experience a boom with a diversification of genres such as romance, crime, horror, and science fiction. "This expansion involved catering to more adult readers, and comic books thus featured more adult content" (Sabin 1993). "According to Lopes, by 1953 the boom market had 650 titles, a monthly circulation of 70-100 million, and revenue at 70 million dollars" (Lopes 2005).

Critics from that times argued that so called one-quarter of comics sold in 1953 were crime or horror films. Therefore, titles as *Crime Does not Pay* and *Tales from the Crypt* started national anti-comic book crusade. In 1954 this crusade resulted by self-imposed industry code for comic books. "The crusade succeeded in eliminating most adult content comic books" (Nyberg 1998). "It also helped to initiate a decline in the comic book market" (Sabin 1993). "The market continued to decline during the 1960s, with sales dropping as much as 50%" (Moore 1997). "Many older genres faded away, and the superhero genre became the predominant genre in the market" (Sabin 1993).

"In 1970s, comic book distribution significantly shifted from newsstands and other general retail outlets to special comic book shops" (Moore 1997). This moment can be considered as a beginning of formation of new structures of comics. Underground comics (or *comix* to vary from mainstream comic

books) and alternatives comics were started by comic fans and new topics, which were taboo until this time elicited. By the late 1970s, the comic book market was a small subculture of mostly adolescent and college-age male readers who frequented specialty comic book shops. "With the growing interest in comic books as investments in the 1980s, sales increased in the early 1990s, until suddenly in 1993-1994 the market entered crisis with a sudden and steep decline in sales" (Moore 1997).

In the late 90s, shift in cultural attitudes about this crossbreeding of illustration and prose is the appearance of a new term for the medium: *sequential art*. "Both the quotation and the term come from Will Eisner's book *Comics and Sequential Art*, the first full-length discussion of "the unique aesthetic of Sequential Art as a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form" (Eisner 1985). It is clear that serious writers whose topics have traditionally been expressed in the written form and in films now choose the comic book.

"As Witek claims, comic book is facing a change from the medium considered solely the domain of sub literate adolescents fantasies and crassest commercial exploitation of rote generic formulas. "Comic art is thus a literary medium in transition from mass popularity and cultural disdain to a new respectability as a means of expression and communication, and this new respect is evident first in the attitudes of the creators themselves" (Witek 1989).

Great example for these claims is Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, which was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award in biography, *Maus* is a story introducing the Jewish Holocaust story in the terms of cats and mice while it explores the intergenerational tension between the survivor of a dead camp and his writer-artist son.

3. Comic books and ideology

All comics are political.

- Alan Moore, comic book writer (quoted in Sabin 1993)

3.1 Introducing Ideology in Comics

This chapter is focused on ideological issues when talking about comic art. Certainly much research about comics has focused on elements other than the ideological. "Scholarship about comic art - comic strips, comic books, and editorial cartoons - is highly diverse in approach and perspective" (Lombard and others 1999) "Research has been conducted that explores the ways comics communicate, the effects of comics on children; the persuasive rhetoric of the comic form" (McCloud 1993).

"But as McAllister claims, an ideological approach to comics is warranted for at least two reasons. First, comic art combines printed words and pictures in a unique way and the complex nature of this combination allows for much flexibility in the manipulation of meaning, but often in a context that is constrained within a small space. And according to McAllister these characteristics have implications for both representation and interpretation of ideological images and meaning" (McAllister 2001).

"The limited space in which the artist/writer has to work, for example, may entice the creator to use stereotypes to convey information quickly" (Walker 1994). Similarly, the use of storytelling devices such as captions and thoughts balloons can make the themes and values in a comic especially explicit.

"A second reason according to McAllister is that the ideological analysis may apply to the understanding of comics is the form's social significance" (McAllister 2001). Ideology in comic books can be traced from their early beginnings but

more than ideology it is nationalism and patriotism. Real ideology can be found in comic books published during World War II.

The ideology of the comics has of course been dealt by many scholarships. Their previous researches underlined the fact that life, stories, themes, and symbols used in comic art are not neutral and unbiased. "McAllister pointed that in practice, not just in theory, often comic books portrayals of social issues and representation of particular groups have significant ideological implications" (McAllister 2001).

"One of the most famous and infamous books concerning comic book research - although it was intended for a popular audience" (McAllister 2001) - is *Seduction of the Innocents* by Frederic Wertham, first published in 1954. "Wertham's book is seen as a catalyst for anti-comics campaign that economically crippled and culturally bowdlerized comic book production not just in the United States" (Barker 1999). This book was also frequently used in communist countries for demonstrating corruptness and wickedness of comic books. But this book was highly ideological itself and arguments introduced in the book were misleading. "Wertham at times seems progressive and even Marxist in tone when he explores the sexist, racist, and fascist values he believed to be found in many comic books" (McAllister 2001). "As Nyberg deduced about *Seduction of Innocents*, Wertham's ideological analysis, while relatively unsophisticated would not be out of place in the company of media and scholarship that addresses many of the same issues" (Nyberg, 1998)

"Other part of Wertham's critique of comics - and resulting alliances and policies that followed - had anti-progressive elements to them. Certainly some of his arguments reflect, in modern context, a conservative critique of comics' ideology. Wertham's elaboration on the

Batman and Robin relation as "a wish dream of two homosexuals living together" (p.190), and his accompanying quotations from gay youth under his treatment, may trigger a feeling of emphatic despair in modern readers for the sexual repression done to youth during such "treatments" (McAllister 2001).

"Barker argues that Wrentham's potentially radical critique was undermined by his faith in traditional institutions such as the law and the alliances he struck with more conservative institutions like organizers in the Catholic Church" (Baker 1999). "Sabin, for example, argues that war comics of the 1950s, often more patriotic in tone but just as violent as other books, were generally ignored by crusaders while the more liberal-learning EC (Educational Comics) books were targeted" (Sabin 1996).

"In the United States, the self-regulatory Comics code, which resulted from the controversy, fanned by Wertham constrained comics in their potential role as oppositional culture" (McAllister 2001). With such provisions as "*Policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions* shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authorities," (Mc Allister 2001) the Comics Code established in the mid-1950s muted "the vitality of comics and ratify authoritarian social control" (Witek 1989). The mentioned researches were only focused on mainstream comics thus comic books published mainly for profit with standard distribution channels.

