

Origin Story: Educators, the Code, and the Making of the Silver Age of Comics, 1940-1971

Leon James Bynum

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Abstract

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My dissertation interrogates the role played by teachers, professors, researchers, administrators, and librarians in comics activism in the years before the establishment of the Comics Code Authority. Teachers occupied a unique space: public servants in one sense, subject matter experts in another. At the same time, they were not impervious to the media's treatment of the anti-comics crusade, nor were they immune to the sway of religion, politics, and race in the conversation. Using teachers' professional journals and local newspapers, I find that educators existed on both sides of the debate as drivers of the action—sometimes as actors, but also as proxies and participants.

In addition, as arbiters of kids' free time, keepers of literacy, imparters of citizenship, developers of good taste, and specialists in the behavior and needs of students, teachers had a special vantage point from which to observe the effects of comics on young readers. Theirs was a valuable position, and it was coopted by any number of factions jockeying for influence. Probing the records of the comic book industry's regulatory body, I determined that educators were targets of the industry's campaign to legitimate the genre.

My dissertation also situates universities as key sites of pro-comics activities and expands the actors in the anti-comics campaign to include independent scholars, as well as university faculty, administrators, and students. Peer-reviewed research was used by parties on both sides of the debate. Evaluating this scholarship, I conclude that unaffiliated researchers made

consequential contributions to the debate, speaking directly to the public in ways that more traditional researchers could not.

Finally, my project establishes the nuance in educators' role in the anti-comics campaign and surveys the ways they were actors, subjects, and instruments in the movement. Utilizing textual analyses of key Silver Age comics, I find that the comic books created in the wake of the anti-comics crusade were direct outgrowths of the anxieties and aspirations of educators—a deliberate effort by comic book publishers to gain their endorsement.

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Dedication

This dissertation project is dedicated to the memory of my father, Dr. Arthur L. Bynum, with whom I spent many quiet afternoons in the library as he wrote both of his dissertations.

Introduction

1. Preamble

On December 10, 1948, Binghamton, New York was thrust into the national news, as well as the middle of the raging debate around the perils presented to the commonweal by comic books, after five hundred students and their teachers gathered to burn 2,000 of them on a massive pyre on the grounds of St. Patrick's School.¹ As covered in a sensationalistic article about the country's declining morals in the December 20 issue of *Time*, the Binghamton bonfire was discussed alongside children attending Ku Klux Klan events, the advertising of prurient materials to students, and instances of mistaken identity in murder convictions.² Comic books—with their often-repugnant content—were rightfully a matter of great import for all Americans.

The events in this small city close to the northern Pennsylvania border brought acute attention and significantly contributed to a series of fiery anti-comics protests conducted by schoolchildren across North America: a Missouri Girl Scout troop held a mock trial for objectionable comic books, setting ablaze all that were found guilty; Cub Scouts canvassed tony northern New Jersey suburbs, in search of distasteful comics to burn publicly; and after their own acts of biblioclasm, pupils in Chicago were reported to have worked to persuade local vendors to discontinue their sales of the obscene books.³

¹ David Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague: The Great Comic-book Scare and How It Changed America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

² "Manners & Morals: Americana," *Time*, December 20, 1948, Time: The Vault.

³ Bill Smith, "Comic-book Code Dying a Slow Death," *Chicago Tribune*, July 16, 1993; "Comic Criminals to Burn: Jersey Scouts to Round up 'Bad' Books for Bonfire," *New York Times*, January 7, 1949; Garth S. Jowett, Penny Reath and Monica Schouten, "The Control of Mass Entertainment Media in Canada, The United States and Great Britain: Historical Surveys," *Report of the Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry: Violence in Print and Music*. Ontario: Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry, 1977.

The Binghamton bonfire was hardly the first anti-comics activism. When comic books initially appeared in the United States in 1933, most adults considered them to be harmless children's entertainment. However, as their popularity soared and new, lurid genres developed, adults began rethinking the innocuity of comics. In a May 4, 1940 editorial in the *Chicago Daily News*, celebrated author of children's literature Sterling North referred to comics as a "national disgrace," with content so violent and tasteless that adults everywhere should be uneasy. North's ringing of alarm bells was not the first, but it set off a national firestorm because he connected comics to the growing threat of teenage delinquency.⁴ Against a backdrop of zoot suit riots in the West and hepcats dodging the draft in the East, his specific call-to-arms to teachers and parents resonated over the course of the next several years, as he highlighted many of the qualities with which educators would take issue. Distress over comics' effects on literacy, behavior, and aesthetic values overtook adults who worked with children—from schoolteachers to police officers to physicians.⁵ Parents claimed to be shocked by kids' interest in the "lack of reality, the amount of hostile expression, and the harrowing suspense."⁶ By the end of the decade, a panic around comics was in full swing, and the panoply of adolescent misbehaviors was being attributed to harmful comic books.

On May 21, 1948, a pair of Oklahoma City fifth graders stole a plane, and confessed to state police that it was comic books that both inspired the crime and taught the flight skills,

⁴ Sterling North, "A National Disgrace and a Challenge to American Parents," *Chicago Daily News*, May 4, 1940, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵ My review of primary source material suggests that educators were almost concerned by comics' potential adverse effects on literacy and behavior. That comic book art could impede the development of vision and aesthetic tastes was a consistent but not pervasive anxiety.

⁶ Child Study Association of America Collection, 1913-1985, Bank Street College Archives, Bank Street College of Education.

which included a “perfect landing.”⁷ The following December, two British Columbian adolescents portrayed pretending to be “comic book desperados” as the reason behind their murder of a neighboring farmer.⁸ Other cases such as the fourteen-year-old Chicago boy who suffocated the eight-year-old girl next-door or the young teen who hung himself on a clothesline or the six-year-old Pennsylvanian who shot his elder brother after a standard sibling argument were attributed to the influence of dangerous comic books; the confirmation that the child read comics was considered probative, without the presence of any additional evidentiary support.⁹ The presence of a comic book in the child’s bedroom or the knowledge that she or he sometimes partook in the reading of the ubiquitous texts was considered sufficient substantiation.¹⁰ Concerned educators, nonplussed authority figures, and intrepid reporters seemed uninterested in interrogating parental behavior or the myriad other possible causes of violence in children. Even accounting for the considerable changes in how psychopathology has contoured our view of young people and adolescent development in the last seven decades, there was a clear belief in the sway comics had over children.

The range of adults weighing in on the dangers of comics was wide; on December 22, 1948, the New York State Pharmaceutical Association urged its members to cease selling comics at drugstores until publishers adopted the standards of the National Organization for Decent

⁷ “Two Boys Lay Flying Skill to Comic Books,” *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, May 21, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers.

⁸ “‘Comic’ Note,” *The Medina Daily Journal*, December 7, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers.

⁹ “Comic Book Quarrel Ends in Girl’s Death,” *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, May 28, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers; “Comic Book’s ‘Lesson’ Costs Boy, 14, His Life.,” *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, June 2, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers; “Boy, 10, Killed in Dispute over Comics Book,” *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, October 4, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers.

¹⁰ Fredric Wertham. *Seduction of the Innocent*. New York: Rhinehart, 1954.

Literature, which also had been active in agitating against comic books.¹¹ Within a few years, there were laws policing the possession and sale of comics in over one hundred municipalities. Editorial boards argued that the ubiquity of comics meant that there was no real way to protect children from them.¹² Even still, prosecutors in Albany, Watertown, and St. Lawrence and Jefferson Counties announced efforts to prosecute purveyors of crime and horror comics based on laws that banned the distribution of print media that glorified criminal behavior.¹³ Although most of these laws were made unconstitutional by 1948's *Winters v. New York*, the anti-comics fuse had been lit already.¹⁴

Over the course of the next six years, a debate around the dangers of comic books posed to young people raged in the American media, and no constituency was more animated by this discussion than educators. Schoolteachers were portrayed as upholding the belief that comics triggered bad behavior and impeded reading in their students. Newspaper and magazine articles were replete with teachers' unsubstantiated claims that comic books served to dissuade young people from exploring other types of literature.¹⁵ And beyond the media depictions, the pressure was on schoolteachers to express disapproval publicly, as many local parent-teacher associations also opposed comics.¹⁶ At the same time, researchers representing a variety of disciplines and

¹¹ "Comic Books Ban Urged," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, December 22, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers.

¹² Marjorie McKenzie, "Pursuit of Democracy: Does the Fight against Comic Books Encroach upon Freedom of Speech?" *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 9, 1949, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹³ "Anti-Comic Book Drive Planned by District Attorney," *Courier and Freeman*, December 29, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers.

¹⁴ *Winters v. New York*, 333 U.S. 507 (1948).

¹⁵ John S. Ridenour, "Dangerous Comic Books," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, July 20, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers.

¹⁶ "Comic Books Discussed by Local Lions," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, December 15, 1948, New York State Historic Newspapers.

organizational affiliations proposed theories, made recommendations, and offered observations about the much maligned medium. Their function as facilitators of acculturation, arbiters of children's leisure time, and instructors of literacy gave prominence to educators' perspectives on the matter.

The maelstrom around comics continued unabated, culminating in sensationalized televised congressional hearings, starring prominent psychoanalyst and Freudian acolyte, Fredric Wertham. Well-credentialed and experienced in interrogating the causal relationship between environment and criminality in youths, Wertham was positioned perfectly to become a national spokesperson on the matter. His research indicated that comic books were the gateway to delinquency. Citing figures that far exceeded those put forth by other sources, Wertham claimed American children read more than a billion comic books per year, framing the problem as a nigh-insurmountable one.¹⁷ In his 1954 monograph, *Seduction of the Innocent*, he argued that crime, horror, and suspense comics—with their graphic and vivid depictions of violence, sex, and other vices—influenced their young readers' behavior.¹⁸ He also claimed that three-quarters of teachers, librarians, sociologists, and parents agreed with him that crime and horror comics were detrimental to young people. As with other incendiary public statements by Wertham, it is unclear how he arrived at that figure, as archival evidence suggests that the split between comics' supporters and detractors was much less one-sided among educators, but his sway with the public was considerable.¹⁹

¹⁷ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*.

¹⁸ Glenn W. McCoy and Easton Whitney McCoy, "The Comics..... Very Funny," *The Bolivar Breeze*, June 3, 1946, New York State Historic Newspapers; Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*.

¹⁹ Ridenour, "Dangerous Comic Books."

In editorials appearing in upstate New York newspapers, such as Saranac Lake's *Adirondack Daily Enterprise* and *The Catholic Courier Journal* of the Rochester diocese, the influence of Wertham's monocausal arguments was the prevailing one.²⁰ Misapplications of his theories also abounded. Associations with pedophilia and pornography were exploited by Wertham and anti-comics politicians to drum up support for banning comics.²¹ Certainly, because of their popularity, comics posed an additional set of dangers, in that they could be used by adults to abuse young people.²² However, Wertham and his proponents utilized his research to imply a real connection between comic books and criminality, and the results were devastating for industry.

Consequently, after a round of televised congressional hearings and a spate of local ordinances illegalizing comic books, publishers came together and established the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) to regulate their own industry. The mechanism they developed was called the Comics Code Authority, or CCA, and sought to monitor the content of comics, in order to render them more acceptable to parents, police officers, politicians, physicians, and educators. What followed was an abrupt migration from the ungrammatical, raw, explicit, and violent horror and crime comics to the superhero genre—long past the years of its greatest popularity, but capable of being refashioned into something palatable for children and their guardians alike.²³ On the capable shoulders of all-American aliens and mutants such as

²⁰ Ridenour, "Dangerous Comic Books."

²¹ "Publisher Says Readers Want Sexy Magazines." *Atlanta Daily World*. December 3, 1952. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Thomas Pitts. "What's on Your Mind?" *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 15, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²² "Comic Books Used as Lure," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 16, 1950, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²³ This is not to suggest that there weren't other popular genres of comics before and after the ACC. Science-fiction, romance, and suspense comics were popular, though lacked the readership and influence of superhero,

Superman and Captain America, the comic book industry was able to find its financial footing again. Perhaps more importantly, the creation of the CCA felt like a victory to opponents of crime and horror comics, and they turned their attention elsewhere.²⁴

By the end of the 1950s, there was anecdotal evidence that the conversation around delinquency had shifted, and parents had supplanted comics as the roots of bad behaviors.²⁵ Comics faded into the background, as limiting access to pornography, television, and rock and roll became bigger issues for moral crusaders.²⁶ Former opponents now saw comics as well-regulated enough to serve as mechanisms of regulation themselves. For instance, in 1957, boards of education in Illinois ordered hundreds of thousands of reprints of “This Is for You,” a crime prevention comic book for children that was printed by prisoners at the penitentiary at Stateville.²⁷ The relationship between education and comic books had changed demonstrably in since Sterling North’s provocative article. Only a decade after being the vexation, comics were making their way into the curriculum.

A 1971 *New York Times* article entitled “Shazam! Here Comes Captain Relevant” praised comic book publishers for having achieved a level of influence and gravitas such that they could raise issues of real social importance, and attributed this new direction and success to changes

crime, and horror comics. They also appeared much less frequently in educators’ literature and research, so they are not the focal point of this dissertation.

²⁴ Karen Sternheimer, *Pop Culture Panics: How Moral Crusaders Construct Meaning of Deviance and Delinquency* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

²⁵ Robert C. Hendrickson, “Better Adults Mean Better Juveniles,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 4, 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Parents Held Responsible for Child’s Reading Tastes,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 30, 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Pastor Says We Can’t Blame Children for JD,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 14, 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Lynn Watson, “The People Speak: Against Murder Pictures,” *Chicago Defender*, March 19, 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁶ “Horror Comics Contributing to Delinquency,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, April 5, 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Juvenile Delinquency,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 12, 1956, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁷ “Comic Books Tells Don’t’s for Kids,” *Chicago Defender*, June 17, 1957, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

brought about by the Code. Marvel Comics' editor-in-chief Stan Lee identified educators as a primary constituency the CCA sought to satisfy.²⁸ Attaining their approval had been a key survival technique, and the industry now was ready for an updated version of the Code that was more congruous with the zeitgeist. After all, much had changed for America in the intervening years. The nation was in the throes of existential geopolitical threats and social upheaval of a magnitude that made any hazards posed by comic books seem miniscule. By the time the Comics Code Authority received its initial revision, comics no longer served as smoke screens for the real causes of America's societal ills. Brown University even offered a course called "Comparative Comics," articulating a persuasive case for viewing comics as a key part of America's cultural heritage:

No longer restricted to simple, good vs. evil plot lines and unimaginative, sticklike figures, comics can now be read at several different levels by various age groups. There are still heroes for the younger readers, but now the heroes are different—they ponder moral questions, have emotional differences, and are just as neurotic as real people. Captain America openly sympathizes with campus radicals, the Black Widow fights side by side with the Young Lords, Lois Lane apes John Howard Griffin and turns herself black to study racism, and everybody battles to save the environment.²⁹

Educators' fears about the dangers comics posed to young minds, their crude art, and fatuous storylines had given way to rigorous scholarship. The Silver Age of comic books was closing on a high note, the genre now lauded by those who had sought to annihilate it not even two decades before. My project seeks to make visible two points: properties based on Silver Age comics are pervasive throughout contemporary popular culture and educators' values and concerns were fundamental in the shaping them; and the differences in the roles and social functions of various

²⁸ Saul Braun, "Shazam! Here Comes Captain Relevant," *New York Times*, May 2, 1971, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁹ Braun, "Shazam! Here Comes Captain Relevant."

categories of educators were underscored by the ways they participated in the anti-comics debate of the 1940s and 1950s.

2. Project Rationale and Objectives

The anti-comics movement of the forties and fifties, the establishment and administration of the CCA, and the subsequent Silver Age of comics contributed to the mainstreaming of comics as a vital commercial and cultural force. The effect of these three interrelated developments was the rebranding of comic books as tools for education. If the process by which this happened is to be appreciated fully, then the participation of educators in these three areas needs to be amplified. In other words, comics weren't changed *for* educators, they were changed *by* educators. Accordingly, my dissertation seeks to answer three questions:

(1.) What role did educators play in the anti-comics debate? How and why did these roles come to be?

I argue that educators were present on both sides of the anti-comics crusade, some favoring the prohibition of most or all comics, while others saw some potential usefulness in them. I make use of the rather generic term “educators” to encompass a number of discrete job functions and populations that were involved in the comics debate of the 1940s and 1950s. These include primary and secondary teachers, school librarians, principals, superintendents, and college and university professors. Generally, there were substantive differences in how schoolteachers and college professors understood the value and dangers inherent in comics, though neither group was a monolith in its approach to the medium. I also consider those

differences and explore how and why both sets of perspectives were synthesized into the CCA and the Silver Age comics that followed.

The college campus activism around comics differed from that at elementary and secondary schools in terms of substance, motivation, intention, and limitations. These observations elicit a number of questions. How did their different professional contexts shape the perspectives of teachers and academics? And how did these contextual differences affect the ways that each group articulated its perspectives? How did the differences in social function between college faculty and schoolteachers play out in the anti-comics debate? What were the implications of the teaching profession's commitment to "general scholarship and broad culture" relative to comic books?³⁰ What options were available to each group to communicate their perspectives on comic books? What opportunities and limitations to participate in the comic book debate were accorded by the differences in the student populations they taught or their institutional affiliations? How did generational shifts affect educational contexts, whereby postwar coeds were keen to normalize comic book-reading, even among adults.

None of this is to imply that broader social forces were not at play. America underwent significant social shifts during the period covered in this project. Educators certainly were not immune to these forces. How they related to comics—as individuals and as a category—reflects these influences. Thus, I also explore whether there were other social forces—such as the looming red scares—that disproportionately affected educators and how they participated in the comics debate.

Probing the lengths to which teachers went to influence the debate around the value of comics reveals new dimensions of their roles as arbiters of youths' leisure time. That concerns

³⁰ Christine Ogren, *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 85.

about comics encompassed their effect on both literacy and behavior made the voices of teachers especially relevant during the anti-comics campaign. The experience also highlighted the significant role schoolteachers, in particular, had come to play in differentiating children's entertainment from education.

(2.) How was the CCA actuated by the perspectives, actions, and research of educators, and why?

The CCA is recognized as having saved the comic book industry, but the role of educators in shaping it has not been interrogated.³¹ In this dissertation, I argue that, as a means of saving their industry after the anti-comics crusade (ACC), CMAA leaders harnessed the concerns, interests, and knowledge of educators. Publishers also were able to reintroduce comic books as superhero-focused tools for improving reading and conduct, and the CMAA was intentional in its campaign to convince educators of the benefits of comic books. Publishers also were thoughtful about communicating the function of educators within the industry. Researchers and university faculty had been regular parts of advisory groups for years, but in light of the Senate hearings, there was newfound urgency in the public understanding these relationships. Accordingly, educators and other child welfare specialists were hired to develop and administer the Comics Code Authority, and there was a sophisticated apparatus created to communicate about it. Special efforts also were made to proliferate favorable research that supported this new

³¹ Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998); Cary D. Adkison, "The Amazing Spider-Man and the Evolution of the Comics Code: A Case Study in Cultural Criminology," *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 15, no. 3 (2008): 241-261; David Palmer, "The Evolution of the American Comic Book Industry: Are We Entering the Third Wave," *Advances in Business Research* 1, no. 1 (2010): 232-239; Jeffrey S. Langan and Patrick Trimble, "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow? An Examination of the American Monomyth and the Comic Book Superhero," *Journal of Popular Culture* 22, no. 3 (Winter 1988): 157-173; Bill Smith, "Comic-book Dying a Slow Death," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 16, 1993, Library of Congress.

public image. Ultimately, seventeen of the forty planks of the Code addressed concerns raised by teachers, and evidence of educators' influence was observable in various facets of Silver Age comics.

The era's comic book scholarship can be subdivided into three distinct branches: one, research that tested whether comics could be used to teach or improve literacy skills; two, research that considered whether comics benefitted or impaired student learning; or three, research that explored whether comics were any more detrimental than previous generations' leisure literature. The majority found that comics were, at worst, harmless, or posed real potential as educative tools. In the context of this dissertation, these studies are not of interest because of their findings—it is no longer in dispute that there is no negative correlation between reading comics and intellectual or psychosocial development—but rather, as contemporary evidence of the opinions held by educators on comics. Present-day readers likely would experience many of these studies as methodologically unsound by current standards, but they reflect a broad desire in educational circles to grapple with the omnipresent artform.

These research findings were readily available during even the most contentious years of the anti-comics debate, but the public discussions around educators and comics were decidedly one-sided.³² I examine the possible reasons that Fredric Wertham's anti-comics efforts prevailed over scholars on the other side of the debate, as well as the influence pro-comics research wielded over Silver Age comics. I have an express interest in understanding what comics' status as literature—though disregarded and dismissed for their content—meant for educators' roles in the debate.

³² W. W. D. Sones, "The Comics and Instructional Method," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, no. 4 (December 1944): 232-240.

(3.) In what ways and for what reasons did educators influence the content and audience of the comics created in the wake of the CCA?

This third research question considers the prominent cultural space the comic book occupies as a direct result of its education-focused renaissance. I argue that, through the Comics Code Authority, the industry implemented the changes in content, grammar, characterization, plotlines, and visual aesthetics that educators demanded, and describe how these transformations augmented the audience and paved the way for widespread acceptance.

I analyze the ways in which Silver Age comics were affected by educators' interest in the genre during the ACC and creation of the CCA. My interest in understanding the effects educators' interests, research, and concerns had on Silver Age comic book characters, art, storylines, themes, readership, and authorship necessitates the exploration of a selection of comic books created between 1961 and 1971, when many of the seminal Silver Age issues were created. I have identified several issues that demonstrate how educators' concerns were addressed in the Silver Age, a sample of which include *Fantastic Four* #52 (use of science); *Action Comics* #252 (conduct); *Strange Tales* #151 (art); *Daredevil* #7 (race); *X-Men* #11 (anti-communism); *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (personal responsibility); and *Doom Patrol* #104 (gender roles). To develop a full understanding, I explore a set of interrelated questions: How had artists' approaches changed because of educators' activities during the ACC? How was the educational research represented in Silver Age comics? How were strategy and audience reflected in the sophistication of the stories and art? How did publishers such as Marvel and DC Comics use their editorial pages to promote these goals? What did the advertisements suggest about changes in audience and strategy? And how and why were the academy, schools, and science represented in Silver Age storylines? This analysis is accomplished through five textual analyses, each of

which deeply probes an influential Silver Age series and the ways that it addressed the aspects of the ACC.

My dissertation project has four specific objectives. First, it considers the ways in which the ACC presented educators with the new opportunities to test the boundaries of their professional authority. I explore what motivated and limited the actions of different groups of educators. Second, it adds educators as actors in the making of the Silver Age of comics. Their influence was great in the ways that these stories were told, drawn, and marketed; this idea has not been integrated into scholarly or popular analyses of the Silver Age, the period during which comics started attaining cultural legitimacy. My third goal is to address the caesurae in the comics censorship historiography relative to educators. Illuminating the long-term consequences of their reactions to comics places educators among the primary drivers on both sides of the comic book debate and the subsequent changes to the industry. And finally, this dissertation reperiodizes the years of anti-comics activism, from 1945 to 1954 to 1940 to 1971. I argue that 1940 was the beginning of educators' reaction to the comic book threat *en masse*. And by making 1971 the study's terminus, I am able to trace their activities through the end of the first iteration of the Comics Code Authority and the Silver Age of comics. I provide more detail about this shift in the fourth section of this chapter.

3. Conceptual Framework

Generally, scholars of the history of comics maintain that schoolteachers were opposed monolithically to comics. They believe that teachers accepted Fredric Wertham's three primary assertions: comics affected kids' reading adversely; the art had a negative effect on the development of their taste and eyesight; and the storylines in comics led to juvenile

delinquency.³³ Scholars themselves do not accept Wertham's claims, but the belief that teachers did has persisted in the decades since the anti-comics campaign.³⁴ Historical perceptions of teachers as moral crusaders influenced this perspective.

³³ Mary Louise Adams, "Youth, Corruptibility, and English-Canadian Postwar Campaigns against Indecency, 1948-1955," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6, no. 1 (July 1995): 89-117; Annessa Ann Babic, ed., *Comics as History, Comics as Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society, and Entertainment* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2014); Arnold T. Blumberg, "'The Nigh Gwen Stacy Died': The End of Innocence and the 'Last Gasp of the Silver Age,'" *International Journal of Comic Art* 8, no. 1 (2006): 197-211; Ronald D. Cohen, "The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U.S. History," *History of Education Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 251-270; Matthew J. Costello, *Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America* (New York: Continuum, 2009); James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986); Jeremy Dauber, *American Comics: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2021); Dennis Doyle, "'We Didn't Know You Were a Negro': Fredric Wertham and the Ironies of Race, Comic Books, and Juvenile Delinquency in the 1950s," *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 153-179; Matthew W. Dunne, *A Cold War State of Mind* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013); Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Andrew Grunzke, "Graphic Seduction: Anti-Homosexual Censorship of Comics in the Postwar Era," *The Journal of American Culture* 44, no. 4 (December 2021): 300-317; Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*; Jeffrey K. Johnson, *Super-history: Comic Book Superheroes and American Society, 1938 to the Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012); Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Ann Marie Kordas, *The Politics of Childhood in Cold War America* (New York: Routledge, 2013); John A. Lent, *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1999); Paul Lopes, *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2009); Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*; Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl, *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way* (New York: New York UP, 2013); Rhoades Shirrel, *A Complete History of American Comic Books* (New York: Peter Land Publishing, 2008); William Savage, Jr., *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens: Comic Books and America, 1945-1954* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1998); John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830-1996* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Sternheimer, *Pop Culture Panics*; Carol L. Tilley, "Seducing the Innocent: Fredric Wertham and the Falsifications that Helped Condemn Comics," *Information and Culture: A Journal of History* 47, no. 4 (2012): 383-413; Tilley, "Superman Says, 'Read!'" National Comics and Reading Promotion, *Children's Literature in Education* 44 (2013): 251-263; Benjamin Woo, "An Age-old Problem: Problematics of Comic-book Historiography," *International Journal of Comic Art* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 268-279; Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001); Chris York and Rafael York, eds., *Comic Books and the Cold War: Essays on Graphic Treatment of Communism, the Code and Social Concerns* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).

³⁴ Adams, "Youth, Corruptibility, and English-Canadian Postwar Campaigns against Indecency"; Lee Burruss, *Battle of the Books: Literary Censorship in the Public Schools, 1950-1985* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989); Cohen, "The Delinquents"; Grunzke, "Graphic Seduction"; Johnson, *Super-history*; Kordas, *The Politics of Childhood*; Lent, *Pulp Demons*; Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015); Matthew Paul McAllister, "Cultural Argument and Organizational Constraint in the Comic Book Industry," *Journal of Communication* 40, no. 1 (March 1990): 55-71; Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*; L. Norman Rosenberg, and Emily S. Rosenberg, "Rethinking Themes for Teaching the Era of the Cold War," *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 5-9; Savage, *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens*; Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*; Paul Thomas, ed., *Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction* (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2013); Tilley, "Superman Says."

Relatedly, university-affiliated researchers and faculty were interested in the medium as well, and college campuses were replete with pro-comics activities and scholarship on their uses. And until the advent of graphic novels in the 1980s, most Americans inaccurately believed that only children read comics. In actuality, a significant portion of readers were college students—even in the 1950s and 1960s. They were vocal about their reading of comics, and campus activities reflected the interest students and faculty had in the medium. Nevertheless, historians neither have looked systematically at college students' participation in the comics debate nor the university as a site of activism around comics.³⁵

In my dissertation, I posit that educators existed on both sides of the debate. In some instances, they were drivers of the action and in others, they were emblems other factions used to support their own viewpoints. Teachers, in particular, occupied a unique space: public servants in one sense, subject matter experts in another. Even so, they were not immune to the media's portrayal of the ACC, nor were they insusceptible to the sway of other powerful forces that had an interest in comics' content. Churches, political parties, and other important figures influenced the way the comics debate was presented. Educators sometimes worked with them and were used by them at other times. In that my goal is to restore educators in the historical narrative on the anti-comics crusade, I strive to present the range of educators' professional, aesthetic, and

³⁵ Due to the public scrutiny that reading and conduct received during the anti-comics campaign, much of the historical research centers primary and secondary schools. These texts include: Frederick Luis Aldama, "At the Crossroads of 21st-century Education Book Bans and Censorship," *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* 32, no. 9 (June-July 2022): 38-40; Burrell, *Battle of the Books*; Cohen, "The Delinquents"; Doyle, "We Didn't Know You Were a Negro"; Robert Genter, "'With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility': Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40, no. 6 (2007): 953-978; Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*; Paul Hirsch, "'This Is Our Enemy': The Writers' War Board and Representations of Race in Comic Books, 1942-1945," *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (2014): 448-486; Johnson, *Super-history*; Kordas, *The Politics of Childhood*; Lent, *Pulp Demons*; Michelle Nolan, *Love on the Racks: A History of American Romance Comics* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008); Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*; Savage, *Comnies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens*; Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*; Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013); Tilley, "Superman Says."

personal perspectives on comics. The ideas about the relative levels of morality of comics reflect my reading of archival sources and not my own value judgments. Accordingly, this project does not present more recent comics studies analyses on how sexuality was not eliminated by the CCA, but rather, was coded differently.³⁶ My contention is that educators viewed the Code as part of an effort to regulate, improve, and preserve the artform, rather than focus on the ways it limited artistic freedom.

In addition, teachers, professors, and researchers were targets of the industry's campaign to legitimate the genre. If educators could be convinced of comics' harmlessness and even benefits, then they could give their imprimatur, and thus make parents and other authority figures accept—or at least ignore—the medium. Classroom teachers occupied a unique space as arbiters of kids' free time, the keepers of literacy, the imparters of citizenship, developers of good taste, and specialists in the behavior and needs of students. Theirs was a valuable position, and it was coopted by any number of factions jockeying for influence.

