Proud to Be an American
Perceptions of American Patriotism Portrayed Through Captain America Comic Books, 1941-2009

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Abstract

Patriotism, while easily defined as “love of one’s country” is not easily quantified. Patriotism is neither constant through space nor is it constant through time. Simply put, what constitutes patriotism depends on who is defining it. The United States of America has often been described as being a patriotic country and yet the idea of Patriotism continues to be a divisive and controversial ideal in America. One of the United States of America’s greatest symbols of patriotism in popular culture is Captain America. Created during the World War II, Captain America has defined patriotism for the youth of America, not only reflecting ideas of popular patriotism, but in ways shaping them. This paper seeks to analyze changing perceptions of patriotism since World War II through Captain America comic books. This will not only demonstrate where patriotism has come, but demonstrate the divisiveness of patriotism throughout United States history, how patriotism has been constantly reinvented throughout United States history, and where patriotism may be headed during the post-911 world.
American’s are considered one of the most patriotic countries in the world. One study performed in 2010 showed that more two thirds of all Americans consider themselves either “extremely patriotic” or “very patriotic.” While patriotism can be defined verily straightforwardly as a love of one’s country, how it is expressed by different groups of people is not so universal. How to properly express patriotism not only varies throughout the political landscape, but also throughout America’s history. Patriotism has had to survive many hardships during America’s journey through the tumultuous 20th and 21st century. While most European countries have abandoned or outright rejected patriotism since World War II, the United States has continued to embrace patriotism. For instance, in 1992 a poll asking various questions about national pride and patriotism found that fifty-one percent of Americans considered themselves as patriotic while only forty percent of English citizens, twenty-seven percent of French citizens and twenty-six percent of German citizens felt the same way. American patriotism has not remained unchanged however. Events like the Vietnam War, the Watergate Scandal, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks have challenged previous assumptions about patriotic behavior.

While patriotism is not uniformly expressed through time and space, patriotism plays an important role in United States as a way to bind Americans together. The United States is composed largely of immigrants and because of this Americans have often found it difficult to find overarching characteristics to unite themselves (such as a common language, religion, or history). The use of patriotism as a nation-building tool helps to unite people of diverse backgrounds as it provides common ideals that all can embrace. Many institutions and media forms participate in creating a sense of national pride in citizens almost from birth. Everything from reciting the pledge of allegiance in school to watching the School House Rock on public television is designed to teach children from a young age to take pride in being American. Perhaps one of the

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most unconventional ways that the media participates in this type of political socialization has been through popular comic book titles. The most successful title to encourage patriotism is the Captain America comic books. Originally created in 1941 as a wartime propaganda adventure comic, Captain America has participated in a wide variety of patriotic behavior, doing everything from selling wartime bonds to rebelling against the United States Government for passing a law that destroyed constitutional rights. While Captain America does not represent every view or expression of patriotism, studying his source material does reveal much about how the United States has been successful in retaining its sense of patriotism and creating a national identity throughout the 20th century. Captain America provides a window into American conceptualizations of patriotism as Captain America both reflects popular ideas about patriotism and engages his readers in accepting new assumptions about patriotic behavior throughout the latter part of the 20th century.

Comic Books as a Cultural Link

In the wake of the Great Depression, the United States saw a new form of entertainment develop: the comic book. Comic books helped many people to escape the hardships of the Great Depression by bringing them on colorful adventures with out-of-this-world heroes and heroines such as Superman, Wonder Women, and Captain Marvel. Typically comic books have been seen as literature for adolescent boys; regarded by many as simply “juvenile, junk culture” because of its fanciful stories and emphasis on violence and costume crime fighters. Recent trends show that comic books are becoming increasingly popular among middle aged men and even adolescent women. Even historians are beginning to use comic books as valuable historical sources that capture insights (especially visual insights) of the time in which the comic book was written.

