

Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

Fakulta filozofická

Bakalářská práce

**Popular culture and conflicts:
American comic books and the portrayal of the 1945-
1990 era**

Ivana Täuberová

Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

Fakulta filozofická

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

Studijní program Filologie

Studijní obor Cizí jazyky pro komerční praxi

Kombinace angličtina – němčina

Bakalářská práce

**Popular culture and conflicts:
American comic books and the portrayal of the 1945-
1990 era**

Ivana Täuberová

Vedoucí práce:

Mgr. Tomáš Hostýnek

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni

Plzeň 2019

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

Plzeň, duben 2019

.....

Täuberová Ivana

Poděkování:

Děkuji Mgr. Tomáši Hostýnkovi za odborné vedení, poskytování rad a materiálních podkladů.

Plzeň, duben 2019

.....

Täuberová Ivana

Content

1	Introduction	7
2	Definition of the term popular culture	9
2.1	Definition of culture.....	9
2.2	Definition of popular.....	9
2.3	Popular culture.....	9
3	The beginning of the comic industry	10
3.1	The first display of comics	10
3.2	The first comic strips in history.....	10
3.3	Modern day comics.....	11
3.4	Timely Comics and the jewish reference	12
3.5	Comic book superheroes	12
4	Comics in years 1945 – 1960	13
4.1	The situation in America in years 1945 – 1960.....	13
4.2	Superheroes and the post-war era.....	14
4.2.1	The influence of nuclear weapons	14
4.2.2	Patriotism of superheroes.....	15
4.2.3	Decrease of sale and new genre.....	15
4.2.4	Superheroes of 1950s.....	16
4.2.5	Superman in the fifties	17
4.2.6	Comics Code Authority	18
5	Comics in years 1960 – 1975	20
5.1	The situation in America in years 1960 – 1975.....	20
5.2	The rise of Marvel Comics.....	22
5.2.1	The power of nuclear energy.....	22
5.2.2	Stan Lee and the first Marvel team of superheroes.....	22

5.2.3	Nick Fury and the World War II commemoration	23
5.2.4	Marvel and the Cold War	23
5.2.5	The return of Captain America	25
5.2.6	Marvel and the American society in the 1960s	26
5.3	The changes of the early 1970s	28
5.3.1	The new direction for Superman	28
5.3.2	The tension between DC Comics and Marvel	29
5.3.3	Saying no to the Comics Code	29
5.3.4	Captain America and the feminist movement	30
5.3.5	Captain America of the 1970s	30
6	Comics in years 1975 – 1990	31
6.1	The situation in America in years 1975 – 1990	31
6.1.1	The liberal message of the mid-decade superheroes	33
6.1.2	The return of superheroes to nationalism	33
6.1.3	The new style of the new creators	34
6.1.4	Captain America as the ideal consumer	34
6.1.5	Watchmen and the nuclear war	35
7	Conclusion	37
8	Resümee	39
9	Abstrakt	41
10	Bibliography	42

1 Introduction

The Bachelor's thesis deals with popular culture and conflicts of the 1945-1990 era. The concrete branch of popular culture that was chosen for this Bachelor's thesis are American comic books. Its objective is to inform readers about comics and popular culture in general, show that comic books are much more than a way of art and literature and draw reader's attention to the fact that popular culture and history are connected. The topic was selected with respect to its relevance for the importance of the comic books and its influence on society today.

In terms of structure the Bachelor's thesis is divided into five main chapters. Every chapter has its own subheads with the analyse of concrete topics related to the concrete chapter. The first part of the thesis is written more generally and the second half of the thesis is oriented on already mentioned era of the 1945-1990 and specified topics related to comic books. The first chapter deals with the term popular culture and its definition. Before understanding the term popular culture, the thesis explains the words culture and popular separately. In the second chapter I describe the beginning of the comic industry. I pay attention to first displays of comics across the history but also to first modern day comic books, first comic superheroes and how does comic book industry look today.

Next three chapters deal with the display of conflicts of the 1945-1990 era in pop culture. Every chapter is focused on a concrete time period of fifteen years. The main comic book characters analysed in the Bachelor's thesis are Captain America, Superman and Watchmen. These superheroes are significant for the comic book industry and are connected to conflicts of analysed time era. The superheroes Captain America and Superman are analyzed the most, since they are the most influential superheroes and the most connected characters to United States and its history. Besides that I will mention other important characters and comic books that were significant in concrete fifteen-year period.

The subheads of each chapter contain the brief mention of important historical events of concrete years that contributed to the pop culture and to the forming of American society. The overview of main historical events which influenced the American society is important for the reader to understand the following issues of the

comic book stories. After the brief history overview follow individual manifestations of conflicts in comic books. I occasionally mention other areas of pop culture which were affected in concrete time period. The following subheads in each chapter are dedicated for concrete events that influenced comic book industry or concrete superheroes and comic books which took place in the certain time period. I focus on the comic books with the stories connected to American history events and the change of American society.

The conclusion is the last part of the thesis and introduces the reflection of the whole work. The main ideas of the thesis are summarized and I describe how pop culture and comic books influenced the worldviews of the people.

Regarding sources a significant number of the sources used for the Bachelor's thesis are printed or electronic book sources. The book that I worked the most with is *Super-history: Comic Book Superheroes and American Society, 1938 to the Present*. Other important book sources that I used for the thesis are *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, *Popular Culture, A Brief Guide to Superheroes: From Superman to the Avengers*, *the Evolution of Comic Book Legends* and *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History*. The rest of the books used for the research are listed in the Bibliography section.

The fundamental part of the research was reading of relevant comic books. The importance of the comic books that I read are on the same level hence I will mention only some. I worked with *Captain America* comics series or *Watchmen* by DC Comics. The stories of comic books are mentioned in related chapters with relevant time periods and the refernce is written in bibliography section.

The research was completed with information from various electronic articles. I worked with several online newspapers – for example www.history.com, www.nytimes.com, www.dccomics.com, www.the-artifice.com or www.avclub.com.

The thesis is descriptive and has been developed by the method of compilation of literature and its analysis. As the thesis is written in English I used english literature, comic books, dictionaries and electronic articles.

2 Definition of the term popular culture

2.1 Definition of culture

The word “culture” does not have one unified explanation. There is a large number of explanations of the word culture across the dictionaries and educational literature. Some of these explanations are focused on social behaviour, historic sights, religion, meals or art. The definition by Cambridge Dictionary is “*the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time*¹.”. As argued by Szeman and O’Brien the word culture can be considered as an antonym to the word nature (Szeman & O’Brien, 2017, pp 3).

2.2 Definition of popular

The meaning of the word “popular“ is more unitary than the definition of culture. As argued by Szeman & O’Brien in *Popular Culture*: “*the term is often used in a contemporary context to describe something that is liked by a lot of people* (2017, pp 4).”. The word comes from Latin words *populus* and *popularis*. The word *populus* is defined as “people“ in English and the word *popularis* is defined as “belonging to the people“.² Although the definition of what is popular is decided by people, it is not certain that all people like it. A big amount of museums in the world include exhibitions of popular culture in order to fill the galleries. This is an inconsistent fact. Artists and gallery owners assume that the art of popular culture is considered to be interesting and known by many people however, it is a question if the art of popular culture will be meaningful in a long term (Szeman & O’Brien, 2017, pp 4).

2.3 Popular culture

The conjuncture of the words popular and culture creates a generally known term popular culture. The most familiar use of the term popular culture as argued by Szeman & O’Brien in *Popular Culture* “*identifies it with the entertainment produced through and by commercial media (television, film, the music industry, etc.) that have economic and technological capacity to reach large, demographically diverse, and geographically dispersed audiences* (2017, p. 6).”. The scale of popularity is measured

¹ Cambridge Dictionary: 2019. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture>

² Vocabulary.com: 2019. Available at: <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/popular>

by consumption. The consumption is dependent on what people buy, listen to and watch (Szeman & O'Brien, 2017, pp 6).

Popular culture is often associated with mass culture or folk culture. The difference between mass and folk cultures is the way of development. Folk culture refers to practices that have developed in a specific community usually by oral communication whereas mass culture is dependent on the technology, economic production and it is targeted on an unknown audience (Kidd, 2017).³

3 The beginning of the comic industry

3.1 The first display of comics

As argued by Petty, opinions on dating of the first evidence of comics are different. Some of comics historians are convinced that the beginning of comics was in the sixteenth century. The reason of conviction are European broadsheets which used text and illustration together for the first time. The connection of illustration and text was created in order to understand the point of creators more clearly. European broadsheets are therefore considered as the ancient precursors of comic books. The first signs of the sequential art were also found in a pre-Columbian picture manuscript, which was discovered around 1519. (Petty, 2006, pp 2; Mccloud, 1994, pp 10).