This dissertation also situates universities as key sites of pro-comics activities. Peer-reviewed research was used to support the arguments of parties on both sides of the debate. I examine this research, who utilized it, and for what reasons. Moreover, universities were early adopters of comic books as communication tools. Beyond the academy, unaffiliated researchers made consequential contributions to the debate, speaking directly to the public in ways that more traditional researchers could not. My dissertation seeks to expand the ACC to include independent scholars and university faculty, administrators, and students, by examining their

³⁶ Joseph J. Darowski, *X-Men and the Mutant Metaphor: Race and Gender in the Comic Books* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014); Andrew Deman, *The Claremont Run: Subverting Gender in the X-Men* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2023); Esther De Dauw, *Hot Pants and Spandex Suits: Gender Representation in American Superhero Comic Books* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2021); Anna Peppard, ed. *Supersex: Sexuality, Fantasy, and the Superhero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020).

research and editorials as indicators of their positionality, which has not been an objective of previous scholarship on the topic.

Ultimately, my project establishes the nuance in educators' role in the anti-comics campaign and surveys the ways they were actors, subjects, and instruments in the movement. It also posits that the comic books created in the wake of the anti-comics crusade were direct outgrowths of the anxieties and aspirations of educators—a deliberate effort by comic book publishers to gain their endorsement.

In order to accomplish this, I establish a framework for understanding a diverse group of professionals that isn't combined typically, but their parallel relationships to youth created similar challenges and opportunities during the ACC. I make use of the rather generic term "educators" to encompass primary and secondary teachers, librarians, principals, superintendents, researchers, and college and university professors. I explore the ways that their relationships to comics were demarcated by the age groups they taught. Throughout the study, I separate them into three groups: those who worked with primary and secondary school children, including classroom teachers, school librarians and administrators, and superintendents; and those who worked at the postsecondary level, including professors, deans, and provosts; and those who identified primarily as university-affiliated and independent researchers (rather than teachers or faculty). I argue that this is a key determinant in their positions on comic books.

I am employing traditional historical methods that make use of both primary source material and secondary literature to develop the narrative. A review of available newspapers reflects that, while elementary and secondary school activism was a national phenomenon, there was plentiful activity in New York state, especially with in Albany, Binghamton, and Rochester.³⁷ I have

³⁷ "Auburn Children Burn Comics in Huge Bonfire," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, December 30, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Catholic Students Burn up Comic Books," *New York Times*, December 11, 1948, ProQuest

conducted an investigation of New York state activities, contextualized within the broader national debate; Upstate New York anti-comics activism was covered robustly by their press.

Anti-comics demonstrations were common throughout the country, but the Hudson Valley experienced a considerable amount of activism. Historian Neil Maher characterized the region as marked by “working-class frustration.”³⁸ Demographic shifts brought large numbers of African Americans from the Lower South to the area, affecting available jobs, affordable housing, and the balance of political power.³⁹ An increase of European immigrants had destabilized traditional notions of community.⁴⁰ This came on the heels of a decrease in demand for milk during the Depression, which had damaged a local economy dependent upon the dairy industry.⁴¹ Additionally, the region had a strong and deep religious history, both evangelical and Catholic.⁴² Religion had a pronounced influence over public life, and schools were not excepted from this. And finally, Americans often conflated notions of race and class with geographic space; this meant that white residents of suburban and exurban places like the Hudson Valley worked hard to separate themselves from urban centers and their purported issues with race and juvenile crime.⁴³ Hudson Valley residents were especially on-edge due to this blend of factors;

Historical Newspapers; “Comic Books Raise Issue in Elmira and Rochester,” *The Catholic Courier Journal*, July 1, 1948. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁸ Neil M. Maher, “Work for Others but None for Us: The Economic and Environmental Inequalities of New Deal Relief,” *Social History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 315.

³⁹ Brian Keough, “Politics as Usual or Political Change: The War on Poverty’s Community Action Program in Albany, New York, 1959-1967,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 36, no. 2 (2012): 37-65.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Fones-Wolf, “Revivalism and Craft Unionism in Syracuse and Auburn Labor Forward Movements of 1913,” *New York History* 63, no. 4 (October 1982): 391-393.

⁴¹ Thomas Kriger, “Syndicalism and Spilled Milk: The Origins of Dairy Farmer Activism in New York State, 1936-1941,” *Labor History* 38, no. 2-3 (1997): 273.

⁴² Randall Balmer, “Fundamentalism, the First Amendment, and the Rise of the Religious Right,” *William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 18 (2009): 893.

⁴³ Stacy Denton, “The Rural Past-in-Present and Postwar Sub/urban Progress,” *American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2014):

vigorously eliminating obvious threats like comics seemed the most effective way of restoring stability.

The tenor of coverage in the Hudson Valley press was a defining feature of the ACC. Newspapers needed to sell copies, and the indicting, unrestrained tone—whether in editorials or news—was consistent across the writings on comics. The presumed connections between comics and juvenile crime were too compelling for most people to dismiss easily, and the press seized on this.⁴⁴ Local newspaper coverage of education and comics fell into six categories: activism on the school grounds; self-regulation of the comic book industry; juvenile delinquency; social issues; curbing comics' popularity; and with much less frequency, nonpartisan assessments of their value. To the casual reader, the assumption was that anyone in education necessarily was opposed to comics.

New York and its environs certainly were not the only places of high anti-comics activism. Wisconsin also experienced substantial activity.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the bulk of the laws policing their activities were enacted by the New York state legislature and local municipalities, as the major comic book publishers were headquartered in the state in the 1940s and 1950.⁴⁶ Similarly, the United States Senate's televised hearings also concerned New York-based

119-123; Carl Suddler, *Presumed Criminal: Black Youth and the Justice System in Postwar New York* (New York: New York UP, 2019).

⁴⁴ Andrew Goldstein, "Depravity for Children: Ten Cents a Copy!" *Hartford Studies Collection* (2003): 13, 16-17.

⁴⁵ "The End of Superman," *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribute*, November 10, 1945, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Catholic School Pupils to Burn 'Undesirable' Comics," *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, November 6, 1945, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Comic Book Bonfire Put off due to Rain," *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, November 9, 1945, personal archive of David Hajdu; Chet Szymczak, "Comic Books Burned," *The Maryville Daily Forum*, February 25, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu; "'Operation Book Swap' Is Launched at Stone Bank against Comic Books," *The Maryville Daily Forum*, March 14, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu.

⁴⁶ Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*.

institutions and figures, such as William Gaines of EC Comics, Bishop Edmund F. Gibbons, and researchers Fredric Wertham, Josette Frank, and Laurretta Bender.

A. Newspapers

As an important source of information on these school-related boycotts, local ordinances, and rallies, local newspapers facilitate the probing of issues related to my first and second research questions. The editorials these papers printed also represented a full spectrum of educators registering a wide range of opinions on comics. Articles published between 1940 and 1954 in the following Southern Tier and Hudson Valley of New York state newspapers have been analyzed: *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*; *The Argus*; *The Bolivar Breeze*; *Cape Vincent Eagle*; *The Catholic Courier Journal*; *The Chronicle Express*; *The County Review*; *The Courier and Freeman*; *The Daily Journal Register*; *Endicott Daily Bulletin*; *The Enterprise*; *Fairport Herald Mail*; *The Greece Press*; *The Greenwich Journal*; *The Long Islander*; *The Lowville Leader*; *Lake Placid News*; *Manhasset Press*; *The Medina Daily Journal*; *The Medina Journal-Register*; *The News-Herald*; *North Country Catholic/Our Daily Visitor*; *New Castle Tribune*; *Ogdensburg Advance-News*; *The Ogdensburg Journal*; *Potsdam Herald-Recorder*; *The Massena Observer*; *The Suffolk County News*; *Ticonderoga Sentinel*; and *Tribune Press*. A review of articles and editorials published by the same papers between 1954 and 1960 reflects that anti-comics activism were infrequent occurrences after the passage of the CCA, which makes 1954 an appropriate terminus.

These local newspapers provide the basis for my investigation into the role of educators in the comic book controversies that led to the creation of the CCA. The aforementioned digitized New York state newspapers repose in nine electronic databases: Library of Congress,

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, 1789-1963; National Archives; New York, Digital State Archives; New York Amsterdam News, 1922-1993, New York Public Library; New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017; New York State Historic Newspapers; New York State Library, New York Newspapers; New York State Newspapers, New York Heritage; and New York State Newspapers, New York Public Library. A fundamental contention of my project is that even among schoolteachers, there was a small but vocal group of dissentients that believed comics had redeemable qualities. My research points to these narratives being contained within the interviews and opinion pages of these newspapers.

For the purpose of representing a full perspective of political dispositions, I have reviewed the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *Atlanta Daily World*, *Chicago Defender*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, and *Pittsburgh Courier* during the same period to understand Black educators' perspectives on the comic book controversy. Sensitized to issues of racially-motivated mistreatment, African Americans experienced different facets of the ACC. Since the late 1940s, African American educators were concerned about the negative representation of Black characters in comics.⁴⁷ My contention is that African American newspaper editorials reflected much less consensus around the dangers of comics in Black communities. Around the same time—and years before it would happen with the broader population—the National Urban League sought to harness the power of comic books to educate African American youths on “Negro Heroes,” and immediately recognized the benefit of the educators' imprimatur.⁴⁸ Generally, for African Americans, it was a more persuasive theory that greater sociological forces than comic books were threatening young people, and that

⁴⁷ “First Race Comic Book Out,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 19, 1947, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁸ “Urban League May Revive Comic Book,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, December 13, 1947, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

supposition defined the perspectives of Black educators.⁴⁹ This dissertation interrogates possible reasons for this divide between African American and white educators.

B. Scholarly Journals

In that some educators sought to prove, disprove, or support various assumptions on comic books, published research can serve as a proxy for the perspectives of those in the profession. I subdivide the articles into three categories, based on which of the aforementioned theories it was meant to test: one, comics could be used to teach reading or improve literacy skills; two, comics were totally innocuous, neither benefiting nor impairing student learning; or three, if comics actually produced deleterious effects in young readers, they were no worse than those of the dime novels or penny dreadfuls that preceded them.

My research makes use of a number of online repositories of educational journals that published research on comics, as well as editorials about them that were penned by scholars, teachers, and administrators. The articles therein chronicle the development of 1940s and 1950s educators' ideas on comics. They include: *The American Scholar*; *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*; literary magazine *The Antioch Review*; *Audio Visual Communication Review*; *The Classical Journal*; *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*; *College English*; *The Elementary English Review* and *The English Journal*, both published by the National Council of Teachers of English; *The Elementary School Journal*; *The English Journal*; *The Journal of Education*; *Journal of Educational Research*; *Journal of Educational Sociology*; *The Journal of Experimental Education*; *Library Journal*;

⁴⁹ Thomas Pitts, "What's on Your Mind?" *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 15, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

National Education Association Journal; *Peabody Journal of Education*; *The Phylon Quarterly*, published by historically Black institution, Atlanta University; *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*; *Review of Educational Research*; *Saturday Review of Literature*; *The School Review*; *Science News Letter*; and *Stanford Law Review*. These databases include JSTOR, Project MUSE, Sage Publications, and EBSCO Information Services.

The databases I utilized were particularly valuable resources for reviewing historical scholarly articles from the disciplines of education, sociology, early childhood development, literacy studies, and other areas educators in which most likely were to publish. From within these disciplines, I selected the journals with articles appearing most frequently in the secondary literature on anti-comics activism. Considering these journal articles alongside newspapers and periodicals allows a comprehensive narrative to emerge. Additionally, theses and dissertations, such as Harlan Lewis Harrington's dissertation, "Comic Books and Children's Reading Interests" (1945), provide an even more substantive set of contemporaneous research findings on the educative value of comics.⁵⁰ I discuss possible reasons that Wertham's efforts prevailed over scholars on the other side of the debate, as well as the influence pro-comics research wielded over Silver Age comics.

I appreciate that my reliance on online databases means that my exploration of journals has not been exhaustive. I wrote the bulk of my dissertation was written during the pandemic, and many of the archives I had anticipated being available to me were closed; some have not reopened to the public as of the spring of 2023.

⁵⁰ Harlan Lewis Harrington, *Comic Books and Children's Reading Interests*, M.A. thesis, Boston University, 1945.

C. Professional Journals

Just as the research published in scholarly journals is a window into the minds of educators, professional journals' editorials and findings penned by scholars, teachers, and administrators reveal a more nuanced discourse on comics. The studies published in professional journals cover a wide range of topics, including the relationship between comics and scholastic aptitude, adolescent behavior, and juvenile delinquency; connections between reading proficiency, comics, and ethnicity; the development of comic books from newspaper funny pages; and the demographics and distribution of readers, as well as the reasons behind their interest in comics.⁵¹ Obtained through JSTOR, the professional journals investigated include: *ALA Bulletin*, published by the American Library Association; *Educational Administration and Supervision*; *Elementary English*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English; *National Parent-Teacher*, published by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers; *The Phi Delta Kappan*; *The Reading Teacher*; *The Science Teacher*.

D. College Newspapers

Large numbers of college students still were counted among comic books readers by the end of the Silver Age.⁵² Because of their students' enthusiasm for the genre, as well as the broader society's concerns about them, university faculty and administrators sought to understand, and in some cases, harness the influence of comics. I have surveyed college papers, published between 1940 and 1971, from the following New York state colleges and universities:

⁵¹ Paul A. Witty and Richard A. Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation I," *Elementary English* 31, no. 8 (December 1954): 503.

⁵² Saul Braun, "Shazam! Here Comes Captain Relevant," *New York Times*, May 2, 1971, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Bard College, Barnard College, Binghamton University, City College of New York, Columbia University, Cornell University, Ithaca College, Syracuse University, Teachers College, Vassar College. These campus newspaper archives were selected based on their proximity to sites of activism at elementary and secondary schools, as well as the roles they played in training teachers or conducting research in education. These news articles and editorials chronicled students' responses to policies and public stances made by university leaders and faculty and provided an additional vantage point of educators' activities.

E. Fredric Wertham's Papers

The anti-comics drumbeat thumped loudly throughout the 1940s and 1950s, with Wertham sounding the alarm around the dangers of comic books in a series of widely read articles. So prominent was he during the period, it is impossible to assess the anti-comics crusade or understand the Code, as demarcated by the first and second research questions, without scrutinizing his work. Having gained strong support from large numbers of concerned teachers, parents, and police officers, Wertham's anti-comics activities only accelerated. He played a key role in persuading Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver to investigate the comic book industry as part of Congress' effort to probe organized crime. On April 21 and 22, 1954, Wertham brought his concerns before a Senate subcommittee on juvenile delinquency. Nevertheless, his most consequential contribution was *Seduction of the Innocent*, a 400-page tome excoriating the deleterious effects of comics. Developed from years of clinical observations, the study had an immense impact, as it engaged authority figures of all stripes around a supposed correlation between comic books and juvenile crime.

While he researched and wrote *Seduction of the Innocent*, Wertham worked at the

LaFargue Mental Health Clinic, which he founded with writers Richard Wright and Earl Brown; it was Harlem's first mental hygiene clinic, and it specialized in adolescent health. The clinic itself was a site of anti-comics activism. Just three years before the Senate hearing, LaFargue hosted mental health education workshops. They were developed by staff psychotherapist Charles W. Collins for the Citizens Mental Health Council, an association of several hundred teachers, psychiatrists, social workers, and housewives, for the purpose of teaching adults to differentiate between harmful and innocuous comic books.⁵³

My project explores Wertham's clinical methodology, relationships to other researchers, scholarly activities, and influence in emerging fields of inquiry. To interrogate them, I studied correspondences and data on violence and comics from the LaFargue Mental Health Clinic records, 1946-1981, in the Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

F. The Child Study Association of American Collection

A contemporary and would-be foil of Wertham, Josette Frank was a public intellectual who lacked academic bona fides but was a prominent voice among comic books' proponents. Through her work with the Child Study Association of America (CSAA), she published several monographs and dozens of journal and magazine articles, all focused on literacy and behavior. By the time the ACC began, Frank already had a loyal following of teachers and parents who eagerly awaited her views on comics. She was an in-demand speaker and advised comic book publishers on educational matters. And like Wertham, she had no primary university affiliation.

⁵³ "Comic Books Topic at Parents' Clinic," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 17, 1951, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Despite this exposure and expertise, her research never achieved a comparable level of influence to Wertham. Making use of Frank's papers in Bank Street College's CSAA holdings, my project examines the reasons for this, as well as why other independent scholars found limited success.

G. Silver Age Comic Books

The Jonathan Zeitlin collection, held by Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, includes the great majority of the seminal issues of the Silver Age, as described in the research of several leading comic book scholars, including José Alaniz, Arnold T. Blumberg, Chris Galaver, Robert Genter, Zack Kruse, Antonio Pineda and Jesus Jimenez-Varea, and Marc Singer.⁵⁴ In addition to works published by Marvel and DC Comics between 1957 and 1970, the collection also includes educational comics from the same era. These permit me to probe the educators' broad influence on the art form via the CCA. Analyses of the visual composition, as well as close readings of the texts, allow for an evaluation of the ways that educators' interests are manifest in Silver Age comics. Reviewing the actual comics—rather than reprints, collected compendia, or digitized uploads online—provides access to ancillary features, including letters to and from the editorial staff and advertisements, that reveal vital information on readership and publishers' intentions. Accordingly, the Zeitlin collection is used to address the third research question.

⁵⁴ José Alaniz, "Death and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond," *International Journal of Comic Art* 8, no. 1 (2006): 234-248; Arnold T. Blumberg, "'The Night Gwen Stacy Died': The End of Innocence and the 'Last Gasp of the Silver Age,'" *International Journal of Comic Art* 8, no. 1 (2006): 197-211; Chris Galaver, "The Rise and Fall of Fascist Superpowers," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 7, no. 1 (2016): 70-87; Genter, "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility"; Zack Kruse, "Steve Ditko: Violence and Romanticism in the Silver Age," *Studies in Comics* 5, no. 2 (2014): 337-354; Antonio Pineda and Jesus Jimenez-Varea, "Popular Culture, Ideology, and the Comics Industry: Steve Ditko's Objectivist Spider-Man," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 6 (2013): 1156-1176; Marc Singer, "'Black Skins' and White Masks: Comic Books and the Secret of Race," *African American Review* 36, no. 1 (2002): 107-119.

H. Comic Book Industry Records

In 2014, after the dissolution of the CMAA, the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia acquired its papers. The Rare Book and Manuscript Library also holds a cache of CMAA newsletters, which were published quarterly between December 1955 through May 1971. These newsletters provide useful insights into how the Code was developed and operated in its earliest years. For instance, one of the earliest publications developed by the CMAA was a brochure explaining its origins, operations, and the professional biographies of its administrators, elucidating the structural connections between administration of the CCA and schools.⁵⁵ These matters are probed further in books the CMAA published on its own progress and processes, including *Facts about Code-Approved Comics Magazines* and the *Americana in Four Color* series. Also of particular interest are the CMAA's public efforts to win broad support for comics as positive reading material for children; approximately half of the CMAA's operating budget went to support the campaign. My project delves into the CMAA's efforts to appeal to educators, as framed by the second and third research questions.

As neither Marvel nor DC Comics makes their archives publicly accessible, the institutional histories they published at regular intervals beginning in the 1990s provide access to otherwise unavailable information on the administration of both companies. Other secondary sources describe the national controversy that led to the creation of the CCA or the history of comics' Silver Age. This set of documents supports the analysis of the second research question. I also want to note that the period during which much of the archival research was conducted coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic closures in New York City. Consequently, one of the

⁵⁵ "Approved by the Comics Code Authority" pamphlet, 1954, MS #1623, Folder 1, Comic Magazine Association of America Records, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library, New York.

key archives, Society of Illustrators Museum/Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art, was closed to the public and their collection of uncatalogued CMAA documents was inaccessible to the public. Instead, I made use of New York Public Library's smaller holdings of CMAA papers.

I. Governmental Reports

Close readings of four governmental reports, issued by the New York Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics between 1950 and 1955, and the stringent 1955 law criminalizing vulgarity in comics (Penal Law, Sections 540-543, entitled "Comic Books") provide additional context on the legal environment in which schools and colleges were operating. The U.S. Senate also held hearings and produced reports relative to the controversy: *A Compilation of Information and Suggestions Submitted to the Special Senate Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce Relative to the Incidence of Possible influence Thereon of So-Called Called Crime Comic Books During the Five-Year Period 1945 to 1950* (1950); *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books): Hearings before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency* (1954); and *Interim Report: Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency* (1955). This content is informative for the analysis all three research questions.

J. Private Archives

Columbia University professor David Hajdu made available to me resources he had collected for his own research. These include newspaper articles, out-of-print books, and other impossible-to-find materials that allowed me to create a robust narrative around anti-comics activism in Upstate New York schools in the 1940s.

4. Chronological Scope of the Study

As mentioned previously, in conjunction with reevaluating the actors on both sides of the debate, my dissertation extends by several years in each direction the anti-comics activism era. Studies of the CCA often focus on the years between 1945 and 1954, treating the matter as another Cold War project that was wrapped up neatly with the creation of the Code.⁵⁶ Considering these issues relative to educators requires a longer view. Placing them at the center of this discussion necessitates examining the social context and attendant perspectives on educators that were so fertile for the anti-comics crusade. Based upon my review of newspaper archives and professional and scholarly journals, there was little attention paid to the potential dangers of comic books prior to Sterling North's 1940 article. For more than a decade after its

⁵⁶ Ron Barlow and Bhub Stewart, eds. *Horror Comics of the 1950s*. New York: Nostalgia Press, 1971; Michael Bowman and Holly Kathleen Hall, "Ordinance 556: The Comic Book Code Comes to Blytheville, Arkansas," *Communication Law Review* 14, no. 2 (2014): 1-31; Stephen Burt, "'Blown to Atoms or Reshaped at Will': Recent Books about Comics," *College Literature* 32, no. 1 (2005): 166-176. Julia L. Certain et al, "The Fourth Decade: 1954-1963," *Language Arts* 60, no. 1 (1983): 75-98; Cohen, "The Delinquents"; Costello, *Secret Identity Crisis*; Dauber, *American Comics*; Joseph O. Dewey, *The Graphic Novel and the Post-Cold War American Narrative* (West Port, CT: Praeger, 2016); Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics, and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2011); Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*; Grant Geissman, *Foul Play!: The Art and Artists of the Notorious 1950s E.C. Comics* (New York: Harper Design, 2005); Genter, "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility"; Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*; Goldstein, "Depravity for Children"; Grunzke, "Graphic Seduction"; Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*; Charles Hatfield, Jeet Heer, and Kent Worcester, eds., *The Superhero Reader* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Cold War Kids: Politics and Childhood in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 2014); Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*; Kordas, *The Politics of Childhood*; Paul Levitz, *Seventy-five Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking* (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2010); Paul Lopes, *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2009); Constance M. McCullough et al, "The Third Decade: 1944-1953," *Language Arts* 60, no. 1 (1983): 51-74; Diana Moyer, "University Speaker Censorship in 1951 and Today: New McCarthyism and Community Relations," *Journal of Thought* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 29-44; Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "Rethinking Themes"; Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*; Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); David Park, "The Kefauver Comic Book Hearings as Show Trial: Decency, Authority, and the Dominated Expert," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 259-288. Margaret E. Peacock, *Innocent Weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon, *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2003); William Savage, Jr. *Comic Books and America, 1945-1954* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); Savage, *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens*; Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*; Sternheimer, *Pop Culture Panics*; Strub, "Black and White and Banned All Over"; Roy Thomas, *Seventy-five Years of Marvel Comics: From the Golden Age to the Silver Screen*, Los Angeles: Taschen, 2014; Tilley, "Seducing the Innocent"; Tilley, "Superman Says"; Wright, *Comic Book Nation*; York and York, *Comic Books and the Cold War*.

publication, concerned adults—especially educators—were conversant with the aesthetic, content, and quality concerns he broached. The article marked a turning point in the way that educators discussed comic books. Further, 1971 is a logical end point, as it was the last year that the comics industry operated under the initial CCA rubric. While some of the issues of the ACC continued after the implementation of the Code, the educational questions largely had been sorted by the end of the sixties.⁵⁷

Practitioners and fans alike identify the period between 1954 and 1971 as the Silver Age of comics. The superhero genus was created in 1938, with the introduction of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's Superman. Whereas early superhero—or Golden Age—comics were populated by characters who reflected the liberal values of the FDR era, appealed to younger readers, and possessed abilities of divine or magical origin, those of the Silver Age featured heroes with science-derived superpowers, shared aesthetic qualities and influences with pop art, and were conversant with contemporaneous social issues.⁵⁸ A direct outgrowth of the CCA, the Silver Age was a period during which the comic book industry experienced considerable expansion in readership and market share, bolstered by the popularity of superheroes. Among the key successes of the Silver Age are multibillion-dollar properties such as *Spider-Man*, *Avengers*, and *Justice League*. This project interrogates educators' values as expressed in the ACC as well as the relationship between Silver Age storylines, characters, and art, and the perspectives of 1940s and 1950s educators.

⁵⁷ Michael Stern, "Marvel Comics Are for Real," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, March 27, 1969; Lawrence Van Gelder, "A Comics Magazine Defines Code Ban on Drug Stories," *New York Times*, February 4, 1971.

⁵⁸ Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*; Gene R. Swenson, "The New American 'Sign Painters,'" in *Art in America, 1945-1970: Writings from the Age of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism*, ed. Jed Perl (New York: The Library of America, 2014); Justin Englebart, "Superman's Editor Mortimer Weisinger": *The Success and Extension of the Superman Brand in the Silver Age of Comics*, M. A. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017.

In many ways, schools have been sites of activism around not only what young people have been allowed to learn, but also, what they have been allowed to access. Historians understand that the anti-comics crusade is part of the “cycle of outrage” that James Gilbert describes, but without any real analysis of the function or history of schools and educators relative to it.⁵⁹ Educators’ moral panic around comics in the 1940s and 1950s mirrored their later public anxiety over rock and roll, violent video games, and gangsta rap. Moreover, I investigate what comics’ status as both leisure and literature—though disregarded and dismissed for its content—meant for educators’ roles in the debate.

5. Historiographic Contribution

Schools of all types were ground zero in the controversy, with teachers, librarians, principals, and professors staking out positions. Yet educators are virtually invisible in the literature on the anti-comics movement and its legacies, which has developed considerably over the course of the last two decades.⁶⁰ In the rare instance that teachers, principals, and librarians are mentioned, they are represented as enemy combatants of the comic book. Similarly

⁵⁹ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*.

⁶⁰ Bart Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005); Bowman and Hall, “Ordinance 556”; Paul Buhle, “History and Comics,” *Reviews in American History* 35, no. 2 (2007): 315-323; Michael Cart, “From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature,” *Voices from the Middle* 9, no. 2 (2001): 95-97; Costello, *Secret Identity Crisis*; Dauber, *American Comics*; Doyle, Dennis A. “We Didn’t Know You Were a Negro”; Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*. Genter, “With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility”; Goldstein, “Depravity for Children: Ten Cents a Copy!”; Grunzke, “Graphic Seduction”; Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*; Holt, *Cold War Kids*; Johnson, *Super-history*; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*; Shawna Kidman, “Self-regulation through Distribution: Censorship and the Comic Book Industry in 1954,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 75, no. 1 (2015): 20-37; Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*; Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*; Park, “The Kefauver Comic Book Hearings as Show Trial”; Leonard Rifas, “Especially Dr. Hilde L. Mosse: Wertham’s Research Collaborator,” *International Journal of Comic Art* 8, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 17-44; Savage, *Comic Books and America*; Savage, *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens*; Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*; Sternheimer, *Pop Culture Panics*; Tilley, “Seducing the Innocent”; Tilley, “Superman Says”; Wright, *Comic Book Nation*; York and York, *Comic Books and the Cold War*.

unexplored in progressive education research are the ways that schoolteachers' responsibilities relative to reading, imparting culture and citizenship, and arbitrating children's free time intersected with comic books.⁶¹ My project seeks to offer interventions around educators' actions and contributions to the anti-comics crusade, the Comics Code Authority, and Silver Age comics, as well as the broader connections between education and comic books in the mid-Twentieth Century. In addition, communities sought to keep their values central through an intense regulation of students and schools. This was especially pronounced in Catholic contexts. The principle of academic freedom worked in concert with the very different relationship between professors and undergrads to grant higher education contrasting opportunities with comics. I consider the ways that the societal functions of teachers and professors accorded license or limited authority to speak about comics.

⁶¹ Richard C. Anderson et al, "Growth in Reading and How Children Spend Their Time outside of School," *Reading Research Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1988): 285-303; Cohen, "The Delinquents"; Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890–1990* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017); William W. Cutler, *Parents and Schools: The 150-year Struggle for Control in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); James W. Fraser, ed., *Preparing America's Teachers: A History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007); James W. Fraser and Lauren Lefty, eds., *Teaching Teachers: Changing Paths and Enduring Debates* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2018); Dennis Gaffney, *Teachers United: The Rise of New York State United Teachers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); John I. Goodlad, Roger Soder and Kenneth A. Sirotnik, eds. *The Moral Dimensions of Teachers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990); Stephanie Jones and James E. Woglom, "Dangerous Conversations: Persistent Tensions in Teacher Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* 95, no. 6 (2014): 47-56; Michael B. Katz, *Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1975); Herbert M. Kliebard, *Schooled to Work: Vocationalism and the American Curriculum, 1876 1946* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999); Edward A. Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); Adam Laats, *The Other School Reformers: Conservative Activism in American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015); Young Jay Mulkey, "The History of Character Education," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance* 68, no. 9 (November/December 1997): 35; Eileen Murphy, "Who'll Be Tomorrow's Teacher?" *Seventeen* 7, no. 10 (October 1948): 114-115, 168-169; Margaret A. Nash and Jennifer A. R. Silverman, "'An Indelible Mark': Gay Purges in Higher Education in the 1940s," *History of Education Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (November 2015): 441-459; Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "Rethinking Themes"; Diana D'Amico Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers: Professionalization Policies and the Failure of Reform in American History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2020); Jonna Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race in the Battle for School Equity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Kate Rousmaniere, *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); Clarence Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union* (New York: Columbia UP, 2011).

