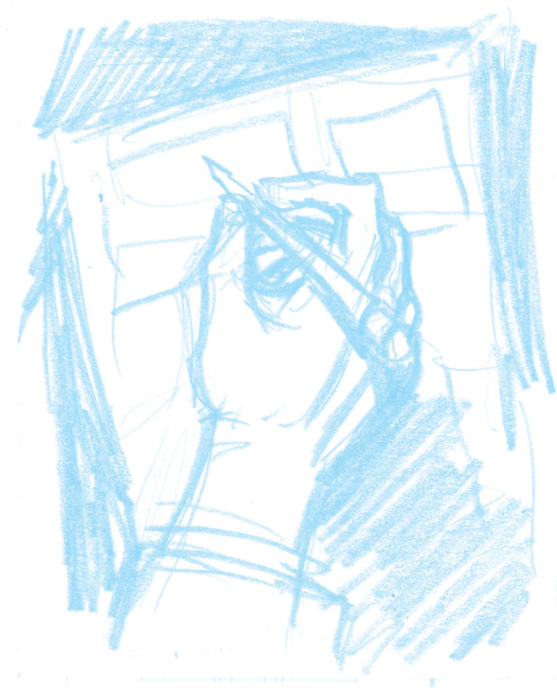
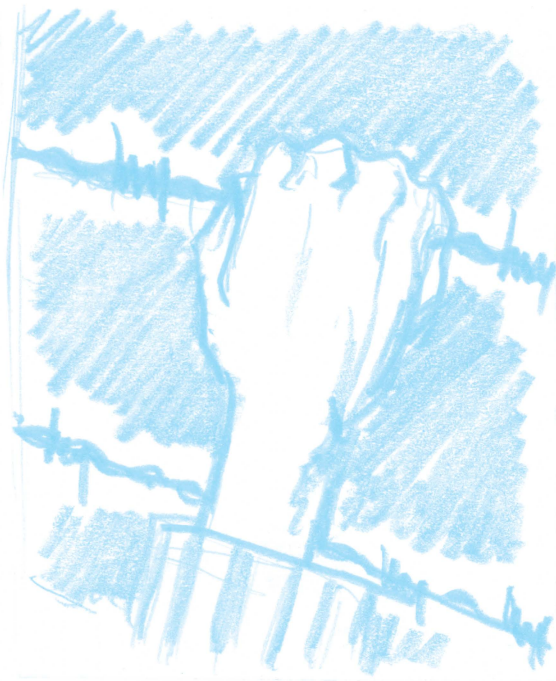
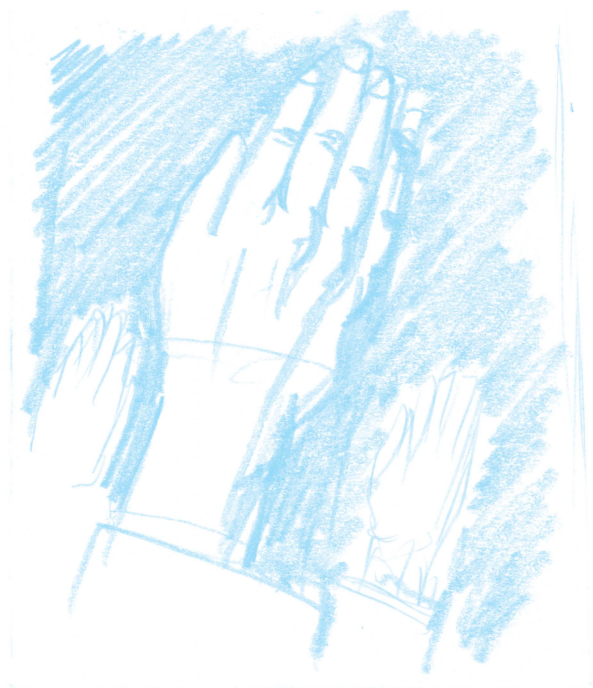




# AMERICAN CARTOONISTS NAZI GERMANY AND THE HOLOCAUST

The Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg  
Holocaust Resource Center and Archives

QUEENSBOROUGH **CUNY**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE





# AMERICAN CARTOONISTS, NAZI GERMANY, AND THE HOLOCAUST

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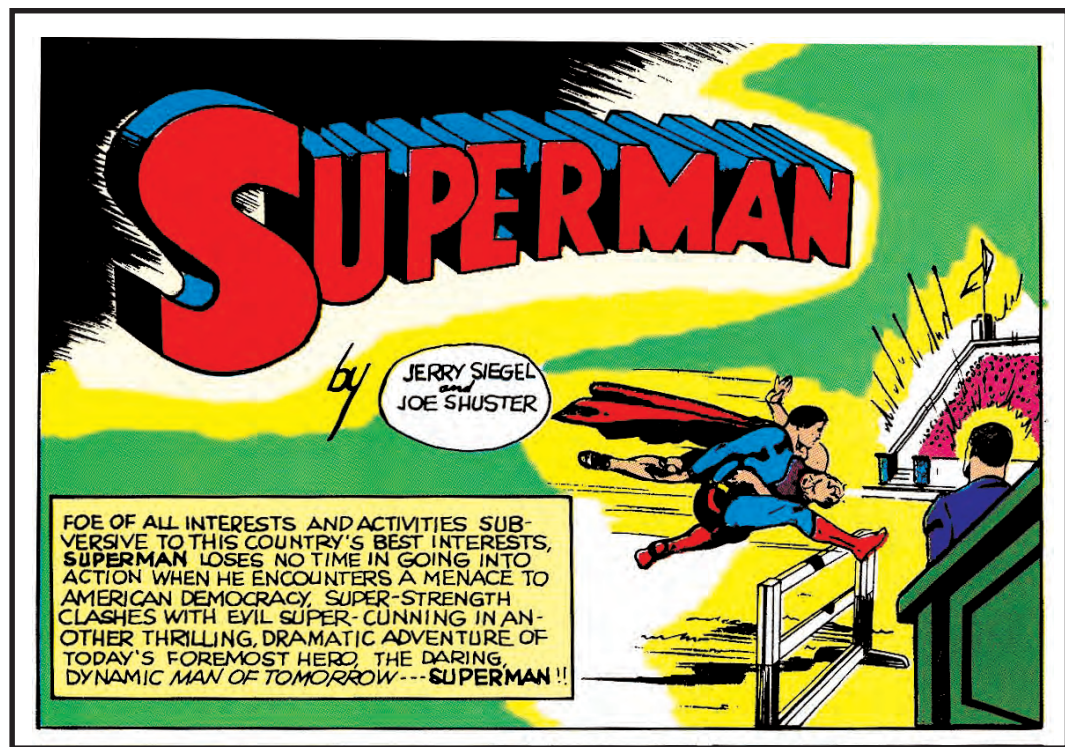
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**COMICS ARE A MEDIUM**, and superheroes a genre in that medium. It is a medium that encompasses high and low art, comedy and drama, realism and fantasy. The superhero of the comics industry of the 1930s and 1940s was more than a cop with a cape, more than a cowboy with a ray gun. In part, he was an expression of the mostly unconscious messages that the immigrant Jews and their descendants were sending out to America. These messages included:

- Look out for the Nazis!
- Have some compassion for their victims!
- Don't you understand we are just like you?
- You have to help!
- Here is how you can use your gifts, America—to help those in need and distress!

— DANNY FINGEROTH, DISGUISED AS CLARK KENT, P. 18



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It was in November, 1938 when blind hatred swept German Jews during Kristallnacht, "The Night of Broken Glass."

The planet needed a hero—fast. Who could have predicted that this hero would be one concocted by two Jewish boys in Ohio? Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster carved out a character that became that hero, and an American icon: Superman!

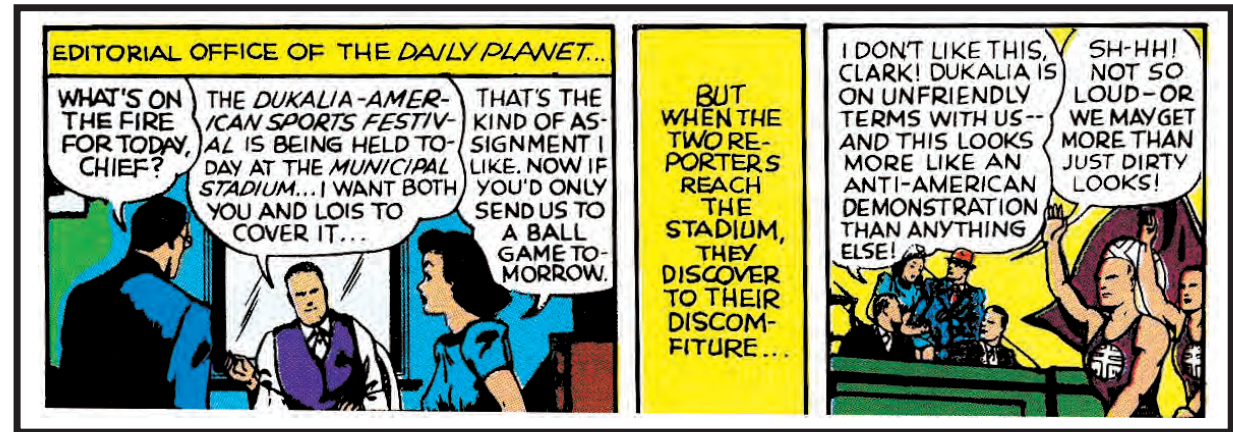
— SIMCHA WEINSTEIN, *UP, UP, AND OY VEY!*, P. 21

ABOVE *SUPERMAN ARCHIVES* VOLUME 3, 1991,  
(ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 1941), JERRY SIEGEL & JOE SHUSTER, P. 124

Journalists Clark Kent and Lois Lane are sent to cover the Dukalia American Sports Festival. Note how closely the graphic resembles the infamous 1936 Berlin Olympics! The Dukalian athletes march, arms stretched in a clear "Heil Hitler" pose, before the Dukalian consul Karl Wolf.

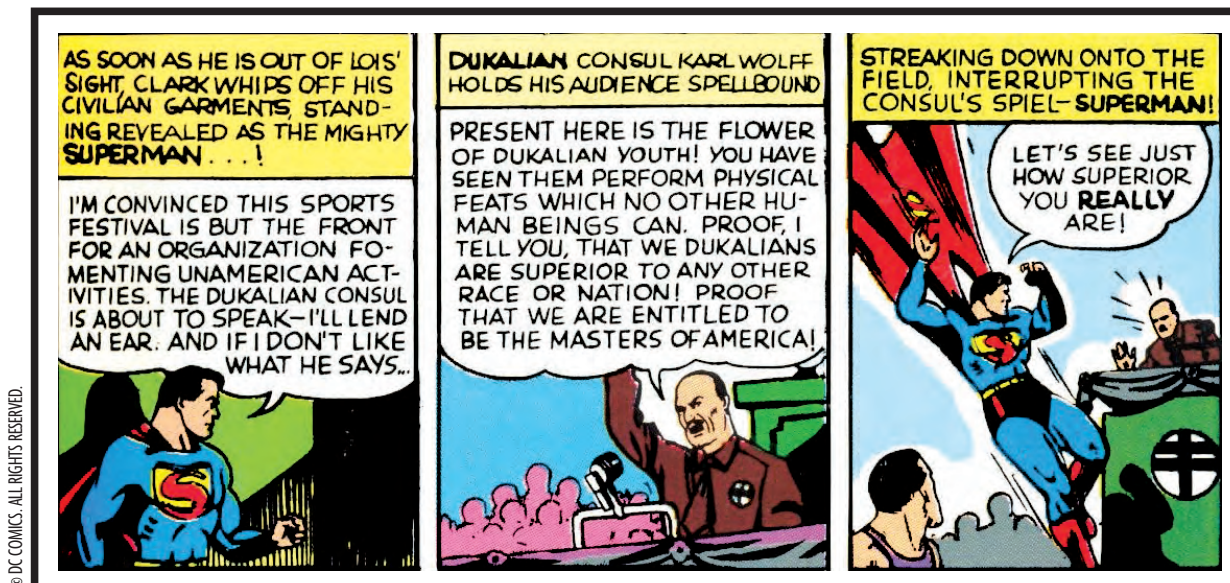
Karl Wolf, the Dukalian consul, resembles Hitler. He is seen bellowing to the crowd: "Present here is the flower of the Dukalian youth. The Dukalians are superior to any other race or nation! Proof that we are entitled to be the masters of America!" Superman streaks down and "humiliates the fascist Dukalians."

