

Plot Twist or Plot Hole? Public Debate About *Secret Empire* and American Identity Crisis

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Abstract

The 2016 presidential election represents a crisis of national identity for many Americans. In 2017, Marvel Comics published *Secret Empire*, a comics event premised on the fascist corruption of the character Captain America. In light of the coincidental thematic overlap between these two incidents, public discourse around *Secret Empire* constitutes a microcosm of memory work ignited by crisis, trying to address the rupture in national identity by redefining the site of Captain America. Drawing on discourse in professional cultural reporting and criticism from a range of outlets, I use political discourse analysis to analyze the development of arguments to integrate or abnegate *Secret Empire* as a Captain America story. In this public debate, *Secret Empire* became a referendum on American identity and the limits of acceptable counterfactuals to national narrative.

Keywords: Captain America, politics, political discourse analysis, collective memory, lieux de mémoire

Introduction

Donald Trump's election to the presidency in 2016 was a crisis; a shocking twist in the expected plot of American political history. There have been competing narratives forwarded to explain how and why it happened, some trying to reinterpret the story of American identity and politics in a new light of xenophobia, racism, misogyny, and other moral failings to account for Trump, while others reject him as an illegitimate aberration to protect the story of a meritocratic nation of immigrants and beacon of democratic freedoms. This debate is historical, evidencing and interpreting the reality of what American history has been and what the nation is now, but it is also about memory. What experts know to be factual about our past and our present is for many less important than what we imagine about where we come from and who we are.

National identity is tied to specific sites of collective memory, and Trump's election ignited debate over the definition of these sites and their memorial contents. The discontinuity between expectations and reality have led to a rupture in the widely accepted story of America as told through sites of memory, and the sites require repair in the aftermath. One such site is Captain America, and this project analyzes the public debate over the character's recent representation in the 2017 comics event *Secret Empire* (*SE*). Though its contents are often

medium- and genre-specific to comics and superheroes, the contours of the public debate over how to understand Captain America after *SE* are shaped by the need to react to the crisis of Trump's election. Public discourse around *SE* constitutes a microcosm of memory work ignited by the crisis of the Trump presidency, trying to address the rupture in national identity by redefining the site of Captain America.

My analysis focuses on professional cultural reporting and criticism in news, periodical, and online outlets. Reporters and critics are important intermediaries between the public and memory sites, influencing patterns of exposure and ways of thinking and amplifying the visibility of existing public discourses.¹ The cultural-critical discursive mode thus is analogous to and predictive of discourse and sentiments in social and interpersonal spaces more nebulous and difficult to sample. I built a corpus of 111 texts using an iterative purposive sample of English-language outlets that covered *Secret Empire* in some critical capacity that situated the comic in larger popular culture and political conversations. After identifying the outlets *Birth.Movies.Death.*, *Bleeding Cool*, *The Daily Dot*, *Hollywood Reporter*, *io9*, *The New York Times*, *Paste Magazine*, *Polygon*, *Slate*, and *Vulture*, I used keyword searches of their archives to find all *SE* coverage between the event's announcement in March 2016 and its conclusion in September 2017. Popular culture-oriented outlets like *Bleeding Cool* and *io9* posted many articles relating to *SE* during this period, whereas the traditional outlets of *The New York Times* had just one in August of 2017, indicating the controversy had expanded beyond its original comics niche. I do not consider the wide range of different outlets' styles, editorial slant, or audiences in my analysis except to note that they show the breadth of the public interest in Captain America's identity crisis. As real-world events and the fictional plots apparently collided, these outlets of both popular culture and public political discourse engaged with *SE* and the controversy around it as a proxy for the crisis of American identity.

Life Accidentally Imitates Art

Secret Empire became a lightning rod for the rupture of American identity partly by design. As a major comics event in the works since early 2016 that involved thirty-two different book titles over its official run from April 19 to August 30 of 2017, a marketing campaign, and accompanying merchandise rollout, it represents an enormous investment of time, energy, and money into a product that was supposed to attract attention and inspire consumption. A comics event is a marketing ploy through which the publisher (in Captain America's case, Marvel Comics) tries to boost sales for existing and new comic books by having their plots crossover with a major plotline centered on already successful characters and the books in which they appear. Captain America is one of Marvel's flagship characters, at a peak in popularity due to his visibility in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and *SE*'s premise is that he betrays the public, the nation, and his own established principles by revealing himself to be a fascist.