Another example which is considered to be one of the first contributions to the comic book history are satirical magazines of the 1780s. Satirical magazines included so-called “dialogue balloons” which are according to The Free Dictionary⁴ defined as “*speech balloons*”. Dialogue balloons are essential for comic books which is the reason why historians focused right on satirical magazines (Petty, 2006, pp 2).

3.2 The first comic strips in history

Although there are many pieces of evidence of comics in the history, most of the comics historians agree that the comics started on May 5, 1895 in the pages of the New York World when The Kid From Hogan's Alley was published. The author of the single

³ Kidd: 2017. Available at: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0193.xml>

⁴ The Free Dictionary: 2019. Available at: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Dialogue+balloon>

panel humor cartoon was Richard F. Outcault. R. F. Outcault introduced The Yellow Kid which was the fictional character popular in first few decades of the twentieth Century. According to John Canemaker from The New York Times: “*Yellow Kid, which was published in the color Sunday funnies, led to the development of the comic strip* (Canemaker,1995).”⁵ Comics gained more readers in a short time period. Various newspapers published comic strips which were mostly humorous. The expansion brought many of popular characters like Happy Hooligan, Maggie & Jiggs, Mutt & Jeff or the Katzenjammer Kids. The genres of comic strips were expanded to other genres such as fantasy, represented by Winsor McCay. The most successful fantasy comic strip was considered Little Nemo in Slumberland (Petty, 2006, pp 2).

3.3 Modern day comics

Collectors of comic books agree on Funnies on Parade being the first comic book in history. The comic book was published in 1933 and it was mainly the collection of newspaper strip reprints. However, it is generally familiar that the comic book industry itself started in June 1938 with the first publication of Action Comics #1 (Petty, 2006, pp 3).

Action Comics first introduced The Man of Steel who is known as Superman. Although Superman was an overnight product of Jerome Siegel and Joe Shuster, it gained instant popularity and transformed comic book industry. The cover of Action Comics #1 pictures Superman as a man with red cape and blue suit lifting the car and destroying it by the rock. It also pictures three scared people running away. This picture is in fact a scene of saving Lois Lane from kidnapers from the first story introducing Superman. The original price of the print was 10 cents however, as argued by Robb it also “*was the first-ever comic book to sell for \$1 million, in 2010* (2014, pp 15).”. The publication of Action #1 is considered to be the beginning of the era of the years 1938 – 1949, the so-called “Golden Age” of comics (Robb, 2014, pp 45,46; Petty, 2006, pp 3).

The enormous success of Superman was not only due to Jerome Siegel and Joe Shuster, but it was also affected by the historical vein of America. A big amount of

⁵ Canemaker: 1995. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/17/books/the-kid-from-hogan-s-alley.html>

people came to America in order to live a better life and live “The American Dream”. Residents of America were mostly immigrants which supported the sympathy towards the character of Superman, the last man of the doomed planet Krypton – in fact an immigrant. Jerome Siegel and Joe Shuster, the founders of Superman, were European immigrants (Petty, 2006, pp 3).

3.4 Timely Comics and the jewish reference

The publishing comic book company Timely Comics, the antecedent of Marvel Comics, was founded in 1939 by Martin Goodman. As argued by Belman the first superhero published by the company Timely Comics was the Human Torch. In 1941 the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner was joined by the character of Captain America.⁶ Although there were no jewish signs in the first superheroes like the classic Superman, the character of Captain America published by Timely Comics showed certain jewish characters. It is important to say that the creators of Captain America were jews. The rival of Captain America is called Red Skull however, the important part is that the character is the Nazi agent (Kaplan, 2002).

Another sign of Captain America being a Jewish character is his alter ego Steve Rogers. According to Kaplan “*Steve Rogers could be seen as a symbol for the way Jews were stereotypically depicted as frail and passive.*”⁷ However, Steve Rogers took the serum which was created by the scientist called Professor Reinstein which is a clear reference to the physicist Albert Einstein who was Jew (Kaplan, 2002).

Although the era proved signs of anti-Semitism, the publishers in the comic book industry were mostly managed by the Jewish publishers. One of those publishers was Martin Goodman from Timely Comics and Harry Donenfeld from DC Comics (Kaplan, 2002).

3.5 Comic book superheroes

The first costumed superhero character The Phantom was created by Lee Falk. The Phantom appeared in newspaper comic strip in 1936. The character was notable with whitedout eyes without pupils which later became an significant feature for other

⁶ Belman. Available at: <http://allenbellman.com/timely-history/>

⁷ Kaplan: 2002. Available at: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-in-comic-books/>

superheroes including Batman, Green Lantern and Green Arrow.⁸ The success of Superman was the trigger to release of a large number of other superheroes. Superheroes that were introduced after the release of Superman were for instance Batman, Captain America, Wonder Woman, the Human Torch, Captain Marvel, the Sub-Mariner, Dr. Fate or the Spectre.

4 Comics in years 1945 – 1960

4.1 The situation in America in years 1945 – 1960

The time period of years 1945 – 1960 was prospering for United States of America. America experienced an economical growth. The demand for goods such as automobiles or electrical appliances was increasing. After the The Second World War one of the highest priority was marriage and family which also portrays in comic book industry (Reeves, 2000, pp 139).

The significant political tension between United States and the Soviet Union led to the Cold War. The Cold War had an substantial impact on comic book industry. The main disagreement was concerning the fact that the Soviet Union was concerned that the best political ideology is communism whereas United States were convicted about democracy and capitalism. The two ideolgies of great power countries could not exist at the same time. As argued by Reeves *“the two nations disagreed strongly about the future of postwar Europe. The United States expressed the desire to let Europeans choose their own leaders, hoping they would be allies. The Soviets were determined to control lands they had conquered, both to exploit their economic resources and to seal off avenues for future Western invasions (2000, pp 141).”*. The beginning of the Cold War is considered with the speech of Winston Churchill in Fulton on March 5, 1946 saying *“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatian iron curtain has descended across the European Continent (Reeves, 2000, pp 142).”*

Harry Truman, the president of the United States, annunciated on March 12, 1947 the doctrine dealing with post-war finacial support for Greece and Turkey. *“Truman requested \$400 million from Congress and declared. what became known as*

⁸ Guinness World Records: 2019. Available at:
<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/products/books/superlatives/superhero-timeline>

the Truman Doctrine (Reeves, 2000, pp 142).”. The year after, in 1948, arose the plan for the European recovery called The Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan also helped in the political objectives of the United States in Western Europe. Italy and France did not include communist party in government.

In April 1949 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed in order to be protected of a possible Soviet Union attack. The NATO agreement was signed on April 4, 1949 by ten European countries, United States of America and Canada. The supreme commander of NATO became General Eisenhower and was named by the president Harry Truman (Reeves, 2000, pp 143).

The significant event of 1950s was the civil rights movement. The goal of the movement was to acquire equality and justice between human races and fight against racial discrimination. The first impulse of the movement was the rejection of the activist Rosa Parks. She rejected giving the seat in a bus to a white person which resulted in protests of African Americans in city buses.⁹ Although there were significant disagreements in the era of 1945 – 1960, the time period brought mainly prosperity and more stability to United States of America.

4.2 Superheroes and the post-war era

In the post-war era, there were two main problems related to comic books industry. The amount of readers was declining and the industry was enquired by The Government. One of the main problems of post-war era and publishing was the progressing censorship. Censorship influenced not only comic books but also other forms of prints. The publishers of comic books were involved in the conflict with the Government due to exploring new concepts. Comic book stories became neutral and inoffensive (Johnson, 2012, pp 42; Lopes, 2009, pp 10).

4.2.1 The influence of nuclear weapons

As argued by Johnson, the American society was substantially changed after the United States of America dropped bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and August 9, 1945. After discovering the power of nuclear weapons, comic book superheroes did not seem to be that powerful. There are several examples of the use of

⁹ history.com editors: 2010. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/1950s>

nuclear weapons in comic books. The unauthorised Superman comic book story from 1944 included scenes of villain Lex Luthor building an atomic bomb. The story should have been published in 1944 thorough The Department of Defenced asked Detective Comics not to publish it. The comics was published in 1946, a year after dropping the bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Another example of the use of nuclear weapon in comic book was Action Comics #101 published in 1946. The main character is Superman who covers an atomic bomb test. The cover of Action Comics #101 displays the explosion of an atomic bomb and Superman flying in the air and filming it. The comic book was declined by the Government since it could have caused losing fear of nuclear weapons by people (Johnson, 2012, pp 50).