In grappling with the anti-comics crusade, historical works generally frame the participation of educators as outraged and condemnatory; they are presented as a monolith and the focus was on schoolteachers and librarians largely, to the exclusion of higher education. Many historians interpret the ACC as part of what James Gilbert terms “cycles of outrage,” which describe patterns of parents’ and teachers’ anxiety around perceived connections between youth culture and juvenile delinquency.⁶² David Hajdu articulates a similar perspective, finding that the ACC was the latest in a series of regular generational panics around social change in *The Ten-cent Plague: The Great Comic-book Scare and How It Changed America*. His inquiry into the ACC is a broad one, though he does explore the schoolyard of a site of anti-comics activism. He probes the actions of schoolteachers and students, but those of college faculty are unexplored.⁶³

Similar ground is covered in *Pop Culture Panics: How Moral Crusaders Construct Meaning of Deviance and Delinquency*; Karen Sternheimer locates the ACC in a series that also includes fantasy and science fiction novels, video games, pinball, and texting. She describes each as stemming from the tensions evoked by the leisure time paid labor accorded teenagers in the postwar era. Anti-comics activism was led by educators, parents, law enforcement, and the clergy, rather than politicians, who were the key actors in other movements. Like Gilbert, she argues that the ACC is unique among pop culture panics in that teenagers’ increased visibility in the 1940s and 1950s was a major contributing factor. They also agreed that perceptions of race and class always have influenced which behaviors mainstream society found objectionable and the social deviance projected upon teens was socially constructed. Unlike Hajdu, she describes

⁶² James, *A Cycle of Outrage*.

⁶³ Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*.

the perspectives of teachers on both sides of the anti-comics debate, though she does not clarify patterns or causes.⁶⁴ Jonathan Zimmerman also interprets the ACC as part of America's cycles of outrage, but adds that teachers had the specific function of imparting American patriotic ideals. Taking an in-depth look at curricula developed during these periods, Zimmerman explores the differences in the ways that these cycles played out in educational versus religious contexts.⁶⁵ This is a key distinction for understanding how schoolteachers' social functions contoured their responses to comic books.

Patriotism also has been a facet of the conversation around comics and communism. Matthew Dunne and Marjorie Heins both identify Cold War anxieties as the chief influencer of teachers' ACC activities. Dunne connects concerns around comics and brainwashing to censorship in schools, while Heins interprets schoolteachers' public stances as constricted severely by loyalty oaths and purges.⁶⁶ Amy Kiste Nyberg also sees the ACC as a product of Cold War anxieties, but teachers and librarians feared the damage comics would do to kids' literacy more than foreign forces or political retribution. She contextualizes their actions within a broader movement by adults to control youth culture.⁶⁷

Others viewed teachers' actions and attitudes as having more to do with broader social forces than the content of comics. Lee Burrell describes 1940s and 1950s schoolteachers as uncomfortable with the increasing diversity of student bodies and the pressure it brought to

⁶⁴ Sternheimer, *Pop Culture Panics*.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005).

⁶⁶ Marjorie Heins, *Priests of Our Democracy: The Supreme Court, Academic Freedom, and the Anti-Communist Purge* (New York: New York UP, 2013); Dunne, *A Cold War State of Mind*.

⁶⁷ Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*.

include noncanonical works in the curriculum.⁶⁸ Alison M. Parker and Catherine J. Ross both understand the ACC through the lens of First Amendment, with Parker arguing that librarians and teachers were at the vanguard of censorship of comic books, movies, and dancing in years just before World War II, and Ross describing a general failure on the part of schools to protect in the rights of students.⁶⁹

Educational and behavioral concerns were less pressing to teachers than homophobia, which Andrew Grunzke identifies as the driving force of the ACC. Wertham's claims worked in concert with teachers' personal conservatism to create a culture of concern around comics.⁷⁰ Also moving beyond the delinquency argument, Richard D. Deverell and Jill Lepore pronounce the ACC as a reaction to postwar disruptions to home life and gender norms.⁷¹ John Lent agrees, reframing the ACC to an international conversation, and emphasizing that parents and teachers were inspired more by societal changes than a desire to protect children.⁷² My dissertation assumes societal forces are consequential to educators' engagement with comic books, but their professional functions ultimately defined their choices.

Monographs focusing on Wertham and the ACC establish a foundation for understanding researchers' reactions to Wertham and the comic book debate. My dissertation argues that, though Wertham and his supporters seem to have prevailed, opposing research also influenced

⁶⁸ Burrell, *Battle of the Books*.

⁶⁹ Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Catherine J. Ross, *How Schools and Courts Subvert Students' First Amendment Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015).

⁷⁰ Grunzke, "Graphic Seduction."

⁷¹ Richard D. Deverell, *The Comics Code Authority: Mass-Media Censorship in Postwar America* (Ph.D. dissertation, The University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, 2020); Richard D. Deverell, *Men of Steel and Sentinels of Liberty: Superman and Captain America as Civilians and Soldiers in World War II* (M. S. thesis. The College of Brockport, 2013); Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*.

⁷² Lent, *Pulp Demons*.

the CCA. A second objective of my project is to interrogate the ways and reasons that the contributions of independent researchers, including Wertham, and university-affiliated scholars were valued differently by the public. Previous historical scholarship in this area centers Fredric Wertham's work—with earlier texts by Bart Beaty, John Savage, Gilbert, and Nyberg—and discredits Wertham's research methodology.⁷³ Beaty's summary dismissal of Wertham's research is rooted in *Seduction of the Innocent*'s failure to adhere to standard practices in media and communication studies. He also observes that Wertham's research was popular with social conservatives, but provides little analysis for the reasons behind this.⁷⁴ That Wertham sought to discredit social science research on mass media in favor of his own multidisciplinary "clinical method" also is posited by Nyberg.⁷⁵ She goes on to postulate that academics were more tolerant of comics than their schoolteacher counterparts.⁷⁶ I interpret the archival evidence differently and argue that the scholarship revealed diverse perspectives on both sides of the debate. James Gilbert investigates the reasons that Wertham's research eventually fell out of favor with the public. He concludes that *Seduction of the Innocent* was both a beneficiary and casualty of phases of moral panics; once the public's interest in mass media abated, scholars found Wertham's observations too simplistic to warrant continued consideration.⁷⁷ Hajdu adds that Wertham's research reflected a fundamental lack of understanding of comics as an expression of generational independence.⁷⁸

⁷³ Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*; Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking Press, 2007).

⁷⁴ Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*.

⁷⁵ Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*.

⁷⁶ Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*.

⁷⁷ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*.

Conversely, Chris and Rafiel York attempt a rehabilitation of Wertham, noting that he never made a monocausal argument and that his analysis of comics' capacity to communicate ideas around race was groundbreaking.⁷⁹ Though not quite a reclaiming of his work, Jean-Paul Gabilliet's *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* is an investigation into the social forces that gave rise to Wertham's success.⁸⁰ Andrew Grunzke's take on Wertham is a more neutral one. He assesses the broad approach Wertham took to publishing, which maximized the reach of his research. Wertham similarly capitalized on his reputation following his participation in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Grunzke also briefly touches upon the influence Wertham had on research in the emerging field of visual literacy.⁸¹

Not focusing on Wertham specifically, Marjorie Heins explores the lack of consensus in research on media, causality, and behavior.⁸² James C. Lethbridge contends scholars used the fear of juvenile delinquency, the breakdown of the nuclear family, and communism to contain anxieties and dissent during the postwar years; he pronounces Wertham as being at the vanguard of this movement.⁸³ In *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Jill Lepore highlights the research of independent and university-affiliated scholars such as Laretta Bender and W. W. D. Sones who countered Wertham and advocated for the educative potential of comics. However, she does not contextualize their scholarship within the broader set of educators' activities during the

⁷⁸ Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*.

⁷⁹ York and York, *Comic Books and the Cold War*.

⁸⁰ Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*.

⁸¹ Grunzke, "Graphic Seduction."

⁸² Marjorie Heins, *Not in Front of the Children: "Indecency," Censorship, and the Innocence of Youth* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 2007).

⁸³ James C. Lethbridge, "Comic Containment: No Laughing Matter," in *Comics as History, Comics as Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society, and Entertainment*, ed. Annessa Ann Babic, (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2014), 107-122.

ACC.⁸⁴ Richard D. Deverell expands the conversation to one that discusses the practitioners who contributed research in support of comics during the early 1940s, including artist Coulton Waugh and Wonder Woman's creator, William Moulton Marston. Their scholarship supported arguments on both sides of the comic book debate.⁸⁵ Finally, Jeremy Dauber analyzes the relationship between the proliferation of academic research and schoolteachers using comics in the classroom in the 1940s and 1950s.⁸⁶ These last two texts lay a foundation for understanding the significance of research in the ACC.

In addition, I explore the role race played in Wertham's work. His patients were almost exclusively Black; existing scholarship on comics censorship has not sought to illuminate the role of race in the comic book controversy. This is despite the reality that Wertham testified that comic books promoted racial hatred in children due to the negative portrayals of Black people.⁸⁷ I also examine the ways that the reactions of African American educators were substantively different from their white counterparts, as well as how Black comic book characters were changed by the establishment of the CCA. This area generally has been neglected by scholars in historical texts.

I investigate the motivations and actions of educators during the creation of the Code. I also seek to add my analysis to the body of work on Silver Age comic book publishing, in order to probe how educators' activism shaped it. A third objective of my dissertation is to explore the ways that the CMAA responded to educators. I contend that, to ensure the industry's survival,

⁸⁴ Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*.

⁸⁵ Deverell, *The Comics Code Authority*.

⁸⁶ Dauber, *American Comics*.

⁸⁷ "Say Comic Books Foster Rate Hate," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 1, 1954, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

the Code absorbed teachers, librarians, researchers, and administrators into their operations as staff members, developed a Code that addressed their most critical concerns, and targeted them as a key constituency in their publications. However, Lethbridge argues that any embracing of educators by the CMAA was born out of a specific desire not to be associated with communism.⁸⁸ Outside of this text, the relationship between educators and the creation of the Comics Code Authority has not been a topic of in-depth historical scholarship. Other studies focus on the effects of the Code's establishment. One commonly articulated analysis is that the CCA impeded the creativity of artists and therefore hampered the development of the artform.⁸⁹ Nyberg offers the dissenting perspective that the Code didn't hurt the industry, but did cause the readership to skew older.⁹⁰ Another prevailing viewpoint is that the Code was a reflection of postwar America, where people were willing to trade freedoms for security and felt an urgent need to regulate children's access to media.⁹¹ Finally, Gabilliet also examines the CCA as a means of maintaining the industry's financial viability, but without the educational angle. He goes on to theorize that the Code ultimately harmed comic books more than youths' interests shifting to new forms of mass media.⁹² I maintain that neither the function nor significance of the CCA can be understood without apprehending its educative roots.

And lastly, my dissertation considers the ways that educators helped shape Silver Age comics. It is accepted widely by scholars that comics reflect the historical milieu in which they are written, particularly in terms of plots, characterization, and tone. Historians have not placed

⁸⁸ Lethbridge, "Comic Containment."

⁸⁹ Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*. Savage, *Comic Books and America*.

⁹⁰ Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*.

⁹¹ Johnson, *Comic Book Superheroes and American Society*. Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*.

⁹² Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*.

educators as active participants in this phenomenon, though. Silver Age comics that reflect Cold War culture are examined by Matthew Costello, Jeffrey K. Johnson, William Savage, Jr., Dauber, Grunzke, Lethbridge, and York and York.⁹³ As various aspects of American identity shifted in the midcentury, comics manifested the country's apprehensions and aspirations. Dauber disagrees with Grunzke, Savage, and York and York on the political disposition of early Silver Age comics, with the former describing them as embodying liberal ideals and the latter defining them as upholding more conservative values.⁹⁴ Building on ideas about containment culture put forth in Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, Lethbridge specifically notes the influence of military readership on comic books. Eighty percent of all GIs in World War II army camps read comics and publishers continued centering them in the storytelling, even into the Silver Age.⁹⁵

Rather than anything about educators, Nyberg posits that it was the move from newsstand sales to direct market distribution towards the end of the Silver Age that ultimately affected the content of comics most.⁹⁶ Similarly, Deverell notes that market forces were the greatest influences on comics, and asserts that it was the artists themselves who sought to address more social issues after the creation of the Code.⁹⁷ Micah Rueber articulates the defining features of the Silver Age as rooted in the corporatization of American society and the increased pressures around conformity it wrought.⁹⁸ Ramzi Fawaz frames Silver Age comics as exploring the

⁹³ Costello, *Secret Identity Crisis*. Dauber, *American Comics*. Lethbridge, "Comic Containment." Savage, *Comic Books and America, 1945-1954*. Savage, *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens*.

⁹⁴ Dauber, *American Comics*. Savage, *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens*.

⁹⁵ Lethbridge, "Comic Containment."

⁹⁶ Nyberg, *Seal of Approval*.

⁹⁷ Deverell, *The Comics Code Authority*. Deverell, *Men of Steel and Sentinels of Liberty*.

reactions to bigotry and exclusion. He states that they recast superheroes as outcasts and disruptors of the social order rather than patriotic paragons.⁹⁹ Gerard Jones agrees with the social difference argument, but identifies Jewish identity and immigration status as the key influences.¹⁰⁰ Grunzke also notes that comic book publishers earned some goodwill from schoolteachers with the pro-war storylines and patriotic superheroes in the postwar years, though he doesn't clarify whether there was an intention on the part of publishers to do so.¹⁰¹ Additionally, Dauber presents educational comics as evidence of the industry responding to educators' concerns, though his focus primarily is on the Golden Age.¹⁰² The common theme is that social forces influenced the content of Silver Age comics, which is certainly true, but the ways that audience and intention factor into the equation deserve greater consideration, and my dissertation centers educators in this conversation.

6. Chapter Outline

My dissertation is subdivided into five chapters across three parts, which address my research questions. Following the introduction, the first part investigates primary and secondary schools. The first chapter seeks to clarify when and how teachers were expressing their opinions, and when and how others—especially those who objected to comic books—coopted their

⁹⁸ Micah Rueber, "The Man in the Gray Metal Suit: Dr. Doom, the Fantastic Four, and the Costs of Conformity," in *Comics as History, Comics as Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society, and Entertainment*, ed. Annessa Ann Babic (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2014), 156-170.

⁹⁹ Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (New York: New York UP, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

¹⁰¹ Grunzke, "Graphic Seduction."

¹⁰² Dauber, *American Comics*.

perspectives to support their own views. Looking at editorials and published research in professional and scholarly journals, I consider audience, methods of delivery, and related strategies. I also examine the ways that parents' conduct and the dictates of external groups—especially the Catholic Church—shaped educators' actions. Addressing my first research question, I argue that classroom teachers participated on both sides of the debate—sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. I also argue that the context in which they taught shaped their perspectives and behaviors, with differences noted between those who taught in public, parochial, and predominantly Black schools.

The focus of the second part is academia and research. Independent scholars and even pseudo-scientists—most notably, Fredric Wertham and Josette Frank—were at the vanguard of the anti-comics crusade. The second chapter probes the reasons for their prominence, how they operated differently from university-affiliated scholars, and what their independence allowed them to accomplish that other researchers could not. Using Wertham's research on racial issues as a point of entry, I also interrogate scholarship and activism on comics and ethnicity. Along with government reports from the Senate hearings on comic books and juvenile delinquency, Wertham and Frank's papers are the primary archival sources for this section. The second chapter also responds to my first research question; I argue that those researchers who operated independently from academic institutions and school districts were free of many of the professional and political expectations that limited the influence of other scholars.

The third chapter explores the university as an important site of the comic book debate. I analyze the ways that research was used by both pro- and anti-comics factions to argue their perspectives. Again, I investigate audience and context, including the ways that different types of scholarly and university communications were used to persuade diverse publics. I consider

how students' activities and research contribute to educators' views and actions. I also look at policies and public statements employed by administrators, as informed by student behavior. In response to my first research question, I argue that differences in the educational contexts between schools and universities allowed the latter to be centers of pro-comics research and activities.

In the third section, I concentrate on comic books and their publishers. The fourth chapter examines the ways that the comic book industry recognized college professors, schoolteachers, and researchers as constituents whose approval would facilitate mainstream acceptance. Making use of CMAA records, I explore how educators were integrated into the Comics Code Authority as thought-partners, collaborators, and audience. With my second research question as a prompt, I argue comic book publishers projected an image to the public of having synthesized educators' concerns into their regulatory efforts, which contributed to a stabilization and mainstreaming of the industry.

The fifth chapter discusses the ways that Silver Age Comics reflected the concerns and recommendations educators expressed during the anti-comics crusade. Close readings of a selection of comic books created between 1957 and 1971, when many of the seminal Silver Age issues were published, clarifies educators' impact on comics' content, readership, character and story development, and visual art. I employ textual analyses to investigate key themes that were motivated by educators, and the Jonathan Zeitlin collection holds the comics that were examined. Investigating my third research question, I argue that comic book creators utilized storytelling tactics meant to satisfy educators concerns around the genre's capacity to encourage misbehavior.

And the final section catalogues my concluding thoughts about education's enduring legacy in superhero comics, from 1971 to the present—specifically, its widespread acceptance and acclaim, comics' new curricular and pedagogical functions, and the end of the Code. Additionally, I offer my assessments on how comics have changed American education.

Part I

The Avengers

Chapter 1: The School and Comic Book Activism

1.1 Introduction: Advice from the Field

“English Classroom” was a popular recurring column in *The English Journal*, the peer-reviewed publication of the National Council of Teachers of English. Every month, the editors invited readers to write in with classroom challenges, to which other readers could offer suggestions based on their own experiences. Among the secondary school language arts teachers who read the journal, the column accorded opportunities to present perspectives and practices on the classroom’s contemporary challenges. In the forties and fifties, this meant comic books.

In the April 1955 issue, the editors posed a question that had been raised several times in the preceding years: “What is your opinion on teen-agers reading the classics via comic books—thus eliminating the reading of the same classics in their English textbooks?”¹ To be sure, this inquiry was not just about determining what students should read in the classroom; it just as much was a question of whether schoolteachers should give their imprimatur to comic books as an acceptable form of literature for kids.

The timely question elicited responses from across the nation. One came from Dorelle Markley Heisel, an early-career teacher at Cincinnati’s Western Hills Night High School, who enthusiastically described using the medium in the classroom. While noting that comic books were useful when teaching literary devices, Heisel also asserted that students could read comic book adaptations of classics in only a half-hour, thereby allowing them to be exposed to several canonical texts within the same academic year.

¹ Dorelle Heisel and John H. Treanor, “English Classroom: Problems and Solutions,” *The English Journal* 44, no. 4 (April 1955): 232.

A second teacher, Ruth-Marie Ballard of Central Junior High School in the Boston suburbs, also favored using comics in the classroom. Abbreviated classics gave teachers options that could be tailored to the interests of specific students, she said. Because these stories could be finished quickly and came in a format kids knew and enjoyed, students were more open to trying new material. “I have found the project to be very successful in encouraging young people to become acquainted with our great literary classics without the tedium of wading through endless pages of description which they consider boring.”² Although Ballard also gratefully expressed a feeling that the comic book fad soon would fade, she appreciated comics as a critical tool for engaging reluctant student readers.

Expressing the countervailing opinion was John H. Treanor, an English teacher at Francis Parkman School in Boston. Deeply dubious of comics’ value, he adamantly rejected the idea that comic books could communicate the subtlety or depth of the classic novels they were meant to represent.

Right off, I’d deny that teen-agers read the classics through the comics... First, “reading” a classic involves much more than seeking to understand a plot. It means sensing the flavor and atmosphere of the style. It means responding to stirring vocabulary and felicitous phraseology. It means a gradual, slow seasoning, the leisurely unfolding of a dramatic situation. It means hidden shadows, brilliant overtones, sudden vistas that reveal hitherto unknown characteristics of the human heart. It means, too, the music of words and the rhythmic cadence of sustained prose. It means a bond both intellectual and emotional between the author and his reader, each playing a necessary part. Secondly, the true classic could never inform the barren leaves of a comic. A classic is first of all genuine, all wool and a yard wide—no surrender, no expediency, no sham effects, no pretending to be what it is not. A classic requires a full stage because it fashions the great impulses of humanity into drama and soul-shaking scenes. By its very definition, a classic wrings from its creator all that is best—the happiest blending of word and thought, the nicest use of sustained and noble language, the unequivocal standard of true and unchanging morality.³

² Heisel and Treanor, “English Classroom,” 232.

³ Heisel and Treanor, “English Classroom,” 232, 237.

Treanor's ardent answer evinced not only a reverence for the classics, but a deep commitment to a traditional method of reading instruction. It is unclear from his statement whether Treanor actually spent any time reading comics or why he assumed that they could not be used to communicate the themes of a given novel, the beauty of the original language, or even some new insights only made possible by comics' unique amalgamation of texts and images. Unlike Heisler and Ballard, Treanor recognized no educational use for the comic book and he acted on a sense of personal responsibility to express this. His comments typified the concerns of many teachers.

Probing the lengths to which teachers went to influence the debate around the value of comics reveals new dimensions of their roles as arbiters of youths' leisure time. Teachers were concerned about comics' effects on both literacy and behavior; this made their actions, motivations, and voices especially relevant during the anti-comics campaign (ACC). The comics debate also underscored the significant role teachers had come to play in differentiating children's entertainment from education. It provided a different vantage point for understanding how, when, and where teachers' authority was relevant, as well as the dimensions of their activism.

As will be argued in the next three chapters of this dissertation, based on teachers' professional and social functions, two facts defined their participation in the comics debate. First, the nation recognized the value of their imprimatur in this specific discourse. Accordingly, some groups sought to influence how teachers interacted with comics. Others endeavored to represent their perspectives as those of teachers. Still others labored to shape how the public understood teachers' opinions of comics. Teachers certainly spoke for themselves at times, but it was the combination of these factors that accounted for what the public saw as the actions of

teachers. And second, Cold War anxieties limited schoolteachers' freedom of expression, which already was regulated heavily. In the ACC, teachers were in a unique position, whereby they were actors because of their professional role in cultivating young minds, subjects because of their lack of professional stature, and tools of the debate due to their social function of imparting American values.

This chapter draws from literature on the history of the teaching profession in the United States. Two themes inform my understanding of the activities and perspectives of schoolteachers on both sides of the anti-comics debate: how society understood the role and social functions of teachers; and the actual conditions in which teachers were working during the 1940s and 1950s.

In *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race in the Battle for School Equity*, Jonna Perrillo argues that three obstacles shaped teachers' campaigns to attain professional status in the United States. First, throughout the twentieth century, teachers' professional goals regularly worked at cross purposes with the aims of those agitating for civil rights. Second, this relationship remains operative even in the present time. And third, conversations around teachers' rights did not promote a constructive and beneficial school culture among many key constituencies.⁴ She also highlights the ways teachers saw themselves contributing to a more progressive society.⁵

Perrillo frames tensions between New York City teachers and Black communities, born out of an inequitable distribution of resources and dating back to the Depression, which informed the fears of a racially changed society that animated the anti-comic movement. Furthermore, she describes the growing influence that non-educators had in the postwar classroom.

⁴ Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights*, 2.

⁵ Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights*, 3.

...[The] oppressed teacher of the 1950s and 1960s was plagued by what teachers perceived to be a more expansive cast of characters: the civic partnerships created within the civil rights movement, along with changes in the wider culture, meant that the teacher's responsibilities were now "spelled out for her by judges, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, businessmen, and religious leaders." Even parents appeared to have more control over teachers' professional lives than they did.⁶

This latter point was a hallmark of the anti-comics crusade. Other authority figures freely weighed in on comics' effects on learning and behavior, in addition to implementing regulations and policies without teachers' input.

Clarence Taylor's *Reds at the Blackboard* also investigates teachers' efforts to establish professional status, with a specific focus on the role the Communist Party played with New York City unions. The connections between teachers and the party fostered a commitment to a social agenda in their union activities, including "racial equity, child welfare, the advancement of the trade union movement, academic freedom, and better relationships with parents and communities."⁷ This encapsulates many of the conversations in the teaching community during the ACC. Was banning comics was the best means of protecting the welfare of children? Was regulating comics tantamount to dangerous censorship? And how could parents work with teachers to address the new medium of comics?

Taylor also describes the climate of fear in which teachers worked. There was no space for political dissent, as the New York City Board of Education colluded with the police department to keep suspected Communists out of teaching positions.⁸ When teachers harbored

⁶ Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights*, 8.

⁷ Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard*, 1.

⁸ Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard*, 5.

opinions on comic books that ran counter to those of their principals and superintendents, there were professional consequences for voicing them.

Given that schools were socializing forces and tools for national success, Americans across the political spectrum scrutinized the effectiveness of public school teachers. Diana D'Amico Pawlewicz's *Blaming Teachers: Professionalization Policies and the Failure of Reform in American History* examines the relationship between professionalization policies and teachers shouldering the responsibility for deficiencies in the U.S. educational system.⁹

Pawlewicz argues that the agitation of unions may have improved teachers' material circumstances, but did not result in more professional authority, expertise, or prominence.¹⁰ With a focus on New York City schools, Pawlewicz analyzes the ways society has made teachers responsible for the shortcomings of public education and sought to use reform and professionalization to address the issue. Critics described an inept population of teachers as barriers to educative, cultural, and political goals.¹¹ Union leaders, schools of education, administrators, politicians, and the general public couched professionalization in the language of addressing teachers' shortcomings, which undermined efforts to improve their professional stature and opened the space for external groups to compete for influence. Their goal was to deploy only those professionalization processes that reinforced teachers' responsibility for promulgating American values and facilitating assimilation. Cold War tensions and demographic change brought about by the Great Migration, increased immigration, and suburbanization made that goal feel more urgent in the 1940s.¹² These reforms affected the

⁹ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*, 2-3.

¹⁰ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*.

¹¹ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*, 49-51.

¹² Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*, 13.

training and certification of teachers, in addition to educational standards.¹³ Further complicating matters was the fact that teachers were not monolithic, with the mostly female primary and mostly male secondary school teachers disagreeing about educative and professional matters.¹⁴ Rather than resulting in the sort of advancement that professionalization accorded several prominently male professions, the process ultimately limited teachers' classroom authority and autonomy and kept the teaching corps primarily female and white.¹⁵ In fact, Pawlewicz's work is distinct from other historians because she maintains that perceptions of authority as the domain of white men kept classroom teachers from accessing the power reforms accorded unions.¹⁶ Teachers were not uniform in their reactions to comic books, and their professional roles informed these differences in perspective.

Further limiting teachers' authority over their own professionalization were perspectives like those of Boston school superintendent Jeremiah E. Burke, who articulated, "It is for the pupils, not for the teacher, that the schools exist... Teachers are not justified in publicly expressing an adverse opinion of a school official."¹⁷ This contributed to a culture of imposed orthodoxy, whereby teachers lacked the professional space to speak with impunity against parents and school leaders; instead they relied upon anonymous missives in the op-ed pages to advocate for themselves. Having their voices heard meant risking their careers.¹⁸

¹³ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*.

¹⁴ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*, 137, 142.

¹⁵ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*.

¹⁶ Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars*; Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004); Jon Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*, 5.

¹⁸ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*, 183.

Pawlewicz also asserts that professionalization efforts equated whiteness with quality and success and posited white teachers as uniquely qualified to navigate so much distressing change. The interests of Black teachers were excluded from professional discourse almost entirely.¹⁹ These points were evinced in the racialized fears expressed by many whites about comics and juvenile delinquency, as well as in the ways that Black educators and students attempted to debunk causality arguments.

Dennis Gaffney describes a less politically active teaching corps than Pawlewicz, Taylor, or Perrillo. In *Teachers United: The Rise of New York State United Teachers*, Gaffney argues that prior to unionization in the 1950s, New York teachers were poorly organized, politically ineffectual, and either acted upon or ignored by elected officials. Explaining the situation along gendered lines, he also represents teachers as deferential to their administrative leaders, and asserts that most understood their sphere of influence not to extend beyond the classroom.²⁰ Nevertheless, my project contends that Gaffney's observations are not borne out by teachers' activities during the ACC.

Anne Marie Kordas's *The Politics of Childhood in Cold War America* explains how expectations of teachers shifted in the 1940s and 1950s. In the wake of the Cold War, success against the Soviets depended upon the production of patriotic, ideologically consistent Americans. While indoctrination into a belief system that centered patriotism and national superiority long had been an unswerving aspect of American childhoods, this practice became especially significant in the years immediately following the Second World War. Americans

¹⁹ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*, 45.

²⁰ Dennis Gaffney, *Teachers United: The Rise of New York State United Teachers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

believed themselves to be locked in an ideological war with the Soviets, who represented the diametrical opposite of the sociopolitical spectrum. Ingraining beliefs in America's economic and political superiority, manifest destiny, global responsibility, and singularity of citizenship had to be initiated in the earliest years of childhood. And these were understood to be virtues more than mere neutral concepts. Schoolteachers were critical to achieving these goals.²¹

Kordas maintains that the politicization of childhood had been a recurring process since the Revolutionary War and identifies a significant uptick during the Cold War. She asserts that when American virtues have been under attack by foreign forces, this politicization increases. Nationalism was infused in American education, from the deliberately "simplified" spelling of words to distinguish American English from its European ancestor to the memorization of hagiographic anecdotes about the founding fathers. The intended result was patriotic, civic-minded, disciplined, and liberated children who worked industriously for their families, communities, and nation; America's values were made to seem natural aspects of virtuous people's personalities. The values part was crucial. Apprehensions about communism were not uncommon across the globe, though, it was the Americans who broadly believed that they were ordained divinely to eradicate its spread. To combat encroaching communism, public institutions and mass media sought to reinforce middle-class morality. She also argues that these forces resulted in a narrowness of acceptable behaviors for American children and adolescents.²² This constriction also circumscribed how teachers were permitted to work, upholding social expectations for conformity, patriotism, and decency.²³ Jonathan Zimmerman similarly

²¹ Kordas, *The Politics of Childhood*.

²² Kordas, *The Politics of Childhood*.