Ubiquity has made comics events increasingly less effective at drawing attention,² but a twist of fate catapulted Marvel's 2017 event onto the national stage. The inciting action in *SE* is Captain America's silent coup to put the United States in the hands of the fascist, formerly Nazi-allied organization Hydra. He goes on to rewrite national history, remove political opponents, and imprison minorities. The similarities between real life political events and the fantastical story were eerie and uncomfortable to behold for many commenters: "Waking up to find that America-the-idea has become openly hateful, no longer masked with a hopeful veneer to hide longstanding bigotry, is not a distant fiction for millions of Americans" after Trump's victory.³ Within a week of *SE* #0's release on April 19, 2017, the Trump administration was resisting judicial oversight on the Muslim travel ban⁴ and news broke that, as part of anti-immigrant policies and a crackdown on undocumented immigrants,⁵ they had deported the first person protected under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.⁶ As the *SE* plot was reaching its crescendo in August, Trump's tepid, equivocating response to the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville⁷ and the murder of counter-protester Heather Heyer were in headlines.⁸

In other circumstances, temporarily making Captain America the leader of a fascist coup might have been written off as a bizarre and offensive, but ultimately forgettable, corporate ploy to goose sales. Against the backdrop of resurgent white nationalism and creeping fascism many readers perceived around them, Captain America's political and moral corruption was a facet of the national crisis, a representative miniature through which the crisis could be addressed and more easily resolved than in real life. *SE* became a referendum on American identity and the limits of acceptable counterfactuals about its superhero avatar.

Superhero as Site of Collective Memory

Captain America does not mediate Americans' national memory; rather, he constitutes a site in which collective memory is anchored and indexed. Sites of collective memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, are characterized by their real or metaphorical spatial fixity and capacity to hold meanings. Sites need not be physical spaces or objects, but can be anything with a perceived concreteness, familiarity, and predictability for the community that employs it. Memory must be stored in sites when the acceleration of history through processes of industrialization, digitization, and mediatization displace memory from living experience.⁹ As people become alienated from their collective past, sites of memory then become necessary prostheses for recollection of collective identity:

Lieux de mémoire arise out of a sense that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory, hence that we must create archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and authenticate documents because such things no longer happen as a matter of course. [...] without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep [us] away. These bastions buttress our identities, but if

what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need for them. If the remembrances they protect were truly living presences in our lives, they would be useless.¹⁰

True to this observation, Captain America was not the subject of national debate until the 2016 election and *SE* threatened the integrity of the character and the collective memory he encompasses.

It is not surprising that Captain America would be a site of national memory. The link between Captain America and American identity goes back to the character's 1940 introduction as a clear metaphor for Americans taking up arms to defend Western democracy from fascism. Appearing in 1940 and punching Hitler in the face on the cover of his first issue, Captain America was an expression of pro-interventionist politics held by his Jewish-American creators, Jack Kirby and Joe Simon.¹¹ His was the first superhero comic to explicitly depict Nazis and the Axis as public enemies.¹² This publishing origin story and the blatant symbolism of the character's name and red, white, and blue costume referencing the national flag established Captain America as the archetype of a nationalist superhero, a character through whom discourses around and ideologies underpinning state policy and national identity become legible and legitimate.¹³ All superheroes have the capacity to represent political stances, but his nationalist affiliation and origin in association with World War II make Captain America an unavoidably political character representing an ostensibly mainstream conception of American identity.¹⁴

Sites of collective memory are plucked out of the progression of history for their significance to moments of national importance but through careful forgetting, they also assume the character of pure, timeless symbols.¹⁵ Like lived memory, sites selectively index events, ideas, and emotional resonances that uphold a specific narrative of collective origins. "Nation is narration" of identity and belonging, but also of denial and exclusion.¹⁶ Intervention in World War II was not a popular opinion when Captain America debuted in late 1940, a year before Pearl Harbor, but postwar memory conveniently forgot that detail; it contradicted the post-hoc narrative that defeating the Nazis was a moral duty Americans knew they were uniquely called on to fulfill.¹⁷ Audiences today understand Captain America as the eternal embodiment of their ancestral "patriotic ideals" in staunch opposition to "distinctly anti-American values, including Nazism [...], fascism, communism, anarchism, and terrorism."¹⁸ Marvel itself defines Captain America as "a patriotic symbol" who "rallied the troops abroad... and the people at home" as a fictional soldier in World War II and today "represent[s] America... through the world and beyond."¹⁹ It is then little surprise that *SE*'s contradiction of this established history and nationalist characterization would represent a crisis for its American audience.

