

I'M JEWISH.

I DON'T HAVE A QUOTE UNQUOTE JEWISH-SOUNDING NAME.

I DON'T LOOK OR SOUND JEWISH, WHATEVER THAT LOOKS OR SOUNDS LIKE...

SO IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW I WAS JEWISH, YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW...UNLESS I TOLD YOU.

SAME GOES FOR MY MUTATION.

L'CHAIM.

SH'MA YISRAEL ADONAI ELOHEINU ADONAT ECHAD...

UHM...

BARUCH SHEM K'VOD MALCHUTO L'OLAM VA'ED.

I REMEMBER MY OWN CHILDHOOD-- THE GAS CHAMBERS AS AUSCHWITZ, THE GUARDS JOKING AS THEY HERDED MY FAMILY TO THEIR DEATH. AS OUR LIVES WERE NOTHING TO THEM, SO HUMAN LIVES BECAME NOTHING TO ME.

I'M SORRY. I'M NOT MAKING LIGHT.

JET LAG. I HAVEN'T SLEPT SINCE SHAVOUS.

I'M LOOPY

HAPPY HANUKKAH!

THE JEWISH HISTORY OF COMICS

OF COURSE, THERE'S BEING RAISED JEWISH.

AND THEN THERE'S BEING RAISED BY A RABBI.

"MY FATHER'S GOD TOOK US OUT OF EGYPT. MY NEW GOD HAD KEPT US THERE."



SARAH MONOSON



**"THE COMIC BOOK IS A JEWISH INVENTION.
THE SUPERHERO GENRE IS A JEWISH INVENTION."**

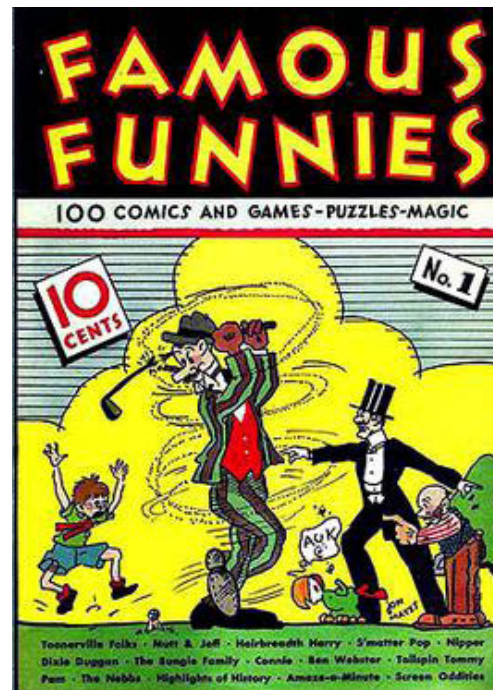
THESE ARE THE WORDS OF ROY SCHWARTZ, JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR OF *IS SUPERMAN CIRCUMCISED?: THE COMPLETE JEWISH HISTORY OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST HERO*. SCHWARTZ, HIMSELF JEWISH, SUMMARIZES WITH THIS QUOTE THE LONG HISTORY OF JEWISH-AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS AND THE COMIC BOOK INDUSTRY THEY PIONEERED.



THE ORIGIN OF THE INDUSTRY LIES WITH —

MAX GAINES

...BORN TO JEWISH PARENTS IN NEW YORK CITY. IN 1933, GAINES HAD THE IDEA OF REPRINTING OLD NEWSPAPER COMIC STRIPS TOGETHER INTO BOOKS. *FAMOUS FUNNIES* No. 1, THE FIRST RETAIL COMIC BOOK, WAS PUBLISHED THE NEXT YEAR.



AS THE LIMITED SUPPLY OF PRE-MADE STRIPS RAN OUT, THERE WAS A DEMAND FOR NEW STORIES. THIS DEMAND WAS LARGELY FILLED BY JEWISH WRITERS AND ARTISTS WHO COULDN'T FIND WORK ELSEWHERE DUE TO ANTISEMITIC RESTRICTIONS.