4.2.2 Patriotism of superheroes

During the Second World War there was a significant growth of sale of comic books. As argued by Robb “*Seventy million Americans – almost half the population – read comics, according to the Market Research Company of America. In the first quarter of 1946* (Robb, 2104, pp 128).”. However, the first complaints about comic books came from parents, librarians or teachers who were concerned about young children reading comic books and seeing superheroes as their idols. Superman became the display of patriotism due to his background story. The character was born on another planet and was transported to United States of America to make the country a better place. Understanding the origin of Superman, people saw him as an immigrant.¹⁰ During the time of The Second World War the patriotism displayed by superheroes such as Superman or Captain America was considered ideal account of people understanding the war however, the politics of The Cold War made the patriotism look simple. As the situation after the Second World war in America had changed, the comic book industry had to change the content of the storylines (Robb, 2014, pp 128; Lopes, 2009, pp 27; Burlingame, 2014).

4.2.3 Decrease of sale and new genre

By the year 1947 comic book industry had gone through a massive decrease of sale. The demand for best-selling Superheroes in the time period such as Captain America or Superman descended. A big number of heroes were completely withdrawn

¹⁰ Burlingame: 2014. Available at: <https://comicbook.com/blog/2014/07/04/who-is-the-most-patriotic-superhero/>

from sale. The reason behind that was that Superheroes were no longer needed. The Second World War has ended and after fighting Adolf Hitler, heroes did not have any bigger enemy to fight. The most accurate quotation displaying the attitude of United States of America towards comic book superheroes was written by Johnson “*During the war, the United States had become Superman, and in late 1945 the nation needed to change back to Clark Kent* (2012, pp 49).”(Robb, 2014, pp 129; Johnson, 2012, pp 49).

In the 1950s the comics industry included Warner Bros cartoons and animal characters from Walt Disney. The characters created by Walt Disney and Warner Bros were more popular in 1950s than superheroes. One of other trends in popular culture were horror comics and movies. Horror movies did not become popular in the era of The Second World War since people knew there were more realistic enemies to fight however, in 1950s horror became one of the most popular genres on all platforms (Robb, 2014, pp 129).

4.2.4 Superheroes of 1950s

Some of 1950s superheroes were displayed in comic books with storylines connected to the Cold War. The significant distinction was that superheroes fought on both sides of the war. Marvel Comics, by then Atlas Comics, introduced Captain America whose monthly comic book had to be cancelled in 1950 due to a decrease of sales. However, in 1954 the character of Captain America was resumed and called by the nickname “Commie Smasher”. The character was displayed on covers as a superhero fighting communists. The cover of the comic book Captain America #77 shows the character fighting the ship of communists and the cover Captain America #78 displays him fighting a character from Soviet Union who has nuclear powers. However, Captain America was after three more comic books cancelled due to low sales (Johnson, 2012, pp 56).

While Marvel Comics was not successful with Captain Marvel fighting in Cold War, Detective Comics published comic books which were not directly oriented on fighting villains of the Cold War. DC superheroes were focused on living according to American society. Superman and Batman were no longer dealing with enemies, they had their job, family or pets and lived ordinary lives just like American society did. Although DC Comics's superheroes did not fight villains of the Cold War directly, they

showed a significant amount of American superiority which some would consider as an indirect war (Johnson, 2012, pp 57).

As argued by Johnson, the typical comic book superhero of 1950s fought for law and was very respectful to American society. That is why Detective Comics created new versions of old superheroes which were not rebellious. New versions of old superheroes frequently displayed the superiority of American life. In 1956, superhero The Flash was updated by the editor Julius Schwartz. Identity of The Flash in common life was Barry Allen who worked as the police scientist fighting for law and order, identically as the new version of Green Lantern who became a member of intergalactic police force. *“The dying alien police officer chose an American to become Green Lantern because he was the most qualified candidate. No other nation could have produced someone so exceptional (Johnson, 2012, pp 57).”* By choosing an American to become the character of Green Lantern, showed the American superiority to the readers (2012, pp 57).

4.2.5 Superman in the fifties

After the decrease of sale in the first half of 1950s, in the second half of the fifties Superman was rediscovered again by new readers. Readers could discover new information about the origin of Superman in ten page story “The Origin of Superman” in comic book Superman #53 written by Bill Finger. In 1951 the radio series The Adventures of Superman had ended. In the series which were broadcasted on the radio occurred for instance Batman and Robin. Indeed the radio was not the only platform where Superman appeared. The comic book superhero had its own movies - Superman filmed in 1948 and Atom Man vs Superman from 1950. In 1952 the television started to broadcast series called Adventures of Superman. As Superman started to be famous in television and radio, he was reinvented in comic books. With the reclaim of fame in comics Superman was not the only creature with super powers. As argued by Robb *“There were other additions to the Superman family in the Fifties. Following the Jimmy Olsen book there was Krypto the Superdog (from 1955), and Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane (from 1958), as well as additions to the main books, such as Supergirl (from 1959). Superman’s dog was introduced as a test subject for Jor-El’s rocket to Earth,*

with the rocket knocked off course and arriving on Earth long after Superman. (Robb, 2014, pp 140).”

There were several attempts of “superwomen” – the female version of Superman. In Thrilling Comics #2 appeared the Woman in Red which was created by Richard E. Hughes and George Mandel. The decade was significant for Superman since he gained new villains. The most significant one was Brainiac with the nickname Collector of Worlds. The intelligent villain bottles up whole cities and seems to be very smart. *“He seeks the superiority that comes with knowledge (DC Entertainment,2018)”*¹¹. On the other hand Brainiac reminds people around the world how dangerous can Superman as an alien be. This is a considerable turnover since the time Superman was liked because of being an alien. 1950s were significant for Superman's return as well as brought various characters which influenced stories of Superman and allies (Robb, 2014, pp 140, 141).

4.2.6 Comics Code Authority

The Comics Code Authority, also known as "the Comics Code", was a part of restrictions formed by Government founded in year 1954. Comic book industry had to follow certain rules and guidelines in order to publish a comic book with an acceptable content. Comics Code Authority stems from the anger of people which caused the increase of sales of horror comic books. Parents, teachers and educators were afraid of the content offered by comic books. People were convicted that comic books were immoral since the violence, nudity and anger was shown (The Artifice, 2017).

However, parents and educators were not the only people being afraid of comic book content. The fear was powered by mental health experts trying to ban the distribution of comic books completely. Dr Fredric Wertham, a German-American author and psychiatrist, wrote a book with the title Seduction of the Innocent. The book was published in 1954 and describes how comic books affect young children in a negative way. The situation has resulted in investigation of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in spring 1954. A significant amount of people from the comic book industry were summoned to tell the details from the industry they worked in (The Artifice, 2017).

¹¹ DC Comics. Available at: <https://www.dccomics.com/characters/brainiac>

Several workers from comic book industry testified to explain the meaning of certain comic books. William Gaines, the publisher of EC Comics., was one of the witnesses testifying. During the testimony William Gaines was challenged to explain the meaning of the cover of one of Crime Suspensories comic book. On the cover there was an ax covered in blood and a head separated from the body which was held by an unknown man. The answer of Gaines was that the cover was in “good taste.” Which led to a closure of the company EC Comics. The closure inspired remaining publishers to cooperate and form the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA), an association which summarized the rules of the content that was allowed to be published in comic books (The Artifice, 2017).¹²

Comics Code banned variety of restricted topics in comic books. As argued by Robb restricted was “*the depiction of violence and gore, especially in (but not limited to) crime and horror comics. Sexual content was also outlawed, even mild forms of sexual innuendo, as were depictions of drug usage. Disrespect for authority – whether in the form of a policeman, judge, government official or respected institutions – was prohibited, while a requirement that ‘good should triumph over evil’ was enforced* (2014, pp 135).”. Under the ban were also lurid or gruesome illustrations and the titles could not include words “horror” or “terror”. According to Comic Book Legal Defense Fund the code for editorial part is divided into three parts – A, B and C. Here is an example of code rules for editorial matter eligible for the thesis.

- Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.
- Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.
- All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.
- Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities. NOTE.—It should be recognized that all prohibitions dealing

¹² The Artifice: 2017. Available at: <https://the-artifice.com/comics-code-authority/>

with costume, dialog, or artwork applies as specifically to the cover of a comic magazine as they do to the contents.¹³

Employees of the comic book industry were not comfortable with the Comics Code Authority. Stan Lee, comic book writer, published a story in Spider-Man without the permission of the CCA. The story included the character Harry Osborn, the friend of Peter Parker who was dealing with drug addiction. The publishing of the story was considered as a defiance however, there was an upturn of comic books which were published through the direct market distribution. Comic books that had been published through the direct market distribution were called Underground comics (The Artifice, 2017).¹⁴

5 Comics in years 1960 – 1975

5.1 The situation in America in years 1960 – 1975

In January, 1961 John Fitzgerald Kennedy became the new president of the United States of America. American citizens were impressed by the new president 's speeches and overall appearance of the White House family. For many people the new president represented a new hope for the state since as argued by Reeves, Kennedy promised to “*get America moving again* (Reeves, 2000, pp 171).”. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy showed considerable resistance to communism, which appeared to be dangerous. The first check of presidential powers as a military leader was the Bay of Pigs Invasion. However, the invasion was unsuccessful (Reeves, 2000, pp 171).

The society affecting event which happened on November 22, 1963 was the assassination of J. F. Kennedy. The event changed society, especially young people, who lost their hope with the lost of their president (Watson, 2011).¹⁵ The presidential elections won in 1964 Lyndon Johnson. As argued by Reeves, “*Johnson was a Cold Warrior. He was firmly anticommunist and believed in the containment policy and the domino theory* (Reeves, 2000, pp 182).”.

¹³ Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. Available at: <http://cbldef.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/>

¹⁴ The Artifice: 2017. Available at: <https://the-artifice.com/comics-code-authority/>

¹⁵ Watson: 2011. Available at: <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/american-history-the-1960s-10-years-that-changed-a-nation-134041543/114624.html>

Another historical event that affected American society was the Vietnam War. Since the Vietnam War seemed to be endless and non-winnable, citizens of America started to protest against it. The biggest amount of protest began in the spring 1965 (Reeves, 2000). Vietnam War was also portrayed in pop culture. The comics dealing with Vietnam was published in Marvel Comics with the title *The Nam*. The authors of the comics series are Vietnam War veterans Doug Murray and Larry Hama. *The Nam* mixes the past with the recent political ideologies (Schlund-Vials, 2017).¹⁶ As argued by Johnson the lasting threat by war led to the peace movement. War was no longer a tabu and was projected to residents of the United States clearly – “*television soon broadcasted the Vietnam War into millions of American living rooms nightly* (Johnson, 2012, pp 59).”.

Although American society was still a feared of nuclear war, it was not the only trigger to the ambition of the new American society. The Vietnam War was not the only event that shaped ambitions of the baby boomers, young people born in the era of economic prosperity in America after the World War II. It was also the assassination of role models such as John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. Along with the rock and roll and other influences of the pop culture, baby boomers became the influencers of the 1960s (Johnson, 2012, pp 59).

The society of the 1960s began as a conservative and stable however, at the end of the 1960s ended more liberal oriented. “*The 1960s’ last year featured massive anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, the Stonewall Riots protesting the mistreatment of gay citizens, and increased violence between police officers and student protestors across the country* (Johnson, 2012, pp 102).”.

The beginning of the 1970s began with the tragedy of the Kent State shooting, where four student were killed during the protest against Vietnam War (History.com editors, 2017).¹⁷ Another world-altering event which happened in 1972 was Watergate. The squad of people led by Richard Nixon broke into the offices of democratic party and looked for the confidential documents of the party. The event caused the

¹⁶ Schlund-Vials: 2017. Available at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-comics-captured-americas-opinions-about-vietnam-war-180964964/>

¹⁷ History.com editors: 2017. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/kent-state-shooting>

uncertainty of American society and questioning of their leaders (Reeves, 2000, pp 208).

5.2 The rise of Marvel Comics

The decade of 1960s was prosperous for the Marvel Comics. Although Marvel had its beginning in the 1930s, by launching Marvel Comics #1, the demand was not as high as for the comic books by Detective Comics. However, Marvel Comics superheroes were considered to be more realistic than DC superheroes which led to Marvel Comic becoming equable competitor to Detective Comics. The generation of the baby boomers did not need superheroes of the 1940s, like Superman and Batman, which protected their parents from the influence of war. Baby boomers were interested in new, more realistic superheroes. This new type of superhero was offered by Marvel Comics. Unlike the DC superheroes, Marvel superheroes were facing real life problems and the happy ending was very rare (Johnson, 2012, pp 59,60).

5.2.1 The power of nuclear energy

The new Marvel superheroes had one feature in common. Unlike DC superheroes who were usually aliens, Marvel heroes gained their powers through a nuclear accident. As argued by Jeffrey K. Johnson the nuclear energy was a part of American society. Comic book industry used the power of a nuclear energy as a way to give the superpowers to their heroes. Superheroes who gained their superpowers via the nuclear accidents are for instance the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Daredevil, and the Incredible Hulk (Johnson, 2012, pp 60).

5.2.2 Stan Lee and the first Marvel team of superheroes

The early characters of Marvel Comics were principally creations of the writer Stan Lee and artists like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. Stanley Martin Lieber started to name himself Stan Lee after publishing Captain America #3 in May 1941 and later used it as his legal name. Inspired by the success of the Justice League of America, the team of superheroes formed by Detective Comics, Stan Lee formed the Fantastic Four. According to Robb the heroes of the Fantastic Four “*would be super-powered, they’d also be real, relatable people, unlike powerful figures such as Superman* (Robb, 2014, pp 162).”. Stan Lee wanted to avoid the unobtainable perfection of superheroes of Golden Age, since he wanted to implement more realness (Robb, 2014, pp 160). As

argued by Johnson, The Fantastic Four was transformed from a normal family to a family affected by nuclear powers, which was similar to a common American family living in the nuclear era (Johnson 2012, pp 59,60; Robb, 2014, pp 160,162).

The Marvel superheroes did not hide their superpowers which was another difference from Detective Comics Superheroes like Superman. The characters did not hide in their homes but enjoyed their fame (Robb, 2014, pp 165).

5.2.3 Nick Fury and the World War II commemoration

During the 1960s originated also the comic books which commemorated the World War II. The team of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby published a comic book Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos which summed up the memories of the war. The character of Nick Fury was used as a commemoration mean for readers. As argued by Pustz “*Comic books often have black and white narratives pitting heroes against villains. These narratives, combined with the melodramatic stories, unapologetic patriotic symbolism, and an intended audience of boys and young men, make comic books an excellent venue for conveying public memory* (2012, pp 184).”. In the comic book Sgt. Fury #1 published in May 1963 is shown the character of Adolf Hitler executing anyone who does not obey as he wants (Pustz, 2012, pp 184,185).

The momentous aspect related to commemoration of World War II is the relationship between the characters Nick Fury and Captain America. The characters represented the exceptionalism of United States of America however, each of them represented the uniqueness of the nation differently. Although the character of Nick Fury symbolized individualism, Captain America was a great example of patriotism and nationalism favouring the collective. The example of this ideology can be seen for instance in the uniform of Captain America inspired by the American flag (Pustz, 2012, pp 185).

5.2.4 Marvel and the Cold War

The atomic threat of the Cold War was still bigger with the upcoming Cuban Missile crisis. The Marvel superheroes were inspired by the threat and created their new superheroes as the normal people often working as scientists. The scientists were working with the nuclear power which usually went out of control and transformed

them into a new superhero with superpowers. The threat was used as a source of the superpowers unlike the pre-war era where the source was an unknown super serum (Robb, 2014, pp 170,171).

The significant character which was created by Stan Lee during the Cold War time period is the Incredible Hulk. The Incredible Hulk was not only inspired by the Cold War, but also by Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and the Jewish legend of the Golem. The obvious reference to the atomic threat can be seen in *The Incredible Hulk #1*, published in May 1962 (Robb, 2014, pp 171).

The story is about Dr Bruce Banner who works for the US military and is going to test the gamma bomb. The test is disturbed by a teenager who is near the bomb and Banner decides to save him. The story includes the betrayal of his assistant, Igor, who appears to be a spy from the Soviet Union. Igor decides not to stop the countdown of the explosion so the United States of America will lose their best nuclear physicist. However, Banner survives and becomes the incredible Hulk (Lee, 1962).

The Incredible Hulk was not the only superhero who gained his superpowers through the nuclear power. In 1964 the new superhero Daredevil who was blinded by the radioactive substance was introduced by Marvel Comics. However, Daredevil served as an evidence that the nuclear power was both dangerous and fruitful. Although the radioactive substance took away one of his senses, it gave him a new ability and a completely new identity. This was connected to the main question of the society during the Nuclear Age in United States of America – Is the nuclear power something to be proud of or something to be scared of? The comic books published by Marvel showed many different points of views and feelings about the Nuclear Age, so that the different readers had something to identify with (Johnson, 2012, pp 62). Johnson makes a case “*the Fantastic Four and the Incredible Hulk served as a warning against nuclear Power's destructive presence in American society and Daredevil presented atomic energy's role as both positive and negative, they did by addressing society as a whole* (Johnson, 2012, pp 62).”.

