

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: Re-Examining the Great Divide (Again): Superman Comics, the *Partisan Review*, and Jewish American Identity

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This research project will focus on the Jewish American identity that arose from two specific artifacts of print culture in which many Jewish Americans partook intellectually and creatively: the little magazine and the comic book. Specifically I will be focusing on the *Partisan Review* and the first four years of appearances by Superman in comic books like *Action Comics* and his own self-titled series. Though pre-World War II was a difficult time for Jewish Americans who were consistently being oppressed, the decade from 1936 to 1946 was also filled with writing – both intellectual and creative – that worked to parse out a place for Jewish Americans in modern American society. In 1936 many intellectuals joined forces with the John Reed Club – an American communist organization – to fund the *Partisan Review*. This “little magazine” was known for its leftist/communist leanings and its frequent publication of Jewish American authors, which allowed for a specific Jewish American led voice in defining a specific section of American politics and art.

I will specifically argue that, even though these two sets of artifacts come from different traditions of aesthetics and have very different views on aesthetic worth – the *Partisan Review* was very intellectual and “high” cultured, while comic

books were considered very juvenile and “low” cultured – the goals each of these projects are working toward are quite similar. I will explore how material published in these two periodicals reflects Jewish American writers’ understandings of their own place in American society as a whole and the ways they believed their ethnicity did (or, in actuality, did not) fit into the schema of an American identity. The editors and writers associated with these two publications largely sought both a usable past from which they could form their own personal identities and a meritocratic future that would allow them equal footing in America and beyond.