*GOLDEN ('38-'56) & SILVER ('56-'70)
AGE JEWISH CREATORS & PUBLISHERS*

- MAX GAINES
- JERRY SIEGEL
- JOE SHUSTER
- BOB KANE
- BILL FINGER
- WILL EISNER
- HARVEY KURTZMAN
- AL JAFFEE
- BILL GAINES
- JOE SIMON
- JACK KIRBY
- STAN LEE

"JEWS WERE STILL MARGINALIZED IN RESPECTABLE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, WHETHER IT'S AD AGENCIES, POLITICAL CARTOONING, NEWSPAPERS OR MAGAZINES."

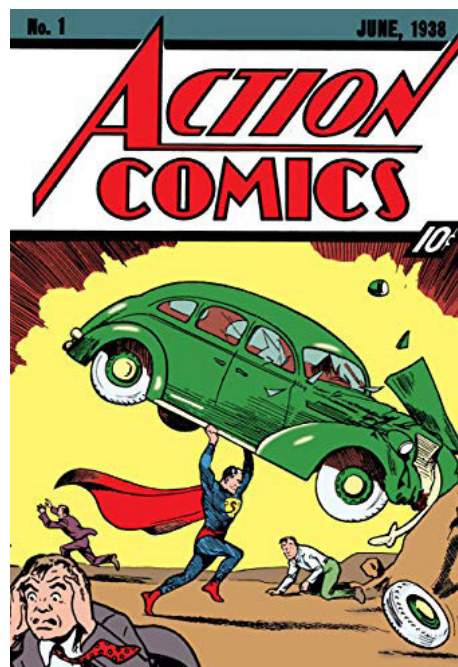
THUS, THE COMIC BOOK INDUSTRY BECAME POPULATED WITH JEWISH CREATIVES THAT SCHWARTZ DESCRIBES AS –

"WORKING-CLASS, EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWS IN NEW YORK THAT COULDN'T FIND A JOB DUE TO THE DEPRESSION AND RISING ANTISEMITISM."

TWO OF THESE JEWS THAT FOREVER CHANGED COMICS WERE

JERRY SIEGEL & JOE SHUSTER

THE CREATORS OF SUPERMAN. IN 1938, THIS "CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED," AS SIEGEL AND SHUSTER CALLED HIM, DEBUTED WITH *ACTION COMICS* No. 1. THE COMIC WAS IMMEDIATELY SUCCESSFUL, HERALDING THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS AND, ESSENTIALLY, THE SUPERHERO GENRE.



JEWISH CREATORS CONTINUED TO REVOLUTIONIZE COMICS THROUGHOUT AND BEYOND THE GOLDEN AGE WHILE IMBUING THEIR JEWISH AND IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES INTO THEIR WORK. ALTHOUGH CHARACTERS WEREN'T EXPLICITLY JEWISH EARLY ON, ESPECIALLY IN THE GOLDEN AGE, THEY STILL REFLECTED THE CULTURE OF THEIR CREATORS.

SUPERMAN IS A MOSES AND IMMIGRANT ALLEGORY.

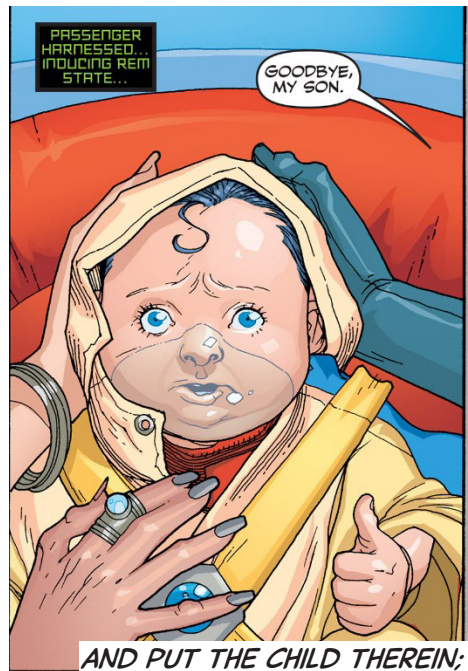
PANELS FROM SUPERMAN: BIRTHRIGHT (2003), MARK WAID & LEINIL FRANCIS YU.