But another significant role in ideology and comic books represents alternative comic books or so called underground *comix*. Because of the all independency of its authors these works started to reflect on social and political issues, which could not be found in mainstream comics. "Characters such as *Whiteman* created by Robert Crumb; the anarchist hero *Trashman* by Manuel Rodriguez" (Sabin 1993).

The underground *comix* influenced current comics and the social messages in these comics. "For example, *comix* illustrated to mainstream creators the potential for social criticism that the comics medium have" (McAllister 2001). "In addition, many of the most provocative comics of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor*, have direct lineages to the undergrounds" (Witek 1989).

3.2 The superhero comic book industry

This chapter is introducing the function of superheroes in comic books and discussing major influences on the content of such comic books. Superhero genre developed in the 1930s. Comic book superheroes have thrilled and inspired generations of readers but critics have dismissed them as nothing more than kid's stuff. It is usually comic book with one individual character-everyman figure-possessing superpowers and fighting super villains to overcome them. "According to Jewet and Lawrence, in the modern superhero story of the American nation, helpless communities are redeemed by lone saviour figures that are never integrated into their societies and never marry at the end of the story" (Jewet, Lawrence 2004). They are usually outsiders to the human community.

"McAllister describes several factors contributing to comic book's legitimization of dominant social values is the fact that they began as a medium for children" (McAllister 2001). "Children regarded the early comic books "as their books" (Waugh 1947), the first medium they exclusively could call their own. "Ninety-five percent of boys and ninety-one percent of girls between the ages of six and eleven bought comic books regularly by 1943" (Nye 1989). "By 1941, the two Superman comic books sold 1.4 million copies every two weeks" (Nye 1989).

"McAllister claims that long-term success of the comic books was guaranteed just by the first publication of superhero comic book, National Periodical's *Action Comics*, featuring Superman" (McAllister 2001).

"Comic book appealed to children because of their orientation, their colloquial and simple language, and their pictorial of the messages" (Frank 2005). McAllister describes other features which contributed to the mass popularity of comic books between children.

"Because they were designed and marketed for children, early comic books tended to legitimize dominant cultural values in at least two ways. They had to have plots and characterizations that children could easily grasp; they shield away from themes dealing with sophisticated social criticism, which would be difficult to convey to children (especially in printed format). Through the 1940s comic, then, comic books stressed simple themes, such as good versus evil, with clearly establishing rules for understanding, which characters were good and which were bad" (McAllister 2001).

One of the first description of comic book can be found in *Childhood Education*, which claimed that comics'

[]crude blacks and reds spoil the child's natural sense of colour, their hypodermic injection of sex and murder make the child impatient with better, though quieter stories. Unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers through-out America must band together to break the "comic" magazine (North 1993).

"Thus, the potential for outside criticism from parents, educators, community and religious groups, and especially the government tended to "mainstream" content and to discourage themes that might be viewed as corrupting" (McAllister 1990). It must be mentioned that comic book superheroes have thrilled and inspired generations of readers but critics have dismissed

them as nothing more than *kid's stuff*. However, if we go behind the mask of superheroes we can see more complicated story concerning deep social and political issues. Superheroes represented basic American believes that individual can make a difference in society and history.

3.3 Organization of the comic book industry

In this chapter an organization of the comic book industry is briefly discussed. It is important to demonstrate basic procedures and to show how the medium was produced.

"With the economic success of the Superman character, the superhero comic book industry expanded quickly and massively. In 1939-1940, there were sixty comic book titles on the stands; by 1941 there were 168" (Steranko 1973).

"As in any medium there were tensions between those industry practitioners who saw their product as a commodity and those who saw it as an artistic endeavour. In the industry's first decade, the scales were overwhelmingly tipped toward the commodities view. Many early comic book organizations, especially the smaller companies, were owned by people who had earned sizable amounts of money during Prohibition, not always legally, and sought to invest this money in easily accessible and successful industries" (Wilcox 1986).

By the mid-1940s the production was already highly routinized and strict division of tasks between artist, writers, and editors were not conducive to artistic innovation or authority. For artist, especially, economic profit encouraged simple quickly produced content. "Many artists were teenager boys from modest background who were willing to work for low wages" (McAllister 2001). The publishers usually owned the rights to the finished artwork, and artists and writers were rarely credited.

3.4 World War II and comic books

The war effort in 1940s increased the importance of reinforcing dominant social values and institutions to solidify U.S. sentiment against the Axis menace. "Comic did their part. In the few years before the United States entered the war, over 25 *patriotic* superhuman appeared in comic books" (Goulart 1988). The bombing of Pearl Harbour changed American public opinion and America entered the war. Typical American isolationism evaporated facing Japan's surprise attack. Comics at this time had a unique twin audience: children at home and bored soldiers in the foxholes. "Comic books, in fact, outsold the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *Reader's Digest* ten to one at military post exchanges" (Zorbaugh 1994). "Forty-four percent of men in training camps read comic books regularly" (McAllister 2001).

"At home, comic characters pushed the sale of war bonds, warned children of sabotage efforts, encouraged blood donations and product rationing, attempted to prevent work absenteeism and intolerance of the war, and warned against over optimism" (Turov 1982). "Many comic books romanticized the United States and stereotyped the Germans and Japanese" (McAllister 2001). "It was once a common sight to behold the Human Torch (very popular comics in 1950s) burning the arm off a grotesquely deformed Japanese while a pretty girl gleefully cheered him on" (Thompson 1977). Important thing to mention is that many of the young artists creating comic books were Jewish and liberal. "Morally repelled by the Nazis, they expressed their politics in the work" (Wraight 2002).

"Two of these creators were, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, produced Captain America, Kirby was born Jacob Kurtzberger

in 1917 in New York City's Lower East Side. The son of working-class Austrian immigrants, he had changed his name to Jack Kirby because he "wanted to be an American". He later cited his experience of growing up in a tough neighbourhood where good boys learned to survive by acting tough and standing up to bullies as primary inspiration for his comic book work and his politics. His art, simple and direct, action-oriented and imaginative, was perfect for comic books. Although the aesthetic virtues of Kirby's work would have been lost on most "serious" art critics and professional illustrators of the time his innate grasp of the medium and the superhero genre in particular made him one of the most prolific, imitated, and influential artists in the field's history" (Morris 2005).

