

Comic-Superheroes as a Mirror of American Culture

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When in 1938 Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel created *Superman*, they weren't aware that they produced a milestone in the history of American popular culture. The publication of *Action Comics #1*, the first *Superman* story, occurred synchronous with the birth of a new medium, the comic book. In contrast to its predecessor, the comic strip, the comic book was the first medium addressing exclusively teenaged readers. *Superman* became the prototype for a whole range of comic superheroes to come. While the concept of these comic-superheroes is still the same, these comics interestingly adapted to the socio-cultural climate of America history.

The presentation focuses on the medium comic book and its most famous protagonist, the superhero, as a socio-historical parameter of American Culture. Using examples from the medium's history, we will examine superheroes' struggle for workers' rights in the late 30s and the use of comics during World War II. While in the second half of the 20th century the confidence in the American government diminishes, superheroes directly address these problems: From the fear of an atomic bomb in the 60s to the economic problems during the Regan era, superheroes reflect the lack of trust in American politics. Even today, after the September 11th and the Patriot Act, superheroes lend their voice to illustrate the problematic issues. Through examination of the use of violence, the construction of the hero in mainstream-comics, I will not only show the importance of comic-superheroes for the American culture, but I will also provide the tools to analyze America via its popular culture.