AND WHEN SHE COULD NO LONGER HIDE HIM,



SHE TOOK FOR HIM AN ARK OF BULRUSHES,



AND PUT THE CHILD THEREIN;



EXODUS 2:3

THE MAN OF STEEL, CAPTAIN AMERICA, AND OTHER HEROES REGULARLY FOUGHT NAZIS, EVEN BEFORE IT WAS SEEN AS ALL-AMERICAN*, AND PROTECTED THE VULNERABLE.



*THIS CAPTAIN AMERICA COVER, WHICH WAS HIS 1941 DEBUT, DEPICTS HIM PUNCHING HITLER BEFORE THE US JOINED THE WAR AND WHEN AMERICANS WERE STILL GENERALLY OPPOSED TO GETTING INVOLVED. SHOWING A PERSONIFICATION OF AMERICA FIGHTING AN EVIL THAT AMERICANS WERE IGNORING WAS POTENT COMMENTARY BY CAP'S JEWISH CREATORS.

THE X-MEN FUNCTIONED AS AN ALLEGORY FOR VARIOUS OPPRESSED MINORITIES, LATER FEATURING EXPLICITLY JEWISH CHARACTERS, AS WELL AS OTHER MARGINALIZED IDENTITIES.



THE MERE CONCEPT OF SUPERPOWERED, BENEVOLENT PEOPLE CAN BE CONSIDERED AS BEING INFORMED BY CREATORS' JEWISHNESS.

JEWISH COMIC BOOK CHARACTERS CREATED BY JEWS

- BATWOMAN (GREG RUCKA)
- BATMAN (ON A TECHNICALITY BY RUCKA)
- HARLEY QUINN (BASED ON AND VOICED BY JEWISH ACTRESS ARLEEN SORKIN)
- SUPERMAN (CODED, SIEGEL & SHUSTER)
- MAGNETO (CHRIS CLAREMONT)
- KITTY PRYDE (CLAREMONT)
- BEN GRIMM/THE THING (KIRBY, LEE)
- SPIDER-MAN (CODED, LEE AND LATER BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS ETC)

ADDITIONALLY, DANNY FINGEROTH, COMIC WRITER AND AUTHOR OF *DISGUISED AS CLARK KENT: JEWS, COMICS AND THE CREATION OF THE SUPERHERO*, SAID –

"PEOPLE WITH REAL POWER DON'T NEED TO IMAGINE SUPERPOWERS!"

WITH THESE WORDS, SCHWARTZ SITUATES THE SUPERHERO GENRE AS SOMETHING UNIQUELY INTERTWINED WITH MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS.

"I THINK THE IDEA OF A BEING WHO WIELDS GREAT POWER WISELY AND JUSTLY WOULD BE VERY APPEALING TO PEOPLE WHOSE HISTORY INVOLVES FREQUENTLY BEING THE VICTIM OF POWER WIELDED BRUTALLY AND UNJUSTLY."

IN FACT, THERE LIES A PROTO-SUPERHERO EARLIER IN JEWISH HISTORY WITH THE GOLEM OF PRAGUE.

IN THIS STORY, A RABBI IN 16TH CENTURY PRAGUE CRAFTS A GOLEM TO PROTECT JEWS LIVING IN THE GHETTO FROM ANTISEMITIC VIOLENCE.

A GOLEM IS A CREATURE CRAFTED FROM MUD OR CLAY AND IMBUED WITH LIFE THROUGH JEWISH RITUALS.

WILL EISNER, A TITAN IN THE COMIC WORLD, WROTE THAT GOLEM'S WERE –

“PERCEIVED IN THE 1930S AS A MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTER, AN EARLY SUPERHERO.”



JUST AS THE GOLEM WAS CRAFTED TO PROTECT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, JEWISH CREATORS CRAFTED SUPERMAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, AND THE THING (THE LAST OF WHICH IS ACTUALLY MADE OF ROCK) TO PROTECT THE DEFENSELESS.

