

Basis for American culture is in the people. Everyone has been affected in some way or another by Marvel Comics, whether young or old. Marvel Comics has been a major cultural icon in the eyes of Americans and the rest of the world.

The Marvel Universe is everywhere. It is part of our culture, part of our heritage, even part of our language. Catch phrases like the Thing's "It's Clobberin' Time!" or "Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-man." And even the editorial comments " 'nuff said!" and "Excelsior!" During the 1970s and 80s run of television's "The Incredible Hulk," "Hulking out" became a slang term for losing control. And there's probably not a baby-boomer alive who can't sing at least part of the theme song from 1967's "Spider-man" animated series. (Marvel: The Characters and their Universe)

The company that would become known to the world as Marvel was formed in 1932 by a young (twenty-two year old) man named Martin Goodman. He started a publishing house to turn out pulp fiction magazines, an extremely popular form of entertainment in the early part of the century. Goodman published Marvel Science Stories, Marvel Tales, and the Red Circle. Suddenly, DC comics published a man in blue tights and a red cape. Goodman then moved seriously into the comic industry.

Goodman first published Marvel Comics in 1939. This publication included such characters as Prince Namor and Sub-Mariner created by Bill Everett. Bill Everett would later come to draw the very first Daredevil issue in 1964. He then continued to draw Prince Namor until his untimely death in 1973.

As with Everett, another young artist named Carl Burgos entered the Marvel family. He created a character named Angel-not to be confused with the later created Angel in the X-men-and the Human Torch. A New York native would have little to do

afterwards with Marvel until the 1950's, like Everett. He then worked on his character's Giant Man and the (new) Human Torch. Burgus died tragically in 1984.

During their time, two other artists joined and had a major impact on Marvel comics. Their names were Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. Today, they're not seen as a team except for their work on Captain America. They were born two years apart and both worked before on major comic companies. They then split up and went their separate ways.

After the split, Simon went on to a stint with Archie comics and in the late 1960's became the editor of the satire magazine Sick. Kirby, meanwhile, realigned with Timely (now called Atlas) in the late 1950's, where he was rediscovered. Timely introduced such characters as the Fiery Mask and the Red Raven.

Simon and Kirby quickly rose to the positions of editor and art director, respectively, and soon found themselves working with a teen named Stanely Martin Lieber. Stanely, a junior writer, was related to Goodman's wife. As a teenager, he won the New York Herald Tribune essay three times. He was then dubbed Stan Lee! After Simon and Kirby's financial dispute, Stan was left to carry on the story writing.

Even more artists came in the 40's and 50's: John Buscema, John Ramita, and Gene Colan. John Buscema was born in New York City in 1927, whose brother Sal would also make his debut as a Marvel artist. John Ramita was born in Brooklyn during the 1930's. Born four years before Ramita, Gene Colan was born a New York native.

The 1950's were an awkward time for comic books in general. Marvel tried to revive such books as Captain America, Sub-Mariner, and the Human Torch. But to no

success, it was a dying industry. To add more to the plate, the government was blaming comic books for every societal problem in the nation.

“Things were extremely bad from ’58 to ’61,” said artist Joe Sinnott, one of Marvels most accomplished inkers. Sinnott recalls what it was like, “ We were doing monster books, you know, ‘Gordo,’ characters like that. It was a fun period but we weren’t making much money at that point and they weren’t all that popular. It was in ’61 when the heroes came back and pulled us out of the doldrums.” (Marvel: The Characters and their Universe) Not only was Marvel pulled from the doldrums, so was the entire comic industry.

Catching up with DC comics was a large task. After their creation of the Justice League, Stan Lee had to come up with something fast. Working with Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck, Lee was a busy man. None of them knew what high standards they were about to set for comics.

With issue #1 of The Fantastic Four, which debuted in November 1961 under the imprint of Marvel comics group, a new revolution in comics was officially underway.

Stan Lee then had an idea. When the business started comics were only six pages long and only different characters each time. Lee then had the epiphany to make on-going stories with the same character. This helped put out more books, about twenty-six pages long, with better quality. Another setback was actually writing the script. The writer would give the artist a script and the artist would simply follow the script. Lee would simply describe the story and leave the overall design up to the artist.

While Marvel's reader base exploded with the Big Bang, the company itself did not- at least not at first. "When I first started, it was just Stan and me in the office," notes Flo Steinberg, who served as Lee's assistant from 1963 to 1968 (and who is back on Marvel today as a proofreader) "By the time I left it was like a little bullpen, maybe four or five people." One of those in the bullpen wasn't even a bull. The talented Marie Severin, who was not only one of the most versatile artists the company had was capable of working in almost any capacity from pencil to art color styling, or even, art direction; was also one of the very few female artists in an almost male dominated comic book industry.

In 1972, Stan Lee became the publisher. Thomas then replaced Lee as editor and chief. That same year, Martin Goodman, the man who started it all, retired from the company.

However Marvel's huge creative boom of the 1970's had not translated into a huge financial boom. That would begin in the late 80's, which was another time of change for the company. In 1987 an entertainment company called New World; that same year Tom DeFalco took over as editor and chief; replacing Jim Shooter bought Marvel. Marvel's fortunes at this time were greatly improved by the success of two movies, but ironically they were not Marvel Movies.

Soon after the Fantastic Four, characters began booming out onto shelves. The Incredible Hulk, Spider-Man, and X-men just to name a few have really revived the comic industry. Spider man alone has become a major cultural icon among Americans.

No one who worked on the first issue of The Fantastic Four forty years ago could have predicted that it was destined to change the direction of popular culture in the

twentieth century. But the last panel of that first issue that says it all, “And so was born  
The Fantastic Four!! And from that moment on the world would never again be the  
same!!”

Sources:

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