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Conceptualizing Nazism in America through Alternative History Media

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Conceptualizing Nazism in America through Alternative History Media

Matthew Fear, Advisor: Dr. Christoph Schiessl, HONORS 3030

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



The Man in the High Castle, Seattle, Washington, Amazon Prime, 2016



Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus, Rockville, Maryland, Bethesda Softworks, 2017

Methodology/Sources

- Dick, Philip K. *The Man in the High Castle*. Gollancz, 2019.
- Powell, Zachary Michael. "The Ethics of Alternate History: Melodrama and Political Engagement in Amazon's *The Man in the High Castle*." *South Atlantic Review* 83, no. 3 (2018): 150–69.
- Rosenfeld, Gavriel. "Why Do We Ask 'What If?' Reflections on the Function of Alternate History." *History and Theory* 41, no. 4 (2002): 90–103.
- Rosenfeld, Gavriel David. *Hi Hitler!: How the Nazi Past Is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*. 2017. Windows. Bethesda Softworks