SUPERMAN ARCHIVES VOLUME 3,  
JERRY SIEGEL & JOE SHUSTER, P. 125



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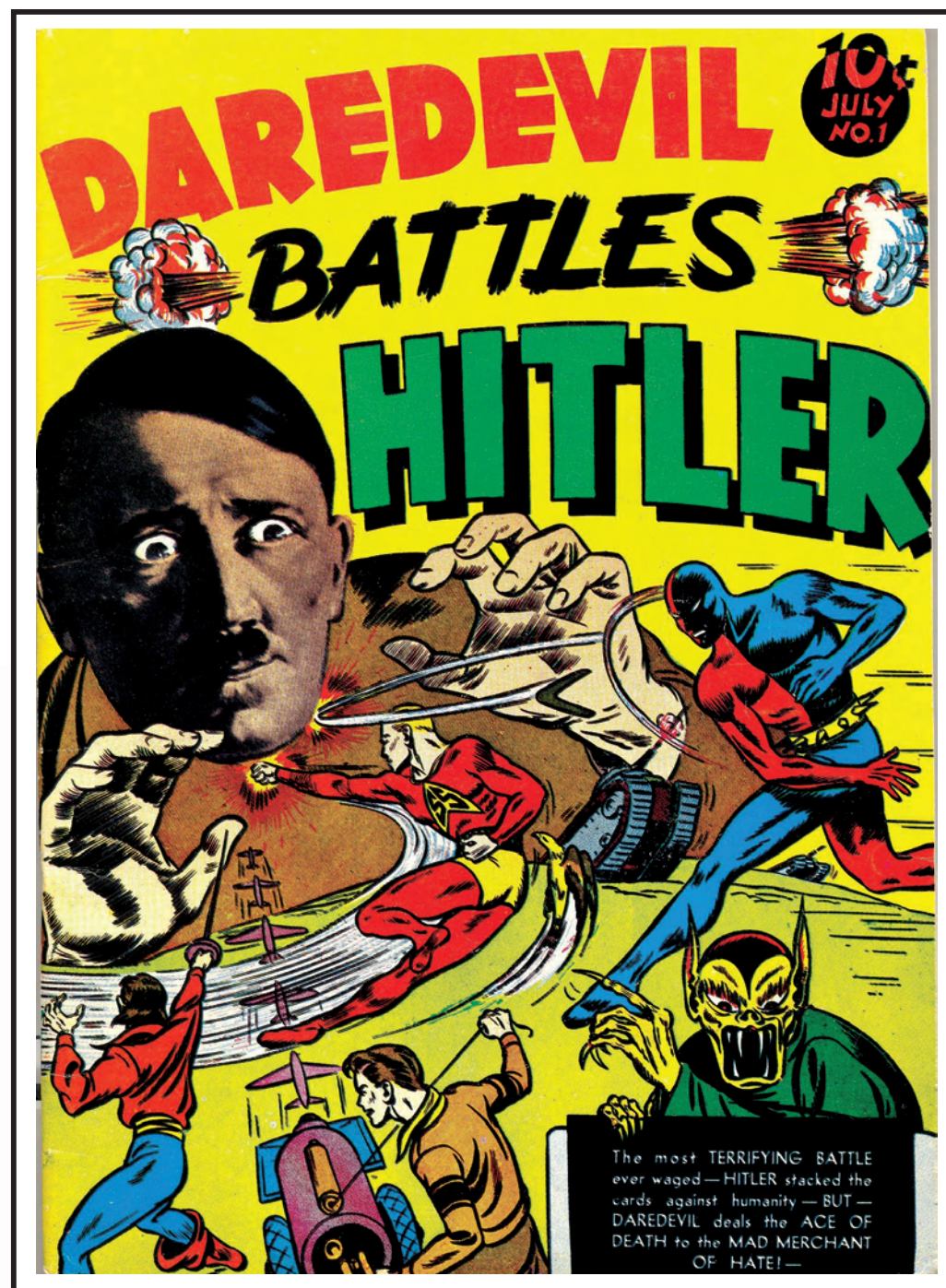
News of Superman and his ethnic undertones did not escape the enemy's notice in real life. Josef Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda, denounced Superman as a Jew. In the April 25, 1940 edition of *Das Schwarze Korps* (p. 8), the weekly newspaper of the Nazi SS, attacked the comic and its Jewish writers, concluding with the line: "Jerry Siegel lack [sic] stinks. Woe to the American youth, who must live in such a poisoned atmosphere and don't even notice the poison they swallow daily." (<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/superman.htm>)



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Superman showed the way. But as the war in Europe was raging, cartoon artists became ever more daring in their own war against Nazi Germany. In a way, they anticipated U.S. involvement in World War II. In July 1941, Lev Gleason Publications launched *Daredevil Battles Hitler #1*, art by Charles Biro (also written by Biro) and Bob Wood.

The cover was astounding: Daredevil and other Silver Streak heroes deliver a surprised Fuehrer an ignominious sock in the jaw, an armada of fighter planes is also aimed at him, while a devil-like caricature points at Hitler, evil personified, holding a sign announcing that "Daredevil deals the Ace of Death to the Mad Merchant of Hate!"





Biro was prescient. It was 1941 already. In an episode entitled "The Man of Hate: Adolf Hitler-Dictator of Germany" published in the same #1 issue of *Daredevil*, p. 4, he went on to portray the Great Dictator frantically commanding his marching, conquering forces in a German-accented English. The message was clear: world beware!

At the same time that *Daredevil* was published, another superhero made its appearance in response to the threat that Hitler and the Nazis posed. His name: Captain America, a character dreamed up by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby (Jacob Kurtzberg) in 1940. As Simon's son, Jim, later wrote: "Captain America was the first major comic book hero to take a political stand [against Hitler]."

"The fact that Cap's creators were Jewish wasn't lost on people. 'There was a substantial population of anti-war activists... [including] the German-American Bund...[The publisher, Martin Goodman] was inundated with a torrent of raging hate mail [following the first issue of *Captain America*] and vicious, obscene phone calls. The theme was 'death to the Jews.'

"The cover of the first issue of *Captain America*—as was the case with *Daredevil*—also has 'Cap' socking Hitler in the jaw, as if he were just another grotesque comic-book villain—in such a direct manner at such a flashpoint in history was, then and now, a courageous act. It was a literal and figurative punch in the face of fascism." Nazi soldiers and a swastika behind them shoot at "Cap" to no avail. Note "Cap" donning a patriotic costume of red, white and blue with a star on the chest and stripes at the waist. Fingeroth, p.58



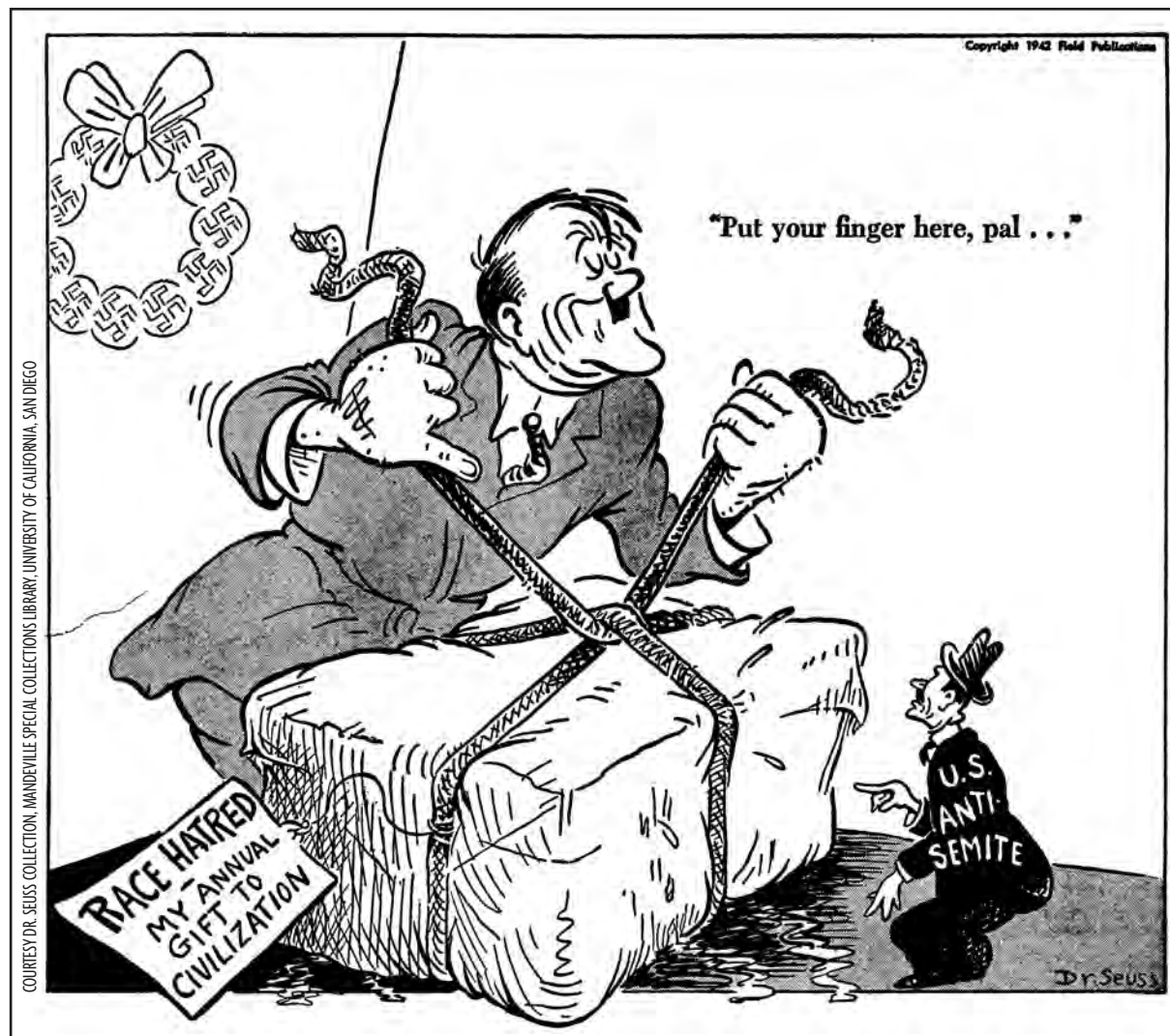
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CAPTAIN AMERICA COMICS #1 (MARCH 1941).

Before Dr. Seuss was Dr. Seuss, he was Theodor Geisel, and before he became known for the Cat in the Hat, he drew unconventional political cartoons for *PM*, a left-wing daily newspaper in New York.

During 1941-1942, when Dr. Seuss drew for *PM*, he was implacable in his drawings, castigating Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, "Japan," and the French premier of the Vichy government, Pierre Laval. Similarly, he lashed out against anyone opposing the war effort. From the anti-Semitism and racism exhibited by the common American to the vitriol hurled by Father Charles E. Coughlin, Dr. Seuss exposed the damage that such hatred caused.

Published on December 16, 1942, just before Christmas, Dr. Seuss mocked a midget-sized U.S. anti-Semite joining a fulfilled Hitler wrapping a "gift to civilization," — "RACE HATRED."



Published on July 20, 1942,  
 another powerful and, to an  
 extent, pioneering cartoon by  
 Dr. Seuss suggested the fate  
 awaiting Jews under Hitler.  
 Hitler and Laval stand together  
 in a grove of trees from which  
 hang the bodies of ten Jews.  
 Their lynching done, Hitler  
 and Laval sing together from  
 a piece of sheet music, "Only  
 God can make a tree/To  
 furnish sport for you and me!"

— Richard H. Minear, *Dr. Seuss  
 Goes to War: The World  
 War II Editorial Cartoons of  
 Theodor Seuss Geisel*, p. 101



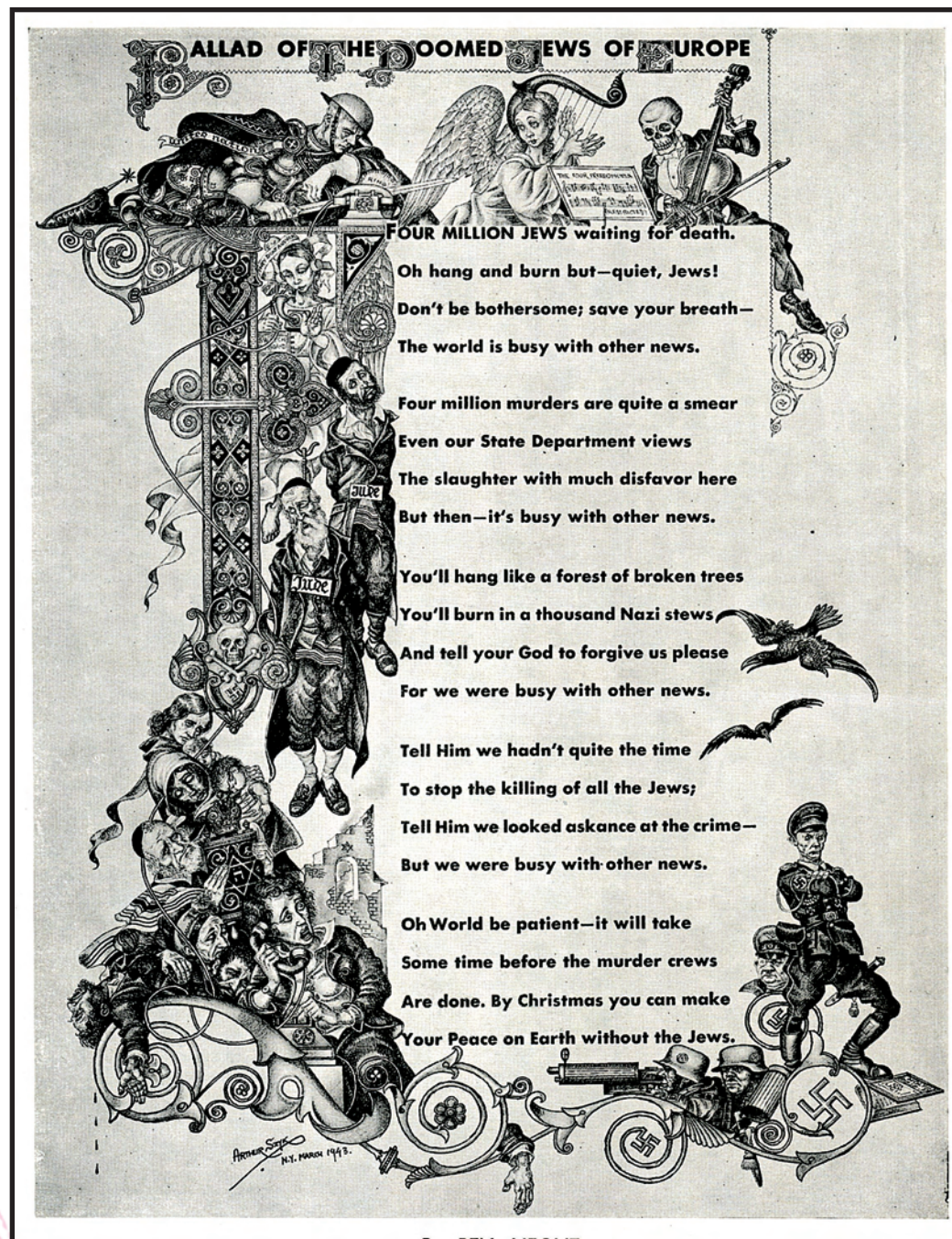
"Arthur Szyk became one of America's most prominent cartoonists and caricaturists during World War II. During the darkest periods of the war, his work provided Americans with a reason to fight by exposing the villainous threat that Nazism posed to Western civilization." Szyk was in England when the war broke out, but moved to New York City in late 1940. Like other artists of the period, he quickly embarked upon a campaign to alert isolationist America to the deadly evil of the fascist aggressors in Europe and to the ongoing mass murder of Europe's Jews.