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6 Botzakis., 50.
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Comic books provide a unique medium into American popular culture that often demonstrates through colorful pictures and extraordinary stories insights into stereotypes and ideals and are reflections of the ideals to which their readers subscribe. Simply put, if comic books did not relate to its readers’ ideals and perceptions of the world, they probably would not continue to read them. There is a duality to this: reflective and creative. Comic books reflect the ideals, morals and often time political ideology of their readers. Comic books also help to create and shape ideals and morals through the progression of their plots. For instance, while the protagonist of comic book might reflect the ideals that his readers have on love in the beginning of the story, the protagonist may, through the events of the comic books, discover a new perspective and change their own feelings towards love. In turn, the reader, having gone through the same emotions and thought processes might find that he has arrived at the same point ideologically as the protagonist. In the case of the ideal of civic patriotism Captain America is perhaps the clearest embodiment of changing perceptions of patriotism for adolescent and young adult males in pop culture. Comic books capture in visual and written ways how Americans view the past, perceive their present, and what they hope or fear about the future.

The Birth of an American Icon

Throughout the early and middle 1940s the United States engaged in World War II. They primarily fought against Germany and later against the Japanese. Even though Pearl Harbor officially marked the United States entrance into the war, the United States had long been invested into the victory of the Allied Powers. In a famous speech, President Roosevelt’s called on America to be the “Arsenal of Democracy,”8 asking the citizens to support the Allied Powers with food, weapons, and financial aid. Four months later Joe Simon and Jack Kirby answered in their own way by giving the world Captain America. Working for a publishing company, they noticed that opponents to the war had been quite active in printing anti-war literature. “The opponents to the war (World War II) were all quite well organized”, recalled Kirby, the comic book’s illustrator, “We wanted to have our say too”9 Captain America

first appeared in *Captain America Comic #1* in March of 1941 with the unforgettable cover depicting Captain America breaking through a window and punching Hitler in the face. Thus, Captain America had begun fighting the Nazis nine months before the United States had even entered the war.\(^{10}\) According to the comic book, Steve Rogers (who would become Captain America) was a young man living during the time of World War II. He had been born into a small family of poor immigrant parents. He wanted to join the military to fight against the third Reich, but was too physically weak to enlist. Because of his desire to serve, one general offered Rogers the opportunity to participate in a special Super Soldier Program. Rogers eagerly accepted and so with the help of a super soldier serum and a scientific experiment Steve Rogers was transformed from a weak, gangly teenager to a full grown man at the peak of human physical perfection. Armed with his trusty shield and his costume that hid his identity and bore the colors of the American flag, Captain America was born.\(^{11}\) Quickly, Captain America became Timely Comics’ (now known as Marvel Comics) most popular comic book.\(^{12}\)

Captain America’s origin story reflects much of what it meant to be American in the 1940s. Rogers, before his transformation seemed to mirror much of America. He had been born of immigrant parents from Ireland in Manhattan, New York City.\(^{13}\) His mother had died early in his life due to influenza, a common disease in the newly urbanized United States.\(^{14}\) Steve Rogers wanted to serve his country out of a sense of duty and loyalty. While the horror of the first World War was still fresh in the minds of some, many young men saw World War II as an opportunity to travel and have an adventure.\(^{15}\) Steve Roger’s life mirrored many of the youth at the time.

Steve Rogers (Captain America), aside from mirroring the lives of the stereotypical American youth, also provides a unique view into what it meant to be a patriot during World War II. Captain America, first and foremost was a soldier. The US Government created him and he operated under the jurisdiction of the US Military. This too became a qualifying.

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\(^{10}\) Joe Simon, *Captain America* 1 (March, 1941).

\(^{11}\) Joe Simon, *Captain America* 1 (March, 1941).

\(^{12}\) Wright, 36.

\(^{13}\) Marvel. “Captain America (Steve Rogers),” http://marvel.com/universe/Captain_America_(Steve_Rogers) (accessed March 6, 2011).

\(^{14}\) Marvel.

aspect of patriotism in the United States—that service in or support of the United States armed forces was a quintessential part of patriotism—which continues into contemporary culture.\textsuperscript{16} Another aspect that Captain America portrayed was that he came from a poor immigrant family. In 1900, nearly one fifth of the population of the United States was either an immigrant or had at least one immigrant parent.\textsuperscript{17} The United States government expected and propagandized that all Americans should participate in civil activism and patriotic duty.

