

The Betrayal of Captain America



A White Paper
by
Michael Medved and
Michael Lackner

Executive Summary

The Defense Department must face international terrorism without the aid of a celebrated hero of past victories – comics figure Captain America.

Even after September 11th, Marvel Comics and other publishers are disseminating comic books that actively promote a destructive cynicism and mistrust of the United States Government. They express anti-war sentiments, condemn America as a racist state, liken the actions of our Armed Forces to the murderous crimes of Islamic terrorists, portray terrorists as advocates for sympathetic causes, show others to be victims of U.S. aggression, and reveal our Government officials to be scheming, evil villains. A Wildstorm comic describes the FBI as breaking countless human rights laws, and one Marvel superhero even goes so far as to threaten President Bush with assassination. Our country and our Armed Forces deserve better.

* * *

As if Defense Department officials didn't face enough challenges in disarming Iraq and defeating al-Qaeda, they must now prepare to face our enemies without a celebrated component of past victories over diabolical foes. Captain America, the patriotic superhero whose comic book exploits inspired the nation in World War II, now feels uncertain about his nation's cause. In his latest adventures, the "Sentinel of Liberty" not only expresses ambivalence on the current war on terror but even embraces trendy notions that the U.S. somehow deserves the hatred of Islamic radicals. Disillusioned, embittered, surprisingly sympathetic to terrorists, and amazingly uncertain about which side represented the real "good guys" in World War II, the new Captain America provides a startling example of a popular symbol of nationalism transformed into a handy bludgeon for America-bashing.

The alteration of this beloved patriotic icon represents only the most glaring example of a disturbing and undeniable trend in a powerful industry that



The Foundation for
the Defense of Democracies

continues to influence youth around the world. Several major comic books today actively promote a destructive cynicism and mistrust of the United States Government, at a time when America faces a strong-willed enemy sworn to our destruction. These comic books illustrate a broader problem – the epidemic of self-doubt and self-hate infecting our popular culture, disseminated by the arts and entertainment industry. How many young men and women, of age to serve in the Armed Forces, will feel discouraged from putting their lives on the line to defend the “Empire of Blood” (as America is described in the “Captain America” series)?¹ It is precisely this demographic group that is targeted by the comic book industry.

Marvel Comics and other publishers, such as Wildstorm Productions, disseminate this material – amazingly enough, after September 11th. This material, marketed as entertainment wrapped in alluring covers, with PG ratings, PG+ ratings or no ratings at all, can shape the worldview of our young people in a way far more powerful, and with greater subtlety, than political journals or news magazines.

This odd, unsettling direction for America’s powerful comic book industry comes at a time of maximum influence for the dream-makers at Marvel. The company owns 4,700 characters, including classic heroes like “Spider-Man” and “Daredevil,” already brought to life in smash hit films, not to mention “The Incredible Hulk” (due for big screen stardom this June) and the versatile mutants of “X Men 2” (the eagerly awaited sequel to the surprise movie hit from two years ago). The sale of billions of dollars worth of film tickets, DVD’s, video games, toys, clothing and other licensed products, gives Marvel Comics unquestioned mainstream credibility and clout, making the bizarre abuse of its copyrighted super-heroes all the more surprising.

These comic books contain several outrageous themes: that the actions and attitudes of our leaders are morally equivalent to those of Islamic terrorists, that the United States government is incurably racist and exploitive of its own citizens, that our government officials are evil and scheming, and that the war on terrorism is unjustified. All these elements overlap into one overarching message: Blame America.

Moral Equivalency to Terrorism

Most notable is the startling new Captain America series initiated in 2002, entitled “The New Deal.” The popular character Captain America first appeared in 1941 just months before Pearl Harbor and soon became an iconic representative of the muscular patriotism displayed by the American World War II generation. Yet, these associations all but disappear in the cynical “New Deal.”

Captain America himself draws a direct parallel between the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center and America’s bombing of Dresden during World War II. He reflects as he enters Dresden, “You didn’t understand what we’d done here — until September the 11th. Before then — You would have said we were doing what we had to do — To defeat Hitler and the Nazis. ... But now — what do you see? February the Thirteenth and Fourteenth, 1945.

These people weren’t soldiers. They huddled in the dark. Trapped. While the fire raged above them. Faces pressed to the broken walls that locked them in. Clawing at the cold earth until it grew too hot to touch. And while there was nothing left to breathe there in the dark, they died. (Images of burned gasping corpses — a



woman and children). The city's firemen fought the blaze for days before they could begin the search for survivors. There were no survivors. (Image of destroyed bicycle in the ashes). History repeats itself like a machine gun. A madman lights the spark - and the people pay the price."² This point is gruesomely illustrated with parallel black and white artistry showing the bombed World Trade Center and the bombed Dresden, together with the linguistic parallelism referring to September 11th, 2001, and February 13th and 14th, 1945.

