From Maus to Magneto: Exploring Holocaust Representation in Comic Books and Graphic Novels

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From *Maus* to Magneto:
Exploring Holocaust Representation in Comic Books and Graphic Novels

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Modern Judaic Studies

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Abstract

The following Capstone project documents my research into the topic of Holocaust representation in comic books and graphic novels. Comics are an oft-overlooked medium in academic circles, so there is a distinct lack of scholarly works examining comics outside the fields of pop culture studies or comics art studies. As a result, outside of works like Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, the phenomenon of Holocaust representation in comics is relatively uncategorized and unexamined. It was my intention in this project to demonstrate that comics are a legitimate medium for depicting and analyzing the Holocaust both as a historical event and through the lenses of trauma and memory. I approached this goal by establishing a spectrum of the types of Holocaust representation in comics and presenting an in-depth analysis of a single representative work for each category on the spectrum, concluding with an examination of visual and stylistic trends within comics across the spectrum.
Executive Summary

As the title suggests, this Capstone project investigates the ways in which comic books and graphic novels have been used to represent the Holocaust, both in terms of depicting the historical/factual reality of the Holocaust and in exploring the Holocaust through the lens of trauma studies and memory. My aim in choosing this particular topic was to demonstrate that comics are a legitimate medium for Holocaust representation, and that they should therefore be given more scholarly/academic focus within the field of Holocaust and trauma studies. In addition, it is my hope that this will serve as the starting point for a larger project of examining and cataloguing examples of comics Holocaust representation to make them more accessible and known to the general public.

It is important to always define your terms so before moving forward I would like to take a moment to define exactly what I mean by the term “comics.” This may seem like an obvious point – anyone reading this paper has probably had at least some exposure to comics and has some conception of what comics are. Perhaps your first thought is of the short comic strips in the newspaper, or of the four-color adventures of comic book superheroes like Superman and Captain America. Maybe you’ve read or at least heard of such longer-form comics, often called “graphic novels”, as Maus, Watchmen, or The Sandman, comics that have received enough critical acclaim to be considered literature in scholarly circles. Indeed, the term “comics” encompasses all of these different forms. For the purposes of this paper, I used the definition of comics outlined by cartoonist and comics theorist Scott McCloud in his ground-breaking work Understanding Comics, which explores the history, form, and language of comics through the medium itself. According to McCloud, comics are “juxtaposed pictorial images in deliberate
sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.”

The next important point before getting into the real content of this project is that comics are specifically a medium, not a genre. It can be very tempting to (mistakenly) think of comics as a genre, especially if your only familiarity with comics is with the seemingly ubiquitous superhero comic books. This is not actually the case. There are many different genres within comic books – superhero, Westerns, romance, horror, science fiction, “sword and sorcery” fantasy etc. – and within the longer form graphic novels there are as many genres as there are for non-graphic literature – biographies, memoirs, historical fiction, historical non-fiction, and fantasy, to name just a few. Comics would be more accurately described as a medium, like film, music, the visual arts, or books, through which any number of different themes, stories, and genres can be explored, and it is in this sense, as a medium for Holocaust representation, that I assessed the comics featured in this paper.

My research for this paper was divided into three main branches. These were 1) Holocaust and trauma studies, 2) comics studies, with specific emphasis on Judaism and Jewish influence on comics, and 3) Holocaust representation in comics. The first two of these categories functioned primarily as background research, giving me the academic grounding to begin seriously analyzing and interpreting the ways in which my examples of comics Holocaust representation approached portraying the Holocaust. One thing that I realized very quickly is that there is an incredibly large amount of material that falls within the parameters of Holocaust representation in comic books and graphic novels. Consequently, I needed to develop a system for sifting through the wide variety of comics Holocaust representation in existence and categorizing them in some way. The system that I decided on is a spectrum of six major types of

Holocaust representation that can be found in comics, spanning from allegorical representation at one end to survivor testimony on the other. It is important to note that this spectrum is just a construct, a device to facilitate analyzing an incredibly diverse and complex body of works, and that there are many examples of Holocaust representation in comics that blur the lines between categories. In terms of presenting the spectrum, I chose a single comic book or graphic novel to represent each category and presented a close analysis of the ways in which each category’s example used the medium of comics to approach representing the Holocaust. At the end of the paper I also examined some visual/stylistic trends common throughout examples of Holocaust representation in comics across the spectrum.
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And finally, a special shout out to my comic book Capstone Professor X, Michael C. Rogers, whose Capstone project/seminar course “The Evolution of Comic Book Movies” (Spring 2014) was both a fantastic course and a partial inspiration for my project, demonstrating that yes, you can do a legitimate, academic Capstone project about comic books.
Advice to Future Honors Students

My first piece of advice is a general one to any Honors student working on their Capstone project – STOP PROCRASTINATING! Trust me on this one. You’ll convince yourself that you’re on schedule, that you have plenty of time to finish your project, that of course it’ll be fine to take the weekend off. And that right there is how you end up writing your “Advice to Future Honors Students” section on the weekend before the final turn-in date while everyone else is hanging out outside enjoying the first five minutes of warm weather in months. Don’t make my mistakes.

My second piece of advice is specifically aimed at my fellow Judaic Studies Honors students. When I started thinking about what topic I wanted to research for my Judaic Studies Capstone, I had a lot of difficulty finding something that fit within the subject matter of the major and was still something that I was passionate enough about to spend a year and half researching. I finally found my topic by looking at my own life and the things I was interested in, totally separate from my academic pursuits, and finding a way to connect that back to Judaic Studies. What I realized is this – Judaic Studies can be found in the most unexpected of places. Even comic books. So don’t be afraid to think outside the box and find something that is important to you. You’re going to be spending a lot of time on this topic, so make it a good one.
Chapter 1

Allegory to Testimony: Introducing the Spectrum of Holocaust Representation in Comics

The first step in providing a comprehensive survey of comic book and graphic novel representations of the Holocaust is simply determining which works to include. How best to provide the reader with as complete a picture as possible of the wide range of comics that fall under the umbrella of Holocaust representation without while at the same time being selective enough so as to not overwhelm with an exhaustive list of every single Holocaust comic book or graphic novel currently in existence? A quick Internet search for the search terms “Holocaust graphic novels” reveals pages of results, and this is before even taking into account the numerous examples of Holocaust representation and allegorical Holocaust references to be found within the pages of individual issues of mainstream superhero comics. Some sort of uniform system is needed to help sort through the wealth of material available and parse out the works that best illustrate the rich variety of types of Holocaust representation that can be found within the medium of comics.

After considering various organizational schemas I have divided Holocaust representation in comics into six distinct categories, each of which will be elaborated on later in this chapter. For each type of representation I will explain my definition of the category and then present a profile of a single work (or in one instance, a single superhero comic book character) that I believe best showcases that category, exploring different aspects of the work in question.
These works will serve as case studies of the ways in which each type of Holocaust representation is presented in comics. At the end of the paper I will also provide some suggestions for further comic books and/or graphic novels that fit within some of the categories. The six categories that I have devised are as follows: allegorical, plot-driven, historical fiction (within which I have chosen to focus on historical fiction in mainstream/superhero comic books), historical non-fiction, vicarious survivor accounts/2nd generation testimony, and survivor testimony. These categories lie along a spectrum ranging from purely allegorical references to the Holocaust on one end to survivor testimony and Holocaust memoirs on the other. Positioning allegory and testimony as opposing ends of a spectrum is not intended as a value judgment about the relative worth of either as a form of Holocaust representation but rather as a convenient way of visualizing the similarities and differences between each category as you move along the spectrum. A final category that will not be discussed in this paper but that I feel it is important to point out is what I refer to as tangential Holocaust representation. These are works connected to but not directly about the Holocaust, for example Will Eisner’s graphic novels *The Plot* and *Fagin the Jew* that address the theme of anti-Semitism or works focusing on the broader historical context of WWII (for example, this is a common recurring theme in Captain America comics, particularly those written and used as propaganda pieces during the war itself). While they don’t discuss the Holocaust as such, works in this category are important supplementary materials for Holocaust study and I would be remiss to not mention them in this context.

At this point a brief disclaimer is necessary: It is important to note that this is not a definitive list of all the possible types of Holocaust comics, merely my take on the most prominent categories and attempt to set up a basic framework for understanding the types of Holocaust stories that have been told using the medium of comics. Also keep in mind that there
exist many works that blur the lines between categories and defy easy classification. For example there is Joe Kubert’s *Yossel: April 29th, 1943*, in which Kubert uses his personal history as a jumping off point for a work of speculative historical fiction imagining what his life would have been like if his family had not left Poland prior to the Holocaust – does this count as pure historical fiction, or does the element of personal connection bring it into the realm of memoir, albeit fictional memoir? Or where to place Miriam Katin’s *Letting it Go*, the memoir of a Holocaust survivor that deals not with her experiences during the Holocaust but rather her continuing struggle with that trauma as framed through a contemporary journey to Berlin. This graphic novel is certainly a Holocaust story, but with its absence of Holocaust imagery is it a Holocaust memoir in quite the same sense as one like Katin’s other graphic novel *We Are on Our Own* that focuses on depicting the actual events in question? Or is it perhaps a different category of memoir altogether? My point here is that questions of genre when looking at comics or any other medium are inherently complex and that any attempt at categorization like the one I have set up here is by necessity a simplification, and in the field of Holocaust studies even the idea of categorization or structuralism is itself controversial. Finally, in the interest of keeping this paper tightly focused on the unique qualities and range of Holocaust representation possible through the medium of comics I am also not taking into account examples of Holocaust representation in comics that are not works originating within the medium, such as graphic novelizations of works like Anne Frank’s diary.
Chapter 2

Allegorical Representation

Category Introduction

The first category of Holocaust representation in comics that I’ll be discussing in this paper is the category of allegorical representation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines allegory as “A story, picture, etc. which uses symbols to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one; a symbolic representation; an extended or continued metaphor.” It is the last two sections of this definition, “a symbolic representation, an extended or continued metaphor,” that are most pertinent to understanding what I mean by allegorical representation. Allegorical representation is unique among the categories in my spectrum in that in this category the Holocaust is not literally represented in any way. There is no literal imagery of Nazis, concentration camps, or any other elements of the historical context or reality of the Holocaust. Instead, works of allegorical Holocaust representation explore the major themes and moral dilemmas/questions of the Holocaust through the use of fictional characters, settings, and situations that serve as an extended metaphor for the Holocaust itself. To the knowledgeable reader this metaphor will be recognizable as a re-presentation of the Holocaust separate from its historical context, while even readers who do not realize that the work they are reading is a

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Holocaust allegory will still be able to benefit from the themes and moral discussions presented and learn about the Holocaust, albeit in an abstract sense.

**Case Study: Days of Future Past**

Perhaps the best example of allegorical Holocaust representation in comic books is the classic X-Men story *Days of Future Past*, co-plotted by writer Chris Claremont and artist John Byrne. *Days of Future Past* is a two part story arc published by Marvel Comics in *Uncanny X-Men* #141-142 (January & February 1981). Along with the Dark Phoenix saga, *Days of Future Past* is one of the most popular and iconic X-Men storylines. It was also recently adapted into a movie, which will be discussed briefly later in this section. On a more personal note, *Days of Future Past* also has the distinction of being the first superhero comic book story that I ever read, and thus can be considered partly responsible for the existence of this project in the first place.

Set in New York in the far-off year 2013, *Days of Future Past* presents an apocalyptic future in which North America is under the control of the robotic Sentinels, who have been
programmed by the American government to “‘Eliminate’ the mutant menace once and for all.”³ This open-ended program is interpreted by the Sentinels as requiring them to take complete control of the continent and ruthlessly hunt down and exterminate all mutants (humans with “mutant genes”). A handful of mutants are kept alive in internment camps, and of these a few remaining members of the X-Men and their former enemy Magneto form an anti-Sentinel resistance movement. Their basic plan involves using the telepathic powers of one of the mutants to send mutant Kate Pryde’s consciousness backwards in time into the mind of her younger self, teenager and new member of the X-Men Kitty Pryde, so that she can prevent the event that directly led to the apocalyptic future – the assassination of anti-mutant presidential candidate Senator Kelly in 1980 by the (yes, the name is patently ridiculous) Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. By doing this, the resistance movement plans to avert both the mutant genocide that has already occurred and the approaching global nuclear war against the Sentinels.