²³ Kordas, *The Politics of Childhood*.

maintains that teachers have been agents of safeguarding American values, though he clarifies that controversies with religious underpinnings had different histories and motivations than those informed by patriotism. He also connects the role of teachers to a gatekeeping function of the education system meant to ensure the loci of power did not change in society.²⁴

A small corpus of texts describing purges of queer teachers also provides valuable context for understanding the restrictive space which teachers occupied. *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers*, by Karen Graves, is a case study of how Cold War politics led to the investigation and firing of dozens of gay and lesbian teachers in Florida between 1956 and 1965.²⁵ Stacy Braukman's *Communists and Perverts under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956-1965*, also interrogates Florida's termination of gay teachers and suspected Communists, but through the lens of an attempt to maintain white supremacy in the South.²⁶ Though this research has a regional focus, it underscores the extent to which teachers' words and actions were policed and that a culture of conformity defined their experience in the forties and fifties. These conditions elucidate the untenable positions in which some teachers found themselves amid externally organized anti-comics activism occurring on schoolgrounds; speaking out was not free of consequences.

James W. Fraser and Lauren Lefty offer useful framing of how teacher training informed the public's view of the profession. First, until the 1960s, it was variable, with future schoolteachers prepared at technical institutes, traditional universities, land-grant colleges, and

²⁴ Zimmerman, *Whose America*.

²⁵ Karen L. Graves, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

²⁶ Stacy Braukman, *Communists and Perverts under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956-1965* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2012).

the precursors to community colleges.²⁷ This came after an earlier history where having completed basic schooling was considered sufficient training to teach. One of the earliest reforms allowed anyone who could pass a state examination—irrespective of their preparation—to teach young people. And many schools simply hired anyone willing, which only added to the perception that the general public was as qualified as teachers to opine on educational matters.²⁸ Second, Fraser and Lefty posit that things began changing in the mid-twentieth century. With the increased unemployment rates during the Depression, schools were able to hire more selectively. After the Second World War, the G. I. Bill made college-going a reality for larger group of future teachers. And third, the Space Race with the Soviet Union sparked governmental investment in schools, students, and teachers. Accordingly, most secondary school teachers had college degrees by the end of the thirties, and most states required them for all teachers by the end of the fifties. More universities established teacher-training programs, though many were underfunded, undertheorized, and poorly planned. Compounding this challenge was the lack of commitment from school systems to implement professionalization reforms.²⁹ The ways that teachers have been educated have done little to engender public support for their authority and expertise. During the anti-comics campaign, the public did call upon teachers to speak on the value of comic books, but just as frequently, other authority figures and the media spoke on their behalf and university faculty sought to shape their opinions, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The public's trust in teachers' authority and expertise was inconsistent over the course of the comics debate.

²⁷ Fraser and Lefty, *Teaching Teachers*, viii.

²⁸ Fraser and Lefty, *Teaching Teachers*, 17-18.

²⁹ Fraser and Lefty, *Teaching Teachers*, 21-22.

The brief column in *The English Journal* is a valuable resource for thinking about how schoolteachers' roles contoured their participation in the comics debate. It illuminates three key points. First, despite that positions like Treanor's predominated in the press and were represented as educators' unified voice, they were not a monolithic group in their thinking about comics. In actuality, they held a range of perspectives on the genre. Second—and closely related—educators had substantive interest in ascertaining whether comics had any educative value. And third, teachers participated in the comics debate as actors, subject, and tools of those who sought to shape public perception about comic books. This chapter will probe those roles teachers specifically played in the anti-comics debate, as well as how and why these roles came to be, and the implications of schools as sites of activism for teachers, school librarians, students, and administrators. In considering the acts of anti-comics crusading on the grounds of elementary and secondary schools in New York between 1940 and 1954, I analyze the actions of educators, parents and students, and community and religious leaders, in addition to educators' ubiquitous defenses and indictments of comics that crowded editorial pages during that period. I also probe primary and secondary school educators' efforts to persuade each other about the educative value comics did or did not possess. And finally, I evaluate demographic patterns and discuss press coverage of national trends aimed at protecting school-aged children from comic books.

1.2 Golden Age Comics³⁰

Many of the complaints of educators were not unfounded; these unregulated comics code were a vulgar affair. Art and storylines alike lacked specificity. They had a rushed quality, in which no targets for readers seem to have been identified. Stories simultaneously seemed sophomoric but assumed some sexual or emotional maturity on the part of readers.³¹ The art was not detailed and instead, appeared to have been quickly and haphazardly drawn. The coloring was simplistic. Tonally and visually, the artwork was reminiscent of newspaper-style comic strips: cheap, disposable, and minimally communicative. Golden Age comics were not intended to withstand aesthetic analysis or repeated viewings.³²

Stories were short—typically from eight to ten pages long—with little detail or nuance, and characterization between issues was not consistent.³³ Generally, there was light narration, and dialogue was scant.³⁴ The scripts featured colloquial language, and correct grammar was not a priority.³⁵ A textbox in *Human Torch* described the eponymous character as “a scientific creation of the late Professor Horton, who [sic] body bursts into flames at his slightest wish!” That ungrammatical aspect was common to comics of the era. Unlike the better-known comic book stories of later eras, plotlines rarely hinged on the technology-based *deus ex machina*.³⁶

³⁰ I use the terms “Golden Age,” “Silver Age,” and “Bronze Age” to be consistent with terminology used by comic book scholars and fans as descriptors of historical periods and not indicators of relative quality or merit.

³¹ Carl Burgos, Stan Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (June 1941).

³² Stan Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 3 (March 1942).

³³ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

³⁴ Stan Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (June 1941).

³⁵ Mickey Spillane and Stan Lee, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1941).

³⁶ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

Text bubbles included few words and simple language. Some of this was intentional; for instance, early *Human Torch* stories were aimed at the very young, so the text featured only simple sentences intended for beginning readers.³⁷ However, this was undermined by the barely legible lettering that was characteristic of the period.

There was little experimentation with layouts. Most artists adhered closely to a standard two-column, six- or eight-panel arrangement.³⁸ Nevertheless, a few of these early comics did test out new storytelling formats that never caught on. *All Winners Comics* #2 had a short story by Stan Lee; it featured only text without images. The same issue also had other prose sections with only picture montages to support the textual storytelling.³⁹ Creators' names were not listed on any opening splash page. Instead, some featured magazine-style tables of contents, though these did not last long in the genre.⁴⁰ Other formatting aspects also had not been codified by the Golden Age era, and there were inconsistencies in numbering, layout, and volume size between issues.

Depictions of violence were regular and explicit.⁴¹ They showed hangings, shooting, and mutilations.⁴² Murder was depicted—sometimes, quite graphically.⁴³ The torture shown even included elderly people.⁴⁴ And unlike the comics of the fifties, sixties, and seventies, principal

³⁷ Carl Burgos et al, *Marvel Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1939).

³⁸ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

³⁹ Carl Burgos, Stan Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 2 (September 1941).

⁴⁰ Spillane and Lee, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁴¹ Burgos et al, *Marvel Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁴² Spillane and Lee, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁴³ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁴⁴ Carl Burgos, Stan Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1942).

characters could be on the receiving end of graphic violence. For instance, popular character Namor was shot at point-blank range in 1941's *All Winners Comics* #3.⁴⁵ Kids with guns also were commonplace. Stereotypically male behavior was encouraged in male characters, and by extension, young male readers; within stories, negative consequences were shown for boys and men who lacked aggression.⁴⁶

Though Silver Age plotlines would be more serious, villains of the Golden Age villains were more sinister.⁴⁷ War and monster stories strongly influenced the villainy of that era's superhero comics.⁴⁸ *Young Allies* evinced the influence of horror comics, with a recurring B-story, "Unsolved Mysteries," that featured vignettes like, "The Boy without a Brain," "Voodoo in Hungary," "The Superstition Mtns.," "The Skulls of Calgarth," and "He Is Not Dead!"⁴⁹

The patriotic propaganda was notable for its heavy-handedness.⁵⁰ For instance, Nazis and Hitler himself were regular villains for Superman, Wonder Woman, and Sergeant Fury and the Howling Commandos during the war years.⁵¹ The mandates of Captain America and Destroyer were laid bare in a 1942 ad in *Young Allies*: they were "America's freedom defender" and "nemesis of dictatorships," respectively.⁵²

⁴⁵ Spillane and Lee, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁴⁶ Stan Lee and M. Fred, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 4 (June 1942); Burgos et al, *Marvel Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁴⁷ Spillane and Lee, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁴⁸ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1; Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁴⁹ Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁵⁰ Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁵¹ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁵² Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 3.

Sometimes, the tone was much lighter. The first issue of *Young Allies* saw the youthful heroes defeating a comically inept Hitler and Red Skull.⁵³ Relatedly, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Secretary of the Treasury from 1934 to 1945, took out comic book advertisements to encourage kids to buy war bonds and stamps. It fit perfectly with the patriotic endeavors and emphasis on masculinity for the mostly male readership of Golden Age comics.

Golden Age characters of color had no agency, no intelligence, and were never depicted as attractive as even regular citizens. Writers did not shy away from scenes of these characters being tortured.⁵⁴ Africans and Native Americans were depicted as animalistic, committing gratuitous acts of violence against women and children.⁵⁵ They were savages who only could be helped by being exposed to the American way of life.⁵⁶ Generally, the main characters—whether heroes or villains—always were white. Some ancillary characters were Black. Other racial groups seldom were seen.⁵⁷ When these characters appeared, they were risible and displayed few heroic qualities.⁵⁸ One such portrayal was Washington “White Wash” Jones, an African American supporting character in 1941’s *Young Allies*, published by Marvel Comics’ predecessor, Timely. White Wash was drawn in the minstrel tradition, with exaggerated lips and eyes, a style not reflected in the illustrations of white characters.

⁵³ Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁵⁴ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 2.

⁵⁵ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁵⁶ Stan Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (December 1941); Stan Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 3 (March 1942).

⁵⁷ Carl Burgos et al, *Marvel Mystery Comics*, vol. 1, no. 4 (February 1940).

⁵⁸ Burgos et al, *Marvel Mystery Comics*, vol. 1, no. 4.

Figure 1. A panel from a 1941 issue of *Young Allies*, which featured White Wash Jones, whose characterization and physical description is rooted in minstrelsy. This typified the portrayal of characters of color in the Golden Age.



Source: Cronin, Brian. "15 Comic Book Panels Marvel Doesn't Want You to See." Comic Book Review. Valnet, Inc., September 12, 2017. <https://www.cbr.com/panels-marvel-does-not-want-you-to-see/>.

White Wash's dialogue also was a world away from that of the white characters. The grammar was poor and the content was frivolous. White Wash was a fully-vetted member of the Young Allies, but he was hardly a superhero. He usually needed rescuing, and it was primarily for comic relief.⁵⁹

"Adventures of Ka-Zar the Great" was printed in *Marvel Comics* #1. It was a jungle comic with a blonde-haired, blue-eyed male presiding over wild animals and unruly African

⁵⁹ Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 1.

natives. The stories were set in places where anticolonial revolutions later would erupt, including Cairo, Johannesburg, and the Belgian Congo.⁶⁰ Africans were colored unrealistically, with a greyish tint to their skin tones that caused the characters to look inhuman.⁶¹ One of Kazar's villains, Black Talon, had an uncomfortable origin story, in which the hand of an African killer was transplanted to the body of a white man and quickly corrupted him. His entire portrayal was predicated on racist, inhuman views of people of African descent.⁶² Pedro the Peril, an outlaw of Mexican descent, was presented as unkind, out of shape, and stupid, and the characterization relied on many stereotypes of Latin-American culture.⁶³

Prior to his career in comics, Stan Lee had written training films for the military, and that practice with propaganda also informed his Golden Age Marvel scripts, including for *Young Allies* and *Marvel Mystery Comics*. These comics were published contemporaneously with Executive Order 9066 and the forced relocation and incarceration of Japanese Americans. Ethnic slurs were commonplace in Golden Age comics, but those towards the Japanese were ubiquitous.⁶⁴ Because of the era's rampant xenophobia, Lee was able to exploit American fears of "invaders from the East" with scary wartime stories, like "The Coming of Khan" and "This Yellow Invasion Begins," and characters like Kwan, Demon of Dictatorships.⁶⁵ He wrote, "Soon

⁶⁰ Burgos et al, *Marvel Comics*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁶¹ Carl Burgos et al, *Marvel Mystery Comics*, vol. 1, no. 3 (January 1940).

⁶² Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 2; Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁶³ Stan Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 4, (June 1942); Gabriel Arnaldo Cruz, *Superheroes and Stereotypes: A Critical Analysis of Race, Gender, and Social Issues within Comic Book Material* (Ph.D. dissertation. Bowling Green State University, 2018); Albert S. Fu. "Fear of a Black Spider-Man: Racebending and the Colour-line in Superhero (re)Casting," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, vol. 6 no. 3 (2015): 269-283.

⁶⁴ Spillane and Lee, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 3; Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 4.

⁶⁵ Burgos, Lee et al, *All Winners Comics*, vol. 1, no. 4.

the moment shall arrive when The Khan shall be Master of the Western Hemisphere [sic] and Japan shall rule the world!”⁶⁶ Indeed, Khan’s express purpose was to conquer America and its allies (and the typo reinforced one part of what concerned educators about comics). And while white heroes were sketched with a range of prepossessing stereotypes, in the years after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese characters were drawn to resemble apes, troglodytes, or actual monsters. And characters of color demonstrated a propensity for violently attacking and sexually degrading non-agentive white female characters.⁶⁷

1.3 The Comic Book Debate: A Moral Mission

According to John I. Goodlad, Roger Soder and Kenneth A. Sirotnik, “Teaching the young has moral dimensions, however, simply because education—a deliberate effort to develop values and sensibilities as well as skills—is a moral endeavor. The teacher’s first responsibilities are to those being taught.”⁶⁸ Teachers recognized their duty to educate young people on their personal and civic responsibilities. That the line between the duties of the state and parents was often blurred gave educators license—if not a responsibility—to register opinions about children’s leisure. This obligation worked in close concert with their other role as keepers of the curriculum, to develop students holistically. As noted by philosopher Walter Feinberg, American teaching had a “moral mission,” and that mission put those who taught squarely in the center of the comic book debate.⁶⁹ Accordingly, they were cast in centrally in a dual role: identifiers of comic potential dangers and sources of potential solutions.

⁶⁶ Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 2. Lee, *Young Allies*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁶⁷ Burgos et al, *Marvel Mystery Comics*, vol. 1, no. 3 (January 1940).

⁶⁸ Goodlad, Soder and Sirotnik, *The Moral Dimensions of Teachers*, xii.

⁶⁹ Goodlad, Soder and Sirotnik, *The Moral Dimensions of Teachers*, xvi.

Local newspapers were where the public debate over comics was waged. The articles and editorials communicated great concern about the sway comics had over the nation's kids. There was a one-sidedness in how educators' perspectives were represented that reflected the deep anxieties Americans held about the seemingly ubiquitous juvenile delinquency and broader social changes in the postwar American landscape. Their omnipresence made comics a convenient scapegoat, and the reporting suggested that teachers, scholars, doctors, politicians, and law enforcement uniformly opposed them.⁷⁰ This especially was the case in the New York region, where so much school-based anti-comics activism occurred.

In U.S. newspapers, the treatment of activism on schoolgrounds was a common topic between 1948 and 1954. Reporters shared stories of young people, often seemingly at their own direction, organizing and executing complicated anti-comics activities, including bonfires, boycotts, and protests. No details were too salacious to be excluded. A couple of local stories were particularly well-covered throughout the national press. Two separate December 1948 bonfires in Upstate New York—one at Binghamton's St. Patrick's Parochial School and the other at Saints Peter and Paul's School in Auburn—clarified that the most aggressive anti-comics activities were happening in religious schools.⁷¹ In these contexts, the moral imperatives of teachers and school staff were clear, and the entire apparatus of the school could be mobilized to combat comics' popularity. Even still, newspaper articles supported that these activities largely were student-led, as claimed by anti-comics activists who promoted the idea that comics were so

⁷⁰ Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*, 213.

⁷¹ Associated Press, "Catholic Students Burn up Comic Books," *New York Times*, December 11, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Auburn Children Burn Comics in a Huge Bonfire," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, December 30 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Comic Books Form Huge Bonfire a Copies Are Dumped," *The Daily Journal-Register*, December 24, 1948, New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017.

bad that even kids recognized it.⁷² Further, newspapers printed claims of broad community support for activities such as the eight graders' anti-comics campaign at Bishop Quarter Military Academy in Oak Park, Illinois and the decrees made by Baltimore's Bishop Lawrence J. Sheehan while on schoolgrounds, directing parents to confiscate their kids' comics.⁷³ The situating of activism at schools and the imprimatur of the Church was powerful reinforcement for the ACC and a disincentive for pro-comics teachers to speak out.

James Gilbert interpreted Americans' eagerness to embrace comics as delinquency's root led to the press minimizing facts that did not suit this narrative.⁷⁴ This obfuscation downplayed the role of educators in supporting or countering anti-comics activities. The articles about in-school activism skirted around censorship claims and connections to Nazi tactics. What did serve their purposes were newspaper stories focused on children as agentive actors in the ACC. In January 1949, the *New York Times* characterized a bonfire in Rumson, New Jersey as one largely directed by Cub Scouts—boys between five and ten years old. Another in *The Tribune Press* relayed that students voluntarily joined teachers and parents at a public hearing held at Gouverneur Grammar School in St. Lawrence, New York.⁷⁵

While still maintaining that there was a connection between comics and delinquency, newspapers also extensively published articles and editorials on the potential educational uses of

⁷² "The Patrician, 1949," yearbook, January 27, 1949, St. Patrick's Academy, personal archive of David Hajdu.

⁷³ "Comics Hit by Groups over Nation," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, November 11, 1948, New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017; "War on Bad Comics Books," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, October 28, 1948, New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017.

⁷⁴ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*.

⁷⁵ "Comic Criminals to Burn," *New York Times*, December 11, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "December Meeting of PTA Tomorrow—Grill Comic Books," *The Tribune Press*, December 15, 1948, New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017.

comics. Proponents claimed comics could innovate classrooms due to their capacity to teach, train, or influence perspectives. The range of individuals exploring these topics was broad, with corporate entities, law enforcement, and even the New York City Board of Education seeking to learn ways they could use comics to promote their causes.⁷⁶ They had a sense that, if comics could influence kids to commit crimes, the medium also could teach more positive types of behaviors. In January 1950, the *New York Times* reported that industry insiders and researchers agreed “educators... have at long last been forced to confess that comics are a powerful force in educating the public... They are beginning to use comics themselves as a tool of their own trade.”⁷⁷ Reading expert Katherine Clifford was specific in her theory that one could “subtly infuse an exciting story with arguments for race tolerance or other worthy aims.”⁷⁸

Despite the enthusiasm for change expressed in articles like these, at this juncture, neither side fully reconciled what it meant that comics could be an effective teaching tool. Opponents, including those in education, were reticent to acknowledge that any good could come from comics. The very idea undermined claims about their inherent valuelessness. If comics could be used to educate, then could they also be worthy of remaining in the marketplace? This was an uncomfortable question for anti-comics crusaders, and one they seemed uninterested in exploring. Further, they never wrestled with what comics could be if publishers addressed their

⁷⁶ “Comics Can Be Helpful,” *The Ogdensburg Journal*, July 22, 1948, New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017; Madeleine Loeb, “Anti-comics Drive Reported Waning,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1950, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Lillian K. Goldstein, “We Love Our Children: Children and Comics,” *The County Review*, May 6, 1948, New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017; George Dixon, “George Dixon’s Washington Scene,” *Endicott Dailey Bulletin*, October 12, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; “Opinion and Example,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 27, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷⁷ Madeleine Loeb, “Anti-comics Drive Reported Waning,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1950, New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017.

⁷⁸ “Common Sense in Comics,” *The Medina Daily Journal*, October 20, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

chief complaints: the shoddy artwork; the unsavory plotlines; the illegible lettering. The interest in their use by federal government agencies and even the top academic institutions in the nation didn't seem to mitigate this disdain or apprehension.

Contemporaneous with reports on the educational uses of comics was coverage of the self-regulatory efforts of comic book publishers. After fourteen months of planning, the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers (ACMP) was announced publicly on July 1, 1948, for the express purpose of regulating comic books. In response to damning accusations against the genre by independent scholar Fredric Wertham and months of terrible press, the ACMP unveiled its "six-point code [that] forbid nudity, portrayal of methods of committing a crime, scenes of sadistic torture, obscenity, humorous treatment of divorce, and ridicule of religious or racial groups."⁷⁹ Within two years, though, the ACMP folded. The affiliation of publishers was a loose one and the code lacked effective means of enforcing the regulations. The organization's failure only emboldened comics' opposition, resulting immediately in increased attention from anti-comics educators and lawmakers.⁸⁰ It made no real impact on how the industry functioned or the comics were created; it was considered a failed endeavor by most.

Some articles covered publishers' plans for the ACMP; others described the effects of the self-regulation on comics themselves; and many expressed suspicions over the very prospect of it. Their close relationship with children made educators' perspectives on this system valuable, and they found themselves in the center of the discussion of the regulatory efforts. In a September 10, 1948 *New York Times* article, Henry Schultz, the ACMP's executive director,

⁷⁹ Amy Kiste Nyberg, "Censoring Comics: The Implementation and Enforcement of the 1954 Comics Code," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Journalism Historians Association, October 1993.

⁸⁰ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

appealed to teachers by noting that “a group of educational leaders” would advise the organization on comics’ contents.⁸¹ This was a promise that Schultz kept, though it is unclear whether it won over many teachers. That same month, ACMP staff were quoted in the *North Country Catholic* and *Endicott Daily Bulletin* as vowing to clean up comic book’s grammar and pledging to produce “good, wholesome entertainment or education.”⁸² The ACMP depended upon the optics of teachers, librarians, and principals supporting their attempt at regulation; they did not communicate clearly on how they would be integrated into the process or contribute to quality control. The unsophisticated approach to framing the narrative around the relationship between educators and regulation resulted in coverage like a July 1948 *Catholic Courier Journal* article where college faculty described the fledgling ACMP as a hollow gesture.⁸³ The editorial staff of the *Ogdensburg Journal* dismissed the new code as a last-ditch act of self-preservation.⁸⁴ Writing for the Associated Press, James Marlow speculated that the real purpose of the ACMP was to neutralize anti-comics arguments, especially because comics were only about as violent as nursery rhymes.⁸⁵ With the poor press, this early effort at self-regulation never got off the

⁸¹ “Publishers to Start Regulation of Comics,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸² “Sex and Sadism Banned in Code on Comic Books,” *North Country Catholic*, July 11, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; “Comics to Bar Sex, Sadism,” *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, July 2, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

⁸³ “Code on Comic Books Called on ‘Gesture,’” *The Ogdensburg Journal*, July 7, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; “Student of Comics Calls Clean up Code ‘Only a Gesture,’” *North Country Catholic*, July 25, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

⁸⁴ “Some Comic Book Publishers Adopt New Morals Code,” *Ogdensburg Journal*, July 20, 1948, New York Newspaper Archives, 1753-2017.

⁸⁵ James Marlow, “Rhymes in Mother Goose as Gory as Comic Books,” *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, July 7, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

ground. Few schoolteachers spoke favorably about the ACMP. And in areas like the Southern Tier, where there had been such robust anti-comics activities, the activism continued unabated.⁸⁶

Though this will be covered in much greater detail in the fourth chapter, it is worth noting here that the second industry-wide attempt at self-regulation was more successful. Six years later, when publishers came together to incorporate the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) to develop a regulatory body—the Comics Code Authority, or CCA—its leadership negotiated its media image much more effectively, particularly relative to teachers. Viewing it as the industry’s final lifeline, publishers were unwilling to gamble on the endeavor being unsuccessful; the rollout of the CCA was sophisticated and well-organized. Newspaper reporting on the CMAA focused on the strength of its leadership, its similarity to the highly successful film code, and most critically, the ways that the CCA was structured around the concerns of educators. CMAA staff coordinated press coverage to enumerate the successes of the Code, as dictated by the publishers and described by educational and civic groups, in addition to the ties between the comics industry and educators. Expressions of encouragement for the Comics Code Authority more than balanced vestigial hesitancies leftover from the ACMP’s failure.

The moral dimensions inherent in the profession guaranteed that teachers’ perspectives were valuable to those on both sides of the comic debate. If comics’ proponents could claim the support of teachers, the medium might get a reprieve from the relentless critiques of parents and politicians. At the same time, critics felt teachers’ disapprobation would lead to legal remedies

⁸⁶ This project makes use of the New York State Division of Local Government Services definition of the Southern Tier, which includes parts of central and western New York. Currently, there are fourteen counties included in this classification: Allegany, Broome, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Otsego, Schoharie, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga, and Tompkins.

for the comic book problem. This supposed influence belied teachers' lack of agency in aspects of their own contexts. In actuality, the appearance of teachers' support was enough to sway the public. Teachers were not always drivers of action in which they were framed as central participants.

1.4 Comics, Delinquency, and Schools

Perhaps the most robust coverage centered on comics as the root of juvenile delinquency. The tenor of the coverage was consistently histrionic. Incidents of children committing crimes, small and large, were explained with any connections they had to comics, no matter how tangential. For example, between May and October 1948, the *Adirondack Daily Enterprise* ran at least five separate stories about children driven to murder, violence, or thievery by the prurient comics they read.⁸⁷ Teachers' anxieties were understandably heightened by these reports.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the connections between comic-reading and acts of violence or law-breaking by kids were exaggerated into direct causality. The press offered no other plausible explanations, and the evidence was scant that comics were leading to the behaviors. Fourteen-year-old Richard Watkins died by suicide, apparently emulating a scene in the comic book found beside his body; the Johnstown, Pennsylvania case was reported widely as a prime example of the genre's dangers.⁸⁹ Just a week before, the *Endicott Daily Bulletin* reported that a pair of fifth

⁸⁷ "Two Boys Lay Flying Skill to Comic Book," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, May 21, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Comic Books Quarrel Ends in Girl's Death," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, May 28, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Comic Book's 'Lesson' Costs Boy, 14, His Life," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, June 2, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Dangerous Comic Books," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, July 25, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Boy, 10, Killed in Dispute over Comic Books," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, October 4, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

⁸⁸ Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*, 92.

⁸⁹ "Murder Lesson in Comic Book Costs Boy Life," *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, June 2, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

graders in Oklahoma City had stolen a plane and flown more than one hundred miles after reading a comic book with similar plot elements.⁹⁰ A few states away in Chicago, a “husky, baby-faced” fourteen-year-old named Roy Adams killed his six-year-old neighbor after a dispute over comics.⁹¹ Comic books were depicted not only as crime manuals, but indirect inciters of lawbreaking as well. And the messaging was that no part of the country went untouched by it.

Ultimately, the idea that comics invariably and singlehandedly led to oversexualization and violence caught fire in the United States; from 1948 to 1954, the press also communicated this as the prevailing view of schoolteachers, administrators, and scholars. The same events were reported repeatedly, and to most casual readers, the proof was irrefutable: comics threatened the sexual development of kids and represented America’s declining postwar mores. The following survey of newspaper reporting of comics paints a clear portrait of the contested nature of education in the ACC.

PTAs occupied a significant place in this conversation. As collectives of teachers and parents, their activities were of great interest to the general public during the ACC. Part of its organizational mission was to promote positive social change.⁹² They signaled what was and was not appropriate for young people, and newspapers dutifully shared their activities as doctrine. What was not communicated was teachers’ lack of agency in these entities. By the postwar years, teachers increasingly were responding to the interests of parents.⁹³ The PTA’s

⁹⁰ “Fifth-graders Steal Plane, Fly 120 Miles,” *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, May 25, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

⁹¹ “Boy, 14, Admits to Smothering Girl to Death with Pillows,” *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, May 28, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

⁹² Cutler, *Parents and Schools*, 10-11.

⁹³ Cutler, *Parents and Schools*, 167-173.

anti-comics activities were not a proxy for those of teachers, but they were evidence of parents' general disdain for comics and the pressure that placed on teachers.

For example, the rhetoric of a local PTA chapter in Ravena, New York was typical of how classroom teachers were represented as discussing comics in the press; contemporaneous teacher interviews in *The News-Herald* and *The Enterprise* featured descriptions of comics as “glorifying crime and sex deliberately [to] appeal to the primitive instincts and obstruct civilized thought and action...”⁹⁴ Even without evidence of the publishers' intentions, the argument would have struck most of the public as plausible. Similarly, the commonly held belief that women in comics were unvaryingly depicted as scantily clad and more sexualized than their filmic counterparts, was captured effectively in a January 1948 *Suffolk County News* story about a local parent-teacher group.⁹⁵ Writing about the activities of yet another PTA, Rochester's *Catholic Courier Journal* reported significant increases in the sale of “obscene” comics.⁹⁶ Quoting an industry insider that only a quarter of comics were not lewd, the article contributed to the narrative that teachers and parents agreed that comics were irredeemable.

Another robust body of reporting focused putting on arguments specifically in conversation with Fredric Wertham's anti-comics efforts. The majority of these articles expressed support for Wertham's basic arguments: the medium was a ubiquitous, corrosive, unstoppable force; comic book-reading correlated with violent and even murderous behavior in children; comics had no educational value; astronomical numbers of kids read comics; and

⁹⁴ “Union Free PTA Opposes Comic Books,” *The News-Herald*, December 3, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; “Resolutions,” *The Enterprise*, December 10, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

⁹⁵ Joseph Jahn, “This Week,” *The Suffolk County News*, January 16, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

⁹⁶ “Obscene Magazine Increase Reported,” *The Catholic Courier Journal*, April 29, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

authority figures uniformly opposed comics.⁹⁷ This cadre of Werthamites echoed teachers' points about the need to regulate children's leisure time, which was a means of teachers asserting their own professional authority and expertise.⁹⁸ Werthamites also were well-organized, vocal, and abundant, with adherents across all aspects of the teaching profession, especially at the primary school level. For them, there was a clear connection between the acquisition of literacy and other essential skills and appropriate behavior. Teachers saw themselves on the front line of the battle outlined by Wertham, and most of society agreed.⁹⁹

Parents' relationship to comics was a more passive one, conversely. The idea that they had the lion's share of culpability in the delinquency conversation was not articulated regularly in the mainstream press until after the passage of the CCA.¹⁰⁰ It simply had not been part of Wertham's calculation, which meant that it was not a mainstay in the press' coverage. For example, speaking to the Congress of Correction in Boston, Wertham ascribed fault to comic book publishers for manufacturing an "anti-social" product.¹⁰¹ Moreover, at a speech about comics delivered to the Harlem chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of

⁹⁷ "Blood and Thunder of Comic Books Breed Juvenile Crime, Authority Says," *The Massena Observer*, March 18, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "The Comics... Very Funny," *The Bolivar Breeze*, June 3, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

⁹⁸ *Massena Observer*, "Blood and Thunder."

