until "Memories Are Made of This" two years and several hits later that Martin finally had a No. 1 song.

In 1956, the team went their separate ways. Martin's career faltered through 1957 with no hit songs and one poorly received film, *Ten Thousand Bedrooms*. The club work continued, however, and 1958 saw a dramatic turnaround with a surprisingly strong serious performance in the film *The Young Lions* and four song hits. Martin also returned to television in number of specials. More hit films followed, including the classic *Rio Bravo* (1959), as did the hit songs. Martin left Capitol Records in 1961 and recorded for Reprise/Warner Brothers for the next dozen years.

Martin then added musicals and light comedies to his serious films, appearing in a two or three features a year including *Bells Are Ringing* (1960), *Ocean's Eleven* (1960), *Kiss Me, Stupid* (1964), and *The Sons of Katie Elder* (1965). At the same time, he was setting records with his nightclub shows and still having hit songs. His biggest hit from this time was "Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime," which pushed the Beatles out of the No. 1 position in 1964. Martin charted 27 more times in the next decade, including the smash "You're Nobody 'Til Somebody Loves You."

Martin began a television show which bore his name in 1965 (see entry). The show lasted nine seasons, and was followed by another decade of over 30 *Celebrity Roasts* and nearly a dozen variety specials.

In 1966, Martin starred in the first of four comic-adventure Matt Helm films, parodies of the James Bond series. A fifth was planned but never made. Instead, Martin played a key supporting role in the hit movie *Airport* (1970), which spawned three sequels and started the "disaster" cycle.

After nearly a decade off the charts, Martin had two hits in 1983, "My First Country Song" and "Since I Met You Baby," the latter helped by a music video which gained heavy rotation on MTV, first as a joke, and then for real. The rest of the 1980s saw Martin begin to slow down on all fronts, eventually announcing his retirement in 1990.

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Marvel Comics revitalized the genre of costumed superheroes in the 1960's. Editor and chief writer Stan Lee (see entry) crafted characters with fantastic abilities, but human flaws: Spider-Man battled not only villains, but self-doubt, guilt and ulcers, and he had to sneak out of his Aunt May's house to do it. The Incredible Hulk and the Thing would have preferred to be without their powers, while members of the Fantastic Four or the Avengers argued and quit on a regular basis. While DC Comics' stories were heavily plotted and

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mystery oriented, Marvel's stories were driven by character. The "Marvel Method" gave the artist more say in the story, and allowed for rousing fight scenes and cosmic settings.

The company that became Marvel was started as Western Fiction Publishing in 1932 by Martin Goodman, publisher of pulp magazines like *Complete Western Book, Star Detective,* and *Marvel Science Stories.* In 1939, Goodman went into comics by contracting with Funnies, Incorporated; a studio of artists and writers that packaged comics for other publishers. Their first project, *Marvel Comics* No. 1 (dated November, 1939), included two of Marvel's seminal characters. Bill Everett's "Sub-Mariner," the water-breathing Prince Namor of Atlantis, was more of a modern-day Marvel villain: waging war on "the surface world" for despoiling his kingdom. Co-star Carl Burgos' "Human Torch" was his thematic opposite; when they began fighting each other, Namor destroyed New York City just for openers.

Goodman followed the industry practice of publishing through several paper companies for tax purposes. *Marvel Comics,* rechristened *Marvel Mystery Comics* with No. 2, was published under the Timely Comics imprint, the name applied by fans to all their books of this period. Some of the Timelys also displayed a small "Marvel Comic" logo.

Timely started an in-house "bullpen" of writers and artists, including the team of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. Their first success was *Captain America* (March, 1941), one of a string of patriotic heroes slugging it out with "Japanazi" fifth columnists well before Pearl Harbor.

Marvel's biggest character debuted in a throwaway story for the last issue of *Amazing Fantasy* (No. 15, August 1962). When bookish Peter Parker received superpowers from an irradiated spider's bite, he stitched his "Spider-Man" costume only to make money on television, then a thief he couldn't be bothered to capture later murdered his uncle. Spidey was a hero unlike any before him: neurotic, unsure of himself, and obliged to earn funds by selling pictures of his fights to a newspaper editor who hated him. Yet he baited the deadliest villains with jokes, and when faced with hopeless odds, found the strength within to turn the tide, a nobility shared by many Marvel heroes.