Sites are most relevant when their meaning is under contestation. If memory and the identity formed through it are not threatened, then it needs no sites to preserve it; universal

agreement “is ultimately the road to amnesia,” obsolescence, and identity loss.²⁰ The contestation of the meaning of *lieux de mémoire* is how Captain America rises to national significance. In 1940, he challenged the defined site of the superhero genre with overt politicism by advocating intervention and challenging Americans to put their values into practice in the European war. Post-1941, though, with public opinion in favor of the war and other superheroes also fighting Nazis, Captain America faded from public relevance. Now he has been reactivated as a *lieu de mémoire* by the confluence of the legacy-disrupting *SE* storyline with the American identity crisis induced by the 2016 presidential election. *SE* thus catalyzed multiple projects of re-dedication that attempted to reestablish a consensus of meaning around the site of Captain America.

The Popular is Political

In a moment of identity crisis, what role does art play in national memory? I have demonstrated why Captain America and *Secret Empire* have contemporary political resonance, but how does talking about pop culture constitute political speech? How does the public use popular culture as a discursive site of national identity construction and rehabilitation?

Different media play different roles in memory work depending on their perceived relevance to recalling the past, understanding the present, and projecting a vision of the future.²¹ Popular media is highly consumed but not regarded as authoritative except when the popular text has been reified over time into a *lieu de mémoire*, and/or has become politically controversial. Public disagreements over specific cultural objects often indicate a site whose collective meaning is under contestation, in which the “public display” of opinions about the object “becomes an *occasion* for speaking about problems well beyond” it.²² This is especially significant when many communities feel alienated from traditional political engagements and discourses. For those who believe in their own political powerlessness, political expression may only be possible in reaction to popular culture texts that show “the core contradictions of our lives indirectly enough to make discussion of them bearable.”²³ The discourse around *SE* is not merely art criticism; it is a debate over what to do with a disturbing vision of American identity and, by extension, what to do to resolve the crisis constituted in the 2016 election and Trump presidency.

Because I am interested in the specific political utility of this pop culture discourse, I use the framework of political discourse analysis.²⁴ Political discourse analysis (PDA) is an innovation of critical discourse analysis (CDA) that recognizes discursive formations are in service of deliberation. Whereas CDA illuminates “traces of ideological bias in texts” in the interest of society-wide justice and equity,²⁵ PDA analyzes how “discourses (and orders of discourse, as structures) provide agents with reasons for action.”²⁶ To summarize Fairclough and Fairclough’s model, values (what we care about) predict goals (in which our values are realized) that, in light of relevant circumstances produce a claim for action meant to effect positive change

to fulfill goals. Without disregarding the influences of structural power on proposed policies and outcomes, PDA is interested in the form of practical reasoning for practical argumentation, “the social and rational *activity* of attempting to justify or refute a certain claim, and aiming to *persuade* an interlocutor” to accept or reject a certain claim.²⁷

The goal shared by all participants in the public discourse over *SE* is a return to consensual enjoyment of Captain America comics, but their values, relevant circumstances, and claims to action differ. In analyzing public discourse about Captain America in 2016 and 2017, I look for the development of judgments of *SE* through the framing of relevant circumstances and invocation of values to build one of two claims to action, either to integrate or abnegate *SE* from the Captain America site. My analysis identified three key issues in the debate: contemporary political circumstance, comics publishing circumstance, and values of engagement with comics and superheroes. The latter two are beyond the scope of this paper, which is interested in the relevance of the debate over *SE* to political discourse. This debate does not map perfectly onto the national discourse over how to interpret American history in light of the 2016 presidential election and Trump presidency. However, the use of the circumstance of contemporary political climate in both integration and abnegation arguments shows the parallel readers saw between *SE*'s events and Trump is why this debate took place on the national stage. Given this root cause and the development of argument in light of political circumstance, the opposing claims to action for redefining Captain America have significant implications for public debate over national identity.