After a long build-up of the present-day X-Men checking Kate’s story and fighting the Brotherhood, and of the remaining future X-Men falling in battle as they try to protect Kate’s unconscious body from the Sentinels, the plan is successful, and Kate in the body of Kitty Pryde is able to convince the X-Men of 1980 (the present day, for the comic’s original readers) of her story. Working together, they are able to stop the assassination of Senator Kelly. Kate’s mind is returned to the future once the task is completed, although the story leaves it open-ended as to whether or not the future has actually been changed, closing the narrative with a cryptic “Only time will tell.”⁴

⁴ Ibid, 47.
Holocaust Allegory & References in *Days of Future Past*

The plot summary above offers a good sense of how and why *Days of Future Past* can be considered an example of allegorical Holocaust representation. The storyline is centered around the government-mandated mass murder of mutants based solely on the group they were born into, a genocide that originated in legal measures isolating and marking that group as societal outcasts. Even in the broad strokes, the parallels to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust are striking.

The X-Men comics in general, especially beginning in the mid-1970s with writer Chris Claremont, have always explored themes of intolerance, with mutants in the Marvel Comics Universe constantly facing persecution and hatred from the non-mutant community. In a description of the X-Men series in 1982 Claremont stated,

> What we have here, intended or not, is a book about racism, bigotry, and prejudice [...] It’s a book about outsiders, about people who are beyond the pale, so to speak [...] a story about downtrodden, repressed people fighting to change their situation [...] The Jewish situation is the most obvious genocidal example in the human experience.

Claremont’s authorial claims offer a weighty and series-wide demonstration of the use of the X-Men to explore themes of prejudice, intolerance, and persecution. By no means unique to individual storylines like *Days of Future Past*, injustice is an integral part of Claremont and

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5 The status of the X-Men and of mutants more generally in the Marvel Comics Universe as a frequently victimized minority has been used either deliberately or implicitly throughout their history to allegorically represent and explore intolerance and discrimination against a number of different persecuted groups in addition to the Jewish people. For example, during Chris Claremont’s run of writing X-Men in the 1970s the comics often reflected the Civil Rights movement, with the opposing ideologies of Professor Xavier and Magneto paralleling those of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, respectively (Fingeroth, 2007, 121). More recently, the X-Men film trilogy used mutants to explore issues of homophobia and gay rights – for example, in *X-Men United* there is a very clear “coming out” scene in which one of the teenage X-Men reveals that he is a mutant to his parents, while in *X-Men: The Last Stand* a large portion of the plot centers around the controversial discovery of a “cure” for being a mutant and the resultant debate of whether being a mutant is something that can or should be “cured”. In the same vein, an X-Men storyline in the mid-90s featured the Legacy virus, a clear metaphor for the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Christian Norman, “Mutating Metaphors: Addressing the Limits of Biological Narratives of Sexuality,” in *The Ages of the X-Men: Essays on the Children of the Atom in Changing Times*, ed. Joseph J. Darowski (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2014), 170).

subsequent writers' vision of the series. Secondly, this quote provides an explicit acknowledgement by the writer of the X-Men during this period that “the Jewish situation” of the Holocaust has a conscious influence on the series. In *Days of Future Past*, Claremont and Byrne take these underlying themes a step further and actively present the X-Men in a symbolic Holocaust scenario using clear and deliberate Holocaust imagery.

The Holocaust imagery comes into play very early on in the first issue of the story. A few pages in, several panels of exposition introduce the reader to the setup of the apocalyptic future world –

In North America, in the year 2013, there are three classes of people: ‘H’ for baseline human – clean of mutant genes, allowed to breed. ‘A’ for anomalous human – a normal human possessing mutant genetic potential…forbidden to breed. ‘M’ for mutant. The bottom of the heap, made pariahs and outcasts by the Mutant Control Act of 1988. Hunted down and – with a few rare exceptions – killed without mercy. In the quarter-century since the act’s passage, millions have died. They were the lucky ones.

These few panels, along with the accompanying art, carry a lot of Holocaust imagery. First of all, there is the idea of a governmental act legally defining and classifying people as a means of separating out certain groups – in this case mutants – for persecution. This parallels the 1935 Nuremberg Laws in Nazi
Germany which created a legal definition for what made a person Jewish. The specific restrictions on procreation for “anomalous” humans and mutants mirror another Nazi decree, the “Law for the Protection of the Hereditary Health of the German People,” which restricted the marital and reproductive rights of people with “hereditary illnesses” (these were not always actually hereditary illnesses) and others deemed to be a threat to German racial purity.

The illustrations paired with the descriptions of the classes of people in Days of Future Past are another example of Holocaust imagery, this time associated with the concentration camps. Both “baseline humans” and the book’s protagonist, mutant Kate Pryde, are depicted wearing standardized uniforms marked with their genetic status. The humans wear coats with a large “H” emblazoned on the back, while Kate, and as we see in future pages, all the remaining mutants, wear green prison uniforms with a large “M” on the back and a small one on the front. During the Holocaust, a very similar system was used in many of the Nazi concentration camps to visually classify different types of prisoners. Prisoners in the camps would wear striped prison uniforms marked with colored triangles based on what category of prisoner they were, for example yellow for Jews, red for Communists, purple for Jehovah's Witnesses, and so forth.

Furthering this parallel to concentration camp organization, in one of the panels shown above the Sentinel refers to Kate Pryde as "Mutant 187" as opposed to calling her by name, a clear reference to the serial numbers assigned to prisoners at the Auschwitz concentration camp complex. In just a few panels and lines of exposition, the future world of Days of Future Past is very clearly delineated as analogous to the Holocaust.

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8 Ibid.
Another major scene in terms of Holocaust imagery in *Days of Future Past* occurs a little bit further on in the first issue of the story. At this point, Kate Pryde’s mind has been successfully sent backwards into the body of her younger self, and Kate-as-Kitty is trying to explain her story to the still somewhat skeptical present day X-Men, going into further detail about the series of events that led to the mutant Holocaust depicted earlier in the comic. The “rabid anti-mutant candidate” that Kate describes as having been elected as the American president in 1984 functions as *Days of Future Past*’s equivalent of Adolf Hitler, the leader playing off societal fears and discontent to push forward an anti-mutant agenda. The illustration for the panel supports this reading, depicting the unnamed candidate standing in front of a flag banner and gesturing with his arm as he clearly gives a passionate speech against the mutant threat, an image meant to evoke that of Hitler giving one of his speeches to the German people. More subtly, Kate’s comment in the prior panel that “We [the mutant population] thought the mood of hysterical paranoia would pass. It didn’t.” can be interpreted as a reference to the attitude held by many German Jews in the early days of the Nazi regime that the government-instituted persecutions weren’t a cause for major concern and would eventually die down.

Aside from the clear Holocaust imagery used in depicting the future world of *Days of Future Past* as described above there are a few other ways in which the comic book encourages the reader to interpret the story as a work of allegorical Holocaust representation. First of all, there is the fact that Kate Pryde is chosen as the one to be sent back in time to prevent the

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11 Claremont, *Days of Future Past*, 17.
assassination. Within the story, the rationale given for this choice is that the younger Kitty Pryde, who in 1980 was a brand-new and completely untrained member of the X-Men, would not have developed mental defenses against psychic intrusion and therefore would not be able to stop the mind swap from occurring. This all makes sense within the parameters of the story; however it seems more than a coincidence that the character selected as the savior of the world from a second Holocaust is also the one overtly Jewish member of the X-Men at the time the story was published.

More concretely than this, *Days of Future Past* also has one of its characters blatantly call attention to the parallel being set up between the events of *Days of Future Past* and the Holocaust. During a scene depicting the debate over Senator Kelly’s proposed anti-mutant legislation, Dr. Moira McTaggert, there with Professor Xavier to defend against Kelly’s proposal, makes the pessimistic – and, as the reader knows, all too accurate – prediction of “Registration of mutants today, gas chambers tomorrow.” Interestingly, and crucially, Moira McTaggert is not a mutant. Having this observation made by someone who, while an ally to the mutant cause, is still ultimately an outsider to the prejudices aimed at them by society ensures that it comes across as an unbiased evaluation of the situation at hand. This lends the statement more validity than if it had been made by someone with an intimate personal stake in the matter.

By very obviously laying down the connection between the fictional mutant scenario and the

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12 Ibid, 18.
13 The other major Jewish character in the X-Men comics, Magneto, who will be the focus of the next section of this paper, was not established as a Holocaust survivor until August 1981, and even then was not officially confirmed as Jewish until the publication of *X-Men: Magneto Testament* in 2009. Kitty Pryde has been explicitly Jewish since her introduction in *Uncanny X-Men* #129 (January 1980) and when not in her X-Men costume is frequently depicted with a Star of David necklace clearly visible around her neck.
historical reality of the Holocaust this line reinforces the metaphor set up in the comic’s previous pages as discussed above and invites the audience to read *Days of Future Past* as a Holocaust allegory.

The ambiguity of *Days of Future Past*’s ending also plays into understanding how the comic functions as a work of allegorical Holocaust representation. While the comic initially suggests that preventing the future genocide of the mutants is a simple cause-and-effect task – stop the assassination; stop the mutant Holocaust – the fact that even when this task is completed, the future is uncertain demonstrates the real world complexity of the issue and the difficulty of changing the many factors that lead to a situation like the Holocaust. While it would be comforting to think that all the blame for the persecution of mutants in *Days of Future Past*, or that of the Jews during the Holocaust, can be placed on a single person or governmental action, that mindset avoids confronting the reality of society-wide prejudices against the group in question that allow or even tacitly endorse the persecution, even if they aren’t the ones actually implementing it. It is these underlying prejudices and instances of intolerance among “ordinary” people that ultimately need to be changed in order to prevent another Holocaust. Stopping the assassination of Senator Kelly may prevent the rise of the Sentinels and the mutant genocide in this instance, but the comic makes the very critical point that until the world as a whole stops hating and fearing mutants there is no guarantee that another anti-mutant leader won’t step up and begin the process again. In this way, *Days of Future Past* uses what could have been a run of the mill alternate future storyline to present a crucial lesson about intolerance and the “never again” mantra that has become so ubiquitous in the post-Holocaust world.
Beyond the Comic – 2014’s X-Men: Days of Future Past

In 2014, 20th Century Fox released a movie adaptation of Days of Future Past, loosely based on the comic book storyline (as with most comic book movie adaptations, a lot of liberties were taken with the source material), and serving within the X-Men film franchise as a bridge between the original trilogy of X-Men films – X-Men (2000), X2: X-Men United (2003), and X-Men: The Last Stand (2006) – and 2011’s part-prequel, part-reboot X-Men: First Class. The focus of this paper is of course on comics, not comic book movies, so I won’t go into too much depth on the X-Men films. However, there are some major differences between the book Days of Future Past and the movie X-Men: Days of Future Past that bear mentioning here.

As I will discuss in the next section of this paper, X-Men: First Class, the film that X-Men: Days of Future Past is most directly a sequel of, focused extensively on exploring the influence of the Holocaust on the development of the character Magneto, with his quest for revenge serving as a major driving force in that film. Interestingly, given this focus on the Holocaust in the first film, the film adaptation of Days of Future Past actually moves away from the allegory and direct parallels to the Holocaust of the original comic, very much downplaying the clear Holocaust imagery present in the future portions of Days of Future Past and instead continuing X-Men: First Class’s focus on the Magneto/Xavier dynamic.

The future scenes in X-Men: Days of Future Past film (which, due to the aforementioned bridging of the old and new X-Men films are actually set in the present day, with the present day scenes taking place in the 1970s) are reduced to what basically amounts to a “base under siege” setup, with the remaining X-Men holed up in a remote fortress fighting off Sentinels and trying to protect Kitty Pryde and Wolverine, the character who is sent back in this version of events instead of Kitty. While the choice of Wolverine instead of Kitty Pryde for the movie both in
terms of the popularity of the character and the film's shifted timeline, it does remove the added meaning of having the story centered around a Jewish character. The future world scenario is set up only briefly in a montage scene that opens the film and in not nearly as much detail as is seen in the comic book version. Unlike in the comic book with its specifically Holocaust-related imagery, the future world scenario in the film is portrayed as much more generically apocalyptic, with familiar shots of destroyed city landscapes and the remnants of humanity enslaved making up a majority of the scene. The main emphasis in this expository scene is in establishing the film’s core question of whether or not the future can be changed rather than developing a Holocaust-allegory world. As a result, *X-Men: Days of Future Past* comes across right from the start as more of a standard time travel/science fiction superhero narrative than one specifically aimed at allegorically exploring the Holocaust.
Chapter 3

Plot Driven/Incidental Representation

Category Introduction

The second category in my spectrum of Holocaust representation in comics is what I am referring to as plot-driven Holocaust representation, specifically as it functions in superhero comic books. Unlike the more symbolic and covert allegorical representations of the previous section, these are comic books with overt and direct references to the Holocaust. However, unlike works for which Holocaust representation is the primary function of the piece (as will be the case in the next category), these works use those references first and foremost as a device to either further the main plot or as a side story set apart from the main plot, with Holocaust representation as a secondary aim. In other words, these are Holocaust plots and references that occur concurrently with or in the background of the comic book’s central plot; they are not in themselves the central plots of the book. The most common way in which this type of comics Holocaust representation plays out is through the inclusion of characters that are Holocaust survivors and – crucially – whose identity as Holocaust survivors directly impacts the development of the comic book’s storyline.

