



AMERICAN SOFT POWER THROUGH HOLLYWOOD SUPERHERO  
MOVIES: THE CASE OF THE TRILOGY OF CAPTAIN AMERICA

BY

MISS LALITA SUWANKAEWMANEE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
PROGRAM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES (INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS  
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC YEAR 2020

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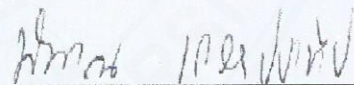
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AMERICAN SOFT POWER THROUGH HOLLYWOOD SUPERHERO MOVIES:  
THE CASE OF THE TRILOGY OF CAPTAIN AMERICA

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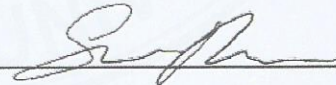
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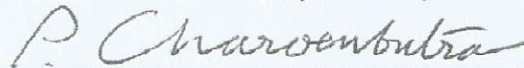
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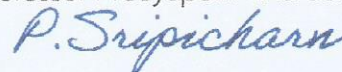
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### ABSTRACT

The Captain America trilogy exemplifies American ideals: individuality, democracy, liberty, equality, and patriotism through the life and identity of its protagonist Steve Rogers. From the blatant display of American cultures to American values to the artistic imitation of American policies, the Captain America trilogy incorporates all mentioned elements and presents the world the compelling stories where heroes are created, sacrifices are made, damages are done—all for the protection of humanity. As the curtain comes down, superheroes always emerge as the saviors—to all. The assertion of power, as the trilogy demonstrates, is no longer through the brutal force of military power but wielded through soft power, namely culture, values, and policies. Only through careful analysis of the storyline, character traits, dialogues, and images, one may discover hidden messages in the art that imitates life. As stated by Joseph Nye (1990), a political scientist, “The best propaganda is not propaganda”.

**Keywords:** Hollywood Superhero Movies, The Trilogy of *Captain America*, American Soft Power, Popular Culture, the source of power, American Culture, American Values, American Foreign Policies

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Miss Lalita Suwankaewmanee

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	(1)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	(3)
LIST OF FIGURES	(4)
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Questions	7
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	8
2.1 What is power?	8
2.2 A traditional form of power	9
2.3 New face of power and its resources	10
2.4 Popular cultures as a mean to create soft power	18
2.5 Cinema: the USA’s influential soft power	23
2.6 Superheroes and superheroes movies	25
2.7 Captain America and his movies	30
CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF PRIMARY TEXT	34
3.1 Theoretical framework: soft power	34
3.1.1 The American culture’s relationship with soft power	34
3.1.1.1 The definition of “Culture”	34
3.1.1.2 Popular culture as a cultural resource	36

3.1.1.3 The Significance of Americanization	38
3.1.2 The American values	40
3.1.2.1 Democracy	40
3.1.2.2 Individualism	41
3.1.2.3 Liberty	41
3.1.2.4 Equality	42
3.1.2.5 Patriotism	42
3.1.3 The American Government Policies	42
3.2 Review of Primary Text	43
3.2.1 <i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	43
3.2.1.1 <i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i> (2011) Plot	44
3.2.2 <i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i> (2014)	45
3.2.2.1 <i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i> (2014) Plot	46
3.2.3 <i>Captain America: Civil War</i> (2016)	48
3.2.3.1 <i>Captain America: Civil War</i> (2016) Plot	49
CHAPTER4RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	52
4.1 The American culture	52
4.2 The American values	57
4.3 The American policies	77
CONCLUSION	87
REFERENCES	90
BIOGRAPHY	107

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1.1 Three types of power (Nye, 2004, p.31)	12
4.1 The timeline of the trilogy of Captain America releases and US foreign policy	81





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### 1.1 Introduction

“The answer is, of course, it would be best to be loved and feared. But since the two rarely come together, anyone compelled to choose will find greater security in being feared than in being loved.”

(Machiavelli, 1497-1527)

Machiavelli's statement taken from *The Prince* (1497-1527) above clearly suggests that, for a ruler, it is better to be feared than to be loved because the nature of humans and virtue will make people be unfaithful if the situations allow them to be. In addition, the goal of the ruler is to preserve the state; consequently people are required to be obedient. Between generosity and brutality it seems that using brutality to make people fearful is more reliable (The Prince: Important quotations explained, n.d.). In previous times power was created by coercion, fear, and threats and this form of power is called hard power. Hard power has been used as a traditional way to get the result that one wants for a long time. Powerful countries use their military strength and economic sanctions as tools of hard power. However, Machiavelli's statement might not work with individuals and world's politics anymore.

In the present, there is a new face of power called soft power. This term was coined and developed by Joseph Nye in 1989. It is a power of persuasion and attraction. It rises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political values, and policies. Nye (2004) stated that soft power is one source of influence. Many countries in the world have shifted their interest from hard power to soft power and invested their money in culture to help them create soft power. The country which displays a high level of soft power is the United States of America (USA) and its soft power is very distinguished on the global stage. Hollywood is a good example to explain how soft power is created and its influence spread. Other than the entertainment industry, technology and education are counted as means to produce soft power.

Power today is less tangible and coercive among advanced democracies than it was in the past (Nye, 2004). Hollywood is used as one of the soft power tools which the USA uses to influence people and the USA produces and exports a number of movies around the world every year. Although the largest film industry in the World is in India, they lack the cultural influence that the USA has. The American movie industry is so popular throughout the world and cinema box office takings, particularly in Asia, are dominated by U.S. movies. Hollywood movies make billions of dollars a year and the amount of money keeps on growing. Additionally, a lot of Hollywood movies are produced to appeal to audiences of every age and gender so that is the reason why the money in this industry keeps increasing as they can attract the wider audiences. However, producing the movies in Hollywood studios is not as easy as you think because the process of producing some movies garners interference from the government. David L. Robb (2004) argued that Hollywood has always been influenced by the elites and institutions of the government. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) are revealed in engaging in programs to influence the content of the movies produced by Hollywood studios (Secker & Alford, 2017). Tarabay (2014), an Aljazeera's reporter, interviewed Phil Strub, the Pentagon's entertainment-liaison officer, about the military support for Hollywood movies. Strub has been the Pentagon's liaison officers for Hollywood for more than 25 years. His name has appeared in the after credits of movies thanking him from many movie producers. Strub revealed that the U.S. military supports a great number of Hollywood movies and he made reference to the movie *Jurassic Park III*(2001) saying it too received support from the U.S. military. The A-10 which is a military aircraft, was provided by the Pentagon and appeared in the movie. In order to get this aircraft into the movie from the Pentagon, Strub said that he had to read and review the entire movie script, ask the filmmakers to change the script, get the filmmakers to agree to do so, then submit the new script to the military, finally to get the authorization to use the aircraft. Strub also talked about the movie *Captain Phillips* (2013) saying that most of the ships and destroyers that appeared on screen were conducting specific training exercises. This movie showed a very positive view of the U.S. Navy thus enhancing its reputation as the audiences who watched it believed that if they need help from the Navy, the Navy would be

there to help them. As the shipping industry was so unprotected, the U.S. Navy would be the only ones who can protect them (Tarabay, 2014). The Pentagon has a long history of censoring and financing Hollywood films by providing military equipment or military experts for film productions. The way Hollywood movies narrate the story can lead to the control of societies because the stories relate to real life (Kellner, 1995).

Regarding the importance of film, it is interesting that since the year 2001, after the September 11<sup>th</sup> incident, superhero movies have been resurrected by Hollywood to a much more popular mainstream mass consumption and huge revenue source of media. Comic superhero characters are portrayed in many films. Superhero films are particularly interesting, as they demonstrate responses to a crisis. They model leadership styles and visualize the proper relations between the leader and his people, and between the individual and his community. Finally, they define notions of sacrifice and service and explore the possibility of agency against a backdrop of fate and determination (Kord & Krimmer, 2011). Douglas Kellner (2010) stated that “contemporary Hollywood cinema can be read as a contest of representations and a contested terrain that reproduces existing social struggles and transcodes the political discourses of the era” (p.2). Film produces a particular narrative of an issue, such as security by using certain symbols and codes to create a specific narrative in the recipient’s mind (Schmid, 2014). People love to believe there is someone who can save them. It is also very popular as these movies, although political in nature, are very entertaining. Kellner (2010) stated that many films can be vague in expressing their political nature. He further stated that they show a contradictory mixture of those who do not follow politics and political motifs. After the 9/11, 2001 terror attacks on New York and Washington, there was a meeting between the U.S. government and film producers from Hollywood. In a meeting with Karl Rove, Senior Advisor and Deputy Chief of Staff during the George W. Bush administration, film producers were called upon to serve the country in the War on Terror and make patriotic films. In stark contrast, during the Vietnam War the Hollywood film industry generally avoided presenting films engaging the conflict or the films showing the USA was the country who initiated the fight between two countries. For the war on terror period, it often appears on the screen that films from

Hollywood illustrate the attack of the United States on Middle East countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan or countries that have a conflict with them aiming to show how powerful the U.S. military is.

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. military have used movies as their propaganda tool for over a century. The US Government has sponsored propaganda in the form of Hollywood movies since World War II up until the present. The Voice of America was used to promote a positive image of the USA after World War II. The government also uses popular media as ways to manipulate and control the population. Specifically, they have used Hollywood as a tool to propagandize the public. Military and war propaganda are probably the oldest form of public manipulation (Redmond, 2017). Randolph Bourne (1981) stated that the state will always make war to be easy to consume through the use of entertainment. According to Robb (2004), the Navy official stated that the number of men wanted to join the Naval Aviators increased by 500 percent after 1-2 years since the movie 'Top Gun' was released. In 2004, the CIA declassified the motion picture as 'psychological warfare' and an unnamed author of the Office of Strategic Services, or OSS stated that motion pictures are one of the most powerful propaganda weapons at the disposal of the United States (Redmond, 2017). Redmond (2017) argued that in Hollywood movies they always present that the CIA are needed to help people to get through nefarious situations. Even though the CIA conducts complicated and sometimes controversial operations, we are made to believe that it is necessary to have them and feel thankful that some organization will do this job for us while we safely relax watching TV at home. The CIA began inserting its agents into the Hollywood system by the early 1950s. Finally, the United States were able to control and manipulate the population's thoughts and opinions through motion pictures (Redmond, 2017).

Since the end of the Cold War, the CIA has been directly involved in at least 20 major Hollywood productions (Secker & Alford, 2017). The U.S. military not only supports the movies based on the reality of the plot, they also provide assistance for non-realistic action movies such as extraterrestrial movies like *Battle: Los Angeles* (2011), *Battleship* (2012), *Pacific Rim* (2013), they all benefited from the Pentagon's influence. *Battleship* (2012) was filmed during the biannual RIMPAC exercise in 2010

with the assistance of the U.S. Navy. *Battleship* is a movie that helps people to understand more about the Navy because it shows how powerful the U.S. Navy is as the story line portrays the fight between the U.S. Navy and the aliens at Pearl Harbor. Ultimately, the Navy can destroy the aliens and bring back peace. *Pacific Rim* (2013) asked for assistance from the Department of Defense (DoD). The producer wanted to record the sound of one helicopter taking off. Due to this minor detail of support, the producer had to send them the full movie script. The DoD also provided the vehicles and soldiers as background extras when the movie *War of the Worlds* (2015) was filmed. In addition, the filmmakers took all and incorporated the DoD's suggestions into their final productions. These institutions will only support the movies that make them look positive and they say that realism and accuracy are not the priority (Secker & Alford, 2017). The extraterrestrials in the movies are used as metaphor because they can be interpreted to be any of the USA's enemies in the real world. Both the CIA and the DoD claimed that they get involved in movies and TV series selectively in order to provide a level of assistance. They also claimed that they just want to make sure that those movies portray the activities and methods of the U.S. government agencies dedicated to national security (Secker & Alford, 2017). However, Secker and Alford (2017) argued that the real purpose of government involvement in the film industry is to guide the filmmakers to stay away from sensitive topics and to create the movies that portray the U.S. in a positive light. Filmmakers make use of the CIA and the DoD's support to reduce production costs and to make their movies look real. They agree to let the CIA and the DoD read the full movie scripts and yield to change the script when needed in order to get their sponsorship. The movies which are produced under this agreement become a tool to create good images for both the CIA and the DoD.

The Pentagon also embraces the superhero movie *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) which was inspired by a real world event, World War II. Steve Rogers, a fragile little man who was rejected from a military many times, was chosen to undergo a special treatment to create a super-soldier by the U.S. government. He was injected with a serum created by a scientist and became the super-soldier Captain America who was stronger, larger, and more attractive to opposite sex. Captain America's transformation was used as a metaphor for the United States

during World War II. The US wanted to imply that they are not a warlike nation, but the reason that they were involved with the war is because of the moral quest and that they think it is the right thing to do; similarly Rogers felt the same way as he was a weak guy and did not like bullies. At the end of the movie when Captain America sacrificed himself protecting the US from the leader of Hydra, the antagonist, that wanted to attack the United States this reinforces this metaphor. Captain America was supported by the U.S. military for this exact reason (Secker & Alford, 2017). There are two more movies of Captain America which are *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016). Captain America movies are the form of popular culture which were exported from Hollywood to millions of audiences around the world and Captain America movies consist of many hidden political messages. Furthermore, the movies and the Captain America character represent many aspects of American values such as democracy, individualism, liberty, equality, and patriotism; the movies also reflect some American policies through the story lines. It is obvious that Captain America is a symbol of the United States, his costume and his shield represent the American flag and he represents all good representations of the USA through his character. Captain America is portrayed in every movie as a leader who fights against the enemies, he has leadership skills and he is very independent; he does what he thinks is right to protect his people and his beloved country. In the movies *The Avenger* (2012), *Avenger: The Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) he has to cooperate with other superheroes to successfully complete missions, but his role doesn't change; he is still the leader among them and he is the one who makes the final decisions along with Tony Stark aka Iron Man. Even the Entertainment Liaison Office also manifests a good attitude toward the Captain America character in the movie *The Avengers* (2012) (Secker & Alford, 2017). It is interesting to study about Captain America movies because the Captain America character and movies represent the USA. The movies and character can also reflect the three resources of American soft power which are culture, values, and policies. Many Hollywood movies are full of propaganda and the influence in crafting films and manipulating audiences' thoughts are dangerous for the audiences. Even though not all the movies are interfered with and manipulated by the government, I believe that every movie has messages to deliver and has an

effect on the audience's thoughts and feelings. Kellner (1995) said that the way Hollywood narrates the stories can have an impact on societies as it is produced based on real life issues so people can relate themselves with those stories. In addition, since the resurrection of superhero movies after 9/11 incident Hollywood keeps producing superhero movies until now and this type of movie captures the wider audience; each generation is fascinated by and admires the superhero characters. Captain America movies and other Hollywood movies are exported all over the world and numerous people watch them but they are not aware that they may be influenced by American soft power through these movies, especially for children and young adults as they are easily influenced and persuaded. We now live in the world where geopolitics and culture are now being given by the major power countries. They use popular media as a propaganda tool to attract people and promote themselves. Nowadays, people can readily access media and it is even easier for them to be influenced (Redmond, 2017). Therefore, when the audiences consume media, apart from finding it entertaining, they should be conscious and think about the details inside especially when they watch a movie.

## 1.2 Research Question

Fun, exciting, and entertaining *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) stress that the resources of American soft power which are culture, values, and policies have been established through the stories and characters. Utilizing soft power as its principal theoretical frameworks, this study therefore aims to address the following research question:

- 1) How does the trilogy of Captain America movies reflect three resources of American soft power?

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents previous studies which are relevant to the analysis of the trilogy of Captain America movies. It will start with the explanation of power, followed by the different forms of power. The new face of power will be introduced and a definition will be revealed. After which, since this research focuses on American soft power through Hollywood superhero movies, this chapter will also review previous studies of popular culture, as the movies themselves are popular culture, and popular culture is one of the most influential ways to produce soft power. The definition and components of a superhero will be exposed and Captain America stories and his character will also be explained.

#### 2.1 What is power?

Before talking about soft power, it is important to know the concept of power. There is a debate among political scientists about the concept of power, as the definitions of power have been defined differently from each researcher's perspective in world politics. Power is the term which is known and recognized by all, but few people understand it. A lot of people have power but the impact of power depends on a relationship between them. Robert Dahl (1957), one of the most famous political scientists, defined power as the relation between people. He explained that one can have power over others and get them to do something that they would not otherwise do. For example, a policeman is standing at the intersection and he commands the cars to turn left or right as he orders. Therefore, in this case the policeman has power over the drivers to control them to go to the direction that he wants. In Cambridge dictionary, it described the meaning of power as an ability to control people and events. It is the capacity to do things, the ability to get the outcomes that one wants. In addition, the dictionary tells us that power is the capability to affect the behavior of others, or influence others' behaviors to get the outcomes that one wants.



Joseph Nye (2004) defined power as the capacity to influence the behavior of someone to get the consequences that one wants. You can force someone to do something that you want by using threats, command, or co-opt with them. It depends on the context and relationship which power is used. He also defined the second term of power as the possession of capabilities or resources that can influence outcomes. A country will be considered as powerful if it has a relatively large population and territory, extensive natural resources, economic strength, military force, and social stability as the United States, China, and Russia, for example. However, having all power resources does not mean that you will get the result that you want. To illustrate, the United States had the advantages over Vietnam in almost every way during the Vietnam war. Nonetheless, having a bigger and stronger U.S army did not mean they could win this war. Nor could it prevent its country from the atrocious terrorist attack including 9/11. Having high power is one of the desires which a lot of people and nations want to achieve. World politics is an example to illustrate what power is, because many countries in the world would like to become a world leader, so they have to compete against each other in every way to accomplish their goals. One of the countries that is well-known and has high influence is the United States of America. They have become the world's most powerful nation after theirs and their Allies victory in World War II.

## **2.2 A traditional form of power**

The USA and the Allies' victory in the second world war came from the usage of traditional form of power; it is the use of economic and military power and this practice is called hard power. Hard power is used as a tool to influence the behaviors of others to follow what one wants. Hard power is often aggressive and is often shown in the form of politics. The countries that have more power usually use economic sanctions or the military threat to invade those who have less power. The United States is an example of how one uses their hard power to threaten others. They used their military ability against the terrorists in the War on Terror after the September 11 incident in 2001. As seen and heard in many international news channels, the USA sent a large number of soldiers to the Middle Eastern countries

and used economic sanctions with Iraq during Saddam Hussein's era. The United States has also used sanctions on other Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen to pressure them (Sanctions Program and Country Information, 2017). Jonas Elmerraji (2010) said that "Economic sanctions are a popular way for large governments to exert their disapproval over one another. While wars are costly – both economically and politically – economic sanctions tend to be somewhat less tangible, at least for the country doing the sanctioning, but for the country being sanctioned, the results can be enormous and long lasting". Hard power has been a traditional form of a foreign policy tool for a long time, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century another kind of power, which has existed in history for a long time but rarely was it publicized, has emerged, been defined, coined and developed further.