Significant argument is also that comic book authors and publishers were fighting Hitler even before U.S. Comic books launched their propaganda effort long before the federal government began the war with Germany. Superman, of course, was central to this campaign. In one wartime adventure, he tells a group of soldiers, "I have seen proof that American soldiers cannot be defeated by Superman or anyone else - not even Mr. Schickelgruber's so-called master race!" (Wright 2001). World War II comic books exemplified the medium's purest expression of dominant social values. Therefore, comic books were one of the dominant media at this time with immense potency on people. Although it was a period of big clichés and melodramatic stories, comic books perfectly pictured feelings, beliefs, and wishing of people.

3.5 Comic books after World War II

"The periodic after the war into the 1950s was a water fresh era for the comic books, which began to be viewed as a potential art form" (McAllister 2001). This era is called Silver Age of Comics. "As McAllister also states, for the first time, young artist and writers who as children had been fans of

comic books began to filter into business, altering the way the work was approached and produced" (McAllister 2001) .

"No publisher exemplified this trend more than EC comics, which stood for either Entertaining Comics or Educational Comics, depending upon the particular publication" (McAllister 2001). "The company had been started in 1945 by M. C, Gaines, the early comics pioneer" (Jacobs 1973) .

"As McAllister writes, Gaines avoided the two traditional comic book genres, gentle [animal] humour (which his father had published) and superhero, finding them too restrictive and predictable. Instead, EC developed three relatively new comic book genres, with a slightly more mature orientation: the horror/science fiction, the war comic, and the satire comic" (McAllister 1990) .

The EC horror comics of the early 1950s stressed realistic art, including the depiction of blood and gore, and the surprise ending. "Virtue doesn't always have to triumph, Gaines suggested to writers" (Jacobs 1973). "One story in *Shock SuspenStories* told of a man beaten to death by an over patriotic mob because he did not take off his hat while a U.S. flag passed by; the end of the story revealed the man to be a blind war veteran" (Thompson 1977). "The war comics created by Kurtzman, EC chief editor, attempted to convey a documentary tone and avoid false sentiment - quite different from the war comic books of only five years before" (Jacobs 1973). "The satire comic was Kurtzman's *Mad*, which perhaps best illustrated EC's effective criticism of accepted attitudes, not only through its artistic style and manifest content but through its challenging of many accepted American values in its storylines" (McAllister 2001). "As Daniels noted, Harvey Kurtz was one of the three members of the press who attacked Senator Joseph McCarthy nationally before he was censored" (Daniels 1971). "EC's realistic art, unpredictable lots and oppositional themes

were to influence many of the underground comic creators of the 1960s and 1970s" (Estern 1974).

"The pressure that the industry had felt since the early 1940s from parent groups, church groups, and educators was increased by the popularity of EC's horror and crime comics" (McAllister 2001). "Parents picketed supermarkets that sold comic books" (Thompson 1977). "In fore mentioned *Seduction of innocents*, child psychiatrist Frederic Wertham accused crime comic books of perpetuating juvenile delinquency, romanticizing criminal and sexual deviance, and belittling authority" (Wertham 1954). "Excerpts from the books were reprinted in several popular magazines, such as *Ladies Home Journal*" (McAllister 2001).

"By 1955, at least sixty communities had held formal investigation of comic book distribution in their areas, and several implemented regulatory measures. But the most imposing pressure came from the U.S. Senate, whose 1954 investigation of the relationship between comic book and juvenile delinquency concluded that responsibility for content rested with distributors and publishers. U.S. Senate strongly advised self-regulation" (McAllister 2001).

"The result was the Comic Code Authority of the CMAA (Comics Magazine Association of America), formed in 1954" (Wright 2001). "The Comic Code Authority was explicitly designed to *mainstream the values and messages presented in comic books*" (Sabin 1996). "Within its first six months of existence the Authority reviewed 5,000 stories, 200 of which were rejected and 1,300 of which were revised" (Jowet 1976). "EC at first subscribed to the Code but abruptly abandoned it after a story about black astronaut was rejected unless the character was recolored as white" (Thompson 1977). "The code was a *setback* for the art of comics, which was forced into essentially infantile patterns when its potential for maturity

had only begun to be explored" (Daniels 1971). "By the middle 1950s and into the very early 1960s, not only had the code eliminated much of the comic book industry's creativity, but also television was cutting into circulation figures" (McAllister 2001).

3.6 Restoration of the industry in 1960s

"In the early to middle 1960s, however, three factors helped to rejuvenate the industry, the first of which was the popularity of the "Batman" television program" (McAllister 2001). First, it helped the comic book industry to thrive financially. "The program's popularity faltered down to the entire comic book medium" (Gold 1989). Another reason according to McAllister is that the programme to some degree reinforced the *campy* nature of comic books" (McAllister 2001). Finally, and perhaps most important, the program's success pointed to the unlimited potential for licensing popular characters to other media and products. The licensing of characters later became the most important source of financing for comic book publishers.

McAllister then pointed out an additional significant feature that rejuvenating influence on the comic book industry was the rise of underground comics (McAllister 2001) It is assumed that the first modern underground comic was Jaxonx's *Good Nose (Snot Reel)* in 1963. "The form gained nationwide attention, however, with Robert Crumb's *Zap Comix* in 1967" (Estren 1974). "Two characteristics are central to the undergrounds as said by McAllister: radical opposition to dominant institutions and an adult readership" (McAllister 2001). "Crumb's Mr. Natural inhabited a world where free love and drugs were explicitly desirable, and *comix* such as *Class*

War Comix and *Slow Death Funnies* openly presented radical arguments as reasonable and even preferable" (Witek 1989).

"Underground creators enjoyed complete artistic autonomy; many artists wrote and edited their own stories" (Etren 1974). Underground *comix* contrary to mainstream comic books involved much enhanced range of topics and some completely new themes appeared such as pornography for example. Independency of its authors on Comic Code Authority led either to satirising of superheroes format or displaying more real-life stories. "When some of these artists later worked with mainstream comic book publishers, they demanded more freedom, other they formed their own companies" (McAllister 2001).

4. Popular Culture as a Bearer of National Complex

This part is going to introduce several comic books and analyze their roles and functions concerning particular period. The part is to describe features of nationalism, ideology, and American identity conveyed in these comics. Every mentioned comic book was somehow significant concerning particular time period and displaying considerable themes like racism, drugs, religion, Native American Rights and so forth.

Before the examination of these features, brief introduction of comic books as an instrument or part of popular culture must be undertaken. Characters from comic books became artefacts of popular culture. They are entertaining and accessible for youth people due to their abilities and villains they have to fight.