The reference of the Nuclear Age can be found in comic book *Amazing Fantasy #15*, the first comic book story about the origin of Spider- Man published in 1962.

Spider-Man was the first teenage comic book character in the new Marvel style. The character of Peter Parker was bitten by a radioactive spider, which resulted in Peter Parker gaining superpowers. Spider-Man became a hero not only due to his superpowers but also because of fighting the crime. The tragic murder of his uncle forced him to use his superpowers for good of the society. In his book, Johnson deals with the sentence which was said by the character of Peter's uncle "*with great power there must also come great responsibility* (Lee, 1962).". This sentence refers to the character of Peter Parker, who had superpowers, however, there was a big responsibility related to it. He often suffered in his private life. Johnson compares the Peter Parker to American society: "*the U.S. was not using nuclear power for selfish purposes, but rather was altruistically attempting to save the world* (Johnson, 2012, pp 63).".

5.2.5 The return of Captain America

According to Stevens while working on Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby had an idea to create the character of Captain America in the modern Marvel Universe. However, the creators were not persuaded that the character with its origin from the 1940s would be successful in the 1960s. In the result of uncertainty, they made a decision of letting the readers decide themselves. The character of Human Torch meets in Strange Tales number 114 the villain who first appears to be the Captain America, however he finds out that it is his enemy – the Acrobat. At the end of the story, Stan Lee wrote a message to the reader: "*You guessed it! This story was really a test! To see if you too would like Captain America to return! As usual, your letters will give us the answer!* (Lee & Kirby, 1963)". The response was positive and therefore the Captain America was reinvented in in The Avengers number 4. The storyline tells that Captain America had been frozen for years and now has been liberated from the ice. As the character comes from a different decade, Captain America is considered to be very wise and advice giving man (Stevens, 2015, pp 82,83,84).

In the 1960s the idealistic rhetoric of Captain America during battles became symbolic to this character. The villains that he fought against were usually the Nazis. As an example in The Avengers volume 1, number 15, Captain America uses his ideological points and during the battle he says "*There's one weapon we're armed with which he can never possess! A thing called - Justice!* (Lee & Heck, 1965)".

As argued by Stevens Captain America primarily occurred in The Avengers comic books however, the character also appeared alongside the character of Iron Man in Tales of Suspense volume 1. In 1968 the Tales of Suspense series were renamed to Captain America and the series gave writers the opportunity to develop the character of Captain America. The views and personality changes of Captain America could be seen in his solo adventure stories, one of them concerned the dispute in Vietnam. In Tales of Suspense volume 1, number 61, Captain America is sent on a mission to Vietnam where he meets Communist enemies who show him verbally the inferiority to Americans (2015, pp 86):

Cap: Is the Communist Fighting Man so weak, so unsure of himself that he fears one lone American?? Is THIS the much-vaunted power of the Viet Cong??

Viet Cong strongman #1: He has the temerity to mock us! Let us attack him together!

Viet Cong strongman #2: Ah So! It matters not HOW we win, so long as we crush the jeering American! (Lee & Kirby, 1965, pp 2,3)

Whereas the readers were not satisfied with labeling Communists as villains, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby had to change the narrative and moved the story from the focus on the Cold War. The writers changed Captain America into a wiser character who does not want any other character to be killed unnecessarily. The attitude towards the violence had been significantly changed. The example can be seen in the new Tales of Suspense version, where Captain America warns the Nazi assassin of electrocuting by an electrical omniverter even if the Nazi assassin is disrespecting democracy and shouting that the Third Reich should live forever (Stevens, 2015, pp 87).

5.2.6 Marvel and the American society in the 1960s

American society did not first embrace many of the cultural ideas. The same was in Marvel company, which introduced new social and cultural elements in the comic book industry. The significant step in comic book history was taken in 1965 when Marvel started to feature black characters in the background which culminated in the introduction of the first black superhero character in Fantastic Four #52. Although Marvel started to react to the changes in American society and culture by adding the first black characters, in the early and mid 1960s the studio still published conventional

stories. Marvel had mostly published the conservative stories, which supported the American exceptionalism, right of the state and paradoxically were against any social changes. The more liberal side of the studio that celebrated the changes in the society started to publish the stories with mentioned content in the late 1960s (Johnson, 2012, pp 98).

The state of the American culture and society influenced the personalities of the Marvel superhero characters. As argued by Johnson “*Marvel’s most popular hero, Spider-Man, continued to fight crime and express little social commentary. Captain America remained a symbol of American patriotism and honor*” and “*Iron Man was perhaps the most conservative of all the Marvel superheroes during the early and mid-1960s* (2012, pp 98).” The conservativeness of Iron Man rested in the traditional understanding of the problems in America while defeating Communist around the world however, there was a sign of liberalism in the mid 1960s when the character started to question the Vietnam conflict.

Marvel used elements of liberalism to appeal younger readers while still being mostly conservative. The studio published stories for the audience who believed in the status quo (Johnson, 2012, pp 99).

The differences in American society were also portrayed into publishing of DC Comics and Marvel. While Marvel was keeping up with the changes in society, created new superheroes that were attractive to younger readers, DC Comic remained more conservative and published comic books with traditional beliefs. As argued by Johnson “*The differences between these two comic book companies’ superheroes showcase American society’s tensions during the 1960s and, more importantly, help to display the growing generation gap that in part led to both chaos and change during this pivotal decade* (2012, pp 102).”

American society was also changed by significant human shifts like on July 20, 1969 when Neil Armstrong became the first human to step on the Moon. As the 1960s began more like the conservative era, with all the changes, comic books started to implement more liberal elements (Johnson, 2012, pp 101,102).

5.3 The changes of the early 1970s

As the 1970s had begun, the comic book industry started to publish darker and more angry content. The dramatic changes of the 1960s changed the American society and American citizens had to accommodate to the situation after dramatic changes from the 1960s. American society was in the middle of social and cultural controversy. The malaise and the lack of American confidence was often displayed in comic book stories which often resulted in superheroes dealing with intractable powers and problems which were impossible to deal with (Johnson, 2012, pp 123; Pustz, 2012, pp 138).

5.3.1 The new direction for Superman

With the beginning of the new decade, DC Comics tried to find the balance between the content being too revolutionary or too traditional. DC Comics thus implemented a few changes, most of them related to the character of Superman. One of the significant changes was that Mort Weisinger, best known for editing Superman since the 1950s, left the DC Comics. As Denny O’Neil and Neal Adams had become the new creators of Superman, they were asked by the new editor Julius Schwartz to transform the character into a “darker character” that would appeal to more modern readers. The core of the character was kept – Superman was still very oriented of the traditional values of the society – however, the creators modernized him (Johnson, 2012, pp 104). According to Pustz, “*Superman comes to a realization that being less powerful is a good thing, in part because it will give him more challenges and hence more sense of accomplishment, but mostly because it will prevent any sort of abuse of power* (2012, pp 148).”.

The cover of the comic book Superman #233 published in 1971 pictures the character stronger, getting out of chains of Kryptonite, while one of the titles says: “Kryptonite Nevermore!”. The content of the story describes the continuous depriving of powers, which gave the room for the creators to create new story ideas and make the character of Superman more relatable. However, this changed when Julius Schwartz found out that the number of sales is decreasing and in order to make a bigger income, Superman gained his powers back again. It seemed that American society preferred the more traditional side of the character (Johnson, 2012, pp 105).

5.3.2 The tension between DC Comics and Marvel

Johnson makes a point in his book that “*The third change that symbolized the start of a new era marked the breakup of an influential Silver Age team and the movement of a comic book great to a new superhero universe* (Johnson, 2012, pp 106).” The artist Carmine Infantino started to work in DC Comics as an editor-in-chief and he was interested in gaining new readers especially by stealing them from Marvel. His main focus was Jack Kirby, who worked in Marvel since its beginnings. Infantino persuaded Jack Kirby to quit his job in Marvel and start to work as and writer and artist in DC Comics. Johnson says in his book that Kirby was not satisfied in Marvel because his co-worker Stan Lee often took credit for a bigger part of their work. In July, 1970 the advertisement of the coming of Jack Kirby was placed in the DC comic book, which signaled the definite end of the Silver Age. However, after five years of working for DC Comics, in 1975, Kirby returned to Marvel. DC Comics was struggling to make the new image of their universe and how to incorporate both conservative and liberal elements just as the American society (Johnson, 2012, pp 106,107).