### **2.3 New face of power and its resources**

This form of power, which is now widely discussed among political scientists, is named soft power and was firstly labeled so by Joseph Nye in 1989. Nye was aware of the existence of soft power throughout history but explained that even though the concept of soft power is recent, the behavior it denotes is as old as human history (Nye, 2008). Nye (2004) defined soft power as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments and it arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. Soft power is more than just persuasion or ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it, it is also the ability to attract, and attraction leads to acquiescence. If you can get someone to do what you want, then you do not have to force them to do it. If you can persuade someone to follow your lead so you do not have to force them to do things (Nye, 2008). Nye (2008) further explained that soft power is one source of influence. It is an attractive power and its resources are the assets that produce such attraction. He stated that soft power may be less relevant than hard power in preventing attacks, policing borders, and protecting allies, but soft power is particularly relevant to the realization of surrounding. Soft power of a country based on three resources which are:

- 1) The American culture (in places where it is attractive to others)
- 2) The American political values and (when it lives up at home and abroad)
- 3) The American foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)

Soft power is an element of influence. It is formed largely by our own values. These values are shown in culture, policies in our own country, and the way we behave internationally (Nye, 2002-2003). Soft power on occasions is difficult to use and it is easy to lose the impact of soft power; if you lose it, it is expensive to regain. However, it is probably a better risk averse option than the use of military or economic power. In order for soft power to be successful, it relies on its credibility. This credibility is damaged beyond repair when governments are seen to use it for propaganda and to manipulate societies, and cultures; propaganda in its essence is a negative thing. Nye (2015) stated that the best propaganda is not propaganda. Conversely, soft power is seen as a more positive form and affects others to gain the desired outcome by the cooperation of framing the agenda, positive attraction, and persuasion. To put it simply, hard power is push and soft power is pull (Nye, 2011).

Although the military is mostly associated with hard power, on occasions they also play a role in generating soft power. The military has also arranged joint training, assistance programs, and the exchanging of its officers with other countries during times of peace. In contrast, soft power that the government wields is not at the same level as the hard power they own. This hard power includes resources such as oil and gas, assets such as the armed forces; the latter being strictly governmental (Nye, 2002-2003). Technology has advanced and smart phones change the way people receive information; Governments now use social media to communicate with their people. Therefore, it is easier to create soft power as people have many channels to access soft power. To summarize each type of power, it is demonstrated in the table below:

Types of Power	Behaviors	Primary Currencies	Government Policies
<b>Military power</b>	Coercion Deterrence Protection	Threats Force	Conceive diplomacy War Alliance
<b>Economic power</b>	Inducement Coercion	Payments Sanctions	Aid Bribes Sanction
<b>Soft power</b>	Attraction Agenda setting	Values Cultures Policies Institutions	Public diplomacy Bilateral and multilateral diplomacy

Figure1.1: Three types of power (Nye, 2004, p.31)

Jonathan McClory (2015) developed the world's first composite index for measuring the soft power of countries. His research takes Nye's three resources; its culture, its political value, and its foreign policy, as a starting points. He separated data into six categories which are Government, Culture, Engagement, Education, Digital, and Enterprise. Each category functioned as a sub-index with its own individual score. In his research, he separated between Education and Culture sub-index but Nye included education in the cultural category of soft power resources. 7,250 samples were collected from different countries in different continents. The survey consisted of a series of questions translated into the main language(s) of each country by native speakers, using an 11-point numeric answering scale from 0-10. For the composite index result, the United Kingdom was the first ranked of The Soft Power 30 followed by Germany, the United States, France, and Canada. Four countries from Asia which are Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and China were also in the top 30.

From the poll result, the United Kingdom was a strong performer among all of the sub-indices that comprise the index as they have many influential institutions

such as BBC World Service, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Council, publicly funded cultural institutions, even their higher education system is also world class. These publicly funded institutions of the United Kingdom provide them with an incredible source of admiration and attraction around the world. Britain's creative industries such as film, art, and music, to architecture, design, fashion, major sport institutions like the football Premier League, as well as highly respected brands like Rolls Royce, Burberry, and British Airways also make a positive impact on perception of the UK and help the UK to create their soft power. Additionally, The UK's soft power also benefits from strong civil society as their NGOs and the religious community form an essential part of British soft power (McClory, 2015).

The United States was number three in the composite index ranking but there are many elements of soft power that the U.S. ranks better in than other countries. To demonstrate, the USA is a destination for education and they attract more international students than any other country. American culture is pervasive and their digital and technology is ahead of other nations. New Zealand and Ireland are also in the ranking due to their soft power even though they are small nations. South Korea is an interesting country that we should also pay attention to. South Korea has transformed its economy and politics in the last 30 years. They have invested a lot of money in their culture and their entertainment industry. K-Pop has expanded its territory outside South Korea. Korean food is more well-known, as well as their electricity appliance brands such as LG and Samsung which are exported all over the world. Talking about Asian nations that invest in soft power, China is one of those countries. Chinese government invested tens of billions of dollars into soft power efforts like the global Xinhua news agency, hundreds of Confucius Institutes, and a broad range of aid and development. China has a plan to increase its investment and expand its soft power while other nations cut their funds on soft power. Hosting the Olympic games in 2008 and the Shanghai Expo in 2010 are their achievement in investing in soft power but China has not achieved much of a return on its investment due to its political issues (McClory, 2015).

For each sub-index, the result which McClory (2015) collected showed that Switzerland was number one in Enterprise. Metrics for this sub-index objected to

capture the attractiveness of a country's business model, capacity for innovation, and regulatory framework. In Southeast Asia, the tiny country of Singapore, was ranked second. Interestingly, South Korea was in the top ten countries in this sub-index as well. Due to its efforts in politics and economic transformation, it makes a strong impact for South Korea. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital is a new element of soft power. Digital resources are the useful ways to reach much larger audiences both domestically and internationally. Individuals, companies, media outlets, and civil society groups can reach people across boundaries by using digital resources and it produces international links. The United States was at the top of this sub-index followed by the UK. Both the US and UK are the leaders of digital and communication infrastructure. Israel and South Korea were in the top ten countries in the Digital sub-index as well. They are seen as having high capability for innovation in several areas of technology (McClory, 2015).

Political values such as human rights, equality, freedom and democracy were used as a range of metrics in Government sub-index. It was no surprise that the Nordic and Northern European countries were in the top ten of this sub-index; Switzerland was ranked first. Their attractive, functioning, stable and free political system is seen by people around the world and it helps these countries produce their soft power. France was ranked first in the Engagement sub-index which aimed to measure the reach of states' diplomatic networks and their commitment to major challenges like development and the environment (McClory, 2015).

Education is another form of a powerful soft power resource and the United States outperforms the rest of the world and ranked first in this sub-index. The focuses of this sub-index were higher education, engagement and contribution of the universities to which extent is felt internationally. The United States attracts more international students than the United Kingdom and Canada who were ranked second and third combined together and the USA has more world class universities than any others. Furthermore, American academic research is also the largest followed by Britain. Outstandingly, the United States was ranked the first in culture. American culture and its creative industries have incredibly reached audiences globally and account for 11% of GDP according to UNESCO (McClory, 2015). The USA has very powerful soft power, and much of American soft power has been produced

by Hollywood, universities, sports, and technology. Firms, education, foundations, and other non-governmental groups develop soft power (Nye, 2004 a , p.17). Hubert Védrine & Dominique Moïsi (2001) stated that Americans are so powerful because they can “inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to the mastery of global images through films and television and because for the same reasons, large numbers of students from other countries come to the United States to finish their studies” (p.3). Furthermore, a German editor, Josef Joffe, said that “the USA’s soft power was even larger than its economic and military assets. U.S. culture, low-brow or high, radiates outward with an intensity last seen in the days of the Roman Empire, but with a novel twist, Rome’s and Soviet Russia’s cultural sway stopped exactly at their military borders. The USA’s soft power, though, rules over an empire on which the sun never set” (as cited in Nye, 2004, p.11). American soft power is everywhere and we cannot restrict it in place.

According to McClory’s research (2015), it showed that the U.S. is the world’s leading nation in terms of education. After World War II the US was recognized as the world’s leading educator and international students were attracted to study there. This attraction was not only to students but also scholars and the United State became the largest host country in the world for international students. Those who study abroad and reside in a country on a temporary basis are no doubt influenced by their system and the ideals and thoughts of the international students in American universities are shaped for life by the experiences they encounter, the approaches they are taught, the methods that their professors use, and the focus highlighted in using data to solve problems. On returning to their home country, international students can often feel disenchanted by their country’s lack of organization in education, quality of seminars, the course-credit system, availability of higher class laboratories and library facilities and the overall standard of teaching. These students then feel that they need to change the way their existing education system is and they try to adopt the US university’s style of academic work into their own education system.

Philip G. Altbach & Patti McGill Peterson (2008) stated that higher education has always served as an international force influencing intellectual and scientific development and spreading ideas worldwide. Its sphere of influence encompasses

people and institutions. The experience for those who have had the opportunity to study in their own country or abroad have had further assistance in shaping their attitudes and thoughts toward society and culture. We can say that education together with culture, science, technology, and other subtle forces encompasses soft power. The relationship between soft power and international education is not a new phenomenon. Students have studied abroad since the origin of the modern university in the Middle Ages and have been influenced by what they learned and experienced. Academics and science can often produce and play significant roles in enhancing soft power (Nye, 2004). The United States is known as a hub of higher education and many universities in the U.S. are within the top of the Universities world rankings and many students around the world wish to come to study in the US. In addition, there are various academic and cultural exchange programs that provide an opportunity for people who are interested to go to the U.S. and gain experience of the American way of life; the United States has always been a dream destination for students. Even after the 9/11 period both domestic and the international situation was tense due to the terrorist attacks and there were visa restrictions put in place. That being said, the U.S. was still the first choice for teenagers in Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia as a location for pursuing education abroad (Nye, 2004). Aleksandr Yakovlev, a Soviet politician and historian, went to study in the United States at Columbia University in 1958 and he was strongly influenced by his studies with David Truman, a political scientist. After Yakovlev graduated and went back to his homeland, he eventually went on to become the head of an important institute Politburo member, and a key liberalizing influence on the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (Nye, 2004). Moreover, during the cold war the United States and Soviet still exchanged education, science, and culture. Some American skeptics during that time were afraid that the Soviets scientists would steal their scientific knowledge. Nonetheless, Nye (2004) argued that those skeptics failed to notice that not only the Soviet scientists learned about scientific secrets that the U.S. had, they vacuumed up American political ideas as well. Many of Soviet scientists became leading advocates of human rights and liberalization inside the Soviet Union. (p.45).



The United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have been recognized as the countries who use the soft power potential of higher education and scholarships to initiate a global reaching. A number of international students who receive scholarships have high potential and opportunities because when they return to their home countries they can be in senior positions both in public and private divisions. So they are able to use their experiences and knowledge that they have learned through universities and life abroad to advance their sectors. The Fulbright Program, Chevening Awards and Colombo Plan Scholarships are some of the examples of how the governments employ higher education as a development assistance and to spread their norms via educational exchange (Sheng-Kai, 2015). Apart from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia other countries in Europe and Asia have used their higher education as a soft power tool as well. Singapore has given out the scholarships to students from ASEAN countries since 1998. Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Singapore Scholarship after the Asian financial crisis to help the ASEAN students pursue a full time undergraduate degree and expect the students to contribute to the development to their homeland after graduation. Using scholarships as a foreign policy tool, it aims to expand their soft power territory in their regional neighborhood (Sheng-Kai, 2015). Erasmus Mundus is one of the well-known scholarships given by the European Union (EU). The scholars who receive this scholarships will study a Master's Degree between one to two years in three to five partner institutions who offer different courses to scholars. The objective of the scholarship is to contribute and increase the world wide attractiveness of European universities. The EU has succeeded in terms of projecting their soft power through higher education as many international students want to apply for this scholarship. The United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore or Eu are not the only ones who promote their values and norms through higher education. China, a newcomer in this area, has aggressively followed a similar way to enlarge its soft power by higher education as well (Sheng-Kai, 2015).

## 2.4 Popular culture as a means to create soft power

Another effective mean to help a nation produce and broaden its soft power is by using popular culture. Popular culture is the notions, standpoints, and norms in the mainstream which is seriously driven by the mass media (Fiske, 1989). Popular culture is an influential political instrument as it is capable in generating and connecting feelings among audiences. It can form the basis of an individual's identity which is an influential source for political belief and action (Street, 1997). The country which heavily uses its popular culture to enlarge its soft power is the United States of America. Popular culture is debatably the most captivating and controversial tool of American soft power (Fraser, 2008). American popular culture represents freedom, individualism, capitalism and liberation. These values can be broadened to other nations through the use of mass media which allows the information to disseminate to the audiences quickly and it can win people over with its culture. The objective is to reduce the resistance from other nations' policies (Yu, n.d.). American entertainment industries and its famous pop icons such as Madonna, McDonald's and Mickey Mouse attract the audiences universally. Billions of people in the world can access and consume the influence of this American popular culture (Fraser, 2008). The image of the U.S. internationally is cautiously created and slightly gets into the public's mind. Politics become more dramatic so it makes the line between popular culture and politics blur (Yu, n.d.). Street (1997) argued that popular culture shapes the image of politics. Even though American popular culture has spread around the world, there is a resistance as well. Some group of people feel that American popular culture is a threat and anti-Americanism is overwhelming among Muslim countries. American foreign policy is a factor which produces anti-Americanism (Yu, n.d.). Madeleine Albright, the former U.S. secretary of state, said that "There are some who describe our country as hegemonic, equate globalization with Americanization, and say unkind things about our hamburgers" (Fraser, 2005). However, Fraser (2008) argued that the resistance of McDonalds around the world provided evidence and showed that the American mass culture is so powerful. The logo of McDonalds is recognizable and people are reminded of the U.S. when they see the logo. American popular culture has been used in different degrees of

effectiveness in many eras of the President as part of American foreign policy for almost a century. From President Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush people have been aware of the strategic importance of American cultural power (Fraser, 2008). The United States foreign policy is formulated by plenty of evidence from the American movie and broadcasting industries. The USA's entertainment industries can also demonstrate how audiences around the world react to American popular culture. In the countries where they share the same values as the U.S., American popular culture will be successful because the American soft power depends on the value systems that audiences believe in. For example, in Western countries, their populations' values associated with individualism and democracy, therefore American movies or any media which relate with these values will be effective and popular (Fraser, 2008). Fraser (2008) further argued that since the movies have become a new form of mass entertainment and expanded around the world, the U.S. has taken that advantage and emerged as the world's powerful nation. President Woodrow Wilson was convinced to consider movies as a valuable tool of American foreign policy. Hollywood filmmakers also saw the promise of movies as weapons of American soft power. The National Association of the Motion Picture Industry sent a memo to the President saying that "The motion picture can be the most wonderful system for spreading national propaganda at little or no cost." President Wilson agreed to that statement and he believed that Hollywood could be an instrument to drive and spread American values over the world (as cited in Fraser, 2008, p.175). President Wilson established the Congressional Committee on Public Information and George Creel was chosen to be responsible to promote President Wilson's vision of a world peace and democracy. Meanwhile, he exercised his power over Hollywood films through the U.S. War Trade Board. The films which contained false American values or demonstrated the negative images of the United States were banned for export (Fraser, 2008). Tino Balio (1985) stated that the White House declared movies to be an essential business after the end of World War I as President Wilson owed a great debt to Hollywood, motion picture was an extension and a new form of the USA's global power.

During World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt created the U.S. Office of Wartime Information. It was an organization which worked closely with Hollywood to produce movies. Hollywood was transformed into a propaganda factory to produce films which portrayed the importance of the war and created patriotism. Walt Disney also made a film to show their war effort and Donald Duck was made as a patriotic cartoon character who served the country as a soldier. Interestingly, after Japan, an Axis power allied, lost in the battle field and fell under American control, the Japanese started to imitate American values, habits, and institutions. Japan was forced by the United States to adopt the American political institutions and the film industry model. After World War II, the United States initiated the European Recovery Program (ERP) also known as Marshall plan to aid Western Europe. The USA used Hollywood to insert a soft power component into the Marshall plan. Economic support and cultural exports were Marshall Plan's strategy. Therefore, Hollywood studios received approximately US\$10 million grants as part of the United States and European Recovery Plan. Noteworthy, during the Truman's administration which was during the Cold War period, Hollywood was compelled to produce and export the movies that represented the positive manners of American way of life and values as a part of soft power campaign in Truman's administration. In addition, Hollywood produced more of the movies which demonstrated the confrontation of the U.S. with the Soviet communism. Hollywood movies took over the American domestic box office in around the mid-1980s. The U.S. government clearly regarded Hollywood films as a necessary soft power weapon (Fraser, 2008). Hollywood has been part of the U.S. government's soft power for a long time, however in some countries American soft power through Hollywood movies has been rejected such as in Cuba and Islamic countries. After September 11, 2001 Hollywood co-operated with Washington again to produce films. The Pentagon provided the weapons and military hardware for the filmmakers to produce *The Sum of All Fears* (2002). This film could have been billed as a Hollywood-Pentagon co-production. Some people argued that the Pentagon manipulated Hollywood to present only positive images about the U.S., nevertheless Philip Strub, the Pentagon's special assistant for entertainment media, said that the reason why the Pentagon got involved with the Hollywood production was because they wanted to communicate directly to the American

public through that powerful media (Seelye, 2002). As mentioned earlier that Hollywood movies are exported internationally, however in the last 30 years Hollywood films have become more dominant. Hollywood films portray and deliver the American values such as democracy, individualism and liberty to the world and in the box office records, American films catch people's attention and contribute to the USA's soft power. A poet, Carl Sandburg, wrote about Hollywood in 1961 "All movies good or bad are educational and Hollywood is the foremost educational institute on earth [...] What, Hollywood's more important than Harvard? The answer is, no as clean as Harvard, but nevertheless, farther reaching." Hollywood continues to increase the USA's soft power as the world watches on.

Apart from Hollywood studios, television is a communication channel used among the masses. It is an easy way to reach both educated and uneducated audiences as most people have television at home and the TV show producers can be sure that the audiences will understand by only watching their shows. The political psychologists claimed that among all the channels of communication such as newspapers, radio and television, television has the most influential power towards the audiences because television programs contain subliminal messages which are able to influence the audience's thinking and hence their responses through a process known as priming. In the process of priming, people are unconsciously influenced by representation of environment stimuli, including words, pictures, and persuasive messages (as cited in Yu, n.d., p.10). During 1986 – 2011, it was the time when the TV show *The Oprah Winfrey Show* was aired. This TV show hosted by Oprah Winfrey was one of the most famous and influential talk shows in the history. Notably, Oprah Winfrey was named by Time Magazine to be the most 100 influential people six times. She was also named as one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th Century, an honor shared with Albert Einstein, Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. She was only one of four people who were included on these lists in both the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century and according to Forbes magazine, Winfrey was named as the most powerful celebrity on 2007 (Garthwaite & Moore, 2008); *The Oprah Winfrey show* was a channel for the U.S. to communicate with the world. Additionally, Winfrey also contributed American soft power when she talked about American values through

her show. The show was broadcasted internationally and it reached audiences in about 145 countries (Yu, n.d.). The topics which Winfrey brought to discuss in her show were various ones such as book reviews, interviews, self-improvement, and world events. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* was seen as a political tool when Winfrey openly supported Barack Obama who was the candidate for the U.S. presidential election in 2008. Due to the fact that Winfrey fully supported Obama and talked about him through the show helped Obama to be seen in a positive light and increase the opportunities for him to win the election (Pease & Brewer, 2008). *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and Winfrey herself helped the U.S. increase its positive image and it was a channel for the United States to spread its culture to the wider audience (Yu, n.d.). The soft power that the United States has created will be effective if it is consistent and communicated (Nye, 2004). As the U.S. is able to build, control, and access an effective communications infrastructure such as satellite broadcasting and internet, this communication system can enhance American soft power (Fraser, 2008). The influence of the USA's soft power will reach its purpose if the country is responsible for what it promises.