— Steven Luckert, *The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk*

"We're Running Short of Jews," 1943, pen and ink on paper shown on right, portrays the comic image of bloated Nazi figures. From left to right, kneeling is Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda; Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Imperial Navy; Hitler; and Hermann Göring, Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe and President of the Reichstag, all festooned with sashes, belts, medals, and other accoutrements, surrounded by swastikas and skulls and crossbones—even on their uniforms. All of them are staring into space, as if they are thinking that since two million Jews have already been murdered, what next? The two million figure was probably based on a December 13, 1942 *New York Times* report (p. 21) that such a number of Jews "have already been slain by all manner of satanic barbarism."

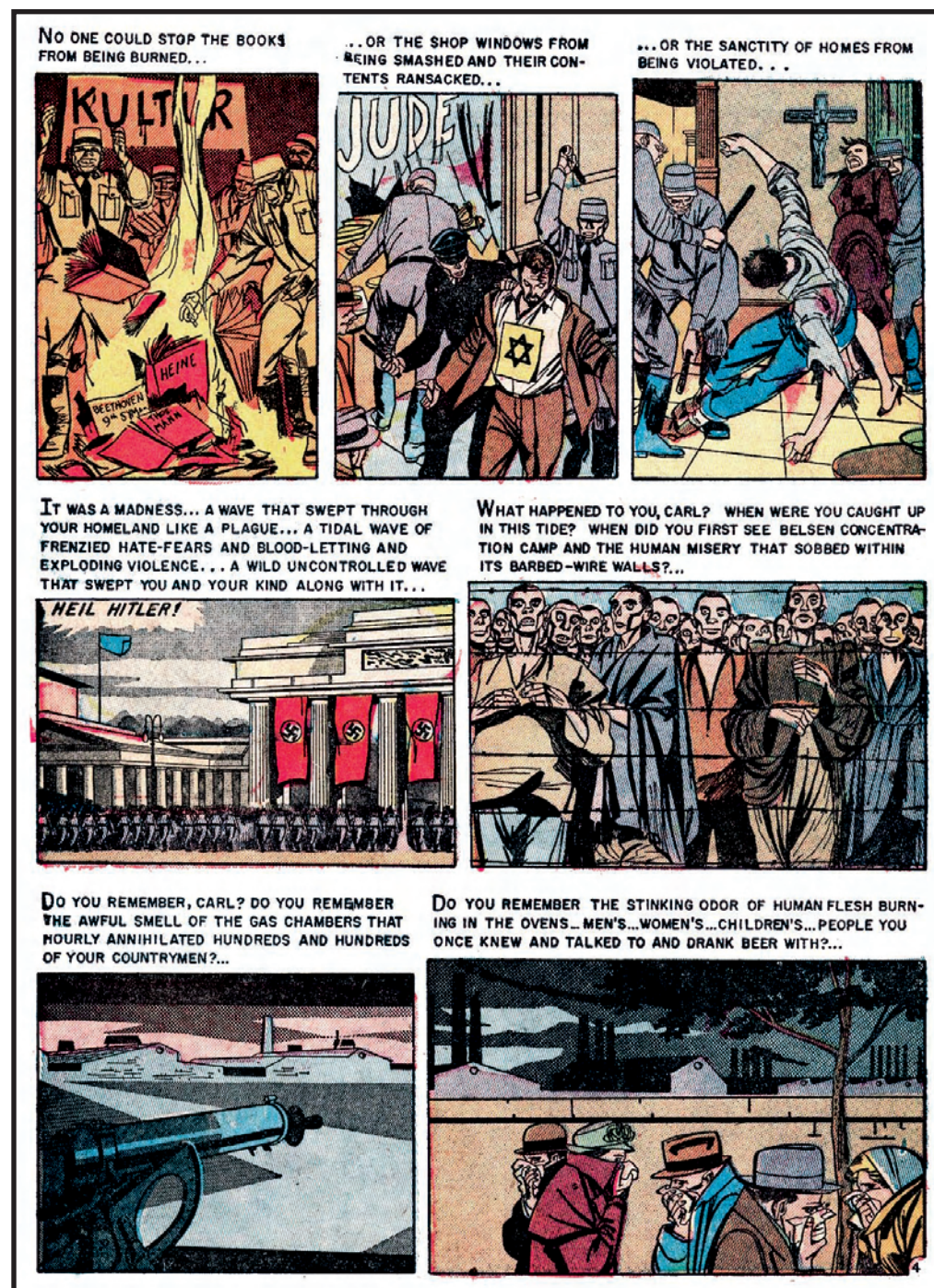


Another 1943 Szyk illustration, "Ballad of the Doomed Jews of Europe," is shown as it appeared in the booklet "Save Human Lives," which was distributed by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe at Madison Square Garden on March 9, 1944. The caustic verse was by Hollywood screenwriter Ben Hecht, "a biting indictment of Allied inaction. Szyk's illustration has Nazi troops preparing to machine-gun a group of Jews, one of whom desperately puts in a call for help to the United Nations. The telephone line intertwines itself between the bodies of dead and still living Jews to reach an angelic operator, who informs the caller, 'Sorry, they don't answer'. Above, a U.N. soldier, sword in hand, watches the phone ring while an angel with a harp and Death, a skeleton playing the cello, perform 'The Four Freedoms (Restricted)'."



While Dr. Seuss and Szyk referred to the mass murder of Jews at the hands of the Nazis as it was happening, it was only about a decade later that more popular cartoonists would take up the subject. A short-lived comic published by EC Comics in 1955 entitled *Impact*, was published by Bill Gaines and edited by Al Feldstein. The debut issue included the story by Bernard Krigstein, "Master Race." Martin Jukovsky pointed out how the story was an "exceptional undertaking," conspicuous at a time when a few books had been written about the Holocaust. On p. 5 of the story, Krigstein included the burning of books (Heine and Thomas Mann), Nazi brutality, the gas chambers, and an echo of yet another iconic picture of almost-dead staring faces behind barbed wire (shot at the evacuation of a concentration camp at the end of World War II by Margaret Bourke-White for Life magazine). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact\\_EC\\_Comics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_EC_Comics)

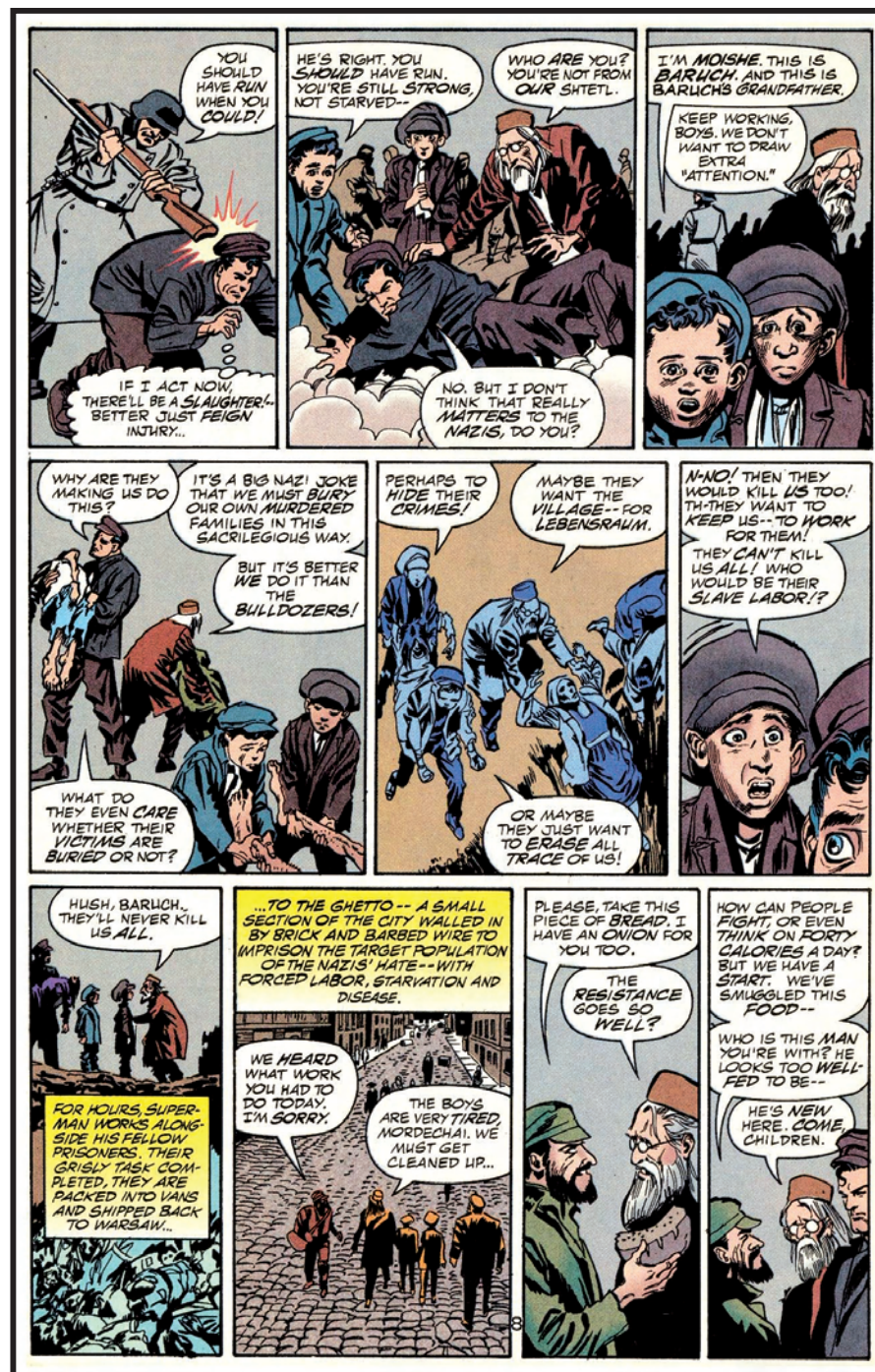
At the end of the story, a Holocaust survivor seems to recognize his Nazi persecutor in a subway car.

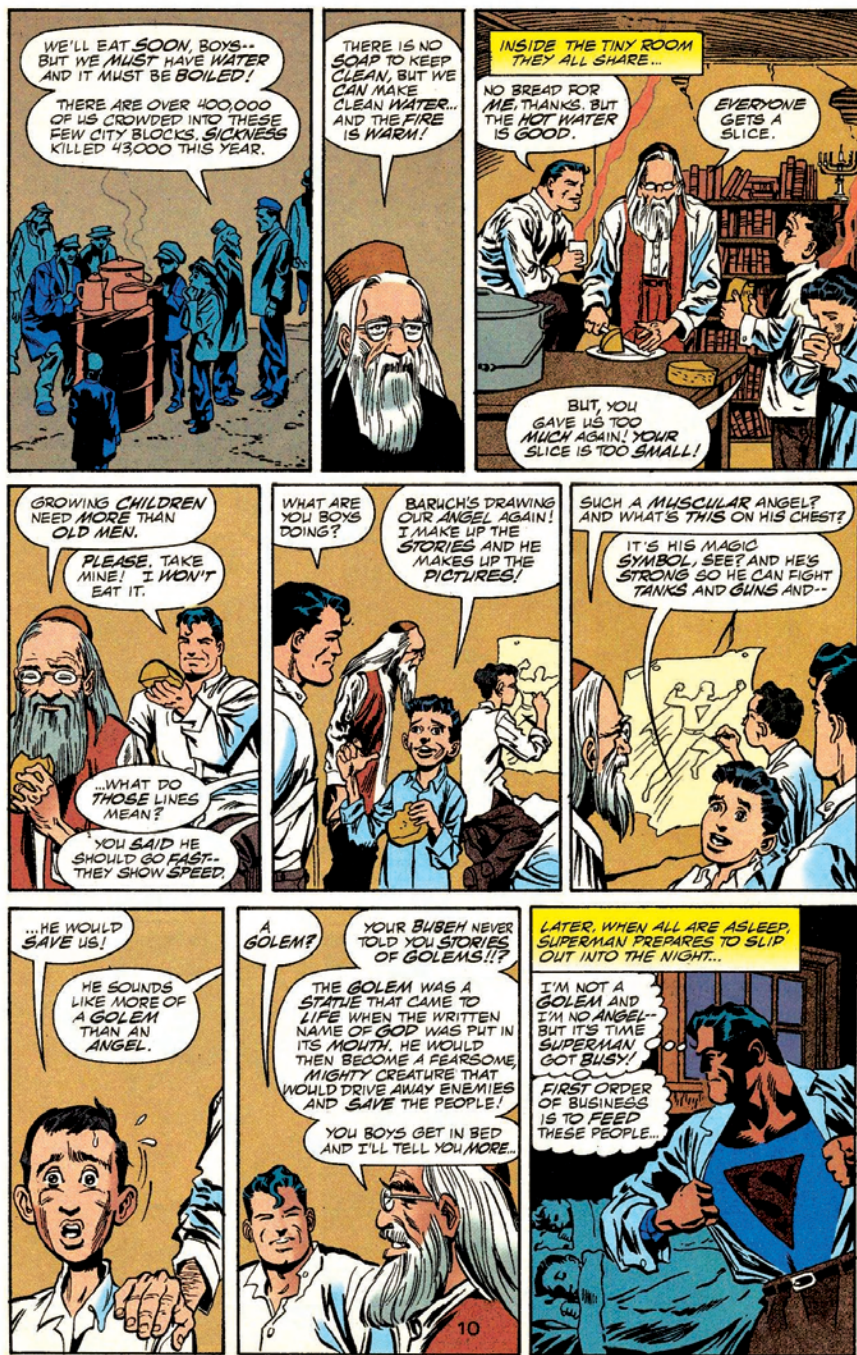


Another 40 years would elapse before other comic book writers took up the Holocaust. Such became three consecutive issues of *Superman: The Man of Steel* # 80, 81 and 82, commissioned by the editors of DC Comics to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Superman's debut in Action Comics in June 1938. "The very real Nazi threat that had been left unspoken by Siegel and Shuster in the original 1938 comic [was] now brought into full focus." (Weinstein, p. 30)