Captain America's new, post 9/11, understanding of the destruction of Dresden suggests a moral equivalence between the Allied forces in World War II in the midst of a bloody, all-out global war and the al-Qaeda terrorists who attacked unsuspecting office workers on a peaceful morning in September. Especially in a comic book aimed largely at children and teenagers (and rated PG) the comparison (in the hero's own voice) is both illogical and obscene.

The series also equates America's use of anti-personnel weapons with acts of terrorism. The terrorists take hostage the citizens of a small town, many of whom work in a defense plant that manufactures land mines and cluster bombs. The terrorist leader, Faysal Al-Tariq, is determined to punish the United States for its cruel, reckless misdeeds against his people. "Some of you are asking your God. Why you will die today," the charismatic militant explains. "Some of you know. Those of you who work at the bomb manufacturing facility. At the edge of this peaceful town. Today you will learn what it means—to sow the wind. To reap the whirlwind." The terrorist then addresses Captain America through loudspeakers, demanding, "Tell our children then, American- Who sowed death in their field—and left it for the innocent to harvest? Who took their hands, their feet?" The comic book panel here shows a shattered wheel from a child's bombed bicycle, and then portrays Captain America's own horrified thought process. "Land mines outlast wars," he tells himself, "aren't disarmed by treaties. Cluster bombs fall without detonating—but explode at a touch." Back in the occupied church, a hostage mother turns with fury on her own husband and shrills: "This is how you feed our baby? With bombs? You make bombs?"³

No one in this comic, neither Captain America nor any of the hostages, ever offers a word of rebuttal to the terrorist's anti-American tirade.

Indictment of United States Government

Despite their radical messages, Captain America comics continue to be packaged in deceptively patriotic covers and are rated PG (suitable for all ages with "parental guidance"). Thus any parents seeing their children reading these comics would not see anything deserving objection — unless they bothered to read the content.

Captain America's indictment of his own country becomes explicit as he listens to yet another sympathetic rant from a terrorist mastermind: "Guerillas gunned my

father down while he was at work in the fields—With American bullets," the fanatic helpfully explains. "My mother was interrogated and shot. Our home was burned... You know your history, Captain America... You played that game in too many places... The sun never set on your political chessboard – your empire of blood." To this verbal assault, "The Sentinel of Liberty" meekly admits, "We've changed. We've learned... My people never knew. We know now. And those days are over."⁴

In addition to making oblique, one-sided and damning references to controversial elements of real-life American foreign policy, Marvel Comics recently highlighted totally invented, gut-wrenching atrocities in order to underscore this nation's vicious, racist nature. A prequel to the Captain America story appeared for the first time in January, 2003, under the title "Truth- Red, White and Black."

In the new perspective on the old yarn, we now learn that the super-soldier formula used to create Captain America first received testing on unsuspecting black soldiers, employed as human guinea pigs. In "Truth- Red, White and Black," an evil U.S. Army scientist baldly declares: "It's necessary to see if our methods apply to the inferior races."⁵ The white commanders separate the African-American GI's into two groups, one of which speeds away on locked trucks (like the Nazi transports) to a secret, sadistic laboratory, while the remaining soldiers face mass murder from squadrons of machine gunners (like the Nazi Einsatzgruppen). The human experimentation on the survivors features horrific panels showing victims in agony,

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bodies exploding, and laboratory walls splattered with blood.⁶ This recent comic series unequivocally suggests a heavy-handed analogy to the death camp experiments of Dr. Mengele.

The timing of this publication is curious. Today America is at war. Why would a publisher wish to blur the distinction between the America of WWII and our enemy Nazi Germany? Might it be to suggest that there was no moral certainty then, and no moral certainty now?

Joe Quesada, editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics, provides an alternative explanation. He cheerfully acknowledges the Holocaust echoes. "There are moments in our history that may not have been our shining glory," he told us. "We've done things in our history to our own citizens that aren't right." He specifically cited the infamous Tuskegee experiment of the 1930's, in which medical researchers left syphilitic black patients untreated in order to study effects of the disease. "The beauty of America is that we can tell these stories and learn from our mistakes and move on."