In the age of globalization where people can access to the internet and information is delivered quickly and easily, the U.S. can use this advantage to conveniently spread and grow their soft power into people's mind and they are in a good position to maintain its culture domination globally. Fraser (2008) stated that the United States still has the greatest economic and military, therefore these advantages will help the U.S. spread and create attractiveness of its culture internationally. A challenge of the United States is to maintain themselves in a powerful soft power position, and have to produce and conduct their foreign policies and American cultural power as a positive normative model. In addition, their foreign policy and cultural power has to be consistent so it will empower one another and the U.S. has to do it continuously and keep the words they have pledged.

## 2.5 Cinema: the USA's influential soft sower

As Hollywood has been a tool to help the U.S. produce and expand American soft power for a long time and it has continued to expand since President Woodrow Wilson's administration, nowadays films from Hollywood or outside the U.S. have become one of the most important and popular media of entertainment in the modern world. What is interesting about the film is that its sounds and its images reflect both in the way it was produced and the reason for its production (Dissanayake, 1992). Films often involve political issues representing conflicts during the period when the film is produced in reality. Sometimes the political ideologies of films are implicit, while at other times they are quite explicit. Films can be a tool for learning and provide audiences with knowledge. They are especially adept at illuminating the social indicators of the realities of an historical era. The audiences can learn about the situations back in history, by watching films through fictional characters. In other instances films can sometimes show history through biographical characters representing political subjects such as the movie *Primary Colors* (1998) provides an explicit satirical take on Bill Clinton, or *W.* (2008) which presents a biopic of George W. Bush. For such movies, it takes an immense amount of research, production and marketing. For this the industry must invest a lot of capital to replicate the authenticity of its subjects. Films creators tap into the events, fears, fantasies, and hopes of an era and give cinematic expression to social experience and reality. They do research and use the audiences' feelings to produce the films for convincing people to believe about what they try to say. So, when the audiences have the common feeling toward the contents and agree with what the stories tell, it is easier to persuade the audiences to follow the direction of what people who are behind the films want. If the audiences think and feel as what the filmmakers wish them to, then this is a key indicator of soft power in practice.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the direction filmmakers took changed. Americans yearned for more imagination, for a hero who could save the country from the negative feelings which came from war in the 1960s and 1970s. The filmmakers wanted to restore an older picture of the U.S.; a picture which showed the U.S. in a positive light as the world's savior or redeemer. The movies *Superman I*



(1978) and *Superman II* (1980) provided an indirect commentary and critique of social and political context. This helped to fuel Reaganite conservatism (Ryan & Kellner, 1988). *The Dark Knight*, the DC highest grossing films of 2008, can be read as a critical allegory about the corruption, violence, and nihilism of George W. Bush, the President of the United States, and Dick Cheney, the United States Secretary of Defense, era. Some of the superhero films of the last years of the President George W. Bush period can be read as critical of the failure of the conservative regime. The Batman films have a lot of political messages hidden inside, especially the Batman films during the late Bush era showing the policy to be utterly corrupt and the economic, political and legal system in paralysis, approximately the case by the end of the failed era.

Douglas Kellner (2010) argued that movies always reflect the economic and political conflicts of that era. Many superhero films resonate with and can be viewed within the history of social and political struggles and context of their period. In this way films can help interpret the social history of an era and contextualize films in their matrix of production, distribution, and reception can help illuminate the multiple and sometimes contradictory meaning and effects of specific films, genres, and filmmakers. Aural dimensions are prevalent in films and audiences experience films in different ways. What one person sees, hears, and understands can differ from person to person. This enhances the movie experience for its audience and often on websites such as Youtube.com. You can view the audience's social commentary regarding what they believe that were hidden messages and political contents. In simpler words, cinema is a form of media that provides a way of seeing, either reproducing conventional modes of seeing and experiencing the world, or enabling one to perceive things one has not viewed or experienced before.

Stanley Carvell (1979) argued that cinema frames the world, offering “a world viewed”, proliferating motion pictures that depict action and movement and this provide panoramas of time and vistas of history. Cinema may focus vision on external, surface appearances, or provide deeper and more critical visions of human beings, social relations, or historical processes, as do many of the best contemporary films. Andrew Light (2003) claimed that contemporary films raise important debates concerning surveillance technology, identity politics, or environmentalism, generating



arguments that can contribute to political enlightenment of philosophical understanding. Embodied in film are the fundamentals of economics, politics, daily life and culture. These aspects form the crucial components which make a good film. Films raise issues and can provoke debates over significant events, concerns, views and predictions of the present moment. One way filmmakers choose to express these views are through superhero movies.

## 2.6 Superheroes and superhero movies

In the last 10 years, Hollywood has produced and exported various superhero movies to all over the world and superhero movies capture the widest audience and generate the most capital. Superhero movies provide an outlet to express political ideals and they have mass appeal due to their entertaining nature. Children receive the movie in a different light than most adults, they dream of emulating their heroes. They ask their parents for the latest costumes and figurines so they can recreate the battles in which the superhero saves the day. Superheroes are undeniably American icons. They were invented during the 1930s by the creators of comic books. A Superhero is defined as a heroic character with selfless, pro-social mission; with super power extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express his biography, character, power, or origin; transforming from an ordinary person to superhero; and who is generally distinct. To clarify, a superhero is a character in a film or story who has special strength and uses it to do good things and help other people. It is someone who has done something very brave to help someone else. Moreover, superheroes almost always have a mission to accomplish. The superhero's mission is prosocial and selfless, which means that their fight against evils must fit in existing, professed more is society and must not be intended to benefit or further his own agenda. The mission convention is essential to the superhero genre because someone who does not act selflessly to aid others in times of need is not heroic and therefore not a hero (Coogan, 2006, p.30-32).

The identity element comprises the codename and the costume, with the secret identity being a customary counterpart to the codename. The reason that superheroes have to have their secret identities is because they can protect themselves and their loved ones from their enemies. In addition, they can have normal lives like other people. For example, Batman's secret identity is Bruce Wayne, Superman is Clark Kent, and Captain America's is Steve Rogers. Costume is another element which defines superheroes. The superheroes costume removes the specific details of a character's ordinary appearance, leaving only a simplified idea that is represented in the colors and design of the costume (Coogan, 2006, p.33). Scott McCloud (1993) stated that color plays an important role in the iconicity of the superhero costume. The color of the superheroes' costumes are less than expressionistic, but therefore more iconic, due to the simplicity. He further stated that because costume colors remained exactly the same panel after panel, they come to symbolize the character in the reader's mind. Back in the early formation of establishing superheroes to capture the public's imagination it was found that those superheroes that did not have a costume were not as popular as those who did. Writers adapted to this and those superheroes were then given a costume.

These elements which define a superhero is their mission or task, their specific super powers, their hidden identity and their costume and this is demonstrated nowadays in cinema and comic books. Captain America is a superhero whose secret identity is Steve Rogers and his costume design is intentionally based on the American flag which is red, white, and blue. His costume also comes with a winged mask, a chainmail shirt, and a stars-and stripes shield. He has a very high level of intelligence as well as agility, strength, speed, endurance, and his reaction time is superior to any Olympic athlete who has ever competed; he represents the pinnacle of human physical perfection. Captain America's first mission was to spread his message of patriotism and encourage those who had not yet joined the war effort, to join and to be happy to do so. The writer wished for people to feel love towards their country and to go to any lengths to save it from harm. In later years Captain America was used to save the world from supervillains but his message has always remained one of strong patriotism towards his country; USA.

Additionally, Superheroes can be used as metaphors. Coogan (2006) stated that the superhero has a unique signifying function and they can be used to express the ideas that other genres cannot portray as well. Superheroes embody a vision of the use of power unique to the USA. Superheroes enforce their own visions of right and wrong on others, and they possess overwhelming power, especially in relation to ordinary crooks. They can project power without danger to themselves, and they can effortlessly solve problems that the ordinary authorities cannot handle. This vision of power fits quite well with the position the U.S. found itself in after the Cold War. The U.S. was the only superpower in the world, something like superman in the days before other superheroes and supervillains were on the silver screen. In every superhero movie, the indispensable character that makes a superhero become a real superhero is a supervillain. The supervillain is one of the important components of the superhero genre. A hero illustrates the virtues and values of a society or culture, on the other hand a villain illustrates a darker side and inversion of those values that humanity admires. Coogan (2006) defined the supervillain as an extraordinary villain who commits devilish and egregious actions at an extravagant level. In simpler words, Coogan described the supervillain as the reverse version of a superhero. The supervillain has a self-interested and anti-social mission; the supervillain might seek for power, prosperity, fame, or infamy that serves his interest. According to Coogan (2006) there are five types of supervillains which are the monster, the enemy commander, the mad scientist, the criminal mastermind, and the inverted superhero supervillain. To clarify, the monster is the oldest type of supervillain. It pictures as the reverse version of humanity and it normally appears in a form of creature. In addition, it does not have a sense of right or wrong and it lacks a soul. Kaiju in the movie *Pacific Rim* (2013) is an example of this type of supervillain. A monster in a human form such as a serial killer is referred to as a monster as well because he lacks sympathy and empathy, that makes him seem lacking a soul (Coogan, 2006). The second type of supervillain is the Enemy Commander and it is also the second oldest type of supervillain. The enemy commander has a state's resources to support him, he might be a leader of that state, dictator, the king, tyrant, or absolute ruler. Enemy commanders represent different values in their societies which are unlike the culture where the stories are made. Even though they are seen as villains

outside their soils, in their own lands they are seen differently. For example, Adolph Hitler was seen as a heroic ruler by Nazi Germany, on the contrary in the USA, Adolph Hitler was viewed as a supervillain. As well as Osama bin Laden, the USA considered bin Laden as absolute evil but Muslim people in his area see him as a courageous jihadist. Darth Vader from the movie *Star Wars* is a good example of the enemy commander as supervillain. Apart from his own Jedi power, he commands the emperor's armies and has the Empire's resources to support him although he is not the emperor. Additionally he is viewed as a hero of the Empire. The other supervillain from superhero comics which is a purer example of the enemy commander is the Red Skull. His power is only inferior to Hitler in Nazi Germany. He is in charge of the scientific and military resources of the Third Reich and involved in defeating and conquering the U.S. and its allies. The Nazi's ideology; racist, genocidal, and totalitarian, contrast with the American way of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. The character of Captain America contains these ideologies and the Red Skull represents the Nazi German's belief so the battle between Captain America and the Red Skull symbolizes the actual battles between the U.S. and German forces (Coogan, 2006). The next type of supervillain by Coogan (2006) is the Mad Scientist. The characters of the Mad scientists are having an obsessive behavior and working with extremely dangerous or unconventional methods and they have revenge as their motivation. Dr. Armin Zola who serves the Red Skull in Captain America is an example of the mad scientist. The fourth type of supervillain is the Criminal Mastermind. This type of supervillain has been around much longer than the superhero. Lex Luthor demonstrates a criminal mastermind type of supervillain. He threatens the stability and a safety of the hero and his own world. When he wants to commit a crime, he plans it very well and also clues it. He sets the rules himself, keeps his words and has a sense of honor about the rules of the game he has created. The criminal mastermind values his enemy's life highly because fighting against an correspondingly skilled adversary can bring the greatest pleasures to his life. The last one is the Inverted-Superhero Supervillain. This type of supervillain is limited to the superhero genre because they have superpowers, codenames, and costumes which are the elements to be a superhero. The difference between the inverted-superhero supervillain and other types of supervillain is they can become

superheroes. Marvel comics presents many supervillains who change from bad guys to good guys such as Hawkeye, the Black Widow, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch and Sandman. To illustrate, the Black Widow was a supervillain before she became S.H.I.E.L.D agent. She was threatened by the Soviet commissars to destroy her village and held her husband as a hostage if she would not become a spy for them. Later on she works for S.H.I.E.L.D as a double agent, and finally she turns her back on supervillainy and becomes an American superhero after the death of her husband who she later knows the truth that he was a Soviet super-agent the Red Star who forced her to do the job for the Soviet Union. The other example is Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. They were the members of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants but when the time passed by it revealed that they were only teenagers who were confused and misled.

On top of these five types of supervillain, Coogan (2006) explained four more sub-types of supervillain which are the alien, the evil god, the femme fatale, and the super-henchman. Aliens can be monsters, mad scientists, criminal mastermind, enemy commander, or inverted-superhero supervillains. For example, The Super Skrull from *Fantastic Four* is a monster but also an inverted-superhero supervillain. Loki is an example of an evil god as he has unlimited supernatural power, however he can be an inverted-superhero supervillain as well when he fights crimes on earth as his brother Thor does. Thanos is also an evil god but he is an enemy commander too because he rules his own world and commands a massive force, and threatens the Earth with invasion as what we see in the movie *Avengers: Infinity War (2018)*. Madam Natacha or the Black Widow was a femme fatal and an inverted-superhero supervillain until she deserted from the Soviet Union to become an American superhero. Super-henchmen are those minions who ungraded themselves to have superpower or superior abilities but these minions lack mania and drive of the supervillain. In the real world there are some people who are seen as supervillains and those supervillains who have threatened the world post 9/11, such as Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, and Osama Bin Laden who are portrayed in the Hollywood films that they can only be stopped by the U.S. In the media these figures are framed as megalomaniacal, power-hungry supervillains. Therefore, the

superhero figure and genre are used to embody metaphor meaning. (Coogan, 2006,p. 233).

Nowadays, superhero films are watched by millions of viewers not just inside, but also outside of the U.S.. The popularity of superhero movies has significantly increased post 9/11. To illustrate this point, according to the top 100 Box Office records in July 2018, there are 24 superhero movies listed in the highest all-time worldwide grossing films. The highest-grossing superhero film is Marvel's *Avengers: Infinity War (2018)*. It is ranked 4<sup>th</sup> and this film earned \$2,042,200,000 worldwide. In the U.S., Marvel's *Avengers: Infinity War* made \$676,000,000 and this accounted for 33.1% of the total sales. In contrast, overseas, this movie earned \$1,366,200,000 which calculated as 66.9% of the worldwide gross. Other well-known superhero movies such as *Marvel's The Avenger (2012)*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)*, *Black Panther (2018)*, *Iron Man 3 (2013)*, *Captain America: Civil War (2016)*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)*, *The Dark Knight (2008)*, *Spiderman 3 (2005)*, *Batman VS Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016)*, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol.2 (2017)*, *Thor: Ragnarok (2017)*, *Deadpool (2016)*, and the superhero animation movie like *Incredibles 2 (2018)* are also recorded in the top 100 highest-grossing worldwide (All Time Box Office: Worldwide Grosses, n.d.). In 2018, since the beginning of the year, there were 3 superhero movies from Marvel that were released and then more superhero movies from the same company which are *Ant-Man and The Wasp*. The number of superhero movies shows the increase of popularity of the superhero movie genre and the impressive Box Office results, along with those of other superhero films, suggest that the superhero genre has a universal appeal that extends well beyond the U.S..

## 2.7 Captain America and his movies

Before Captain America became a Hollywood film, he was a fictional superhero appearing in American comic books published by Timely comics, a predecessor of Marvel Comics and was created by the cartoonists Joe Simon and Jack Kirby in the early 1940s during the explosion of World War II in Europe. Captain America was designed as a patriotic super soldier who often fought the Axis powers

of World War II and who can sacrifice himself to preserve his nation. The cover of Captain America #1 was Steve Rogers punching Hitler in the face and this first comic of Captain America had sold almost one million copies during that time. Captain America was a consciously political creation. It is not just only a traditional type of superhero movie where the story is about the good guys catching the bad guys and the hero saving the world, it also contains a lot of political issues hidden inside the story line. The popularity of Captain America began to fade in the late 1940s because there were no more Hitlers or Hirohitos to valiantly beat up. Then, Captain America's story ended for a while. Eventually, Stan Lee, who was working at Atlas Comics at that time, revived Captain America in 1953. Lee realized that the country was shocked by the Korean War and was in need of heroes again, so he reintroduced Captain America (Misiroglu & Roach, 2004). However, at that time there were no Nazis, instead, Lee created a new villain based on the situation during that time that the U.S. fought against the communist in North Korea. He labeled Captain America as a 'Commie Smasher'. Bellotto (2014) said that Joseph McCarthy, the Republican U.S. Senator of Wisconsin, also used Captain America as a mouthpiece against communists. In the late 1950s early 1960s, superhero comics were in vogue once again. So, Captain America had a chance to return to the forefront of the comics as a regular old superman who vanquished all evils, regardless of whether it was currently in conflict with the United States. Captain America's reintroduction came in the comic Avenger #4, when he was discovered in a block of ice, thawed, and then promptly given a leadership position in the Avengers. It is at this point when Captain America became the Cap we know today and the one we see in all those movies (Bellotto, 2014).

Captain America was produced into three of his own movies which are *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), and the latest released, *Captain America: Civil War* (2016). These three movies have made a great amount of money for Marvel between 2011 to 2016 and the money that they made has increased with each new release. As of 2017, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) is ranked the 306<sup>th</sup> in all time box office worldwide grosses and it made 370.6 million USD during the time when it was in the cinemas. The sequel *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) made 714.3 million USD and



it is listed as number 100 in the record. The last one *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) has made a big jump from 100<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> and it made 1.153 billion USD (All Time Box Office: Worldwide Grosses, n.d.). The amount of money they have made and the better rankings in the box office worldwide grosses record indicate that the popularity of Captain America character and his movies have augmented since it first released. The Captain America character was formed as a symbol of nationalism and identity and to symbolize everything that is great about the United States so it is interesting to study how the U.S. uses this character and its movies to influence their citizens and people around the world.

Jason Dittmer (2013), an expert on geopolitics and popular culture, called Captain America as a nationalist superhero. He used the term nationalist superhero to identify someone who represents himself or herself as a guardian of a specific nation or state explicitly through his or her name, uniform, and mission. He further explained that Captain America was written as a super-soldier created by the U.S. government and later he sees himself as the living embodiment of the American Dream rather than a tool of the state and when he was added the star-spangled uniform and the name as Captain America it was apparent that he is the representative of the country. The nationalist superhero like Captain America carries an additional burden that other superheroes do not which is the embodiment of the nation-state. The embodiment in the nationalist superhero has implications for the kind of stories that are likely to be told and the way they are likely to be read. Additionally, it is said that Captain America is the archetype of the nationalist superhero even though he was not the first character that was created (Dittmer, 2013). Apart from his name, Captain America, and the national flag costume which are represented through the character, a weapon that he carries, a shield, indicates his association with the American geopolitical script. His shield also has patriotic color; red, white, and blue with the star, as the American national flag and it is a defensive weapon which is different from other superheroes' that are offensive. However, Captain America uses his shield as an offensive weapon when he hurls his shield to his opponents and it bounces back to him. Captain America's shield indicates that America embodies defense rather than offense (Dittmer, 2005; 2013).