The Marvel reader of the 1960's was part of a fraternity called "Marveldom Assembled." Stan Lee gave full story credits to artists, inkers and letterers, plus nicknames like Stan "The Man" Lee, Johnny "Ring-A-Ding" Romita, and of course, Jack "King" Kirby (see entry). The entire comic engaged the reader with Stan's wordplay, from Thor's mock Shakespearean dialogue to the carnival huckster house ads. The forsaken text page had become "Marvel Bullpen Bulletins," with chatty goings-on, news and "Stan's Soapbox." The real "True Believers" joined the "Merry Marvel Marching Society," or wrote clever letters to the editor in hopes of winning a "No-Prize" (when fans complained they hadn't received the No-Prizes, a fancy envelope was mailed—with No Prize inside).

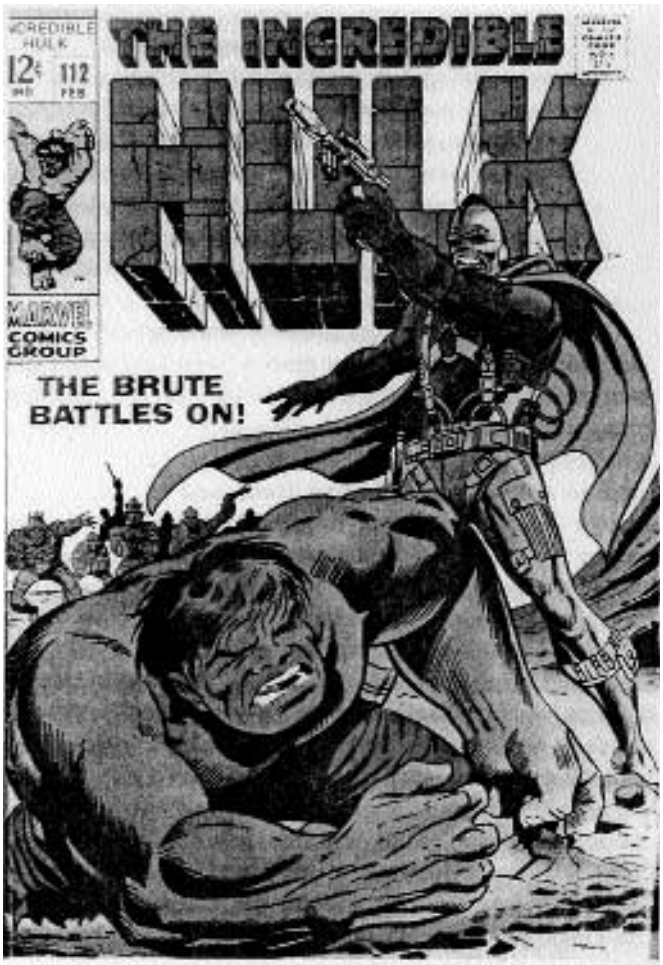
Marvel's popularity was growing, but Marvel's circulation was stymied. DC allowed them to distribute only eight titles a month, so to give Spider-Man his own title, Lee had to cancel *The Incredible Hulk.* New heroes buddied up in anthology titles: The Sub-Mariner and the Hulk were in *Tales to Astonish,* the Human Torch and Dr. Strange in *Strange Tales.* Marvel soon had enough characters to form another team, *The Avengers.* They recovered Captain America from suspended animation in an iceberg, but later broke up, leaving Cap to lead a new team.

In 1968, Marvel got a new distribution deal, and was now able to launch dozens of new titles. The Hulk, Captain America, Thor and others finally got their own books, and Sgt. Fury appeared in both the World War II milieu and the James Bond age as *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* There was even a *Captain Marvel:* no relation to Fawcett's classic character, but an alien spy who switched sides to defend the Earth. Stan was at his moralizing best with the *Silver Surfer* (August 1968), the former herald of the world-devouring villain Galactus, now wandering the world with Christ-like musings on the human race.

The Marvel Age effectively ended in 1972, a year that started with Lee lecturing on comics in Carnegie Hall. Marvel had just taken on the Comics Code Authority by issuing, without Code approval, a Spider-Man story dealing with drug addiction. Its success forced the Code to revise many of its 1950s-era rules. Then Goodman retired, having sold the company to Cadence Industries, and Stan advanced from Editor-in-Chief to Publisher, relinquishing his day-to-day duties.

