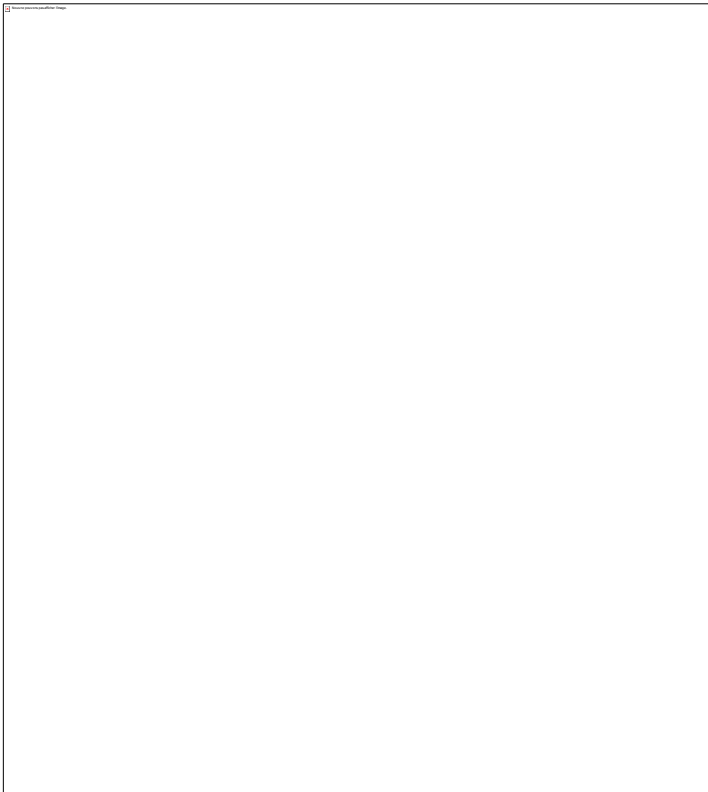


American propaganda during the Second World War in comics and cartoons

(AXE CREATION-RAPPORT AUX AUTRES)

In 1941, two years after the annexation of Poland by Hitler, the Pearl Harbor attack by the Japanese happened. Consequently, the Americans declared war on Germany, Japan and other axis forces. But no battles took place on the American soil. Yet, the Americans developed a new war weapon: propaganda, which is found even in comics and cartoons for children and teenagers.

Propaganda in comics



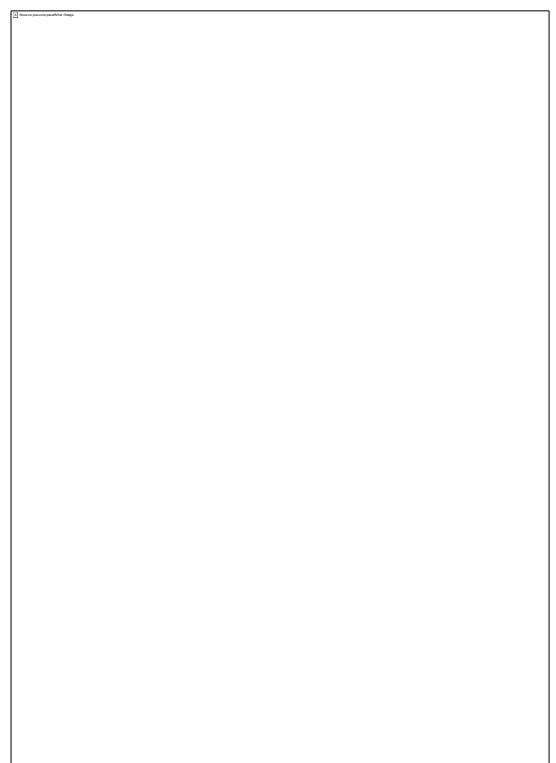
In 1940, the Marvel Comics editions created in 1938 by Martin Goodman published the adventures of Steven Roger, aka "Captain America", the character of scenarist Joe Simon and drawer Jack Kirby. The goal of this comic book is very patriotic because the hero defends American values against the Nazis. He's the defender of democracy and the free world.

Steven Roger was the son of poor Irish immigrants. His father was an alcoholic and Steven found a safe place in drawing. After studying at the Academy of Design, he became a comic artist. Steven was pretty weak but wanted to join the army to fight Nazism. The government transformed him into a Super-Soldier.

One of his worst enemies was Red Skull, a character clearly inspired by Nazis with his SS uniform. Red Skull and the others Nazis are cruel, sneaky and use dubious methods like spying, torture or brainwashing. Captain America was the opposite of the nazi morality : heroic, honest, and loyal to his country. The message conveyed by this comic book was very patriotic and used the American values of progress and liberty, against dictatorship.

Marvels raise awareness among young people with a teenage character who accompanies Captain America in his adventures : James Barnes, aka Bucky, enlisted in the US Army and friend with Steven Rogers. At some point in history he was brainwashed by the Soviets and became a Russian war machine. The authors thus warn young people against Soviet propaganda. Indeed, Captain America regularly fought the Russian army.

Other superheroes fought the nazis or the Soviets, like Superman.



Propaganda in cartoons

Another popular art form among children is cartoons. It was also an ideal means of propaganda because they were shown in cinema before the film and on television. In October 1941, as Disney studios suffered general strike when the country went to war, many studio buildings were requisitioned by the army to make propaganda. Walt Disney then began to create short propaganda or military instruction films, like *Der Fuehrer's Face* or the feature film *Victory Through Air Power* in 1943, a military documentary about aviation, widely publicized by American press.



If the tool used was effective, the military films were not profitable and the production of feature films *Bambi* and *Snow White* was slowed down. In most of his propaganda movies, Walt Disney used his favorite characters : Mickey, Donald, Scroodge McDuck...

Mickey is a heroic character and Donald is easily-influenced. In a famous short film, he was manipulated then enlisted by the Nazis. Disney showed the danger of German propaganda.

Thanks to his past as a gold digger and his fortune, Scroodge is a representation of the American dream. But he was also the symbol of the rich citizen who saves his fortune to benefit the army which will be able to obtain ammunition and fight dictatorship.

Legacy

Today, the fight of comic book characters against dictatorship and for human rights is still used in movies like *Avengers*. Superheroes are righteous characters who uphold quintessentially American values like freedom and justice. The authors try to raise awareness among young people. Cartoons have always been a way of dealing with serious subjects with humor accessible to all ages. The aspect of propaganda has somewhat disappeared from this art, but war, dictatorship or poverty are still themes treated by the authors of comic strips, cartoons or caricaturists. This art was for a long time a propaganda tool.