Captain America is an example of popular culture's role. He is used as a cultural product that has an ability to vaguely and invisibly connect the political projects of the American nationalism, internal order, and foreign policy through an individual to the scale of the nation (Dittmer, 2005). Captain America's character embodies the American identity and shows the audiences that he is a hero both of, and for, the nation. Furthermore, younger audiences may dream about being Captain America, linking themselves to the nation in their imaginations. His character as an explicit American superhero makes him a representative of the idealized American nation and as a guardian of the American status quo (Dittmer, 2005). Stan Lee, a former writer for *Captain America*, explained that Captain America represents the best aspect of the USA; courage and honesty (as cited in Dittmer, 2005, p. 629). Moreover, his image and origin reflect the American dream and identity of 1941. A blond-haired, blue-eyed man with his almost obsessively Anglo-American name, Steve Rogers, overcomes his physical weakness to become a proud soldier for his nation and the fact that Captain America has fewer superpowers than other superheroes turns to be his uniqueness as his real skills rely on his athleticism and his leadership skill. (Dittmer, 2005). Captain America in both movies and comic books show many different aspects to the readers and audiences. Anne Egros (2011) argues that Captain America mirrors the social values and principles that unite Americans such as individualism, idealism, and a can-do attitude. Additionally, he illustrates the importance of freedom, equality, and justice. Mark D. White (2014) also claims that Captain America embodies the distinctive timeless principles of Americans which are freedom, equality and justice; he believes that the American ideals are universal. They do not apply just for Americans but for all people around the world (White, 2014). In conclusion for Captain America's character, it is obvious that he is a symbol of the USA and good things about them, so it makes him interesting to study for this reason.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

“What is soft power? It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.”

(Nye, 2014, p. X)

In the past, powerful countries used their strength in military and economic power to threaten and colonize the rest of the world. Since approximately the beginning of the twentieth century, the format of colonization has changed. Military invaders and economic sanctions which are components attributed to the term known as hard power, were not accepted easily. Therefore, the countries which were powerful had to shift their strategies to influence other countries and their people by using a different approach. This approach is also referred to as soft power and culture is one of the ways to make an impact on societies which several countries use. This research aims to capture the essence of soft power and clearly show this as the definitive subject matter throughout. This chapter explains the definitions and concepts of 3 resources of soft power. The resources are culture, values and foreign policies. This research will demonstrate how the USA uses movies to help spread their soft power and the trilogy of the Captain America movies are used to highlight this. These movies display American culture, American values and American policies and the research will explain how these aspects are used.

#### 3.1 Theoretical framework: soft power

##### 3.1.1 The American culture’s relationship with soft power

###### 3.1.1.1 The definition of “Culture”

Culture is the word that cannot find an absolute meaning. Raymond Williams (2015), an influential Marxist theorist, academic, novelist and critic, stated that culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language. The complexity of the word 'culture' can be seen by a huge variety of attempted definitions that exist. In the 1950s, two anthropologists, A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, collected more than 150 definitions of the term 'culture' from American and English sources alone (Tomlinson, 1991). Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) defined culture that "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action" (p.181). Nye (2004) defined culture as a set of values and practices that create meaning for societies and it has many manifestations. However, the most popular definition of 'culture' that is often quoted comes from the nineteenth-century British anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917). He stated that "Culture is... that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 2016, p.1). Raymond Williams (2015) identified three broad definitions of culture in modern usage. Firstly, culture can be used as a description of a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development. To illustrate, culture in the first definition refers only to intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic factors – great philosophers, great artists and great poets if we talk about the culture development of Western Europe (Storey, 2018). Secondly, Williams (2015) explained that the word 'culture' is used as indicative of a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group. For this definition, speaking of the cultural development of Western Europe, it refers to the development of literacy, holidays, sport, religious festivals, for example. Lastly, Williams (2015) suggested that culture can be used as a reference to the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. Using this third definition, we can think of poetry, the novel, ballet, opera and fine art (Storey, 2018). Assembling the second and third definition of culture that Williams defined creates the term

‘popular culture’. Storey (2018) argued that the second meaning; culture as a particular way of life, let us speak of practices such as the seaside holiday, the celebration of Christmas, and youth subcultures, as examples. These are usually referred to as lived cultures or practices. The third meaning; culture as a signifying practice, would let us speak of soap opera, pop music, and comics as examples of culture. These are usually referred to in texts. Few people would think of Williams’s first definition when talking about popular culture.

### 3.1.1.2 Popular culture as a cultural resource

Nye (2004) explained that popular culture is one of the cultural resources that helps to create soft power, but some analysts treat soft power as popular culture which Nye said is a mistake as they confuse and equate soft power behavior with the cultural resources. According to John Storey (2018), he stated that before we study the definitions of popular culture, there is another term that we should know as it is a core concept to study popular culture. That term is ‘ideology’. Storey explained that ideology is referred to a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people that may possibly distort or present false images of reality and has an impact on the power relations in society overall. He also indicated that ideology can be used to refer to ideological forms such as television fiction, pop songs, novels, movies, or other forms of popular culture which always present a specific world’s image and these forms of ideology may take the unconscious meanings to affect the audiences’ dispositions and conceptions.

The term ‘popular culture’ is defined in various ways as well. Williams (2015) suggested four current meanings which are (1) well-liked by other people (2) inferior kinds of work (3) work deliberately setting out to win favor with the people (4) culture actually made by the people for themselves (p.180). Distinctly, the term popular culture brings the complexity of the different meanings of the term ‘culture’ and the different meanings of the term ‘popular’ (Storey, 2018). Storey (2018) listed six definitions of popular culture. Firstly, this definition is quantitative and he explained that “Popular culture is simply culture that is widely favored or well-liked by many people”. However, there is an objection to this definition that Storey concerned. He stated that a quantitative index is not enough to provide a definition of popular culture as we cannot find an agreeable figure to

identify if something becomes popular culture or it is just culture. Secondly, he defined popular culture as “the culture that is left over after we have decided what is high culture” but the weakness of this definition is that it requires standards to qualify as high culture. Thirdly, Storey argued that the way to define popular culture is as ‘mass culture’. It is a culture that commercialized and commoditized. It is mass-produced for mass consumption. Some cultural critics argued that mass culture is an imported American culture (Maltby, 1989). Additionally, there is a claim saying that popular culture is American culture that operates under the term Americanization (Storey, 2018). The fourth definition that Storey defined is popular culture is the culture that originates from the people, but the objection for this definition is it cannot indicate who qualifies for inclusion in the category ‘the people’. Storey’s fifth definition of popular culture came from Antonio Gramsci’s term ‘hegemony’. Gramsci used the term ‘hegemony’ to refer to “the way in which dominant groups in society through a process of intellectual and moral leadership, seek to win the consent of subordinate groups in society” (as cited in Storey, 2018, p.10). Storey further explained that the cultural theorists who use Gramsci’s political concept see popular culture as:

“a site of struggle between the ‘resistance’ of subordinate groups and the forces of ‘incorporation’ operating in the interests of dominant groups. Popular culture in this usage is not the imposed culture of the mass culture theorists, nor is it an emerging from below, spontaneously oppositional culture of ‘the people’ – it is a terrain of exchange and negotiation between the two: a terrain, as already stated, marked by resistance and incorporation.” (Storey, 2018, p.10)

However, Gramsci’s definition depicts hegemony as a process which forms inclusion of groups thus leading towards popular culture not a classification (Storey, 2018). Storey’s last definition is also an approach, a method of analysis rather than a definition. He stated that “The main point to insist on here is the claim that postmodern culture is a culture that no longer recognizes the distinction between high and popular culture.” In the conclusion of Storey’s six

definitions he stated that no matter what popular culture is, the thing that these six definitions have in common is that it is the culture that only arisen after industrialization and urbanization period. Additionally, popular culture is defined as a set of beliefs, practices, and objects that are pervasive, dominant and known by people in a society at the period of time. Besides, it includes the feeling and activities which are created due to collaboration with the dominant matters. Popular culture in the contemporary period is seriously influenced by mass media and it penetrates into people's everyday lives. Consequently, popular culture can influence and shape an individual's thought towards certain issues (McGaha, 2015).

### **3.1.1.3 The Significance of Americanization**

According to Storey's third definition of popular culture, he mentioned that there is a claim saying that popular culture is the American culture which operates under the term 'Americanization. For a better understanding, I would like to explain more about this term since it is used as one of the frameworks for this research. The term Americanization was initially used around early the 1900s. Originally, it referred to a social movement where the objective was to integrate immigrants into American society (Granham and Koed, 1993). In 1904 – 1905 the United States experienced an influx of immigrants into the country consisting of people from different races, countries, and characters. In order to help these immigrants integrate themselves to the American way of life, there was a procedure implemented to transform them into Americans. Huebner (1906) and Butler (1920) described Americanization as a assimilation and transformation for the immigrants in the United States. Not only was it an instruction for the newcomers to gain their American citizenship, it was a full process that attempted to merge them into the American society, economy, and the American standard way of life until at the end, they can think, act and live like Americans. Hueber (1906) further explained that there are levels of Americanization. Some immigrants can learn and apply full American methods, customs, and concepts into their lives. Some people fully adapt to the American method, but are still not able to speak the language. Some who are not fully Americanized and hardly adapt themselves will have a less degree of being American. He explained that the migrants that come from different places or have different nationalities will have their own distinguishing characteristics. Some of them

are willing to be Americanized and some are easier to be influenced whereas some nationalities were required to use certain forces against them to influence. Some researchers in Europe have seen Americanization as a threat to their customs and culture values due to the expansion of American corporation to Europe in around 1920s (Bonin & de Goery, 2009; von Mahs, 2011)

Generally in the present, the term Americanization refers to the influence and impact of the American culture that is manifested in other countries around the world. The Americanization term has become more widespread since the end of the iron curtain of the Soviet Union in 1989-1991. However, the U.S. has exported their products, technologies, art, music, fashion, techniques, as well as people since at least the nineteenth century (as cited in Šimelytė, Korsakienė, & Ščeulovs, 2017) and the United States had expanded their power and different kind of aspects of American culture to many parts of the world by the end of the twentieth century and the new era of the twenty-first century. Due to the growing nature of American culture, some scientists believe that Americanization and Globalization are one and the same. They highlighted that the process of Americanization does not only relate with services, goods, communication, entertainment, business, and technologies, but it is more common to assimilation and invasion of cultures as the original definition of the Americanization process was policy on Assimilating immigrants (as cited in Šimelytė, Korsakienė, & Ščeulovs, 2017). Furthermore, Kuisel (2000) defined Americanization as a transfer of culture while Tipps (1973) and Craig (2008) defined Americanization as a form of modernization and specific type of globalization. Jaifeng (2009) claimed that when countries become one by having a strong interrelationship this is classed as globalization but when countries adopt American culture, it is more a case of Americanization. Dahrir (2013) argued differently stating that cultural globalization is a type of competition and negotiation process when countries try to keep the culture and position through the world whereas Americanization is an invasion of American culture, customs and values (Adam, 2007). Products, American way of life, and American values have expanded much faster than other countries (Tomja, 2013). To summarize, Americanization is not only involved with American products, services, technologies,

or entertainment, it is also a cultural transfer, an invasion of American culture, and an influence that American culture has on other countries.

### **3.1.2 The American values**

Culture and values have a strong relationship between each other. They are two of the three resources used to help one country create soft power. As Nye (2004) stated that culture is a set of values and practices that create meaning for societies, cultural resources are needed to promote and share a country's values. If a country's values are admired and other countries want to follow and buy into your values, that country may gain the outcomes that it wants in world politics as soft power rests on the ability to shape others' preferences. The values that are related to this research are individualism, democracy, liberty, equality, and patriotism.

#### **3.1.2.1 Democracy**

The term democracy is from two Greek words: 'demos' means the people and 'kratia' means power or authority. So democracy can be translated into a form of government that gives power to the people and it is based on rule of law ("What Is a Democracy?", n.d.). In the popular phrase of Abraham Lincoln, he said democracy is a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." In Ancient Greece democracy was a direct democracy; this was a system where the citizens would meet to discuss all policies, and then make the decisions by majority rules. The ancient Greeks had a concept that human societies should be governed by the ethical principles found in nature. At the present time direct democracy cannot be used due to a large and diverse population spread over a large geographic distance. Later on, the American founders created 'indirect' or 'representative' democracy. In this system, the citizens will choose the representatives to make the decisions for them ("What Is a Democracy?", n.d.). They give power to the leaders and representatives they have chosen. People are sovereign in a democracy and they are in the highest position of political authority. Additionally, they are free to criticize the leaders and representative they have elected, as well as observe how they manage government's businesses, and those leaders and representatives should listen to the people and respond to their needs and suggestions (What is Democracy?, 2004)



### 3.1.2.2 Individualism

The term 'individualism' is used by many people in different aspects and is given several meanings, but the definitions that I use to explain this term are from Geert Hofstede (1980) and Harry C. Triandis (2018). Hofstede (1980) gave a definition of individualism as a focus on rights above duties, a concern for oneself and immediate family, an emphasis on personal autonomy and self-fulfillment, and the basing of one's identity on one's personal accomplishment. Triandis's definition (2018) is similar to Hofstede's. He defined individualism as people who are independent and self-governing. They are principally driven by their desire to spend time alone rather than with other people. They have their own preferences, their own needs, their own rights, and the relationships that they form with others still prioritize themselves over the other party; their behaviors are based on their attitudes rather than the norms of the collective.

### 3.1.2.3 Liberty

Liberty is defined as the state of being free for people to live their lives in the way that they want or do what they want to do without being oppressive or authorities as long as those acts do not harm or impinge other people's freedom. The framework of liberty that I use for this research is from an English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, in his book *On Liberty* (1859). Mill separated liberty into three types and each type must be recognized and respected by any free association. The first type of liberty that Mill explained is the liberty of thought and discussion. In other words, it is a liberty of thought and opinion. Mill argued that every individual must be allowed to express their opinions even if they form the minority, whether those opinions are right or wrong, and those opinions should not be silenced because silencing the opinions will hurt the public and omit the truth. So the individual should have freedom to show and articulate unpopular views. The second type is the liberty of individuality, as one of the elements of well-being. It is the liberty of tastes and pursuits, or the freedom to plan our own lives. In this second type of liberty, Mill looked at the question of whether people should be allowed to act on their opinions without facing legal punishment or social stigma. Mill argued that actions from the individuals should not be as free as opinions. He asserted that both opinion and action must be limited when they would cause harm

to others and be “a nuisance to other people” (SparkNotes Editors, 2005). Lastly, the liberty of the limits to the authority of society over the individual. Mill explained that once an individual enters into society, the individual has a promise to not infringe others’ rights, to contribute to the society, and not to hurt other people in order to exchange for the protection and benefits that society offers. For people who harm others should be punished by law, but if they cannot be punished by law the society’s opinion and judgement can be used as punishment.

#### **3.1.2.4 Equality**

The term equality refers to various ways that people are treated the same. This term is commonly translated as ‘equality of opportunity’ (American Political Culture, n.d.). It means that everybody in society has the same standing and gets equal treatment under the law. No matter who you are, what race, belief, religion, gender, or sex you hold, everyone must obey the law so they can enjoy the same rights. In addition, every person will get the same opportunities to compete and achieve for successes they wish for (SparkNotes Editors, 2010).

#### **3.1.2.5 Patriotism**

Patriotism is defined as the love of a country and attachment of national value (as cited in Skitka, 2005, p. 1996). It is an effective attachment of the in-group independent of one’s feeling towards the out-group or authorities (Blank & Schmidt, 2003). Rufus W. Clark (1847), an American pastor and author, wrote in his work ‘What is patriotism?’ that a person who is a true patriot not only avows to love his country, but is willing and ready to sacrifice his own interests, his ambition, his property, and his life for his nation’s good if it is necessary. He uses his powers, judgement, and influence to keep the property and his fellow-citizens lives safe, and contribute to the advancement of the nation virtue, prosperity, and happiness.

### **3.1.3 The American Government Policies**

Government policies at home and abroad are another potential source of soft power. Government policies can reinforce or squander a country’s soft power. Domestic or foreign policies that appear to be hypocritical, arrogant, indifferent to the opinion of others, or based on a narrow approach to national interests can undermine soft power. However, policies can strongly affect soft power

and the image of that nation. For example, the American's policy on the Vietnam war and the 2003 Iraq War were rejected by many people around the world and made the United States unpopular. Popular culture is relevant to the achievement of policy goals. It can make a country reach its goal in terms of foreign policy (Nye,2004). The three resources to create soft power are related. Culture and popular culture consists and portrays the values that a nation wants to promote and the values are delivered and transferred to people around the world through media and popular culture that they consume. When the values of one country are accepted, admired, and other countries want to follow and buy into one's values, so that country will have an advantage to conduct their policies and gain the outcomes that it wants. Therefore, it will not be successful to create a country's soft power if one resource is omitted as these three resources support one another. The image of a country and its attractiveness to others is a compound of various notions and attitudes. It depends in part on culture, in part on domestic policies and values, and in part on substance, tactics and style of our foreign policies (Nye, 2004).

### 3.2 Review of Primary Text

#### 3.2.1 *Captain America: The First Avenger (2011)*

"There are men laying down their lives. I got no right to do any less than them. That's what you don't understand. This isn't about me."

-Steve Rogers-

*Captain America: The First Avenger* is a 2011 superhero film, based on the Marvel Comics superhero of the same name. It is the fifth instalment in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the fifth instalment of Phase One. It was directed by Joe Johnston and stars Chris Evans as Steve Rogers or Captain America, Hayley Atwell as Peggy Carter, Sebastian Stan as Bucky Barnes and Weaving as Johann Schmidt or Red Skull. The film spawned two sequels: *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* in 2014 and *Captain America: Civil War* in 2016.

### 3.2.1.1 *Captain America: The First Avenger (2011)*Plot

In the present day, researchers in the Arctic Circle uncover the buried wreckage of a large, wing shaped aircraft. Johann Schmidt, commanding officer of the Nazi science division HYDRA and his men invade a stone church in Tønsberg, Norway, seeking a mysterious cosmic artifact known as the Tesseract, which possesses untold powers. In New York City, Steve Rogers is once again rejected for military duty on the battlefields of World War II, despite making multiple attempts at different enlistment offices, due to his frail physical appearance and numerous health issues. While attending an exposition of future technologies with his friend Bucky Barnes, Rogers attempts to enlist again. After overhearing Rogers' conversation with Barnes about wanting to help in the war, Abraham Erskine allows Rogers to enlist as a candidate of Project Rebirth, a “super-soldier” experiment being conducted by the Strategic Scientific Reserve under the supervision of Erskine, Colonel Chester Phillips, and British Agent Peggy Carter. During basic training, Colonel Phillips is unconvinced by Erskine's claims that Rogers is the right person for the procedure, but relents after seeing Rogers commit an act of self-sacrificing bravery. The night before the treatment, Erskine reveals to Rogers that Schmidt underwent an imperfect version of the procedure and suffered negative side-effects due to his inner ambition for power and obsession with becoming a ‘superior man’. Rogers undergoes the super soldier treatment and becomes a stronger man with an enhanced physique. U.S. Senator Brandt approaches Rogers and offers him the chance to tour the nation for the USO to promote war donations, using his image as the strong, ideal soldier as a symbol for the public to rally behind. During his work for the USO Rogers performed in scripted stage shows as the star-spangled character ‘Captain America’. In 1943, while on tour in Italy performing for active servicemen, as well as encountering his colleagues from the Strategic Scientific Reserve, Rogers learns that his friend Bucky’s unit was lost in a battle against Schmidt's forces. Rogers refuses to believe that Barnes is dead and becomes determined to mount a solo rescue attempt, receiving help from Peggy Carter and Howard Stark.