Case Study: Magneto

Since this category of Holocaust representation in comics specifically requires that the Holocaust representation not be the main focus of the comic book in question, selecting a single
work to use as a case study would not be the most effective way of presenting the category. Most examples of this type of Holocaust representation only deal with brief depictions of the Holocaust – in a quick reference to a character’s Holocaust history, in a few flashback panels, or at most a few pages dealing with a Holocaust-related subplot. In addition, the inclusion of a character with a Holocaust backstory allows for a wide range of approaches to addressing the Holocaust – depicting actual flashback scenes, grappling with the idea of Holocaust memory, or focusing on the idea of catharsis and playing out revenge fantasies, to name just a few. Looking at only one work, even an entire issue devoted to exploring a character’s relationship to the Holocaust would not adequately convey the range of ways this category of Holocaust representation can function. With this in mind, I have decided to use as a case study not a single comic book issue or collected volume that might only demonstrate one of these aspects but rather to focus on a single character, and present for that character a selection of different ways in which the Holocaust backstory is addressed and utilized within the comics.

The most logical such character Magneto from Marvel Comics’ X-Men franchise. Magneto is a prime example of a comic book superhero/supervillain/antihero (depending on the point in the storyline) with a Holocaust origin story. The various writers of Magneto for both the comics and the movies based on those comics have used this origin story to explore and represent the Holocaust both as a historical event and as a traumatic influence on Magneto in the present day. After a brief introduction to the character of Magneto and his Holocaust origin story I will examine some different ways in which Magneto has been used in the X-Men comics to represent aspects of the Holocaust as historical fact and as an influence on the present.
Introducing Magneto

Magneto, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, was the first major villain for the Marvel Comics superhero team the X-Men, introduced in *X-Men* #1 (1963). With the mutant ability to create and manipulate magnetic fields, Magneto was a powerful opponent for the team of mutant teenagers led by Professor Charles Xavier. Referred to frequently as the “Mutant Master of Magnetism,” Magneto served as a major recurring opponent of the X-Men throughout the comic’s original run from 1963 to 1970. After 1970, the series was discontinued due to poor readership and existed only through reprints of old issues until 1975. For this beginning era of the X-Men comics Magneto was a fairly one-note character, a typical megalomaniac villain bent on world domination and the subjugation of humanity, without any of the depth or sympathetic backstory that would come to define the character in later eras.

This depiction of Magneto changed when Chris Claremont took the helm of the X-Men series in 1975, following the success of *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 (May 1975) and its introduction of a new, international X-Men team. During his time writing X-Men, Claremont introduced a new origin story for Magneto, namely that Magneto was survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Describing his decision to recreate Magneto as a Holocaust survivor Claremont once explained,

> I was trying to figure out what made Magneto tick…and I thought, what was the most transfiguring event of our century that would tie in the super-concept of the X-Men as persecuted outcasts? It *has* to be the Holocaust! … All the rest fell into place, because it allowed me to turn him into a tragic figure who wants to save his people. Magneto was defined by all that had happened to him.15

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As this statement illustrates, the creation of Magneto’s Holocaust origin story was not merely an addition of some details to make the character more fleshed out and detailed but rather a complete reimagining of Magneto as a figure profoundly shaped and haunted by that history.

The first explicit mention of Magneto’s Holocaust backstory occurs in *Uncanny X-Men* vol. 1 #150 (August 1981). Believing that he has killed the X-Men’s youngest member, 13-year-old Kitty Pryde, in a fight with the X-Men, Magneto is startled into a moment of introspection about the villain he has become, comparing his actions against humans to those of the Nazi guards during his childhood in Auschwitz. This moment is a major turning point for Magneto’s character, starting him down a path to (at least temporary) reformation and beginning his evolution from a pure villain role to the more complex antihero role he plays today. After this first brief introduction of the idea that Magneto was a Holocaust survivor, that Holocaust backstory was gradually expanded upon through dialogue and flashback scenes scattered throughout *Uncanny X-Men* and the other X-Men titles. For example, later issues of Claremont’s *Uncanny X-Men* establish Magneto’s role as a Sonderkommando at Auschwitz and introduce his wife Magda, a Sinti Gypsy and fellow Auschwitz survivor.

Since the first introduction of Magneto as a Holocaust survivor, this history has played a major role in the development of the character and the ways in which the comic books he stars in
– whether the main X-Men books or any of the solo series focused specifically on Magneto –
approach depicting Magneto and his motivations. Beyond simply outlining the facts of
Magneto’s Holocaust experiences, the X-Men comic books (both the general X-Men books and
the various solo series focused specifically on Magneto) use those experiences to explore
Magneto’s motivations as villain and anti-hero as well as to look at the Holocaust more generally
in terms of history, trauma, and memory. An entire paper could be written just exploring the
many different instances of references to Magneto’s Holocaust history and the function of those
references within the narrative, so instead of providing an exhaustive rundown of all of these
instances I will instead examine the ways in which a sample issue of *Uncanny X-Men* addresses
and explores the Holocaust in relation to Magneto.

**Visualizing & Verbalizing Trauma – *Uncanny X-Men* #161**

The example I chose of Holocaust representation in stories involving Magneto is
*Uncanny X-Men* #161 (September 1982), as it provides an excellent exploration of the idea of
trauma and is also an issue where a majority of the narrative is dedicated to Holocaust themes
rather than just a page or a few panels. The main narrative in this issue of *Uncanny X-Men* is a
flashback sequence by a comatose Professor Xavier (this issue is part of a storyline in which
Xavier has an alien growing inside him) to the first time he met Magneto, then called Magnus, in
Haifa in 1962. The basic premise for this first meeting is that Xavier is in Haifa to help a friend
of his, Dr. Daniel Shomron, a psychiatrist whose patients are all Holocaust survivors. Magnus is
there serving as a volunteer at Dr. Shomron’s clinic – as Dr. Shomron explains, “Most of our
volunteers were in camps, Charles. They bring a degree of empathy to their work that the rest of
us can’t match.”¹⁶ Xavier uses his mutant power, telepathy, to enter the mind of one of Dr. Shomron’s patients, Gaby Heller, who is in a state of what Shomron describes as “catatonic schizophrenia, a total retreat from reality” in response to her traumatic experiences in Dachau.¹⁷ Xavier is able to break through Gaby’s metal wall and help her confront her memories of Dachau, bringing her out of her catatonic state. After this, Gaby, Magnus, and Xavier spend a lot of time together in Israel, becoming friends and, in the case of Magnus and Xavier, establishing their divergent views on the mutant situation. As this is a superhero comic book, an action-focused plot does eventually come into play, as it turns out Gaby has knowledge of the location of a secret stash of Nazi gold and is kidnapped by Hydra, a recurring villain organization in the Marvel Comics Universe composed of “the cream of Hitler’s SS, the dreaded Schutzstaffel,”¹⁸ yet another example of the Holocaust permeating the Marvel Comics universe. Various fight scenes between Xavier, Magnus, and Hydra ensue, with the end result that Gaby is rescued and Magnus parts ways with Xavier, taking with him the Nazi gold and vowing to use it in the future struggle between mutants and humans, stating as he leaves that “Mutants will not go meekly to the gas chambers. We will fight…”¹⁹

While the *Uncanny X-Men* #161 briefly reiterates the basics of Magnus’ Holocaust story, reminding the reader and introducing to Xavier that he was an inmate at Auschwitz and that his entire family was killed during the Holocaust (note the panel included here, in which Xavier

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¹⁷ Ibid, 7.
¹⁹ Ibid, 20.
reacts with shock to Magnus’ camp tattoo), the real meat of the story in terms of Holocaust representation and the reason why I am including it in this paper is the way in which the comic approaches visualizing and exploring the effects of trauma on both Gaby and Magnus. First, there is the sequence in which Xavier enters into Gaby’s mind and views her memories from when she was a little girl in Dachau. As this sequence is an extremely important visual that really needs to be viewed in its entirety, I am including the entire page here and will discuss it after the break.

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20 Ibid, 8.
The light is pure, unbearable -- the face of the gorgon, or perhaps of the Lord; or both -- yet he does not look away, he cannot.

He remembers a line from the Bhagavad Gita... "I am become death, the shatterer of worlds."

Then, the majestic radiance fades, images form, a voice is heard. It is Gabrielle, age 10.

Through her young, innocent eyes, he relives the war. He/she stands packed so tightly in a cattle car that the dead cannot fall, but remain on their feet, supported by those around them till the cars are unloaded.

Her grandmother dies that way, by Gabby's side.

The lucky ones are gassed, their bodies cremated. But Gabby is beautiful, like the guards, like her.

So she survives, young in years, ancient in spirit. Innocent no longer.

Was she wicked, evil, the child wonders, that she should be punished so? She thinks of suicide, but lacks the courage. She prays the guards will tire of her and send her to the gas chamber, but they never do.

Instead, in the last days of the war...

...she is dragged before the commandant, who points a magic wand at her, chants an obscene spell...

...and transforms her into solid gold.
Instead of depicting the literal/factual content of Gaby’s memories of Dachau, this page utilizes several visual tricks to convey the horror and trauma of those memories by using more symbolic and metaphorical representation. Firstly, it deviates from the standard panel structure of the rest of the book – instead of a series of neat, rectangular panels, Gaby’s memories are enclosed in large, irregularly shaped panels that dominate the page. Resembling a broken mirror, the panel structure conveys the shattering and cracking of Gaby’s psyche in response to her experiences. Even the border lines enclosing the panels are thick and jagged, evoking scar tissue, in contrast with the thin, even lines of the borders in the rest of the book. Moving on to the content of the panels, the page presents a combination of factual information about Gaby’s time in the camp – for example, the text box describing her trip to Dachau in a packed cattle car and the accompanying visual of prisoners standing behind the fence of the camp – and nightmarish images representing the ways in which Gaby’s ten-year-old self processed and interpreted her experiences. Particularly striking is the image of the horned and fanged monster figure in a Nazi uniform, a figure that dominates the page and straddles the individual panels that make up the fragments of Gaby’s memories. The image in the final panel, in which Gaby is transformed into a gold statue, ties into the Nazi gold plotline, representing Gaby’s knowledge of the location of the gold. However, I would argue that the specific imagery of a statue also connects to Gaby’s frozen, catatonic state prior to her therapy session with Xavier.

The extremely bold and visual exploration of the effects of trauma on Gaby’s psyche is placed in dialogue within the narrative with a much more subtle and text-based examination of the ways in which Magnus too has been shaped by the Holocaust. Magnus’ trauma is conveyed mainly through conversations between him and Xavier regarding their differing ideas about the place of mutants in society and later on in the text, in his dialogue with one of the Nazi/Hydra
soldiers. The main ideas that come across in these various scenes are Magnus’ deep-seated fear that a mutant Holocaust will occur in the future, the evolution of his hatred towards the Nazis into mistrust and animosity towards humans, his adamant refusal to ever be a victim again, and his survivor’s guilt over the fact that while he now has formidable superpowers, during the Holocaust he was powerless to save his family. The comparison and juxtaposition of Gaby’s psychological and physical response to her childhood in Dachau with Magnus’ ideological reaction to his in Auschwitz serves to highlight the point that there is no single “right” or “normal” way that people respond to traumatic experiences on the scale of the Holocaust. It also helps to further position and cement Magneto’s cynical and pessimistic view towards mutant-human relations as directly evolving out of his reaction to his Holocaust experiences. Magnus may not have been physically catatonic but, as Xavier puts it, “in many ways, Magnus has been as deeply scarred by his experiences as Gaby.”

Beyond the Comic – Magneto in the X-Men Film Franchise

While not actually comic books themselves and thus technically beyond the scope of this paper, a discussion of the importance of the Holocaust backstory in the mythos of the character Magneto would be incomplete without at least some mention of the way in which this backstory has been portrayed and interpreted within the 20th Century Fox film adaptations of the X-Men comics, specifically X-Men (2000), X-Men: First Class (2011), and, as has been addressed earlier, X-Men: Days of Future Past (2014). All of the X-Men films that Magneto is featured in

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21 Ibid, 10.
(in addition to those listed above, *X2: X-Men United* (2003) and *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006)) reference in some way his Holocaust backstory and explicitly present it as the driving force behind the character’s actions; the rationale and justification for his extreme views regarding the tense relationship between mutants and humans in the X-Men universe. Furthermore, this backstory is in fact spotlighted by the films, not merely treated as side information to round out Magneto’s character. Both *X-Men* and *X-Men: First Class* begin not with present day scenes involving the titular X-Men but with scenes depicting Magneto as a child during the Holocaust discovering his mutant powers of magnetism by bending the gates of Auschwitz when he is separated from his mother. Particularly in the case of *X-Men*, the first X-Men film, this is the viewer’s first introduction to the world of the X-Men – a young Jewish boy in a concentration camp who also happens to be a mutant. More than any other way of potentially introducing the X-Men to movie audiences, this opening scene clearly establishes the thematic connection between the X-Men as a persecuted minority and the Holocaust.

