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Conceptualizing Nazism in America through Alternative History Media

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Why Do We Ask, “What if?”

• “Alternative history is inherently presentist. It explores the past less for its own sake than to utilize it instrumentally to comment upon the present... The primary function of alternative history—the answer to the question “why do we ask, ‘what if?’” is to express our changing views about the present.” – Gavriel Rosenfeld, 2002

• “As opposed to dystopias set in the future, Amazon’s MHC creates estrangement by locating the story not only in the past but in an alternative history of that past; in doing so, it encourages Americans to evaluate the ethical demands of a democratic society by comparing past abuses to the present” – Zachary M. Powell, 2018

• “Dissolution of Historical Nostalgia...” – Zachary M. Powell, 2018

The World Where Hitler Won
Why Nazism above all else?

• “The scenario of the Nazis winning the Second World War is one of the most popular themes in the entire field of alternative history.” – Gavriel Rosenfeld, 2002

• Easily Identifiable/Recognizable

• Speaks to/Invokes American Patriotism (Historical Memory)

• Icon of Evil

• Timeless Enemy/Universal Enemy

• Easily Adaptable to various mediums (Television, Video Games, Movies, Books, etc.)

• Demonstrate that any individual can become an extremist under certain circumstances

Examples in Various Mediums

• Lightning in the Night, Fred Allhoff, 1940

• The Man in the High Castle, Phillip K. Dick/Amazon Prime, 1962/2019

• The City on the Edge of Forever, Harlan Ellison (Star Trek), 1967

• What if: Überman, Saturday Night Live, 1979

• Fatherland, Robert Harris, 1992

• The Last Reich, Arthur Rhodes, 2001

• Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus, Bethesda Softworks, 2017

Methodology/Sources