Comics are an integral part of pop culture thanks to its mass consumption and kitsch features. The word kitsch, derived from German, can be used as a characterising feature of it. The popular culture is a type of mass culture - popular commercial art - which is very closely connected with comics. But popular

culture does not involves only comics. Comic books coincide in popular culture as well as Hollywood films, musicals, and „catchpenny literature. “As Honeef claims, popular culture called mass culture or *folk culture*, in another perspective, is not a result of local cultural tradition but it is something what originated from society” (Honeff 2004). It is a product which is oriented on expectations of its consummates and it reacts as a seismograph, which can predict potential changes in collective mood and behaving. Of course, young, adolescent, and uneducated populations are main consumers of such ethnicity.

4.1 Captain America

Captain America is definitely the best choice for describing such things as nationalism and ideology in comics. “The origin of this character is dated to 1940 and it is connected with the entry of the United States into World War” II (Dittmer 2005). It is obvious from the appearance of the character that Captain America is a symbol of America. His dress and a shield are pictured in American national colours and symbols (see Appendix No.3). He is a superhero and super patriotic although as his creators claim he has fewer super powers than almost any other costumed hero; his real skills lie in his athleticism and his leadership skills. From the beginning, Captain America helped construct an identity for America. Following quotation is taken from the first issue of the Captain America:

“It is the spring of 1941. „The ruthless war-mongers of Europe” have cast their sights on „a peace loving America,” and „the youth of our country” heed „the call to arm for defence.” As foreigners agents carry out „a wave of sabotage and treason” against the United States, the president authorizes a top-secret plan. A patriotic young American named Steve Rogers, too sickly and weak to

qualify for standard enlistment, volunteers for a dangerous scientific experiment conducted by the nation's top scientist, Professor Reinstein. Injected with a strange, seething liquid, Rogers undergoes a startling transformation. Growing in a height and mass, Rogers's muscles expand and tighten to peak of human perfection. No longer a frail patriot, he now has a massive physique, a proud new name, and a bold mission. The nation's newest „super-soldier," Captain America, is born" (Simon and Kirby 1941).

Clearly identified as a territorial symbol of America by his red, white, and blue star-spangled uniform, Captain America is part of what Renan (1990) has called the *cult of the flag*. "Villains often mock Captain America for his uniform, which is in fact a vaguely ridiculous display of stars and stripes completed by pirate's gloves and boots and, inexplicably, small wings on his head that resemble those on the ankles of Roman god Mercury" (Dittmer 2005).

Stan Lee, comic book icon and former writer for *Captain America*, points out that Captain America represents the best aspects of America: courage and honesty. "As Dittmer claims, America only acts in the name of security, no empire" (Dittmer 2005). "True to this form, young Steve Rogers in 1940 is a reluctant warrior, but not a reluctant patriot" (Kirby 1969).

"In the first issue Rogers says I hate war-and senseless bloodshed-but I can't stay behind-while others do the fighting! There must be something I can do-some place for me!" (Simon and Kirby 1941).

"After this plea gains him access to the super-soldier serum that gives him strengths and quickness, Captain America is provided with a weapon unique among comic book heroes: a shield". This shield, colored with stars and national colours, is a more symbol of defence rather than offence as Ditter theorizes" (Ditter 2005).

We can assume that it symbolizes the defence of democracy and American principles. "The sense of being part of something extraordinary, the American nation, is inherent to the storyline of *Captain America*" (Ditter 2005). The Captain's willingness to die for his country (witnessed in virtually in every issue) reinforces the centrality of the nation in the readership of the comic book (Morris 2005).

"Captain America serves as a cultural product that vaguely and invisibly connects the reader (usually young and male, aspiring to heroism), through the body of the hero, to scale the nation" (Jewet and Lawrence 2004). Ditter theorises on the symbolism of Captain America by the following quotation.

"To understand the symbolic and dichotomous relationship between Captain America/U.S/Self and the Supervillan/Georival/Other, attention must be paid to the history of Captain America icon itself. Captain America represents a different type of American identity than Superman, who, as an alien come to earth, embodies the ultimate American immigrant-the Other-who is, nevertheless, willing to fight for „truth, justice, and American way. Superman's story of origin is the ideal American immigrant narrative, with outsider (or Other) who adopts a new homeland and fully assimilates, happily abandoning any previous culture; instead , Captain America's narrative of origin is 1941 nativist fantasy of individualist patriotism, with Capatin America's (and thus, America's) values contrasted against his un-American Others.

The Captain, as a product of the American military industrial complex, begins as a toll of the establishment and proxy for American foreign policy. In his first issue, when a Nazi saboteur assassinates the creator of the „super-soldier serum" (Dr. Reinstein, an obvious allusion to Albert Einstein), Captain America captures the murderer and treats the reader to an image of the Captain bursting into a room in Germany and decking Hitler nine months before Pearl Harbour and the American entry into WWII" (Ditter 2005).

4.1.2 Captain America ... "Commie Smasher!!"

"In 1949, after catching saboteurs and spies on the home front and fighting alongside American troops in Europe and the Pacific until WWII was completely finished, *Captain America Comics* folded" (Jewet and Lawrence 2005). The title was revived in 1950s and titled as „Captain America ... Commie Smasher" (see Appendix No.4) in an effort to reflect on new war – the Cold War. But this series was not published for a long time. "According to Wright, one of the reasons for not running this series anymore could be its diversification from Cold War issue beyond the message that Communists were evil, overweight, and poor dressers" (see Appendix No.5, 6, 7) (Wright 2001).

"The third incarnation of Captain America began in 1964 with Captain America's revival after being found frozen in a North Atlantic iceberg since World War II". Interestingly, this effectively disavowed the *Commie Smasher* era of Captain America, which never happened since he was frozen in an iceberg" (Ditter 2005).

A year later after publishing *Commie Smasher* Captain America, this Captain America was revealed as an imposter. This disavowal reflected the changing political climate of post-McCarthy America, in which McCarthyite Americanism was deemed to be false patriotism (Jewet and Lawrence 2004).

Sten Lee, the writer who brought back Captain America in the 1960s, has said, regarding the production process, that „everything that is happening at the time a story is written has an effect on that story, whether an obvious effect or a subliminal one. We [creative staff] are all influenced and affected by the events of the world around us at any given time" (Lopes 2005).