"In #81 (7/98) Clark Kent is sent on assignment 'to get the real scoop on the Nazi occupation of Poland'." So Superman disguises himself in the garb of a shtetl resident (sic, p. 7), witnesses Nazi brutality firsthand, and is forced to join the persecuted Jews. He befriends two young boys, Moishe and Baruch, and assists them in the harrowing task in filling a mass grave with the bodies of the Nazis' victims. "But the victims are never named as Jews...indirectly referred to as the 'target population of the Nazis' hate. In another case, they are called the 'murdered residents' of a bombed-out shtetl." On the other hand, "the story is strewn with Hebrew names and Yiddish words." (Eric J. Greenberg, *New York Jewish Week*, July, 10, 1998)

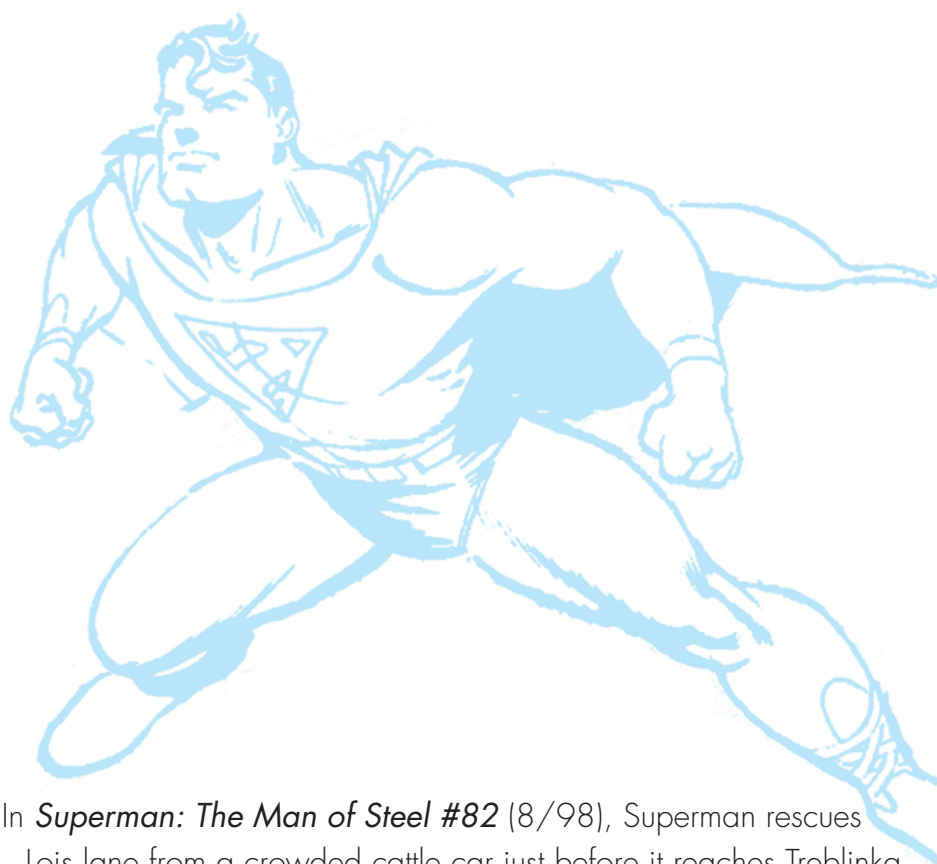
SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL # 81, P. 8  
WRITER-ARTIST JON BOGDANOVE





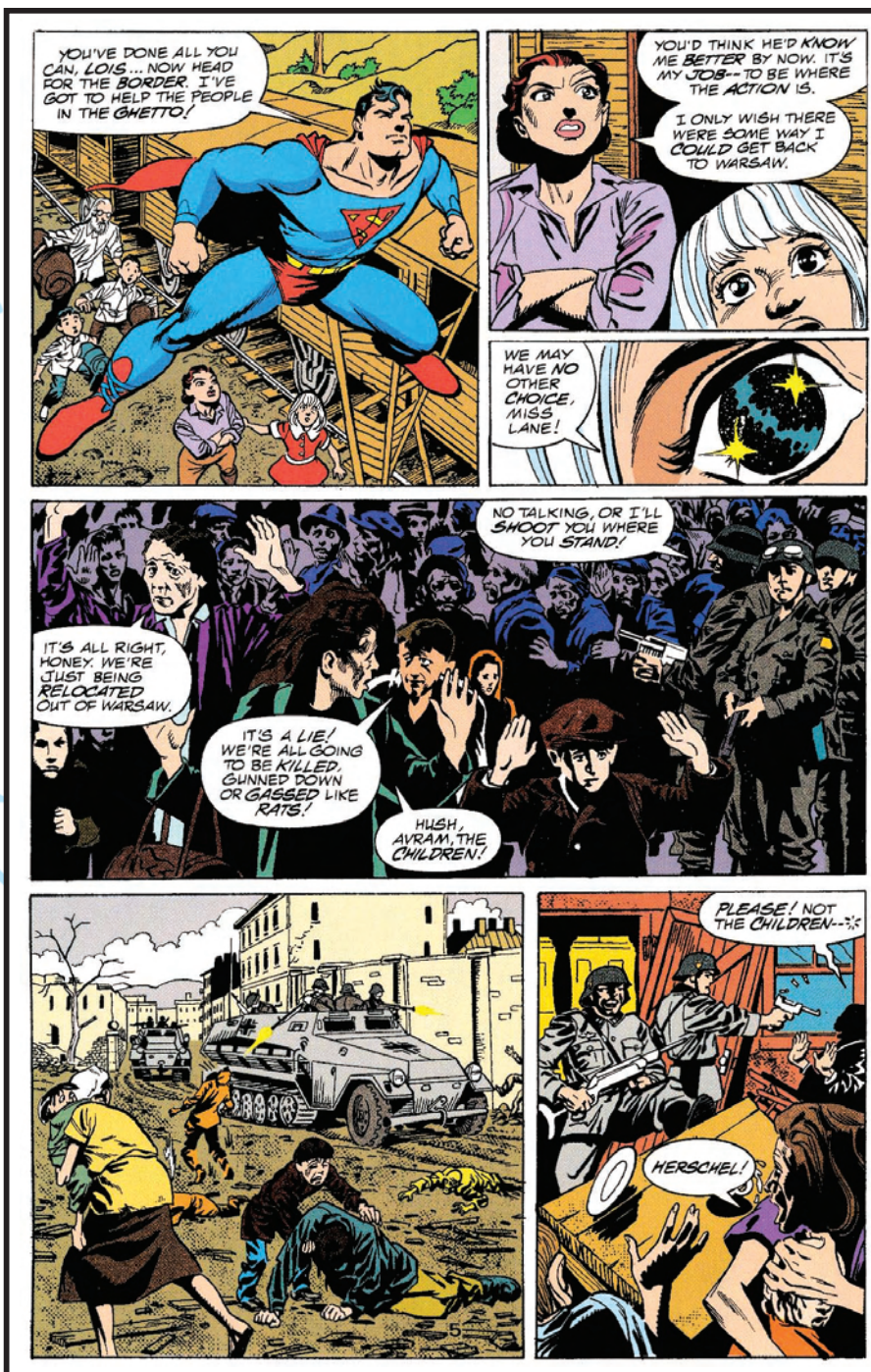
Later in the same issue, Clark is welcomed to Moishe and Baruch's home. Baruch is seen drawing the picture of an "angel." The grandfather exclaims, "He sounds more of a golem than an angel." He then notices Clark's puzzled expression and says: "Your bubeh never told you stories of golems?"

SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL # 81, P.10  
WRITER-ARTIST JON BOGDANOVE

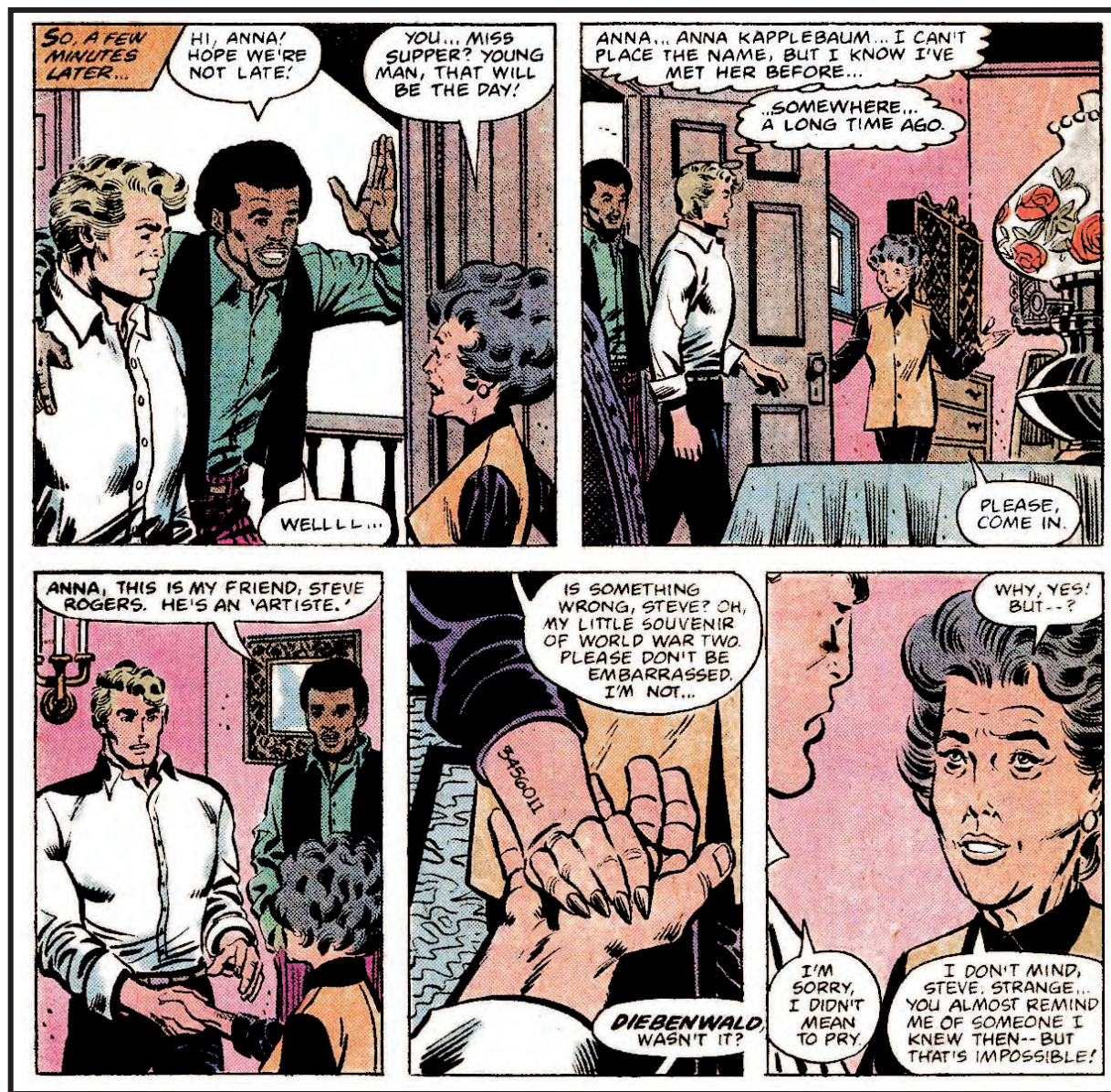


In *Superman: The Man of Steel* #82 (8/98), Superman rescues Lois Lane from a crowded cattle car just before it reaches Treblinka (pp. 1-4). Then he joins the Jewish resistance fighting alongside real-life hero of the Warsaw-ghetto uprising, Mordecai Anielewicz (p.8). In one of the frames (p. 5), a young child in a cap is seen with his hands up. This is surely the iconic picture of the little boy with a cap on his head being marched with other Warsaw Ghetto Jews as an SS officer points his gun at him.

*SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL* #82, P. 5  
WRITER-ARTIST JON BOGDANOVE



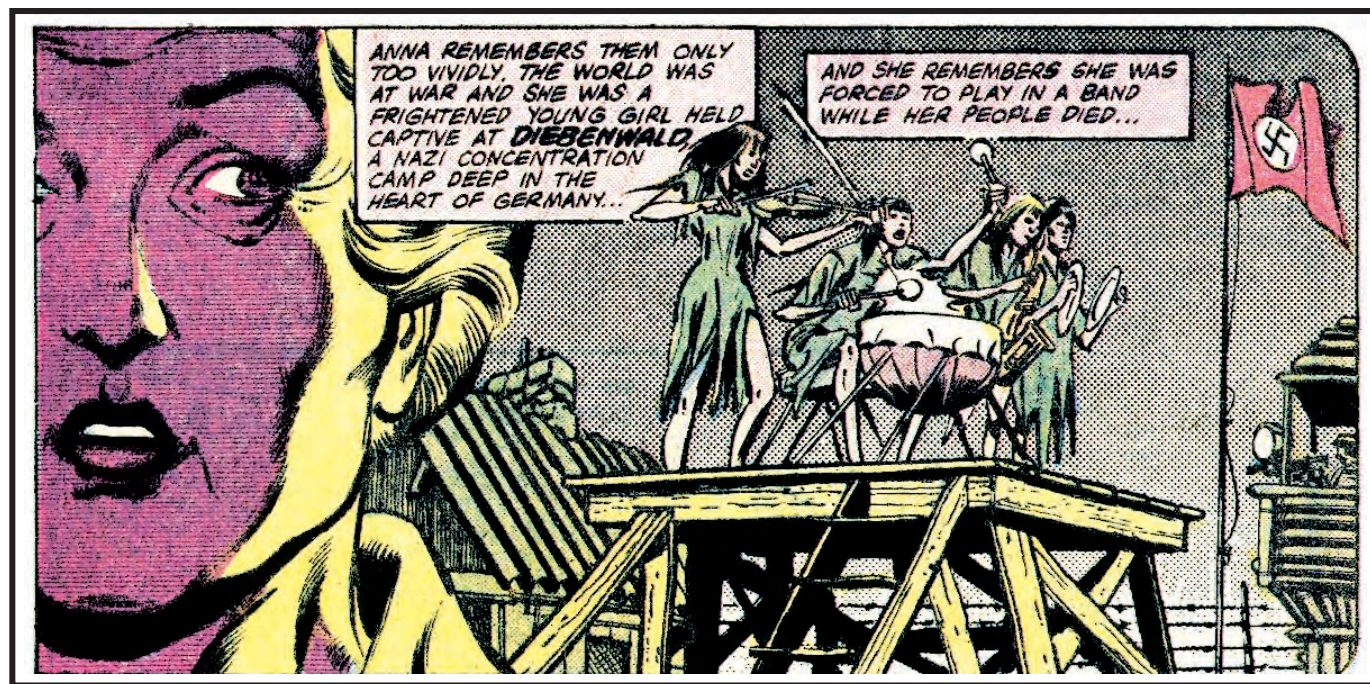
It was 1979 when Captain America again took up a Holocaust theme. This time, Captain America, originally a frail, young, blond WASP named Steve Rogers, visits the home of a Holocaust survivor, Anna Kapplebaum, who, when extending her hand in salutation, exposes a tattooed number. Anna seems to recognize him. In her memory, she goes back to the time when she was taken to the death camp "Diebenwald," (Buchenwald?) where upon arrival, a doctor (called "Mendelhaus" in "Cap" #245, p. 15, reminiscent of Dr. Joseph Mengele) determined, with a slight move of his hand, who went to the right for forced labor and potentially lived, or to the left "for treatment," a sure death (p. 17). But then, Captain America zooms in and rescues Anna. "Yes," she says, "some of us had survived Hitler's Holocaust, but more than six million other Jews, my family included, had not." (p. 27)



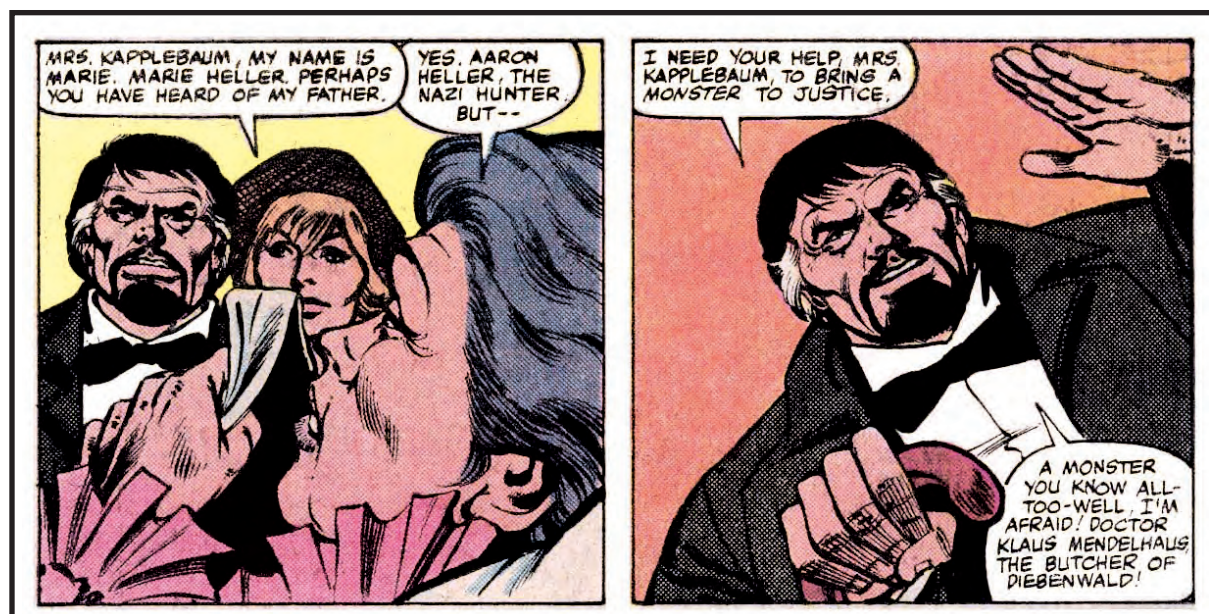
CAPTAIN AMERICA, #237, SEPTEMBER 1979. PLOT: C. CLAREMONT; ART: S. BUSCEMA & D. PERLIN

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A few issues later, *Captain America* #245, May, 1980, continues with Anna Kapplebaum's story. She remembers being forced as a young girl to play in the Diebenwald band while people were marched to their deaths. (Such orchestras were indeed part of the grim scenario the Nazis created in many concentration camps). She receives a visit from Aaron Heller, a Nazi hunter, and his daughter, Marie. (Reminiscent of French Nazi hunters, Serge and Beate Klarsfeld). They ask for her help "to bring a monster to justice" (p.16). But a spy for a secret Nazi organization recognizes Heller, denounces him, and Anna is kidnapped, only to be rescued by "Cap."



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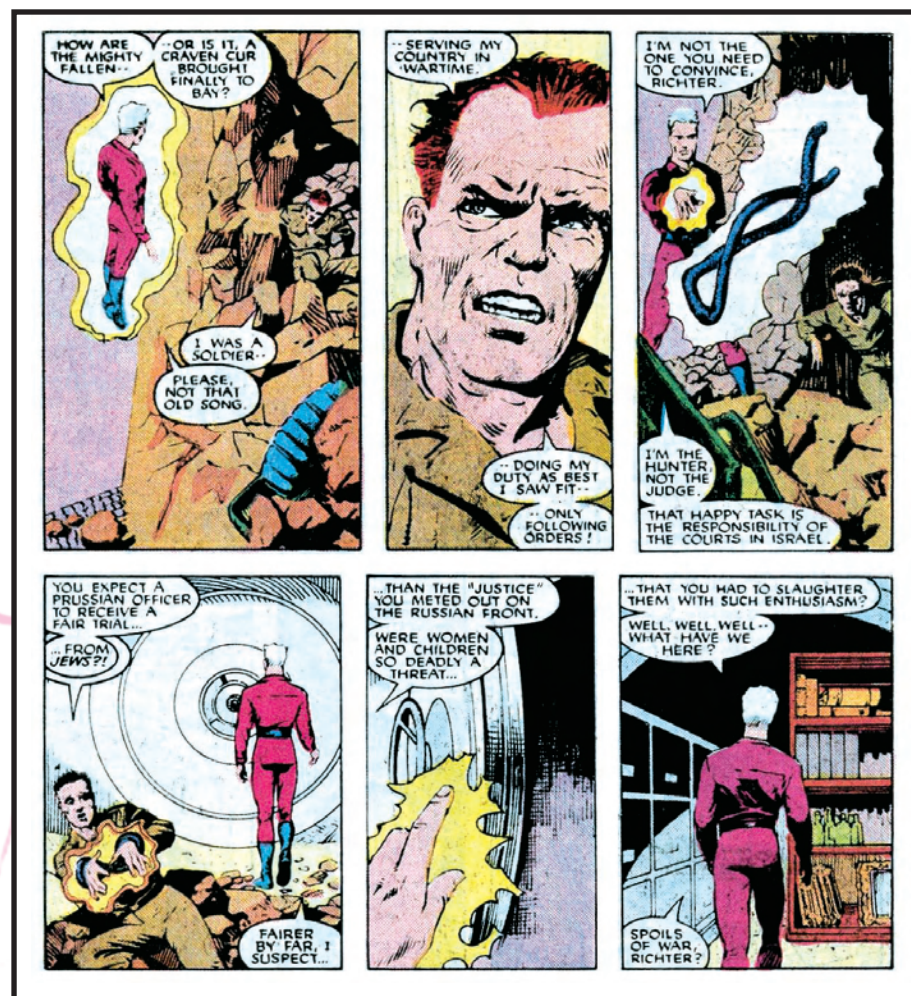
PP. 7 AND 16  
SCRIPT: ROGER MCKENZIE; ART: CARMINE  
INFANTINO & JOE RUBINSTEIN.



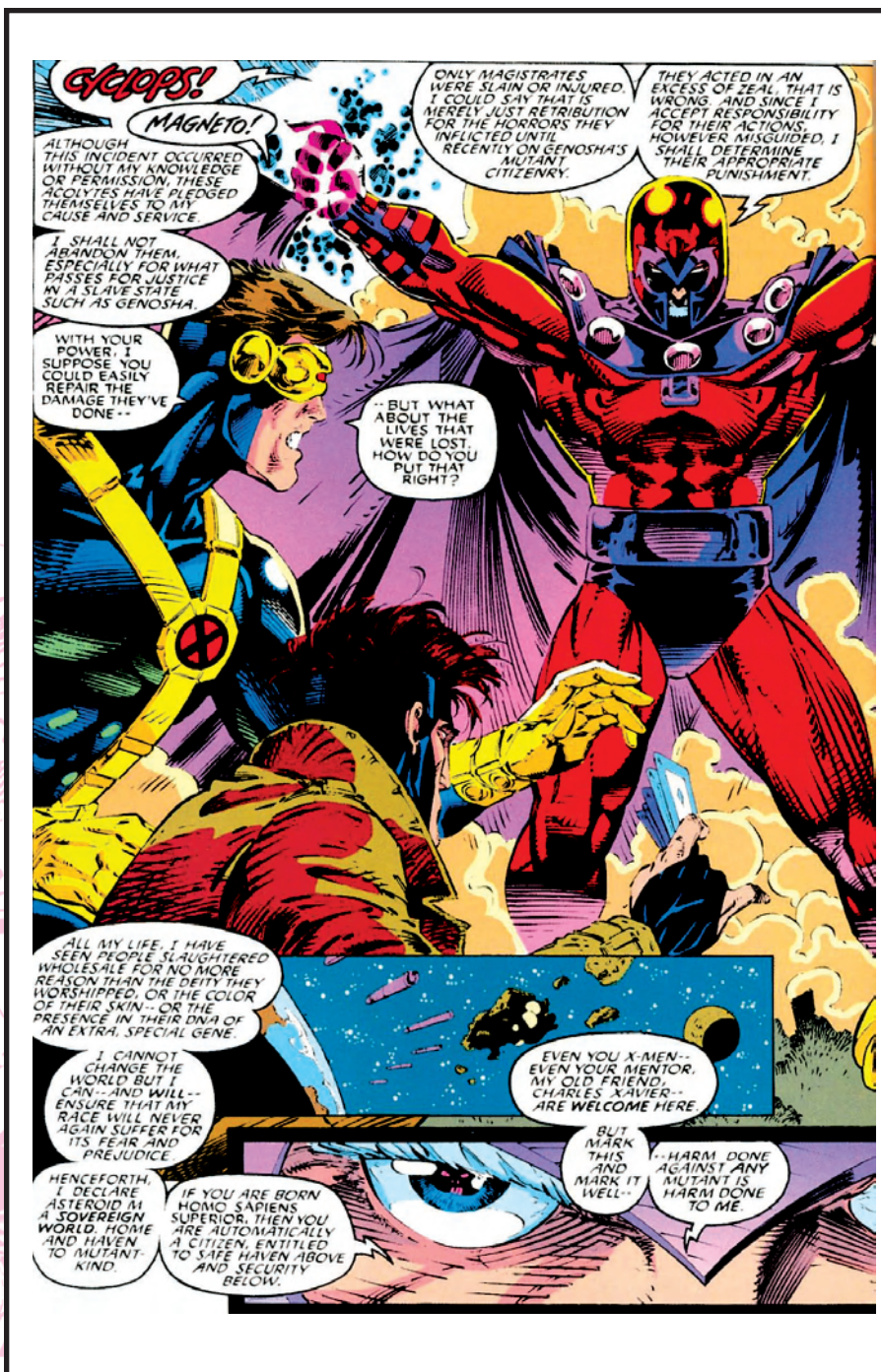
*Classic X-Men*, first created by Stan Lee (Stanley Martin Lieber) and drawn by Jack Kirby (Jacob Kurtzberg) in 1963, turned over the writing and illustrating of X-Men to others. It was Jewish writer Chris Claremont that invested the X-Men with a Jewish link, and particularly, as he recalled in later years, the Holocaust and its survivors. (Weinstein, p. 110)

In Vol. 1, N. 19, March, 1988, Magneto, the "complex villain/antihero," first mentions his Holocaust experiences: "I endured one death camp...in Auschwitz...I will not see another people fear what they do not understand and destroy what they fear." (p. 10)

At the end of this issue, in the story "I, Magneto," Magneto delivers a "Prussian officer" for trial in Israel. (p. 5)