Of National Importance: Citing Political Circumstance

The perceived real-world parallel with the Trump presidency is intrinsic to the arguments over *Secret Empire*. The integration of political discourse in a critical mode of pop culture discourse is indicative of a trend in American media criticism to take the social roles of art and the culture industry seriously. Within the last decade, critics have developed an appreciation for political meaning in popular culture, praising effective engagement and criticizing poor or lacking attention to sociopolitical implications.²⁸ This is especially true when popular media happen to coincide with topics already under public debate, which is why *SE* did not attract much public attention until after Trump's inauguration. Though Marvel leaked the basic premise of *SE* prior to the 2016 election, only a niche audience of comics reporters, critics, and readers took notice. After Trump won the presidency and *SE* issues started coming out, the perceived resonance between the two and their reflection on American identity caused the controversy to expand to a larger public and the national stage.

SE had been plotted long ahead of the election results made it look like a commentary on Trump specifically, but all debate participants take as a given that *SE*'s author, Nick Spencer, intended to make some political statement. Aside from the eventually revealed content, the early

publicity teased a political engagement with themes of the corruption and abuse of presidential power. The title *Secret Empire* comes from a 1974 storyline by the same name in which Captain America uncovers a government conspiracy orchestrated by the president to undermine Captain America's legitimacy, an unsubtle criticism of then-president Richard Nixon. Before the 2016 election, Marvel's spokespeople were calling back to the 1974 comic, promoting the new *SE* as "a Watergate moment" that would lead younger characters to reevaluate their relationships with other heroes and the government.²⁹

After the election and the official start of the event, the backlash began. Spencer did not shy away from the accusation that his work was political, only defending himself from allegations of fascist sympathies. He maintains that he was critiquing the dangerous allure of fascism, and many commenters agreed that Spencer and Marvel probably intended to make some kind of generic, uncontroversial statement about the moral superiority of democracy. In the face of criticisms of the execution and the premise of *SE*, however, Marvel changed their story. As criticism mounted in April 2017 ahead of the first issue, Marvel said that the parallels with current politics were "probably intentional but metaphorically, not literally."³⁰ In May, they released an unprecedented statement that audiences should wait until the end of the event to form their opinions on *SE*.³¹ As the backlash against the comic continued to grow, Marvel's editor-in-chief, who had promoted the comic by saying Marvel "tr[ies] to write comics in 2016 that are about the world and the zeitgeist of 2016," began insisting that the event was not supposed to be a commentary on contemporary politics.³²

The real-world crisis of the Trump presidency was the source and backdrop of the public debate over *SE*, but the integration and abnegation sides interpret the perceived parallels in opposite ways. Those in favor of integrating *SE* with Captain America canon view similarities between the fascist Captain America and President Trump as a coincidence that increased the impact of Spencer's intended anti-fascist, pro-democracy message. Integrationists argue Spencer's parable of the allure of fascism would have always been relevant but is especially so in "an era when neo-fascist ideology has somehow found a home in the highest echelons of American politics" in the form of Donald Trump.³³ Grappling with the corruption of institutions in fiction would teach Americans that "as much as symbols can be corrupted, they can be redeemed" and potentially empower resistance against the Trump administration's policies.³⁴ The integrationists represent the abnegation argument as indicative of ignorance and hysteria from readers and critics unfamiliar with comic books and unable to see where *SE* was going.

Those in favor of abnegating *SE* are critical of the premise of the event and are not taken in by the obviously temporary twist of characterization intended only for shock value. The *New York Times* article announcing that Captain America would be "Fighting Evil Again" after *SE* notes in the first line that this is "Surprising [to] absolutely no one."³⁵ Abnegationists see the coincidence of contemporary politics as a spotlight on the already suspect decision to make a famously moral character just "another monster who wants to see the world burn, at a moment

when American politics is not short of those monsters.”³⁶ Regardless of *SE*’s ultimate restoration of Captain America to virtue, they believe the damage of seeing the avatar of idealized American integrity lead a fascist coup is done.

