



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 29, 2024

Media Manipulation: Is Anti-communism Now Just Another Un-woke Prejudice?

If a group that murdered 100 million people in less than a century can't be described as villainous, what can?

This question could be asked now that entertainment website ScreenRant has published, and MSN.com has publicized, an article lamenting how “wrong” it was for comic books to have portrayed communists as villains during the 1950s. In fact, ScreenRant writer Shaun Corley even saw fit to republish a 46-year-old *mea culpa* by a famed Marvel Comics writer who said he “regretted” being part of the “Red Scare.”



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This growing tolerance of — and, in fact, affinity for — communism is nothing new. More than 15 years ago already I [wrote](#) about how Marxism was again [winning converts](#) in Japan, Germany, the United States, and elsewhere. So imagine that: Monsters can be resurrected when the entirety of a popular culture — media, academia, and entertainment — are continually breathing life into them.

Enter Corley, who cites a [1978 interview](#) with legendary Marvel writer, editor, and publisher Stan Lee, who passed away in 2018 at age 95. Corley [writes](#) in his summary:

- Marvel Comics reflected the Cold War era with anti-Communist propaganda, a move that Stan Lee later regretted. The portrayal of villains as Communists was simplistic and naive.
- The Cold War had a deep impact on pop culture, with fears of nuclear war leading to the depiction of Communists and Russians as bad guys in Marvel Comics.
- In the late 1960s, Marvel began creating more sympathetic Communist characters due to changing societal views influenced by student protests and the Vietnam Conflict. Depictions of Soviet characters became more nuanced and reflective of the changing world.

Corley then stated in his first paragraph that “Lee tapped into a zeitgeist with foes such as the Gargoyle and the Crimson Dynamo, simplistic villains who wanted nothing more than to spread the gospel of Communism.”

“Lee confessed they were ‘simpler’ and ‘more naive’ times,” Corley later added. “Lee reflected on the nature of villainy, and how it changed, noting that during World War II, the Nazis were bad guys, and afterward, the Soviet Union became our enemy. Likening himself to ‘Pavlov’s Dog,’ Lee said he jumped on the anti-Communist bandwagon, cranking out one-dimensional villains.”

To be frank, the more logical interpretation is that Lee was merely catering to his market all the way through: He was anti-Nazi when that was fashionable, anti-communist (and anti-Nazi, though not visibly) when that was fashionable, and anti-Nazi and sympathetic to communism when that was fashionable. It’s what politicians do.

(In keeping with this, writers now put sexual devolutionary (“LGBTQ”) [characters in comics](#).)



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But there's much to unpack here. Consider the first complaint: The comic-book portrayals were simplistic.

You don't say? That's so unlike comic books, isn't it? We thought it was like imbibing Aquinas or Aristotle!

(Apropos to this and ironically, in recent times I've been calling shallow, superficial grasps of issues a "comic-book understanding" of them.)

All this said, there is a deeper truth in Corley's commentary, and it's only fitting to explain it better than he understands it.

It is true that, unlike comic books, people are complex; consequently, not *every* member of a dark group has a black heart. I once read about a white man known for doing charitable works in the black community who, it was discovered after his passing, had at the same time also belonged to the KKK. There were [fellows of Jewish heritage](#) who were part of the brutal Nazi SS. As for communists, I know a very good man (though with fuzzy politics) who decades ago was a member of the Communist Party, apparently out of convenience, in his then-Eastern Bloc nation.

The lesson? The Truth is black and white — but people are *shades of gray*. Each of us is imperfect, that is; "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," as the Bible puts it.

This dichotomy between the Truth's and man's natures, however, confuses many; it's why people so often ascribe grayness to "truth" and don't believe in Truth. This relativism can reach absurd lengths, too. For example, the subhead of a [2013 piece](#) in the ostensibly intellectual *Atlantic* reads, "Are we prejudging evil? How Satanists can help us understand the world."

"Prejudging"? What is "evil," by definition?

The article also instructs that it's "time to stop demonizing Satanists," which is a bit like counseling against theorizing about the theoretical.

Speaking of the demonic brings us to communism's nature. The ideology's adherents murdered 100 million because they wreaked death and destruction, often killing just for the sake of killing, *wherever they took power*. It was approximately 20 million dead under Stalin and about 60 million under Mao, while the Khmer Rouge exterminated one-quarter to one-third of Cambodia's population between 1975 and '79, to provide a few examples.

This said, it's impossible to do communism's injustices justice in the remaining space. But for added perspective, do consider a passage from Gary Saul Morson's [splendid 2019 essay](#) "Leninthink":

Under the Third Reich, an ethnic German loyal to the regime did not have to fear arrest, but [Vladimir] Lenin pioneered and Stalin [of the communist USSR] greatly expanded a policy in which arrests were entirely arbitrary: that is true terror. By the time of the Great Terror of 1936–38, millions of entirely innocent people were arrested, often by quota. Literally no one was safe. The Party itself was an especially dangerous place to be, and the NKVD was constantly arresting its own members—a practice that was also true of its predecessor, the Cheka, which Lenin founded almost immediately after the Bolshevik coup.

NKVD interrogators who suspected they were to be arrested often committed suicide since they had no illusions about what arrest entailed. They had practiced exquisite forms of torture and humiliation on prisoners—and on prisoners' colleagues, friends, and families.



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“Member of a family of a traitor to the fatherland” was itself a criminal category, and whole camps were set up for wives of “enemies of the people.” Never before had such practices defined a state.

So, yes, people are complex. Yet claims of complexity are often just a mask for confusion or cowardice. As for the matter here, maybe the '50s comic-book understanding of communism was essentially correct.

After all, what's more “simplistic and naive” than thinking a vicious ideological movement that has savaged everything it has touched deserves an umpteenth look?



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