The 1960s were a difficult time to write *Captain America*. As America embroiled in the Vietnam War, Captain America's role

as the embodiment of American values put him squarely in the middle of the politics of the time (Jewet and Lawrence 2004). As Ditter also pointed out, American people torn between competing geological scripts, there was a great pressure both for and against Captain's America intervention in the war in Vietnam (Ditter 2005) . As the war ground on, it became clear that the majority of the readership wanted Captain America to remain in the United States, and, for the most part, he did (Wright 2001).

Captain America is therefore a universal superhero for every period and he is always ready to intervene when America and its interests need. It is a superhero for whom the terms like defence of justice, defence of nation, defence of „American way“ are presented in every issue of this comic book. The word defence can be closely connected with his only weapon – shield.

This chapter, thence, introduced the character of Captain America, his history, his development, and the ways of connecting this fictional person to the American Identity. It should be obvious now that Captain America is not only a character for children and teenagers entertainment.

4.1.3 Captain America and terrorism

Such ideological and patriotic comic book as Captain America simply had to reflect on events from 9/11. These events coincided with the preparation of a new Captain America series, and storylines were hurriedly written to feature new American foe. The first twenty-four pages of *Captain America* #1 specifically reference the events of 9/11 was published several months after the terrorist attack. "Captain America's response to the attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon is one of mourning, righteous anger, and self-discipline" (Ditter 2005).

While at Ground Zero, Steve Rogers has a conversation (see Appendix No. 8) with a rescue worker after finding a corpse in the rubble (Rieber and Cassaday 2002):

"Rogers (Captain America): I saw a man and woman - when I'd run here from the park. They jumped. Holding hands.

Rescuer: I'll get a stretcher.

Rogers: Have you seen the news?

Rescuer: Too much of it.

Rogers: Do they now, yet?

Rescuer: Oh, they know. But they're still calling him a suspect. They say there's no evidence, yet. They say they want to be sure.

Rogers: We have to be sure. This is war."

As Ditter pointed, interesting thing on this exchange is that while the dialogue is taking place, the action, viewed from the third person perspective, is of the rescuer and Rogers covering the corpse (Ditter 2005). The reader is personally put in the place of the victims at the World Trade Centre. The following citation is taken from Captain America comic book presenting his inner monologue. "It is an example of American behaviour and a statement of American military power" (Ditter 2005) also presenting determination not to allow terrorist to defeat *American Dream* and commitment to justice and multiculturalism.

We've got to be stronger than we've ever been. Or they've won. We can scout every bloodstain trace of their terror from the Earth. We can turn every stone they've ever touched to dust, and every blade of grass to ash. And it won't matter. We've got to be stronger than we've ever been - as a people. As a nation. We have to be America. Or they've won. We're going to make it through this - we, the people. United by a power that no enemy of freedom could begin to understand. We share - we are - the American Dream (Rieber and Cassaday 2002).

Captain America is an artefact of popular culture. He serves to his country and to his consumers within the world of superheroes morally and physically. Wright also describes his status as a voice for a resistant, counter hegemonic narrative that illustrates the connection between the American way of life and American military operations around the world (Wright 2001).

4.1.3 Captain America today

Captain America was assassinated in 2007 (see Appendix No. 8). He was 66 on the day death. It seems that the hero developed to the end. Comic books with Captain America were published uninterruptedly except one break in 1964. Even this comic book was never as popular as other comic books mentioned in this work - Captain America was somehow exceptional in comparison with other superheroes.

He never possessed any super weapons and gadgets. He was just a hero and super patriotic and to current readers he could appeal to human and too earthbound.

It is obvious that the subject of this comic book has been depleted with times and his constant fight with similar villains palled the readers. Between contemporary competitors like video games and new comic books with more violation Captain America did not have a chance to captivate new readers. His readers were mostly comic books fans that were growing up with Captain America.

Captain America has never had his movie like Superman or Spiderman and what more he was not interesting for franchising. His human dimension must be also mentioned. "As Berkeley wittily commented he was not a stiff nationalist bully you would expected but he was surprisingly likable even troubled guy (Berkeley 2007).

4.2 Wonder Woman

Not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, and power. Not wanting to be girls, they don't want to be tender, submissive, peace-loving as good women are. Women's strong qualities have become despised because of their weakness. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman.

- William Moulton Marston, creator of Wonder Woman

"Wonder Woman was created in 1941 by William Moulton Marston, perhaps the unlikeliest of comic book writers, as an exploration of view of the female psyche" (Jones and Jacobs 1995). William Marston was a middle-aged psychologist, one of the inventors of the lie detectors, and defender of comics. This author with Ph.D. degree from Harvard was hired by D.C. comics as a consultant to create a female superhero to appeal both girls and boys audience.

As a wounded intelligence officer Steve Trevor on the island which is a home of modern Amazons The queen's daughter princess Diana falls in love with the helpless man (see Appendix No. 9).

Against her mother's protest she goes to America with Steve to defend America from Nazis, described by the goddess Athena as a last citadel of democracy and equal rights for women. Like Superman, Wonder Woman was more powerful than a locomotive and she had better technical equipment than Batman - an invisible plane, a telepathic tiara, a magic lasso that made people to obey her, and a bullet-proof bracelet.

Wonder woman was a great success. Female aspect was very heavily promoted but Wonder Woman herself had very masculine approach artistically. Wonder Woman therefore more appealed to male readers.

"The series is also rife with references to classical mythology, including frequent appearances by the Greek gods and goddesses" (Wright 2001). Despite all these things Wonder Woman during the wartime behaved similarly like other superheroes characters. She was advising children on the home front urging them to collect old paper and scrap metal, which could be recycled into the war material for soldier overseas.

The character of Wonder Woman is also important for another reason. She was reflecting the increasing role of woman in society during the war and not only during the war. Many feminists used Wonder Woman as an example of superhero character, which is equal, or even better then other male superheroes characters of that time (see Appendix 10, 11). Feminists also praised Wonder Woman as a progressive gender image for young girls. Wright comments on this in his work stating;

"[...] while the character was indeed powerful and the series featured more prominent female characters, than any others, Marston's stories often underscores the Victorian assumption that superior female virtues like compassion and empathy were best applied as a restraining influence on aggressive men, not as a means to female self-sufficiency" (Wright 2001).

Unfortunately there was little in Wonder Woman stories to suggest that woman could or should compete equally with men in the working world. As Wonder Woman she was an Amazonian superhero, but as Diana Prince, her common identity, she was a secretary.