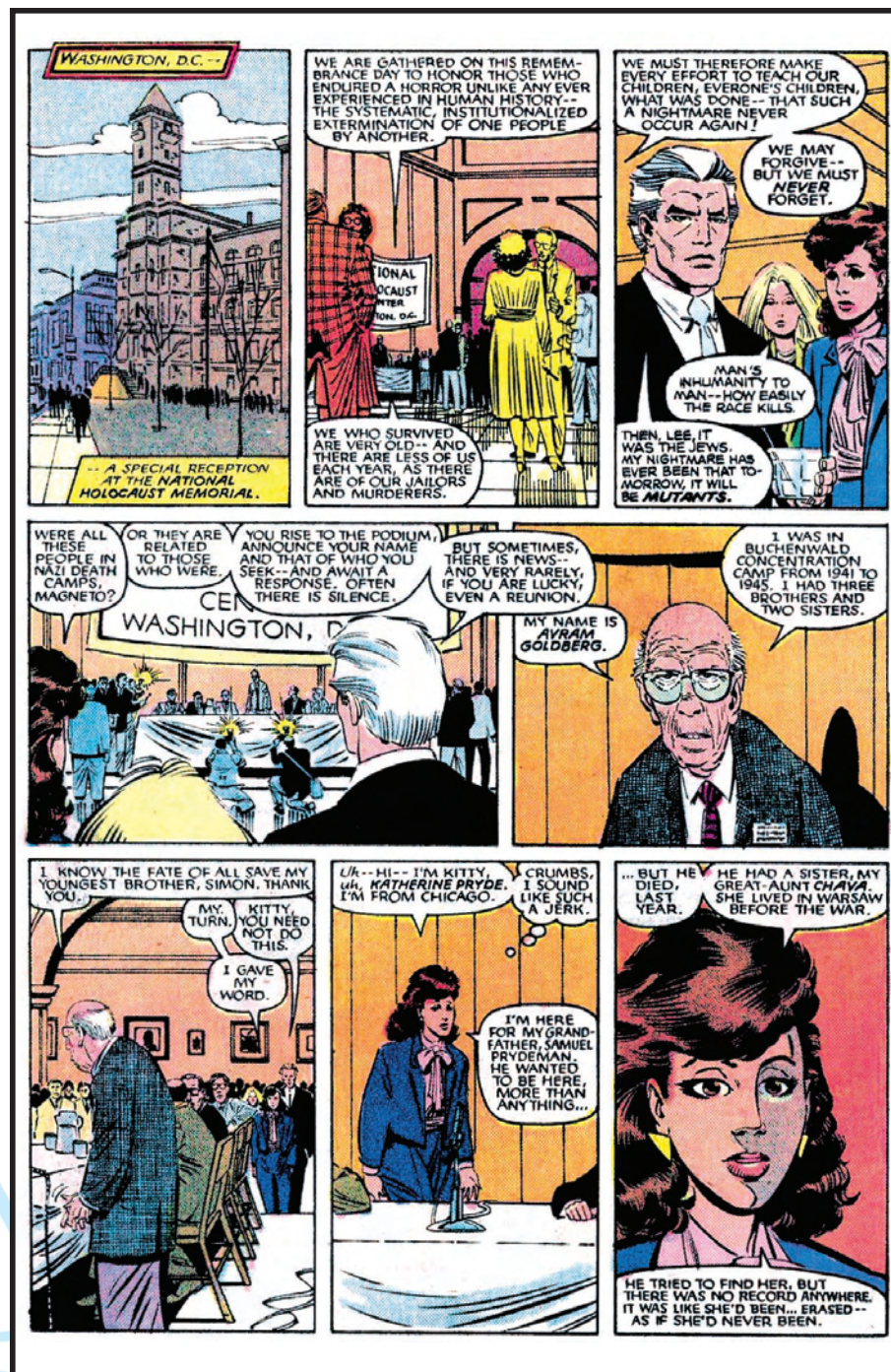
It was in *X-Men: The Movie* #19, March 1978, that Magneto first mentions his Holocaust experiences (p. 42). As Weinstein tells us, "Magneto was always tortured by the fact that he could have stopped the Nazis in Auschwitz if only he had been aware of his incredible powers. 'What it feels like to be different, to be Jewish,' [Chris] Claremont explained, 'became my window through which I could present the X-Men universe to a broader audience.'" (p. 111)



It was the same Chris Claremont who also created the character of a young Jewish woman from Chicago, Kitty Pryde, "who takes pride (pun intended) in her religion." Her paternal grandfather, Samuel Prydeman, had been held in a Nazi concentration camp. Many years later, Kitty attends a special reception at the National Holocaust Memorial in Washington, D.C. where she speaks in honor of her grandparents. (Weinstein, p. 113)

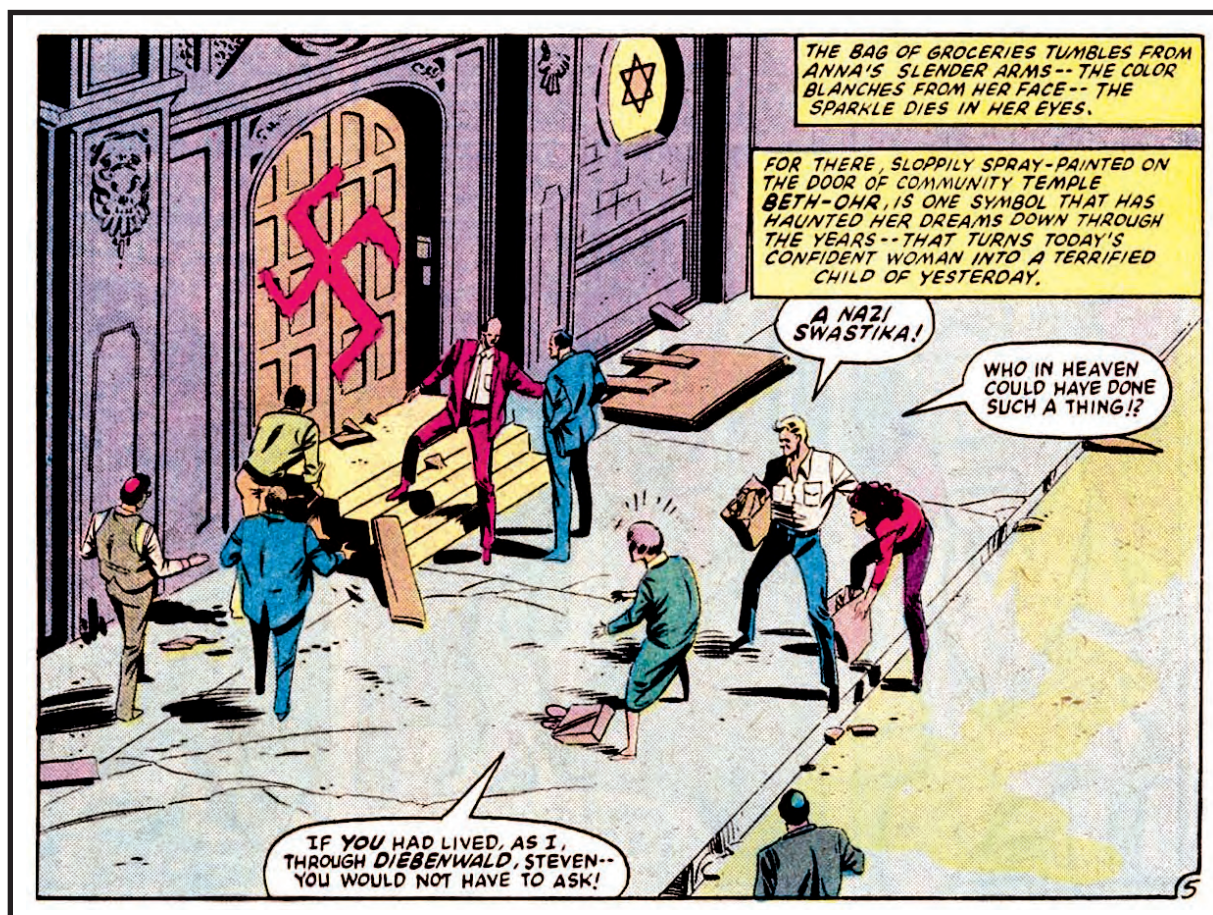


THE UNCANNY X-MEN, VOL.1, N. 199, P. 13, NOVEMBER 1985.  
WRITER: CHRIS CLAREMONT; ARTISTS: JOHN ROMITA, JR. & DAN GREEN.



As the years went by, it was not only the Nazi atrocities and the Holocaust memories that the cartoonists portrayed. It could have been thought that following Nazi Germany's mass murder and destruction, such ideologies would have been relegated to the bin of history. But this was not the case. A November 1982 issue of *Captain America, Vol. 1, N. 275*, has Steve Rogers walking with Anna Kappelbaum when they come upon the door front of Temple Beth-Ohr, on which a Nazi swastika was sprayed in red paint, the pews toppled, and a Torah scroll stolen (pp. 5-6). An anti-Nazi protest is consequently called for to take place in the Robert Moses State Park, Long Island. When a band of neo-Nazis donning red swastika armbands show up, a violent confrontation between the groups erupts, which "Cap" intervenes to stop.

Back already in 1982, neo-Nazis referred to Holocaust denial and "Zionist lies," demanding that, "Just as the Blacks must be sent to Africa—the Jews must be sent to Israel." (p. 8)



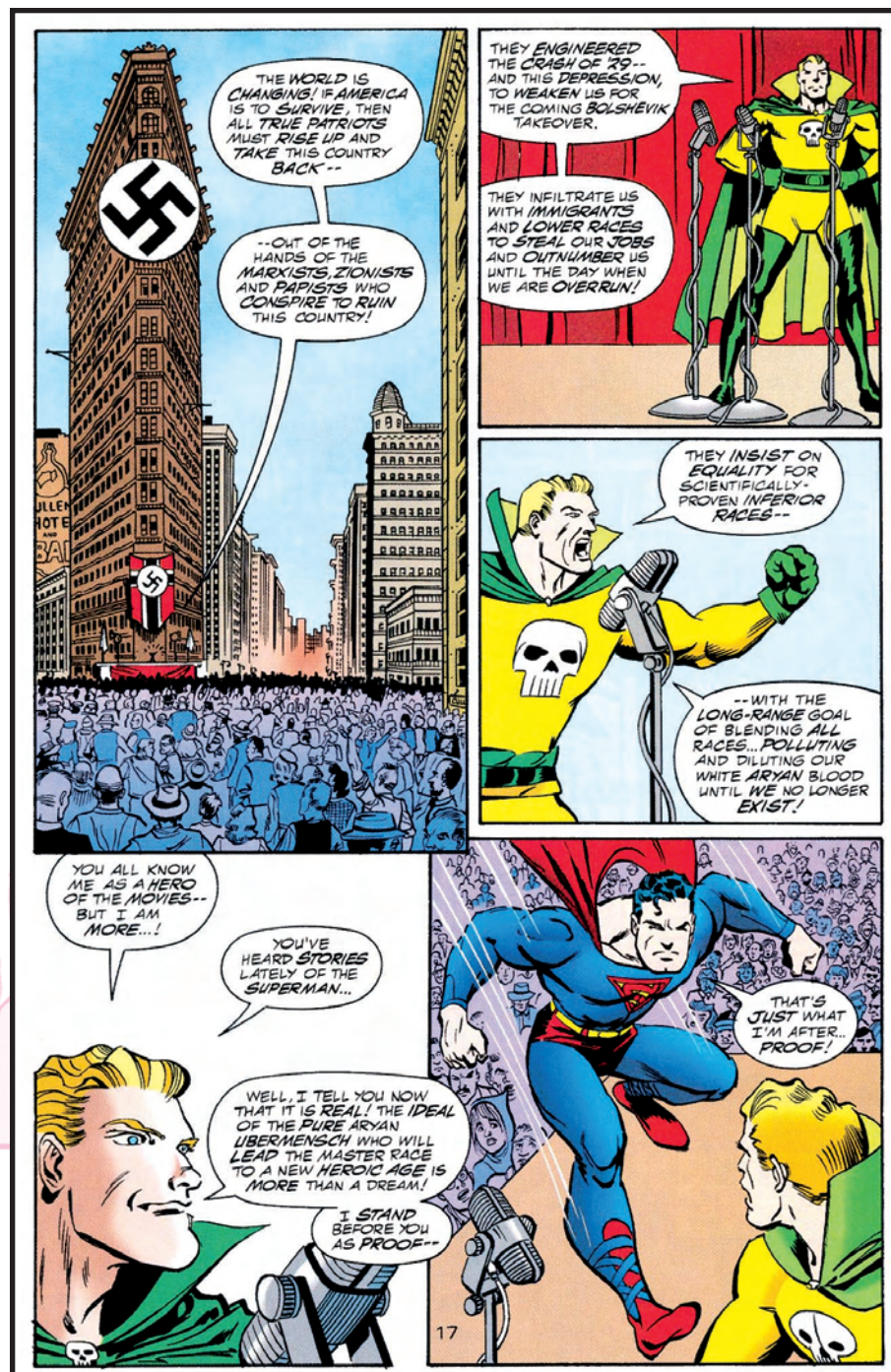
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SCRIPTER: J. MARC DEMATTEIS; PENCILER: MIKE ZECK; COLORIST: DON WARFIELD.

The neo-Nazi ideology was taken up once again in June 1998 by *Superman: The Man of Steel #80* (6/98). A Nazi rally draws a large crowd in downtown Metropolis. On what is clearly the Flatiron Building (23rd. St and 5th Ave., Manhattan), an enormous swastika hangs. On a podium in front of the building, a blond, blue-eyed, muscular speaker harangues the crowd: "The ideal of the pure Aryan Ubermensch who will lead the master race to a new heroic age is more than a dream! I stand before you as proof." (p. 17)



WRITERS: BOGDANOVE & SIMONSON.