Quesada denies that any political agenda motivated the new direction for the beloved super hero. "We're not out there to preach politics. We never said we're going right, or going left. These are classic characters who are open to many interpretations." Concerning the thinking behind "Truth- Red, White and Black," Quesada claims that the inspiration came from the President of Marvel Comics. "He said if Captain America were created today, he would be black, because most of our military is black." When we corrected Mr. Quesada on this misunderstanding (a recent front-page analysis for USA Today showed that less than 10% of current combat units are African American, and less than 20% of all military personnel) he expressed surprise at the statistics. He fell back on the classic defense as to why material in

comic books should not be subject to scrutiny. "These are just stories," he insisted. When asked what message he hoped the stories would convey to the young people who are disproportionately represented among comic book consumers, he said that they should "learn racial tolerance" and that "peace is the best way to go, wherever possible."

Marvel Comics, he declared, wants to emphasize "the American Ideal," not the flawed "American Way."

Of course, it is not possible to distinguish between the abstract "American Ideal" and the extant "American Way" without some political agenda. This agenda is revealed in several of the Marvel comic books discussed in this paper.

We can look, for example, to the newest Captain America storyline. A Native American named Inali Redpath refers to the founders of the United States as "White men with powdered wigs, repressed sexuality and wooden dentures."⁷ He reflects on his hatred of the United States of America and his past friendship with Captain America, "... I should have made a distinction between the country – and the man." Redpath watches Cap fighting a vicious genetically engineered soldier named Barricade, who threatens to immolate a school bus filled with screaming children. Redpath muses, "I don't know why I'm worried about Cap. I've seen him work. He can take care of himself. Has for several lifetimes. But I can't help thinking he's not ready for this. He's such a relic of the past. The war is different now. The sides are less clearly defined. On the one hand it seems obvious. Men are trying to kill him. That would be wrong. On the other hand – Cap and Barricade were made by the same people [i.e., the United States Government]."



Although Cap doesn't know that yet. I worry about Cap because he was born in another time. A time when villains had honor – and the government never had madmen on their payroll. A time that never really existed. Except in his mind.”

Government Officials Evil & Scheming

Marvel's strange expression of its “American Ideal” takes many other forms. In the final issue of the six-issue Captain America series, “The New Deal,” it is revealed that a terrorist mastermind supplied electronic ID tags to both the U.S. Government and his terrorist minions. The terrorist explains that it was easy to sell the devices to the U.S. Government, which he describes as “militaristic.” Captain America does not object to this characterization of our government.⁸

Government officials opposed to an internationalist agenda are revealed to be vicious, lawless thugs. This is expressed in a comic book featuring the Avengers — a team of super heroes lead by Captain America. It is portrayed as a welcome and enlightened step forward that the Avengers now report to the United Nations instead of the United States Government. In the introduction Marvel announces, “Because of their efforts, the United Nations has made an offer to the Avengers that will make most people cheer ... and some others prepare for war.”⁹ An Administration official violently opposes this transfer of authority to the United Nations. U.S. Secretary of Defense Dell Rusk (with the same initials as Donald Rumsfeld?), in a private telephone conversation with the President, condemns this diminution of American power: “Our tether to the world's most powerful entity has been cut. They'll be reporting directly to the United Nations instead of us. This is not a good day for America, Mr. President. Not a good day.” While Rusk is instructed by the President not to pursue the matter further, he acts. The Secretary of Defense breaks into the residence of the Avengers' U.N. liaison and demands that he become a U.S. informant. The Secretary, while strangling the man, screams, “You don't get it, do you, Henry? This is a direct order from the President of the United States. ...” The liaison, dropping back on the ground, responds, “Yes. I understand.”

Senior U.S. officials, including members of the Cabinet, are portrayed as arrogant and hostile villains in other comics as well. In the Captain America series, an angry Cabinet Secretary Dahl refuses to disclose to Captain

America, on fatuous grounds of “national security,” why and where U.S. Intelligence obtained electronic dog tags for its agents identical to those worn by domestic terrorists. The Secretary also expresses to S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury the view that Captain America has outlived his usefulness and that the order should be given to stop him.¹⁰

It doesn't stop there. In “The Punisher” (soon to be yet another major motion picture starring Thomas Jane), we are treated to the obscene portrayal of President George W. Bush as a slobbering drunk who relishes the prospect of nuclear war. The climax of the story shows the President pouring another hard drink and muttering to himself: “Lousy ... sonffa ... urrp! Any nukin' gits done ... I'm s'poseda do it, dammit ... show 'em ... show all 'em French

maggots ... droppa bomb on Franceland, s'what I'm gonna do ...”¹¹ The comic goes so far as to show the vigilante hero breaking into the White House, dropping a bullet on the President's desk and challenging the President with the threat of assassination: “Nine millimeters. I'm never further away than that.”