According to Wright, we can find even sadomasochistic quality in this comic book. Almost every book was riddled with female domination, bondage, subjugation, masters and slaves, punishment, loads of fetishism, and man grovelling at the feet of women (see appendix 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). There was a

latitude in these stories to suggest that Wonder Woman was not so much an exemplar for ambitious girls as an object for male sexual fantasies. "Some critics have even viewed her magic lasso as an symbol of sexual control" (Lombard 1999).

4.3 The Incredible Hulk

The Hulk belongs to the anti-superhero family and this comic book was launched during the cold war between America and Russia - the time of fear of nuclear war. "It articulated a mass anxiety over the threat of nuclear attack" (McAllister 2001).

The main character is doctor Bruce Banner that is exposed to the gamma ray explosion while saving a teenager who trespassed into a gamma bomb test side. He survives the blast but he soon realizes that the accident changed him in incredible way (see Appendix 17, 18, 19). When night falls, Banner grows and undergoes a Jekyll-Hyde or Frankenstein's monster transformation in a hulking grey man-monster with incalculable strength an enraged personality (Wright 2001). To prove his resemblance with the monster in Frankenstein there is reference in the book that depicts the monsters supernaturally developed frame:

"As I said this I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among, which I had walked with caution; his stature, also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of man" (Shelley 1963)

With the second issue, his authors Lee and Kirby changed the character's colour to green (Steranko 1973). The bomb inventor Dr. Banner, therefore becomes a victim of his own device.

The Hulk is interweaved with metaphors. First one is the fear that the atomic weapons could get out of control, which characterizes the era of 60s. According to McKenna we can find other metaphors for both the unpredictability and the irreversibility of the process of experimentation. Concerning this Arendt writes:

"Through the introduction of the experiment, in which we prescribed man-thought conditions to natural processes and forced them to fall into man-made patterns, we eventually learned how to "repeat the process that goes on in the sun," that is, how to win from natural processes on the earth those energies which without us develop only in the universe" (Arendt 1963).

The Hulk is both a warning against the effects of nuclear exposure and social pariah who stand against the authority of the state. He wished only to be left alone but, but civilization would never let him. "The Hulk stood as a creature of Cold War preoccupations and scientific progress gone horribly wrong" (Wright 2001). His very existence pointed to the failure of modern world civilization, and so the Hulk proved intolerable to society's controlling forces.

Comic book also started to dedicate to the racial issue in 1960s more regularly. The Hulk especially empathized with African Americans. "The green Hulk befriends an impoverished African American teenager and explains him, "World hates us ... both of us! ... Because we are different!" (Wright 2001).

4.4 Spider Man

With great power must also come great responsibility.

- Stan Lee, author of Spider Man

Peter Parker, the main character of this comic book, is a shy science eager boy who lives with his uncle Ben and his aunt May. When a bite from a radioactive spider gives Peter „spider like“ powers he does not even consider fighting crime he goes into show business. But when he fails to stop the thief who later murders his uncle, Peter Parker learns that with great power there must also come great responsibility.

Part of the appeal is that before the spider bite, Peter Parker's life was "mess". After he gets superpowers his life is even bigger "mess". Teenage readers were not therefore seduced by his red and blue costume but they were seduced by Peter Parker as a character and his problems with girls, with school problems, and his problems at work. It was a teenager with problems and this secured popularity for this comic book. Till that times comic book superheroes acted like a parents of readers but Peter Parker often acted like readers.

The Spider Man comic book is also significant for another reason. It was a first comic book, which showed problems concerning drug addiction. The danger of drug addiction was presented in special three issue comic series where friends of spider man faced to drug problems (see Appendix 20, 21, 22, 23). Till that time the topic of drugs was taboo in any children literature because of Comic Code Authority regulations. Every comic book must have been approved by this Authority before publishing and must have bear a special stamp symbolising the approval and unexceptionably for readers. Comics Code Authority rejected this special issue of Spider man but Marvel comics published it anyway. Their decision to

publish so-called controversial comic book was pivotal because Comic Code Authority lost its influence on contents of comics.

4.5 Superman

In 1938, the first and greatest superheroes of all Superman leaps from the pages of Action Comics into the imaginations of children. Superman has become a national icon for America (see Appendix No. 24) as well as a cultural institution. He is a grandfather of all comic books superheroes. "Even the most elite and insulated intellectuals have been exposed to enough pop culture to be familiar with the Man of Steel and what he stands for" (Morris 2005). "He fights a *never-ending battle for truth, for justice* (Superman 1938), and - still enthusiastically after all these years, despite the fact that no one can define it any more - for *the American Way*" (Wright 2001). However, his creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster had immense problems with finding publisher for their work. Schuster's and Siegel's hero combined elements from everything they had read from comic strips to pop magazines. "He was presented as a last survival from death planet sent to the Earth like a science fiction Moses with strength of Hercules fighting for the common men" (Wright 2001). Superman was send to every newspaper syndicate of the country and they all refused. Newspapers did not accepted this comic, but comic book publishers - which were originally just reprints of newspaper strips decided not only reprints comic strips but to start completely new, not-presented stories. The Golden Age of comics began with the first issue of action comics presenting Superman (see Appendix No.1).

Unlike most newspaper character, Superman lives in the same world as his readers. He lived in a city, a metropolis with a lynch mod and wife beaters where politicians were

corrupted, where businessmen exploited workers. "This was a real world of 1938, a world in need of a hero" (Wright, 2001). What really made Superman revolutionary was his alter ego Clark Kent, which made him more accessible to his readers. Soon Superman became super famous. His popularity in comic books even convinced newspaper chains to turn into a daily strip read by twenty million people. Meanwhile each monthly issue of Superman sold nearly a million copies.

Superman comes from the distant planet to America and he can never come back there because his planet was destroyed and ultimate American couple adopts him. This is an obvious parallel to the exodus of Jews from Europe. Most of comic book creators were Jewish and is very reflected in World War II comic books. Wright also considers this as a clear example of allegory to immigrants. Superman comes from unknown planet receiving American lifestyle and American values.

"He is as close as contemporary Western culture has yet come to envisioning a champion who is the epitome of unselfishness. The truest moral statement that can be made of Superman is that he invariably puts the needs of others first" (Morris 2005).

Superman comic books are not only mirror of American culture, but it is a mirror for whole world society. Any problems concerning social strikes, racial intolerance, poorness, Nazism, World War II, Communism, Cold War are interweaved in his comic books.