⁹⁹ "Breed Juvenile Crime," *The Medina Daily Journal*, July 21, 1948, NYS Historical Newspapers; "Hours Set for New Library at Lyon Mt.," *Plattsburgh Press-Reporter*, April 21, 1948, NYS Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁰ Conversely, in African American newspapers, editorialists made frequent calls for increased parental responsibility as a means of curbing juvenile delinquency, even before the CCA was implemented. For examples of this, see: "Comic Book Remedy," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 29, 1950; "Recent Book on Comics Can Reassure Worried Parents," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 18, 1949; and Marjorie McKenzie, "Pursuit of Democracy: Does the Fight against Comic Books Encroach upon Freedom of Speech?," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 9, 1949.

¹⁰¹ "Comic Books Are Denounced," *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, September 3, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

Colored People, Wertham acknowledged the role of segregation in creating juvenile delinquency but made no mention of parental responsibility.¹⁰²

On the more philosophical side, comics' relationship to the grand challenges of the day also inspired editorials and reporting. About five percent of the articles surveyed concerned communism and discussed comics, either as evidence of its continued influence or a potential tool in its proliferation. Children were understood to be especially vulnerable to this.¹⁰³ For example, *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, *The Catholic Courier Journal*, *The Argus*, and *North Country Catholic* all ran multiple articles promoting *Is This Tomorrow*, an anticommunist comic book aimed at children and purchased in bulk by many Catholic schools between April and September 1948.¹⁰⁴ According to Marjorie Heins, Clarence Taylor, and Chris York and Rafiel York, reactions like these were part of a larger fear of communist indoctrination of children and the role comics potentially played in it.¹⁰⁵ In a November 1948 interview in *The Massena Observer*, Marvin E. Gibson, chairman of the Oneida County Committee on Crime Magazines, exhorted parents to monitor their children's comic books for signs of indoctrination.¹⁰⁶ As schools already

¹⁰² "Comics Books Subject of Sound-off Lunch," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 24, 1954, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰³ Dunne, *A Cold War State of Mind*.

¹⁰⁴ "Wide Sale of Anti-red Books Pushed," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, April 6, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Sales Record Claimed," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, May 6, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Anti-red Comic Book Banned in Detroit," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, May 6, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Detroit Hits Evil Magazines, Comic Books, Bans Sale of Catholic Anti-red Booklet," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, June 14, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Ban on Comic Book Lifted," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, September 23, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Jaycees Will Distribute 10,000 Booklets Warning of Red Threat Here," *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, April 30, 1948; "Catholic Digest to Test Detroit Police Ban on Anti-red Comic Book," *North Country Catholic*, NYS Historic Newspapers; George Hartman, "Popular Incendiary Comic Books Catch Our Wondering Critic's Eye," *The Argus*, no date.

¹⁰⁵ Heins, *Priests of Our Democracy*; Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard*; York and York, *Comic Books and the Cold War*.

¹⁰⁶ "Some Comics Called Course for Criminals," *The Massena Observer*, November 22, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

functioned as sites of inculcation for American values, they also were positioned to inoculate against communism's assault on the nation's children.

Comics as a threat to morality was another frequently discussed topic. While reporting that comics were an efficient mode of communication, Marcus H. Boulware, writing for *The Pittsburgh Courier*, lamented that this quality also meant that they could influence children's moral development.¹⁰⁷ Going even further in *The Catholic Courier Journal*, Marie Weidman argued that comics even posed a threat to the decency of adult readers.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, perceptions of murder and sex made comics frequent topics of concern for religious leaders, and parochial schools were places they could enact regulations as they saw fit. Educators in religious contexts freely framed their desires as the will of the students, which reinforced children's malleability as much as crime and horror comics did. For instance, in a regular column called "Teentimers" in *The Catholic Courier Journal*, editorial staff appealed to youths by writing in a teenaged voice, publishing anti-comics philippics that problematized various aspects of the superhero genre.¹⁰⁹

Race and comics were covered thoroughly in the Black press, though mainstream papers neglected the topic. Black newspapers, including *Amsterdam News* in Harlem, *Atlanta Daily World*, *Chicago Defender*, *The Baltimore Afro-American*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, and *The Pittsburgh Courier*, all ran articles that were critical of the depiction of characters of color, and even championed students who attempted to take it on.¹¹⁰ They featured quotes by African

¹⁰⁷ Marcus H. Boulware, "Current Comic Book Craze Both Good, Bad for Kids," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁸ Marie Weidman, "So-called Comic Books Can Harm Adults Also," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, April 3, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹⁰⁹ "Teentimers," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, July 1, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹¹⁰ Fern Marja, "Kids Win War on Comic Book's 'Ape-like Villain'," *Afro-American*, May 5, 1945, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Richard Dier, "Kids Crusade to Eliminate Stereotypes," *Afro-American*, September 8, 1945, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Negro Villain in Comic Book Killed by Youngsters," *The Chicago Defender*,

American educators acknowledging the positive images of Black people created for Black students by Black comic book artists.¹¹¹ The Black press did not shy away from directly naming racist aspects of comics, especially distasteful representations of African, Afro-Caribbean, and Black American characters.¹¹² In addition, Black newspapers consistently—and years before mainstream papers did so—railed against the idea that comic influenced kids’ behavior more than parents and other sociological factors, notably poverty. At this point, Black reporters were more sensitive to the blanket indictments of demographic groups with only scant evidence, given the depiction of African American crime statistics in the media.¹¹³ Further, in Black communities, there often were histories of parents publicly critiquing the educational offerings and opportunities made available to their children; it is not inconceivable that they may have doubted other conclusions attributed to teachers—like those about comics.¹¹⁴

Other articles attempted to curb comics’ appeal among young people. Concerns about censorship were common at the time. A chorus of aggressively pro-censorship patriots saw it as the only way to save the republic from comics; they completely drowned out those on the other side of the debate. The structure of schools made it easy to use the label of communism to keep certain books and ideas out entirely, and the press created a sense that most teachers, librarians, and principals were keen to use this tool against comics. Teacher purges, banned books, and

May 5, 1945, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Steamboat: Youngsters’ Protest Ousts Stereotype from Comics,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 5, 1945, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹¹¹ “First Race Comic Book Out,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 19, 1947, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹¹² Gerald Frank, “Say Comic Books Foster Race Hate,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 1, 1954, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹¹³ Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010), 77.

¹¹⁴ Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights*, 4.

blacklisting were common prophylactics against the spread of threatening ideology. Any number of anti-comics activities seemed normal and appropriate in that environment. Depending upon the educational context, the censorship promoted by anti-comics activists varied in terms of style and intensity; Catholic schools saw the aforementioned bonfires, while public schools more commonly experienced subtler activities, often driven by parent-teacher associations. A celebratory article describing the support a school group gave to pharmacies and newsstands that refused to sell comics on a “nationally-circulated Catholic list of ‘undesirable literature’” was not uncommon in content or tone.¹¹⁵ Even still, DC Comics ran a nationwide newspaper campaign with full-page spreads that was meant to disincentivize censorship by sharing Superman’s pro-American virtues. Readers only encountered these after sifting through front page write-ups of comic book-inspired youthful crime.¹¹⁶ Comics were sufficiently worrisome that full-on censorship was not off the table.

Instances of people organizing against comics grew in tandem with the press’ interest in the topic. All over the country, Parent-Teacher Association chapters, clergymen, civic groups, and professional organizations included comics on the lists of banned books they developed, and these stories were discussed amply in newspapers.¹¹⁷ A common tactic enacted by these groups involved the creation of review board that read, rated, and made recommendations to parents and comic book creators. Educators always were represented on these committees. As will be

¹¹⁵ “City Adopts Plan to Censor ‘Comics’,” *North Country Catholic*, August 1, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹¹⁶ Leonard Lyons, “In the Lyons Den,” *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, July 28, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹¹⁷ “Druggists Join to Clean out Objectionable Comic Books,” *North Country Catholic*, August 1, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; “Elmer Rice in Revolt on Ban of Comic Book,” *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, December 3, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; “Erway Denies Censorship in Act on Comics,” *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, December 6, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; “Elmer Rice Fights Albany Ban on Comics,” *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, December 3, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; “Comics Drive Hit,” *The Ogdensburg Journal*, December 3, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

probed in detail in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, the idea of the citizens review board later would be adopted by the industry in its self-regulatory strategies; educators would be included in those efforts as well.¹¹⁸ Alternately, if there were groups of citizens organizing in favor of comics, these stories were nowhere to be found in the media.

There also was coverage of the limited governmental action around comics. The laws functioned as companions to schools' own anti-comics policies and practices, as the public assumed that teachers could be effective at keeping comics out of the hands of young people. According to the American Municipal Association, by the end of 1948, more than four dozen cities had banned the sale of comics.¹¹⁹ In New York state, an exceptionally broad law in St. Lawrence County prohibited the publication distribution, sale, and possession of comics.¹²⁰ New York State Senator Benjamin Feinberg of Plattsburg even proposed an unsuccessful bill to curtail the sale of comics across the state.¹²¹ These laws ranged from specific embargos on the sale of violent or explicit comics to codes that dictated to whom comics could be sold to criminal action against publishers.¹²² And indeed, there were prosecutions, too. On December 29, 1953, at EC

¹¹⁸ "Comic Books Raise Issue in Elmira and Rochester," *The Catholic Courier Journal*, July 1, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹¹⁹ "Comic Book Bank," *Endicott Daily Bulletin*, December 21, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹²⁰ "Hart Will Get after the Comics," *Ogdensburg Advance News*, December 19, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Anti-comic Book Drive Planned by District Attorney," *Courier and Freeman*, December 29, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Comic Books Survey Asked," *The Ogdensburg Journal*, December 18, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹²¹ "Senator Feinberg to Battle 'Comic' Books," *Lake Placid News*, December 3, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Outlawing Comics Will Be Quite a Job," *The Greenwich Journal*, December 5, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Feinberg Plans Bill against Comic Books," *The Ogdensburg Journal*, November 24, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "'Undesirable' Comics," *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, December 2, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "War on 'Undesirable' Comic Books Planned by Feinberg," *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, December 2, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹²² "Nothing Funny Here," *The Medina Daily Journal*, May 12, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Regulation Seen Needed on Sale of Comic Books," *New Castle Tribune*, November 26, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Comic Books Survey Asked," *The Ogdensburg Journal*, December 18, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

Comics headquarters in Manhattan, publisher Bill Gaines, business manager Lyle Stuart, and secretary Shirley Norris were arrested for the sale of a banned comic they produced.¹²³ Schools were hotbeds of anti-comics activities, but seldom the targets of anti-comics legislation. Among the laws that were enacted, it's worth noting that most did not last long, between changing tastes among constituents and the caprices of appellate courts, which were indisposed towards censorship. In fact, the Supreme Court ruled that they were unconstitutional in *Winters v. New York*.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the threat of more laws censuring comics remained a popular talking point for politicians. The newspaper coverage had done real damage, though, as the years of negative press had created a sense that comics were agents of the illegal.

A small subset of the articles published endeavored to make points about the nuances of comics that countered prevailing negative narratives, instead articulating their attributes for a newspaper audience that seldom heard these points. With this sort of article, advocates of comics set out to make four points. First, there were good and bad comics; the artform was not monolithic, and there were possibilities for educational uses. A June 1949 *Pittsburgh Courier* article named educational researcher Josette Frank as a resource for parents trying to distinguish good from bad comics.¹²⁵ The second chapter of this dissertation delves into Frank's work and

¹²³ Even before this incident, EC Comics was known to the public for harsh cross-examination its editor, William M. Gaines, underwent in the 1954 televised Senate hearings on comic books and juvenile delinquency. His failed defense of crime and horror comics made national headlines. Despite this association, both Gaines and his father, Max C. Gaines, founder of EC Comics, were secondary school educators before publishing comics. See: Marcia Seligson, "Bad Boy of Publishing: Lyle Stuart," *New York Times*, November 30, 1969, New York Times Machine; Joseph McLellan, "Conveyor of the Controversial," *The Washington Post*, September 6, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹²⁴ *Winters v. New York*, 333 US 507 (1948).

¹²⁵ "Recent Book on Comics Can Reassure Worried Parents," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 18, 1949, ProQuest Historical newspapers.

influence, but she was a strong advocate for the idea that that the wheat could be separated from the chaff, and educators played a key role in this.

Secondly, comics may be *neither* good *nor* bad. Some were simply sources of entertainment that neither helped nor hindered readers.¹²⁶ At the time, this was a novel intervention for the much-maligned genre, the only salvation of which seemed to be its potential educational use. The notion that comics could be innocuous did not gain traction until well after the ACC. Newspaper articles reporting that there was a generational aspect to comic book-reading claimed that the medium was as harmless as content beloved by children in previous generations.¹²⁷ This was a fiercely debated idea among educators.

Thirdly, as mentioned earlier, the concept of parental responsibility was broached, but much more comprehensively in African American-aimed papers than the mainstream press.¹²⁸ In his weekly column in *The Suffolk County News*, Joseph C. Jahn offered practical advice to parents of comic book readers.

The modern teen-ager is less of a problem than his counterpart two decades ago. He is better mannered, gets higher marks, can jump higher, run faster, throw a discus farther, toot a bugle better, and has more common-sense... Today's youngsters were born during the depression, brought up during the war, and must now fit into a society which is undergoing basic changes. They need understanding, and some need help.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ "Progress Reported on 'Comic' Cleanup," *The Ogdensburg Journal*, June 29, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹²⁷ "Branchport Book Club Hears about Books," *Chronicle-Express*, July 10, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹²⁸ "Parents Held Responsible for Child's Reading Tastes," *LA Sentinel*, July 30, 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Pastor Says We Can't Blame Children for JD," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 14, 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Poor Home Life Found Greatest Delinquency Aid," *The Medina Daily Journal*, October 22, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Case History," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 21, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "Comic Book Ban Spreads across Nation," *North Country Catholic*, December 5, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; Joseph C. Jahn, "This Week," *The Suffolk County News*, May 21, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; Ed Fix, "Random Samplings," *The Argus*, no date. "Parents Asked to Be Responsible for Comic Reading," *The Massena Observer*, November 1, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹²⁹ Jahn, "This Week," May 21, 1948.

Editorials like these were uncommon, though. This remained a fringe argument, which left the responsibility for shielding kids from dangerous comics to institutions outside of the home—namely, schools, courts, and churches.

And finally, a few articles contextualized the comics brouhaha within broader cultural shortcomings. Chief among them were a waning education system, a decline in the centrality of the church in public life, and the rise of materialism.¹³⁰ Reporters and editorialists pointed out that comics hadn't the power to rend America; rather, the issues attributed to the medium actually were the result of a rapidly changing society. Speaking to the *New York Amsterdam News*, Reverend R. L. Ryan noted that children regularly contended with violent films and television, ubiquitous tasteless advertisements, and crude literature, even in schools; comics were but one minor influence in their lives.¹³¹ Articles like these were instrumental in the communication that comics were not inherently wicked. They were merely a medium of communication—albeit a highly effective one—that could be used to teach or persuade or entertain with equal proficiency. This laid the groundwork for the comics industry's subsequent campaign around the medium's utility to civilized society.

There are several key themes from this investigation of press coverage of the ACC. First, Wertham's fiery rhetoric and inclinations towards exposés were integrated easily into other movements—mostly rightwing in their political disposition—which paved more avenues for sharing his research and ideology. Second, racism and the differential in education that it wrought drove differences in perspective. Black educators experienced the ACC very differently

¹³⁰ "Sanford Warns of Comic Books for Children," *The Ogdensburg Journal*, October 19, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers; "What Is the Matter with Us," *The Long Islander*, July 22, 1948, NYS Historic Newspapers.

¹³¹ "Pastor Says We Can't Blame Children for JD," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 14, 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

from their white counterparts. The urban/rural divide also was pronounced, with more extreme activity reserved for exurban and suburban areas. The supposed increase in violent crime experienced in large metropolises like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles meant that educators and other authority figures had less attention to devote to largescale anti-comics undertakings.¹³² And lastly, there was a clear and robust pattern of anti-comics activism in the Catholic community. The Church mobilized groups across the faith to combat the comic book threat. Unlike other contexts, Catholic schools were spaces where the Church could control nearly every facet of the experience, and anti-comics efforts were employed fully. The following section considers the activities of educators and their students in parochial schools, with a specific focus on the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut tristate region, before expanding to a national conversation. In particular, I analyze the ways that educators were able to use noncurricular tools—the schoolgrounds, pupil-led groups, student publications, and even their participation in Parent-Teacher Associations—to curb comic books’ influence.

1.5 Catholic Education and Comics

The most thoroughly organized corner of the anti-comics factions were Catholic schools. With moral education more pronounced at Catholic schools, regulating comics was a simple affair.¹³³ In public fora, the concerns of Catholic school teachers and principals were aligned more closely than those at public schools.¹³⁴ The Catholic press also was organized to

¹³² Lisa Krissoff Boehm and Steven Hunt Corey, *America's Urban History* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

¹³³ Vincent P. Lannie, *Public Money and Parochial Education: Bishop Hughes, Governor Seward, and the New York School Controversy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

¹³⁴ Lannie, *Public Money and Parochial Education*.

communicate effectively with the national rank-and-file around the Church's specific interests at a given time.¹³⁵ This was embodied perfectly in the bonfire at St. Patrick's School in Binghamton, held promptly at 11am on Friday, December 10, 1948.¹³⁶ The weather was characteristically cold for a Western New York winter.¹³⁷ On the day of the blaze, all classes were dismissed an hour before lunchtime—evidence that the effort had the full support of the school's administration—and students were encouraged to attend by the Sisters of St. Joseph, who taught them.¹³⁸ High schoolers were the most active, with the grade school students primarily watching and cheering the growing conflagration.¹³⁹ Nearly all 560 of St. Patrick's students attended.¹⁴⁰ With unmistakable excitement, they sang both the school's alma mater and "The Catholic Action Song," the lyrics of which describe "an army of youth flying the standards of truth... fighting for Christ, the Lord."¹⁴¹ For these participants, the call to oppose comics was about much more than juvenile delinquency or politics.

More than 2,000 comics were burned in a kiln near the school's hardball court.¹⁴² In the days leading up to the event, the student organizers collected from other children enough objectionable comics to fill eight large crates intended for the shipment of Ivory Snow and Rice

¹³⁵ Richard Ginder, *With Ink and Crozier: The Story of Bishop Noll and His Work* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1953).

¹³⁶ "The Patrician, 1949," yearbook, January 27, 1949, St. Patrick's Academy, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹³⁷ "Catholic Students Burn up Comic Books," *New York Times*, December 11, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹³⁸ St. Patrick's Academy, "The Patrician, 1949."

¹³⁹ St. Patrick's Academy, "The Patrician, 1949."

¹⁴⁰ St. Patrick's Academy, "The Patrician, 1949."

¹⁴¹ St. Patrick's Academy, "The Patrician, 1949."

¹⁴² "2,000 Comic Books Are Burned by 600 Children," *Union Bulletin*, October 26, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

Krispies boxes.¹⁴³ The whole affair was “designed to dramatize their comic book boycott,” and the Southern Tier press covered it robustly.¹⁴⁴ Describing the act as an example for all communities to follow during the ACC, *The Catholic* emphasized that opposing comics was a matter of conscience.¹⁴⁵ The event was publicized as “student-organized and expressed the will and wish of the students.”¹⁴⁶ The press, including *The Catholic Sun*, also stressed that the students’ stance against comics was their own choice, registering the power of Catholic moral education.

The boycott was led by John Farrell, president of the junior class. In the early phase of their campaign, students sought pledges from businesses they frequented—collecting them from 35 owners of local pharmacies, delis, and soda fountains—to curtail the sale of comic books that stress crime and sex.¹⁴⁷ Vendors were made to pledge neither to display nor sell comics.¹⁴⁸ At the completion of the bonfire, Farrell acknowledged his familiarity with the comic book industry’s efforts at self-regulation, explaining, “The publishers are gradually improving their books and they are cleaning them up. Time will tell what improvements they are making.”¹⁴⁹ The prevailing view of participants was that the industry’s insufficient attempts demanded further interventions from schools. The students received national attention for their activism.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴³ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁴⁴ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁴⁵ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁴⁶ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁴⁷ “Catholic Students Burn up Comic Books,” *New York Times*, December 11, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁴⁸ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁴⁹ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁵⁰ *New York Times*, “Catholic Students Burn up Comic Books.”

Newspapers reported that the youths demanded that leading publishers offer a “sincere, sustained response” to the comics book problem, and in the process, “earned respect” of every “good American.”¹⁵¹

In many ways, St. Patrick’s was a natural locus for this level of anti-comics activism. Morality was taken seriously at the school. Only three full-color photos were curated into its yearbook: one of Jesus Christ; one of Pope Pius XII; and the third of the Right Reverend Monsignor D. Francis Curtin. The caption under the Pope’s picture detailed his actions against socialism, Nazism, and Catholic persecution in Eastern Europe; the loss of China to communism; and the devastation of the atomic bomb. It catalogued and contextualized the most pressing issues facing Catholic communities in the decade before.¹⁵² In addition, the caption described the range of charitable works benefitting “millions of good people of all races,” all inspired by the Pope. The section concluded with a list of accomplishments by “the Pope of the Masses.” Describing him as a champion of the common man, Pius XII’s special relationship with the American people and sustained interest in expanding human rights and social justice were noted.¹⁵³ This modeled for students their moral and religious duty.

St. Patrick students expressed devotion to traditional mores. These were socially engaged students who were guided closely by their clergy advisors.¹⁵⁴ The valedictory address printed in the yearbook even promoted the “[upholding] of old-time [values] in a mad, frenzied” world.¹⁵⁵ The yearbook also featured an appeal to students to reach beyond their immediate communities.

¹⁵¹ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁵² St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁵³ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁵⁴ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁵⁵ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

Entitled “You Can Change the World; Are You Willing,” the article warned of the dangers of communist messaging in television, film, radio, organized labor, government, education, and books and periodicals. These children were being conditioned to be suspicious of comics by multiple sources. A monumental event for the students, the bonfire was mentioned quite a few additional times throughout the school yearbook, including in a prominently placed two-page spread.¹⁵⁶ Given the size of the community, many of the ads that supported the publication of the yearbook likely included those 35 distributors who signed the students’ pledge. Additionally, some of these business owners were parents to students at St. Patrick’s.¹⁵⁷ The school, via the Church, was exerting great influence over several other parts of the community. Parochial school teachers found themselves working in an environment where the rejection of comics was dictated to them completely.

¹⁵⁶ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁵⁷ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

Figure 2. The reporting on the bonfire at Binghamton’s St. Patrick’s School held on December 10, 1948, highlighted the robust participation of the student body.



Source: Hicks, Sarah. “Librarians vs. HUAC’s Book Burnings.” American Library Association. July 25, 2017.
<https://www.oif.ala.org/librarians-vs-huacs-book-burnings/>.

The staged publicity shots are clear evidence of the coordination by the administration, students, teachers, and parents with the press. The school was reinforcing to students that their duty as young Catholics was to “make the world around them a more Christian place” as “Catholic action, social service, and the attempt to prevent social disorders go hand in hand.”¹⁵⁸ Fittingly, school leaders and teachers encouraged students to support the ecumenical press and avoid worldly literature.¹⁵⁹ *The Catholic Sun* was the official newspaper of the Diocese of Syracuse, widely available in the region and easily accessible at \$2.50 for an annual

¹⁵⁸ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

¹⁵⁹ St. Patrick’s Academy, “The Patrician, 1949.”

subscription.¹⁶⁰ It played a powerful role in inciting anti-comics activism in Catholic schools, as did Bishop Edmund F. Gibbons of the Albany Catholic Diocese, who asked parishioners to boycott any local vendors that sold indecent comics and magazines.¹⁶¹

The event was not free of critique. The student demonstrations were particularly concerning to distributors. Abraham M. Pierson, a New York-based purveyor, connected the ACC activities on schoolgrounds to Hitler's regime. Labeling the messaging as propaganda, he argued that harsh measures were not the ones that would solve the juvenile delinquency problem.¹⁶² He also noted the then-unacknowledged truth that significant numbers of adults read comics, which necessitated much less oversight.¹⁶³ Other merchants noted that some of the businesses targeted by anti-comics activists did not even sell the periodicals.¹⁶⁴ Vendors asserted that they wanted to make decisions that were in the best interests of all customers, not only those that were financially motivated.¹⁶⁵

The situation was not substantively different outside of the New York region. One of the earliest comic book conflagrations occurred in November 1945, on the grounds of SS Peter and Paul Parochial School in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. Speaking at the event, Reverend Robert E. Southard, SJ of Loyola University Chicago, blamed the town's woes on widespread comic book addictions, which were indicative of imbalanced "home and school environment[s]."

¹⁶⁰ St. Patrick's Academy, "The Patrician, 1949."

¹⁶¹ St. Patrick's Academy, "The Patrician, 1949."

¹⁶² "Burning Books Does Not Help, Pierson Says," *New York Times*, December 12, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁶³ *New York Times*, "Burning Books Does Not Help, Pierson Says."

¹⁶⁴ *New York Times*, "Burning Books Does Not Help, Pierson Says."

¹⁶⁵ *New York Times*, "Burning Books Does Not Help, Pierson Says."

Southard had worked with numerous youth groups, and that informed his perspective.¹⁶⁶ He went on to note that good comics could be substituted, but ultimately, all students needed to be “trained in the art of self-entertainment.”¹⁶⁷ Evaluating comics’ suitability for grade school readers, Southard personally compiled lists that organized the comics reviewed into three groups: “harmless, which included the most whole titles on the market, such as *Disney*, *Mother Goose*, *Blondie*, *Mutt and Jeff*, *Katzenjammers*, *Roy Rogers*, and *The Lone Ranger*; “questionable,” which were not explicit, but still not completely inoffensive, like *Li'l Abner*, *Orphan Annie*, *Tarzan*, *Dick Tracy*, *Flash Gordon*, *Mandrake*, and *Superman*; and “condemned,” which were too intolerable to be exposed to children, including *Batman*, *Hawkman*, *Wonder Woman*, *Miss Fury*, *Miss Victory*, *Human Torch*, *Green Hornet*, and *Crime Does Not Pay*.¹⁶⁸

The first group was comprised of family-friendly fare, cartoonish and usually derived from newspaper comic strips.¹⁶⁹ The second category consisted of comics meant for slightly more mature readers, as they contained more violence and social commentary.¹⁷⁰ Comics that threatened the social order were adjudicated as condemned; standard superhero stories appeared with greater frequency on Southard’s list than crime and horror comics.¹⁷¹ They generally were aimed at more mature readers and several even dared to depict women in nontraditional gender roles.¹⁷² The students who collected the most comics for disposal were honored with their names

¹⁶⁶ “The End of Superman,” *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, November 10, 1945, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁶⁷ “Catholic School Pupils to Burn ‘Undesirable’ Comics,” *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, November 6, 1945, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁶⁸ *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, “Catholic School Pupils to Burn ‘Undesirable’ Comics.”

¹⁶⁹ *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, “Catholic School Pupils to Burn ‘Undesirable’ Comics.”

¹⁷⁰ *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, “Catholic School Pupils to Burn ‘Undesirable’ Comics.”

¹⁷¹ *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, “Catholic School Pupils to Burn ‘Undesirable’ Comics.”

¹⁷² *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, “Catholic School Pupils to Burn ‘Undesirable’ Comics.”

in the local paper, and subsequently, both “questionable” and “condemned” comics were to be burned.¹⁷³ Southard was committed to supporting comics that encouraged a “respect for property and life; respect for police and other duly appointed guardians of the law,” both concepts that later reemerged in the Comics Code Authority.¹⁷⁴ He also was among an influential subset of Catholic activists who did not condemn all comics and wanted to use the genre for educational purposes; he even went on to write comics for the Catechetical Guild Education Society.¹⁷⁵

At St. Gall’s Parochial School, located on Chicago’s West Side, more than 3,000 comics were burned, immediately followed by 600 students signing a petition that subsequently was sent to Washington, D.C. The appeal demanded lawmakers establish a ban on “indecent comics.” Reportedly organized by fourth grader Marlene Marrello, the bonfire occurred on December 5, 1947, a brisk Friday afternoon. Among those burned were suspense and superhero comics, like *Crime Busters*, *Batman*, *Miss Marvel*, *The Spirit*, *The Phantom*, *Mandrake*, and *Superman*, but also those generally considered to be innocuous, including *Archie*.¹⁷⁶ A year later, SS Peter and Paul School made headlines for a comic book burning on its grounds. This Auburn, New York bonfire took place on December 23, 1948, planned after Reverend E. Leo McManus, assistant pastor of St. Mary’s Church, had spoken to the PTA on the dangers comics posed to American youths.¹⁷⁷ To send a message to comic book publishers that they were displeased with filthy

¹⁷³ *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, “Catholic School Pupils to Burn ‘Undesirable’ Comics.”

¹⁷⁴ *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, “Catholic School Pupils to Burn ‘Undesirable’ Comics.”

¹⁷⁵ Reverend Richard E. Southard, SJ and Addison Burbank. *The Life of Christ: A Catholic Comic*. Saint Paul, MN: Catechetical Guild Education Society, 1955.