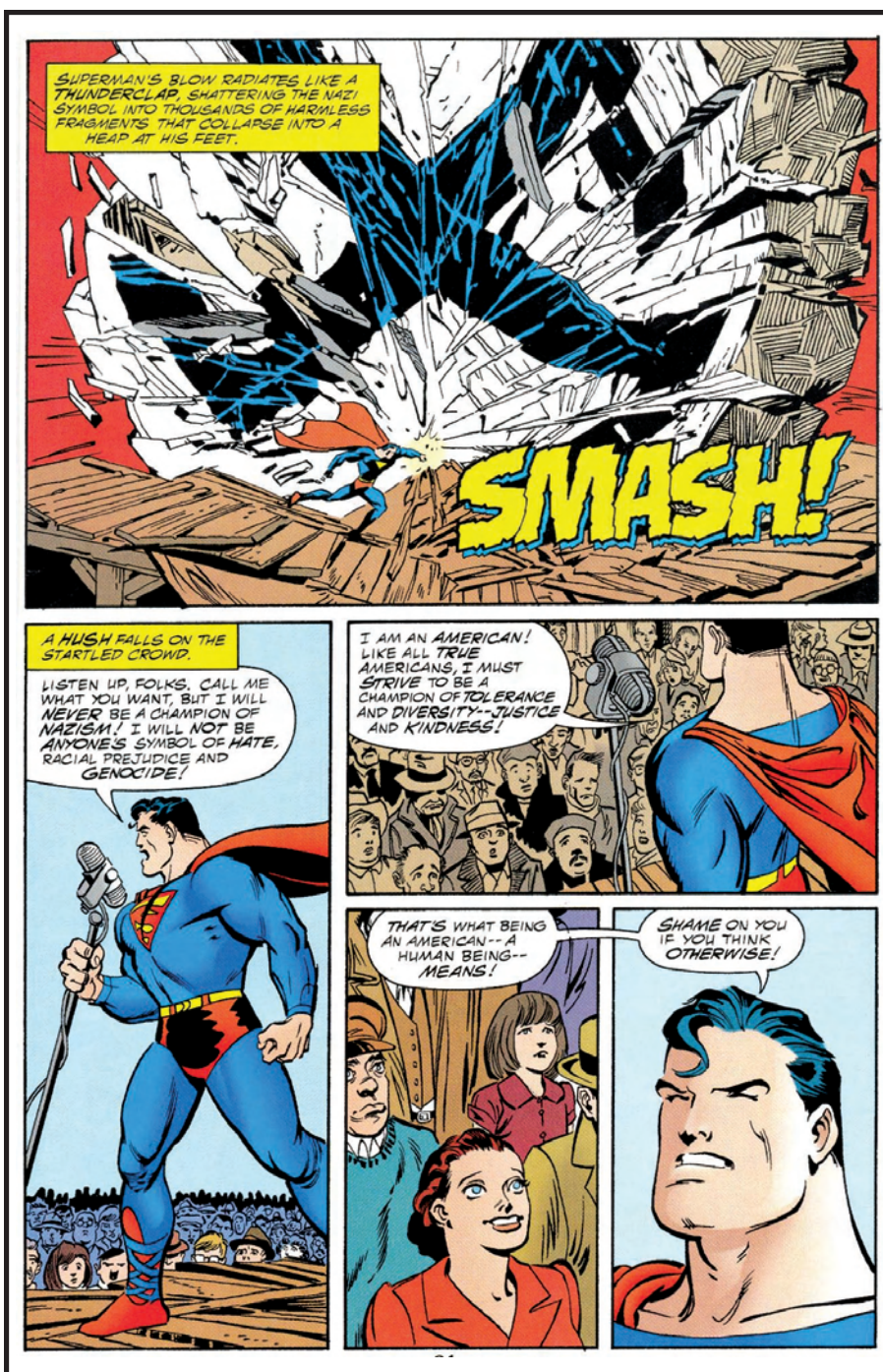


But the blond, yellow caped speaker with a skull on his chest is helpless “when the cable supporting the massive swastika hanging above his podium suddenly snaps and the sign crashes toward the earth, threatening hundreds of lives. Superman swoops down and pushes the giant sign away with seconds to spare. Then, to his horror, he hears the fascist [speaker] praising him—Superman—as a true hero, the real ubermensch!”

Rejecting such an appellative, Superman grabs the microphone: “Listen up folks. Call me what you want, but I will never be a champion of Nazism! I will not be anyone’s symbol of hate, racial prejudice and genocide! I am an American! Like all true Americans, I must strive to be a champion of tolerance and diversity—justice and kindness!”



*SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL #81 (7/98), P. 21.  
PLOT: BOGDANOVE & SIMONSON.*

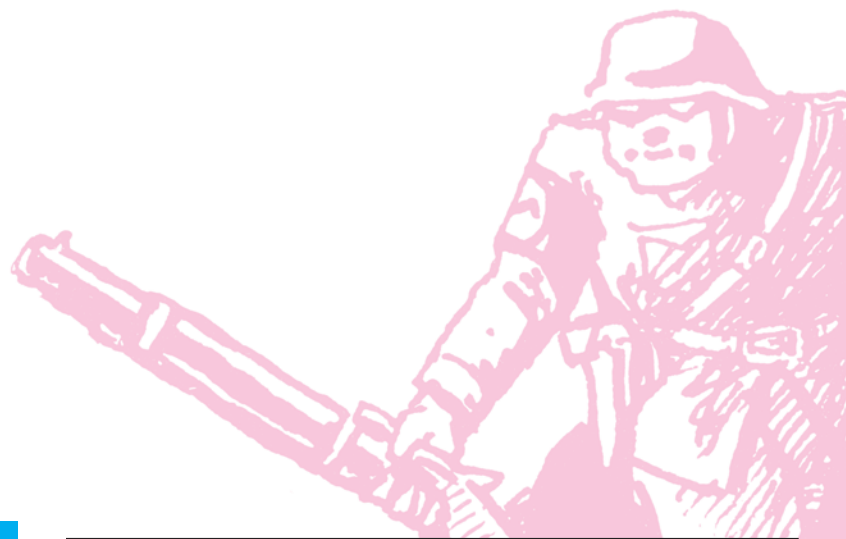


It is most likely that such accomplished cartoonists as Chris Claremont (*X-Men*) and Joe Bogdanove (*Superman: The Man of Steel*), writing in the mid-80's and the mid-90's, were surely acquainted, if not directly inspired, by Art Spiegelman's path-breaking *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. (See Fingerioth, p. 128)

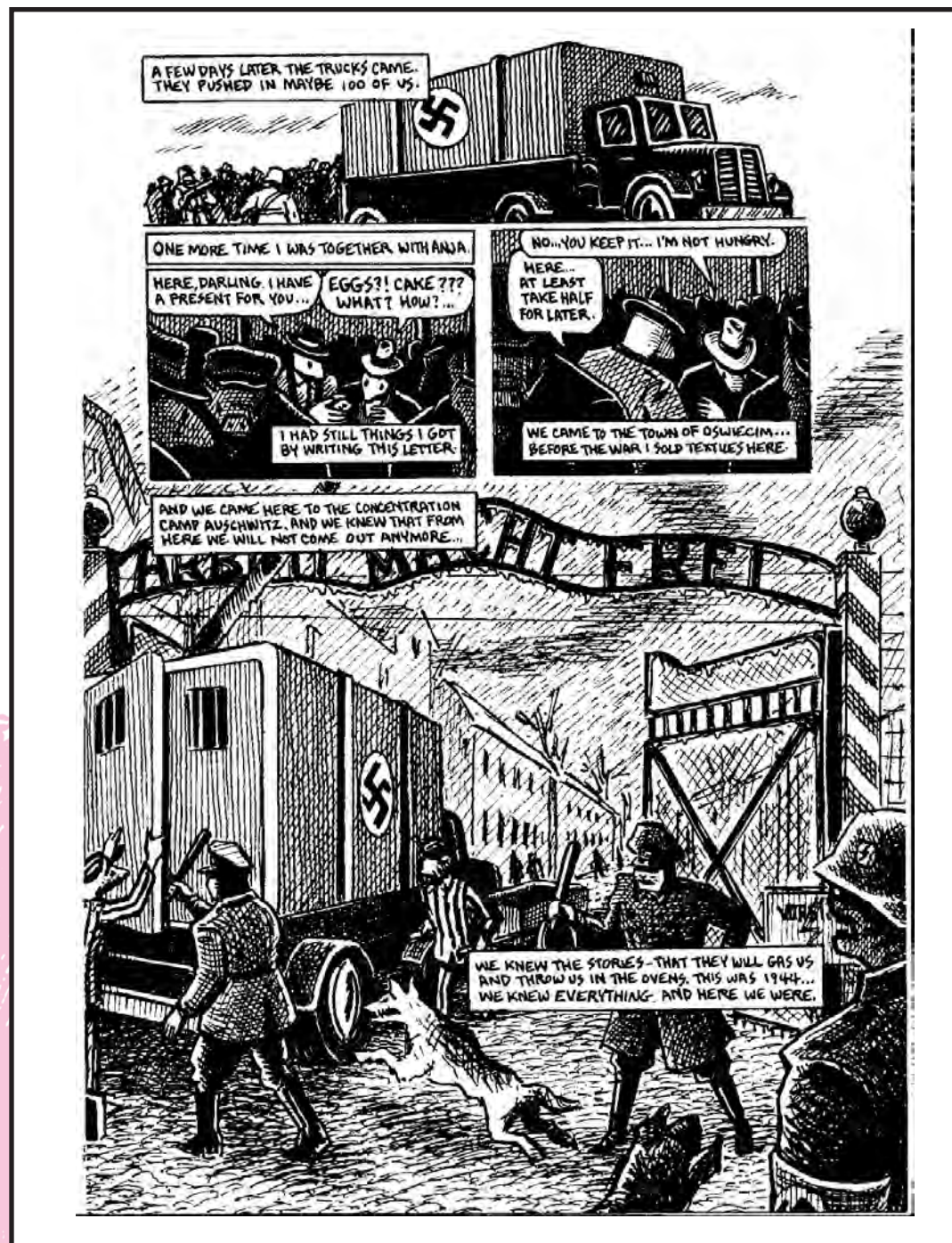
Published originally in *Raw* magazine between 1980 and 1985, and published in book form in 1986, the whole story confronts the horrors of the Holocaust head on. The graphic novel recounts the struggle of Spiegelman's father to survive the Holocaust as a Polish Jew and draws largely on his father's recollections and experiences. The book recounts the struggle of Vladek Spiegelman living with his family in Radomsko, Czesochova, Sosnowiec and Bielsko in the late 1930s and his tragic odyssey during the war that ultimately led him to Auschwitz as prisoner #175113.



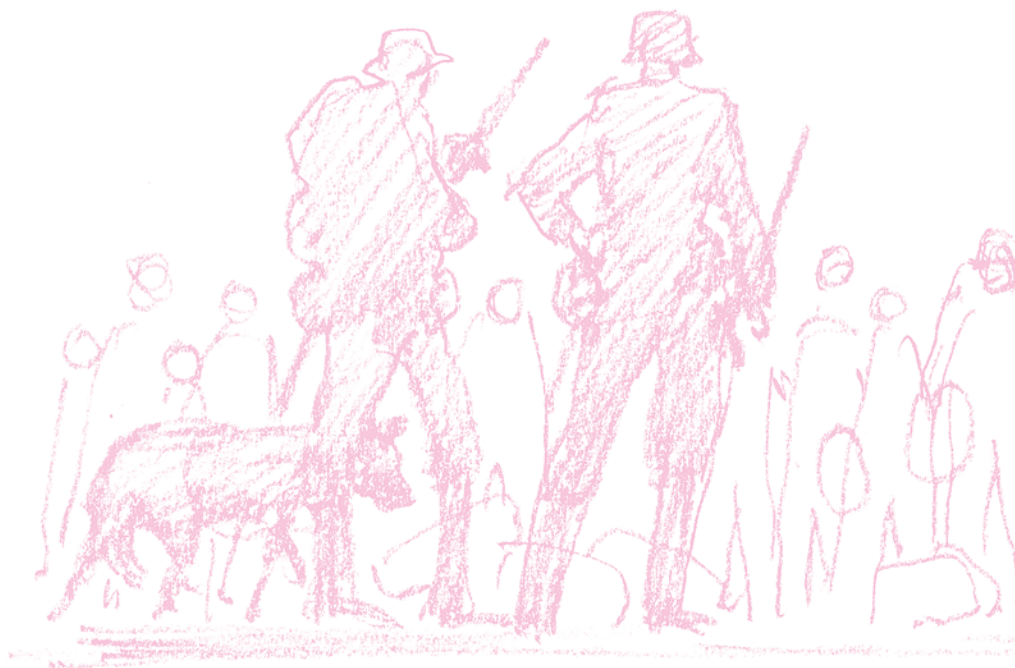
Spiegelman often referred to the apprehension that he (and we might add, other authors and artists also felt) in trying to express the inexpressible. Thus, his comic-book style drawings present all people as anthropomorphic animals: the Jews, as mice, are seen as weak and helpless victims; the Nazis are represented by cats who haunt the mice, and the Poles—occasionally—as pigs. These “tiny animal figures that move, dress and speak like human beings, become a metaphor for the Jewish experience.” (Susan T. Goodman, The Jewish Museum)