Comic book superheroes were created as, and always have been from the beginning, an adolescent power fantasy.

As literary constructs go, they do not need to be terribly complex; in their primary-coloured costumes, fighting gaudy villains and hyper-dramatic menaces that are not terribly subtle, they are intended to excite the

imaginations of children with the same fire and energy as myths and fairy tales of years past" (Morris 2005).

Modern times caused creating a distance between Superman and his adolescent readers. "According to Morris, as a pop culture icon he was enjoying his greatest influence in 50s and 60s" (Morris 2005). For today's generation, Superman is meaningful figure, more laughable than admired. Superman lost his fight for young readers. He did not manage to catch the changing climate in society. "This ultraconservative Big, Blue Boy Scout, actively protecting restrained capitalism lost his sheen" (Morris 2005).

During the World War II Superman creators Siegel and Schuster thought that a Man of Steel could stop the world war in two pages (see Appendix No. 25, 26) In a special issue for Look Magazine in February in 1940, Superman simply grabs Hitler and his ally Stalin and puts them on the League of Nations. It is actually end of story and end of war. Superman paper victory made react Goebbels, minister of propaganda in Nazi Germany, called Superman a Jewish man. The official SS newspaper mocked Siegel as physically and intellectually circumcised. This is a great example how influential Superman comic book was.

5. Conclusion

This work's aim is to disprove stigma and discrediting of comic books as a genre fit only for children with plain topics. I hope to have demonstrated how comic books reflect American society and its features in a changing time. Comic books have come a long way from undervalued genre to highly respected media, which is coveted by writers creating graphic novels and coveted by directors as a source of inspiration. Comic books are not restrained by any conventions now. New genres have been permeating and graphic novels with more intellectual and grown-up topics occupy new readers.

Taboo topics were always broken in comic books and liberality of comic books authors was conveyed in many stories. Drug addiction, homosexuality, racial, and social issues confronted society and therefore comics should be prized for their openness to these topics.

Ideology and propaganda in comic books during World War II might be considered as diminutive and highly stunted but on the other hand we cannot apply same literary criticism approach on comic books because comic books have never an ambition to be equal with literature and they never have novelistic structure. Many critics of comics approach to comic books with a prejudice considering their literal quality but they should be aware of the mass culture therefore pop culture or mainstream aim. If we look at the comic book without any preconception we can trace very reflection of American society and this is the way comic books should be studied. The influence on young generations of readers has often been at the centre of debates. We can say that shaping the national character of not only adolescent readers comic books fulfilled their role in the good sense of word.

The creation of comic books - superheroes are now more popular than have ever been because of major motion pictures, video games, the Internet. But on the other hand comic books sales with superheroes are at historical lows. Superheroes represent modern types in mythology or modern kind of folklore but the golden era of comics will never come back. The genres of superheroes appear to be exhausted and worn out.

New directions in comic art (graphic novels), which have captured young adult audience with more mature content and which employ novelistic structures for political and ideological purposes is the future for comics genre. Comic books like *Maus*, *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Return*, and Jack Jackson's *Los Trejanos* proved that new topics will appeal to new reader as good as mainstream comics. Superhero genre is dead and readers need to identify themselves with more realistic stories and characters.

6. Resume

Komiks je hned po americkém jazzu považován za typického představitele původní kulturní formy Spojných Států. I když se nejedná o čistě americký kulturní fenomén můžeme toto tvrzení považovat za správné, protože právě ve Spojených státech komiks prošel největším vývojem. Komiksové knihy vznikly díky malým novinovým komiksům - stripům, které byly u čtenářů natolik populární, že vydavatelé novin začali vydávat souborná díla těchto mini komiksů. Tato souborná díla předznamenala vznik nového media - komiksu. Komiks byl od počátku zaměřen na dětského čtenáře. Bohužel někteří jeho kritikové, jako by si tento fakt neuvědomovali, považovali komiks, díky tématům a kýčovitosti, za pouhého představitele pokleslé literární formy. Na komiks ovšem nemohou být pasována stejná měřítko jako jsou používána u literatury. To již vyplývá z popsání vzniku tohoto média, jeho zaměření a formy. V současné době komiks prožívá novou éru díky pracím Arta Spiegelmana nebo Jacka Jacksona, kteří si i u ne právě komiksových čtenářů vydobyli pozornosti a úcty. Z komiksu se stalo médium, které je stále častěji vyhledáváno filmaři, kteří čerpají z komiksových příběhů pro své scénáře nebo spisovatelé, kteří jen chtějí vyzkoušet jiný způsob vyprávění příběhů, což je prvotní funkcí komiksu.

Komiks však jako by stále byl opomíjen akademickou společností a je na něj většinou nahlíženo s předsudky, přitom může posloužit jako výborný příklad vlastností a charakteru americké společnosti. Tato práce si klade za úkol nastínit a přiblížit tyto prvky, které jsou v komiksech přítomny. Zabývá se také ideologií a propagandou, které komiksu kralovaly v době druhé světové války a v ranných dobách studené války a prostupuje je dodnes. Tato práce na komiks nahlíží jako na typického představitele pop kultury, tedy kultury masové, která

nejlépe reflektuje stav společnosti v dané době. Mezi spojením komiksu a pop kultury je očividný vztah. Pop kultura je především vyjadřována vizuálně a tento prvek komiksu nechybí. Pop kultura byla vždy primárně lépe přijímána mladšími konzumenty, a proto byl komiks od počátku určen dětem a adolescentům.