Finally, Captain America’s support of spreading and defending democracy illustrates another way in which many expressed patriotism. This included Captain America fighting Nazis in Europe as well as fighting Nazi spies within the United States. This attitude that the enemy was not just abroad but at home as well lead many Americans to be suspicious of German-Americans and Japanese-Americans living in American cities. Ultimately, this lead the United States Government to relocate millions of Asian-Americans into internment camps during World War II because of fears of Japanese spies. Although less known than the Japanese internment camps, the United States government suspected German-Americans as spies and nearly 11,000 were put into German internment camps. These camps were in response to fear of enemy infiltration and sabotage, which Captain America confronted often in his comic books. In fact, a Nazi spy assassinated the very scientist who had created the super-serum that transformed Steve Rogers.

Ironically, had Steve Rogers lived in Germany, he might have been the ideal Nazi. He had blond hair and blue eyes and due to his super soldier serum he represented the peak of human physical perfection. Had he not been wearing red white and blue, he easily could have passed as the poster child for Hitler’s youth. In that same vein, Germany and the United States had many similarities in the 1940’s. They both accepted increasingly socialist programs to help them through the Great Depression, espoused a heightened sense of nationalism, and both attempted to expand their

\textsuperscript{16} A poll administered in 2008 reported that 62\% of all Americans (nearly two-thirds) considered military service a patriotic activity, ranking only second to voting. Lymari Morales, “Nearly All Americans Consider Military Service ‘Patriotic’,” Gallup, \url{http://www.gallup.com/poll/108646/Nearly-All-Americans-Consider-Military-Service-Patriotic.aspx} (accessed May 4, 2012).

realm of influence and bring in the land that they saw as rightfully their own. The United States, before the turn of the century, had engaged in war with Spain, seemingly in defense of the Monroe Doctrine. What resulted was the loss of the remaining of Spain’s Empire: Cuba gained its independence (though the United States would continue to dominate it until 1969) and Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines came under American control. A few months before, the United States had annexed the overthrown Kingdom of Hawaii. By the onset of World War II, the United States pushed for more influence in the Far East into China and it seemed that Manifest Destiny might consume the whole Pacific as it had done to much of North America the century before. In much of the same tone, Germany had pushed to gain land that it had lost after World War I and bring in other German speaking peoples under its influence. What ultimately threw Europe into war was Germany’s annex of Poland and other non-German speaking territory.

Despite the similarities that the United States and Germany shared, they remained bitter enemies. The United States disapproved of the amount of power that Hitler had acquired and to disruption they had made on their trade with France and especially England. Similarly, Captain America remained bitter enemies with foes such as the Red Skull and Baron Zemo, both staunch Nazis and leaders in Hitler’s regime in the comic books. The Red Skull, Captain America’s arch-nemesis and best known rival, represented Nazism for Americans in much of the same ways that Captain America represented Democracy. He was an evil scientist bent on the creation of the perfect race and death of those who less worthy.18 Just as the Nazis appeared to many Americans as mysterious and in many ways evil, the Red Skull wore a mask that gave his face the appearance of (shockingly) a red skull. The skull mask represented death and the red represented the murder and diabolical nature of Johann Schmidt, the man behind the mask.

Throughout the 1940s Captain America fought Nazis and defined patriotism through his acts of loyalty and courage, but the war ended by the mid-1940s and Captain America began to fade in popularity. Many grew tired of the fighting and wanted to have their American soldiers return home. But ending in retirement and a government pension was too monotonous for the Star Spangled Avenger and so he went out with a bang…literally. In his final mission in April 1945 Captain America and his

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sidekick Bucky Barnes attempted to stop a drone plane full of explosives when the plane exploded killing Bucky Barnes and hurling Captain America into the cold Atlantic Ocean. Captain America would not become a regular character in Marvel comic books for nearly another twenty years.

A Hero Reborn

By the mid-1960s the United States was again engaged in a costly war in foreign lands. This time, the war was centered in Vietnam. But this war differed greatly from World War II. The United States had been cautious, if not reluctant, about getting involved in World War II. After the war had ended though, the United States began to play a much larger role internationally, becoming a World super power. The United States no longer simply referred to the Monroe Doctrine to exhort control over the western hemisphere as they had done prior to World War II, but began to use ideals such as democracy and freedom as justification for getting involved in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, particularly in countering communists movements taking place in these regions. In the case of Vietnam, the United States had gotten involved early on and when the French finally pulled out, the United States essentially took over the effort in opposing the Viet Cong. The amount of time and soldiers that the United States invested in the Vietnam War was an important factor in making it one of the most unpopular wars in United States history. From protests to draft evasion the American youth and young adults—those who most commonly read comic books—showed their discontent with the War. It was into this environment that Marvel Comics decided to re-introduce Captain America—an old school hero in a time of political and social transformation. This atmosphere changed Captain America just as assuredly as it changed what it meant to be patriotic.