Rogers manages to sneak into HYDRA’s main factory where he finds and frees most of the captive soldiers who begin a riot and start escaping while Rogers continues on to find Barnes, who he discovers in a separate room

where he was being operated on. Schmidt reveals himself to Rogers as ‘the Red Skull’ and makes his escape with Armin Zola, his scientist. Following the liberation of the allied prisoners, Rogers recruits the soldiers as his personal team of Howling Commandos to take out the other known HYDRA operations. Howard Stark outfits Rogers with advanced equipment, including a durable, custom combat uniform that retains Rogers’ Captain America motif and a circular shield made of vibranium. Rogers and his Howling Commandos lead a strong offensive, sabotaging various HYDRA operations. The team later assaults a train carrying Arnim Zola. Rogers and Barnes engage in a fight with the soldiers on the train, during which Barnes falls from the train to his apparent death, while the Howling Commando member Capture Zola on the train. Rogers encounters Schmidt again and they engage in a fight. During the subsequent fight, a machine containing the Tesseract is damaged. Schmidt picks up the Tesseract, and not being able to handle its immense power causes him to explode in a bright blue light, then he disappears. The explosion damages the aircraft that Rogers is on. Rogers sees no way to land the plane without the risk of detonating its weapons, he instead crashes it on the Arctic shelf while making a painful farewell to Carter. Stark later recovers the Tesseract from the ocean floor, but is unable to locate Rogers’ body or Schmidt’s aircraft. Rogers awakens in a 1940s-style hospital room but feeling unsettled he flees outside into what is revealed to be present-day Times Square, where Nick Fury tells him he has been ‘asleep’ for nearly 70 years. Only slightly taken aback after Fury asks if he will be okay Rogers’ only response is that he had a date. Sometime later, Fury approaches Rogers, proposing a mission with worldwide ramifications.

### **3.2.2 Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)**

*Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is the sequel to *Captain America: The First Avenger* and following on from *The Avengers*. It is the ninth film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The film finds Captain America and Black Widow going up against the assassin codename The Winter Soldier. It was released on March 26, 2014. Chris Evans, Sebastian Stan, Scarlett Johansson, Cobie Smulders, Harley Atwell, Toby Jones, and Samuel L. Jackson return as Steve Rogers, James Barnes,

Natasha Romanoff, Maria Hill, Peggy Carter, Armin Zola and Nick Fury respectively. The film is directed by the Russo Brothers.

### **3.2.2.1 *Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)*Plot**

Two years after the Battle of New York, Steve Rogers aka Captain America starts to adjust to the modern world and works as an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. He operates a mission to rescue the hostages of a pirate-hijacked S.H.I.E.L.D. vessel called the Lumerian Star. Rogers, Romanoff, and Agent Brock Rumlow who is leading the team S.T.R.I.K.E. fight the pirates and rescue the hostages. As events unfold, Rogers realizes Romanoff has her own secret mission: Extracting S.H.I.E.L.D. data from the ship onto a USB drive. Rogers is angry with Nick Fury for lying to him. Fury rebukes Rogers for not trusting him and introduces him to Project Insight, a program that will neutralize threats before they even happen. Project Insight consists of three highly advanced S.H.I.E.L.D. Helicarriers that would circulate the Earth protecting its citizens from enemy attacks. Fury is attacked by the fake police and a masked man but he manages to escape. Fury goes to Rogers' apartment as he has nowhere to go. Rogers comes back to his apartment and finds Fury seriously injured. Fury gives the USB drive to Rogers and tells Rogers not to trust anyone. The masked man attacks Rogers' apartment and then disappears. Fury is taken to a hospital but his heart stops beating and he is pronounced dead. Rogers goes back to S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarter to meet with Alexander Pierce. When he is leaving the building, he is attacked by S.T.R.I.K.E. agents but he still manages to escape. Pierce orders S.H.I.E.L.D. agents to hunt for Rogers. Later on, Rogers meets with Romanoff. She tells him that the masked man that he encountered before is an assassin known as the Winter Soldier. Then, they find the location to unlock the USB drive that Fury gave it to them. Meanwhile, Rumlow and his S.T.R.I.K.E. team attempts to stop them. When Rogers and Romanoff arrive at the location, Rogers says that they are at the old training facility where he had trained during World War II. They find a secret storage room full of old computers inside a S.H.I.E.L.D office and there they discover a more modern looking USB slot. Entering the USB in the slot the computer powers up and someone starts to talk to them. It is Arnim Zola, who tells them that he was recruited by S.H.I.E.L.D. after World War II and that he helped to rebuild HYDRA inside S.H.I.E.L.D., but in the 1972 when he got the news he had a

terminal illness, S.H.I.E.L.D., still needing his help, transferred his mind onto hundreds of 200,000 databanks. He tells them that he had been working on an algorithm that HYDRA wanted. He told them that some of the deaths of S.H.I.E.L.D. leaders had been due to HYDRA, showing them a picture of Howard Stark, implying that his death might not have been an accident. He tells them that HYDRA have infiltrated everywhere and he was also involved in the Winter Soldier program. S.T.R.I.K.E. team attacks Rogers and Romanoff again but they survive and escape to Wilson's house to ask for help.

It is revealed that Pierce is HYDRA undercover leader who is working with the masked man. Pierce is going to use Project Insight as a weapon to eliminate what they see as threats against HYDRA's new world order. Rogers encounters the winter soldier again. As Rogers and the Winter Soldier fight, the Winter Soldier's mask is broken and it is revealed that he is Bucky Barnes, Rogers' best friend. Shockingly Rogers recognizes Barnes, but Barnes does not recognize him. Rogers, Romanoff and Wilson are then taken into custody by S.T.R.I.K.E. but they are rescued by Maria Hill. Agent Hill takes them to a secret facility where they find that Fury is alive. Hill and Fury tell them that Project Insight is only hours away and that they have to act quickly. The Helicarriers would hover in a triangle, connected, targeting all its targets before firing and the only way to prevent this is to use three special chips that alter the Helicarriers' program. Each Helicarrier had to have one chip inserted in it. Rogers does not just want to bring down the Helicarriers he wants to take down HYDRA as well. Captain America and Wilson (now revealed to be the Falcon), break in Triskelion and take control of the microphones. Rogers tells all S.H.I.E.L.D. agents that there are HYDRA traitors in S.H.I.E.L.D. and that Alexander Pierce is one of them. Rogers orders S.H.I.E.L.D. not to launch Project Insight. However, Rumlow manages to get the Helicarriers in the air and as the Helicarriers begin to take off, Rogers and Falcon go in pursuit of the first two Helicarriers. They successfully manage to put the chips in the first two Helicarriers. The Winter Soldier appears and destroys Rogers ground support troops; he then takes off in a war plane. The Winter Soldier attacks Falcon and Rogers and he destroys Falcon's suit sending him crashing albeit safely to the ground. Rogers continues the battle with the Winter Soldier and tries to recover the dropped chip. Rogers tries to convince Barnes that

Barnes knows Rogers. As he tries to get the chip in place with only seconds left before Project Insight will initiate, he gets shot multiple times by Barnes. The Helicarriers reach 3,000 ft and using Zola's Algorithm, they target 715,854 people. When all seems lost, Rogers manages to insert the chip at the last minute. The Winter Soldier and Rogers are still fighting. The Winter Soldier violently punches him repeatedly. Rogers falls into the water beneath after the glass pane they are on explodes. Barnes saves Rogers by pulling him out of the water, before disappearing leaving him on a riverbank.

### 3.2.3 *Captain America: Civil War (2016)*

“An empire toppled by its enemies can rise again. But one which crumbles from within? That's dead. Forever.”

-Helmut Zemo-

*Captain America: Civil War* is a 2016 superhero film, based on the Marvel Comics superhero of the same name. It is a sequel to *Captain America; The First Avenger*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Ant-Man*, as well as the thirteenth instalment in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the first instalment of Phase Three. The film was released internationally on April 27, 2016 and on May 6, 2016 in the United States. The film is directed by Joe Russo and Anthony Russo and stars Chris Evans as Steve Rogers/Captain America, Robert Downey Jr. as Tony Stark/Iron Man, Sebastian Stan as Bucky Barnes/Winter Soldier, Scarlett Johansson as Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow, Anthony Mackie as Sam Wilson/Falcon, Chadwick Boseman as T'Challa/Black Panther, Elizabeth Olsen as Wanda Maximoff/Scarlet Witch, Paul Bettany as Vision, Don Cheadle as James Rhodes/War Machine, Jeremy Renner as Clint Barton/Hawkeyes, Paul Rudd as Scott Lang/Ant-Man, Tom Hollands as Peter Parker/Spider-Man and Daniel Brühl as Helmut Zemo.



### 3.2.3.1 *Captain America: Civil War (2016)* Plot

Approximately one year after the Ultron Offensive, public opinion of the Avengers has become increasingly divided due to the events in New York, Washington, D.C. and Sokovia. The team – which now consists of Steve Rogers, Natasha Romanoff, Sam Wilson and Wanda Maximoff – learn that former HYDRA sleeper agent Brock Rumlow, who now calls himself ‘Crossbones’ plans to steal a biological weapon from the Institute for Infectious Diseases in Lagos, Nigeria. As Rumlow and his team lead the assault on the Institute, Rogers and his team battle to intercept them. In the battle, Rumlow taunts Rogers with a story about Bucky and as Rogers is distracted he attempts to commit suicide with a bomb vest, trying to take Rogers with him in an act of revenge. Maximoff contains the explosion, but she loses control of her powers and inadvertently destroys a nearby building, killing several relief aid workers from Wakanda.

At Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Tony Stark demonstrates a piece of technology aimed to recreate and relive old memories, and follows with a speech where he introduces a grant being awarded to all students, giving them all the proper funding to move forward with their own inventions and ideas. When he is leaving, he is confronted by a grieving mother whose son was killed in the Avengers' battle with Ultron in Sokovia. She tells him that Stark murdered her son in Sokovia. She tells him that he thinks he fights for people but actually he fights for himself. One month after the incident in Lagos, Nigeria, in their headquarters Maximoff blames herself and Rogers tries to take the blame himself and console her. Stark has arrived with the Secretary of State, Thaddeus Ross. Ross explains that, due to the events in Lagos, the United Nations has decided they can no longer be allowed to operate privately. To that end, it has been decided that the Avengers will sign the Sokovia Accords, which will establish an international panel to control the Avengers' movements as well as monitor and police the rapidly growing number of enhanced individuals. The team is divided over the act; Stark supports government oversight because he feels guilty for his role in creating Ultron and the devastation Ultron caused. He also feels that the Avengers need to take more responsibility for the consequences of their actions, as he did when he discovered his company was secretly shipping weapons to terrorists.

However, Rogers worries that the Avengers may be compromised if it comes under the control of a nefarious third party, such as the infiltration of S.H.I.E.L.D. by HYDRA. Ross states that refusing to sign the accords will be seen as an act of resignation. Rogers and Stark disagree about the Sokovia Accords. Meanwhile, retired HYDRA operative Colonel Vasily Karpov is ambushed by Helmut Zemo, who asks for information regarding the 1991 mission.

In Vienna, where the signing of the Accords is to take place, King T'Chaka of Wakanda is killed by a terrorist bomb. The news anchor advises that security cameras captured the suspect and it is Bucky Barnes, The Winter Soldier. T'Chaka's son, T'Challa, vows revenge vowing to kill him himself. Rogers and Wilson decide to go behind Ross' back and bring in Barnes themselves. Rogers confronts Barnes and Barnes tells Rogers that he was not in Vienna. Barnes tries to escape with Rogers calmly trying to stop him. T'Challa chases him and Rogers and Wilson also try to chase them both. Finally, Barnes is captured, and Rogers, Wilson, and T'Challa are arrested for obstruction of justice by police. Barnes is released by Zemo, who uses HYDRA's trigger words to send him on a rampage. Rogers and Wilson intervene just as Barnes is escaping containment, with Rogers attempting to calm Barnes while Wilson chases after Zemo, attempting to flee the facility. Zemo escapes, and Barnes nearly gets away in a helicopter before being caught by Rogers. Barnes tells Rogers that Zemo is headed for the abandoned HYDRA facility in Siberia where he and five other Winter Soldiers were created using the Super Soldier Serum he stole in 1991. Stark tries to locate Rogers but is stopped by Thaddeus Ross who advises Special Ops will lead the hunt. Stark is given 36 hours to bring Barnes, Rogers and Wilson in. Romanoff tells him that they are understaffed and they come up with a plan. Stark recruits a new member to the team. Believing Zemo intends to release the other Winter Soldiers and unleash them on the world, Rogers calls upon Clint Barton, Scott Lang to join the team. Trying to flee Berlin and reach Siberia before Zemo, Rogers and his team assemble at Leipzig/Halle Airport, where they hope to take a chopper out of the country. Stark and his team appear trying to stop Rogers. When Rogers refuses to back down, the Avengers get into a massive fight. Rogers and Barnes manage to get away while the rest of the Avengers are captured. Stark finds evidence that Barnes was framed by Zemo while Zemo reaches the facility in Siberia ahead of

Rogers. Stark finds out where Rogers and Barnes are going so he follows the two to Siberia, and is shadowed by T'Challa. Rogers and Stark reconcile and they discover that the other Winter Soldiers have been murdered by Zemo who had never intended to release them. Zemo reveals that he is a Sokovian and wants to punish the Avengers for the death of his family during Ultron's attack. Zemo shows Stark a security video from 1991, which reveals Barnes as the assassin who murdered Stark's parents to steal samples of the Super Soldier Serum from their car. Rogers admits that he knew the circumstances of their deaths, though not that it was Barnes himself who killed them. A disillusioned and enraged Stark then turns on Barnes, forcing Rogers to fight him to save his friend's life. Having succeeded in his plans of ripping apart the Avengers, Zemo waits outside where he meets with T'Challa and the two discuss vengeance and the terrible things it can lead men to do. T'Challa has decided he will not let his desire for revenge consume him like it did Zemo and the Avengers and prevents him from committing suicide, content on sending him to prison. Rogers and Stark are fighting each other. Finally, Rogers manages to disable Stark's armor and begins to depart with Barnes. After the fight, Stark receives a package containing a phone and a letter from Rogers. In the letter, Rogers apologizes for everything that happened and for not telling him the truth about his parents, as well as noting his regret that he cannot accept the accords. He tells Stark that he knows the day will come when the team will need to assemble and act as one again. When that day arrives, Rogers and his team he freed from prison will be there. Barnes and Rogers are granted asylum in Wakanda by T'Challa. Barnes chooses to undergo cryostasis until his brainwashing can be completely removed or suppressed successfully.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 American Culture

*The best propaganda is not propaganda.*

*(Nye, 2015)*

To create soft power, culture is one of the keys to success. The U.S. has invested and expanded their culture in different levels of efficiency for several purposes extensively (Fraser, 2008). Since the era of President Woodrow Wilson, the U.S. has been aware of the advantages of popular culture and they have been using popular culture to convey their values and policies to the world through mass media. As American popular culture contains their values and policies, it is a powerful tool for politics as American popular culture is able to generate and link with the audiences' feelings. Mass media especially the digital channel is an important tool to drive and enlarge values and policies to the rest of the world because it can reach people across the boundaries. Popular culture is heavily influenced by mass media and it can penetrate into people's lives so it is easy for people to intentionally or unintentionally consume American popular culture because it is everywhere and the image of the U.S. purposefully is thoughtfully formed and slightly gets into public's mind.

Hollywood is one of the American soft power producers who create and deliver a number of American movies and other forms of entertainment to the audiences around the world for a long time. Dissanayake (1992) stated that the sounds and images reflect the reason for its production and represents the political conflicts during the time when the film was made in real life. For example, *Captain America: The First Avenger* was produced based on the comics which was written during World War II. People outside the United States learn and know more about American culture, American history, American way of life, American fashion or scenery in the U.S. by watching American movies through fictional characters or

listening to American music. From doing so, many people admire American culture and see the U.S. in positive light. It is good that people can learn other cultures or learn more about other countries by watching and consuming mass media, however they will see only one side of the stories that mass media present to them. As mentioned earlier that Hollywood exports a number of movies to the audiences around the world, different types of movies are consumed by a great number of audiences but the type of movie that attracts a wider audience and multiple age group is superhero movies. For the past few years, Hollywood has produced several superhero movies and sold them to thousands of cinemas outside the United States. Some superhero movies have their sequels and they make more money in each episode that is released. It can be interpreted that people are infatuated with this type of movie because it is fun and entertaining. The audiences can relieve their stress and live in their fancy world when they watch this type of movie. So they have followed and waited for their favorite movies and are willing to spend money to watch it in the cinema. Some consumers spend money on superhero costumes and other merchandise keeping them as collections. Some have blogs or websites to talk and discuss about the superhero movies that they like with other fans. People talk about it, pay attention to it, thus it means that these movies have an influence on the audiences' mind but the audiences might or might not realize that they are influenced. Filmmakers do research and use the audiences' feelings to produce the films. They get into the events, fears, frustrations, imaginations, and hope of the era and produce films to express those feelings then let the audiences experience it. Therefore, when the audiences have mutual feelings toward the contents that they consume, it will be easier to coax the audiences to follow the track that people behind the scene want. If the audiences think or feel the same way as what the filmmakers wish them to, it indicates that soft power is being used.

Captain America movies are part of the American popular culture that distribute the American values and policies to the audiences both inside and outside the United States. They are also a supplementary tool for the United States to create their soft power. The movies were shown in more than 4,000 cinemas around the world (Captain America, n.d.). In addition, according to Box Office records Captain America movie series have grossed more revenue with each new movie released.

The increasing revenue indicates that Captain America movies are popular among the audiences. Superhero movies are an influential political instrument because not only that it is entertaining, but also they are able to generate and connect the audiences' feelings to the stories. The audiences can link their real life to the movie plots and they can be inspired by the superheroes and other characters from the movies they watch. Captain America movies as American popular culture represent the American values such as democracy, individualism and liberty. So it can form the basis of an individual's identity (Street, 1997)

Throughout *Captain America: The First Avenger*, the story demonstrates the usage of popular culture through mass media in the film. Posters, comics, newspapers, advertisements, stage performance and cinemas are used to propagandize the American citizens. The scene when Rogers goes to the cinema and there is an advertisement of the ongoing battle is the first example of the utilization of popular culture through mass media. The advertisement aims to convince the audiences to support the war. Many audiences are influenced by the advertisement because they feel depressed and sob when they see the advertisement. When the advertisement is related to the audience's real life event and the audience can link the advertisement to the current situation they are facing or the situation they have been through, it will create more impact on the audience's feeling. So the audiences will make their decision to support the war easily as they are convinced.

The Uncle Sam poster with the caption "I want you for the U.S. Army" appeared in the movie as well. When Rogers sees the poster at the World of Tomorrow event, it inspires him to enlist again even though he is rejected many times. The Uncle Sam poster was created by James Montgomery Flagg (The Price of Freedom: Americans at War, n.d.). The poster was used during World War I and World War II to encourage the Americans to help with the war effort. The poster which was used during World War II was designed to implant in people's minds the positive attitude towards the war, creating patriotism and confidence. In addition, it was used for recruitment, productivity, and motivation as well as for financing the war effort (The Price of Freedom: Americans at War, n.d.).

After a successful experiment of super soldier serum, Rogers is turned into a superhero. He saves a boy's life and becomes famous overnight. Moreover,

when Captain America goes on a mission to rescue other soldiers in HYDRA's prison and he can save almost 400 men, his picture and story is on the front page of every newspaper. After it hits the newsstands, people admire what he has done, and because of his bravery action it results in the long enlistment lines as a lot of men want to be a hero to help their country fight the battle like Captain America. From this situation, newspapers make Captain America so popular. Everyone knows who he is and what he has done. It reflects that newspapers as mass media have an effect on people's minds and thoughts. The American citizens in the film show that they are influenced by the media they consume.

