

Spider-Man: Not Far From Military Propaganda (script)

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), is an umbrella term for all Marvel-based cinema released under Disney since its purchase in 2009. This includes franchises such as Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Guardians of the Galaxy, the Avengers, and more. In fact, the MCU is filled with over 770 characters!

In 2016, Disney introduced the MCU's newest, and youngest, Avenger— Spider-Man, otherwise known as Peter Parker, in *Captain America: Civil War*. Peter's original characterization, as seen in previous films such as *Spider-Man* in 2002 and *The Amazing Spider-Man* in 2012, was changed completely to fit the MCU's dynamic. These changes relate to Peter's lack of depth, specifically, the MCU gives little to no background on his past or even a look into his mannerisms— Peter is said to have ADHD and tends to be too satirical for his own good).

To be clear, the character rights of Spider-Man are owned by the company Sony, with a co-ownership deal with Disney to allow him in the MCU. All solo films of Spider-Man released after 2016, such as *Homecoming* and *Far From Home*, were produced by Sony. However, all other appearances of Spider-Man in MCU films like *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Endgame*, were produced by Disney.

In this presentation (and in my thesis), I argue Disney's use of the MCU as military propaganda, with a specific focus on Spider-Man. Disney always had a dedication to promoting the military but due to audiences not having a positive reaction to American military propaganda, Disney changed directions with their free advertisement.

Disney's relationship with the military began as early 1941, creating short films for military training and full movies intended to persuade American audiences in supporting their government's foreign financial interests. Since then, Disney had agreements with the military to receive financial aid and include military technology in some films. Iron Man 1 was heavily supported by the military, spotlighting the newest aircraft and weapons. In return, the film had to present the military in a positive light to inspire new recruits.

By 2008, Iron Man 1 was released, featuring Tony Stark, a billionaire inventor of high-tech military-grade weapons. His trip to the Middle East was highlighted in a film released during the Iraq war, and even featured a terrorist group attacking Stark's befriended American soldiers.

Iron Man's roots in the military was always a main characteristic in his solo films, but it was how he dragged a 14 year old Peter Parker into his militaristic ideals that became the center of my thesis.

Captain America: Civil War was released in 2016 and introduced a number of characters to the MCU, but the two most popular were Black Panther and Spider-Man. The film's plot revolved around Iron Man's desire for superheroes to be bound by laws and supervision, but Captain America disagreed— claiming heroes should have freedom as they protect the Earth. In a climactic battle scene, Captain America leads his team toward Iron Man's team, preparing for an all-out war. The newest characters both having a role— Black Panther on Captain America's team fighting against Iron Man's war-based agenda, and Spider-Man on Iron Man's team.

Peter's role in the battle was anything but symbolic, having no idea what the two Avengers were fighting for. Instead, he joined thinking Stark was taking an interest in him as a protege.

Throughout Spider-Man: Homecoming, Avengers: Infinity War and Endgame, Peter grows closer to Stark, taking on his military perspective and becoming a propaganda tool for the MCU's younger audiences.

Spider-Man: Far From Home is the best representation of this so far, having Peter inherit an AI from Stark with access to weaponized drones and a high-tech database. Throughout the film, Peter is pushed to become the newest Iron Man, and take on the role as leader of an army of superheroes. However, Peter is only 16 and still looking for something stable in his personal life, whether it be a girlfriend or father-type figure.

Meeting Quentin Beck, a superhero with a number of similarities to the late Stark, Peter sees a chance to hand to over his gift. Unbeknownst to Peter, Beck is an ex-employee of Stark, waiting for his chance to get revenge. Beck uses the AI to gain power over the masses, and Peter must find a way to defeat him.

Far From Home's plot mainly revolved around the weapons and illustrated the lengths a person would go through to get access to such power. However, Peter never intended to have control over these weapons and never showed interest in them.

Instead, he kept his distance from utilizing the drones, after an incident on his school bus where he nearly kills a classmate interested in the same girl.

Peter spent a majority of the film in contact with Nick Fury, leader of S.H.I.E.L.D., a counter-terrorism multinational government agency. In some scenes, Peter is employed by

S.H.I.E.L.D., being a soldier for the agency, despite wanting a break from his hero duties to be a teenager.

It was through this agency Peter came in contact with Beck. Beck introduced the villains of the film– the Elementals, monsters from “his universe” that evolve when they come into contact with metal, who also killed his family. Beck explains he was part of a military operation to bring these monsters down when they killed his family, a fact which drew Peter in. If Beck was military, he was like Mr. Stark and could be trusted!

When Beck turns on Peter, S.H.I.E.L.D. is too entranced in Beck’s facade to see his evil intentions. Peter is left to save London’s population as well as S.H.I.E.L.D.

Wearing a weaponized suit created using Stark’s technology, Peter dive-bombs into the action, dodges a maze of drones and obstacles, only to be met face-to-face with Beck. After using his heightened senses and instincts to fight his way through a very-convincing illusion projected through the AI’s drones, Peter is nearly shot point-blank by Beck.

Far From Home never directly mentions the military or government, but it brings together what the MCU has been building up for: the youngest Avenger taking on a militaristic perspective. He had one previously, but it was through Stark’s guidance. Now that Stark is gone, Peter can think clearly and individually, showing he supports the destruction the military and government cause, especially that which was done by Stark’s hand.

Disney continues to have an on-again/off-again relationship with the military but prides itself on using the Avengers for propaganda. While these instances I mentioned may not seem too consequential, they follow Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s theory on Cultural Hegemony. Cultural Hegemony is the idea that the ruling class, or in this case, those with power over all

types of media, create cultural norms over the subordinate class through consumerism. Disney uses the popularity of the MCU to convince audiences of the military's power, control, and humanity. They personify an entire war into Stark's character, making it easier to have compassion for him, along with the troops that invaded Iraq. After watching Iron Man 1, a viewer will unconsciously sympathize with these soldiers, and once away from the screen, the image of the soldiers' humanity will stay with them.

In saying this, Marvel may not be pushing Peter as the next Stark, but he definitely is. No matter which way you look at it, Peter is following his mentor's footsteps. But Marvel doesn't want him becoming the face of the army just yet, so they are keeping the character pure. For now.

As the quote goes: "Its easy to fool people if they are already fooling themselves,"
Quentin "Mysterio" Beck, 2019.