According to the story, Captain America had not died when he fell out of the plane he had been trying to stop in the mid-1940s. Instead, he had fallen into the Atlantic Ocean and because of his super-serum he had

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19 Dougall and March, 60.
20 Captain America did appear a few times in the 1950s fighting a Communist version of the Red Skull and a Communist Chinese villain named Yellow Claw. Overall, these runs were unsuccessful and it was later explained that this was not the real Captain America, but instead a man who was pretending to be Captain America.
survived but lay frozen in a block of ice. The Sub-Mariner (one of Captain America’s former allies in the 1940s) found him in this frozen state and soon the super hero team named the Avengers rescued him.\textsuperscript{23} The Avengers (at the time made up of Iron Man, Thor, Giant Man, and the Wasp) offered him a position on their team and Captain America readily accepted. He quickly became the leader of this group and helped to train new members throughout the years. Despite being the leader of the Avengers, Captain America often had his own solo adventures or teamed up with sidekicks such as Rick Jones, the Falcon and Demolition Man.\textsuperscript{24}

Among his many exploits and adventures, it is interesting to note that he never fought in the Vietnam War. In fact, his non-involvement in the Vietnam War contrasts starkly with his involvement in World War II and seemed to reflect the college age youth’s sentiments of the war. In fact, Stan Lee, Captain America’s writer at the time, recognized that the majority of his readers wanted Captain America to stay out of Vietnam.\textsuperscript{25} Many of the college age students decried the war in defense of the Vietnamese, feeling that the United States was picking a fight with a smaller and less influential country. On the other hand, most adults and blue collared workers opposed the war because of the thousands of young men who were losing their lives.\textsuperscript{26} Captain America, while he never directly addressed the Vietnam War, did seem to share the sentiment that it was regrettable that the youth of the nation must die in war. After returning to action, he displayed regret for the death of his partner Bucky Barnes and even guilt that he had let it happen.\textsuperscript{27} This display of guilt and remorse seems to have made the statement that Captain America did not support foreign war, or at least not without good cause. This demonstrates how patriotism had changed over the twenty year absence of Captain America: support of the government and the Vietnam War were not requirement of patriotism in the 1960s and 70s. At the same time, Captain America never did support or speak out against the war. While Melvin Small argues that descent and protest can be expressions of patriotism, particularly in retrospect, in the 1960s showing open descent

\textsuperscript{24} Marvel, “Captain America (Steve Rogers),” http://marvel.com/universe/Captain_America_(Steve_Rogers) (accessed March 6, 2011).
\textsuperscript{25} Wright, 244.
\textsuperscript{27} Stan Lee, Captain America 110 (10 February, 1969).
with the government was considered taboo and more of an extremist activity.\textsuperscript{28}

While Captain America seems to have been absent from the Vietnam War, he did appear to support other important developments throughout the 1960s, particularly the civil rights movement. This became most apparent in 1969 when he took on a new side kick: the Falcon.\textsuperscript{29} The Falcon was the first successful African American super hero. Together, Captain America and the Falcon “waged a campaign against poverty, racism, pollution, and political corruption”\textsuperscript{30} which felt reminiscent of the President Kennedy’s “New Frontier” domestic policies. Captain America’s association with the Falcon in many ways indicated how many Americans felt about racism and segregation. It also reflected Marvel’s attempts to encourage racial equality. During this time (1975) the X-Men, one of Marvel’s most successful comic book superhero teams, introduced a wave of new superheroes from varying racial backgrounds.\textsuperscript{31} Marvel also introduced several other African or African-American superheroes into the Avengers including Black Panther (1968), Luke Cage (1972), Blade (1973), Rocket Racer (1977) and War Machine (1979). While the civil rights movements made a lot of strides, African-Americans still had a long way to go until they could say they had true equality in the United States and in comic books. After all, the Falcon was still Captain America’s sidekick and not the other way around. Patriotism in the 1960s then, for Captain America and many of his readers, included support for the civil rights movement, but did not necessarily include support for foreign wars.