9/11 & the War on Terror

In other instances our leaders and our military personnel are simply portrayed as cold and uncaring. In “The Ultimates,” the view is expressed that our leaders

only engage in memorial services like those held on September 11th for public relations purposes, without sincerity and without sadness. The brittle, female media attaché gloats as she emerges from St. Patrick's Cathedral: “Word just in from the focus groups, General Fury — absolutely humongous post-service approval rating. I told you getting Captain America to read the eulogy wouldn't come off as too cheesy. Our target demographic absolutely adores all this hokey old soldier crap.” S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury answers: “What's the matter with you, Betty? You born without an off switch or something?” Betty retorts with the final word: “Oh, sure. Like you were in there praying for all the itty-bitty children, soldier-boy?”¹²

In part of the Captain America series, it is even suggested that senior U.S. officials are somehow involved in supporting domestic terrorism, with the terrorists wearing the same electronic dog tags used by U.S. Intelligence (parroting a charge that is commonly heard in the Arab world that the United States Government is the real force behind terrorism).¹³

This idea of America the Guilty permeates the Captain America series, including an interchange in which Captain

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America meets a pretty German woman on a plane to Europe. She echoes the doubts of her own real-life government, telling her seat-mate, “Your war on terror. It’s so confusing to the rest of us – Your allies you ignore. It changes every day. Who you’re fighting. Where you’re fighting. What the great evil is that America must destroy today.”¹⁴ Captain America does not defend the war on terrorism. Instead, he responds with anti-war sentiments and the distorted observation that September 11th was the act of “a psychopath,” without reference to the fact that it was the work of a worldwide network of Islamic extremists.

The series ends with a speech by Captain America that could have been given by an anti-war activist: “They’ll always be with us. The Genghis Khans. The Caligulas. The Hitlers. The monsters. With their blood hunger and their murderous toys ... and their lies. But we can stem the tide of blood. Defy the shadow. Defend the dream. We, the people – We all have the freedom and the power to fight – For peace.”¹⁵ Among the monsters listed, the names of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussain are strikingly absent.

These Captain America comics present a politically biased assessment of the war on terrorism. The hardbound edition of this six-issue series, released in January, 2003, contains a tribute to the memory of those who perished on September 11th.¹⁶ In light of the political sentiments expressed in this series, sentiments that would undoubtedly be offensive to many of the victims, this “tribute” in fact does nothing but desecrate their memory.

And it is Not Limited to Marvel ...

Lest one thinks this is limited to Marvel, other comic book publishers have joined the America-bashing fray. In “Global Frequency,” Wildstorm Productions portrays the U.S. military in the most vicious terms and throws in gratuitous Israel-bashing for good measure. The U.S. Air Force is shown mutilating its soldiers into bionic killing machines. A female Global Frequency agent, with old battle scars, speaks to the bionic monster-soldier. “Let me help you. We’re here because we know what it’s like to be abused by commanding officers and forced to do the wrong thing. I’m from Israel, for God’s sake. None of us

ever meant to be like this. Let us fix this.” The monster-soldier replies, “They took my genitals away. Can you make that better? There’s a wire in my brain that simulates sexual pleasure when I kill people. That’s all I have now.”¹⁷

In another Wildstorm publication, “21 Down,” the FBI is attacked. This series involves a superficially non-political theme: teenagers are visited by a mysterious stranger who grants them super powers, but with one catch – they are destined to die on their 21st birthday (a parallel series, “Gen 13,” deals with the same theme). Finally, in Issue #7, the political content is revealed in dialogue between a 20-year old recipient of super powers and a beautiful former FBI agent. The young man asks her, “Why were you suspended from the F.B.I.?” She responds, “I found out the Bureau is experimenting on people ... genies. They did it once before in the Fifties, a place called the U.S. Science City Zero. They’re breaking every Human Rights Law in the book.”¹⁸

Comic books have largely passed “below the radar” of mainstream Media critics. However, with the popularity of movies based on Marvel characters, we can expect more children and young adults to be drawn to comic books, and particularly to Marvel titles.

Though Marvel continues to market the Captain America series with reference to patriotism and nostalgia, the company actually boasts of the edgy content of its latest issues. In a special introduction to the hardbound edition of “Captain America: The New Deal,” Max Allan Collins, author of the acclaimed graphic novel “The Road to Perdition” praises the effort to “take this classic character of a simpler time into the smoky aftermath of September 11th” while avoiding “jingoistic nonsense.”