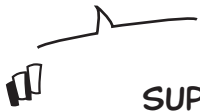
CHECK OUT ISAAC BRYNJEGARD-BIALIK'S "PAPER GOLEM" ART SERIES AT NICEJEWISHARTIST.COM FOR A VERY COOL MIXING OF COMICS AND GOLEMS!



REMEMBER THE TALE OF THE GOLEM, BENJAMIN? HE WAS A BEING MADE OF CLAY -- BUT HE WASN'T A MONSTER.

HE WAS A PROTECTOR.

FINGEROTH ALSO LINKS THE COMMON THEME OF LOSS TO THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE.



SUPERMAN,



ARE ABOUT SUDDEN,

BATMAN,



TRAUMATIC,

AND SPIDER-MAN'S ORIGINS



VIOLENT LOSS –

WHICH COULD BE SEEN TO ECHO THE LOSS OF STABILITY THAT EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWS HAD REGULARLY EXPERIENCED, HE SAID



SUPERMAN'S STORY IN PARTICULAR SPEAKS TO THE IMMIGRANT'S CHILD EXPERIENCE OF LEAVING A HOME YOU WILL NEVER TRULY KNOW, AND THE JEWISH FEAR OF YOUR CULTURE DYING WITH YOU.



ANOTHER FACET OF THE SUPERHERO GENRE THAT SPEAKS TO IMMIGRANTS IS THE

DUAL *IDENTITY.*