¹⁷⁶ “600 Pupils Prepare Petitions Asking Ban of ‘Indecent Comics’ at St. Gall’s Parochial School,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 7, 1947, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁷⁷ “Children of SS Peter-Paul School Burn Comic Books with Bonfire,” *Auburn Citizen-Advertiser*, December 22, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

comics, teachers, parents, and aggrieved public officials organized the bonfire at SS Peter and Paul Parochial School.¹⁷⁸ McManus charged kids to cleanse their own homes of disagreeable comics and canvass their neighborhoods in search of others to burn. In close collaboration with the PTA, principal Sister Boniface, teacher Sister Marcella, and assistant pastor Reverend Stephen A. Chomko marshalled the kids.¹⁷⁹ The entire student body was on hand to bear witness as the unsuitable literature was burned in the schoolyard.¹⁸⁰ The children who collected the most comics for the fire had their names printed in the local paper, a technique that had proven an efficacious incentive for parents and youths in other municipalities.¹⁸¹

Just a few weeks later, after a citywide campaign led by Girl Scouts Senior Troop 29, grade and high school students organized a bonfire on the tennis courts of Cape Girardeau, Missouri's St. Mary's High School. At the event itself, The Very Reverend Theon Schoen led the students in a pledge. Schoen called for all schools, public and parochial, to join their movement. Additional on-campus ACC activities were planned by the school's PTA.¹⁸² The high school students conducted a mock trial, essaying the roles of key figures on both sides of the debate.¹⁸³ The teachers and parents who organized it used a list published in *Parents Magazine* to help classify dangerous comics for schools.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ "The 'Comic' Book Bonfire," *Auburn Citizen-Advertiser*, December 23, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁷⁹ "Children of SS Peter-Paul School Burn Comic Books with Bonfire," *Auburn Citizen-Advertiser*, December 22, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁸⁰ "Pupils Burn Comic Books," *New York Times*, December 23, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁸¹ "School Children in Auburn Collect, Burn Comic books," *The Post-Standard*, December 23, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁸² *The Southeast Missourian*, "Pupils Burn Comic Books to Open Girardeau Drive."

¹⁸³ *The Southeast Missourian*, "Pupils Burn Comic Books to Open Girardeau Drive."

¹⁸⁴ *The Southeast Missourian*, "Pupils Burn Comic Books to Open Girardeau Drive."

This sort of activism, whereby Catholic officials offered guidance to schools and libraries to restrict comic book-reading, continued unabated for the next six years. In another high-profile example, the Archbishop of Chicago took an active role in the local ACC movement, convening a committee to review the decency of comics.¹⁸⁵ Their findings were communicated to the teachers and principals of Catholic schools in the area. A different citizens' committee in Newport noted that reminding retailers that exercising good citizenship meant not selling objectionable comics to students; collecting and donating "good books" to libraries so that kids had access to better reading material; organizing campaigns around improving writing and reading habits; encouraging self-censorship; using media attention to highlight their objections; and targeting national publishers and editorial boards responsible for abhorrent comics and periodicals.¹⁸⁶

Anti-comics activity of this sort only began slowing with the 1954 establishment of the Comic Codes Authority, which will be covered in more detail in subsequent chapters. The enactment of the Code did not end all activism immediately.¹⁸⁷ In the Pacific Northwest,

¹⁸⁵ Ginder, *With Ink and Crozier*.

¹⁸⁶ "Portsmouth Scouts' Plans for Bonfire Go up in Smoke of 'Book-burn' Tag," *Newport Daily News*, February 13, 1955, private collection; Ruth Thomas to Hilde Mosse, August 23, 1954, box 1, folder 5, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

¹⁸⁷ "Only 200 Books Have Been Given for Comics Swaps," *Roanoke Times*, October 28, 1954, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Come Book Swap Set for This Week," *Roanoke Times*, October 31, 1954, personal archive of David Hajdu; "8,000 'Comics' Go up in Flames," *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, December 13, 1954, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Comics Burned," *Tri-City Herald*, December 13, 1954, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Crime, Horror, Sex Books to Be Burned," *Mansfield News-Journal*, November 5, 1954, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Portsmouth Scouts' Plans for Bonfire Go up in Smoke of 'Book-burn' Tag," *Newport Daily News*, February 13, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Girl Scouts Here Launch Anti-comic Book Drive," *Indiana Evening Gazette*, February 21, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Pupils Burn Comic Books to Open Girardeau Drive," *The Southeast Missourian*, February 25, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu; Chet Szymczak, "Comic Books Burned," *The Maryville Daily Forum*, February 25, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu; "'Operation Book Swap' Is Launched at Stone Bank against Comic Books," *The Maryville Daily Forum*, March 14, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Pupils Burn Comic Books," *Decatur Daily Review*, February 23, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Legion Auxiliary Sets Comic Book Burning," *New York Post*, February 24, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Comic 'Book Burning' Hit in Norwich Legion Drive," *The Bridgeport Post*, February 26, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Protests End Plan to Burn Comic Books," *The Post-Standard*, February 27,

December 1954 saw a spate of anti-comics activities enthusiastically attended by schoolchildren; these included “weekend civic demonstrations,” good-for-bad book swaps, and even an 8,000-comic book bonfire organized by the Junior Chamber of Commerce.¹⁸⁸ A few weeks after the Code was passed, teachers, administrators, and parents at St. Mary’s Parochial School in Mansfield, Ohio planned a bonfire of horror, crime, and pornographic comics. At the suggestion of the school’s principal, Sister Mary Josepha, the seventh and eighth graders in the Civics Club organized the book-swap-cum-bonfire.¹⁸⁹ School-affiliated groups remained active during this period as well. Explorer Post 18, a Boy Scout troop in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, had their February 1955 comic book bonfire cancelled due to negative advance word of mouth. In the end, rather than the symbolic gesture of a grand bonfire at the Butts Hill Revolutionary War fortification, the effort only resulted in the comics collected being donated as scratch paper.¹⁹⁰ The same month, Girl Scouts in Indiana, Pennsylvania used the Comics Code Authority as a critical resource in their effort to collect and burn offensive comics. In its “Operation Cleanup,” Troop 7 amassed and incinerated several dozen comics that were not approved by the Code.¹⁹¹ Instances of school-affiliated anti-comics activities became less frequent, but did not reach a terminus until several years after the Code had been named a success.

1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Norwich Drive in Comic Books a Success as Children Rush to Trade 10 for a Classic,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu.

¹⁸⁸ *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, “8,000 ‘Comics’ Go up in Flames”; *Tri-City Herald*, “Comics Burned.”

¹⁸⁹ *Mansfield News-Journal*, “Crime, Horror, Sex Books to Be Burned.”

¹⁹⁰ *Newport Daily News*, “Portsmouth Scouts’ Plans.”

¹⁹¹ *New York Post*, “Legion Auxiliary Sets Comic Book Burning.”

1.6 National Organization for Decent Literature

Fifteen years into its existence, the National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL) was focused chiefly on efforts to eliminate dangerous comics.¹⁹² At the NODL's founding, its charge was informed by three beliefs: first, lewd literature was easy to produce and peddle, with a high rate on returns for its creators; second, obscene publications were a test of America's fortitude; and third, the best countermeasure for vulgar books was a well-organized and moral citizenry.¹⁹³ The NODL did not originate as an agent of the Church, but it was formed by the Catholic Hierarchy. Individuals from a range of denominations and even secular entities participated in its operation. In some areas, the NODL even was run by non-Catholics.¹⁹⁴ Altogether, there were 49 local NODL chapters attached to dioceses, including 12 in the New York region.¹⁹⁵ The NODL's principal function was reviewing and making recommendations around potentially objectionable literature. The organization engaged teachers, librarians, and professors, alongside anyone else with "a good cultural background, an interest in reading, a concern for the best in contemporary literature, and also a concern for the effect of reading on youth," irrespective of their profession or religion.¹⁹⁶

Biblioclasts were celebrated by the NODL. A 1939 political cartoon entitled "Keeping a Watching Eye" and credited to mononymous artist Barney, showed a figure representing

¹⁹² Ginder, *With Ink and Crozier*.

¹⁹³ John F. Noll, *The Drive for Decency in Print: Report of the Bishops' Committee Sponsoring the National Organization for Decent Literature* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1939).

¹⁹⁴ Ginder, *With Ink and Crozier*.

¹⁹⁵ Noll, et al, *The Drive for Decency in Print*.

¹⁹⁶ Thomas F. O'Connor, "The National Organization for Decent Literature: A Phase in American Catholic Censorship," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 65, 4 (October 1995): 386-414.

“cooperating publishers” throwing books into a large bonfire labeled “elimination of immoral publications,” while a figure representing the NODL states, “I’d better stay around and see that the fire keeps burning!” Conspicuously, the literature being burned included pornographic periodicals as well as actual books. This embrace of censorship was less problematic than the issues posed by comics for many in the Catholic community.¹⁹⁷ For the NODL, censoring prurient books and comics was a matter of national security; at the organization’s founding, the Church asserted, “Obscene literature is an evil of such magnitude as seriously as to threaten the moral, social, and national life of our country. History demonstrates that no nation can long survive when the moral law has broken down.”¹⁹⁸ Unlike some other groups, the NODL made neither apologies nor excuses for bowdlerization.

The Archdiocese decried the comics industry as a violent vice committed to corrupting both the youth and adults of America, with an elaborate, nefarious strategy in place to do so.¹⁹⁹ However, regarding the list of indecent material it regularly created, the NODL was careful to note that not all periodicals were immoral, per se, but each had violated at least one of the following principles (as delineated in the Code for Clean Reading): one, glorification of crime and/or criminals; two, too much of a focus on the prurient; three, depiction of illicit love affairs; four, suggestive or otherwise indecent illustrations; or five, disreputable advertising. Perhaps reflecting their participation on NODL review panels, schoolteachers and other authority figures consistently expressed concerns mirroring these points throughout the 1940s and 1950s.²⁰⁰ The

¹⁹⁷ Noll, et al, *The Drive for Decency in Print*.

¹⁹⁸ Noll, et al, *The Drive for Decency in Print*.

¹⁹⁹ Noll, et al, *The Drive for Decency in Print*.

²⁰⁰ Noll, et al, *The Drive for Decency in Print*.

NODL also developed a “pledge for clean reading,” whereby students promised not only to abstain from buying and reading offensive material, they also vowed to avoid places that sold it entirely.²⁰¹

The NODL’s lists also were used by citizens groups to pressure schools and libraries to enact anti-comics policies, with minimal pushback from organizations like the American Library Association.²⁰² The organization also collaborated directly with the Indiana Pharmaceutical Association to draft a classification code that would allow vendors to determine if specific issues were appropriate to sell to students.²⁰³ It’s worth noting that the NODL did not oppose all comics. It actually published *Treasure Chest of Fun and Fact* between 1946 and 1973; the comic was created to impart Catholic values and teachings to students and was distributed through religious schools.²⁰⁴

The other group prominently assessing comics for indecent content was the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books. In some ways, the group functioned like a proto-Comics Code Authority, reviewing large numbers of comics and sharing the results with the public. The Committee supported itself with sales of its published findings and maintained a small staff that evaluated 386 comics in its initial set of organizational meetings.²⁰⁵ In May 1948, the Committee grew out of a sermon by Reverend Jesse L. Murrell, who also organized the first list

²⁰¹ Noll, et al, *The Drive for Decency in Print*.

²⁰² James Rorty, “The Harassed Pocket-book Publishers.” *The Antioch Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1955): 415; Carol L. Tilley, *Of Nightingales and Supermen: How Youth Services Librarians Responded to Comics between the Years 1938 and 1955* (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2007), 134; Lopes, *Demanding Respect*, 38.

²⁰³ Ginder, *With Ink and Crozier*.

²⁰⁴ Lindsey Bronder, “Capes and Catechesis: The Use of Comic Books to Catechize Catholic Youths” (M.S. Thesis. University of Dayton, 2020).

²⁰⁵ “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded,” *Press-Gazette*, July 2, 1954, personal archive of David Hajdu.

of objectionable comics.²⁰⁶ A large taskforce of over 180 people of “fine standing”— grade and high school teachers, librarians, university professors, PTA leaders, pharmacists, civic leaders, and members of the clergy—came together to review comics. Women comprised more than 85 percent of the Committee.²⁰⁷ The criteria by which comics were evaluated closely reflected many of the expressed concerns of educators: grammar; quality of the writing; presentation of American values and institutions; racial and class prejudice; depiction of law enforcement and substance abuse; printing; artwork; coloring; and the treatment of morbid topics.²⁰⁸ Comics were judged as “not objectionable” (and therefore, suitable for all students), “somewhat objectionable” (and only appropriate for teens and older children who require less guidance), “objectionable,” or “very objectionable.” The latter two designations meant the comics not appropriate for even adult readers.²⁰⁹

The Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books assisted Congressional investigators with their inquiry into pornography and juvenile delinquency in 1954.²¹⁰ Furthermore, the work of the of the Committee influenced the anti-comics crusade in the United Kingdom, where schoolteachers were just as active as they were in the U.S.²¹¹ The lists the Committee generated were utilized by a range of anti-comics groups and were particularly popular with parent-teacher

²⁰⁶ *Press-Gazette*, “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded.”

²⁰⁷ *Press-Gazette*, “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded.”

²⁰⁸ *Press-Gazette*, “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded.”

²⁰⁹ *Press-Gazette*, “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded.”

²¹⁰ *Press-Gazette*, “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded.”

²¹¹ *Press-Gazette*, “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded”; Garth S. Jowett, Penny Reath, and Monica Schouten, “The Control of Mass Entertainment Media in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain: Historical Surveys,” in *Report of the Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry, Volume 4* (Ontario: The Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry, 197), 68.

associations.²¹² More locally, Reverend W. Scott Westerman, pastor of the First Methodist Church of Covington, Kentucky, expressed gratitude at receiving the lists, remarking on the ignorance of vendors relative to the actual content of comics.²¹³ Also utilizing the list compiled by the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books, the Commission on Education of the Hillsboro Methodist Church organized a mass discarding of noxious comics in July 1954.²¹⁴ The Committee had a national reputation and its members were connected to those of other ACC organizations. Similar groups were established all over the country and gave concerned teachers, librarians, and principals opportunities to agitate against offensive comic books.²¹⁵

There were three factors that explain the robust participation of Catholic educators, administrators, and students in the ACC. The first one was doctrinal. To protect the faith and the morality of the faithful, the Catholic Church has been banning writings since at least the fourth century CE. Additionally, between 1559 and 1966, the Church published the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, or the “Index of Forbidden Books,” which made the suppression of potentially heretical books obligatory law. The *Index* banned texts across genres and in some instances, even prohibited the entire oeuvres by certain philosophers.²¹⁶ Across history, the targets of the Church’s censorship efforts have been those individuals and groups that threaten to

²¹² Jowett et al, “The Control of Mass Entertainment Media,” 72-73.

²¹³ *Press-Gazette*, “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded.”

²¹⁴ *Press-Gazette*, “Objectionable Comic Books Are Discarded.”

²¹⁵ Lopes, *Demanding Respect*, 44.

²¹⁶ Max Lenard, “On the Origin, Development, and Demise of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, Journal of Access Services 3, no. 4 (August 2006): 51-63.

upend the social order; perceived connections between juvenile delinquency and comics were partially the result of the white middle class's anxieties around demographic shifts.²¹⁷

Secondly, the Church had a sophisticated apparatus for offering directives and implementing plans with its schools. With clergy serving as faculty and administrators, Catholic schools were organized to respond to the dictates of Church leadership. Further, there were organized groups, such as the National Legion of Decency, National Organization for Decent Literature, National Council of Catholic Men, the National Council of Catholic Women, the Holy Name Society, and the Knights of Columbus, to buttress the fiat of Church leadership. Diocesan newspapers, including *Our Sunday Visitor*, *Magnificat*, *The Catholic Sun*, *The Catholic Union*, and *Catholic Courier*, had the capacity to communicate to parishioners across the New York region, quickly and effectively.²¹⁸

And thirdly, in the 1930s and 1940s, the Catholic Church had success impelling the motion picture industry to establish a program of self-regulation. This was compelling evidence that they could influence comic book publishers as well. Groups of concerned Catholics established their own motion picture review boards in Chicago, Detroit, and Boston. Nationally, the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, and the Catholic Production Code reviewed films and made recommendations on movies deemed appropriate for church members; some of this work continued into the seventies. These initiatives were effectual, and rather than risk governmental action, the film industry opted for self-censorship and established their own regulatory body, the Hays Office.²¹⁹ Its motion

²¹⁷ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*; O'Connor, "The National Organization for Decent Literature."

²¹⁸ Aurelie Hagstrom, "The Catholic Church and Censorship in Literature, Books, Drama, and Film," *Analytic Teaching* 23, no. 2 (April 2001): 147-156.

²¹⁹ Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996).

picture code operated from 1934 to 1968.²²⁰ Many of the same Catholic groups involved in the movement to censor films also were involved in the ACC, and individuals on both sides of the debate would have been aware of its influence.

1.7 Secular Schools and the Censorship Spectrum

Unlike parochial schools, their secular counterparts lacked a powerful, overarching entity to coordinate anti-comics activities and provide their teachers, students, and principals resources to influence large segments of society. Accordingly, there was a greater reliance on independent organizations for the purposes of spurring pro- and anti-comics activism in these contexts. Some organizations worked collaboratively with teachers, librarians, and administrators; other groups counted them among their members. There also was a more overtly political angle to the “moral mission,” with educators and other crusaders expressing serious concerns about the potential connections between comics and political extremism, including communism, fascism, and Nazism.

The American Legion Auxiliary of Norwich, Connecticut had planned a comic book burning for February 1955.²²¹ The Auxiliary did not discriminate based on genre; any comic was fair game for the inferno.²²² Though the Auxiliary was not an educational organization or professional association for teachers, its charter did articulate that bolstering schools and promoting education was necessary for advancing American values. Throughout the 1950s, it

²²⁰ The creators of the Comics Code Authority took as inspiration elements of the Motion Picture Production Code. Chapter four describes this process in more detail.

²²¹ *New York Post*, “Legion Auxiliary Sets Comic Book Burning.”

²²² *New York Post*, “Legion Auxiliary Sets Comic Book Burning.”

organized initiatives and activities supporting the teaching profession.²²³ Even still, it was the “social and moral” objections, not academic ones, that drove efforts like these.²²⁴ In response to the event, John Goldwater, a representative of the comic book publishing industry, commented that biblioclasm was not the American way. Additional pushback came from the American Civil Liberties Union and American Book Publishers Council. Peter Jennison of the Council was even more direct in his analogizing, labeling the Auxiliary’s planned censorship as on the slippery slope to Hitler’s brand of totalitarianism.²²⁵ For some, the encroachment of censorship was more detrimental to society than anything in comic books.

The bad press was enough to dissuade the Auxiliary from going forward with the event; even the National Boy Scouts Council, which previously had supported anti-comics activities with enthusiasm, opposed it.²²⁶ Five thousand comics were to be traded for good books—including the biographies of great Americans, children’s books, and special interest hardbacks on philately and flags from around the world. The idea was for each child to trade ten bad comics for a work of classic literature.²²⁷ There was a large outpouring of interest from local youths, with over 400 participating in the bad comic book drive.²²⁸ Nevertheless, the organizer, Mrs. Charles Gilbert, former president of the Auxiliary’s national operations, stated as she called off

²²³ William Phillips DeMerville Thompson, *History, National American Legion Auxiliary, Volume 1*. Pittsburgh: Jackson-Remlinger Printing Company, 1924: 27, 84, 94; “Why I Teach Contest,” *The Classical Weekly*, November 1, 1953, ProQuest.

²²⁴ *New York Post*, “Legion Auxiliary Sets Comic Book Burning.”

²²⁵ *The Bridgeport Post*, “Comic ‘Book Burning’ Hit in Norwich Legion Drive.”

²²⁶ *The Bridgeport Post*, “Comic ‘Book Burning’ Hit in Norwich Legion Drive.”

²²⁷ *The Post-Standard*, “Protests End Plan to Burn Comic Books.”

²²⁸ “Norwich Drive in Comic Books a Success as Children Rush to Trade 10 for a Classic,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu.

the bonfire, “There are overtones to book burning that aren’t good.”²²⁹ After the cancellation, and another organization assumed responsibility for and privately incinerated all the collected comics.²³⁰ Indeed, it sometimes was a successful defense against the anti-comics crusaders to compare their work to that of fascists.²³¹ William McKenzie, a retired Connecticut police lieutenant who had been active in earlier phases of the ACC, felt the campaign had been ineffective as the public’s obsession with comics was abating as concerns arose about newer media.²³² However, it was clear from Gilbert’s comments and the disavowal of other groups that the suppressive strategies were at issue.

The fact that public schools were avowedly anticommunist and antifascist did not keep teachers and administrators from participating in aggressive anti-comics activities. In the postwar years, editorials comparing the more extreme variants of comics activism with fascism had been common. A January 14, 1949 editorial in Michigan’s *Daily Globe* argued that comic book burnings were just another variant of censorship, one that was unsuccessful in Europe.²³³ The following day, the Asbury Park, New Jersey PTA gave its blessing for a two-day comic book drive that would result in a bonfire. The idea developed from the national meeting of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, held in Atlantic City just three months before, in which the organization affirmed its goal of “working for closer cooperation between the school

²²⁹ *The Post-Standard*, “Protests End Plan to Burn Comic Books.”

²³⁰ *The Post-Standard*, “Protests End Plan to Burn Comic Books.”

²³¹ “Legion Auxiliary Sets Comic Book Burning,” *New York Post*, February 24, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²³² *New York Times*, “Norwich Drive in Comic Books a Success as Children Rush to Trade 10 for a Classic.”

²³³ “Book Burning Scouts,” *Ironwood Daily Globe*, January 14, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu.

and the public library in serving children... to combat the comic-book fad.”²³⁴ In cooperation with the local fire department, the Rumson, New Jersey Cub Scouts of America planned a bonfire for January 1949. The collecting of unpalatable comics was incentivized with the promise of a prize to the Scout who brought in the largest number of them. With a planned procession from Borough Hall to the bonfire’s location in Victory Park, the event had the full imprimatur of local leadership and cooperation of school administration.²³⁵ Forty Cub Scouts led the collection efforts, and Walter F. Carle, the town’s superintendent of roads, agreed to provide the incinerator. The troop leader provided a list of good comics, none of which were burned.²³⁶

Across the state, harsh measures were being enacted against comics, evoking disagreements about the appropriateness of censorship as a tactic for opposing the genre. Representing 6,900 drugstores, the New York Pharmaceutical Association asserted that pharmacists “do not desire to act as censors” to aid the fight against juvenile delinquency.²³⁷ Noting that ordinances had been passed in fifty cities around the country, including nearby Rochester, *Editor and Publisher* ran an editorial praising the voluntary self-regulatory rubric recently implemented in New Orleans. The plan was based on a study that had appeared in the journal earlier. The editorial staff felt other models promoted censorship. This one, however, encouraged kids to seek out higher-quality books rather than eliminating comic books, a tactic that subsequently would become very popular among teachers and researchers.²³⁸

²³⁴ National Congress of Parents and Teachers, “Proceedings of the... Annual Meeting.” Washington, D.C.: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1949: 91.

²³⁵ “Comic Criminals to Burn,” *New York Times*, January 7, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²³⁶ “‘Bad’ Comics to Go,” *Asbury Park Evening Press*, January 6, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²³⁷ “Pupils Burn Comic Books,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²³⁸ “The ‘Comic’ Book Bonfire,” *Auburn Citizen-Advertiser*, December 23, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

Just two months earlier, an October 30, 1948 editorial in the *Charleston Daily Mail* put the blame for this rise in suppressive behavior on “parental neglect and indifference,” a rare argument at the time. Comic book burnings again were derided as an American form of Nazism and labeled a threat to America’s “democratic educational system.”²³⁹ These well-argued points went unanswered, though. Even the US military resorted to burning comics at one point. On the orders of the federal government, a shipment of comics, valued at \$17,500, was burned after the content was deemed too socialistic. The government had ordered the creation of the comic to spur reenlistment, but it was preferable to destroy the books rather than risk encouraging Marxism.²⁴⁰ The extreme activism that had occurred on schoolgrounds fit into wider pattern of aggressive resistance to comics.

In many instances, it was educators who were advocating for censorship. The Joint Committee on Comics and Comic Books in Waltham, Watertown, and Weston was typical of so many ACC groups in its composition, with educators, PTA members, scout leaders, clergy, a judge, and the school board administrators participating. One particularly vocal member, John W. McDevitt, said of the students in his district that comic book-reading caused a preoccupation with death and doom. He also cited what he described as legal evidence derived from the testimonies of youthful offenders that comics “provide the blueprint for crime.”²⁴¹ In that he was the school superintendent of Waltham, Massachusetts, his perspectives greatly influenced the

²³⁹ “A Little Too Pat,” *The Charleston Daily Mail*, October 30, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁴⁰ “Comic Books Burned,” *Mansfield News-Journal*, February 21, 1951, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁴¹ “3,000 Comic Books.” *St. Louis Register*. November 12, 1954. Catholic News Services Archive.

policy recommendations made by the Joint Committee, if not how the schools themselves dealt with comics.²⁴²

In some instances, the critiques of comics were started in other contexts and eventually were taken up by educators. A key example of this occurred when the *Quincy Patriot Ledger* initiated its campaign against dangerous comics in October 1948, with the editorial entitled, “A Dangerous Situation.” Another fifteen front-page editorials on the comic book threat followed over the course of the next decade.²⁴³ City ordinances were passed to control the sale of comics and form a citizen review board in late 1948. Distributors pledged to ban comics and legislators quickly enacted other such injunctions around the state of Massachusetts.²⁴⁴ This culminated in the establishment of a school committee to support the *Patriot Ledger*’s successful initiative.²⁴⁵ In response, Lee Gleason Publications, Inc. sued Quincy in federal court in June 1949.²⁴⁶ It took years for the case to move through the court system’s labyrinthine appeals process, but the

²⁴² “Church Speakers Endorse Plea for Crime Comic Ban,” *Patriot Ledger*, October 11, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁴³ “A Dangerous Situation,” *Patriot Ledger*, October 9, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu; “The Way Is Open,” *Patriot Ledger*, October 20, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Cooperation Needed,” *Patriot Ledger*, October 26, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu; “The Heat Is On,” *Patriot Ledger*, November 3, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu; “An Intelligent Attitude,” *Patriot Ledger*, November 20, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Controlling Comic Books,” *Patriot Ledger*, December 15, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Who Says We Can’t,” *Patriot Ledger*, July 23, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu; “A Fine Record,” *Patriot Ledger*, January 8, 1951, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Serving Quincy,” *Patriot Ledger*, October 24, 1951, personal archive of David Hajdu; “State Follows Quincy’s Lead in Juvenile Reading Review,” *Patriot Ledger*, April 4, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu; “City Review Board Blacklists 51 Objectionable Publishers,” *Patriot Ledger*, March 24, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Distributors Promise to Ban Objectionable Novels, Comic Books,” *Patriot Ledger*, February 16, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Crime Comic Book, Liquor Control Laws Passed by Council,” *Patriot Ledger*, December 21, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Citizen’s Review Board Condemns Two Dozen Novels, Crime Comics,” *Patriot Ledger*, February 11, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁴⁴ *Patriot Ledger*, “State Follows Quincy’s Lead in Juvenile Reading Review”; *Patriot Ledger*, “City Review Board Blacklists 51 Objectionable Publishers”; *Patriot Ledger*, “Distributors Promise to Ban Objectionable Novels, Comic Books.”

²⁴⁵ “School Board Backs Crime Comic Drive,” *Patriot Ledger*, October 16, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁴⁶ “Comic Book Firm Sues City,” *Patriot Ledger*, June 23, 1949, personal archive of David Hajdu.

activities of the civilian review board were ruled unconstitutional in 1957. Changing tastes also blunted the later efforts of the Joint Committee, but it was the censorship claims that finally made its work unpopular, and several members resigned due to the pressure.²⁴⁷

It also is important to keep in mind that many Americans were torn about whether to censor comics and could not advocate for either position. One such example is the October 1948 *Quincy Patriot Ledger* editorial that resulted from the comic book-inspired suicide of a seven-year-old Roxbury boy. The author decried censorship, while at the same time arguing that the public health crisis caused by comics demanded they not be peddled out of “common decency.”²⁴⁸ This was emblematic of a broad and deep ambivalence around how to control the comic book problem and was reflected in the lack of common school policies employed nationally. Teachers and administrators, in particular, wrestled with this idea. While, like parents and other authority figures, many educators disdained censorship, they also recognized the benefits of more aggressive tactics.

Comic book swaps—whereby kids congregated at a school or library and exchanged their comic collections for more preferable children’s literature—were a less contentious tactic for keeping the medium out of children’s hands. One slated for late October 1954—just days before the Comics Code Authority was ratified—in Roanoke, Virginia, elicited a lukewarm reaction

²⁴⁷ “Reviewers, Not Censors,” *Patriot Ledger*, March 12, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Public Confused,” *Patriot Ledger*, March 27, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Mr. Lewis Is Right,” *Patriot Ledger*, April 6, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Personnel Unimportant,” *Patriot Ledger*, May 23, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu. “Obscenity Unprotected,” *Patriot Ledger*, June 26, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu; “City’s Literary Review Board Is Called ‘Unconstitutional’,” *Patriot Ledger*, March 13, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Quincy Literary Review Board Members Resign; Opposed to Censorship,” *Patriot Ledger*, March 8, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Orders to End Board of Literary Review Presented to Council,” *Patriot Ledger*, April 2, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Obscene Literature Control Board Bill Killed by Senate,” *Patriot Ledger*, July 17, 1957, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁴⁸ “A Healthy Awareness,” *Patriot Ledger*, October 12, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

from local youths. To combat interest in horror comics, in particular, the Junior Women's Club collected an underwhelming 200 good books to donate to Virginia Heights, Jameson Elementary, St. Andrews, and Lady of Nazareth, a group of local public and private schools.²⁴⁹ Ultimately, additional organizations lent their support to the effort, including the four firehouses, a radio station, the YMCA and YWCA, a recreation center, and a community center.²⁵⁰ Pressure from the Southwest Lions Club and Exchange Club contributed to at least one local drug store removing the objectionable books from its shelves.²⁵¹ While the reports do not propose reasons for the youths' lack of enthusiasm, other instances of students' successful participation usually involved incentives that were not present here, including cash prizes, certificates or trophies, or the printing of their names in newspapers.