The U.S. government in the movie uses Captain America as a presenter to promote and sell war bonds. Rogers has to travel around the U.S. and dress in Captain America costume to do a stage performance trying to convince the audiences to buy war bonds. It appears that the show is very popular. Not only the kids have fun while they are watching the show, their parents also enjoy it. Captain America's story is published in a form of comic books. People in every age group and gender are attracted by his popularity and stories. Furthermore, the U.S. government produces a movie about the war in which Rogers is a leading actor who has a responsibility to protect the Americans. His popularity has positive feedback for the war. The American citizens show their support by purchasing a great amount of war bonds.

Interestingly, the American citizens who support the war do not perceive the narratives of Captain America such as stage performance, comic books, his stories in the newspapers, as well as the movie which is produced by the U.S government as propaganda. Because people feel entertained and have fun while they are consuming the media so they disregard the fact that the real purpose of the mass media is to influence their feelings and convince them to believe what the producers want them to believe. The Americans are impressed with the image of Captain America which is presented by the mass media. They feel that he is a superhero who will protect them from bad people and make them safe from the war. When they consume mass media that present Captain America's stories, they have hope and they can also put themselves in a fantasy world and that fantasy world seems real for them because the stories presented by the media based on

true stories that they have confronted so they can connect those stories with their real life events, the situations that they watch make them feel that they are part of what they have seen. Therefore, it creates a connection between the fantasy world and real life events of the audiences and that connection gives the benefit to soft power as it grows American soft power in people's minds. Then, it comes to Nye's statement which he said "the best propaganda is not propaganda".

A lot of people do not perceive popular culture through mass media that they consume as propaganda, however there are people who feel that American popular culture is a threat to them and their society. They feel that America tried to Americanize them. The term Americanization is not only involved with the American products, services, technology, or entertainment, it denotes the effect and power of American culture that is manifested in other countries. Additionally, it refers to assimilation and invasion of cultures as the original definition of the Americanization process was a policy on Assimilating immigrants. To illustrate, the American citizens in *Captain America: The First Avenger* are Americanized. They are persuaded to think and follow as what the media producers want them to do. For example, the media producer uses Captain America as a symbol to convince American men to enlist, not too long, the enlistment line is full of people who want to support their country, or when the U.S. government uses Captain America as a promoter to sell war bond, a lot of people incredibly purchase war bond as they are convinced. The audiences around the world who consume Captain America movies are Americanized as well. They are swayed by Captain America whose look is charming, the messages and values that the producers insert in the movies. Children who watch the movies and are influenced by the movies receive the movie in a different light than adults. They dream that they want to be like their superheroes or dream that their superheroes will keep them safe.

Although there are a number of people who are convinced by the American soft power through popular culture that they are consume, there are people who do not pay attention and they feel that the content that mass media presents is not related to their lives so they could not careless as they are not convinced by what they have seen. To illustrate, the man that Rogers met when he went to the cinema shouted out loud that he did not care and did not want to see



the advertisement about the ongoing war. He just wanted to watch a movie. He did not have any interest in supporting the war and no matter how often he watches the advertisement, he still will not change his attitudes. Since mass media has a massive impact on the audiences' mind and American popular culture has continued to grow and expand domestically and internationally, so when something is too overwhelming, it will never get positive feedback. Consequently, there is a resistant from people outside the United States about American culture as well especially among Muslim countries or the countries that have different beliefs and values from the USA. Some of American movies are banned in some countries because of the content which attacks those countries. Additionally, those countries feel that the U.S. is a threat to them by invading their countries using popular culture to influence and Americanize their people. So there is an existence of anti-Americanism among Muslim countries and the countries that have different beliefs or different political system from the U.S. (Yu, n.d.). American popular culture can be very useful to learn more about the USA. In an appropriate amount, it will make American popular culture charming and convincing. However, sometimes when something is too extreme there will always be a bounce back in a negative way as the USA receives their feedback.

#### 4.2 The American values

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

(The Declaration of Independence, 1776)

The United States Declaration of Independence, which was signed in 1776 by the thirteen American colonies under the Kingdom of Great Britain, declared that thirteen independent sovereign states were no longer under British rule. The representatives of the thirteen states that were from New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Carolina, Massachusetts Bay, Pennsylvania, Virginia,

Georgia, Rhode Island and Province Plantation, Connecticut, Maryland, and Delaware. The meeting was held on July 4, 1776 at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia. This declaration was a first step in forming the United States of America. The sentences above are part of the Declaration of Independence and it has been called “one of the best-known sentences in the English language” (Lucas, 1989, p.85). This quote represents a moral standard to which Americans should attempt (McPherson, 1991) and contains the values that Americans admire. The set of values creates the meaning for American society, not only are their values esteemed by the Americans, but also by people outside of the United States who would like to follow and buy into their values too. Consequently, when American values are respected and followed, the U.S. will have an advantage to shape their followers’ preferences and it is a gateway in helping the U.S. produce soft power. The trilogy of *Captain America* demonstrates the remarkable American values alongside multi-faceted stories which are told through the characters and the experiences that they endure, and those values help the U.S. produce and spread their soft power.

In *Captain America: The First Avenger*, the major backdrop of the film was the second World War—American forces against the power of autocracy in Nazi Germany; the symbolic scene was the Captain punching Hitler while glorifying the American military and the freedom of a democratic country the US is. In European history, prior to Hitler being appointed as Chancellor in 1933, Germany was a democratic country but soon after became an autocratic state where Hitler declared himself Führer and held on to an absolute power—he eliminated all opposition parties, trade unions, and other potential opposing voices (BBC Bitesize, n.d.). When war raged through Europe and Nazi Germany force grew, the major opposing forces were the Allies; the alliance of countries with the prominent states being the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was famously said the collective effort of American workforce in the war was “The Arsenal of Democracy” and that they had the power to turn the tide of the war. The country turned its cities into factories that produced items in support of the Allied forces and the American soldiers marched into war—the US did play a large part in the defeat of Nazi Germany, and it was said to be owed to “The Arsenal of Democracy” (Detroit Historical Society, n.d.).

After the second World War, the US had proven its military powers by defeating the seemingly indomitable Nazi army and Japanese military. The decades were promised of joyous prosperity. However, the fear of the postwar atrocity was spreading since the weapons became more complex and hostilities with the Soviet Union and its communist allies grew. The cold war that came after the second world war was the war that the US attempted to combat communism. President Harry Truman had series of foreign and national policies to limit communist forces. The 'Fair Deal', the policy that guaranteed equal rights, health insurance, and minimum wage for all Americans, was meant to exhibit a liberal alternative to right wing suggestions. In 1947, President Truman issued a loyalty oath to all public employees to condemn radicalism and subversion. This is part of the "Truman Doctrine". Truman's other efforts include allowing the US military support to anti-communist forces in Greece and Turkey as well as other communist forces worldwide (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, n.d.). Despite the fall of the Soviet Union, President Vladimir Putin's Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014 invokes memories of Joseph Stalin's autocratic unification of Eastern European nations under communist regime. But this new 'Cold War' with Russia is less of the US combatting communism but more on balancing the nations' power in the global stage and preventing the deterioration of Democratic ideals. Meanwhile, democracy in countries in Latin America and the Middle East were failing—populist policies created "dictatorship through democracy" in Venezuela and a violent coup by Egypt's generals in 2013. This prompted new literature on democracy to propagate more definition of democracy, for example, calling populism undemocratic as it exploited poor and underprivileged constituencies. In the US, the political landscape had evolved, more divided factions and discrimination within different groups, ethnicity, class, and backgrounds. It can be said that American democracy in the twenty-first century is under threats, nationwide and abroad (Hayden, 2014).

#### 4.2.1 Democracy

Democracy is a noticeable and important value which Americans respect and people around the world have a wider experience of this remarkable value for a longer time in history. In the Captain America movies, democracy is portrayed often through the stories and characters. Additionally, it leads to other values which arise due to the consequences of democracy, such as individualism, liberty, equality, and patriotism. The stories of Captain America demonstrate democracy in different aspects. To start, *Captain America: The First Avenger* portrays the United States as a democratic country who fights against Nazi occupied Germany and the Axis power during World War II, with the corporation of the Allies, which is represented through Peggy Carter, the British agent who comes to the United States to operate the super-soldier mission. During the scene where Rogers goes to watch a movie in the cinema, there is an advertisement discussing what is happening in the war. It shows that many young men are lining up to serve their country; and even little boys are doing something to help their country. “[...] Meanwhile, overseas, our brave boys are showing the Axis powers that the price freedom is never too high. Together with Allied forces, we'll face any threat, no matter the size” said the commercial announcer. Additionally, When Steve Rogers becomes Captain America, he is instructed to travel around the country to perform in a heavily staged show which encourages American citizens to buy war bonds. This show has a propaganda fueled song containing lyrics about Captain America as the representative of the United States fighting for his country to protect the Americans from Adolf Hitler and the Axis power.

*[...] We can't ignore there's threat and a war we must win. ...Who'll give the Axis the sack and is smart as a fox? ...Who's making Adolf afraid to step out of his box? ...Who'll kick the Krauts to Japan? [...]*

*(Star Spangled man, Captain America: The First Avenger)*

At the end of the show Captain America hits the actor, who is dressed like Adolf Hitler, in the face. The statement from the advertisement that Rogers sees in the cinema and his performance indicates two different governmentsystems which are democracy and dictatorship. The United States is a

democratic country that gives rights to their citizens in choosing their own leader, Germany and the Axis power on the other hand govern their countries by dictatorship. Germany under Hitler was transformed into a totalitarian state and they invaded a lot of countries around the World. The U.S. believes that Adolf Hitler and the Axis power are a threat to the U.S. and democracy; so the U.S. as a democratic country decides that they have to stop them.

In *Captain America: Civil War* indirect democracy is shown. It is the system that most countries in the World use nowadays; especially the United States. It is well established through an agreement of Sokovia Accords. The collateral damages from the Avengers at Sokovia in *Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)* and at Lagos, Nigeria in *Captain America: Civil War (2016)* where several hundred innocent people lost their lives, as well as the events that occurred in New York and Washington D.C, result in an agreement of the Sokovia Accords signed off by the representatives of 117 countries. Secretary Ross, a representative of the U.S. government, says to the Avengers that he understands that the Avengers have secured the world for a long time and the citizens have appreciated what they have done for them. But while a number of people admire them as heroes, there are some who see them as vigilantes. In the past few years, the Avengers have operated their mission with unlimited power and they have no supervision. So the governments around the world can no longer accept their operation because there are a lot of innocent people suffering from the damages the Avengers have caused. Therefore, Secretary Ross proposes the Sokovia Accords to the Avengers members. A substance of the Sokovia Accords explains that the Avengers will no longer be a private organization and that they have to operate missions under the United Nations Panel. If any of the superheroes reject this accord, they will be retired or if they break the rules, they will be arrested and potentially imprisoned. The 117 countries refer to the countries that use democracy as a system to govern their countries and the action from the representatives of 117 countries to sign off the Sokovia Accords reflects the indirect democracy that the citizens of each country will choose the representatives to manage the government's business for them. To explain, civilians from many countries have suffered negative effects from the Avengers' previous missions; some civilians are dead, injured, or disabled. The

buildings, houses, schools, and hospitals are destroyed by the operations of the Avengers even though the superheroes tend to save the world and people's lives from the supervillains. However, after the situations, losses and damages the civilians are left with the suffering, but the superheroes can go back to their home just like nothing has happened. The civilians think that the superheroes are not taking responsibility for the damages and losses they have caused. Therefore, the civilians who are suffering from incidents call for the governments of the world, who are supposed to take care and protect their people's interest, to take responsibility. Although, the governments are selected from the citizens to be their representatives in order to make the decisions for them, the citizens are sovereign in this democratic system and they are in the highest position of political authority. In addition, the citizens are free to criticize and observe the representatives they have chosen and the representatives should listen to the voices of citizens (What is Democracy?, 2004). Hence, when the citizens who encounter danger call for their governments to protect them, the governments have to listen to public opinions and take actions to keep their people safe. So, the Sokovia Accords is the solution that 117 countries agree to use to protect their people and manage the operation of the Avengers' mission and it indicates a ruling of the countries through a system of democracy.

#### **4.2.2 Individualism**

Individualism is an outcome of democracy, when a country is democratic, people can be free and have the rights to plan their own lives and pursue their happiness as long as it does not harm other people. The United States is known as a free country where people are independent to live their lives. Individualism is well established in the Captain America movies. The character of Steve Rogers is an example of a person who is very independent. Rogers is a weak skinny man who has a strong intention to join the U.S. army and serve his beloved country. Unfortunately, he is rejected many times due to his physical issues, even so he never gives up and keeps trying to succeed with his desire to protect his country. "Look, just give me a chance." Rogers says to a doctor who checks his profile for enlistment because he feels like being a soldier is very important to him. James Barnes or Bucky, his best friend, tries to stop him from applying for the army because he does not want Rogers to get killed in the war. He says to Rogers "Why are you so

keen to fight? There are so many important jobs.” Bucky convinces Rogers that there are other jobs that Rogers can do to serve the country but Rogers does not want to do those jobs and explains to Bucky about his desire “Bucky, come on! There are men laying down their lives. I got no right to do any less than them. That's what you don't understand. This isn't about me.” Rogers’ determination to be a soldier reflects the individualism as he is driven by his desire, he has his own preferences, his own needs, he knows that he has the rights to apply for the army as other men. He is independent and determined to reach his goal even though other people look down upon his passion and underestimate his abilities. During the ride that Carter is taking with Rogers to the secret laboratory, Rogers tells Carter that he knows this neighborhood and he got beaten many times around that area “Did you have something against running away?” Peggy Carter asks Rogers. “You start running, they'll never let you stop. You stand up, push back. Can't say no forever, right?” Rogers replies to Carter. His response to Carter emphasizes the personalities of independence and self-governance which are parts of individualism and he also has his standing point that he will never give up his dreams and surrender to any bully. After Rogers undergoes a super-soldier operation and becomes Captain America he realizes that the army unit that Bucky is in was lost in a battle against Johann Schmidt’s forces. Colonel Philips tells Rogers that his friend is most likely dead but Rogers refuses to believe that and becomes determined to mount a solo rescue attempt, receiving help from Peggy Carter and Howard Stark, who fly him behind enemy lines. Due to his strong intentions and never giving up personality, Rogers finally rescues Barnes and engages in the battle with HYDRA villains and Schmidt. At the end of the fight, Schmidt explodes in the bright blue light due to the immense power of the Tesseract he was holding and the explosion damages the aircraft that Rogers is on. Rogers sees no way to land the plane without the risk of detonating its weapons, he instead crashes it on the Arctic shelf and sacrifices his life to save other people. Rogers’ behavior to sacrifice himself and his intention to protect innocent people conform the continuation of individualism.

Captain America movies continue demonstrating individualism through other characters. Tony Stark has broken up with his girlfriend, Pepper Potts, because he refuses to give up being Iron Man as she has asked. Stark says to Rogers

that “[...] A few years ago, I almost lost her, so I trashed all my suits. Then, we had to mop up HYDRA and then Ultron. My fault. And then, and then, and then, I never stopped, because the truth is I don't wanna stop. I don't wanna lose her [...]” Stark’s decision to continue being Iron Man shows that he has a concern for himself and prioritizes himself over the others. No matter how much he loves Potts, he still loves himself more. T’Challa, who lost his father during the United Nation meeting to ratify the Sokovia Accords in Vienna, vows revenge for his father’s death. He says to Romanoff when they have a conversation “Don't bother, Miss Romanoff. I'll kill him myself.” T’Challa intends to kill Barnes, who he thinks is responsible for his father’s death, by himself. He does not care if he will be stopped or captured by the government according to the Sokovia Accords, he wants to bring justice for his father his own way. His attitude and volition to vengeance for his father establishes individualism. He is motivated by his retaliation and he prioritizes his need over the others.

Apart from establishing individualism in the superheroes’ side, Captain America movies also portray individualism through the villains and supervillains in each episode. *Captain America: The First Avenger* portrays individualism from the supervillain side by Johann Schmidt. Schmidt is the former head of the Nazi Scientific division. He is a brilliant scientist in his own right, he fought his way through the ranks of Nazi elite to become an indispensable ally of Adolf Hitler. He has an ambition to become a superior man so he undergoes an imperfect experiment of super-soldier serum. Consequently, he is transformed into the terrifying Red Skull. Schmidt decides to turn his back on Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany as he wants to operate HYDRA forces by himself. He has an intention to rule the world alone (Red Skull, n.d.).

“Tomorrow, Hydra will stand master of the world. Born to victory on the wings of the Valkyrie. Our enemies weapons will be powerless against us. If they shoot down one plane, hundreds more will rain fire upon them! If they cut off one head, two more shall take its place. Hail Hydra!”

*(Johann Schmidt in Captain America: The First Avenger, 2011)*



Schmidt is concerned only about himself and how to seek power. He always puts himself before the others and does not care how many people will die when he operates his mission to become the conqueror of the world. He does not hesitate to kill his rivals or even his subordinates to preserve the outcome that he wishes for, ultimately he is dominated by his desires. Therefore, all of his behaviors establish the individualism in himself.

In the next episode, Alexander Pierce is the villain in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. He is one of the HYDRA's leaders and its top undercover operative inside the United States Government, S.H.I.E.L.D., and the World Security Council (Alexander Pierce, n.d.). He orders HYDRA forces within S.H.I.E.L.D. and additionally he intends to make the world a chaotic place, hence people will give up their freedom voluntarily. He creates Project Insight composed of three heavily armed Helicarriers which will give HYDRA absolute power to control the world. The real purpose of this project is to kill approximately 20 million innocent people to bring a better balance to the world's population and anyone who HYDRA believes is a threat to HYDRA's new world order. Pierce uses his influence in the World Security Council and S.H.I.E.L.D. to launch this project because he believes that what he is doing is right to make the world a better place. He does not feel guilty to murder millions of people to reach his objective. Pierce is like Johann Schmidt, he is propelled by his need to overcome his enemies and he is willing to do whatever it takes to succeed his mission. His deeds support the individualism which was defined by Hofstede (1980) and Triandis (2018).

In *Captain America: Civil War*, Helmut Zemo is a Sokovia civilian who turns to be a terrorist because he wants to avenge the Avengers after he lost all of his family members in a battle of Sokovia. He is obsessed with finding the way to destroy the Avengers. He knows that he cannot defeat the Avengers by himself so he plans to have them ruin each other. First, he frames Bucky Barnes, the Winter Soldier, for the terrorist attack that killed King T'Chaka and many innocent people in Vienna. His action causes the Civil War of the Avengers as Captain America defends his best friend from the world whereas Iron Man operates the manhunt for the Winter Soldier. Furthermore, Zemo revealed to Iron Man that the Winter Soldier was responsible for his parent's death. Zemo's actions cause damage to the Avengers

and also innocent people's lives. In the scene where Zemo, Captain America, Bucky Barnes, Iron Man and T'Challa are in HYDRA Siberian Facility, Captain America asks Zemo as he does not understand why Zemo has committed these actions "You killed innocent people in Vienna just to bring us here?". "I thought about nothing else for over a year. I studied you. I followed you, but now that you're standing here, I just realized there's a bit of green in the blue of your eyes. How nice to find a flaw" Zemo replies. "You're Sokovian. Is that what this is about?" Captain America asks. "Sokovia was a failed state long before you blew it to hell. No. I'm here because I made a promise." Zemo answers. The answers that he gives Captain America reflect his independent identity. He is motivated by his indignation and he focuses on revenge. Therefore, all the behaviors he has done are caused by the identity of individualism.