Marvel has continued to issue flops, hits and true trendsetters since then. Roy Thomas and Barry Smith adapted *Conan the Barbarian,* Robert E. Howard's character from *Weird Tales,* which revived the sword-and-sorcery genre. Chris Claremont revitalized the *X-Men* by blending cosmic soap opera with misunderstood teenage mutants, characters immediately familiar to the adolescent fans that now bought comics at specialty retail stores. In the 1980's, Marvel's reliance on spin-off "X-" books led many fans to deride their "Teenage Mutant Ninja" clichés, and inspired two independent creators to mine gold with *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in 1984.

Marvel's fortunes in television and movies have been somewhat spotty. The syndicated *Marvel Super Heroes* of 1966 was a hit despite its limited animation. Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four each spawned three cartoon series, while the X-Men appeared weekdays and Saturdays on the Fox network. "Spidey" was a feature of PBS' *The Electric*



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Company. Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno starred as *The Incredible Hulk* (CBS, 1978-82), with a plot formula borrowed from "The Fugitive." Its success led to a series of live-action *Spider-Man, Captain America* and *Doctor Strange* TV movies. In 1996, a TV-movie of the mutant spinoff *Generation X* appeared on Fox.

In movies, Marvel's brightest spot remains Republic Studios' 1944 *Captain America* serial. The only other character to hit theatres was *Howard the Duck,* a brilliant satire in comics, but a George Lucas-produced goose egg on screen in 1986. *The Punisher,* starring Dolph Lundgren, went straight to cable and video in 1989, as did a *Captain America* feature in 1990. A low-budget *Fantastic Four* feature was shelved upon completion in 1993, when a bigger budget film was announced. James Cameron signed to direct a Spider-Man feature but the project was bogged down in lawsuits. Stan relocated to California as president of Marvel Films to pitch the characters to Hollywood.

Comics have made Marvel a major entertainment conglomerate. It was sold to Roger Corman's New World Pictures in 1986, then purchased in 1989 by the Andrews Group. Now called the Marvel Entertainment Group, they acquired the trading card company Fleer, and independent publisher Malibu Comics. Of greater concern to retailers was Marvel's 1994 acquisition of comics distributor Heroes World, which was then named its exclusive distributor. Other publishers reacted by signing exclusive deals, forcing retailers to order comics from several distributors at once. This development arose as prices climbed, driving sales down. Marvel started 1996 with a splashy *DC versus Marvel* crossover series, but also with hundreds of layoffs and a halving of its comics output.

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Marx Brothers, Chico (Leonard 1886-1961), **Harpo** (Adloph, 1888-1964), **Groucho** (Julius 1890-1977), **Zeppo** (Herbert 1901-1979), and, early on in their careers, **Gummo** (Milton, 1893-1977), vaudeville players of the 1910s and Broadway stars of the 1920s, achieved their lasting place in American popular culture through the movies they made in the 1930s. They belonged to the generation of vaudeville comics that made it big in film during the early sound era: W. C. Fields, Mae West, George Burns [illegible] Gracie Allen, Jack Benny, and Bob Hope.

I'll Say She Is, starri[illegible] opened on Broadway in Ma[illegible] the best routines th[illegible] smatter-ing of s[illegible] d harp interlude[illegible] others oafishly m[illegible] ed as a Paramount pub[illegible] be seen in the 1982 documentar[illegible] *a Nutshell.*) They quickly became the [illegible] New York literati, and frequently joined a group of prominent luminaries who met at the round table in the Algonquin Hotel. Chico joined the Thanatopsis Club, an exclusive literary poker club, and reeled in producer Sam Harris and writer George Kaufman for their next two Broadway shows, *Coconuts* (1925) and *Animal Crackers* (1928).

These shows were major hits on Broadway for years. Then, after the Wall Street crash of 1929, Groucho and Harpo were wiped out financially—Chico was always broke due to his gambling. They needed more money, and fortunately the film industry was mining Broadway talent for the new "talkies."

Coconuts (1929) and *Animal Crackers* (1930) were filmed by Paramount without changes. The next three films they did systematically reduced the staples of American high culture to comic rubble. *Monkey Business* (1931) portrayed rich society snobs as little more than gangsters putting on airs. *Horse Feathers* (1932) sent up the university as a locus for corruption and foolishness. *Duck Soup* (1933), their

(Addendum: Since this article was written in 1998, Marvel has finally engendered several successful movie properties: "Blade," "X-Men," and "Spider-Man," "Daredevil" and "The Hulk.")