5.3.3 Saying no to the Comics Code

With the beginning of the 1970s and the continuous dealing of Marvel with cultural and social problems, the medias like New York Times Magazine named comic book no longer appropriate only for children. However, the Comics Code Authority was still restricting the content of comic books. Although the Comics Code has become almost comical for readers, it still had the powers to ban comic books with appropriate content. It was not only the readers who thought that Comics Code was becoming something archaic, the attitude of teachers and librarians has also changed with the change of American society. There were some readers who supported the authority, however Comics Code had to face the challenge by the government (Johnson, 2012, pp 106,107; Lopes, 2009, pp 165).

The power of Marvel influencing young readers was noticed by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. With the spread of drug use, the department asked Marvel in 1970 to publish the comic book that would discourage young readers from drug use. Marvel published the story Green Goblin Reborn! which was not approved by the Comics Code. Although the authority had to liberalize the rules

of publishing, the core of it still remained conservative. DC Comics soon saw an inspiration in Marvel and published the story where Green Arrow's sidekick Speedy starts to use drugs and becomes addicted to it. Nevertheless it was hard for Comic Code to define the new rules while American society was still changing and how long would the changes last (Johnson, 2012, pp 110,111).

5.3.4 Captain America and the feminist movement

The feminist movement was displayed in several comic books with Captain America of the 1970s. Captain America had a relationship with Sharon Carter, the Agent 13 of S.H.I.E.L.D. however, the gender of the writers of Marvel comic books was male which reflects in the relationship of the characters. Captain America and Sharon often fought about the fact that one of them will have to quit the job in order to maintain their relationship. The character of Sharon Carter embodies the feminist movement herself – she works for the most important military agency in the world. Nevertheless Captain America still often disparage her gender. The example of Captain America disparaging the female gender can be seen in in Captain America and the Falcon volume 1, number 137 when Sharon faints (Stevens, 2015, pp 118).

Captain America: Safe? What are you talking about, Sharon?

Sharon: I'm not sure! I just know I've got bad vibes! There's something wrong!

Captain America: You bet there's something wrong! The Falcon needs help and he's gonna get it. This is no time to go feminine on me, honey. (Lee & Romita, 1971, pp 7)

5.3.5 Captain America of the 1970s

During the 1973-1974 the American society went through a lot of political and social confusion. This led to continuous publishing of stories by publishers which had the elements of new liberal ideas but also remained traditional. As the American society went through the confusion, comic book industry felt the same. Comic books even started to question the American society. Marvel started to publish stories where the character of Captain America questioned modern American life and the beliefs of society. After the incident of Watergate, American society did not know who can be trusted. The same attitude presents Captain America – the character is confused and does not know if he is able to trust anyone, even himself. In his book, Johnson makes a

point that “*In Captain America #153–156, Steve Rogers, the true World War II Captain America who was frozen in ice and then recovered in the 1960s, fights the 1950s Commie Smasher Captain America* (2012, pp 113).”. The real Captain America defeat the Captain America from the 1950s which symbolizes the surrender of the old traditional life and beliefs. This is a significant change since the 1950s, when comic book superheroes never questioned themselves. The new character of Captain America adapted to the new society which doubted itself (Johnson, 2012, pp 113).”.

In the storyline of comic books Captain America and the Falcon #163–176, Captain America fights the character named Number One. In his book, Johnson makes a case that the character Number One is actually president Nixon. However, finding out that the president of the United States of America is a supervillain makes Captain America question his identity again. Captain America loses his faith in the United States and decides not to represent the States anymore. The character decides to be known as Nomad however, he still fights the crime. After the incident of president Nixon, American society felt betrayed and identified with the Captain's America surrender of representing United States of America (Johnson, 2012, pp 115).

The Watergate incident influenced the American society and pop culture significantly which resulted in several manifestations in comic books. DC Comics and Marvel started to publish stories which included the manifestations of American president. For instance DC Comics published in 1973 the story Prez #1 which featured the teenage boy Richard who became the president of the United States of America. As argued by Johnson. “*While Marvel was creating comic books stories that focused on a villainous version of the real life president, DC was creating a campy teenaged leader* (Johnson, 2012, pp 116).”.

6 Comics in years 1975 – 1990

6.1 The situation in America in years 1975 – 1990

After the Watergate scandal, American society lost its trust in the Government, which affected all spheres of American psyche. After the resignation of the president Nixon, Gerald Ford was elected the new American president. Gerald Ford soon

pardoned Nixon of all his crimes in the interest of American society and its vision of the presidency however, he was not respected by the society (Johnson, 2012, pp 116).

Although America had a reason to celebrate because the military involvement in Vietnam was over, the society was still shattered by the crisis and recent incidents. “ *In 1975, already weakened by the energy crisis, the economy fell into its worst recession since the 1930s. By May, unemployment rose above 9 percent. Rampaging inflation compounded the misery. Ford agreed to tax cuts but opposed large public works programs to stimulate the economy* (Reeves, 1999, pp 220).“. The crisis was in its expansion and America feared of unemployment and inflation (Johnson, 2012, pp 117).

Another hope for America was the election of 1976 when Jimmy Carter was elected as the new president of the United States of America. The president tried to bring the faith of American society back however, he was not successful.

The New York blackout in 1977, the Iranian hostage crisis, increasing number of crimes and the economical crisis caused another doubts of American society. The largest city of United States of America seemed very problematic. In 1980 the unemployment level of the United States was the highest since the Great Depression (Johnson, 2012, pp 119, 120; Reeves, 1999, pp 224).

The increasing tension of The Cold War was also a threat to America. The society was afraid of the hypothetical World War III. In 1981 Ronald Reagan became the 40th president of United States of America. The president was determinedly standing firm against Soviet Union. According to the U.S. Department of State “*Two early events increased U.S.-Soviet tensions: the suppression of the Solidarity labor movement in Poland in December 1981, and the destruction with 269 fatalities of an off-course civilian airliner, Korean Airlines Flight 007, by a Soviet jet fighter on September 1, 1983* (2011, pp 313).“. The president Reagan was considered as an anti-communist however, he renewed the importance of nationalisms, which finally strengthened the beliefs of American society Depression (Johnson, 2012, pp 128).

Even though the in 1984 re-elected president Ronald Reagan gained popularity at the end of his second term, he could not be re-elected again. Therefore the new president of America became George Herbert Walker Bush. Bush promised to continue

in the prosperity of president Reagan and gave American society the hope again. In 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, many American citizens considered this date as the end of the Cold War. (U.S. Department of State, 2011, pp 314; Johnson, 2012, pp 148).

6.1.1 The liberal message of the mid-decade superheroes

Comic book industry produced stories that often comprised liberal message or liberal elements. One of the examples of liberalism in comic books was Iron Man. Although Stark fought the Communists in Vietnam and was very right-wing and nationalistic, he had dramatically changed over the past years. In comic book Iron Man #78 published in 1975, Stark starts to question the government of America just like the military and American society. Iron Man was considered as the typical Cold War warrior therefore questioning the bases of American society and the role of the United States of America in the world was surprising. However, it reflected the views of American citizens. Johnson described Iron Man of the 1970s as “The energetic, self-assured industrialist had become a depressed, self-loathing alcoholic just as a once confident nation had become a self-questioning society (2012, pp 123) .”.

The Marvel superheroes were usually proud of America through the characters were not sightlessly trustful and showed the signs of anger about the state of American society (Johnson, 2012, pp 118). As argued by Johnson “ *While Marvel was producing stories about the rowing cultural backlash, DC was attempting to entertain its readers and make them forget about their troubles* (Johnson, 2012, pp 119).”.

6.1.2 The return of superheroes to nationalism

As the new president Ronald Reagan pioneered individualism and nationalism, comic book superheroes had a chance to return to their nationalistic roots. The heroes displayed the American exceptionalism again by copying the attitude of the president Ronald Reagan. A significant number of citizens was concerned that America has lost its direction during the 1970s and had to find it back. The comeback could be realized by returning to the roots of traditional beliefs. This was also an opportunity for comic book industry to increase the number of sales. However, the change always brings not only the positive consequences but also the negative ones (Johnson, 2012, pp 129).

President Reagan boosted conservative ideas which led to the creation of super-conservative superheroes. These characters were different from the conservative superheroes from the past by the intensity of violence and tradition. To the superheroes lines up for instance the Superman, Punisher or Daredevil (Johnson, 2012, pp 149)..