LIKE SUPERHEROES, IMMIGRANTS – EVEN THE COMIC CREATORS THEMSELVES – MAY HAVE

*A NAME THEY USE
AT HOME*



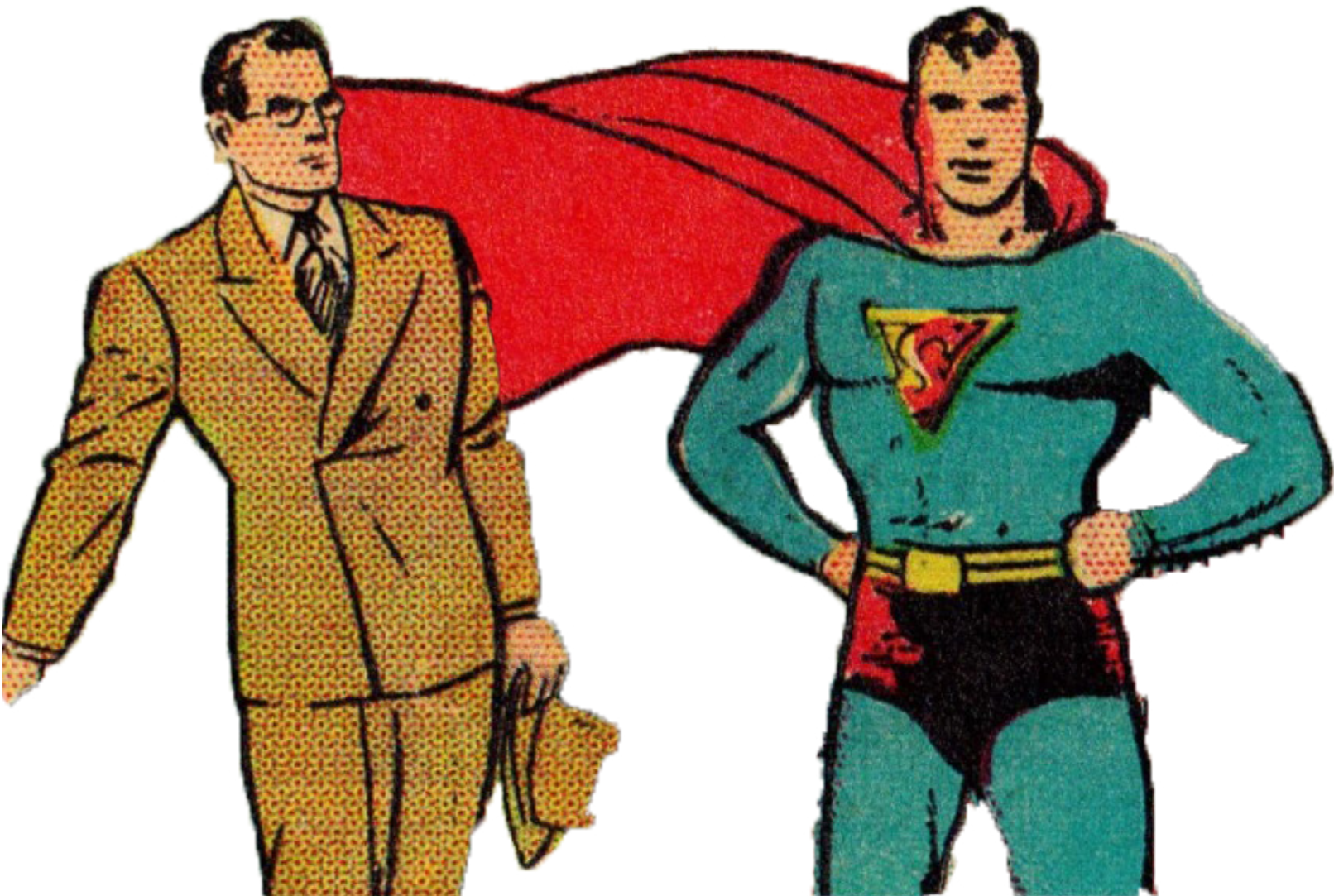
*A DIFFERENT ONE
IN PUBLIC.*

SUPERMAN, OF COURSE, HAS HIS FAMOUS MONIKER. BUT HE ALSO HAS

*HIS AMERICAN NAME,
CLARK KENT.*



*HIS KRYPTONIAN NAME,
KAL-EL.*



THE LATTER IS HEBREW INSPIRED, WITH EL MEANING GOD (LIKE ELOHIM, THE COMMON NAME FOR GOD IN JEWISH SCRIPTURE, AND LIKE THE ANGELS' NAMES GABRIEL, MICHAEL, AND RAPHAEL) AND THE WHOLE NAME TRANSLATING TO "ALL OF GOD" OR "VOICE OF GOD."

KAL-EL IS THE NAME CONNECTED TO SUPERMAN'S HOME AND CULTURE THAT HE MUST HIDE FROM OTHERS TO ASSIMILATE. SIMILARLY, MANY IMMIGRANTS CHANGED THEIR NAMES TO FIT INTO AMERICAN SOCIETY. MAX GAINES WAS BORN GINZBERG; STAN LEE WAS STANLEY LIEBER; JACK KIRBY WAS JACOB KURTZBURG; BOB KANE WAS ROBERT KAHN, WHICH WAS ALREADY A GERMAN-IZATION OF THE JEWISH NAME COHEN.