#### 4.2.3 Liberty

Liberty is one of the important values which is stated in the United States' Declaration of Independence (1776). There are three types of liberty according to John Stuart Mill (1859). Firstly, it is the liberty of thought and discussion. For the land of freedom, every individual should be free to discuss and express their opinions although they do not come from the majority. It does not matter whether the opinions from the minority are right or wrong, their opinions should not be silenced. For example, the scene from *Captain America: The First Avenger* where Rogers goes to watch a movie in the cinema, there is an advertisement announcing about the war and trying to convince the audiences to support the ongoing event. Rogers and other audiences watch the commercial with respect, a woman has tears in her eyes while she is watching this advertisement, however there is a man who does not think the same as Rogers and other people. He shows his opinion out loud among the audiences that he does not care about what is happening in the war and he asks the cinema to play the movie immediately, everyone looks at him and he starts having an argument with Rogers. Two of them end up fighting each other at the back of the alley. From this scene, it shows that everyone has the right and freedom to express their opinion, you do not have to agree with most people in society. You have the liberty to choose whether you want to support the war or not. You can have your standing point and speak it out, however no matter how much

liberty you have to show your opinion, it should not harm others and you should show other people respect when you express your view. In the scene, Colonel Phillips also shows disagreement with Dr. Erskine due to Dr. Erskine's decision to choose Rogers as a candidate for the super soldier project. He says to Dr. Erskine "When you brought a ninety pounds asthmatic onto my army base, I let it slide. I thought, what the hell? Maybe he'll be useful to you, like a gerbil. I never thought you'd pick him." Colonel Phillips has the liberty to show a different view as he has a concern for his country. If Rogers is not the right candidate, this super soldier project that they have prepared for a long time will fail. Dr. Erskine listens to Colonel Phillips's opinion with respect but he still insists with his decision. He explains to Colonel Phillips that he chooses Rogers not because of his physical attributes but for his good heart. Colonel Phillips believes that revealing his opinion is the right thing to do as every individual should have freedom to show their view and their view should not be ignored (SparkNotes Editors,2005). Furthermore, it might help to raise a concern to Dr. Erskine to think twice before he makes the decision. Steve Rogers as Captain America also revealed his opinion about Project Insight to Nick Fury in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* after he finds out that S.H.I.E.L.D. under the U.S. government control is building the Helicarriers to prevent the world from the terrorists. He raises his concern to Fury that this project does not protect civilians from terrorism, but it robs the freedom from them as they are pointed at with guns all the time and Rogers is actually right about what he says because in the end S.H.I.E.L.D. is compromised by HYDRA members who work undercover in the organization. Instead of protecting civilians from any harm, the Helicarriers become the threats themselves as HYDRA intends to kill millions of innocent people by these machines. In this case, if Rogers's opinion was omitted, the public would be hurt. Another scene which reflects the liberty of thought and discussion is the scene in which Mrs. Spencer, a grieving mother whose son was killed in Sokovia, comes to see Tony Stark at the MIT meeting. She says to Stark "His name was Charlie Spencer. You murdered him in Sokovia. Not that it matters in the least to you, you think you fight for us but you just fight for yourself. Who's going to avenge my son, Stark? He's dead and I blame you." From this scene, it makes Stark realize that what the Avengers have done by trying to save people's lives in Sokovia and the latest incident in

Lagos, Nigeria caused a lot of innocent people to lose their lives and leaves the scars for people who survive more than the Avengers can comprehend. In displaying her liberty, Mrs. Spencerspeaks the truth about what happened to her family and evokes Stark to the reality of his actions and helps him to decide to agree with the Sokovia Accords. Although the Avengers ultimately save more lives than killing, the voices from the majority who lost their loved ones are still valuable. It is important for the individual to have the liberty to present their views even though they may only be from one percent of the population. Their opinion should be listened to because sometimes those little voices will show us the different aspects of the stories and they will make us think more carefully before we make the decisions which will affect a lot of people like what happens with Stark.

The second type of liberty is the liberty of individuality. Individuals have the freedom to show their opinions, plan their own lives and pursue their happiness however their actions and opinions should be limited when they cause harm to others. Moreover, actions from the individuals should not be as free as opinions. For Captain America movies most of the characters have the freedom to plan their lives. Male citizens in *Captain America: The First Avenger* have freedom to choose whether they want to enlist the army, James Barnes chooses his path to serve the country, Rogers chooses to pursue his dream to become a soldier and he chooses not to stop the super soldier operation when it seems to go wrong, the Avengers members have freedom to choose which side to support and show their opinions toward the Sokovia Accords issue. Stark chooses to sign the Accords while Rogers rejects it. These people have the liberty to specify their actions as long as they do not cause harm to others. For the villains and supervillains in the movies such as Adolf Hitler and the Axis power, Johann Schmidt, Alexander Pierce and Helmut Zemo, they also have the liberty to pursuit their goals, show their sentiments, have freedom to choose as other human-beings and do not have to agree with the governments and the rest of the world however, their actions are hazardous to other people. Adolf Hitler and the Axis power have a different perspective about politics with the USA; theybelieve in a dictatorship whilst the USA believes in democracy. In fact, they have the liberty to believe so, but their actions threaten the United States and the Allies so they need to be stopped. Johann

Schmidt and Alexander Pierce are standing against the U.S. government. They have the right to do that however both of them lead HYDRA to intimidate and kill a lot of innocent people. Their actions are not acceptable and need to be ceased. Helmut Zemo who lost all of his family members in the Sokovia incident, has every right to request justice for his family, he can show his opinion supporting the Sokovia Accords which is going to be launched and express his sorrow to the world. Instead, he chooses to get revenge against the Avengers by himself. Consequently, his actions lead to the murder a lot of innocent people in Vienna. Even though the individual has a liberty to pursue and design their own lives, their actions should not be as free as opinions.

*“My father lived outside the city. I thought we would be safe there. My son was excited. He could see Iron Man from the car window. I told my wife, “Don't worry. They are fighting in the city. We're miles from harm.” When the dust cleared and the screaming stopped. It took me two days until I found their bodies. My father is still holding my wife and son in his arms. And the Avengers? They went home. I knew I couldn't kill them. More powerful men than me have tried. But, if I could get them to kill each other. I'm sorry about your father. He seemed a good man with a dutiful son.”*

*(Helmut Zemo in Captain America: Civil War, 2016)*

The statement above reflects the last type of liberty which is the liberty of limits to the authority of society over the individual. Everyone in the Captain America movies are counted as individuals in society including the superheroes and supervillains. Mill (1859) stated that once the individual enters into society, in order to get the protection and benefits that society offers, the individual promises not to hurt and trespass upon other people's rights, and also help to contribute to society. However, people who harm others should be penalized by law but if they cannot be penalized by law, society's opinion and judgement can be used as a punishment. Therefore, no matter who you are, it is compulsory to engage in these conditions from the day you step into society, so all citizens in Captain America movies should be protected if they do not break any promises. The citizens in *Captain America: The First Avenger* show a contribution to society by buying war

bonds to support the army, some men enlist to the army to serve their country, and other people help their country in different ways in order to get the protection from the war. As well as the citizens in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, they trust the authorities to protect their lives from any harm, so when the Helicarriers are used to kill those innocent people it is the government's duty to keep them safe. The citizens in *Captain America: Civil War* also need protection from any threat. When the superheroes' operations, fighting against the criminals, which happened in many cities in the United States and other countries in the world result in the collateral damages that affect a lot of guiltless people, the citizens who experienced the effect from these tragedies call for the actions and accountabilities from the governments and the Avengers. The public opinion of the Avengers has become increasingly divided. On one hand people believe that the Avengers should still operate their missions freely and having the Avengers will keep them safe, on the other hand people who are suffering from the Avengers' missions have the liberty to cry out for justice and ask the Avengers to take responsibility for their actions. After submitting a lot of opinions from the citizens and discussions with other countries, Secretary Ross goes to meet the Avengers at their headquarters and says to them that "The world owes the Avengers an unpayable debt. You have fought for us, protected us, risked your lives but while a great many people see you as heroes, there are some who would prefer the word vigilantes. [...] For the past four years, you've operated with unlimited power and no supervision, that's an arrangement the governments of the world can no longer tolerate. But I think we have a solution." The government has come to the solution to launch the Sokovia Accords which are signed off by the representatives from 117 countries. It states that the Avengers shall no longer be a private organization. Instead, they will operate under the supervision of a United Nations panel, only when and if that panel deems it necessary. For this reason, the Avengers are divided into two groups; Stark supports government oversight because he feels guilty for his role in creating Ultron and the devastation Ultron caused. He also feels that the Avengers need to take more responsibility for the consequences of their actions, as he did when he discovered his company was secretly shipping weapons to terrorists. However, Rogers worries that the Avengers may be compromised if it comes under the control of a nefarious third party, such as the

infiltration of S.H.I.E.L.D. by HYDRA. Secretary Ross states that refusing to sign the accords will be seen as an act of resignation. What happened in *Captain America: Civil War* reflects the liberty of the limits to the authority of society over the individual as Mill stated. Those citizens do not infringe others' right, they do not hurt other people, additionally they contribute to society so they must be protected. Conversely, The Avengers have killed a number of innocent people even though it is not their intention to do so, they should be punished by law. Therefore, launching the Sokovia Accords to put the Avengers under the United Nations' supervision is the right thing to do and to build trust with the citizens. If the Avengers are not punished by law, they will be punished by society because society's opinion and judgement can be used as punishment (Mill, 1859). In fact, the Avengers are punished by both law and society as they are criticized and judged about what they have done by the citizens who have the liberty to show their opinions. Those criticisms make them feel very stressed and guilty so it results in the different perspective of the Sokovia Accords.

#### 4.2.4 Equality

Equality is another value that society wishes for and values; it is commonly translated as 'equality of opportunity'. No matter who you are, what gender, belief, race or religion you are you will get equal treatment under the law. Moreover, everyone must obey the law in order to enjoy the same rights and every person will get the same opportunity to compete and achieve for the success they wish for; Captain America movies reflect this value in different scenes. Steve Rogers, a skinny fragile man, is given an opportunity by Dr. Erskine to be one of the candidates for the super soldier project after Dr. Erskine finds out Rogers has tried to enlist many times. He says to Rogers "Well, there are already so many big men fighting this war, maybe what we need now is the little guy, huh? I can offer you a chance." After Dr. Erskine gives Rogers a chance to prove himself, he does not let Dr. Erskine down. He puts effort in training and does not give up when the super soldier serum process seems to go wrong. He finally achieves his dream to become a soldier and proves that he is worth the opportunity he is given. However, at first when he tried to enlist for the army on multiple occasions he was rejected due to his health and physical issues. It seems unfair to Rogers that the reason he is rejected is



because he is weak; he does not get equal treatment like other men. He should be able to get the same opportunity to prove himself and achieve his dream like Bucky Barnes and other people. So, giving the opportunity to Rogers by Dr. Erskine shows the equality of opportunity that every person should have. After presenting his new innovation at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Tony Stark introduces a grant being awarded to all students, giving them all the proper funding to move forward with their own inventions and ideas; Stark's action reflects the equality of opportunity too. Some of the students might lack money so they cannot afford to do their projects. Hence, giving funds to these students initiates the equality of opportunity for the students to compete for their success. In addition, as every person in society, including superheroes, have the same standing and get equal treatment under the law, so when someone does something against the law that person should be punished by the same standard as others. The Avengers have rescued citizens for a long time, without them there might be more crimes and tragedies, however, during the operations the Avengers have killed many innocent people and they do not suffer consequences. So, it is unfair for normal citizens if the Avengers will not get any punishment by law despite everyone being counted as an individual in society. Citizens might think that the Avengers have a privilege above the law and create the inequality of the society. So, the solution that the governments offer to the Avengers, the Sokovia Accords, reflects that the government's attempt to try to show people that everyone is treated equally; no one is above the law even if you are a superhero who saves people's lives.

Another interpretation of equality is related to class, race and gender ~~the equality for classes, races, and genders~~ in the US.

For social class, in the fashion of US Constitution, the American founding fathers did not aspire to abolish class but what was abolished was the caste system e.g. hereditary privileges enforced by law, the aristocracy, titles and nobility. Instead, the US promotes meritocracy, a person can gain fame and fortune from talent and hard work (Kirk, 2020). Equality and social class were represented in the similar light as the equality of opportunity as it appears that no matter where one starts off in life, rich or poor, if a person has a dream, then there is always a path to accomplish it. For example, Rogers first appeared as a weak man and appeared to



be from the middle class but he can later raise to fame. All characters, despite their social class, contribute to society in their own capacity, in the first film, the roles of people's contribution in the war were mentioned and no social class was deemed to be better than others. The notably wealthy characters are the Starks family, whom contributed in the roles of scientists and their creations were for the furtherance of America's greatness, either by having the upper hand in the war or showing technological advancement—the theme of wealth is portrayed as such throughout the trilogy, that it is the tool of creation for the masses and they are praised for having exceptional talents, not only for their wealth per se.

For the equality in terms of race, Captain America trilogy did not make race one of its central themes. However, in analyzing the character of Captain America as the symbol of the nation, the symbol of what USA would appear as a person, the result is a muscular and blonde Caucasian man who holds American values above all. The representation of Captain America as a person denotes the significance of a white man as he is a central character. There are some people of color cast in supporting roles but most do not cause substantial impact to the storyline. One notable role is Sam Wilson (Falcon) who had a wholesome friendship with Rogers in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Captain America: The Civil War*. Nick Fury, the former director of SHIELD is also another African American actor in the supporting role—his character is a person of authority and has the allure of mystery. Black Panther, the main protagonist from the Avengers, may also be said to be the most impactful hero of color on the film. However, with the mention of some roles of people with color and that they are painted in positive light; heroic, intelligent, authoritative, even royalty—the whole trilogy is still white male-centric. The representation of other races is also lacking.

For the message on gender equality, the film attempted to depict women contribution in the war. In *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Peggy Carter, a female agent is one of the main protagonists and the only notable female protagonist in the film. She had assumed the position of authority as a skilled agent—smart, dedicated, courageous, and intelligent. She is a female character that needs no hero to save her from danger. However, her image is portrayed as traditionally attractive and slim. Other female characters in the first installment were

only extras; they were shown doing jobs such as secretaries and other supportive contribution to men. But given the timeframe of the film, the 1940's where sexism was more pervasive, the inclusion of a female agent character and other roles taken by women in time of war were relatively progressive. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the character of Black Widow became a lead role, she showed her soft and sensitive emotions in addition to the usual efficient and cold-blooded secret agent character. Another female character added in the second installment is Maria, a SHIELD agent, who had only a brief screen time. In *Captain America: Civil War*, another main female protagonist, Scarlet Witch, was added. Her powers caused an accident at the beginning of the film and was ordered by Ironman to be held in her apartment against her will. All in all, there are female representations within the films and although they were represented as equally competent as male heroes, they are all depicted as being beautiful—there are no depictions of other female in different body types or age. Hence, by the author's assessment, the trilogy has some contributions for gender equality by having several strong female characters but there are still limited female representations overall.

#### 4.2.5 Patriotism

Patriotism is the value that is distinctly demonstrated in Captain America movies; especially through Steve Rogers or his Captain America character. Steve Rogers is a very patriotic man who is willing to sacrifice his life to serve his beloved country. He has a strong passion to become a soldier so he tries to apply for the army many times, even though he is rejected he keeps trying until he reaches his dream. His strong intention to be a soldier and serve his country reflects patriotism that he has in himself. After Dr. Erskine finds Rogers, he puts Rogers in a training with other soldiers because Dr. Erskine wants to give Rogers a chance to prove himself that he can be the right subject for the super soldier serum project. In fact, Dr. Erskine has made the decision to choose Rogers as the subject already, however Colonel Philips is unconvinced by Dr. Erskine's decision because he thinks Rogers is too weak to take that duty. So, he takes a hand grenade and throws it at where the new recruits are training, all the soldiers move away quickly but Rogers jumps on top of the grenade covering it with his body. "Get away! Get back!" Rogers

shouts and waits for the grenade to go off but nothing happens. This situation shows that Rogers commits an act of self-sacrificing bravery; he is not afraid to sacrifice his life in order to protect other people. Rogers' decision to undergo the super soldier process shows the courage in him as no one knows whether the process will work or not and it also shows that Rogers has a love of his country because he is willing to do whatever it takes to help his country win the war even if it might cost his life if the process goes wrong. Fortunately, the serum works and it turns Rogers into a super soldier. He is on a front page of many newspapers as he rescues a child from the Nazis. Senator Brandt says to Rogers that the enlistment lines have been around the block since his picture hit the newsstands so he promotes Rogers to do a more important job than just being a soldier. Senator Brandt puts Rogers as a performer dressing up like a superhero to sell war bonds to the citizens around the United States. The purpose of his performance is to create patriotism to the citizens and encourage them to support the ongoing war. When citizens have the love of their country, they will support the war by buying the war bonds, and the government will use those bonds to buy bullets, tanks and other weapons in order to fight in the war. Additionally, the song used in the performance, the Star Spangled Man with a Plan, has a main substance to arouse the citizens to see the importance of the war and to visualize how cruel the Axis power is. The performance works very well as the bond sales increase at least ten percent in every state that Rogers visits, as well as the advertisement in the cinema when Rogers goes to see the movie describing what is happening and how important for the citizens to support makes some audiences' eyes full of tears. The advertisement has an objective to activate patriotism in people's minds. Therefore, the feeling and action that the citizens have toward the war by purchasing the war bonds after seeing the performance or feeling supportive after watching the advertisement reflect patriotism that is successfully created in the citizens' minds. Rogers' costume as Captain America demonstrates an attachment of national values as the costume contains the colors of red, white, and blue with the star which are the colors and a symbol of the American flag. Captain America's costume makes him look more patriotic because it is obvious to see him as a representative representing his country. Rogers as Captain America operates the missions to save a lot of people's lives. For example, he leads an attack to stop

Schmidt from using weapons of mass destruction on the American cities and he sacrifices his life controlling the burning airplane to land on the Arctic shelf instead of crashing it to the city. Moreover, he has to fight the winter soldier in order to stop HYDRA from launching the Helicarriers which aim to kill innocent people around the world and he almost gets himself killed from participating in that mission. In addition, he has an intention to protect the world's citizens from the other winter soldiers as he thinks that Helmut Zemo will wake them up from the frozen machines. Therefore, he is in a hurry to travel to the HYDRA laboratory in Siberia to stop them; the only thing that he is worried about is the safety of the citizens. He does not care if his life will be at risk when he tries to protect his people and his beloved country. Other men such as James Barnes, the Howling Commandos, and males who enlist for the army also show their patriotism. They apply for the army with the same reason; they want to protect their loved ones from danger and serve their country. Captain America is a true patriot, he not only avows to love his country, but he is willing and ready to sacrifice his own interests, his ambition, his property, and his life for his nation's good; if it is necessary. He uses his powers, judgement, and influence to keep the property and his fellow-citizens lives safe, and contribute to the advancement of the nation virtue, prosperity, and happiness (Clark, 1847).

Other than specific scenes, overall, in the Captain America trilogy, it has been evident throughout the films that Captain America is the embodiment of American central values, especially Patriotism. In the first installment of the series, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Rogers was eager to become a soldier and serve his country; supporting the war effort as means of Patriotism. Later, his sense of patriotism evolved, becoming a more complex character with his own moral compass after his doubts of the authority in *Captain America: the Winter Soldier*. His anti-authority and control gave a nuance definition to Patriotism as Rogers backed up his argument on his strict moral code, saving humanity, and not being subjected to political agendas—deeming government agendas to be problematic and deserving distrust. The release of *Captain America: The Civil War* (2016) was at the time USA was at a political divide—it raised a question of whether superheroes were best being free individuals to serve the people or being agents of the state. Captain America made a point that USA as a country that abandoned civil liberties is not a

state that anyone would wholeheartedly serve—and thus Captain America has evolved the definition of Patriotism to grow out of simply serving the state and blind obedient to supervision (Maruo-Schröder, 2018).

