COMIC BOOKS & IDEOLOGY

ethnicity, gender, war, & propaganda
so what is **IDEOLOGY** anyway?
IDEOLOGY

A set of sense-making ideas about how the world works. Ideologies aren’t hidden - as they are composed of taken for granted assumptions about the way in which the social world works.
WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT IDEOLOGY?

- Ideology is intertwined with issues of power - those who benefit from a dominant idea often wield power in a society.

- Ideologies are perpetuated through a number of institutions in a society - including mass media.

- Comics are produced by individuals (or groups of individuals) who bring their own preexisting ideas to their work.

- Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the work of comic book creators embodies elements of their ideologies.
**PREFERRED READING** - when the creator’s intent matches the reader’s understanding of the message

**OPPOSITIONAL READINGS** - when the creator’s intent does not match the reader’s understanding of the message

**NEGOTIATED READINGS** - where some ideological assumptions are accepted, and others are rejected
ok...what is PROPA GANDA then?
PROPAGANDA
A series of related communication acts that spread a particular interpretation of an event. Propaganda tries to reach a large audience through the use of mass media and attempts to create uniformity of interpretation among audience members by using what are arguably manipulative techniques.
COMICS & PROPAGANDA

- Propaganda works best when audiences are not aware they are being exposed to it.

- Comics are a perfect medium to address contentious subjects - the word “comics” already suggests something funny, light, and kid friendly.

- Perception of propaganda is very subjective - if we perceive that a comic book is advocating an ideology we do not support, we are likely to view it as propaganda.

- Some of the most blatant propaganda is produced during times of conflict (military or political) - Second World War & the Cold War (both pro and con)
SUPERHEROES IN TIMES OF WAR
Together our pennies, nickels and dimes will add up to VICTORY
The Fighting Yank

10¢

66 PAGES OF ACTION COMICS IN FULL COLOR

America's Bravest Defender

No. 1

Pep Comics

JAN. No. 1

10¢

64 PAGES ALL COLOR

INTRODUCING THE SHIELD!

G-MAN EXTRAORDINARY

Also—
BENTLEY OF SCOTLAND YARD
THE COMET
THE MIDSHIPMAN and others
WAR COMICS
World War II - Simplistic depiction of war - no superheroes, the “good guys” always achieving victory

A few stories might detail the details of an individual soldier overcoming inner conflict before engaging in an act of courage

After the “simplicity” of WWII, many characters found a new purpose - opposing the threat of “invasion and tyranny” from unnamed “aggressor nations,” “dictator nations,” and “people’s dictatorships.”

Cold War
ANTI-WAR COMICS
Scholars cite Harvey Kurtzman as the earliest anti-war creator for his work on EC Comics’ *Frontline Combat* (1951-1954) and *Two Fisted Tales* (1950-1955)

- Majority of the stories took place in the Korean War

- Kurtzman resisted glorifying war and using racist stereotypes - used death to indicate the futility and horror of war.

- Insisted in his stories that the enemy is as human as ourselves.
Look, wife! I threw it at the land at first, but our own money. Now it's the water and the wall I shall make. I shall make a dam across the river and the water for the wall will be from the dam.

Look at the big man! He's cut a large part of the wall. Next week I'll be done with the wall. And when the wall is done, I'll start on the foundation and the roof.

I have ordered enough stone and wood to build a house. And the wall is done. Now I'll be done with the roof and the foundation.

Yes, I shall put in lots of strong wood to make it strong. I shall fix the roof and the foundation.

And the wall was done, and the roof was done, and the foundation was done. And the house was done, and the dam was done, and the land was done.
KEEP OUT OF THE WING LITTLE HOMER LADYS! I AM TAKING US ALL TO LOOK FOR THE WIND HOUSE!

OK, let's start! We have a wall we need to build.

OK, the wall is halfway up. I need a lot of sand into this wall. With this sand, I will make a new standing wall.

There's a snowstorm coming up.

But the wind cannot get through because the walls are so high.

CRACK!

With rules...

With rickeys...

And with cannon...

The walls aren't tall enough to stop the wind. The cold wind can reach around the walls. The stone house of lots is destroyed in a moment from a single artillery blast.

The soldier came over foot. The soldier's foot is in the tanks.

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A STORY THAT STARTED FIVE YEARS AGO!
GOVERNMENT PRODUCED COMIC BOOKS
IDEOLOGY & PROPAGANDA
“GOOD DEED!”

THE SCOUTS WERE CAME TO CONQUER, WITH MURDERS!

WITH RIFLES... WITH GRENADES... WITH CANNONS...

THE SCOUTS CAME ON FOOT, THE SELLER’S KNOBBED HIS TOE, THE SCOUTS CAME... ACROSS THE WIND WIPED ACROSS SHREDD...

THE HEAVY HARDCORE CAME TO CONQUER, WITH MURDERS...

...WITH MURDERS...

...WITH GRENADES...

...AND CANNONS...

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REPRESENTATION
Ideology serves the interest of the dominant group in a society by defining their role in relation to other (less powerful) members of the society.

Subordinate groups are often portrayed in popular culture (mass media) as “The Other” - designation that makes them seem strange, unusual, and distant.

**Definition through negation** - “we know what we are by labeling what we are not”

As those definitions are repeated (in mass media) over time, they become harder to dismiss.

**representation** is central to exploring ideology in mass media.
WOMEN IN COMICS

of victimization and hyper-sexualization: refrigerators & cheesecake
REFRIGERATORS?

- In 1999, Gail Simone posted a list outlining a number of female leads & supporting characters who had been maimed or killed in mainstream superhero comics.

- Titles the list “Women in Refrigerators” - in reference to *Green Lantern* #54 (1994).

- Drew both criticism and agreement from professionals within the comic industry (both publishers and creators).
DEAD MEN DEFROSTING

- Ron Marz- "To me the real difference is less male-female than main character-supporting character. In most cases, main characters, "title" characters who support their own books, are male. ...the supporting characters are the ones who suffer the more permanent and shattering tragedies. And a lot of supporting characters are female.

- In response, John Bartol (WiR site editor) wrote an article entitled *Dead Men Defrosting*

- when male heroes are killed or altered, they are more typically returned to their status quo

- after most female characters are altered they are never allowed, as male heroes usually are, the chance to return to their original heroic states.
VICTIMIZATION OR PLOT DEVICE
CHEESECAKE?

- hyper-sexualization of women in mainstream comics

- Since the 1990s - hyper-sexualization has become especially pronounced in mainstream (as well as many indy comics)

- Cheesecake - the depiction of women in highly suggestive clothing or poses, often to the level of anatomical impossibility
WHY?
ETHNICITY
AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION

- earliest depictions almost always shaped by racist stereotypes - the interests of the white majority being served by existing representations

- harsh caricatures - ignorant savages in need of enlightenment by a white hero or comic relief in an all white cast.

- After WWII, depictions of African Americans all but disappeared - mostly white creators tried to figure out how to portray minorities without relying on insulting stereotypes