In the prequel film *X-Men: First Class*, Magneto, along with Charles Xavier, is elevated to the role of main character, and as a result of this the Holocaust also becomes front and center in the narrative. Like *X-Men*, the film opens with the scene at the gates of Auschwitz, but *X-Men: First Class* goes a step further, showing an extended version of the scene and elaborating more on the young Magneto’s (from here on, I’ll refer to him by his pre-Magneto name, Erik Lehnsherr) experiences in the camp. After the display of his mutant powers, Erik is taken to a Nazi scientist, Dr. Schmidt, who serves as a clear Dr. Mengele analog. Instead of being a Sonderkommando as in the comics, Erik is portrayed in the film as a victim of Schmidt’s sadistic experiments in an attempt to manifest and study his mutant powers, which, as Schmidt discovers by murdering Erik’s mother in front of him, are triggered by anger and pain. As a result of this
elaborated backstory sequence, Erik’s psychological state and character motivation are even more clearly presented as a result of his experiences during the Holocaust than in the more subtle references (opening scene of *X-Men* notwithstanding) in the original X-Men trilogy.

In addition to depicting more of Erik’s childhood during the Holocaust, *X-Men: First Class* also uses the Holocaust as a primary driving force for the film’s narrative as a whole and for presenting the evolution of Erik into Magneto over the course of the film. A large portion *X-Men: First Class* is dedicated to Erik’s personal revenge quest against Schmidt – it is this quest that brings him into contact with Xavier in the first place and motivates him throughout the entire film. In addition, in the final scenes of the film Erik’s decision to kill Schmidt over Xavier’s protestations is coupled with Erik putting on the iconic Magneto helmet for the first time, symbolically presenting the choice of vengeance as the moment at which Erik ultimately rejects Xavier’s hope for mutant-human coexistence and truly becomes Magneto. The final film in the X-Men series to particularly focus on Magneto and the Holocaust, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, has already been discussed in relation to the source comic book, so I won’t say more about it here except to mention that it fits into Magneto’s character arc by presenting a shift of focus from the personal revenge quest of *X-Men: First Class* to Magneto’s more universal fears of and extreme attempts to prevent a repetition of the Holocaust, this time against mutants.
Chapter 4

Historical Fiction (Superhero Comic Book)

Category Introduction

The next category of Holocaust representation in comics is historical fiction, and for this paper I have chosen to focus specifically on historical fiction occurring within the realm of superhero comic books. Historical fiction as a genre does not require overmuch introduction or explanation, as the name is fairly self-explanatory and anyone reading this will have certainly had at least some experience with works that fall into this category. Put simply, historical fiction is a genre in which an invented narrative is set in the past, generally in a period of some historical importance. While the characters and specifics of the plot are themselves created by the author, in good historical fiction there is the tacit understanding by the reader that the events of the narrative could have in reality occurred during the period in question. As a result, without being pure historical fact, works of historical fiction can often be a good guide to understanding and learning about the culture and historical realities of the time periods that they are set in. Within this framework, a work of Holocaust historical fiction would by definition be an imagined but historically based story set during the period from 1933-1945 and focusing on the events of the Holocaust specifically, as distinguished from a piece set during this period but dealing with a different aspect of world events, for example life for Japanese-Americans during World War II.
For the purposes of this paper I have chosen to focus not on the category of historical fiction Holocaust representation in comics generally but rather on that of historical fiction Holocaust representation specifically within superhero comic books. I believe this distinction is important because the added dimension of character and brand recognition of having well-known characters from superhero comic books appear within a historical fiction Holocaust piece deeply affects the way in which the reader approaches and understands the work itself, the audience that the work is targeted to and ultimately reaches, and the ways in which the work can be used as a tool for Holocaust education. While the idea of a superhero comic presenting an authentic historical fiction account of the Holocaust may seem oxymoronic, as you will see it is indeed possible and has been successfully done on at least one occasion. The key to making a historical fiction superhero comic book about the Holocaust work is that it needs to be a Holocaust story first and a superhero comic second, with the superhero elements not encroaching on the presentation of a historically accurate, albeit fictional, narrative (thus eliminating the possibility for such cathartic but wholly fantastical images as Captain America punching Adolf Hitler!).

**Case Study: X-Men: Magneto Testament**

The blending of Holocaust historical fiction with superhero mythos is attempted and I would argue achieved in the Marvel Comics book *X-Men: Magneto Testament* (2009) by writer Greg Pak, artist Carmine Di Giandomenico, and colorist Matt Hollingsworth. This storyline focuses on the Marvel Comics character and sometimes villain, sometimes ally of the X-Men, Magneto, who was discussed in the previous section of this paper. *X-Men: Magneto Testament* is an elaboration on and expansion of the origin story of Magneto as a Holocaust survivor originally established by Chris Claremont during his run of writing *Uncanny X-Men*, presenting Magneto’s childhood and adolescence as Max Eisenhardt, a Jewish boy in Nazi Germany and,
eventually, a Sonderkommando at Auschwitz. *X-Men: Magneto Testament* covers the period from 1935-1948 and through its young protagonist is able to document and explore many aspects of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, from the Nuremburg Laws and Kristallnacht to life in the ghettos of Poland and mass killings by the Einsatzgruppen to the Sonderkommando revolt at Auschwitz.

Before getting into the specifics of the content of *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, a quick note on the format and packaging of the book is necessary. *X-Men: Magneto Testament* was originally published as a five part mini-series that came out in monthly installments from November 2008 to March 2009. *X-Men: Magneto Testament* was published under the Marvel Knights imprint, one of the many sub-sections of Marvel Comics focusing on publishing a particular type of comic book (for example, the Icon imprint specializes in creator-owned comic book properties, while Marvel Illustrated publishes comic book adaptations of classic literature). According to a press release in 2006 by Marvel’s Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada, the aim of the Marvel Knights imprint is to allow for the publication of “‘evergreen events’ – self-contained limited series that think outside the box, that challenge readers to re-think their favorite Marvel characters and re-evaluate the legends that surround them.”22 The five individual issues of *X-Men: Magneto Testament* were later collected and republished as a single trade paperback volume in October 2009, and it is this collected volume that I read and will be using as the basis of my analysis. The key difference in the collected volume from the single issues is the addition of an afterword to the first and last issues by author Greg Pak, extensive endnotes elaborating on the historical basis for the events described, and a teacher’s guide containing suggestions for how to use the book in classroom study of the Holocaust. The trade paperback volume also includes a short historical non-fiction comic, “The Last Outrage”, about artist and Holocaust survivor Dina

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Babbitt, which will be discussed in-depth in a later section of this chapter. Aside from these specific content additions, reading *X-Men: Magneto Testament* in trade paperback form has the advantage common to all collected volumes of comic book series in that it packages together a complete storyline into one book that can be read at one stretch instead of incrementally and is absent of the advertisements that would have been scattered throughout each single issue, disrupting the narrative flow of the piece and in some cases limiting the impact of particular panels or plot points.

**First Impressions: Analyzing the Cover Art & Back Blurb**

What makes *X-Men: Magneto Testament* such a unique and fascinating example of Holocaust representation in comics is not necessarily the formal graphic elements it employs (these are fairly standard for a superhero comic book), but rather the way in which it uses superhero mythology as an opening to tell a compelling and educational Holocaust story and brand recognition of a popular character to attract a wider and different audience than a “typical” Holocaust story. Nowhere is this conscious mixing of the historical and the super-heroic more clearly presented than in the cover art and back blurb of the collected edition and individual issues. As the initial entry point into *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, these elements serve to most directly convey the premise of the book and to sell the story to its intended audience. Examination of *X-Men: Magneto Testament* therefore logically begins with a close look at this first impression the potential reader has of the book.
As *X-Men: Magneto Testament* was originally published in five installments, there are actually five different covers for the series (all of which can be viewed in the appendix to this paper). The cover used for the front of the collected volume is the cover that was originally published with the second installment of the series. The choice of this particular cover to serve as the reader’s first introduction to the comic book is a telling one, as this cover more than any of the others clearly establishes the premise that the rest of the storyline will operate under – that this is first and foremost a Holocaust story, with Magneto a figure that looms over the comic without being directly present in it. The foreground of the cover art depicts a young boy, future Magneto Max Eisenhardt, standing behind a barbed wire fence. Hovering in the smoky sky above the boy’s head in the background is the image, instantly recognizable to fans of the X-Men comic books and/or films, of Magneto’s helmet. Like Superman’s “S” insignia or Captain America’s iconic shield, Magneto’s helmet serves as an immediately identifiable symbol of the character. The presence of this symbol as a spectral figure looking down on Max confirms the importance of the events that will unfold within the book in understanding the development of Max Eisenhardt into Magneto, while the transparency and backgrounding of the image imply that this more prophetic aspect of the story will be subtle.

The cover art is also significant in that in a single glance it immediately situates the piece in time and space for the reader. Although the cover and title of the book do not at any point
explicitly state the setting or time period, the cover (designed by artist Marko Djurdjevic) utilizes evocative imagery to firmly cement the piece within the Holocaust. Firstly, the color palette the cover art for *X-Men: Magneto Testament* is mostly black and white, with only small splashes of red in the young Max Eisenhardt’s shirt and in scraps of rags trailing down from the barbed wire fence he leans against. This color scheme helps evoke the Holocaust through its association with the black and white photographs that make up most of the visual documentation of the Holocaust. Intentional or not, the use of small amounts of red coloring in the cover can also bring up associations with Steven Spielberg’s Holocaust movie *Schindler’s List*, which uses the color red sparingly in an otherwise entirely black and white film to generate additional meaning.

The manifest content of the cover image is also essential in immediately establishing *X-Men: Magneto Testament* as a Holocaust work. Even without the famous “Arbeit Macht Frei” entry gate, the barbed wire fence that Max Eisenhardt is standing behind is a clear representation of Auschwitz, itself one of the most frequently used symbols for the Holocaust as a whole, while Max’s costuming on the cover is an almost identical match to the clothing worn by a young Warsaw Ghetto inhabitant in one of the most iconic and widely recognizable Holocaust photographs, the Warsaw boy photo. Taken together, all of these signs make it possible for anyone with even a passing familiarity with the Holocaust to recognize *X-Men: Magneto Testament*.

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25 The Warsaw boy photo is one of a collection of 49 photographs taken by SS troops to document the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto (April 19th-May 16th, 1943). This set of photos, with the title “The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw is No More”, was collected by the German commander in charge of the liquidation, Jürgen Stroop, and was meant as a birthday present for the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler (*Representing the Irreparable: The Shoah, the Bible, and the Art of Samuel Bak*, p. 95). Among these photos, the Warsaw boy photograph depicts a young boy standing alone amidst the chaos of the ghetto’s liquidation, surrounded by other Jews being rounded up by the SS but separate from them, with his hands held above his head in a gesture of surrender. While initially intended as a documentation and even celebration of the Nazi system and the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, this collection of photographs and especially the photo of the Warsaw boy has become an iconic image for the post-Holocaust world, serving as a symbolic representation of all the Jewish children murdered during the Holocaust.
Testament as a Holocaust story just from the cover, while the fact that it is also a superhero comic book is only apparent in the title and presence of Magneto’s helmet.

Besides the cover art selected to represent the trade paperback as a whole, the covers to the other four individual issues of the mini-series are extremely revelatory of the creators’ approach to marketing the book to the superhero comic book audience while still presenting it as primarily a work of Holocaust historical fiction. Besides the cover to the second issue discussed above, only the cover to the first issue of X-Men: Magneto Testament contains any visual reference to the character of Magneto. In this cover as in the cover to the book as a whole, Magneto appears only as a spectral figure, in this case as Max Eisenhardt’s reflection in a pool of blood. Like the ghostly image of Magneto’s helmet in the issue #2 cover, depicting Magneto as a reflection of Max establishes the connection between Max’s experiences during the Holocaust and his development into Magneto while still holding Magneto at a distance from the actual events of the comic book. Max Eisenhardt is clearly introduced as the main character of the story, not Magneto. This first cover, again like the cover to the second issue, very consciously uses Holocaust imagery to set up the context of the storyline, specifically through Max’s Star of David armband and the barbed wire fencing visible in the background of the image. The inclusion of these telltale symbols of the Holocaust is clearly intended to prepare the reader for the comic book’s Holocaust focus, as the narrative arc of this first issue takes place in 1935 and
concludes well before the imposition of the requirement for Jews to wear the Star of David or the establishment of concentration camps like Auschwitz.