Yet another "Operation Book Swap," during which students were to receive an educational comic for every ten objectional ones turned in, was sponsored by the Wakeman American Legion Auxiliary.²⁵² In the 1950s, Wakeman township had a population of just over 600 denizens.²⁵³ Rockwellesque, the quiet Ohio hamlet had no need for a police chief until 1953; the town's concerns about comic books and crimewaves seems a clearer overreaction than most.²⁵⁴ The Auxiliary began advertising "Operation Book Swap" in the local press on February

²⁴⁹ Only 200 Books Have Been Given for Comics Swaps," *Roanoke Times*, October 28, 1954, personal archive of David Hajdu; "Comic Book Swap Set for This Week," *Roanoke Times*, October 31, 1954, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁵⁰ *Roanoke Times*, "Comic Book Swap Set for This Week."

²⁵¹ *Roanoke Times*, "Comic Book Swap Set for This Week."

²⁵² "Ten 'Bad' for One 'Good': Comics 'Swap' Set Up," *The Chronicle-Telegram*, February 24, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁵³ "U.S. Census Bureau," Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1951, Accessed 30 December 2022, <https://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/1951-02.pdf>.

²⁵⁴ "History," Florence Township, Eerie County, Ohio, Accessed 30 December 2022, <https://florencetwp.com/about/history.html>.

24, 1955. And beginning at 9 AM on March 1, 1955, students of all ages were encouraged to visit Townsend-Wakeman School, where the Auxiliary was trading the Code-approved comics. Parents were informed of “Operation Book Swap” via letters monographed by the Wakeman Bank Company.²⁵⁵ By this time, the comic book industry already had self-regulatory policies in place, but committee member Elaine Brucher was careful to assert that many in the Auxiliary did not believe they went far enough to address the concerns of teachers and parents.²⁵⁶ By March 5, 531 comics had been collected, and a cash prize of \$2.50 was awarded to third grade student Mickey O’Dell, who had gathered the largest number. They were all burned in a bonfire on the campus of the Townsend-Wakeman School.

The Auxiliary affirmed that additional anti-comics activities would continue, and a second phase of the Wakeman anti-comic book campaign collected an additional 896 comics the following week. Although only two-thirds of the comics had been labeled as objectionable, they were burned in the school’s furnace—evidence of the collaboration between outside activists and the school administration.²⁵⁷ The six kids who brought in the most comics were recognized with their names printed in *The Chronicle Telegram* of Elyria, Ohio.²⁵⁸ Despite that \$149.68 was spent purchasing dozens of books about King Arthur, Pinocchio, Robinson Crusoe, and doll-dressmaking, merely seventy-five percent of them were distributed.²⁵⁹ This time, “Operation

²⁵⁵ “1,427 Comics ‘Taboo’: A Book Swap Ends,” *The Chronicle-Telegram*, March 11, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; “Operation: Book Swap,” *The Chronicle-Telegram*, March 1, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁵⁶ *The Chronicle-Telegram*, “Operation: Book Swap.”

²⁵⁷ *The Chronicle-Telegram*, “1,427 Comics ‘Taboo.’”

²⁵⁸ *The Chronicle-Telegram*, “1,427 Comics ‘Taboo.’”

²⁵⁹ Wakeman American Legion Auxiliary check number 262, photocopy of a personal check, March 14, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu; Wakeman American Legion Auxiliary bank ledger, photocopy, February 23, 1955 to March 14, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu.

Book Swap” was a success, a fact evinced by shops like Roy’s Confectionary subsequently advertising to the public that it sold good comics books.²⁶⁰

Also in March 1955, the Hartland American Legion Auxiliary sponsored an “Operation Book Swap” in Stone Bank, Wisconsin. Culminating in a large bonfire, this one was staged by the Auxiliary working in close partnership with local PTAs.²⁶¹ The organizers saw the nation’s values as under siege by comics, as they likened the books to foreign “enemies trying to destroy America.”²⁶² The Auxiliary mailed letters that included lists of unsuitable comics to the parents of six- to sixteen-year-old students, again reflecting cooperation between school leaders and anti-comics activists.²⁶³ The letter also included facts and findings about crime, horror, and sexually explicit comics. More than 500 books were collected and burned.²⁶⁴ Cash prizes were promised to the child who returned the largest number of offensive comics.²⁶⁵

There were many educational groups whose activities could be described neither as supporting nor thwarting the proliferation of comic books; they existed somewhere between the two poles. The National Education Association officially found no causality in its own studies of comics and delinquency, but stopped short of recommending them for educational use.²⁶⁶ “The Comics Supplemental Guide,” as developed by the Kindergarten Union International’s League

²⁶⁰ *The Chronicle-Telegram*, “1,427 Comics ‘Taboo.’”

²⁶¹ “‘Operation Book Swap’ Is Launched at Stone Bank against Comic Books,” *The Maryville Daily Forum*, March 14, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁶² *The Maryville Daily Forum*, “Operation Book Swap.”

²⁶³ *The Maryville Daily Forum*, “Operation Book Swap.”

²⁶⁴ *The Maryville Daily Forum*, “Operation Book Swap.”

²⁶⁵ *The Maryville Daily Forum*, “Operation Book Swap.”

²⁶⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, 88th Cong., April 21, 22, and June 4, 1954.

for the Improvement of the Children, underscored the ubiquity of comic book-reading in addition to the complex matrix of forces that came to bear on youth behavior. It acknowledged that the prevalence of comic book-reading somewhat justified the concern, but also that there was little evidence of a causal relationship.²⁶⁷ And finally, some members of the New York City Board of Education publicly decried the dangers of comics, while others served on advisory boards of comic book publishers.²⁶⁸ Within New York City schools, no system-wide bans were implemented, and students—with or without the support of their faculty mentors—did not organize any largescale book swaps or boycotts. Perhaps because they did not need to assert their desire to read or not read comics as aggressively, the tenor of student activism looked fundamentally different here, as reflected in the next section’s case study. There were many reasons that suburban and exurban educators and other authority figures reacted differently than their New York City counterparts. Chiefly, they were fearful of inner-city violence infiltrating their towns and were grasping desperately at what they perceived to be any potential solutions.²⁶⁹

Like their Catholic school peers, public school teachers were active participants in the debate. While their personal convictions represented a variety of perspectives on the medium, in the press, they were almost exclusively depicted as anti-comics. The interest of external factions, including parent-teacher associations, civic groups, and citizens’ committees, delineated teachers’ public stances. Teachers lacked the professional authority to push back against parents and other community leaders. Suburban and exurban fears of urban crime led to communities’

²⁶⁷ Josette Frank, “Let’s Look at the Comics,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1942), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

²⁶⁸ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, 148, 177, 304.

²⁶⁹ Khalil Gibran Muhammad, “Where Did All the White Criminals Go?: Reconfiguring Race and Crime on the Road to Mass Incarceration,” *SOULS: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 13, no. 1 (March 2011): 81-83.

attempts to use schools and their resources to eliminate the comic book threat. Moreover, postwar anxieties about the encroachment of dangerous foreign ideologies into American schools further limited teachers' space to explore openly questions of comics' educative value and potential to inspire juvenile misbehavior. As will be explored later in this chapter, teachers found other means to discuss these issues with one another.

1.8 Race and Comics in Schools: A Case Study

Differences in how Black and white communities experienced the ACC movement were apparent even beyond the ways their respective media outlets reported it. Black students and teachers were acutely aware of issues with the representation of people of color in comics, and this was discussed in public speeches and the Black press.²⁷⁰ Further, it was apparent in the conversations between Wertham's close colleague Hilda Mosse and school librarians that there was a racialized facet to the anti-comics conversation. Librarians around the country expressed

²⁷⁰ "Comic Book Talk," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, April 24, 1954, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Richard Dier, "Kids Crusade to Eliminate Stereotypes," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, September 8, 1945, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Richard Dier, "New Comic Book Battles Hate and Intolerance," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, June 15, 1946, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Editor Charges Pro-Fascists Block Anti-Racist Comic Book," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 11, 1946, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "First Race Comic Book Out," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 19, 1947, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Robert C. Hendrickson, "Better Adults Mean Better Juveniles," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 4, 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Horror Comics Contributing to Delinquency," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, April 5, 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Fern Marja, "Kids Win War on Comic Book's 'Ape-Like Villain,'" *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 5, 1945, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Marjorie McKenzie, "Pursuit of Democracy: Does the Fight against Comic Books Encroach upon Freedom of Speech?" *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 9, 1949, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Parents Held Responsible for Child's Reading Tastes," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 30, 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Pastor Says We Can't Blame Children for JD," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 14, 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Thomas Pitts, "What's on Your Mind?" *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 15, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Taylor Rurley, "Recent Book on Comics Can Reassure Worried Parents," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 18, 1949, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Say Comic Books Foster Race Hate," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 1, 1954, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Urban League May Revive Comic Book," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, December 13, 1947, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Lynn Watson, "The People Speak: Against Murder Pictures," *The Chicago Defender*, March 19, 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

concerns that comics were driving out quality books from children's reading lists.²⁷¹ Many of them drew comparisons between out-of-control behavior in children, comics book-reading, and Blackness, with observations that reading comics caused a child to behave as if "he is from another race."²⁷²

The Cooper Youthbuilders is a useful case study for probing these intersections. Students at the predominantly Black James Fenimore Cooper Junior High School in Central Harlem received national attention for their activism around *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*. The comic in question was notable because it was an adaptation of the 1928 Disney film *Steamboat Willie*, one of the first cartoons with synchronized sound and which featured the debut of Minnie and Mickey Mouse.²⁷³ The film also prominently featured the song "Turkey in the Straw," which was an updated version of the minstrel song "Zip Coon."²⁷⁴ In particular, the character Steamboat Willie smacked of minstrelsy. Student Randolph Ford, president of the Cooper Youthbuilders

...was very much exercised over the unflattering manner in which Negroes were usually portrayed in Comic Books [sic]. He felt we ought to do something about it... Interviews were soon arranged with publishers of both offending and unoffending Comics...²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ "Dealer Bans Crime Comics, Children's Librarian Reports Slump in Worthwhile Reading," *Patriot Ledger*, October 13, 1948, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁷² "Memorandum re: Comic Book Speeches," memorandum, November 22, 1954, box 1, folder 10, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

²⁷³ Daniel Kothenschulte, *The Walt Disney Film Archives: The Animated Movies, 1921–1968*, 40th ed. (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2020).

²⁷⁴ Brian Roberts, *Blackface Nation: Race, Reform, and Identity in American Popular Music, 1812–1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017): 98.

²⁷⁵ "Youthbuilders Fight 'Steamboat,'" Administration of Human Relations Program in New York City Schools, Report to Honorable F. H. La Guardia, Mayor of the City of New York, Louis E. Yavner, Commissioner of Investigation, December 20, 1945: 77.

Youthbuilders was founded in October 1944 by social worker Sabra Holbrook and chief of the New York City Crime Prevention Bureau Byrnes McDonald, with a goal of teaching teenagers good citizenship practices.²⁷⁶ The organization had branches in elementary and junior high schools across New York City.²⁷⁷ The Youthbuilders chapter at Cooper Junior High School was known to be especially active. In 1945, Cooper was “the newest and most modern junior high school in New York City,” though its students grew up in “de facto segregation in Harlem.”²⁷⁸ It was amidst this dichotomy that Cooper students’ social engagement was kindled.

The Cooper Youthbuilders were charged by their faculty advisor, Sidney Rosenberg, with addressing the question, “How can we combat race prejudice?”²⁷⁹ The students decided to focus on comics. Employing some of the sociological methodologies they had been taught, the Cooper Youthbuilders spent several weeks researching racial prejudice and taking oral histories from various individuals.²⁸⁰ The students applied this data to their evaluation and communicated their findings to the public, with some comics “commended for their fair treatment of minority grounds,” while others inspired letters with concerns painstakingly enumerated to editorial boards. One student lamented the manner in which Black characters were sketched.

He said that they were drawn as if they were not even human, that they were made to look stupid, that their lips and other features were drawn without any resemblance to reality, and that even if these publications were Comic Books [sic], the constant repetition of this type of portrayal in them could only increase prejudice among readers.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ “Education: Youthbuilders, Inc.,” *Time*, May 20, 1940, EBSCO.

²⁷⁷ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,” 77.

²⁷⁸ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,” 77.

²⁷⁹ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,” 77.

²⁸⁰ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,” 77.

²⁸¹ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,” 77.

As has been mentioned already, Black newspapers covered comics differently than the mainstream press. The tone generally was less melodramatic, with a greater focus on racial representation than juvenile delinquency. And when youthful crime was mentioned, causes usually were rooted in sociological phenomena and solutions tended to be pragmatic. Consequently, the story of a group of Black students forcing a powerful comic book publisher to reverse course held great appeal and was covered abundantly.²⁸² After their successful bid, the Cooper Youthbuilders organized an assembly to share the news with the student body. They challenged their classmates to continue demanding fair and accurate representations, not only in comics, but also in history books.²⁸³ William Lieberman, a representative from Fawcett Comics, articulated regret for the character's negative reception, and described how persuasive the editorial board found the students' arguments, adding "that they had decided it would be best to eliminate the character as their contribution to American unity and race equality."²⁸⁴ Subsequently, the Cooper Youthbuilders gave interviews entitled "How Do Comic Books Affect Our Education?", "What Is Our Responsibility in Improving Pan-American Relations?", and "How Can Pupils Combat Race Prejudice?" on WNYC radio. These experiences taught students racial awareness and enabled them to be activists. According to Rosenberg,

The lessons learned from these experiences and small successes have been invaluable to the boys. In the first place, they have learned that there is no need to let resentment rankle and smoulder [sic] within them. They can find a successful outlet in the constructive action. In the second place, they have learned that civilized, democratic procedure can accomplish results. There is no need for force and violence. In the third place, they have acquired ease and facility in expressing their ideas to people in the wider community, outside their own neighborhood and racial group. This might even be

²⁸² Marja, "Kids Win War on Comic Book's"; Dier, "Kids Crusade to Eliminate Stereotypes"; *The Chicago Defender*, "Negro Villain in Comic Book Killed by Youngsters"; *Pittsburgh Courier*, "Steamboat: Youngsters' Protest Ousts Stereotype from Comics."

²⁸³ Yavner, "Youthbuilders Fight 'Steamboat,'" 77.

²⁸⁴ Yavner, "Youthbuilders Fight 'Steamboat,'" 77.

considered the most important outcome of their activities, and the ground that this type of inter-group contact may really be the most effective kind of intercultural education.²⁸⁵

The students also inaugurated the Comic Book Honor Roll, which recognized publishers who eliminated racially problematic characters.²⁸⁶ In addition to comics, the Cooper Youthbuilders also reviewed library book and instructional materials. One member even endeavored to develop a supplement to their history textbook, in order to restore the contributions of people of color.²⁸⁷ The case of the Cooper Youthbuilders presented strong evidence that comics could be an effective tool for teaching civic and other abstract concepts.²⁸⁸

Understandings of juvenile delinquency were informed by views on ethnicity, race, class, and space. The urban/suburban divide played heavily into these perceptions, which indicated white middle-class suburban parents were concerned about an “exaggerated epidemic” of minor criminality that framed “white teenage lawbreakers [as] the helpless victims of external villains who lured their prey into an urban dystopic of addiction, crime, and prostitution.”²⁸⁹ The postwar brand of domesticity protected against political and moral dangers, including those posed by working-class, Black, and Mexican Americans.²⁹⁰ Their concerns were keeping these behaviors they associated with African American youths out of their living spaces.²⁹¹ While

²⁸⁵ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,’” 77.

²⁸⁶ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,’” 77.

²⁸⁷ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,’” 77.

²⁸⁸ Yavner, “Youthbuilders Fight ‘Steamboat,’” 77.

²⁸⁹ Matthew D. Lassiter, “Pushers, Victims, and the Lost Innocence of White Suburbia: California’s War on Narcotics during the 1950s,” *Journal of Urban History* 4, no. 5 (2015) 787-788.

²⁹⁰ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 9, 10, 12, 97, 108.

²⁹¹ Doyle, “We Didn’t Know You Were a Negro,” 159-160.

these current tensions began during the first wave of the Great Migration just after the First World War, misperceptions of Black criminality can be traced to the eras of Jim Crow and slavery.²⁹² This experience with the Cooper Youthbuilders disrupted notions of who were delinquents and how the content of comics could be policed. It also demonstrated how teachers could support pro-comics activities without directly participating; this likely was much more easily achieved in urban public school contexts than parochial or rural ones.

1.9 Professional Journals: Discourse among Teachers

Newspapers' overreporting of bonfires and trading programs in parochial schools all over the country contributed to a sense that educators—especially schoolteachers—opposed comic books, but in actuality, this was only a fraction of the story. Limited by a lack of professional authority, whereby parents and other laymen felt justified in dictating how their expertise could be wielded, teachers could do little to pushback against the media portrayals and offer their knowledge as they saw fit. It only was in professional and scholarly journals that teachers, school librarians, and administrators had license to register honestly the panoply of concerns about and attributes of the medium. Principals and superintendents generally sided with most parents in disfavoring comic book-reading. Most secondary school teachers found comic books unbothersome, as they taught students already proficient with reading and writing. Elementary school teachers and librarians were a bit more split in their opinions: some saw opportunities to

²⁹² William E. Cross, Jr., "Tracing the Historical Origins of Youth Delinquency and Violence: Myths and Realities about Black Culture," *Journal of Social Issues* 59, no. 1 (2003): 67-69; Margaret A. Gibson and John U. Ogbu. *Minority Status and Schooling*. New York: Grand Publishing, 1991; Orlando Patterson. *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*. Washington, D.C.: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1998; William Julius Wilson *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

engage young readers, while others worried that comics were a problematic distraction from better literature. Consequently, these educators argued one of two theories:

- (1) Comics were totally innocuous, neither benefiting nor impairing student learning.
- (2) If comics actually produced deleterious effects in young readers, they were no worse than those of the dime novels or penny dreadfuls that preceded them. The question here was whether comics were more folkloric than prurient.

At the time, much of the published research included studies on how comics affected reading. Teachers participated frequently as researchers on this topic. Reading was squarely the domain of teachers, and though the methodologies were not always sound or standardized, many of the studies utilized the data that the teachers personally collected from their own students.²⁹³ This direct connection allowed the studies to be presented as immediate, accurate, and reliable. The studies mostly were published between 1940 and 1957. The methods utilized included interviews; control and experimental groups; surveys and questionnaires; observation, data-collection, and analysis; and teachers reading large numbers of comics and assessing their

²⁹³ Beryl K. Sullivan, "Superman Licked: Junior-high Teacher 'Frames' and Defeats the Invincible Characters of the Comic Books!," *The Clearing House* 17, no. 7 (March 1943): 428-429; John C. Raymond and Alexander Frazier, "Reading Pictures; Report of a Unit," *The English Journal* 37, no. 8 (October 1948): 394-399; Bernice Grohskopf, "The Preacher's Son," *The Phylon Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1957): 373-382; William S. Gray, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," *The Elementary School Journal* 42, no. 9 (May 1942): 641-655; Irving R. Friedman, "Toward Bigger and Better 'Comic Mags': I Let My Pupils Bring Funny Books to Class," *The Clearing House* 16, no. 3 (November 1941): 166-168; Eliot Freidson, "Consumption of Mass Media by Polish-American Children," *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 9, no. 1 (Autumn 1954): 92-101; Florence Brumbaugh, "The Place of Humor in the Curriculum," *The Journal of Experimental Education* 8, no. 4 (June 1940): 403-409; David T. Armstrong, "How Good Are the Comic Books," *The Elementary English Review* 21, no. 8 (December 1944): 283-285, 300.

quality. The studies generally fell into one of five categories: cognition; therapeutic tools; language development; teaching tools; and vocabulary.

In the area of cognition, studies by primary and secondary school educators—including school superintendent Claude Mitchell, schoolteachers Lena Denecke, Alice Sterner, Margaret Stewart, and Earl J. Dias, and principal Edith Z. Sperzel—mirrored those of education and communications professors Katherine Wolf and Marjorie Fiske, William A. Jenkins, Marshall B. Clinard, Helen M. Robinson, Robert M. Sekerak, and W. W. D. Sones.²⁹⁴ Each of these studies determined that the effect of comics on students' intellectual development was minimal, though the parameters of their studies varied. Robinson, Mitchell, Stewart, Sterner, Dias, Sekerak, and Sones investigated at junior high and high schoolers, while Sperzel and Denecke focused on primary school students. Most of the researchers utilized questionnaires and surveys, but Robinson, Mitchell, and Sperzel measured intelligence with vocabulary acquisition assessments and Sekerak used IQ tests.

Another group of primary and secondary school educators postulated that comics could be used to treat certain traumas in young people. As perceptions of comics' educative potential evolved, some found that comic books didn't cause mental ailments, but could be used to treat them. Medical researcher Mardi J. Horowitz's work is the most prominent example of this and

²⁹⁴ Paul A. Witty and Robert A. Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation I," *Elementary English* 31, no. 8 (December 1954): 502; Claude Mitchell, "Comic Strips: How Well Can Our Pupils Read Them?," *The Clearing House* 24, no. 7 (March 1950): 415-418; Helen M. Robinson, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," *The Elementary School Journal* 55, no. 9 (May 1955): 489-500; Robert M. Sekerak, "Mass Communication Media, Reading Comprehension, and Intelligence," *Audio Visual Communication Review* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1957): 468-475; Sones, "The Comics and Instructional Method"; Margaret Stewart, "The Educational Scene," *Elementary English* 26, no. 4 (April 1949): 228-233; Edith Z. Sperzel, "The Effect of Comic Books on Vocabulary Growth and Reading Comprehension," *Elementary English* 25, no. 2 (February 1948): 109-113; William A. Jenkins, "The Educational Scene," *Elementary English* 32, no. 3 (March 1955): 176-181; Marshall B. Clinard, "Secondary Community Influences and Juvenile Delinquency," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 261, no. 1 (January 1949): 42-54; Earl J. Dias, "Comic Books—A Challenge to the English Teacher," *The English Journal* 35, no. 3 (1946): 142-145; Lena Denecke, "Fifth Graders Study the Comic Books," *The Elementary English Review* 22, no. 1 (January 1945): 6-8.

influenced subsequent studies by teachers and scholars alike.²⁹⁵ While most of the scholarship on the topic was conducted by university faculty and independent researchers, public school music teacher Ethel Newell explored bibliotherapy and comics books.²⁹⁶ Though Newell offered well-researched guidance to the classroom teachers and school librarians who read *Elementary English*, the concept of comics as therapeutic tools did not catch on among the general public. For most, Wertham was the voice of the mental health community, and he was clear that comics did just the opposite.

Investigations into the effects comics had on the development of language grew out of a body of inquiries dating back to the turn of the century. Studies by M. V. O'Shea (1907, 1924), Jean Piaget (1926), Dorothea McCarthy (1930, 1946, 1950), and A. F. Watts (1944) led to published research that argued that sociological influences affected language development more than comics.²⁹⁷ Among these were school librarian Helen Anastassiadis's investigation of comic book scripts and language development. Anastassiadis's work was quoted by prolific comic book researchers Paul A. Witty and Robert A. Sizemore, alongside scholars John DeBoer (examining the effects of socioeconomic forces), Ruth Strickland (looking at emotional stimuli's

²⁹⁵ Mardi J. Horowitz, "The Use of Graphic Images in Psychotherapy," *American Journal of Art Therapy* 10, no. 3 (April 1971): 153.

²⁹⁶ Ethel Newell, "At the North End of Pooh: A Study of Bibliotherapy," *Elementary English* 34, no. 1 (January 1957): 22-25; Dom Thomas Verner Moore, *The Nature and Treatment of Mental Disorders* (Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1944): 216-232; Jean M. Lepere, "Literature in the Elementary School," *Review of Educational Research* 31, no. 2 (April 1961): 188-196.

²⁹⁷ Frederick E. Bolton, "The Social Traits of Childhood and Youth," in *The Child: His Nature and His Needs*, ed. M. V. O'Shea (Detroit: The Children's Foundation, 1924): 113; Dorothea McCarthy, "Child Development, VIII: Language," in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, ed. Walter S. Monroe (New York: Macmillan, 1950): 165-171; Dorothea McCarthy, "Language Development in Children," in *Manual of Child Psychology*, ed. Leonard Carmichael (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1946): 476-581; Dorothea McCarthy, *The Language Development of the Pre-school Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1930); M. V. O'Shea, *Linguistic Development and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1907): 2; Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child*, trans. M. Warden (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1926); A. F. Watts, *The Language and Mental Development of Children* (London: George C. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 1944).

effect on language development), and W. W. D. Sones (probing how the genre could be used in the classroom to aid in language development).²⁹⁸

Another subset of articles was created to dispel the notion that comics hurt the acquisition of vocabulary. While they started with university-affiliated researchers like Irving R. Friedman, Robert L. Thorndike, and Florence Heisler in 1941, primary and secondary school teachers subsequently published several studies that demonstrated that there was no difference between the typical vocabulary of comic books and other children's literature.²⁹⁹ Aubrey Shatter, who taught English at a high school in Long Island City, developed a self-evaluation tool to measure the literary skills and patterns of comic book readers in his classroom.³⁰⁰ David T. Armstrong, and Martha M. Schlegel, a high school teacher and principal, respectively, each reflected the influence of scholars Josette Frank and Joe Park in their findings that comic books utilized more advanced vocabulary than other literature aimed at children of the same age.³⁰¹ The comic book industry also picked up on these points and created messaging based on them, which made it harder for anti-comics activists to argue that comics were destructive to learning. The rare dissenting voices included Edith Z. Sperzel and Arthur W. Reynolds, both of whom were school

²⁹⁸ Paul A. Witty and Robert A. Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation II," *Elementary English* 32, no. 1 (January 1955): 46; Robinson, "Educational News and Editorial Comment"; John J. DeBoer, "Some Sociological Factors in Language Development," *Elementary English* 29, no. 8 (December 1952): 482; William A. Jenkins, "The Educational Scene," *Elementary English* 32, no. 8 (December 1955): 553.

²⁹⁹ Robert L. Thorndike, "Words and the Comics," *The Journal of Experimental Education* 10, no. 2 (December 1941): 110-113; Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation II"; Irving R. Friedman, "Toward Bigger and Better 'Comic Mags': I Let My Pupils Bring Funny Books to Class," *The Clearing House* 16, no. 3 (November 1941): 168.

³⁰⁰ Aubrey Shatter, "A Survey of Student Reading," *The English Journal* 40, no. 5 (May 1951): 271-273.

³⁰¹ David T. Armstrong, "How Good Are the Comic Books?," *The Elementary English Review* 32, no. 8 (December 1944): 285; Martha M. Schlegel, "Family Living Vitalize the Language Arts," *The Clearing House* 24, no. 5 (January 1950): 264-270; Joe Park, "An Analysis of the Verbal Accompaniment to Classroom Sound Films," *The School Review* 52, no. 7 (September 1944): 426; Josette Frank, "What's in the Comics?," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, no. 4 (December 1944): 221-222.

principals.³⁰² Publishing his research in the January 1952 issue of *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies*, Reynolds wrote, “I am equally unable to find more than limited evidence that comic books have added to the mastery of vocabulary, language, social studies, or even reading comprehension.”³⁰³ Principals and other administrators did not publish much literature on the topic, but generally, they did not argue in favor of comics’ expanded use in schools.

Another facet of the reading conversation explored how children were affected when comics were their primary leisure activity; this was a separate discussion from their use as teaching tools. Some articles considered the ways that comics reflected contemporary mores and framed this as a valuable quality. In conversation with sociologist Marshall B. Clinard and Teachers College librarian Alice N. Fedder, journalism teacher John C. Raymond and high school curriculum consultant Alexander Frazier posited that comic books were no worse than the pleasure reading options children had in prior generations.³⁰⁴ As arbiters of children’s leisure time—even outside of school—teachers claimed license to dictate the options that were made available to young people.³⁰⁵

In a study for the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Vera J. Diekhoff tried to connect the abundance of leisure time and comic book-reading to delinquency. Framing

³⁰² Sperzel, “The Effect of Comic Books”; Arthur W. Reynolds, “Comics, Radio, and Their Pretensions,” *The Clearing House* 26, no. 5 (January 1952): 253-256.

³⁰³ Reynolds, “Comics, Radio, and Their Pretensions.”

³⁰⁴ Clinard, “Secondary Community Influences and Juvenile Delinquency; John C. Raymond and Alexander Frazier, “Reading Pictures: Report of a Unit,” *The English Journal* 37, no. 8 (October 1948): 394-399; Alice N. Fedder, “Children’s Books and Bridges,” *Elementary English* 26, no. 6 (October 1949): 301-310.

³⁰⁵ Martin Barker, *The Lasting of the Mohicans: A History of an American Myth* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995): 36; Herbert M. Kliebard, *Changing Course: American Curriculum Reform in the 20th Century* (New York: Teachers Press, 2002).

recommendations as coming from teachers to parents, Diekhoff, a staffmember and not an educator, presented anti-comics sentiments from a range of educators, experts, and authority figures.³⁰⁶ The proposed connections between a lack of academic success and juvenile delinquency were exaggerated. The idea being promoted by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers was that comics would corrupt youths intellectually and morally; they allegedly were a slippery slope to moral turpitude and a lifetime of crime. Writing of purported connections between comics and delinquency, Diekhoff offered,

It has frequently been said that children learn ways of wrongdoing from comics, movies, and TV programs, cases of juvenile delinquents who blamed their misconduct on something they saw in the movies or a comic book or on TV are cited.³⁰⁷

Diekhoff's tone suggests the causality link already was accepted as fact. Aimed at audiences of different types of educators, essays and research in Phi Beta Kappa's *American Scholar*, the *Peabody Journal of Education*, *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *NEA Journal*, *The Phi Delta Kappan*, *The English Journal*, and *Elementary English* expressed similar sentiments.³⁰⁸ These fed the narrative that schoolteachers and principals were unified and organized around opposing comics.

³⁰⁶ Vera J. Diekhoff, *What P.T.A. Members Should Know about Juvenile Delinquency: A Guide for Action* (Chicago: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1957).

³⁰⁷ Diekhoff, *What P.T.A. Members Should Know about Juvenile Delinquency*, 22.