By the mid-1970s, patriotism and Captain America had lost much of their appeal. Perhaps this was due to growing anti-Americanism within the United States because of the Vietnam War. Many Americans viewed the Vietnam War with growing concerns about its length and the moral justification of involvement; Lyndon B. Johnson had been re-elected on a campaign of ending the Vietnam War only to increase the war efforts.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Stan Lee, \textit{Captain America} 117 (10 September, 1969).
\item Wright, 245.
\item These superheroes included Colossus (Russia), Storm (Kenya), Wolverine (Canada), Nightcrawler (Germany), Banshee (Ireland), Thunderbird (Apache Nation) and Sunfire (Japan). These superheroes included Colossus (Russia), Storm (Kenya), Wolverine (Canada), Nightcrawler (Germany), Banshee (Ireland), Thunderbird (Apache Nation) and Sunfire (Japan).
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once re-elected. Richard Nixon did much of the same in 1969 when he came into office. Captain America seemed to have lost much of his appeal and Marvel executives began to wonder how such a patriotic protagonist could remain popular in a period of such prolific opposition to the red, white and blue of American imperialism. What complicated the matter even more was the 1972 Watergate Scandal. By 1975, Richard Nixon, due to an ongoing investigation into his administration, stepped down from office, being the first president in American history to resign his post. This left many Americans feeling unsure about the future and what it meant to be American.

In the midst of this national identity crisis, Captain America began an identity crisis of his own that redefined patriotism for him and reflected changing perspectives of patriotism for his readers. Despite Marvel having distanced itself from the Vietnam War, sales of Captain America comic books struggled in the 1970s. Krensky, author of *Comic Book Century* argued that this because the youth saw Captain America, along with other superheroes, as part of the establishment because of his ties to the US military. 32 This changed when Steve Englehart became the new artist of Captain America and Marvel assigned him to save the comic book from cancelation. Captain America, whilst on one of his missions, uncovered a massive government conspiracy that shook his faith in the United States government. 33 The conspiracy involved a worldwide criminal organization that had infiltrated the White House. Just as Watergate had done for many Americans, the level of corruption in Washington destroyed Captain America’s faith in his own government. He was so upset that he could no longer in good conscience continue on as Captain America and turned in his costume, refusing to take orders from the Federal government anymore. He donned a new costume and alias: Nomad—the man without a country. 34

The struggle that Steve Rogers went through mirrored much of the United States was going through: how can you be patriotic if you cannot trust your own government? It was not too long before Steve Rogers came up with a solution; he realized that he could champion America’s ideals (such as liberty, freedom, and equality) without blindly following the Government and so he donned again the Captain America costume. 35

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33 Steve Englehart, *Captain America* 180 (December, 1974).
34 Steve Englehart, *Captain America* 180 (December, 1974).
35 Steve Englehart, *Captain America* 184 (April, 1975).
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Donning the costume again reaffirmed Captain America’s dedication to patriotic principles while acknowledging the need to question and scrutinize the government. From that moment on, Captain America regained much of his popularity and has never been in danger of having his comic book cancelled since.\(^{36}\) In fact, after coming to this epiphany, Captain America comic books went from being on the verge of cancelation, to Marvel’s top selling comic book in just six months.\(^{37}\) Captain America redefined patriotism from being loyalty demonstrated towards an institution into loyalty demonstrated towards ideals. This reflected a growing trend in America to show loyalty to symbols and ideals of America rather than to the Federal Government. This redefinition of patriotism as loyalty towards ideals made Captain America relatable to his readers again. It also reflected the attitudes and struggles about patriotism that comic age readers felt in the midst of Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal.

Patriotism After Vietnam

As Captain America continued to fight villains through the 80s and 90s his struggle to trust his government continued. He often helped old friends within governmental organizations, such as Nick Fury and Sharon Carter of S.H.I.E.L.D. (a fictitious government organization that deals with super human threats) but refused to work directly for the government.\(^{38}\) In late 1987, the government tried to force Captain America into working for them again. Captain America refused and once again abandoned the red, white, and blue stripped costume, this time to take on a new identity simply known as the Captain.\(^{39}\) While he eventually returned to take up his traditional costume, he remained as the Captain for several years. During his time as the Captain he reinforced his stance on what constituted his patriotic duty to a corrupt military general seeking to call upon Captain America’s allegiance. The general wanted Captain America’s help to cover up another government blunder and Captain responded “I am loyal to nothing, General except the [American]