### 4.3 American policies

"The attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world. And the world has come together to fight a new and different war, the first, and we hope the only one, of the 21st century. A war against all those who seek to export terror, and a war against those governments that support or shelter them."

(George W. Bush, 2001)

The significance of the American policies is known in the impact to other countries worldwide in varying shape and form. And American films are famously reflecting the stance of American policies and the USA's stance on its political views. One of the symbolic actions in the films e.g. the Captain punching Hitler may be more obvious but with further analysis, the symbolism regarding USA's view of its role in the world stage is deeply integrated within the plots, the characters' actions, and the dialogues. The events in the real world and the use of hard power by the US are reflected in the films and shaped into the US's perspective to build empathy. Prior to and during the period of the trilogy of Captain America, there were several events that meaningfully influence the US foreign policies decisions and relationships with other states. Examples of these events are namely the tragic September 11 attacks, deteriorating diplomacy with Russia from Russia's annexation of Ukraine, the Snowden incident, and the US foreign interventions. Consequently, the US government had issued multiple policies which reflected its sentiments to these events. And accordingly, many Hollywood films, the trilogy of Captain America included, also mirrored this sentiment.

The attacks on September 11, 2001, the fall of the World Trade Center and the unexpected terror left unspeakable trauma in the minds of American

citizens—it marked the beginning of the new concept of warfare and introduced the world of ideological terrorism. The day after the attacks, President George W. Bush issued a statement to recognize the grief of the nation and declared the War on Terror. The sense of urgency arose from the Bush administration and the media in the following days propel the public to assume that the US is the only force capable of battling against global terror; either the network of terrorism or the concept of evil. The statement echoed the words of Nick Fury in the *Avengers* (2012), the movie launched the year after *Captain America: The First Avenger*, saying it to Captain America and Ironman—the team is called to “fight the battle we never could” similar to Bush’s statement, giving the same sense of supremacy and urgency as they are the only ones being called by fate to eradicate evil forces (Hagley & Harrison, 2014).

Post September 11, 2001, the American public was swept into the world of uncertainty. The sentiment left a perfect ground for the superhero genre revival. The films with the likes of the *Avengers* are the responses to the public sentiments of hopelessness, helplessness, fear of terrorist attacks and war. The renewed popularity itself reflects on the American people’s mentality; the desire for revenge, the struggles to uphold democratic values, and the pride in its military power exhibited in the heroic fashion as seen in *Captain America* (Hagley & Harrison, 2014).

Real world events; drone wars, Edward Snowden’s incident, ISIS, other terrorist attacks, and leaders facing political divide—the tone of all events are reflective in the storylines and scenes in the *Captain America* trilogy (Cavna, 2016). The *Avengers* are the culmination of the American political expressions. The main characters represent American political identities in the post terrorist attack. Overall, the *Avengers*’ collective response to the opposite force is portrayed in a black-and-white term; a group of pure hearted individuals raising up against the force of evil, a traditional story arch in typical American war stories (Englehardt, 1995). The tone assumed dichotomy coupled with the justification of the response for attacks—being the guardian of world peace. The mentality mirrored that of George W. Bush administration’s and the media’s narrative post-September 11. The character Ironman is regarded in a journal in the American Political Association as the representation of the military industrial complex and the depersonalization of war.

The character arch of Ironman is placed in the opposition of Captain America, the symbol of American patriotism and abiding to authority. Captain America was from the period when the enemy was obvious, fascism in all its forms--the line of 'them' and 'us' as well as black and white was clear, the past which reflects his view of the world. Following orders is his second nature as it exemplified his patriotism. However, his view of patriotism was redefined over time (Hagley & Harrison, 2014).

The major clash between Captain America and Ironman was on the disagreement in taking S.H.I.E.L.D. under the system of checks and balances by the UN Committee after the catastrophes the Avengers had caused during their fights in the war. To draw a comparison to post-September 11 America, the Avengers' war symbolized the Global War on Terror and foreign policies shaped around the ideology of the fight against all evils. The US army and the War on Terror did not adhere to the rules of *Jus ad bellum*, similar to the S.H.I.E.L.D. independent operations. In this light, S.H.I.E.L.D. may come to represent the US government, CIA, and the department of homeland security (Hagley & Harrison, 2014).

In 2009, eight years after the September 11 attack and three years before *Captain America: The First Avenger*, President Obama declared in his inaugural address of the new direction of US policies; withdrawing troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, lessen nuclear threat, fighting global warming, and other positive initiatives for peace but yet stand strong in the US's readiness to retaliate to terror (Obama, 2009). By the time the first trilogy of Captain America hit the theatre in 2011, the world had seen devastation from the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan; cities turn into rubbles, countries were disrupted by extremist groups, increasingly violent operations by the US army were deployed, e.g. air strikes and drone attacks became common, yet the activities of global terrorism prolonged (BBC, 2020; Arraf, 2018; Gardner, 2020). During President Obama, although his statement to the public had the perception of scaling down the operations for the War on Terror, e.g. withdrawing troops, but in reality, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the US scaled up in droning attacks and counter terrorism operations; even in 2020, the War on Terror has its continuity and still active (Gardner, 2020). In reality and in the Marvel Universe, one may easily see the similarities in the progression of invasions to foreign soil, the justification of fighting terror for humanity, and realizing the mistakes of foreign state intervention while the



damages and drawbacks were inevitable--there is no example clearer than the revenge of Helmut Zemo who came to symbolize terrorists whose origin was to combat the American forces in their home country.

The directors of *Captain America: Civil War* confessed their intention at an interview that they wanted the movie to reflect the complexities of real-world politics. Hence, the blatant cases of interventions of global politics and infringement upon state sovereignty. The individualism of Superheroes and their role as self-appointed global police, although is at odds with state sovereignty, are endorsed as it is the superheroes' duty to save humanity throughout the trilogy. In *Captain America: Civil War*, the Avengers had a cover operation in Lagos, Nigeria--the intervention with other state internal affairs without the permission from the authorities. Even within the US, the violence from the Avengers' battles remained unchecked, suggesting unlimited authority given by the state. Even if the government condemned the Avengers later on, the damages were done (Farrell, 2016).

*Captain America: Civil War* also followed the disastrous battle in Sokovia in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and other cases of collateral damages from wars, resulting in the loss of lives and properties in foreign soils--the chain of events mirrored that of the War on Terror. Hence, when it comes to UN Oversight, the dueling ideologies of patriotically anti-authority Captain America and pro-regulation Ironman are the perspectives arose from political anxieties of the American public. The Captain's distrust for oversight also symbolizes the people's distrust in its government. The anti-authoritarian's streak was understandable. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), Rogers discovered that HYDRA had infiltrated S.H.I.E.L.D., corrupting the organization from within and even the World Security Council was helpless in this regard. The resistance to authority figures can also mean the resistance to corrupted politicians, it is worth noting that the original comics were released during the time of Nixon, Reagan, and Bush Jr. presidency. When Captain America went rogue and fought independently, the storyline sent the message of his criticism to the state (Later, 2016). In *Captain America: Civil War*, Rogers went rogue in his mistrust of the authorities from international institutions, i.e. the UN. In his view, the UN imprisoned Bucky Barnes, deprived his right to lawyers, and may have the involvement in a secret prison camp similar to the Guantanamo prison. Hence, in his



view, being anti-authority allows him to continue his duty in saving humanity. In contrast, Tony Stark's agreement to comply to the Sokovia Accords emerged from the realization that in the process of bringing peace, the Avengers had inadvertently created villains as seen in the case of Helmut Zemo becoming the villain after his family was killed; collateral damage from the Avengers' battle in Sokovia with Ultron, an Artificial Intelligence initially created by Tony Stark but went rogue (Farrell, 2016). In comparison to the US foreign policies, the trilogy unraveled the responses the US had to terrorism, its ideologies and identities that harbored all its resources to succeed and yet still in constant conflict (Hagley & Harrison, 2014).

The theme of the mistrust of the state in the films also existed in the Captain America comics in the 1970's. While in the films where Steve Rogers woke up in the twenty-first century, in the original comics, Rogers reawaken in the era that he did not miss major events of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. At the time, the American public faced the unpopular Vietnam War. For the young Americans, they detested the war as they were drafted to fight. Hence, to make Captain America more relevant, the writer Steve Englehart came up with the Secret Empire plot, an allegory to the Watergate scandal. The scandal, in the real event, involved President Richard Nixon during 1971 – 1974 that ended in his resignation. The scandal began with his administration's efforts to cover up Nixon's involvement in the Democratic National Committee at the Washington, D.C. Watergate Office complex—the break-in was out of the attempt to get negative information of his political opponents to gain advantage on the President's reelection. In the comic, Captain America was on the case to solve criminal conspiracy in the Whitehouse, he tracked down all the accomplices and eventually confronted the crime leader, revealed to be the President whose appearance was similar to Nixon. After Captain America solved the criminal case, he was left with the deep distrust for the government office; his patriotic trust in ruin. He then went on a soul searching journey, changing the name to Nomad—the man who belongs to no country, and then after some clarity, he returned as Captain America, having evolved his patriotic sense to the loyalty to the American dream with no attachment to any political party or government office (Cavna, 2016).

Other than the dichotomous view in good versus evil with the message associated with the US intervention in other states and its War on Terror, the trilogy included the portrayal of Russia as the enemy. Even before the Cold War era, Russia is portrayed as super villains to the United States. Russia is demonized as a norm in Hollywood and *Captain America* is no exception. Upon the *Captain America: Civil War* controversial release in Russia, according to the interview with directors Anthony and Joe Russo, they were aware of the association between Hydra and Russia, and that a scene in the movie where Siberian soldiers working for Hydra with Russia flag on their badges were edited off (Davis, 2016; BBC, 2016). According to James Chapman, a Professor in Film Studies at the University of Leicester, the stereotyping of Russia to villains in Hollywood since the cold war is a form of ideological inflection that extends to Soviet Communism (Brook, 2014).

During the tenure of the Obama administration and the course of the *Captain America* trilogy, the Russia American relationship underwent major diplomatic disagreements. At the beginning of the Presidency, the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov announced the “Reset” of the bilateral relationship between the two nations, despite past retained since the Cold War, their relationship was meant to start anew (Zygar, 2016). However, the deterioration of the bilateral relationship was evident with multiple international conflicts and failed diplomacy; the conflict in Syria, the Edward Snowden asylum in Russia, the construction of the US land-based missile defense in Poland and Romania are some of many impactful examples of the ideological clashes and obvious battle for the role of supremacy in the global stage. On top of all these events, the Russian annexation of Crimea was the turning point in the US foreign policy towards Russia (Woźniak, 2016).

Since 2014, Ukraine has been in conflict with Russia because it wanted to join the European Union (Walker, 2014). Russia has shown the world that it would prevent ex-Soviet countries from joining Western democracies as seen in the case of the war in Georgia in 2008 (CNN, 2020). Obama had made a public statement on 19th February 2014 that: “our approach as the United States is not to see Ukraine as some Cold War chessboard in which we’re in competition with Russia. Our goal is to make sure that the people of Ukraine are able to make decisions for themselves

about their future” (Epstein, 2014). And later in February 22, after the fall of the Yanukovich administration in Ukraine, the US Press Secretary issued a political statement supporting a democratic Ukraine as well as provided help (Slack, 2014); supporting the IMF to provide a financial aid package of \$15 billion, providing technical assistance in conducting elections and effort in fighting corruption. Despite the goodwill from the US, Russia was angered with the intervention and blamed the US for the interference, supporting the anti-government protesters who toppled down the legitimate regime of President Yanukovich. In a different stance, the US also pointed the finger at Russia for going against the will of the Ukrainian people. Worse yet was the Russian annexation of Crimea. As a consequence, the US and EU imposed sanctions on Russia; ban individuals in Putin’s circles, Russian companies, and asset freezes. Russia nevertheless continued with its policy of annexation. The Ukraine crisis and Crimea annexation came to symbolize the battle of democratic ideologies they US fervently support and the attempt by Russia to assert authority in the region after the Cold War as well as discrediting the US effort. As a consequence, the US changed its foreign policy towards Russia, increasing the US military presence in NATO members’ borders (Wozniak, 2016). Again, one observed the similar theme of the US interventions, obvious in the military forces presence and political statements from the President.

US foreign policies had positioned the US as ~~the country in the role of~~ a savior and protector of democracy worldwide. The same image is also projected in Hollywood films and the authority who ensure the alignment is Phil Strub, Hollywood movies that refer to the military need to be reviewed before the project is approved for military cooperation. Strub is an entertainment liaison at the US Department of Defense since 1989. He has a control on allowing the access to military related information and the permission on using the Air Force’s planes and Navy’s ships in movies. The image of the US military portrayed in media are controlled to be strong and heroic in exchange to the lending of military equipment. If Strub is not satisfied with military characters or the image of the troops, he has the power to ask for change in the scripts. For an example, Man of Steel (2013) was initially denied support as Strub considered the portrayal of the military to be too “cartoony”, hence the screenwriter and the whole production team needed to

revised their script. Negative images such as drug use, murder, and torture by the military would be denied of support, meaning the studio may need to spend millions more on production costs. Films like *Platoon* and *Zero Dark Thirty* were denied of support, so the US does not completely censor filmmakers' creations, but they had actively altered the narrative of the portrayal of the military (Weisman, 2014).

In conclusion, although there is limited evidence of the US government's sponsorship of the trilogy and dictating scripts. The Captain America trilogy is undeniably symbolic and representative of the real events that captured the consciousness of millions of Americans and people around the world. The trilogy is also undeniably American-centric, it represents the world through the lens of American political approaches and how American want themselves to be represented to the world—as heroes. Despite all the damages and wrongdoings, all superheroes are empathized as heroes nonetheless due to their ideology of the fight for humanity. Another layer of symbolism is Captain America and Ironman's representation to the unresolvable American debate on security and individual freedom (Cavna, 2016). All in all, the dual ideologies of Ironman and Captain America are the ideologies of two Americans and their distinct perspective of the role their government should assume and the responsibility of America to humanity and the world (Farrell, 2016).

Year	Event(s)	Details
2001	September 11 attack	The attacks on the World Trade Center and major sites in the US orchestrated by the terrorist group al Qaeda (CNN Editorial Research, 2020).

2008	Barack Obama was elected as President	President Obama vowed to withdraw troops from wars (Obama, 2009).
2009	The Russian Reset Policy	The US-Russian Bilateral Policy that attempted to reset their relationship, but yielded no concrete change (Zygar, 2016).
2011	<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	The introduction to Captain America origin story since his recruitment to fight in the World War.
2012	Barack Obama was re-elected	Obama made a remark on US economic recovery and ending a decade long war (BBC News, 2012)
2014	<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	Captain America discovered that the organization he worked for , S.H.I.E.L.D. had been compromised from inside.
	Russo-Ukrainian War	Series of events from protests to the Yanukovich administration to Crimea Annexation. (Woźniak, 2016).
2016	<i>Captain America: The Civil War</i>	The ideological debate between Ironman and Captain America; whether the Avengers should be under supervision, signing the Sokovia Accord.
2017	Obama's presidency ended and Donald Trump sworn in as the 45th President	Hilary Clinton, endorsed by Obama, lost to the infamous businessman Donald Trump. Obama previously called Trump unfit for office (Rodrigues, 2017).

Figure4.1: The timeline of the trilogy of Captain America releases and US foreign policy



## CONCLUSION

The trilogy of Captain America is one of the most blatant cases of art imitating life. With the trilogy being the main installment within the Avengers movies series, expanding over six years and accumulating gross revenue of over \$2.2 billion worldwide (The Numbers, n.d.), shown to more than 4,000 cinema globally (Captain America, n.d.), the influence of the movies are far-reaching—the plot, the characters, the ideologies, and the messages between the lines are orchestrated for the global audience to take the backseat and viewed the conflicts through American lens. The trilogy, through all it stands for, expanded the American soft power in three fronts; culture, values, and the US policies.

People from all around the world empathize with American perspective through Hollywood movies and mass media it produces and exports over the decades. Superheroes movies are especially powerful due to its entertaining plot, relatable characters, and inspiring heroes. The Captain America trilogy is in itself a symbolic representation of American culture and value. It instills the values of democracy, individualism, and liberty as well as the costumes and American way of life through the scenes and dialogues—all-encompassing schemes represent the identity of the USA (Street, 1997). The character of Captain America is portrayed to be bigger than life; strong and muscular, handsome, patriotic, and most of all, the symbolic hero with the ability to protect everyone from harm, i.e. wars and the enemies in all forms. This character identity creates an unconscious link to the identity of the US; forming a connection between the fantasy and the reality in people's minds. Hours spent in the movies, days after days discussing the movies and moral of the stories online with fellow fans, months enjoying the subculture spiraled out of the films in multiple forms, and over the years, the trilogy captured people's imagination.

The messages on American values, democracy, individuality, liberty, equality, and patriotism, in the trilogy were well integrated. The message on democracy was straight forward, democracy rules the land. The government listens to the will of the people and protection and security of its citizens is a mandate. The

clear example is the conflict regarding the Sokovia Accords, the solution to manage the Avengers' operation and limit their authority. Although the message of the necessity of government control is at odds with another American value, individualism, the trilogy still upholds this value throughout the storyline; from Rogers pursuing his dream of serving the army in the first movie to him choosing to operate independently out of his own redefinition of patriotism. Another American value reflected in the trilogy is Liberty. The liberty in thought and discussion as seen through all distinct characters' expressions. The liberty of individuality, every character chose their own destiny and lived out their full identity; Rogers chose to enlist to the army, he chose to stop the super soldier operation, and he chose to reject the Sokovia Accords. The value of Equality or 'equality of opportunity' was demonstrated through the facilitation of individual choices, e.g. Rogers' opportunity to be enlisted and subsequently chosen for the super soldier operation. As for Patriotism, Captain America is the embodiment of American patriotism signifies not only through his name but his willingness to sacrifice his interests, ambitions, and life for his beloved country and people.

The third source of American soft power, policies, is reflected in the symbolic debate over the Sokovia Accords, the conflict between Captain America and Iron represent conflicting ideologies on the US role in the world stage. Over the period of the trilogy, the US government faced multiple challenges on the global stage and changed its foreign policies accordingly; withdrawing troops from foreign soils, operating drone strikes in its War on Terror, increasing military presence in Eastern Europe and imposed sanctions on Russia as a response to Crimea annexation, and other policies concerning the intervention of the US to promote its value of democracy. The essence of this reality is captured and reimagined on film, represented via the conflict in *Captain America: the Civil War*, whether the Avengers' role as a global police is justifiable since the impacts may cause the loss of lives and the fall of state sovereignty. Regardless, through an American centric view presented, the US eventually emerged as the righteous hero.

It is also important to note that the trilogy is not only American centric, it is also white male-centric, imagining Steve Rogers, a handsome and muscular blonde Caucasian man as an embodiment of USA. There are female lead characters and



people of different races but they only appeared in supporting roles that cater to the growth and greatness of Captain America and the portrayal of the US in a heroic role.

All in all, these messages exemplify via the trilogy's plots, storylines, scenes, dialogues, and strings of images are strong influences to the global audience's mindset on the US as a country, what it stands for, and the judgement on its actions. The Captain America trilogy undeniably has its fair share in the contribution to American soft power.



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**BIOGRAPHY**

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