Collins proudly commends “this story’s courage and ability to examine the complexities of the issues that accompany terrorism... specifically, not to duck the things America has done to feed the attacks.”¹⁹

At this point, we might expect such blame-America logic from Hollywood activists, academic apologists, or the angry protesters who regularly fill the streets of European capitals (and many major American cities). When such sentiments turn up, however, disguised within star-spangled packaging in comic books aimed at kids, we need to face squarely some of the deep cultural malaise afflicting our nation in the midst of a significant war.

For nearly three generations, comic books have exploited dark, disturbing, and violent themes—painful transformations, isolated freaks and killers, corruption in high places, and criminal conspiracies. The new emphasis, however, goes further than ever before – imputing guilt not only to a few malevolent tycoons and their henchmen, but to the American military establishment and the nation at large. Even worse, the new comics extend that indictment retroactively to discredit the nation’s most celebrated triumph, World War II. If the United States cannot feel proud about saving the world between 1941 and 1945, then there is no basis for pride in our past or gratitude for our present. Our country and our Armed Forces deserve better.

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Recommended Action

Above all, concerned citizens should take steps to discourage their own children and their acquaintances from purchasing comic books with poisonous, anti-American messages, or from patronizing companies that unapologetically market such messages.

We encourage you to comment on this highly disturbing trend in the comic book industry – specifically at Marvel and Wildstorm.

Marvel Comics is a division of Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., headquartered in New York City. Bill Jemas is President and Joe Quesada is Editor-in-Chief. The address is:

Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.
10 East 40th St.
New York, NY 10016

An important step would also be to contact Marvel’s investor relations firm: Jaffoni & Collins, Inc. (Richard Land and David Collins) at 212-835-8500 or mvl@jcir.com.

Wildstorm Productions is affiliated with D.C. Comics, a division of Warner Bros. - an AOL Time Warner Company. Jim Lee is Editorial Director. The address is:

Wildstorm Productions
888 Prospect St. #240
La Jolla, CA 92037

¹ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 6 (December 2002)(Rating PG)

Moral Equivalency to Terrorism

² *Captain America* Vol. 4, No.5 (October 2002)(Rating PG)

³ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 3 (August 2002)(Rating PG)

Indictment of United States Government

⁴ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 6 (December 2002)(Rating PG)

⁵ *Truth – Red, White and Black* Vol. 1, No. 2 (February 2003)
(Rating PG)

⁶ *Truth – Red, White and Black* Vol. 1, No. 3 (March 2003)
(Rating PG)

⁷ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 8 (March 2003)(Rating PG)

Government Officials Evil & Scheming

⁸ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 4 (September 2002)(Rating PG)

⁹ *The Avengers* Vol. 3, No. 61 (February 2003)(Rating PG)

¹⁰ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 4 (September 2002)(Rating PG)

¹¹ *The Punisher* Vol. 4, No. 5 (December 2001)(Rating PG+
Violent Content)

9/11 & the War on Terror

¹² *The Ultimates* Vol. 1, No.7 (September 2002)(No Rating)

¹³ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 4 (September 2002)(Rating PG). While later issues reveal that a terrorist mastermind provided the electronic dog tags to both the U.S. Government and his own terrorist forces, the paranoid hostility of the U.S. Government official to Captain America’s inquiries is never explained.

¹⁴ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 5 (October 2002)(Rating PG)

¹⁵ *Captain America* Vol. 4, No. 6 (December 2002)(Rating PG)

¹⁶ *Captain America* Vol. 1: *The New Deal* (2003)(Rating PG)

And It is Not Limited to Marvel ...

¹⁷ *Global Frequency*, No. 2 (November 2002)(No Rating). Wildstorm Productions, headquartered in La Jolla, California, is affiliated with D.C. Comics, a division of Warner Bros. - an AOL Time Warner Company.

¹⁸ *21 Down*, No. 7 (May 2003)(No Rating)

¹⁹ *Captain America* Vol. 1: *The New Deal* (2003)(Rating PG)

About the Authors

Film critic **Michael Medved**, author of “Hollywood vs. America,” hosts a nationally syndicated daily radio talk show focusing on the intersection of politics and pop culture. **Michael Lackner** is a practicing attorney -- and past comic book collector. He is a graduate of the University of Chicago Law School and the UCLA Anderson School of Management.

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THE FOUNDATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

1020 19th Street, NW • Suite 340 • Washington, DC 20036
www.defenddemocracy.org
(202) 207-0190