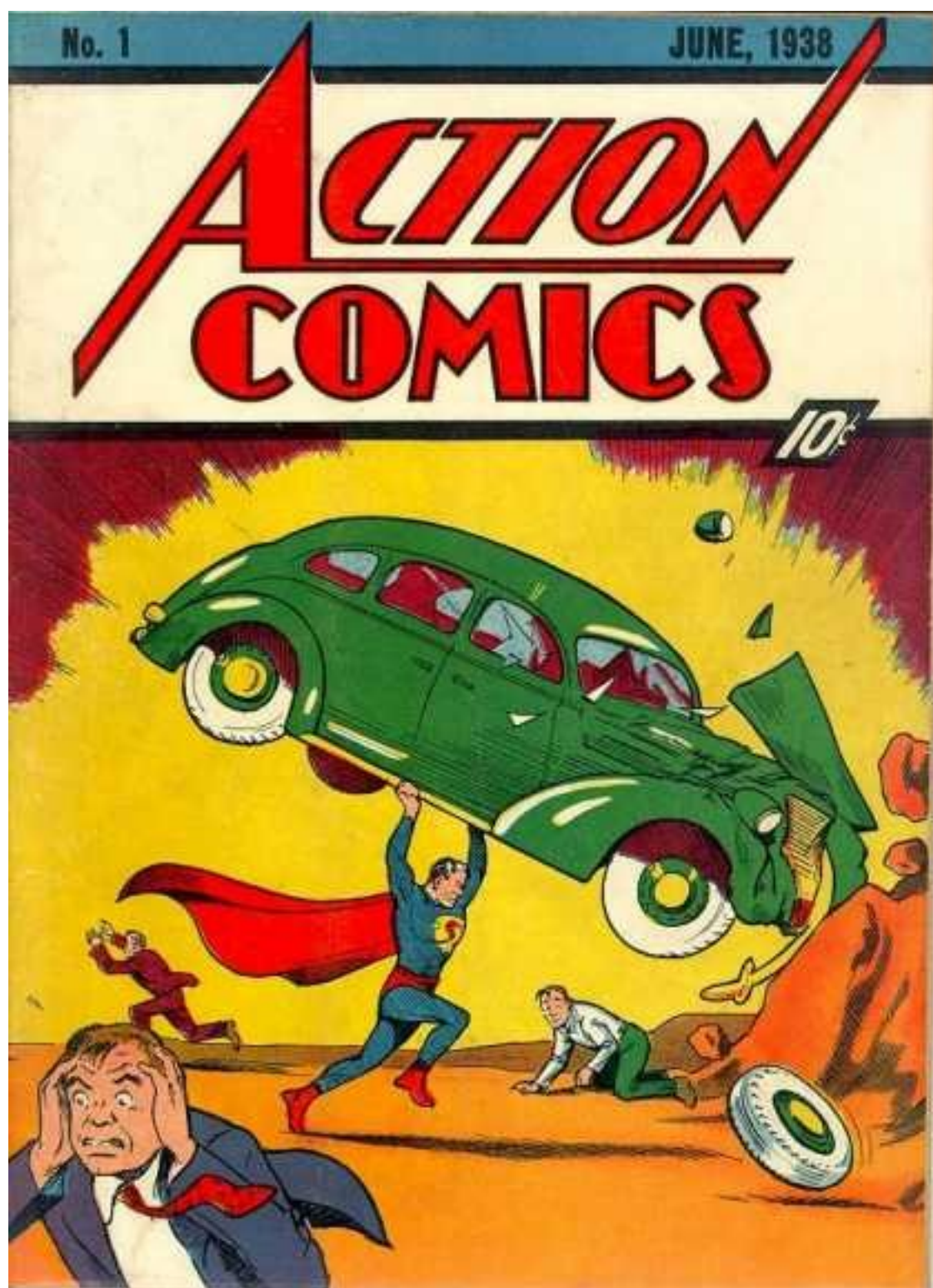
Komiks dal také vzniknout novým postavám - novým moderním mytologickým hrdinům - takzvaným super hrdinům. Tyto charaktery tvoří páteř většiny komiksových příběhů. Jsou to jak morálně tak fyzicky vyvinutí jedinci, kteří bojují nezištně za spravedlnost, demokracii, svobodu a především za americký způsob života. Z toho vyplývá i proti komu vedou svůj boj. Jsou to většinou zločinci, nacisté, komunisté, ale i příšery, mimozemšťané a s časem například i businessmani. Komiks nám tedy poskytuje možnost pohledu na vývoj společnosti, na její obavy a fobie. Nejprůběžnější postava v rámci ideologie a propagaci amerického pohledu na svět je Kapitán Amerika. Tento komiksový charakter poskytuje skvělé možnosti pro analýzu výše zmíněných skutečností. Jeho boj s nepřáteli Ameriky byl v podstatě náplní každého vydání tohoto komiksu. Jeho dialogy jsou často protkány klišé o patriotismu a truismu a spravedlnosti. Navzdory tomu všemu se však z tohoto komiksu nestal jen čistě ideologicky zaměřený komiks. Jeho autoři si dokázali udržet odstup a komentovat i věci pro Ameriku tíživé. Další komiksy ilustrované v této práci byly svou podstatou něčím přelomovým, a proto se staly této práce součástí.

V současné době je komiks na scestí. Super hrdinové již ztrácí pro mladé čtenáře svůj lesk, i když stále vedou svůj boj proti zlu. Ze stránek komiksů se ovšem přestěhovali do videoher a počítačových her. Bohužel postavička z herní konzole je okleštěná o známe bubliny, do kterých pisatelé komiksů ukládají dialogy a nemůže tak prostředkovat stejný zážitek jako při

čtení komiksových příběhů. Prodej komiksů je v současné době na historickém minimu a bude velice těžké vést boj o mladého čtenáře s komiksem apelujícím na jeho smysl pro spravedlnost a morálku. Tento vývoj je ovšem typickým příkladem populární kultury, která se mění zároveň s technologickým vývojem – hledá nová média a způsoby jak zasáhnout co největší počet konzumentů.

Naproti tomu je nutno podotknout, že komiksové příběhy nejsou zcela odumírajícím médiem. Z komiksových sešitů se přestěhoval do knih. Vznik takzvaných grafických novel, které se od běžných komiksů liší jak formátem tak i tématy, které jsou dospělejší a vážnější a zaměřené spíše na dospělého čtenáře je pro komiks jedním ze způsobů jak si udržet své odrůstající čtenáře a jak zapůsobit i na čtenáře, kteří se s komiksem doposud nesetkali.

6. Appendixes



Appendix No. 1



Appendix No.2



Appendix No.3



Appendix No.4



Appendix No. 5



Appendix No. 6



QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.



Appendix No. 8

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Appendix No. 9

QuickTime™ and a
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Appendix No. 10

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Appendix No. 12

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Appendix No. 14

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Appendix No. 16

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Appendix No. 22

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Appendix No. 25

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Appendix No. 26

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ÚDAJE PRO KNIHOVNICKOU DATABÁZI

Název práce	Comics and their Role in American Pop Culture
Autor práce	Tomáš Hruška
Obor	Anglický jazyk pro hospodářskou praxi
Rok obhajoby	2007
Vedoucí práce	Mgr. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.
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Klíčová slova	komiks, pop kultura, USA, ideologie