Abnegationists also criticize Spencer and Marvel for ducking the accusation that they made Captain America a neo-Nazi, instead splitting hairs over whether the fictional organization Hydra, which was part of the Third Reich in early Captain America comics contemporaneous to the Second World War, is a neo-Nazi group in *SE*.³⁷ This semantic obfuscation recalls 2016’s relabeling of white nationalists and American fascists as ‘alt-right activists,’ belying the fact that *SE* makes Captain America a ready “icon for the intolerant” and invites praise from the neo-Nazi online forum *Daily Stormer*.³⁸ A few zealot abnegationists go so far as to accuse Spencer of fascist sympathies, but they are merely mentioned or cited in the coverage, not represented in the public debate’s participants. Spencer being pro-fascist is considered a stretch but many concede that since it is told from Captain America’s point of view, *SE*’s intended moral lesson gets muddled in a “somewhat compelling” argument for the efficiency and power of fascism as a political system and the invitation to sympathize with a fascist leader’s decision-making.³⁹ Regardless of Spencer’s intent, those in favor of abnegation say *SE* gives a platform to an ugly ideology that needs no more attention than it already has and has no place in a superhero comic.

Political circumstance is just one of three key areas I identify in my study. The intersections between the political circumstance and medium- and genre-specific circumstances and values are already becoming visible in the integrationists’ insinuations about the proper audience for and mode of engagement with comics, and the abnegationists’ rejection of particular subject matters and moral characterizations for superheroes. The political circumstances that created a crisis of American identity ignited the debate over *SE*, but the content often draws on existing questions about the nature of comics, superheroes, and their audience. While interesting, a thorough account of the ways in which integrationists and abnegationists answer these questions are beyond the narrow scope of this paper. Instead, I turn next to the ways in which the inciting crisis of American identity runs through the *SE* controversy to animate the different claims to action with broader political implications. Whether interlocutors believe *SE* can be integrated with or must be abnegated from Captain America as national *lieu de mémoire* reflects a public grappling with a moral question about how to understand the 2016 election and Trump presidency.

Who is Captain America?

The development of both the integration and abnegation positions on *SE* starts and ends with a perspective on political circumstances. Integrationists think parallels between the comic and real life exhibit the medium’s best qualities and enhance the author’s intended message. They conclude that the character of Captain America and ideas about national identity embedded in

him are therefore without inherent value. Whatever his creators intended in 1940, integrationists see Captain America as not authored but owned, a piece of intellectual property that “is inherently without an identity; it has no politics or aesthetics or ethics” and can be shaped and reshaped into whatever product Marvel wants to sell.⁴⁰ Some integrationists view the abnegating idea that Captain America should be preserved in his original, uncomplicatedly heroic state as dangerous escapism. In a Twitter thread directed at his critics, Nick Spencer called the campaign to preserve Captain America’s purity an “irresponsible, cowardly argument” in the face of the world’s problems and national flaws.⁴¹ In this view, *SE* is not just an allowable permutation of the national hero; it is a necessary crack in the rosy façade on a national avatar, showing the “rotten, fascist, war-mongering core” and forcing readers to reexamine their heroes and themselves.⁴²

Scaling out from the *SE* debate to the national identity debate, the integration position is one of radical redefinition. The Trump presidency is only shocking because we have willfully forgotten the nation’s long history of misdeeds and unacknowledged vices. However, it is unclear if this unforgiving characterization of America is meant to galvanize a self-improvement project or absolve the public of any need to act. If things are as they always have been and it never was a problem before now, does that mean the problem is long overdue for redress, or that there is no problem after all? Integrationists do not make a clear case for the former, suggesting that their response to *SE* and Trump as ruptures in American identity is equivocal or apathetic. Their position on national identity is radical, but they make no case for radical action.

Abnegationists on the other hand treat the parallels between fictional fascism and real-life politics as a crossed moral line, making *SE*’s version of the character and Trump’s use of the presidency equally insupportable. They describe Captain America as “a secular holy figure” who should not be represented except as “the indomitable spirit of liberty, a defender of the afflicted and oppressed, more uncompromised and virtuous than any real-life political actor.”⁴³ *SE* must be categorically rejected to save Captain America’s soul. Responding directly to the integrationist claim that intellectual property is owned, not authored, abnegationists note that building an event around audience shock at image of Captain America wearing a Hydra uniform depends on Captain America holding some core meaning. If he stands for nothing and means nothing, every possible premise collapses into insignificance; what is the point of a story about an empty signifier?