Unlike the first two issues of *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, the cover art for issues three through five of the mini-series contain no images of or iconography connected to Magneto, at this point in the publication relying solely on audience connection to the figure of Max Eisenhardt rather than the specter of Magneto to attract readers to the story. While the book in its initial two issues uses the promise of Magneto to draw in its audience, by the last three issues this device is no longer needed and the covers are therefore able to more accurately reflect the reality of the book’s tight focus on Max, not Magneto. In each of these last three covers the focal point of the image is the figure of Max, in each case looking directly at the viewer. As with the other covers, the covers to issues three through five follow the same black, white, and red color scheme and each contains visual clues pointing to the Holocaust setting, for example the presence of the “Arbeit Macht Frei” Auschwitz gate sign on the issue #4 cover. Taken as a coherent set, the five covers to the individual issues of *X-Men: Magneto Testament* work in conjunction to first establish the mini-series as an origin story of Magneto, thus drawing in the superhero comic book audience, and then to present the book as a work of Holocaust historical fiction through the use of recognizable Holocaust imagery and a color scheme that prompts associations with Holocaust photographs and films.
Moving past the individual issue covers, the back blurb to the trade paperback further
downplays the extraordinariness inherent in purporting to tell the story of such an important
color in the X-Men canon and strives to situate the piece as a historical narrative in which
supernatural elements (in this case Magneto’s mutant powers as the “master of magnetism”) will
play little to no role in shaping events. First, the opening sentence of the blurb (emphasis mine):
“In 1935, Max Eisenhardt was just another schoolboy – who happened to be Jewish in Nazi
Germany.” Note the deliberate phrasing that presents the book’s protagonist as an ordinary
person caught up in the events of the Holocaust, not as a superhero figure attempting to – or even
with the power to – influence the course of history. This is the story of a normal boy in abnormal
circumstances. Later in the blurb X-Men: Magneto Testament is described as a “heartbreaking
and historically accurate look at one of the most popular characters in the X-Men canon.” Again
the emphasis is on the intended place of the book as a work of accurate historical fiction, with
the popularity of Magneto as an X-Men character as the reason for its existence but not as the
driving force for its story – historical accuracy will not be sacrificed for comic book thrills.

Dedication to Historical Accuracy & Holocaust Education

In reading X-Men: Magneto Testament it is important to understand that the book clearly
conceives of itself as an educational tool that could easily fit into a middle or high school
Holocaust curriculum in addition to being a compelling and emotional origin story of one of
Marvel Comics’ characters. Throughout the internal content, particularly in the collected volume,
of X-Men: Magneto Testament there is copious evidence of dedication to historical accuracy and
of the intention of the creators for this to be an educational historical fiction book about the
Holocaust as much as it is – if not more so – a comic book about the origins of a superhero
character. This commitment to making X-Men: Magneto Testament as historical as possible
while still remaining within the framework of a superhero comic book can most clearly be seen such elements as the narrative’s use of expository captions. These captions are a major source of factual Holocaust history in *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, providing context commentary that is often beyond what is strictly necessary for understanding Max’s specific journey and instead function solely to educate the reader about Holocaust history more broadly and establish a cohesive timeline of crucial events. The dedication to historical accuracy is also apparent in the book’s incredibly subtle handling of the question of Max’s mutant powers of magnetism, an issue that will be addressed a little bit later in this section, and in the overall narrative structure of the book, including slight alterations to elements of Magneto’s previously established backstory in order to both eliminate accidental historical errors and to allow for a wider range of Holocaust representation (for example, presenting Max as a German Jew instead of a Polish Jew, as some of the comics evidence suggests, to facilitate exploration of the rise of the Nazi state26).

Instead of just focusing on one aspect of Magneto’s Holocaust experiences (as, for example, the X-Men movies do by emphasizing dramatic scenes of the young Magneto at the infamous Auschwitz gates as a recognizable shorthand for the Holocaust as a whole27), *X-Men: Magneto Testament* uses the premise of telling Magneto’s origin story as an opportunity to present as wide a range of Holocaust history as possible. This is reflected in the narrative structure of *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, in which each of the five issues of the comic book is focused on using Max’s journey to address a different period of Holocaust history. Building off the details of Magneto’s character established during Chris Claremont’s term writing X-Men comics, namely the creation of Magneto’s backstory as not just a Holocaust survivor in vague terms but specifically a Sonderkommando and the introduction of his wife Magda as a Gypsy

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Holocaust survivor, X-Men: Magneto Testament particularly strives to present to the readers less widely known aspects of Holocaust history.

Just as a brief outline, the five issues of X-Men: Magneto Testament address the following key moments in the history of the Holocaust: Issue #1 – the ascension of the Nazi Party in Germany and the Nuremberg Laws, Issue #2 – the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Kristallnacht, and the invasion of Poland on September 1st, 1939, Issue #3 – the Warsaw Ghetto and the mass murders by the Einsatzgruppen in Poland, Issue #4 – Auschwitz, with particular focus on the role played by the Sonderkommando, and Issue #5 – the Gypsy Camp at Auschwitz and the Sonderkommando revolt of October 7th, 1944. In addition to allowing for compelling and richly detailed storytelling, this structure of having each issue of the overall story closely address a single sub-section of Holocaust history allows the book to function effectively as a companion to a course in Holocaust history, with the individual issues being assigned in conjunction with lessons about each period.

Outside the story itself, the trade paperback edition of X-Men: Magneto Testament contains several significant pieces of supplementary material, such as Greg Pak’s “Afterword to Issue One: A Few Words About History” (the full text of which is reprinted in the appendix to this paper and is well worth a read in terms of understanding the mission statement for the project) and “Afterward to Issue Five”, the aforementioned extensive endnotes to each issue of the story, which greatly elaborate on the historical basis for events in the comic, and a teacher’s guide describing ways in which the book can be used in Holocaust studies curricula for students in 7th through 10th grade. While I won’t be discussing them in any depth to avoid distracting from focus on the actual content of the story in X-Men: Magneto Testament, these supplementary materials serve as a confirmation of the creators’ intent that the book be read not only as a

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28 Pak, X-Men: Magneto Testament, Afterword to Issue Five.
compelling story for fans of Magneto but also as an educational examination of the Holocaust.

They also provide an excellent guide to further Holocaust research and present a detailed model for teaching the book in a classroom setting.

**Addressing the Fantastical: Magneto’s Mutant Powers**

While the story told in *X-Men: Magneto Testament* points the reader in the direction of Magneto and lays the foundation for his motivation and ideology about mutants and humans, Magneto himself makes no appearance in the comic, not even as a framing device. By not setting the story up as for example a flashback narrative bookended by the adult Magneto *X-Men: Magneto Testament* keeps the reader’s focus squarely on the life of the young Max Eisenhardt and his experience during the Holocaust, maximizing the educational potential of the piece and preventing the more fantastical elements of Magneto’s role as a super-powered character from intruding on the emotional impact of the essentially human story being told in the book. In keeping with this, Max’s status as a mutant is also downplayed in the comic, with his mutant powers of magnetism only coming into play in a few scenes, and – unlike the scene in *X-Men* and *X-Men: First Class* of the young Magneto bending the gates of Auschwitz – always in a very subtle fashion. In an early endnote to the first issue of the comic author Greg Pak discusses the book’s approach to Max’s mutant powers, stating that “a…key decision was how we handled Max’s emerging mutant powers. The more we researched the historical material, the clearer it became that we should only give subtle hints about Max’s emerging powers”\(^{29}\). Accordingly, the book never explicitly confirms that Max is a mutant or gives any definitive evidence of his powers, only scattered hints.

By far the most blatant exhibition of Max’s magnetism powers occurs in the third issue of *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, and even this is kept deliberately ambiguous. Near the end of this

issue there is a scene in which Max and his family are captured while trying to escape the Warsaw Ghetto and subsequently murdered by a firing squad, with Max shown to miraculously survive this event. This scene is based on one that originally occurred in the X-Men comic *New Mutants #49*, in which the young Magneto used his powers to move the firing squad’s bullets away, thus saving himself. In the scene as depicted in *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, the only indication that Max was saved by his control over magnetism comes from the text spread across the panels depicting the firing squad, which reads “Sometimes…you get a moment…when everything lines up. When anything is possible. When suddenly…you can make things happen.” This line would seem to point to a supernatural explanation for Max’s survival, but the book does nothing further to confirm this fact and in fact provides a potential reality-based alternate explanation by including a panel depicting Max’s father pushing Max out of the way of the bullets. Whether this action or Max’s powers is ultimately responsible for Max’s survival is left for the reader to determine. The other displays of Max’s powers of magnetism are similarly ambiguous, always leaving room for a non-superpowered interpretation of events. Throughout the five issues of *X-Men: Magneto Testament* are moments where Max seems particularly adept at doing things involving metal, for example his winning a javelin competition in the first issue, even when given an abnormally heavy javelin, with the tacit implication being that these feats are a result of his ability to control magnetism, although the text never explicitly states that this is the case.

31 Ibid., 18-20 (*X-Men: Magneto Testament #3*).
32 Ibid., endnotes to *X-Men: Magneto Testament #3*, 18-20.
33 Ibid., 19-20 (*X-Men: Magneto Testament #3*).
34 Ibid., 20 (*X-Men: Magneto Testament #3*).
Conclusion

While I have for the most part focused on emphasizing the ways in which *X-Men: Magneto Testament* downplays the superhero comic book element of Magneto’s story in order to focus on the more historical and educational aspects of the piece as a work of Holocaust historical fiction, my intention is not to imply that it is solely a Holocaust book that just uses Magneto’s name and the X-Men brand to attract an audience. The book does also function effectively as a backstory to the character of Magneto as he exists in the main Marvel Comics universe. Specifically, *X-Men: Magneto Testament* fleshes out the sparse details known about Magneto’s history from years of (admittedly sometimes contradictory) X-Men canon into a complete, coherent story and through its portrayal of Max’s incredibly traumatic experiences during the Holocaust presents a clear basis for Magneto’s extreme views and personal manifesto in the conflict between mutants and humans in the Marvel Comics universe. The genius of *X-Men: Magneto Testament* is that it is subtle enough in these nods to Max’s mutant powers and hints of his future as Magneto that it is able to stand alone as a work of Holocaust historical fiction for those readers who aren’t invested in the character. A particularly powerful example of this balance is the final page of *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, in which Max returns to the site of Auschwitz in 1948 and finds a note he had buried during his time as a Sonderkommando. This note, with the final lines “Tell everyone who will listen. Tell everyone who won’t. Please, don’t let this ever happen again.”35 can be read both as a survivor’s demand for memory and “never again” isolated of any superhero comic context and, to the X-Men fan, as the beginning stages of Magneto’s defining ideology. Crucially, neither reading diminishes the legitimacy of the other.

35 Ibid., 18-19 (*X-Men: Magneto Testament #1*).
Basically, *X-Men: Magneto Testament* is a superhero comic book only to the extent that the reader brings in their own foreknowledge of the character’s future – it satisfies the serious X-Men fan with a rich backstory for one of the most famous X-Men characters but does so with enough restraint that it avoids alienating readers that have no background knowledge about Magneto or the X-Men. *X-Men: Magneto Testament* remains true both to the character of Magneto and to the historical reality of the Holocaust.
Chapter 5

Historical Non-Fiction

Category Introduction

The next category of comics Holocaust representation is, like historical fiction, a fairly straightforward one that will be familiar to anyone reading this paper. This category is historical non-fiction, which refers to works that present a factual account of a particular historical period, event, or person. Unlike historical fiction, only characters and events that actually existed are used in historical non-fiction, not those created by the author. However, historical non-fiction does not necessarily imply objectivity. Works of historical non-fiction always reflect the creator’s subjective/biased viewpoint of the subject in question to at least some extent. In many cases this subjectivity is an essential, conscious purpose of the piece, as we will see in my case study for this category, while in other cases it is a more unconscious bias.

For the purposes of this paper I will of course be looking at historical non-fiction dealing first and foremost with the Holocaust. However, examples of historical non-fiction Holocaust representation are not constrained to the specific years of the Nazi regime and WWII, the years in which the genocide against the Jews was actually being committed. Given the magnitude of the Holocaust and its continuing influence on the Jewish people and the world even in the present day, study of the Holocaust and of Holocaust history by no means ends with the liberation of the concentration camps or the end of WWII. For this reason, I am considering
works that are focused on the effects and legacy of the Holocaust in the post-Holocaust world as well as on the events of the Holocaust itself as part of the historical non-fiction genre of Holocaust representation.

