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How Captain America: The First Avenger foreshadows America

In *Captain America: The First Avenger*, a 2011 movie produced by Marvel, a normal teenager is in Brooklyn in 1941. Since it is 1941, this teenager named Steve Rogers is looking to join the military and help in the war. However, he gets rejected from the military due to being small, but eventually he gets in after begging a military doctor. Eventually, Steve gets selected for a government program that turns normal soldiers into super-soldiers. This enlarges Steve and makes him extremely strong. After Steve gains this new strength, he is tasked with being a morale booster for the Army and is named “Captain America,” and must perform on stage to make soldiers feel better. However, Steve finds out that his best friend, Sergeant James Barnes, is in the same place as him and finds out he is being held prisoner by German troops. Steve reaches out to Agent Peggy Carter, and she helps him go on a rescue mission for his best friend and other stranded troops. After being gone for a while, Steve is thought to have been killed in action, but surprisingly comes back with all the rescued prisoners including his best friend. While rescuing these people, Steve finds a map of the enemy hideouts and memorizes it. He assembles a taskforce to take these down and takes all of them down except one. This last hideout is protected the most and Steve goes straight in with his taskforce and takes it down. While doing this, he is forced to crash a plane into a glacier in Antarctica to avoid hitting New York City, and Steve is frozen in the process of crashing the plane. 70 years later, Steve wakes up and realizes he is alive due to being frozen in the ice of the Arctic (O’Keeffe).

Captain America: The First Avenger attempts to show the future of America, by showing some of the actions of previous generations affecting the current state of America, through some acts of militarism, feminism, and presentism.

In *Captain America: The First Avenger* there is a lot of militarism shown. Jodie Lout, author of the paper “Agents of the Global Armament: Analyzing Masculinity and Militarism in in “Captain America” and the MCU,” states that Captain America himself “symbolizes” the United States and its “ideological leanings” due to the history behind the character (Lout, 9). Lout explains that Captain America was originally made during World War II as a comic and was used a propaganda tool. However, in both the comic and MCU Captain America is created to fight for the military (Lout, 9). America’s current situation shows that the nation still believes in militarism. The notion that the country needs a strong military to promote its national interests. In *Captain America*, the film constantly highlighted the strength of the military and showed that the actions of the military were the only reason that “evil” was avoided, and no diplomatic methods were used in the film. In *Captain America*, it shows many ways of mobilizing the country to participate in World War II. However, Captain America was a main way of increasing morale. Captain America showed a strong soldier, who could bring hope to the citizens during the war. Now in real life, Lout highlights a couple of methods that the country used such as film propaganda and comics. She explains that the effects of these methods are that they are still being used today in a comparable manner. She claims that Captain America is “representative of a national identity” and that Americans now are a large audience that looks for a “good” or “evil” manner (Lout, 30). This good and evil difference is something that was highlighted within the film as well, where Captain America performs for a crowd and tries to get them to buy bonds by saying that Americans are the “good” guys and that they WILL beat the

Germans. Along with this, author Carolyn McNamara states that the identification of Nazis as evil came from “graphic representations” and that they were portrayed with “grotesque physical features” and “heavy accents” to convince their audience that the German’s are evil (McNamara, par. 14). Overall, the Captain America film shows militarism techniques that are still used today by the American government. A clear example of this are propaganda films. In the Captain America film, they showed a scene where Americans were in a theatre watching a war film. Nowadays, Army commercials are shown throughout to increase morale and support for the military. The Captain America film also shows how much the American government values its military strength through their investment in research to make a super soldier. In the present, American interest with having a strong military is shown by the amount of funding that is given to the military as well as government funded research projects into war technology.

The film also accentuates the role of men and women in society at the time as well. These characteristics are still present in society today, and is another example of some of the previous actions still shown in present America. Jodie Lout states that a clear example of this is Captain America's national identity. Lout claims that his national identity is seen as "heroic manhood" and is only achieved through hypermasculinity (Lout, 14). In Captain America, this hypermasculinity is the super serum where he grows big and strong with massive muscles. However, this viewpoint from the 1940s is still occurrent here, where many young boys see being big and strong as a sign of growth and maturity. Lout continues with this, explaining that the films are "perfect" for "propagating masculinity" as they put out Captain America as a character who continues to show up over and over but cast only one main female character, Agent Peggy Carter (Lout, 14). In *The political economy of global memory: Shared memory of global conflict in Captain America: The First Avenger*, a research article by Jill Edy and Castleberry, they claim that Agent Peggy Carter is someone who is a "no-nonsense" officer and contributes to the story. However, they continue on to say that Peggy's presence and role in the film as a combat officer who commands other soldiers through combat is a "historical anachronism" and is not something that was true in the past. They state that Peggy's presence is a "modern understanding of women's roles in society" and this modern understanding does not signify how it was before. Nevertheless, Peggy's role as a commanding officer who can control other soldiers is true. The actions of soldiers then heavily influenced women in the military now and their role in society. Edy and Castleberry state that "US Women entered the military in large numbers during the war" and this was shown by Peggy's actions and involvement in the military in the film.

Presentism is also extremely common in the film. Presentism is when “pop culture revises the past in line with the values the producers ascribe to contemporary audiences” (Edy, Castleberry). In *Captain America*, presentism is used to cover up some of the things that had occurred in the past that a modern audience would not be comfortable with. In other words, presentism is history but corrected. As stated previously, the film not only adjusted gender roles with Peggy and her combat role, but the film also adjusted the past to make it more appealing to global audiences (Edy, Castleberry). An example of this, is the movie emphasizing the American battle with Germany but completely leaving out the American struggle with Japan in the Pacific.

As a whole, the film highlights key decisions made by previous generations that continue to have an impact on present America. Presentism is the Marvel Cinematic Universe attempting to create a film that not only shows some of these decisions and the effects of it, but to also be a film that will attract a wide international audience. The film has core values of militarism, feminism, and presentism to highlight progression and consistency in modern America.

Works Cited

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