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\(^{38}\) Marvel, “Captain America (Steve Rogers),” http://marvel.com/universe/Captain_America_(Steve_Rogers) (accessed March 6, 2011).
\(^{39}\) Mark Gruenwald, Captain America 335 (November, 1987).
He refused to help the general and instead demanded answers about their involvement in yet another scandal. Captain America’s refusal to trust the government mirrors many of the same feelings that many Americans had after the close of the Vietnam War. Even though the war had ended, the American public could not begin to trust their government again and in fact, perhaps grew even more suspicious. According to one poll taken in 2010, public trust in government had reached a low in 1978 under Jimmy Carter’s Presidency to roughly twenty-eight percent. While it did recover during the Reagan years, it has never come close to reaching pre-Vietnam War levels, which peaked in 1966 during John Kennedy’s Presidency at around seventy-eight percent.

Captain America’s form of patriot often seemed to be in opposition of some seemingly anti-American ideal. In the 1940s, he fought Nazism and in the 1960s and 70s he fought against racism and government corruption. In the 1980s he began to fight against extremist ideologies, particularly those that threatened the United States domestically. These ideologies included anarchism, terrorism, and ironically enough extreme patriotism or ultra-right wing activism. From 1980 to 2001 the United States experienced an increase in terrorism and right-wing extremism. These ranged from school shooting (Columbine High School in April of 1999) and the Oklahoma City Bombing to abortion clinic bombings and the two World Trade Center terrorist attacks (February 1993 and September 2001). Many of these attacks, though not all, seemed to becoming from within and taking place on US soil.

Captain America too began to come into conflict with extreme idealistic villains and organizations on domestic soil. For instance, in the late 1980s Steve Rogers, while still using the super hero name the Captain encountered an extremist right-wing organization called the Watchdogs. The Watchdogs viciously opposed anything that did not represent traditional American values such as homosexuality, pornography, abortion, sex education, and even the teaching of the evolution theory in schools. To get their point across they engaged in terrorist activities such as vandalism, arson, kidnapping, intimidation and even murder. Another villain that the Captain tangled with is Flag-Smasher, an anarchist who

40 Frank Miller, Daredevil 233, (1986)
42 Mark Gruenwald, Captain America 335 (November 1987).
43 Ibid.
wanted to end the political identity of nation-states. A different foe that Captain America faced was the Super-Patriot; an overzealous Captain-America-wannabe who publically criticized Captain America and argued he was more worthy to be a symbol of American patriotism due to his hard-core conservative beliefs. While they fought on a few occasions, neither of them ever definitively won. These are just a few examples of right wing extremism, anarchism, and extreme patriotism that Steve Rogers faced as the Captain.

Interestingly, it was during this time that Marvel introduced a new patriotic superhero: John Walker. John Walker had once been known as the Super-Patriot (mentioned above), but when Steve Rogers gave up the Captain America costume, the United States government gave the costume and responsibility to John Walker. John Walker (as the new Captain America) helped Steve Rogers (during his time as the Captain) to defeat several of their enemies, such as the Watchdogs and Flag-Smasher. When Steve Rogers decided to once again become Captain America, John Walker took up a new alias known as the US Agent.

Captain America and the US Agent represent two different kinds of patriotism that have become more and more divisive since the Reagan years. The US Agent represents patriotism that often is synonymous with political and social Conservatism and encapsulates ideals like supporting the military and American foreign policies, particularly in times of war or crisis. In fact, US Agent is so right wing, that he often felt conflicted while fighting foes like the Watchdogs because he felt sympathetic to their cause. Captain America on the other hand has come to promote patriotism that is concerned with protecting civil freedoms and correcting social injustices. Patriotism during the Regan years began to be more and more associated with right wing conservatism. In an article about the 1988 election, Amy Fried and Mary Dietz argued that Ronald Regan’s predecessor, George Bush, had primarily won the election due to his association with patriotic symbols. For instance, one citizen stated “I like Bush’s attitude. It’s the patriotism thing, the flag—you know, the Pledge of Allegiance and all that. I’m not sure he’ll be able to do much about the deficit, which worries me a lot, but he’s patriotic, so I’m sure