**Case Study: “The Last Outrage”**

The piece that I chose to represent historical non-fiction Holocaust representation in comics has in fact already been briefly mentioned in this paper. It is the short comic “The Last Outrage”, written by Rafael Medoff, penciled by Neal Adams, and colored by Neal Adams and Joe Kubert. As mentioned earlier, “The Last Outrage” was published by Marvel Comics as part of the supplementary materials in the collected volume printing of *X-Men: Magneto Testament*, my case study for historical fiction comics Holocaust representation. The comic was later adapted into a short film in which the images from the comic were combined with voiceover narration, additional animation, and historical footage and context. I chose this particular comics story despite its brevity (it is only six pages long) because of the unique way in which the use of the comics medium plays into the agenda of the piece. As you will see, there is a much stronger connection between the medium and the message than can be found in other works I could have selected (see Appendix II for some other suggested comics/graphic novels within the category of historical non-fiction) – “The Last Outrage” is a story that feels as if it needs to be told through the medium of comics. As you’ll see, this is very much a work by the comics community for a member of that community.

“The Last Outrage” is a particularly interesting example of Holocaust representation in comics because it functions very consciously as both a narrative and a call to action. While many, if not most, other works of Holocaust representation (comics or otherwise) can be

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interpreted as a call to action in the sense that by their very existence they promote the message to “never forget” the Holocaust or that they encourage the reader to fight intolerance, anti-Semitism, etc. in a broad sense, “The Last Outrage” is different in that it overtly advocates for justice in a very specific, individual case. “The Last Outrage” is not about the many injustices and acts of persecution against the Jews as a group during the Holocaust, it is about a very specific injustice committed, and indeed still being committed, against an individual, Holocaust survivor and comics artist, Dina Babbitt.

Before moving on to looking at the ways in which “The Last Outrage” functions as narrative and call to action, I want to first summarize both Dina Babbitt’s story as it is presented in the comic and the context for the creation of the comic. Dina Babbitt (born Dina Gottliebova in 1923) was a Czechoslovakian Jew studying art in Prague when her mother was sent to Theresienstadt in 1942. Babbitt chose to join her mother in Theresienstadt and in September 1943 they were both sent as a part of a transport to Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, Babbitt caught the attention of Dr. Josef Mengele, the “Angel of Death” of the camp, for having painted a mural of characters from the movie Snow White in the children’s barracks (basically a temporary holding cell for children on their way to the gas chambers). Instead of punishing Babbitt, Mengele kept her alive to paint portraits of Gypsy prisoners, document other victims of his sadistic experiments, and paint personal portraits for SS officers and for Mengele himself. After the war, Babbitt went on to become an animator for Jay Ward Productions, Warner Brothers, and MGM, helping illustrate many well-known cartoon characters. In 1973, the Auschwitz State Museum in Poland contacted Babbitt and informed her that a number of her Auschwitz paintings had been found and were being held by the museum.
However – and this is where the “call to action” function of “The Last Outrage” comes into play – the museum refused to return Babbitt’s paintings to her, arguing both that the educational value of the paintings takes precedence over Babbitt’s claim to them and that Mengele, not Babbitt, is the true owner of the paintings. The museum’s refusal to return Babbitt’s paintings gained national attention in the United States, and sparked public outcry, movements in support of Babbitt’s right to the paintings, petitioning, and even a resolution by the US House of Representatives in 2001. The creation of “The Last Outrage” was part of one such movement in 2006, in which the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies and several key figures in the comic book world (including Neal Adams and Joe Kubert, the illustrators of “The Last Outrage”) mobilized over 400 members of the comic book industry and comic art community in support of Babbitt’s cause.

The Image-Text Dynamic

“The Last Outrage” sketches out, both literally and figuratively, scenes from Dina Babbitt’s life, from her childhood before the Holocaust through the beginnings of her struggle with the Auschwitz Museum for the return of her paintings. As this is first and foremost a work of Holocaust historical non-fiction, a majority of the narrative is focused on Babbitt’s experiences in Auschwitz and the controversy with the museum, with only a brief two panel introduction to Babbitt and her life before the Holocaust and a two panel summary of her marriage and career after the liberation of Auschwitz. Enough attention is given to the non-Holocaust portions of the story to give the reader a solid context for the story, but the main drive of the narrative is wholly focused on Babbitt’s Holocaust story.

Organized into discrete, titled sections (for example, “Snow White in Auschwitz,” “Encounter with the ‘Angel of Death’,” and “Discovery of the Paintings”), the structure of “The
"The Last Outrage" makes the comic feel very reminiscent of a newspaper article or profile on Dina Babbitt. It is a very text-heavy comic, but there is no dialogue – information is conveyed solely through descriptive text boxes and through the highly detailed illustrations. While a majority of "The Last Outrage"’s factual information is presented through the text boxes and the comic does not have the usual interplay of images and text that occurs through the use of dialogue bubbles, the success of the agenda of the comic very much depends on the presence of both the images and the text working together.

If you were to separate out the text and the illustrations of “The Last Outrage”, both portions would be readable and understandable – the text reads as a complete article with no crucial factual information missing, while the illustrations form a surprisingly clear visual narrative even without any words for context. However, while both elements of the comic are in a sense complete narratives on their own, they both function very differently in terms of how they convey Babbitt’s story. The text, as mentioned above, is a complete factual account of Babbitt’s experiences, but it is just the facts, presented in a somewhat detached journalistic manner. The art, on the other hand, gives little concrete factual information but instead provides a clear emotional and personal narrative, using detailed illustrations of Babbitt while she goes through the trials described in the text to generate a visceral emotional response in the reader and create sympathy for Babbitt and outrage at her plight. While both portions can be read separately, unlike many comics, neither on its own achieves the full educational and emotional goals of the piece. Put together, the comic comes across as a complete work of documentary journalism, telling a comprehensive narrative through the extensive, informative text boxes, with the illustrations, particularly the details of Babbitt’s facial expressions, conveying the necessary
human emotion and pathos to give the story weight and help it function effectively as a persuasive piece and a call to action.

**The Agenda of “The Last Outrage”**

As I’ve already stated, “The Last Outrage” is not intended to merely be a documentation of a Holocaust survivor’s story. It is also very much meant to be a persuasive piece, designed to generate sympathy and outrage in the reader on behalf of Dina Babbitt and the way in which she was victimized both during the Holocaust and by the Auschwitz Museum after the Holocaust. A major indicator of this agenda is the very title of the comic – “The Last Outrage”. This title very clearly rhetorically positions the refusal of the museum to return the paintings not as an isolated injustice but rather as a continuation of the loss of agency and personal rights that Babbitt experienced during the Holocaust. This connection between Babbitt’s victimization by the Auschwitz museum and that by the Nazi regime is strengthened by the inclusion of the following quote by Babbitt in response to the museum’s refusal, “It’s like a part of my heart is still in Auschwitz.” Not only is the museum’s decision positioned as a continuation of the Holocaust for Babbitt, but the comic also suggests that Babbitt is in a sense trapped in the trauma of the Holocaust and forced to continue experiencing it as long as the paintings remain in the museum’s possession.

Moving on from the title of “The Last Outrage”, the comic also works towards persuading the reader to take action on Babbitt’s behalf through the way in which it portrays Babbitt herself. Throughout “The Last Outrage” there is a very conscious painting of Babbitt as a profoundly wronged and victimized heroine – a figure that the reader should feel sympathy for and outrage at her treatment but also a figure that the reader should admire for her bravery and strength of character; in short, a figure that the reader will strongly want justice for by the end of
the comic. I don’t mean to imply in any way that Babbitt is not any of these things; my point here is that there is a clear rhetorical effort on the part of the piece to particularly spotlight these aspects of Babbitt’s story. Throughout the piece there is a strong emphasis on events that highlight Babbitt’s bravery and heroism – for example, Babbitt’s decision to volunteer to join her mother in Theresienstadt, her painting the *Snow White* mural for the children despite the risk of execution, and particularly as scene in which Babbitt threatens to commit suicide rather than paint for Mengele unless her mother is saved from being gassed.

At the same time as “The Last Outrage” demonstrates Babbitt’s heroism, it is also careful to present Babbitt as a very human and relatable figure that the reader will be able to connect strongly with, using the illustrations to reflect a wide range of very human emotional responses to her situation. Looking at the following series of panels from “The Last Outrage” we see Babbitt displaying fear, grief, horror, and shock, a display of emotions that both develops Babbitt very quickly as a character and generates reader sympathy for her plight.
As the scenes and panels described above illustrate, “The Last Outrage” functions primarily as a persuasive piece, encouraging its readers to take up Dina Babbitt’s cause and help fight for the return of her paintings from the Auschwitz Museum. However, the comic doesn’t just rely on the strength of Babbitt’s story itself as a motivator for readers. Instead, it actively participates in the process by rhetorically framing the Auschwitz Museum’s actions as a virtual continuation of the persecution Babbitt experienced during the Holocaust and by portraying Babbitt herself as a brave and heroic but ultimately extremely human and relatable figure.

**Beyond the Comic – Dina Babbitt & the Auschwitz Museum**

Before moving on to the next category in my spectrum, I would like to take a moment to share what happened in Dina Babbitt’s story beyond “The Last Outrage” and its campaign for the return of her Auschwitz paintings. Dina Babbitt died of cancer in 2009 at age 86, three years after “The Last Outrage” was created and the same year it was showcased in the collected volume edition of *X-Men: Magneto Testament*. As of her death, Babbitt’s paintings remained in the possession of the Auschwitz State Museum in Poland and her children still continue to fight for the return of the paintings. The only concession the museum had made by the time Babbitt

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died was to give her reproductions of the paintings in 2009, keeping the originals on display at the museum. The museum continues to argue that the historical and educational value of the paintings as Holocaust artifacts outweighs Babbitt’s claim on them as the artist, although they have at least in recent years stopped arguing that Dr. Mengele and his descendants are the true owners of the paintings.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
Chapter 6

Vicarious Survivor Accounts & 2nd Generation Memoir

Category Introduction

The next category of Holocaust representation in comics is what I have termed “vicarious survivor accounts”. By this I mean works written by people who have a direct personal connection to the Holocaust but are not themselves survivors. For the most part, this means children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Broadly speaking, examples of vicarious survivor accounts and 2nd generation memoirs tend to explore two major aspects of Holocaust representation, although the extent to which each aspect is emphasized varies greatly. Firstly, these works generally focus on some amount of retelling of the Holocaust story of their parent, grandparent, or other Holocaust survivor. Besides writing about their parents’ or grandparents’ experiences during the Holocaust, 2nd generation memoires/vicarious survivor accounts have the added dimension of exploring the idea of inherited trauma by depicting how growing up with Holocaust survivors affected their own lives.

Case Study: Maus

In a paper about Holocaust representation in comics, there’s no way I could get away with not mentioning what is probably the most well-known work of comics Holocaust representation – Art Spiegelman’s Maus. Numerous books and papers can, and indeed have, been written about the two volume graphic novel Maus, the groundbreaking work in which
Spiegelman chronicles the story of his father Vladek’s survival of the Holocaust as well as the strained relationship between the two of them, highlighted by the book’s narrative of Spiegelman interviewing his father in order to create a comic about his Holocaust story. 

*Maus* is also known for its use of a paradigm in which the characters are all depicted as anthropomorphized animals (Jews are portrayed as mice, Nazis as cats, Poles as pigs, and so forth), in dialogue with stereotypes about these groups and in particular Nazi propaganda of Jews as rats. 

*Maus* is an incredibly important work, both in the field of Holocaust studies and in the history of comics and the move towards legitimizing comics as a serious medium. However, given *Maus*’ status as a seminal work the fields of Holocaust studies and comics studies, there is little I could say about it here that has not already been exhaustively scrutinized and studied in the years since *Maus*’ publication. Rather than retread that ground I am choosing to only briefly examine *Maus*, by looking closely at several scenes and panels in which Spiegelman self-critically explores the possibilities and pitfalls of both Holocaust representation in comics and Holocaust representation in general.

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39 If you are interested in learning more about *Maus*, I am including in the works cited and consulted some scholarly works about *Maus* as well as interviews with Art Spiegelman about the process of creating the graphic novel.
Representation vs. Reality in *Maus*

In *Understanding Comics*, comics art theorist Scott McCloud brings up the famous painting “The Treachery of Images” as a means of introducing icons as the language of comics.40 Crucial to this discussion is the idea presented in “The Treachery of Images” that any medium of representing the real world is inherently separate and distinct from that reality. The caption on the painting states “This is not a pipe” and indeed while it is an *image* of a pipe, there is a world of difference between an image and a physical object. This dynamic between icon and reality is an integral part of comics, but in most cases readers automatically engage with the iconography in comics as representations of real world objects and scenarios, without thinking about the distance between those icons and the reality they depict. In *Maus*, however, Art Spiegelman draws attention to this divide, forcing the reader to consider the relationship between the two and keeping them conscious at all times of the fact that they are reading a comic. Consequently, *Maus* overtly addresses the ways in which both comics and the idea of Holocaust representation itself are necessarily facsimiles, to explore the idea that attempts to visually or narratively recreate the Holocaust, including *Maus* itself, will always be at a distance from the event itself.