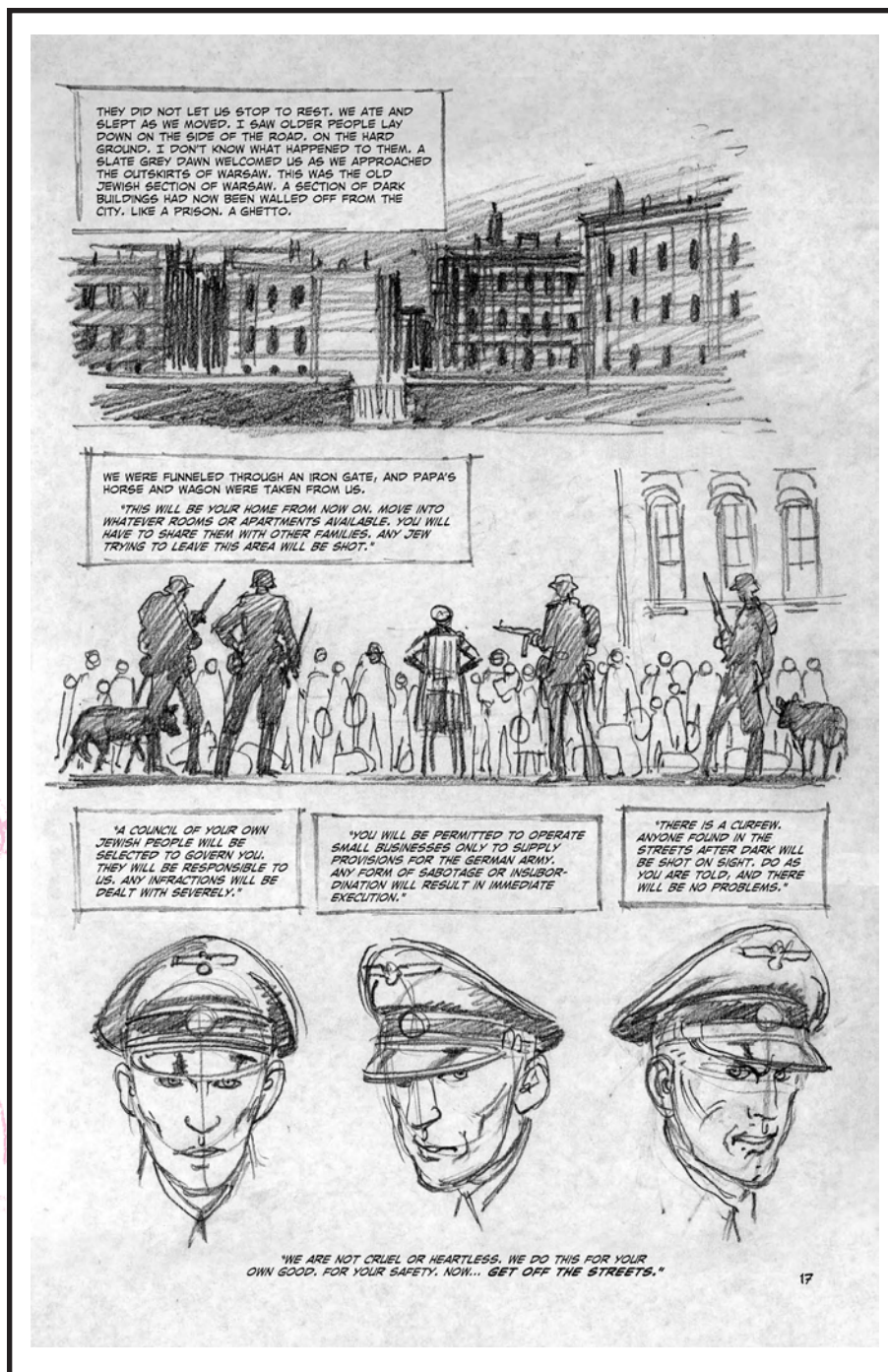
MAUS, P. 157. THE ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ AND ITS SYMBOLIC, MISLEADING AND MOCKING “WELCOMING” SIGN ARBEIT MACHT FREI, “WORK LIBERATES.”



When the 80-year-old master cartoonist Joe Kubert visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., he saw something that struck him profoundly: "Yzeran," the name of the eastern Polish shtetl where he was born. This one word and the context of where he saw it, prompted Kubert to publish *Yossel, April 19, 1943, A Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. Yossel is the story of a 15-year-old who narrowly escapes death by amusing sadistic Nazi soldiers with his remarkable drawings based on the new American form—superhero comic books.

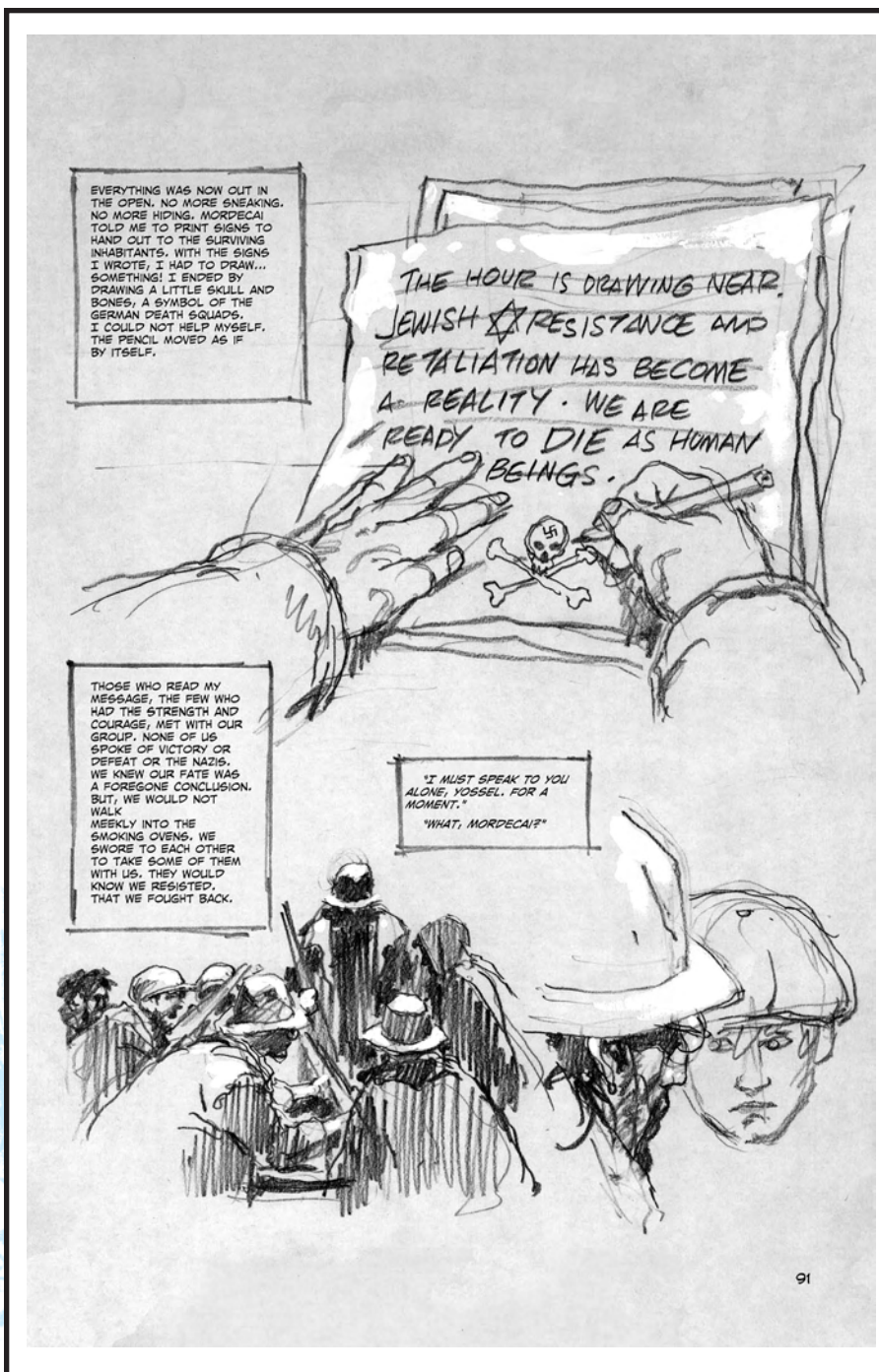


JEWIS ARE HERDED INTO THE GHETTO P. 17.



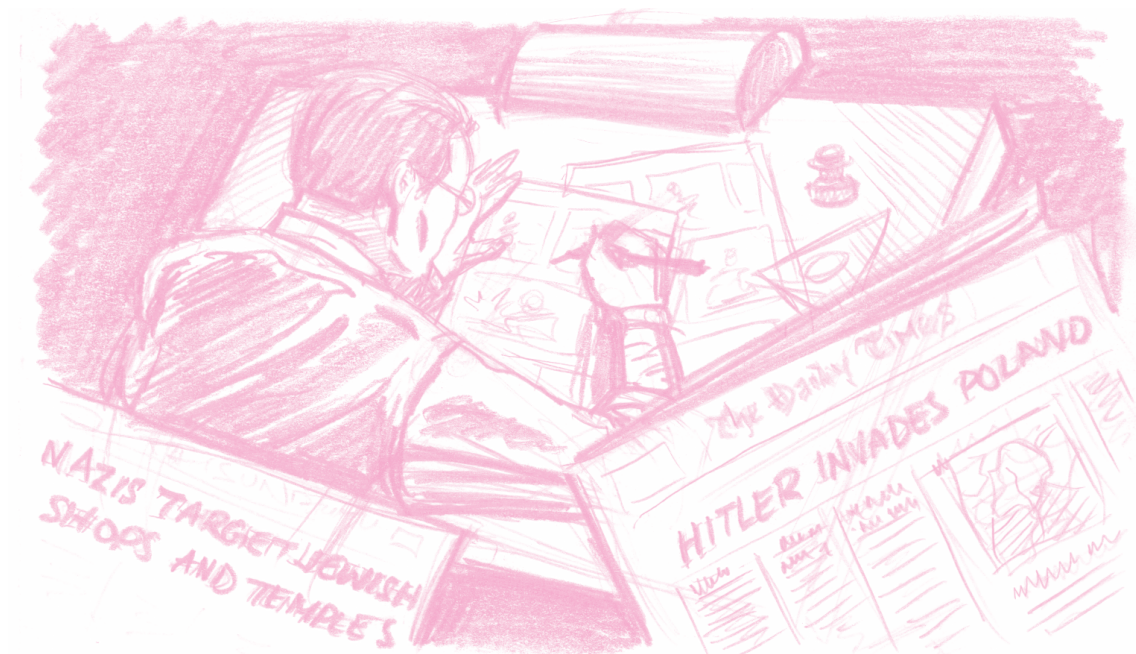
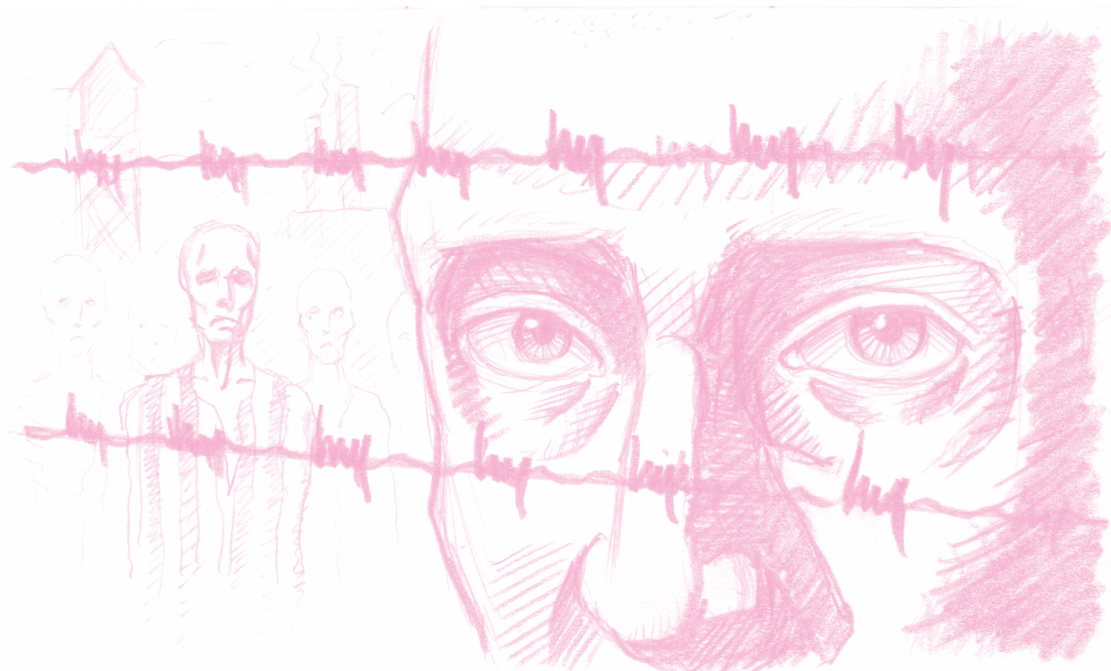
As the artist who worked on such well-known cartoons as *Hawkman*, as the inventor of the caveman *Tor*, and as the 1972 artist chosen to handle DC's version of *Tarzan*, Kubert tells us in the introduction to Yossel that "The drawings in this book are pencil renderings. My original intention was to first pencil, then ink my drawings. But, with my first preliminary sketches, I felt an immediacy in my pencil drawings that I wanted to retain. Also, I wanted to convey a sense that these drawings were in Yossel's mind, even though he may never have had the opportunity to put them all on paper."

THE GHETTO PREPARES ITSELF FOR THE UPRISING. AS WAS THE CASE IN *SUPERMAN: THE MAN OF STEEL* # 82, KUBERT, TOO, MAKES REFERENCE TO "MORDECAI," (ANIELEWICZ), THE LEGENDARY HERO AND LEADER OF THE UPRISING, P. 91.



"Can the story be told?" asked Jorge Semprún. Semprún, a Spanish writer and politician, had been liberated from Buchenwald to where he was deported after his arrest by the Gestapo in France as a member of the French resistance.

This is a question that has been asked and continues to be asked by writers and artists who attempt to transmit such hurtful images. The many cartoon artists presented in this exhibit tried in their own and unique way to sensitize their readers to the great tragedy of the 20th century.



## SUGGESTED READINGS

*Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero*, by Danny Fingeroth

A comprehensive, scholarly, and yet very readable account about the subject.

*Jews and American Comics: An Illustrated History of an American Art Form*, edited by Paul Buhle

Contributors to this volume include such well-known artists as Will Eisner, Jules Feiffer, and Art Spiegelman. The illustrations from the early 1900's Yiddish press to America Torah Tunes (2007), present us with an enlightening picture about Jewish cartoon art.

*Masters of American Comics*, edited by John Carlin, Paul Karasik and Brian Walter

A magnificent and scholarly tome that includes many of the Jewish cartoon artists and their work.

*Up, Up, and Oy Vey!*, by Simcha Weinstein

An indispensable contribution to the understanding of "how Jewish history, culture, and values shaped the comic book superhero." Well illustrated and fully documented. A must for all interested in the subject.



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