44 Mark Gruenwald, Captain America 312 (December 1985).
45 Mark Gruenwald, Captain America 333-335 (September-November, 1987).
46 Mark Gruenwald, Captain America 351 (March, 1989)
that he’ll try”.48 Captain America had veered away from such expressions of trust in the government in the 1960s and 70s. This type of patriotism has alienated many, especially those of a more liberal political view. Patriotism to a large extent has been co-opted by the Republican Party, which has only become truer in recent years. In a 2005 poll, thirty-five percent of Republicans and twenty-three percent of Democrats ranked themselves as “extremely patriotic”. Just five years later in 2010 fifty-two percent of Republicans ranked themselves as “extremely patriotic” as compared to only twenty percent of Democrats. What is even more telling is that only 22 percent of moderates ranked themselves as “extremely patriotic”.49 Patriotism is becoming more and more synonymous with conservative values and as politics continue to become more and more divisive, expressions of patriotism reinforce those political cleavages.

Post 9/11 Patriotism

In 2001, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks the United States Congress passed the USA Patriot Act. This law became one of the most controversial laws in US history. The act drastically reduced restrictions for government agencies, such as the Central Intelligence Agency, to search telephone, emails, medical and other personal records in order to assist law enforcement agencies in opposing terrorist or any person deemed a threat against national security. Many have called the Patriot Act unconstitutional and a breach of privacy. The comic book world of Captain America encountered a similar situation when the Superhuman Registration Act was passed by the United States Congress.50 Congress passed the act after several people died when a bomb exploded in New York City during a conflict between several superhumans. This act required all superhumans (basically anyone with extraordinary powers) to register with the government and make their identity and their powers known publicly. This unpopular law forced all of those who had super powers to reveal their identity, many of which who wished to remain unknown and live normal lives. The passing of the Superhuman Registration Act split the super hero community into two factions: those supporting the law and those who did not.51 Captain America did not

48 Sullivan, Fried, and Dietz, 200.
51 Dougall and March, 62.
support the law and publically opposed the law. This put him into direct conflict not only with the United States government, but with some of his former friends and allies, such as Iron Man, who did support the law.

The analogies between the Superhuman Registration Act and the Patriot Act abound. Both sought to greatly increase the Federal Government's power. Both were passed directly after a crisis and both arguably infringed the privacy of US citizens. What probably surprised readers most was that Captain America, instead of supporting the law, chose to openly rebel against it. This was not simply voicing his opposition, but included resisting arrest, physical opposition to law enforcement agents, and leading an anti-registration faction. This went above and beyond any type of opposition that Captain America had shown to the government before, but he believed the Act that was an indication of the erosion of civil liberties of the superhero community.

Ultimately, Captain America surrendered because he realized that he had endangered the very people he had sworn to protect. The image of Captain America, dressed in red, white and blue, handcuffed and arrested provides a stirring analogy of how the United States traded security for freedom. Americans have replaced civil liberties, human dignity, and justice with the Patriot Act, full body scanners at airports, and a war-prison at Guantanamo Bay. A few issues later, while on his way in handcuffs to be tried in court, Captain America was assassinated by one of his enemies, Crossbones, under the orders of the Red Skull, a shocking end to one of America's most patriotic symbols. With his death, Captain America sent the message that it is the patriotic duty of all Americans, no matter the personal sacrifice, to stand against legislation that takes away constitutional rights.

52 Mark Millar, *Civil War* 7 (January, 2007).
Conclusion

Something that those who read comic books understand is that superheroes rarely stay dead for long. Captain America’s readers believed him to be deceased for most of 2007-2009, but by July of 2009, Marvel revealed that Captain America had returned from the dead.\textsuperscript{54} Patriotism too, will continue to survive and Captain America will continue to define and reflect patriotism much as he has done through much of the twentieth and now into the twenty-first centuries. Patriotism has proven to be just as resilient as Captain America. Every time something happens that would seem to destroy patriotism in America, patriotism rises again to help to bind together the American people. While there may be many different brands of patriotism, its principle definition as a love for one’s country brings hope that the American people can continue to remain united and face the challenges of the twenty-first century together.

\textsuperscript{54} Ed Brubaker, \textit{Captain America: Reborn} 1 (July 2009).
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