6.1.3 The new style of the new creators

With the new decade came the new creators who worked on comic books. The prime creators of the late 1970s and the 1980s who enriched the comic book were Frank Miller and Alan Moore. Frank Miller worked in 1986 on the comic book Batman: The Dark Knight Returns which was sold in a heavier paper in order to last longer. The story became a new style of presenting comic books to an older reader (Robb, 2014, pp 237, 240).

As argued by Robb “*Moore became increasingly concerned about creators’ rights as he toiled for a variety of American companies, giving characters his own unique stamp* (2014, pp 242).“. Alan Moore was also the reason why the American comic book industry opened the door in Britain in Exchange for the British music like the Beatles and Rolling Stones were brought to America. Alan Moore was also known by depicting of the darker side of the superheroes. The darker side of Superman was for instance displayed when “*it saw Wonder Woman, Batman and Robin visiting Superman in the Fortress of Solitude on his birthday, only to discover the Man of Steel possessed by a plant-like alien that has induced him to hallucinate a dreamworld based upon his ‘heart’s desire’* (Robb, 2014, pp 243).”.

6.1.4 Captain America as the ideal consumer

With the popularity growth of the occurrence of hyperviolence in comic books, the number of sales of Captain America's titles decreased. The character did not succumb to the trend of darkness, which resulted in the descent of sold copies. However, Captain America was still on the second place of favourite Marvel superheroes. The fans liked that he stuck to the tradition of individualism (Stevens, 2015, pp 131, 132).

The stories from the 1980s made Captain America look like a superhero, since people recognized him in the streets. The character developed the story of his alter ego,

Steve Rogers. Steve started to work as an commercial artist, lived in the expensive house and started to wear a suit. This whole upgrade of the character referred to the typical ideal consumer of the 1980s. However, Captain America did not completely turn into the ideal consumer. In his job he still represents the rightness of American society. The example can be found in the comic book Captain America volume 1, number 309 “*I know that advertising plays an important role in America’s free enterprise system, but I can’t escape the feeling that our promotion of material things contributes to a consumer-oriented society—one that places more value on possessions than people* (Gruenwald Neary, 1985, pp 11).”. After this speech, Steve Rogers quits his job and decides to illustrate comic books. The character even gets a chance to draw the character of Captain America in comic book series (Stevens, 2015, pp 133).

6.1.5 Watchmen and the nuclear war

One of the new creators of the 1980s, Alan Moore, had an idea to introduce the superhero as the character from the real world. The creator wanted to depict a story where the superheroes would really exist and what consequences would it have. He created the series called Watchmen published from 1986 to 1987. Robb makes a point that “*His original plan was to build a mystery around the death of the Second World War patriotic superhero the Shield, and to feature other members of the Mighty Crusaders (created by Jerry Siegel in 1965, and including characters such as the Fly, the Jaguar, the Comet, and Flygirl)* (2014, pp 244).”. However, Moore was persuaded to create the new group of superheroes. The superheroes had new elements but were mostly based on the type from the past. The new superheroes displayed the consequences of how past superheroes behaved. The superheroes of the Watchmen series served as the critics of conservative ideas that were promoted in comic books as well in American society (Robb, 2014, pp 244; Johnson, 2012, pp 147).

The plot of the story is taking place in the alternative reality of 1980s where the conflict between United States of America and Soviet Union is on the edge of nuclear war. The main characters are normal people costumed as superheroes who fight crime but mainly deal with their own problems. According to Johnson “*Moore had created these new super-conservatives to warn Americans about trusting too much in heroes and government* (Johnson, 2012, pp 147).”. The characters achieve the peace between

United States of America because they find another enemy that have America and Soviet Union in common – Dr. Manhattan – the only character with the real superpowers from the squad of the main characters. Dr Manhattan is not real enemy however, he agrees that it is the only way to make the world a peacefull place. The character of Rorschach does not agree on the lie to convince the world about another more powerfull enemy and unfortunately sends the truth to the publishers before he dies. This is the end of the story – the truth will always find its way.

7 Conclusion

The objective of the thesis was to inform the readers about the connection of the pop culture and history and show that comic books were actually inspired by the changes and conflicts. The 1945 – 1990 era was a significant time period for the growth of comic book industry. The historical events strongly influenced the evolution of comic book industry. Superheroes accommodated to the changes of American society and often showed the people different views of the situation. In other words, comic book superheroes mirrored the American society.

Popular culture as the whole reflects the behaviour of the society. The evolution of the society is always accompanied by the manifestations in the popculture. Pop culture makes people see deeper in the problem or forces them to see other points of view. However, pop culture can influence people both in a positive way and a negative way.

The first displays of comics were seen in the sixteenth century, but publications of the modern day comic books are dated to the twentieth century. Superheroes basically stemmed from the conflicts. The era of 1945 – 1960 showed the signs of patriotism in superheroes as well as the influence of nuclear weapons, which was very topical in the post-war era. The new genres were invented with the change of the society and its requirements. However, the ban of the Comic Code Authority restricted many publishers from the comic book industry.

The Cold War and the constant threat of nuclear war was not only the topic in everyday lives of American society but also in the content of many comic books. A significant number of superheroes gained their powers through radioactive substances and led to the consideration whether it is the power or a curse. With the change of the needs of American society, the Marvel Comics published more realistic superheroes and became the biggest competitor to the DC Comics. Some characters were renewed, some were fighting in wars and some celebrated the American exceptionalism during the era of 1960 – 1975. As the tension between DC Comics and Marvel grew, the disillusionment of the American society displayed in the lives of Superheroes. The United States of America lost its beliefs in government and itself and so did the superheroes. However, with the approach of the new president came a new hope.

The superheroes of the 1975 – 1990 era became more liberal but still aware of the theart of the Cold War. The characters discovered the darker side inside of them just like the creators discovered the new style. Several stories from alternative reality were published while the typical American consumer influenced the character of Captain America.

Comic books has been the part of the history since its first print. The nowadays reader has a chance to look back in past and see the world conflicts, changes in society and the creation of the history through eyes of superhero. As the comic book characters mirror the society and its problems, the manifestation of the problems in pop culture can lead to the awareness of the reader and seeing other points of views of the problem. Although the readers of Superman or Captain America can see the evolution of history from the American point of view, comic books are published in other countries so the reader interested in the history can see both sides of the story. Comic books will always serve as an outlook to the past.

8 Resümee

Das erste Kapitel der Bachelorarbeit ist eine Einführung, in der ich hauptsächlich einzelne Kapitel, Quellen und Methoden analysiere. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit war die Leser über die Verbindung von Popkultur und Geschichte zu informieren und zu zeigen, dass Comics tatsächlich von Veränderungen und Konflikten inspiriert wurden.

Das zweite Kapitel beschäftigt sich mit der Erklärung der Adjektiv -Populär- und Substantiv Kultur, um den Begriff Populärkultur besser zu verstehen. Populärkultur ist oft mit Massenkultur oder Volkskultur verbunden. Im nächsten Kapitel beschreibe ich kurz die Geschichte der Comics von den ersten Ausdrucksformen der Comics im 16. Jahrhundert bis hin zu modernen Comics. Das erste offizielle Comicbuch wurde 1933 veröffentlicht.

In den nächsten drei Kapiteln teile ich die Ära von 1945 bis 1990 nach fünfzehn Jahren. Die Ära von 1945 bis 1990 war ein bedeutender Zeitraum für das Wachstum der Comic-Industrie. Die historischen Ereignisse haben die Entwicklung der Comic-Industrie stark beeinflusst. Superhelden entsprachen den Veränderungen in der amerikanischen so die Comic-Superhelden spiegelten die amerikanische Gesellschaft wider. Die Popkultur als Ganzes spiegelt das Verhalten der Gesellschaft wider. Die Entwicklung der Gesellschaft wird immer von den Manifestationen in der Popkultur begleitet. Die Popkultur lässt die Menschen tiefer in das Problem eintauchen oder zwingt sie dazu, andere Sichtweisen zu sehen. Popkultur kann Menschen jedoch sowohl positiv als auch negativ beeinflussen.

Die ersten Comics wurden im 19. Jahrhundert gezeigt, aber die Veröffentlichungen der heutigen Comic-Bücher stammen aus dem zwanzigsten Jahrhundert. Superhelden stammten im Wesentlichen aus den Konflikten. Die Ära von 1945 - 1960 zeigte die Zeichen des Patriotismus in Superhelden sowie den Einfluss von Atomwaffen, der in der Nachkriegszeit sehr aktuell war. Die neuen Gattungen wurden mit dem Wandel der Gesellschaft und ihren Anforderungen erfunden. Das Verbot der Comic Code Authority beschränkte jedoch viele Verlage aus der Comic-Branche.