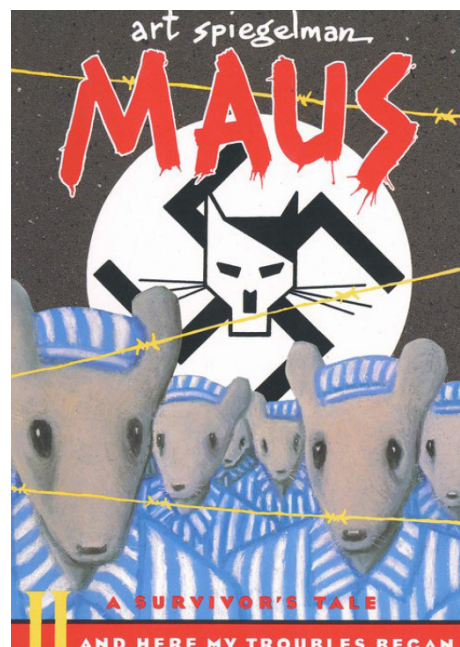
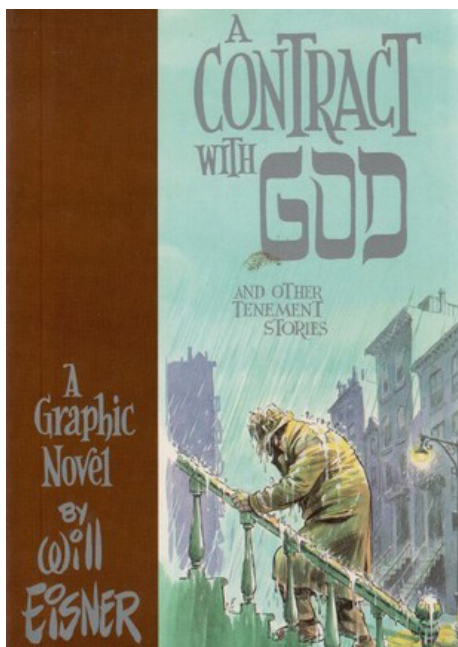
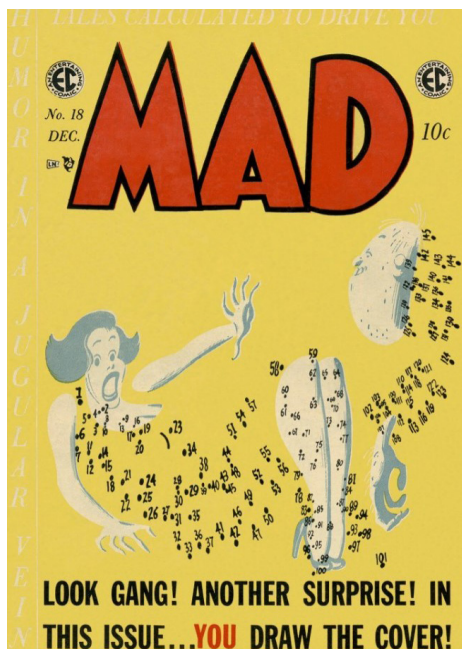
BEYOND HIDING AN "UNAMERICAN" NAME, IMMIGRANTS FELT PRESSURED TO HIDE THEIR CULTURE AND BECOME WHOLLY AND SOLELY AMERICAN. IT IS UNSURPRISING THAT JEWS, WANTING TO BE ACCEPTED AS AMERICAN, MADE CHARACTERS SUCH AS SUPERMAN AND CAPTAIN AMERICA THAT EMBODY AMERICAN IDEALS.

JEWS HAVE ALSO BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN THE COMIC INDUSTRY BEYOND THE SUPERHERO GENRE.

MAD MAGAZINE, DEBUTING IN 1952, FROM HARVEY KURTZMAN WAS HUGELY INFLUENTIAL FOR COMEDY AT LARGE AND WAS RIFE WITH JEWISH HUMOR AND YIDDISH LANGUAGE.

WILL EISNER, INITIALLY KNOWN FOR *THE SPIRIT*, POPULARIZED THE TERM "GRAPHIC NOVEL" WITH HIS 1978 COMICS CENTERING ON JEWISH IMMIGRANT TENEMENT LIFE, *A CONTRACT WITH GOD*.

ART SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS*, PUBLISHED FROM 1980-91, WAS THE FIRST GRAPHIC NOVEL/COMIC TO WIN A PULITZER PRIZE WITH ITS DEPICTION OF THE HOLOCAUST.



THESE WORKS EXPANDED THE DEFINITION OF THE COMICS MEDIUM TO INCLUDE SATIRE AND HISTORICAL MEMOIRS WHILE LEAVING AN INDELIBLE JEWISH MARK.

COMICS AS WE KNOW THEM WOULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT THE LEGENDARY JEWS (1ST OR 2ND GENERATION IMMIGRANTS) WHO PIONEERED THEM.

POP CULTURE WOULD BE RADICALLY DIFFERENT WITHOUT THE LEGACY OF SUPERMAN OR THE SATIRE OF MAD OR THE GRAPHIC NARRATIVE MEDIUM.

THE WORK WASN'T JUST MADE BY JEWS, IT WAS INFORMED BY JEWISH CULTURE AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE.

TO ALL THE ICONIC FIGURES AND UNKNOWN WORKERS OF THE INDUSTRY:

MAY THEIR MEMORIES BE A BLESSING & MAY THEIR LEGACIES LIVE ON.

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