The most obvious way that Spiegelman calls attention to the difference between representation and reality is through the central conceit of the project – the funny animals paradigm. Rather than attempting photorealism in his depictions of the Holocaust or even using

cartoonish human figures, Spiegelman portrays all of the characters in *Maus* as animals in the style of funny animal underground comix, according to a paradigm in which Jews are drawn as mice, Nazis as cats, Poles as pigs, and Americans as dogs\(^41\). While the events that Spiegelman depicts in *Maus* are all directly drawn from his father Vladek’s real life Holocaust experiences, the fact that these real, historical events are visually conveyed to the reader through an inherently fantastical paradigm accentuates the distance both between the reader and the story of *Maus* as a whole, and between Spiegelman as the author and the events he attempts to recreate.

Spiegelman also keeps the reader aware of the constructed nature of *Maus* by pointing out moments and situations in which the funny animals paradigm breaks down as a system for representing the story or becomes in some way untenable. In addition to deconstructing the conventions of the medium, these moments also serve to critique the idea of stereotyping groups more generally. For example, there is a scene near the end of the first volume of *Maus* in which Vladek and Anja are hiding in a cellar that turns out to be infested with rats. Vladek reassures Anja by lying to her that “They’re just mice!”\(^42\) In this scene, the reader is forced to consider the inherent unreality of having mice as main characters and the problems it poses for attempting to recreate the real world – how is it possible that anthropomorphized mice can exist alongside regular mice.

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\(^{41}\) There are a few exceptions to this within the graphic novel, for example a scene in which Spiegelman and his therapist appear as humans wearing mouse masks, and the inclusion of a real-world photograph of Vladek in the final pages of the second volume.

and rats? This scene causes dissonance in the reader’s instincts to accept the world of the comic as a consistent, coherent system by throwing a logical fallacy into that system.

Another example is the opening scene of the second volume of *Maus*. In this scene, Spiegelman is attempting to decide what anthropomorphized animal figure to use to depict his wife Francoise. Francoise is French, but also a convert to Judaism, so Spiegelman struggles with whether to portray her as a Jewish mouse character or as some other animal representing the French. Later on in the scene Spiegelman jokingly describes a solution to the problem – “I tell him [Vladek] I just married a frog…So, you and I go to a mouse rabbi. He says a few magic words and ZAP!...By the end of the page the frog has turned into a beautiful mouse!”

This humorous exchange again serves to highlight the fact that the system of anthropomorphic animal representations used by Spiegelman inevitably breaks down when scrutinized too closely. Yes, there is a specific animal for each national identity and for the Jews, but what does that then mean for people with multiple identities? Francoise is French, but also Jewish. Vladek, Anja, and the other Jews in Sosnowiec are also Polish. Spiegelman himself is portrayed in the graphic novel as a mouse for his Jewishness, but he is also American, so should he then be drawn as a dog? Relationships like Spiegelman’s and Francoise’s that cross religious/national lines become complicated by the fact that those separate groups are represented by different species of animal. In addition, this scene points out the fact that Spiegelman as the creator of the graphic novel is actively deciding to

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implement the system of animal representations, emphasizing that they are a rhetorical construct and not reality.

Throughout *Maus*, Art Spiegelman displays intense awareness of the constructs of the comics medium and often addresses these within the pages of the novel. Spiegelman in these instances deconstructs the conventions of the comics medium, using them to point out the inherent distance from reality in comics and encouraging the reader to engage with this distance as a means of approaching representing the Holocaust more generally, as well as exploring Spiegelman’s own unavoidable distance from his father’s experiences during the Holocaust.
Category Introduction

The final category in my spectrum of Holocaust representation in comics is also perhaps the most straightforward and easy to explain – the category of survivor testimony. As the name suggests, survivor testimony refers to Holocaust accounts, memoirs, diaries, etc. written/created by the person who actually experienced the events being described. Unlike the previous category of vicarious survivor accounts/2nd generation memoirs, the story being told is not mediated or passed on through another person and thus provides the closest personal connection to the events of the Holocaust possible for the reader. In most cases, particularly when it comes to graphic novel examples of survivor testimony, the survivor account is being recounted at some temporal distance from the events themselves (the one major exception to this is diaries written during the Holocaust and recovered and published in the years after, the most famous example being Anne Frank’s diary). This temporal remove provides an added dimension of reflection and layering of the traumatic events of the survivor’s past onto their present-day life, making survivor testimonies frequently as much about the long term psychological and physical effects of trauma as they are a recounting of the specific series of events of the survivor’s Holocaust story.
Case Study: *We Are On Our Own*

The piece that I chose to use as a case study for survivor testimony is Miriam Katin’s graphic novel memoir *We Are On Our Own*. This graphic novel recounts Katin’s childhood during WWII, in which the Jewish Katin and her mother escaped the Nazi invasion of Budapest and spent the rest of the war in hiding in the Hungarian countryside. Interspersed throughout this Holocaust narrative Katin also includes a series of short scenes from her adult life. These scenes form a more loose narrative than the Holocaust one, dealing thematically with the ways in which Katin’s traumatic childhood experiences impacted her adult life, particularly in terms of religion and faith in God. The adult scenes also often feature elements tying them either thematically or literally to the Holocaust scenes that they are in close proximity to in the graphic novel, reinforcing the idea that for Katin the past and present are intrinsically connected and inseparable – although Katin has in a certain sense moved on from her childhood Holocaust experiences, she is still haunted by echoes of it in even the seemingly most innocent and banal of situations. A perfect example of this is the two pages reprinted here (pages 62 and 63 of the novel).
The first page depicts a scene in which Katin and her mother are fleeing through a snowstorm in search of a place to hide after a Russian soldier was found dead in their previous hiding place. This scene is placed in dialogue with the modern day scene on the second page, in which Katin is shown playing with her young son. Notably, one of the games they are shown playing involves Katin’s son hiding in a pile of leaves and making Katin find him. By juxtaposing these two scenes that are so similar in content – the idea of hiding – but so vastly different in context – one is a matter of life and death, the other an innocent game – Katin casts an aura of unease over what should be, and in isolation of the scene on the first page would be, an idyllic scene of a mother and child playing. This pair of scenes is representative of Katin’s approach to portraying the link between past and present in *We Are On Our Own* and visualizing the ways in which the present day Katin is still haunted by the trauma of her Holocaust past.

I chose *We Are On Our Own* as the case study for the category for several reasons. First of all, Katin’s experiences during WWII and the Holocaust are very different from what many people imagine when they think about the Holocaust, the apocryphal “typical” Holocaust
narrative. Katin and her mother are never in a ghetto or concentration camp. They are never forced to wear the Yellow Star. Besides the appearance of Nazis and swastikas, Katin’s story is absent of any of the core iconography that are associated with the Holocaust in the popular imagination. By spotlighting a graphic novel memoir that is outside what is expected of a Holocaust story I hope to emphasize the point that there is no “normal” or “typical” Holocaust story and to encourage the reader to expand what they think of when they think about the Holocaust. Secondly, I chose *We Are On Our Own* because Katin does a remarkable job of telling her story through the simplistic and naïve lens of the little girl she was when she experienced it. Katin is able to effectively recapture that childish innocence and lack of understanding while still conveying the full horrors of what her and her mother went through, which makes the scenes of the adult Katin processing those experiences even more powerful. Finally, in terms of formal elements, *We Are On Our Own* does some very interesting things with color and use of symbolism (even without the aforementioned Holocaust iconography) that make it a particularly good subject for analysis in this paper.

**Use of Color**

Visually, one of the most striking elements of *We Are On Our Own* is Miriam Katin’s use of color to shape and convey meaning in the graphic novel. Color, or the lack thereof, is an incredibly important formal element in comics, as with any primarily visual medium. As seen already in this paper in my discussion of the *X-Men: Magneto Testament* issue covers and the short comic “The Last Outrage”, the usage of color and in particular the interplay between color and monochrome is a significant tool for shaping meaning in Holocaust comics. In *We Are On Our Own* there is a similar dynamic of color vs. black and white as in these previous examples, but for a very different effect. In *We Are On Our Own* scattered pages of full-color panels are
used to distinguish present day scenes with Katin as an adult from the black and white panels that make up the majority of the narrative of Katin as a child during the Holocaust. Color therefore serves as a marker of time, again playing into the idea of the Holocaust being known visually through black and white photographs vs. the color and immediacy of present time – Katin’s use of time-bound coloring fits in with readers’ expectations of the visual relationship between the two time periods.

However, what is particularly interesting about the relationship between the color and black and white sections of *We Are On Our Own*, and indeed of the story as a whole, is that they do not conform to the stereotype of color as positive and uplifting vs. black and white as negative and depressing. This convention is something one would especially expect in this case, as color represents survival and a future for Katin and black and white represents the Holocaust. Instead, self-aware anxiety and trauma is much more present and apparent in the visually uplifting colorized sections of the graphic novel than it is in the visually darker Holocaust sections, in which Katin’s child self is often naïvely unaware of the horrors around her. This contradiction creates an ironic contrast between appearance and meaning that is incredible powerful and revelatory about the effect of Katin’s childhood experiences on her present-day life.

**Struggling with Faith**

Besides presenting the literal/factual content of Katin and her mother’s experiences during the Holocaust, one of the core purposes of *We Are On Our Own* is to explore the impact of those experiences on Katin’s relationship with God and on her lifelong struggle with faith. While this theme of loss of faith permeates the entire graphic novel, there are a few key pages that, when examined together, present a concise and highly symbolic illustration of Katin’s progression from belief to doubt, portraying is as a figurative destruction of God.
The first pieces in this sequence are, significantly, the first three pages of *We Are On Our Own* and therefore the reader’s first introduction to the work as a whole. The graphic novel opens with a scene of Katin and her mother reading Torah together, specifically the first lines of the book of Genesis. These refer to God’s creation of light and the separation of light from darkness on the first day of creation. Visually, the two pages depicting the reading of these lines are very interesting – beginning with an entirely dark page the scene slowly pulls back over the subsequent panels to reveal the Hebrew text of the Torah. More specifically, the darkness of the first page is revealed to be an alef, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and, as seen in the third panel of the second page, of the word הַיהֵנָּה – God. In these two pages, Katin turns a simple scene of the young Katin and her mother reading Torah into a symbolic reimagining of the act of creation itself – the world is created quite literally through the word of God. The third page of *We Are On Our Own* introduces the Holocaust context of the story through a symbolic reversal of the creation scene on the previous pages –
the six panels that make up the page gradually zoom in on a Nazi flag, until the black of the swastika fills the final panel. This imagery coupled with the captioning text “And then one day, God replaced the light with the darkness.” places the Nazis and the Holocaust in direct opposition to God and the act of creation, with the rise of Nazism representing a perversion of creation.

The next major page exploring Katin’s relationship with faith and God occurs a little later in the novel, during a series of scenes depicting Katin’s mother’s preparations to go into hiding with Katin. Amongst these preparations Katin’s mother burns all their letters, books, and photographs, including the copy of the Torah that they were reading together in the opening scene of the book. Katin witnesses the burning of the Torah, which she interprets as the literal burning of God. While Katin’s mother reassures her that “You can’t burn God, silly. He will be with us everywhere helping us. You will see.” the art illustrating the burning of the Torah reinforces Katin’s initial reaction to the scene – in the bottom right corner of the page most of the word הִים, God, can be seen in the flames behind Katin. Particularly in light of the way the first pages of the novel presented the word הִים as a symbolic representation of God him/her/itself, the inclusion of specifically this word in the flames suggests the beginning of the destruction of God for Katin occurring in this moment.