Scaling up to the national identity, the abnegation position resists alteration of the traditional definition of the nation as an exceptional beacon of democracy on the world stage. Whether or not America has always lived up to its ideals is beside the point for abnegationists; abdicating any responsibility to preserve and pursue political or moral ideals would obliterate American history and identity. If Marvel wanted to make a statement about insidious fascism for the betterment of America, then Captain America should have one of the heroes blindsided by its rise and a leader of the resistance, so the story would be “about how one can feel disillusioned

and defeated, but must rise back up to again to fight back.”⁴⁴ But if Captain America leads the fascist coup, if even fictional, perfect symbols of our moral will can fail us, then what hope is there in real life? Though simpler and more conservative than the integrationists’, this position is transparently political and partisan against the Trump administration and its policies. Thus, the abnegation position can articulate a clear, precise prescribed action in response to the rupture of American identity constituted in *SE* and/or the Trump presidency: resist.

Who Are We?

The narratives of history and identity indexed in sites of memory “are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with*. As such, they have no existence beyond our politics, our social relations, and our histories.”⁴⁵ The question of what to do with *SE* attracted national attention because it was a more comfortable, manageable proxy for the question of what to do about the 2016 election and its aftermath. “When a society undergoes rapid developments that shatter its social and political order, its need to restructure its past is as great as its desire to set its future agenda,”⁴⁶ and Captain America speaks to both urges. He has been the embodiment of idealized American ideology in a fictional version of our world since 1940, fighting America’s real-world enemies and supervillains alike. His history is our history, the more embarrassing and shameful episodes carefully excised from both. That history has to be reasserted when present events call it all into question. Are we defined by our memory or our experience? Are we heroic or hateful? If we accept today’s insult to our story about who we are and have always been, who will we be tomorrow? What will our national identity become?

By an accident of timing, *SE* provides an analogous, more manageable proxy for narrating our national identity, and debate interlocutors often understood what they were doing. They also recognized that thinking about an enormously complex issue through a proxy increases risks of miscommunication, that “if there’s to be any kind of productive discourse about Captain America, or more importantly, America itself, it’s vital that we’re on the same page. We can’t make any kind of progress until we’re having the same conversation.”⁴⁷

The debate over *SE* has national implications, but not everybody participating in it did so with that dynamic in mind; in particular, many integrationists dismissed readers’ upset over depicting Captain America as a fascist dictator as hysteria over nothing, even if they expressed passionate beliefs in the political messaging ability of the medium and the *SE* story. Additionally, political deliberation that happens with pop culture can get mired in pop culture issues that are not relevant to policy. Parts of *SE* debate became mired in some integrationists’ accusations that the abnegation position was driven by fake fans who do not read comics or know anything about the industry,⁴⁸ accusations strong tinged with gatekeeping against non-white, female, and queer audiences. Some abnegationists confused the issue by accusing Nick Spencer, Marvel, and anybody who enjoyed *SE* of being fascists purely on the basis of their

affiliation with the comic book. Though pop culture can provide the venue for and useful objects with which to have political debates, pop culture is neither neutral nor infinitely flexible. Its endemic debates can bog down discussion of broader political issues even as it provides unique opportunities for negotiation of meaning.

Another crucial question left unanswered about the use of pop culture sites in political discourse is how much impact they have on political ideas and attitudes. Captain America is one of a multitude of *lieux de mémoire* that constitute national identity, and not one that is central to many communities' idea of the core American institutions. For fans, the *SE* debate may have galvanized a more active deliberation around political power and policies in America, but for people who only knew about the debate because the *New York Times* published a blurb about it in their Books section in August of 2017, it likely had little impact. At the same time, one of pop culture's characteristics is its ubiquity in modern life; everybody watches or reads or listens to or plays *something*. Captain America is a particularly apt pop culture site for political appropriation because of his close ties to modern American identity narration, but popular culture is full of opportunities to engage with the looming questions of who we are and what we value in a meaningful way. Even if it is only among fans of the same media, it may help develop political ideas and habits of participation.

Notes

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¹⁰ Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 7.

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¹² Murray, *Champions of the Oppressed*.

¹³ Jason Dittmer, *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero: Metaphors, Narratives, and Geopolitics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

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¹⁶ Stefan Berger, "Narrating the Nation: Historiography and Other Genres," in *Narrating the Nation: Representation in History, Media and the Arts*, eds. Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 1.

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¹⁸ Allison Lin, "Captain America Returns and Drops a Bomb in Debut Issue," *Paste Magazine*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2016/05/captain-america-returns-and-drops-a-bomb-in-debut.html>.

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