

The American Way: Superhero Propaganda At War

By Charles Allison



“Truth, Justice, and the American Way”

An iconic phrase in American pop culture. Comic books and their characters would have a profound effect on American’s. Shortly after their creation the country found itself in global war. Superhero’s went from children’s entertainment to propaganda for the war machine nearly overnight. The Golden Age of Comics had begun.



“How Superman Would End the War”

Published in 1940, this short comic showed the patriotic hero flying to Berlin and taking Hitler on trial before the League of Nations for “unprovoked aggression against defenseless nations.” Joseph Goebbels, German Reich propaganda minister condemned the comic and its creators. His rebuttal of the comic concluded that Superman broke the laws of “physics, logic and life itself,” and that he was responsible for planting seeds of “criminality and laziness” in the hearts of American children.



Amazonian Princess

Wonder Woman was created to encourage young girls to read more comics and became a role model. She was strong, independent and caring, a female Superman. This approach backfired. Her sex appeal resulted in more young boys reading her stories, especially when immoral Nazi’s would discover her only weakness being when she was bound at the wrist.

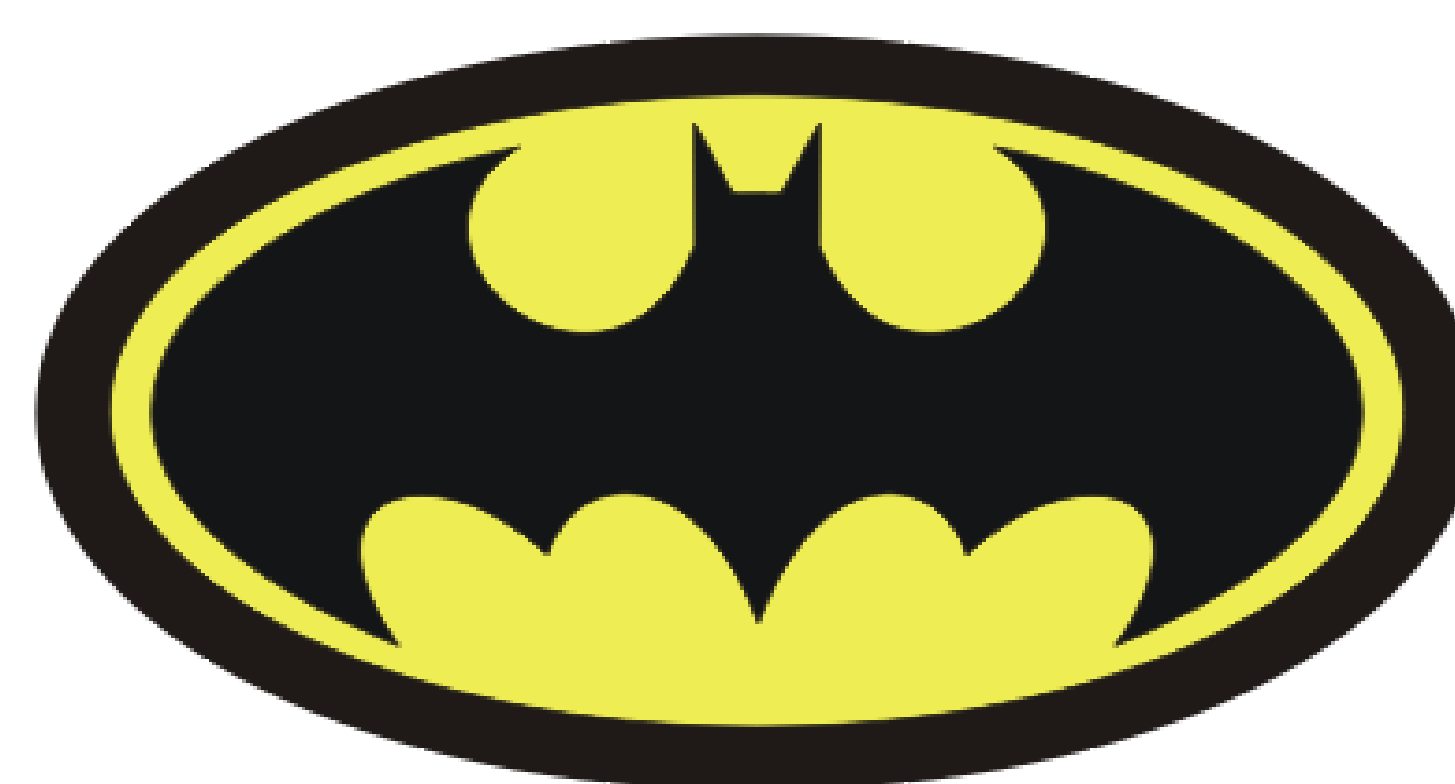
Patriotic Captain

Captain America become one of the most famous and popular characters during the war. His first issue famously depicted him punching Adolf Hitler in the face. Captain America’s stories showed that with enough patriotism and determination, even the weakest of individuals could be as mighty as the strongest soldier on the Front.



The Caped Crusader

Batman was a well-established comic book character when the war started. During the war however, the Worlds Greatest Detective used his abilities to unearth an evil Japanese spy ring operated by the devious Dr Daka in the 1943 movie serial released in theaters. American xenophobia ran wild during the War in the Pacific, leading some to remark the war against Japan was “as much one between races as it was nations.”



The end of an Age

The 1950s brought the end of the Golden Age. Restrictions brought on by the government limited what could be published and superhero’s were the hardest hit. It wouldn’t be until the late 1960s when they had a revival. This too was ushered in by a period of conflict, the Vietnam war. Comic books are often closely tied with the larger events taking place beyond the panels. And America has been forever influenced by the addition of those three words that have become our national mantra, “The American Way”.