44 Miriam Katin, We Are On Our Own (Montreal, Quebec: Drawn & Quarterly, 2006), 5.
The final two pages in *We Are On Our Own*’s symbolic arc presenting the beginning of Katin’s lifelong struggle with faith portray moments in which the young Katin first starts to question the existence of God. Significantly, both scenes are in dialogue with the scenes already described and symbolism used in those scenes to explore Katin’s faith. The first of these occurs during a scene in which Katin and her mother, fleeing from the hiding place described earlier, come across the body of a dog that had been shot by soldiers the night before, a dog that Katin had been friends with during her time in hiding. This scene is a critical turning point in Katin’s development in the narrative, as the death of the dog represents a shattering of the innocence and naïveté that had characterized Katin throughout the rest of the graphic novel. In this moment, Katin is forced to confront and begin to understand the horrors that surround her and her mother, and as a result of this confrontation we see the first cracks begin to appear in Katin’s faith in God. In her first questioning of the idea that God is with her and her mother, or if that God exists, Katin refers specifically back to the quote from Genesis that opened the book and served as shorthand for Katin’s initial faith. As the young Katin turns this quote on its head as she has her moment of realization – “The darkness did not help and the light did not help.” This turning point is expanded upon in the text box commentary by the adult Katin in the subsequent panels, again discussing the idea of God through the language of Genesis used in the opening scene – “And
then, somehow she knew that God was not the light and God was not the darkness, and not anybody at all. Maybe, God was not…”

Fittingly for wrapping up this discussion, the final stage in *We Are On Our Own’s* depiction of the destruction of Katin’s faith in God as a result of her Holocaust experiences is also the last page of the graphic novel. This page is the final panel in a sequence in which Katin plays with her toys and uses them to recreate some of the experiences the reader has just seen unfold over the course of the narrative. The final beat in this play-acting summary of the novel’s events has Katin refer back to the earlier scene of the Torah being burned as she wonders, “And what if Mommy burned that God after all?” In addition to referencing that critical moment of the burning of God earlier in the text, this final page also visually connects back to the first page of *We Are On Our Own* – on both pages the majority of the page is black, with only a single panel in the middle of the page breaking through the darkness – inviting the reader to read the final page in relation to the first one. While the first page deals with creation, the final page represents the opposite, as Katin confronts the destruction of God.

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46 Ibid, 69.
While the previous chapters have focused on presenting Holocaust representation in comics as discrete, separate categories, I do want to take a moment to bring everything together and in a sense unite the spectrum by addressing some key commonalities that exist in Holocaust comics across the board. These are commonalities not in narrative (there is no such thing as a “typical” or “normal” Holocaust story) but rather are stylistic choices and formal elements that I have found to be consistently present throughout at least the examples of comics Holocaust representation that I personally read for this project. While I am not claiming that my selected works should be taken as a representative sample of the wide variety of Holocaust comic books and graphic novels in existence, I believe that the trends I’ve observed are prevalent enough to merit consideration in this paper.

The first aspect I would like to point out is the use of color in Holocaust comics. Putting aside the examples of Holocaust representation that exist within the realm of superhero comics and therefore for the most part fall within the coloring conventions of that genre (although even *X-Men: Magneto Testament* separates itself by having much more muted coloring than the average brightly-colored comic book), there is a definite trend within comics and graphic novels focused on the Holocaust of utilizing a color scheme that is either entirely or predominantly monochromatic, with color only used sparingly and for deliberate rhetorical effect.
Looking back at my case studies from the previous sections, all of the non-superhero comic works – “The Last Outrage”, Maus, and We Are On Our Own – are all or predominantly black and white (as are several other works I read during my research for this project but did not spotlight, for example Auschwitz and The Boxer). Maus is entirely black and white and “The Last Outrage” and We Are on Our Own incorporate color in specific panels or portions of panels while the rest of the comic/graphic novel is black and white. In both of these cases in which color is used, that color is deliberately contrastive with the monochrome of the rest of the Holocaust narrative. For example, in “The Last Outrage” it is Dina Babbitt’s paintings, which can be interpreted figuratively as instances of humanity breaking out from the inhumanity of Auschwitz, that are in full color while the entirety of the rest of the comic, Holocaust scenes and pre- and post-Holocaust scenes, are black ink drawings on a white background. In We Are On Our Own, color is used to delineate time, with the black and white Holocaust scenes contrasting sharply with the vividly, whimsically colorful scenes set in the present day. Even in these instances in which color is used, it is never used to depict the world of the Holocaust – a stylistic choice that perhaps underscores the idea that this is world in which the color and vibrancy of life are squashed out. Aside from the visceral responses generated in the reader by a lack of color in the art of these works, the choice to use black and white drawings helps to further evoke the Holocaust. As discussed earlier in this paper, the Holocaust is known to us visually primarily through black and white photographs and, in some cases, films. The anachronism of seeing the Holocaust portrayed in full color could potentially disconnect readers from engaging fully with the piece.

Another commonality across comic book/graphic novel Holocaust representations is the style of the drawings. There is a tendency within these works to have art that is clearly hand-
drawn and has a sketchbook quality to it vs. a more smooth-lined or computer drawn style. Looking again at the non-superhero comics examples presented in this paper, *Maus* and “The Last Outrage” both utilize ink drawings, while the art in *We Are On Our Own* is very clearly done with pencils and colored pencils. The effects of this stylistic choice are twofold. First of all, the sketchy quality of the art in Holocaust comics gives a sense of rawness, urgency, and emotion to the drawings as opposed to a more polished, smooth art style. Secondly, this style of comic book art in which the reader can see the individual pen/pencil strokes more clearly implies a person behind the art and strengthens the perceived connection between the artist (and in some cases, author/artist) and the art. There is a very clear understanding that the work does not exist in isolation of a creator, an idea which is particularly important for works like *Maus* and *We Are On Our Own* where the author/artist is a key element in the story, both as the creator and as a character. This strengthened awareness of the relationship between the artist and the work of comics Holocaust representation also encourages the reader to think about how the creator both affects and is affected by the story that they are presenting, something that is especially important for understanding the Holocaust and Holocaust representation as a form of trauma.

The final commonality across Holocaust representation in comics that I’d like to point out is the use of certain recognizable examples of Holocaust iconography/symbols as part of the visual language of the comic. This may seem fairly obvious, but as symbols are the language of comics it is important to mention. Some of the most commonly used symbols and images are the Yellow Star badges, the swastika, and the image of the gates of Auschwitz and the train tracks leading in to Auschwitz. While each of these images does function literally as part of depicting the historical reality of the Holocaust, they are also frequently used as metonymy, as a sort of symbolic shorthand for the Jews, the Nazi regime, and the concentration camp system,
respectively. In the case of images of the Auschwitz gates and/or train tracks, the symbolism goes even further, as Auschwitz has come to serve as metonymy for the Holocaust as a whole in the popular imagination48.

I have already discussed the use of symbols as a visual language for the Holocaust in my analysis of the covers of X-Men: Magneto Testament, but there are a few specific examples from other works that I would like to briefly point out. The two best examples that I have found of a purely symbolic usage (by which I mean usage of Holocaust symbols outside the reality of their historical usage) of recognizable Holocaust imagery occur in the first volume of Art Spiegelman’s Maus (copies of both panels I’ll be discussing can be found in the appendix to this paper). The first example is a panel that occurs in 1941, when Vladek is still living in Sosnowiec outside the ghetto but under Nazi occupation. Wearing the Star of David and therefore visible as a Jew, Vladek is present for a violent round-up of Jews at the train station by Nazi officers and must decide what course of action to take – run, or attempt to calmly walk away from the situation49. In the panel in which Vladek is pondering his options, Spiegelman draws him standing in a frame shaped like a Star of David, exactly like the one he is forced to wear on his coat. This usage of the Star of David as a symbol serves to emphasize the way in which Vladek’s Jewishness separates and isolates him as a target of Nazi persecution. Visually, the Star of David frame acts as a spotlight shining on Vladek, showing the reader how visible he feels in this moment, even amidst the crowd and chaos we see in the previous two panels depicting the whole scene. While the presence of the Star of David badge on Vladek’s coat is an accurate

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48 Rothberg, Traumatic Realism, 28-29.
49 Spiegelman, Maus I, 80.
representation of the historical reality, the Star of David spotlight on Vladek in this panel provides the reader with a much visceral sense of what the Star of David badge meant and felt like to those who were forced to wear it.

The second example from *Maus* uses Holocaust symbols in a similar fashion, incorporating them into the landscape of the panel in question, this time in a slightly more subtle way. The second panel occurs when Vladek and Anja emerge from their hiding place after the liquidation of the Sosnowiec ghetto. With nowhere else to go and no one to turn to for help, Vladek and Anja head down the road towards Sosnowiec. In the illustration for the panel of Vladek and Anja walking back to Sosnowiec, Spiegelman draws a road with four branches, a road that is unmistakably meant to look like a swastika, frequently used as metonymy for the Nazi regime. Again, this usage of Holocaust imagery is purely symbolic – the road Vladek and Anja took back to Sosnowiec was of course not really shaped like a swastika, nor is this swastika used in a way that the Nazis themselves would have used it historically. The effect of Spiegelman’s use of the swastika here is to emphasize the idea that Vladek and Anja have no way to ultimately escape Nazi persecution, even if at the moment they appear to be free, having just left the ghetto. No matter which way they head down the road in the panel illustration they are still traveling over part of the swastika, still trapped in the world of the Holocaust.

The use of monochromatic color schemes, a noticeably hand-drawn art style, and Holocaust iconography/symbols are not the only commonalities across Holocaust representation in comic books and graphic novels, nor are they exclusively present in every example of comics

50 Ibid, 125.
Holocaust representation. However, the fact that these trends are present in so many of the works I looked at for this project is a very telling one, and examining them closely is necessary for understanding the ways in which the comics medium can be used to approach such a complex and challenging subject matter as the Holocaust.
Chapter 9

Looking Forward

The six works presented in the preceding chapters of this paper represent only a small subset of the wide variety of examples of Holocaust representation in comic books and graphic novels. I view this Capstone paper as the first steps in a continuing project of cataloguing and analyzing Holocaust representation in comics. Moving forward, my intent is to continue the work begun in this paper and work to make scholarly analysis of Holocaust representation in comics both more existent and more accessible. I have a couple of different ideas as to how to approach achieving this goal, for example creating an online database of examples of comics Holocaust representation, or perhaps beginning an online blog with articles focusing on examining individual works, modeled after the chapters in this paper. I also hope to eventually expand the scope of my research outwards, examining the ways in which comics have been used to depict and grapple with other genocides and major instances of historical trauma beyond the Holocaust. Regardless of what point this project ultimately evolves to in the future, I hope that this paper as it currently stands has effectively demonstrated that comics, like film and literature, are a valid and legitimate medium for representing and exploring the Holocaust.
Works Cited & Consulted

About Comics & Judaism in Comics

Trauma Studies & Representing the Holocaust

Examples of Holocaust Representation in Comics
Katin, Miriam. We Are On Our Own. Montreal, Quebec: Drawn & Quarterly, 2006.

Films

Maus Reading List

Additional Sources


Appendices

Appendix I: Accompanying Images & Texts

Historical Fiction (Superhero Comic Book)

1. *X-Men: Magneto Testament* individual issue cover art
2. Warsaw boy photograph

3. “Afterword to Issue One: A Few Words about History” (Greg Pak, 2008)

In the three years editor Warren Simons and I have been developing “Magneto: Testament,” we’ve struggled with the complicated, rich, and contradictory information the comics give us about Magneto’s life during the Nazi rise to power and World War II. Different comics give different accounts of Magneto’s name, his age, his ethnicity, and religion, his hair color, and even his Auschwitz tattoo number. But as dedicated Magneto fans have documented, the most compelling and essential material indicates that Magneto was a Jewish boy in Europe during the Nazi ascendancy and provides several key details about the fate of his family and his experiences in Auschwitz.

We’ve done our best to remain true to these elements while fleshing out the rest of our hero’s experiences based on research into the actual historical record. Longtime readers will notice a wealth of surprising new details – for example, for the first time, we’re revealing Magneto’s birth name. And sometimes, because the comics record is contradictory or conflicts with historical fact, we’ve had to choose one detail over another. But at every step, we’ve done our best to remain true to the key moments that have contributed so much towards making Magneto the deeply compelling character we know today.

But most importantly, in an age in which Holocaust deniers still spread their lies, we’ve done our best to ensure that the real-world history we explore in the series is entirely accurate and that we deal with this unfathomably harrowing material in a way that’s honest, unflinching, human, and humane. In later issues, we’ll provide citations and suggestions for future reading.
For now, we offer a thousand thanks to Mark Weitzman of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for his expert advice and historical fact-checking.

Greg Pak
New York City
August 2008

Appendix II: Suggested Additional Reading

Allegorical

Chris Claremont and Brent Eric Anderson, *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*

Plot-Driven


Historical Fiction

Pascal Croci, *Auschwitz*

Joe Kubert, *Yossel: April 19, 1943, A Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*

Historical Non-Fiction

Reinhard Kleist, *The Boxer: The True Story of Holocaust Survivor Harry Haft*

Vicarious/2nd Generation

Bernice Eisenstein, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*

Survivor Testimony

Miriam Katin, *Letting it Go*

Bonus Category: Tangential Holocaust Representation

Will Eisner, *A Life Force*

Will Eisner, *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*