Der Kalte Krieg und die ständige Bedrohung durch den Atomkrieg waren nicht nur das tägliche Leben der amerikanischen Gesellschaft, sondern auch der Inhalt vieler Comic-Bücher. Eine beträchtliche Anzahl von Superhelden gewann ihre Macht durch radioaktive Substanzen und führte zu der Überlegung, ob es sich wirklich um die Macht oder einen Fluch handelt. Mit den veränderten Bedürfnissen der amerikanischen Gesellschaft veröffentlichten die Marvel Comics realistischere Superhelden und wurden zum größten Konkurrenten der DC Comics. Einige Charaktere wurden erneuert, manche bekämpften sich in Kriegen und andere hatten den amerikanischen Exzeptualismus in der Ära von 1960 bis 1975 geprägt. Als die Spannung zwischen DC Comics und Marvel wuchs, zeigte sich die Desillusionierung der amerikanischen Gesellschaft im Leben von Superhelden. Amerika verlor seinen Glauben an die Regierung und sich selbst und die Superhelden. Mit dem Vorgehen des neuen Präsidenten kam jedoch eine neue Hoffnung.

Der heutige Leser hat eine Chance, in die Vergangenheit zu blicken und die weltweiten Konflikte, Veränderungen in der Gesellschaft und die Entstehung der Geschichte mit den Augen eines Superhelden zu sehen.

9 Abstrakt

Název: Populární kultura a konflikty: americké komiksy a zobrazení éry 1945-1990

Cíle: Hlavním cílem mé bakalářské práce je upozornit čtenáře na skutečnost, že popkultura a historie jsou propojeny. Dalším cílem práce je informovat čtenáře o komiksovém průmyslu a populární kultuře, nalézt relevantní situace v komiksech, které souvisejí s historickými událostmi, a dokázat čtenářům, že komiksy jsou více než jen forma umění.

Metody: Metodou práce je kompilace literatury a její analýza. Práce je popisného charakteru.

Shrnutí: Populární kultura odráží změny a konflikty společnosti. Komiksoví superhrdinové jsou výsledkem konfliktů a společenských změn. Éra 1945 - 1990 byla významným obdobím pro rozvoj komiksového průmyslu. Znamky vlastenectví v superhrdinech, stejně jako vliv jaderných zbraní lze vidět v komiksech publikovaných v období mezi 1945 - 1960. Komiksový průmysl v poválečné éře přišel s novými žánry, které odrážely změnu společnosti a její nové požadavky. Tyto nové žánry byly ovšem omezeny organizací Comic Code Authority. Během éry 1960 - 1975 byla studená válka a možná jaderná válka neustálou hrozbou pro společnost, což vedlo k tomu, že superhrdinové často získali své síly prostřednictvím radioaktivních látek. Jak se měnila americká společnost, vydavatelé museli přizpůsobit své superhrdiny současné společenské situaci. Ztráta víry americké společnosti ve vládu a identitu Spojených Států vedla ke ztrátě víry superhrdinů v jejich vlastní identity. Superhrdinové z let 1975 - 1990, s poznávacím znamením tmněší myslí, sice projevovaly znaky liberalismu, ale stále si byli vědomi hrozby studené války. Dnešní čtenář má šanci ohlédnout se do minulosti a spatřit světové konflikty, změny ve společnosti a vznik dějin očima superhrdinů.

Klíčová slova: Komiks, superhrdinové, americká historie, popkultura, Kapitán Amerika, Superman

10 Bibliography

Printed sources

GRUENWALD, Mark and NEARY, Paul: 1985. Captain America vol. 1, no. 309: "Nomad Madcap Cap". Marvel Comics: New York

JOHNSON, Jeffrey K. Super-history: comic book superheroes and American society, 1938 to the present. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, c2012. ISBN 9780786465644

LEE, Stan and KIRBY, Jack: 1962. The Incredible Hulk No. 1, The Hulk: "The Coming of the Hulk". Zenith Publishing corporation: New York

LEE, Stan and KIRBY, Jack: 1963. Strange Tales vol. 1, no. 114: "The Human Torch Meets Captain America". Vista Publications INC.: New York

LEE, Stan and HECK, Don: 1965. The Avengers vol. 1, no. 15: "Now by My Hand Shall Die a Villain". Marvel Comics: New York.

LEE, Stan and KIRBY, Jack: 1965. Tales of Suspense vol. 1, no. 61: "The Strength of the Sumo". Marvel Comics: New York.

LEE, Stan and ROMITA, John: 1971. Captain America and the Falcon vol. 1, no. 141: "The Unholy Alliance". Marvel Comics: New York

LOPES, Paul Douglas. Demanding respect: the evolution of the American comic book. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. ISBN 1592134432.

MCCLOUD, Scott. Understanding comics: [the invisible art. New York: William Morrow, 1994.

MOORE, Alan. Strážci: Watchmen. Třetí vydání v českém jazyce. Ilustroval Dave GIBBONS, přeložil Viktor JANIŠ. Praha: BB/art, 2017. ISBN 978-80-7507-735-6.

O'NEIL, Dennis: 1971. Superman vol. 1 no. 233. National Periodical Publications Inc.: New York

Outline of U.S. history. USA: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, 2011.

PETTY, J., 2006. History of Comics. 1st ed. Dallas: Herritageauctions.com.

PUSTZ, Matthew. Comic books and American cultural history: an anthology. New York: Continuum, c2012. ISBN 1441163190.

SIEGEL, Jerome and SHUSTER, Joe: 1938. Action Comic No. 1, Superman. Detective Comics: New York

SIEGEL, Jerome and SHUSTER, Joe: 1946. Action Comic No. 101, Superman: "Crime Paradise!". Detective Comics: New York

STEVENS, J. Richard. Captain America, masculinity, and violence: the evolution of a national icon. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015.

Szeman, O'Brien. Popular Culture: A User's Guide, International Edition. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017. ISBN 9781119140337

REEVES, Thomas C. Twentieth-century America: a brief history. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN 0195044843.

ROBB, Brian J. A brief guide to superheroes. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Book Publishers, 2014. ISBN 9780762452316. Electronic sources

Electronic sources

Brainiac | DC. DC | Welcome to DC [online]. Copyright © 2018 DC Entertainment, unless otherwise [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <https://www.dccomics.com/characters/brainiac>

Comic Book [online]. Copyright © 2014 [cit. 27.04.2019] Available at: <https://comicbook.com/blog/2014/07/04/who-is-the-most-patriotic-superhero-/>

Comics Code Authority: How censorship has affected the history of American comics | The Artifice. The Artifice | www.the-artifice.com [online]. Available at: <https://the-artifice.com/comics-code-authority/>

CULTURE | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary. Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus [online]. Copyright © Cambridge

University Press [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at:
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture>

Dialogue balloon - definition of Dialogue balloon by The Free Dictionary. Dictionary, Encyclopedia and Thesaurus - The Free Dictionary [online]. Copyright © 2003 [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Dialogue+balloon>

How Comics Captured America's Opinions About the Vietnam War | Smithsonian | [online]. Available at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-comics-captured-americas-opinions-about-vietnam-war-180964964/>

Kent State Shooting - HISTORY. [online]. Copyright © 2019 A [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/kent-state-shooting>

My Jewish Learning - Judaism & Jewish Life [online]. Available at: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-in-comic-books/>

popular - Dictionary Definition : Vocabulary.com. Vocabulary.com - Learn Words - English Dictionary [online]. Copyright © Vocabulary.com [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/popular>

Popular Culture - Sociology - Oxford Bibliographies. Oxford Bibliographies - Your Best Research Starts Here - obo [online]. Copyright © 2019. All rights reserved. [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0193.xml>

Superhero Timeline | Guinness World Records. Home | Guinness World Records [online]. Copyright © Guinness World Records Limited 2019. All rights reserved. [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/products/books/superlatives/superhero-timeline>

The 1950s - HISTORY. [online]. Copyright © 2019 A [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/1950s>

The Comics Code of 1954 | Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. Comic Book Legal Defense Fund | [online]. Copyright © 2019 [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <http://cblddf.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/>

The Kid From Hogan's Alley - The New York Times. The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia [online]. Copyright © [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/17/books/the-kid-from-hogan-s-alley.html>

Timely History. Allen Belman – Official Site of Timely/Marvel Artist [online]. Copyright © 2016 cPanel, Inc. [cit. 27.04.2019]. Available at: <http://allenbellman.com/timely-history/>