³⁰⁸ Robert L. Coard, "The Comic Book in Perspective," *Peabody Journal of Education* 33, no. 1 (July 1955): 18-19; Dwight L. Burton, "Comics Books: A Teacher's Analysis," *The Elementary School Journal* 56, no. 2 (October 1955): 73; Clinard, "Secondary Community Influences and Juvenile Delinquency"; *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 261, no. 1 (January 1949): 42. Max F. Baer, "Our Responsibility for Receptive Children among Erring Adults," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 39, no. 1 (October 1957): 23-24; Dias, "Comic Books"; David K. Berninghausen and Richard W. Faunce, "An Exploratory Study of Juvenile Delinquency and the Reading of Sensational Books," *The Journal of Experimental Education* 33, no. 2 (Winter 1964): 161; William A. Jenkins, "The Educational Scene," *Elementary English* 33, no. 2 (February 1956): 117.

In her 1952 essay “Ubinam Gentium Sumus,” which appeared in *The Classical Journal*, high school teacher Dorothy M. Roehm implored colleagues to remember that “as pupils have changed, so have courses of study.”³⁰⁹ Comic books had become a regular part of children’s lives, and they were neither harmed nor benefitted by their reading. She went on to characterize as pointless efforts to defeat or compete with the comic book, as its readers retained the ability to engage with other forms of literature.³¹⁰ Her suggestion of pragmatism typified the most commonly articulated perspective, whether informed by dedicated data collection or years of teaching experience.

The juvenile delinquency angle was well-tread by teachers and librarians, but not as comprehensively as it was in the general press. They sought to convince readers that, if teachers could keep students focused on more wholesome literature, it reduced the likelihood that young people would be exposed to crime in the first place. An example of this was Grace W. Gilman’s editorial in the January 1956 issue of the American Library Association’s professional journal. Gilman, a librarian and chairperson of a committee of ALA’s Public Libraries Division, spoke on behalf of her field when she wrote,

The tools for the answer lie all around in the wealth and glory of children’s literature. The great literature of our day is not being written for adults but for children. And our most gifted artists are illustrators for children. If we have failed to lead children into this golden heritage, whose fault is it? All children need and want leadership. They need heroes to admire. They need adventure, but adventure that combines struggle and danger with honor. They need to know reverence for life and for the Creator that gives that life. Have you found one comic book that gives this? There are, of course, no delinquent children. There are only delinquent parents and teachers and librarians. We all need a refresher course in children’s books. Let’s go back and re-read the great ones and pass

³⁰⁹The translation from Latin is “Where in the world are we?” Dorothy M. Roehm, “Ubinam Gentium Sumus,” *The Classical Journal* 48, no. 1 (October 1952): 23.

³¹⁰ Roehm, “Ubinam Gentium Sumus.”

on our renewed understanding and excitement for them to children who are hungry and spiritually undernourished.³¹¹

The religious undertones were more explicit here than in other places, but this was not just an educative issue for most; it also was a moral one. Indeed, many were hopeful that educators were among the public servants capable of solving the presumed youthful crime epidemic.

In addition to comics' effects on academics and behavior, primary and secondary school educators were concerned about the mental and emotional development of young comic book readers. In "Comic Books—A Challenge to the English Teacher," published in *The English Journal* in 1946, a Massachusetts high school teacher explained both sides of the comics debate to his audience of junior high and high school teachers. He asserted that most agreed that the violence in comics could have some effect on young minds, but the question was whether the phase of life during which kids read comics was long enough for lasting damage.³¹² Though less overtly pro-comics, views like his were consistent with suppositions that comics did not pose a significant threat to students' behavior, advocated by influential independent scholars like Josette Frank and Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg.³¹³

Parental responsibility also was broached by some educators. Teachers could regulate what kids read in school, but their influence was less direct in other contexts. Writing for others

³¹¹ Grace W. Gilman, "Bread or Stones?" *ALA Bulletin* 50, no. 1 (January 1956): 18.

³¹² Dias, "Comic Books."

³¹³ Josette Frank, "Books and Children's Emotions," *Child Study* 26, no. 1 (December 1948): 5; Josette Frank, "What Makes a Book for Children Good?," *Junior Libraries* 5, no. 7 (March 1959): 106; "Chills and Thrills in Radio, Movies and Comics—Some Psychiatric Opinion," *Child Study* 25, no. 1 (January 1947): 42; Josette Frank, "Looking at the Comics," *Child Study* 20, no. 4 (July 1943): 112; Josette Frank, *Comics, TV, Radio, Movies—What Do they Offer Children?* (New York: Child Study Association of America, 1955): 2-3; Josette Frank, *Your Child's Reading Today* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969); Josette Frank, "The Comics as an Educational Medium," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, no. 4 (December 1944): 215.

in the profession in journals and editorials, they shared their observations on incentivizing parents to do more to promote productive reading habits in their children. Michigan bookmobile librarian Ruth Warnecke wrote in *The Reading Teacher*,

Added to the lack of encouragement which young people experience is the example which many adults set. By limiting their own reading to newspapers and magazines they indicate their indifference to literature as an art, philosophy as a way of life, poetry as an affirmation, or history as a guide. By acquiring information from quiz programs, over the backyard fence, from digest magazines and advertising copy they disclaim faith in scholarship, research, and documentation.³¹⁴

Another librarian, the aforementioned Grace W. Gilman, registered a similar perspective, arguing that it was parents needed to work closely with teachers to counteract the effects of comic book-reading.³¹⁵

Lastly, in some articles, primary and secondary educators simply shared with each other facts about comics, gently arguing for their legitimacy. They posited comic book writers and artists as moral and responsible educators who sought to make wholesome entertainment. For example, an editor's note accompanied principal Arthur W. Reynolds's January 1952 essay in *The Clearing House*,

Teachers have been accused of being old-fashioned because they don't appreciate the streamlined, atomic-age children. Mr. Reynolds is glad to be able to throw a little light on these matters—at least as they affect the pupils in Grades 4 through 10 of the Orleans, Massachusetts Public Schools. He has made a study of the comparative scholastic effects of these children of good reading, comic-book reading, and radio listening.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Ruth Warnecke, "Children and Their Reading as Seen by a Bookmobile Librarian," *The Reading Teacher* 7, no. 2 (December 1953): 117.

³¹⁵ Gilman, "Bread or Stones?"

³¹⁶ Reynolds, "Comics, Radio, and Their Pretensions."

The existence and lineage of comics as a natural consequence of previous generations' leisure reading was a talking point frequently employed by comics' proponents. That comics were a logical outgrowth of the more widely accepted comic strips, dime novels, and penny dreadfuls neutralized the idea that they would corrupt children. Raymond and Frazier provided lists of comic book artists for other secondary school teachers and principals who were desirous of learning more about the artform.³¹⁷ These techniques, whereby audiences were taught more about the genre's quality and contributions, later would be coopted by the comic book industry to win over an uncertain public.

Teachers, principals, and librarians held a spectrum of opinions about comics, and these opinions shifted over time; they were never uniformly negative or positive, despite how the media portrayed these sentiments. There was inconsistency in the methodologies utilized, and in some instances, case studies were very informal without reliable results. Nevertheless, the sense was that primary and secondary school educators had much more of an investment in understanding the medium than comics' antagonists were willing to acknowledge. In professional journals, there were few efforts to argue for comics' usefulness; instead teachers and librarians tended to encourage neutrality or tolerance for an unproblematic medium. Perhaps this was the most expedient track for primary and secondary school educators already beleaguered by a changing educational landscape. However, many teachers did have an interest in the educative potential comics, and as will be described in the third chapter in this dissertation, they published research in scholarly journals investigating this theme.

³¹⁷ Raymond and Frazier, "Reading Pictures."

1.10 Conclusions

Primary and secondary school teachers, librarians, and principals were active in the ACC, bringing up issues and offering their solutions on both sides of the debate. The participation sometimes was direct, as they were made to collaborate with parents, clergy, and politicians on anti-comics demonstrations. In other instances, they took to professional journals and newspaper editorials to share observations, research, theories, and personal reflections. (In the third chapter, I will analyze those solutions in greater detail.) In addition, they deployed groups of students to benefit both sides of the debate, with youth leading book burnings in some instances and cooperating with publishers in others. The relative absence of schoolteachers in the historiography evinces the lack of authority and influence they had, even in the domains such as children's literature, where their ubiquity authority should have been undeniable.

There were consequential differences in scale, scope, and framing between how the ACC played out on the campuses of parochial and public schools. The level of control the Church had over both academic and extracurricular matters meant that Catholic schools could be used to make clear, emphatic statements to the public. The December 1948 bonfire at St. Patrick's signaled to the nation that Catholic schools rejected the values put forth in comic books. With more constituents to satisfy, activism was more decentralized in public school contexts. There was no organized institutional apparatus available to them, so external groups filled the ideological vacuum. Specifically, PTAs were consistent in their objection to comics. The press engaged parents to speak about this; instances of teachers directly representing their perspectives were much less common. However, in that public conversations occurred on schoolgrounds or libraries and under the auspices of PTAs, teachers' complicity was implied. It is unclear when teachers were volunteers and when they were pawns in many school-based activist incidents.

What belies the broad agreement of teachers were their editorials and research agendas in professional and educational journals. Given the influence PTAs wielded, it is unlikely that teachers felt empowered to speak against their avowed disdain for comics.

For African American communities, it was a more persuasive theory that greater sociological forces than comic books were threatening young people, and that supposition defined the perspectives of Black teachers, librarians, and principals.³¹⁸ In the period and geographic region surveyed, in the Black press, there were no reports of biblioclasm or bans, either at schools or anywhere else. Generally, reports about Wertham and the ACC were less common. Since the late 1940s, African American teachers and their students were concerned about the negative representation of Black characters in comics.³¹⁹ Articles about juvenile delinquency stressed parental responsibility, while reporting on comics typically focused on comics' potential to educate about racial issues.

Newspapers are key annals for how the ACC played out in schools, with interviews, reporting, and editorials offering incendiary narratives of school-related boycotts, local ordinances, and rallies. Though the tone of the reporting was more hyperbolic than objective, the presence of teachers as actors, subjects, and emblems registers clearly across the full ideological spectrum relative to comics. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the range of perspectives held by college faculty, independent scholars, and teachers was not fundamentally different, but their contexts and the reactions they evoked were dissimilar. Society expected teachers to uphold an air of moral rectitude—one that college faculty was not required to maintain—and that affected reporting about them and how they presented themselves publicly.

³¹⁸ Pitts, "What's on Your Mind?"

³¹⁹ "First Race Comic Book Out," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 19, 1947, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

And that, combined with differences in the populations of students they served, meant that parents and authority figures received schoolteachers and college faculty differently, even when they were espousing similar views.

Simply put, schoolteachers had less freedom than college professors. The fourth chapter will reflect that teachers were less coordinated in their response to comics than university faculty were. This lack of organization may have been contoured by the reality that New York teacher unions only began wielding influence after the Comics Code Authority was passed in the 1954.³²⁰ To be sure, teachers were spoken about more than spoken to in the press during the ACC. Scholars were accorded more opportunities to share their perspectives and research, alongside physicians, judges, and police officers, a reality that reinforces Diana D'Amico Pawlewicz's perspective that teachers were often excluded from public conversations.³²¹ Even principals, librarians, and school superintendents were engaged to speak about comic books with more regularity than schoolteachers, whose primary medium to debate comics were in professional and research journals.

³²⁰ Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights*, 3-4.

³²¹ Pawlewicz, *Blaming Teachers*, 183.

Part II

The Brave and the Bold

Chapter 2: Fredric Wertham, Josette Frank, and Unaffiliated Scholars in the Anti-comics Debate

2.1 Introduction: “Pure Pangloss”

Public interest in the dangers of comics continued into the fifties. Three questions recurred. Did comics lead to delinquency? Did they offer anything of educational value? Should the medium be eliminated altogether? No longer confined to salacious local newspapers or editorial pages of obscure professional journals, the comic book debate now was being taken up by a wide range of public intellectuals. An example of this involved a pair of articles that appeared in 1954 issues of *Commentary*: an exploration of *Seduction of the Innocent*’s themes, framed around one mystified parent’s questions about his son’s comic book obsession; and a review of Josette Frank’s 1954 collection of essays, *Your Child’s Reading Today*, where she advised parents on how to guide their children’s intake of comic books, television, movies, and radio programs.¹

Published by the American Jewish Committee beginning in 1945, *Commentary* ran articles that explored Jewish cultural, political, and religious life in the United States. The issues germane to the comic book debate were touched upon only infrequently in *Commentary*. Almost a decade after Sterling North’s watershed 1940 editorial, *Commentary* finally set out to identify scholarly answers to these longstanding questions. In the 1949 article, “Comic Books and Other Horrors: Prep School for Totalitarian Society,” political scientist and noted antifascist Norbert Mühlén endeavored to

...turn available social-scientific light on a continuously perplexing problem for parents and educators: what is the effect of the prevailing terror movies, radio programs, and

¹Robert Warshow, “The Study of Man: Paul the Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham,” *Commentary* 17 (January-June 1954): 596; Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*; Isaac Rosenfeld, “What Should My Child Read?,” *Commentary*, January 1, 1954, ProQuest: 158; Frank, *Your Child’s Reading Today*.

comic books on the minds of the children who consume them in such enormous quantities?²

What was interesting about this approach was the commitment to presenting legitimate “social-scientific” research to a general audience. *Commentary* was neither a scholarly nor professional journal. Its articles were not peer-reviewed. Its target audience was much broader than teachers and researchers. It did, however, engage academic and other public thinkers to write about critical issues facing society. The conversation had become too prominent to ignore.

Commentary next published additional features on comic books in 1954. The aforementioned pair of articles appeared within months of the televised Senate hearings and ratification of the Comics Code Authority. Each article analyzed the work of one of its leading theorists—Wertham, the primary antagonist in the anti-comic conflict, and Frank, a long-time supporter of the genre as appropriate entertainment for children. Wertham and Frank did not share much in terms of their professional profiles, but both operated as independent public intellectuals, which accorded them opportunities and license to express their views. Unfettered by professional and institutional politics, rigid methodological strictures and publishing expectations, and other checks and balances and attachments that impose academic consequences, unaffiliated scholars were free to pursue informal research agendas that spoke directly and expeditiously to the public. These researchers also had license to discuss their views absent the baggage that comes with connections to schools and the teaching profession.

Both Frank and Wertham were criticized as imprecise in *Commentary*. Essayist Isaac Rosenfeld decried the lack of clarity in Frank’s prescriptions for teachers and parents.³ Before

² Norbert Muhlen, “The Study of Man: Comic Books and Other Horrors,” *Commentary* 7, no. 1 (January 1949): 80.

³ Rosenfeld, “What Should My Child Read?,” 158.

dismissing her conclusions as confusing and contradictory, he commended Frank for endeavoring to offer practical advice.⁴ He also explained that she was too optimistic in her assessment, with its assumptions of skilled parents and responsible youths.⁵

Miss Frank's position, though short on metaphysico-theologo-cosmologology, is pure Pangloss, with the very same dreary, drizzly optimism: all is for the best. Television need not be the death of conversation and shared home life: one can always talk about the programs, and TV can weld the family into a greater unity than ever.⁶

His sarcasm didn't hide the disdain Rosenfeld felt for Frank's lack of methodological sophistication or underpinnings in accepted concepts. Unlike the teachers and parents who made up Frank's audience, it mattered to Rosenfeld that Frank's research reflect a rigorous process, not just mirror a set of popular perspectives.

Full of ludicrous mistakes and blemishes, it may be treasured for its faults which, as I shall show, are extraordinarily instructive; nevertheless, it contains some excellent material and represents, besides, the outlook of a fairly influential school of progressive educators... Provision for this is entirely lacking in Miss Frank's position, and as she makes no statement of principles, it is hard to say what she is advocating except that it is benevolent and without any bite.⁷

Rosenfeld asserted Frank didn't go far enough to condemn obvious bad quality in comics or define good literature for kids.⁸ He took issue with what he perceived as Frank's lack of literary standards, which undermined her ability to advise teachers and parents effectively. He also pointed to her lack of well-theorized analytic framework as being a failing of the work.⁹

⁴ Rosenfeld, "What Should My Child Read?," 158.

⁵ Rosenfeld, "What Should My Child Read?," 159.

⁶ Rosenfeld, "What Should My Child Read?," 160.

⁷ Rosenfeld, "What Should My Child Read?," 158-159.

⁸ Rosenfeld, "What Should My Child Read?," 159.

⁹ Rosenfeld, "What Should My Child Read?," 160.

Rosenfeld and Frank were in agreement that comics were more symptom than cause of dysfunction, but he felt teaching children to differentiate between culturally valuable literature and worthless mass media was a crucial function of teachers and parents.¹⁰

Miss Frank writes such nonsense, not because she fails to see what is involved in the problem of standards (if anything, she sees too much, as she always gives both sides of the argument, even when there is only one side), but because she trembles in holy fear of giving offense—to parents, children, teachers, authors, publishers, program directors; she has a reasonable word for everyone. But the basic problem, how to tell good from bad, and how to win our children for the good, she ignores, presumably because it might cause dissension.¹¹

As much as Rosenfeld rejected Frank's analytic approach and conclusions, cultural critic Robert Warshow was just as skeptical of Wertham's basic suppositions. Immediately characterizing Wertham's research as attacking comics, Warshow contended that it was "not very helpful" in any way other than raising alarm, as it did not clarify comics' long-term effects on readers.¹² He critiqued the facile nature of Wertham's analysis, lamenting the lack of context for his subjects' medical histories, his slipshod approach to evaluating evidence, the monolithic depiction of comic book artists and publishers, and his penchant for editorializing; these criticisms were reiterated by many other scholars.¹³ In addition, Warshow problematized Wertham's framing of the scholarly conversation around comics and motives of other researchers.¹⁴ His conclusion was that Wertham was an ineffectual researcher: "In the violence

¹⁰ Rosenfeld, "What Should My Child Read?," 159.

¹¹ Rosenfeld, "What Should My Child Read?," 160.

¹² Warshow, "The Study of Man," 600.

¹³ Warshow, "The Study of Man," 600-601, 603.

¹⁴ Warshow, "The Study of Man," 603.

of Dr. Wertham's discourse on this subject, one got a glimpse of his limitations as an investigator of social phenomena."¹⁵

Writing for a magazine rather than a journal, Warshow *also* had license to express his opinions informally, and he foregrounded his discussion of Wertham in his personal dubiety that comics had the power to corrupt otherwise well-adjusted children.¹⁶ Instead he attributed the hysteria around comics to the angst that white suburban parents felt negotiating childrearing in the changing society. Noticeably absent from Warshow's article was panicked tone characteristic of so much of the newspaper reporting.¹⁷ While biting, Warshow was composed and straightforward in his review of *Seduction of the Innocent*. A basic supposition of Warshow's is that kids' interest in comics was a fleeting phase that would pass quickly—just as they outgrow children's books as they move through adolescence.¹⁸ This put him at odds with Wertham, who believed the entire genre to be dangerous. Warshow sought answers rooted in logic and common sense, and Wertham's absolutism was cause for suspicion.

Like most middle-class parents, I devote a good deal of over-anxious attention to [my son's] education, to the "influences" that play on him, and the "problems" that arise for me. Almost anything in his life is likely to seem important to me, and I find it hard to accept the idea that there should be one area of his experience, apparently of considerable importance to him, which will have no important consequences. One comic book a week or ten, they *must* have an effect. How can I be expected to believe that it will be a good one?¹⁹

¹⁵ Warshow, "The Study of Man," 602.

¹⁶ Warshow, "The Study of Man," 599.

¹⁷ Warshow, "The Study of Man."

¹⁸ Warshow, "The Study of Man," 596-597.

¹⁹ Warshow, "The Study of Man," 600.

Warshow sought a nuanced articulation of the comic book problem—one that didn't circumvent the societal or parental responsibility—and in that way, he was out of step with much of America. He described himself as having learned that not all violence in comics was the objectionable kind, the writing of some comics is of higher quality than others, and contemporary children had different interests and expectations than those of previous generations.²⁰ Warshow even appreciated the humor, imagination, and sense of irony that went into the creation of many of the purportedly offensive comics.²¹

Warshow's was a unique perspective, emphasizing the parental role while questioning whether there was an issue that warranted their concern in the first place. For this reason, he couldn't dismiss *Seduction of the Innocent* entirely. He gave voice to a critical but intangible aspect of the anti-comics crusade for many teachers: they simply did not feel good about the medium. "I know that I don't like the comics myself and that it makes me uncomfortable to see [my child] reading them. But it's hard to explain to [him] why I feel this way..."²² In articulating this feeling, he also underscored why Wertham's work was so popular: Wertham posited every element of the comic book as potentially problematic, playing into parents' and teachers' fears.

Independent scholars and even pseudo-scientists, including Fredric Wertham and Josette Frank, were at the vanguard of the anti-comics crusade. Focusing on Wertham and Frank, this chapter probes the roles played by independent scholars during the anti-comics crusade. It also posits the reasons that these roles came to be. I interrogate the causes for the prominence of

²⁰ Warshow, "The Study of Man," 599.

²¹ Warshow, "The Study of Man," 597.

²² Warshow, "The Study of Man," 599.

independent scholars, how they operated differently from university-affiliated researchers, and what their independence allowed them to accomplish that other academics could not. Finally, I interrogate the ways that other scholars have approached their research, with special attention to engagement with *Seduction of the Innocent*.

Due to his influence, scholarly conversations around the comic book debate have centered Fredric Wertham and *Seduction of the Innocent*. Historians generally have discredited Wertham as having exacerbated concerns about comics into a nationwide hysteria, with his ill-conceived methodologies and misplaced sense of monocausality. Wertham's approach has been likened to that of Joseph McCarthy in the decades since the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, which has been charged with derailing the Golden Age of Comics. Accordingly, his motivations also were of interest to some researchers. At the same time, Frank, who wielded significant influence during the ACC, has been little more than a footnote in these discussions. I offer reasons for Wertham's singular prominence and attempt to restore Frank and other leading independent scholars, including Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg and Laurretta Bender, to their rightful places in the debate.

Bart Beaty's *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* established the psychiatrist within a tradition of mass media that scholars have dismissed on aesthetic grounds. One of Beaty's fundamental assertions is that Wertham's perspectives were too liberal for the largely anticommunist social scientists, and this inspired their criticisms of his work.²³ In many ways, Chris York and Rafael York's edited volume also is a rehabilitation of Wertham, contending that he demonstrably understood that comics were not the sole cause of juvenile delinquency. They are careful to note that Wertham scrutinized comics because he believed that

²³ Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*.

the medium was capable of sustaining complex narratives, a fact that affected their potential value as reading material. York and York also argue that Wertham's reading of comics was insightful and ahead of his time with regards to race. In jungle comics, for instance, Wertham identified the enduring racist stereotypes that both reflected and perpetuated an America divided along color lines; he noted the superior traits of the white protagonists compared to the Black natives, and also observed how that superiority was communicated through visual means. Wertham argued that such representations not only reflected a nation still plagued by racism, but also projected those beliefs toward the readers of the comics.²⁴ Conversely, in *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comics Books*, Jean-Paul Gabilliet unearths three major objections with Wertham's research that were held by contemporaneous academics: first, his monocausal approach to juvenile delinquency was methodologically unsound; second, he mixed arguments from disciplines, including psychology, criminology, and literacy studies, that did not support and even contradicted one another; and third, Wertham embraced the same sort of commercialism to benefit his anti-comics theories that he condemned in *Seduction of the Innocent*.²⁵ These texts establish a foundation for understanding researchers' reactions to Wertham and the anti-comics movement. My dissertation broadens the conversation to include Josette Frank, in order to argue that independence from academic institutions allowed these researchers to emerge at the vanguard of their respective camps during the ACC.

²⁴ York and York, *Comic Books and the Cold War*.

²⁵ Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*; Dallas W. Smythe, "Television: Dimensions of Violence," *Audio Visual Communication Review* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1955): 58-63.

2.2 Fredric Wertham's War on Comics

Understanding Fredric Wertham as a public intellectual is vital for placing the actions and perspectives of university personnel, independent researchers, and college students in their proper contexts. Wertham's comic book inquiry began at the LaFargue Mental Health Clinic, which he cofounded with fellow German-born psychiatrist, Hilde Mosse, and operated from 1946 to 1958. The research based on the dozen years of data collected from LaFargue was highly influential and served as the basis of anti-comics legislation in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.²⁶ Before the anti-comics debate, Wertham enjoyed a positive reputation as a crusader for the most marginalized and an active advocate for the Harlem community.²⁷ A champion of liberal issues, he collaborated regularly with Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and Planned Parenthood to support a range of causes. His research on the detrimental effects segregation had on African American children was cited as evidence in *Brown v. Board of Education*.²⁸ He had a demonstrated sensitivity to the issues affecting Black and economically depressed communities, and the clinic was dedicated specifically to youths who had been labeled "juvenile delinquents."²⁹

Born Friedrich Ignaz Wertheimer in Nuremberg, Germany on March 20, 1895, Wertham grew up in a middle-class Jewish family, spending part of his youth in England. He received his medical degree from the University of Würzburg in 1921, and undertook additional training at

²⁶ U.S. Congress. *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

²⁷ Thomas J. Meyers to Henry R. Luce, N.D., box 1, folder 3 (Correspondence, 1946 to 1953), LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

²⁸ Tilley, "Seducing the Innocent."

²⁹ S. I. Hayakawa, "Second Thoughts," *Chicago Defender*, January 11, 1947, box 3, folder 5, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

the Universities of Munich and Erlangen and King's College London.³⁰ With his MD in hand, he worked in Paris and Vienna before relocating to Munich to conduct research at Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie, with one of the founders of modern psychiatry, Emil Kraepelin.³¹ In 1922, he moved to the United States and joined the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic at Johns Hopkins University, where he remained for a decade, working under Adolf Meyer.³² He also collaborated with Clarence Darrow at this time, due to their shared interest in aiding African Americans accused of crimes.

By 1932, Wertham was a senior psychiatrist for the New York City Department of Hospitals, conducting evaluations for criminal cases—often with violent criminals. He led the Bellevue Mental Hygiene Clinic and the psychiatric services section of the Queens Hospital Center, frequently working with troubled youth. It was in these contexts that Wertham's interest in mass media and its effects on behavior first developed.³³ In 1941, he published a book-length case study, *Dark Legend: A Study in Murder*. It told the story of Gino, a seventeen-year-old child of Italian immigrants, treated by Wertham after he killed his mother. According to Wertham's text, Gino stabbed his mother to death as retribution for the illicit affair she had with her brother-in-law. The narrative was generally light on analysis and the details were scant. The opening sections were purportedly told in Gino's own voice, but the scientific nature of the study

³⁰ Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*.

³¹ Gabriel N. Mendes, *Under the Strain of Color: Harlem's LaFargue Clinic and the Promise of an Antiracist Psychiatry*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2015; Wolfgang Burgmair and Matthias M. Weber, "'Das Geld ist gut angelegt, und du brauchst keine Reue zu haben': James Loeb, ein deutsch-amerikanischer Wissenschaftsmäzen zwischen Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik," *Historische Zeitschrift* 277 (2003): 343–378.

³² Bayard Webster. "Fredric Wertham, 86, Dies; Foe of Violent TV and Comics." *New York Times*. December 1, 1981.

³³ Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*.

was undercut by Wertham's frequent use of Shakespeare to analogize aspects of Gino's psychological trauma.³⁴

In the 1940s, his interest in mass media and violent crime continued to grow. Invested in understanding how impressionable youngsters became homicidal offenders, Wertham authored a series of monographs exploring these issues. In 1947, he wrote the introduction and contributed analyses to Mary Louise Aswell's *The World Within: Fiction Illuminating Neuroses of Our Time*.³⁵ The book sought to address the "constant misuse of psychiatry," with Aswell curating fifteen recent works of fiction and Wertham providing a psychiatric analysis for "scientific accuracy" in each one.³⁶ His 1949 publication, *The Show of Violence*, was more straightforward, examining actual case studies to probe the forces that caused extremely violent fantasies to develop into real-life physical brutality. These included instances of filicide, homicidal senior citizens, and mass murder.³⁷ The aforementioned publications are of interest for a few reasons. First, they reflect Wertham's long-term commitment to exploring causality and violent crime. Second, Wertham demonstrates a willingness to explore alternative approaches and applications to psychiatric analysis. And finally, sensationalistic crimes with prurient, almost unimaginable details were the usual subjects of Wertham's research. The throughline begun with *Dark Legend*, *The World Within*, and *The Show of Violence* would continue into his anti-comics work.

Wertham's concerns about the connections between mass media and juvenile violence were documented well in his dozens of research articles, editorials, and interviews. This

³⁴ Fredric Wertham, *Dark Legend: A Study in Murder* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1941).

³⁵ Mary Louise Aswell, ed., *The World Within: Fiction Illuminating Neuroses of Our Time* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1947).

³⁶ Aswell, *The World Within*, front flap.

³⁷ Fredric Wertham, *The Show of Violence* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1949).

paralleled the contemporaneous growing discomfort with comics' presumed connections to delinquency, as captured effectively by Sterling North's essay. Wertham was situated perfectly to emerge as the leader of the anti-comics movement, as he already was established as a vocal and knowledgeable critic of mass media. And once he turned his attention to comic books, he spoke prolifically against them. Beginning in 1948, he published a series of articles that framed comics as a dangerous new medium. These articles included, "The Comics... Very Funny!" and "It's Murder" in *Saturday Review of Literature*, "What Your Children Think of You" in *This Week*, "Are Comic Books Harmful to Children?" in *Friends Intelligencer*, "The Betrayal of Childhood: Comic Books" for the American Prison Association, "The Psychopathology of Comic Books" in *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, and "What Are Comic Books" for *National Parent Teacher Magazine*.³⁸ All published within ten months, Wertham focused his message directly on teachers, parents, or both. Perhaps the most influential of these was his first take on the medium, "The Comics... Very Funny!," where he debunked the seventeen attributes of comics most commonly mentioned by the genre's proponents. Widely read, the article thrust Wertham in the center of the conversation.³⁹

He continued publishing polemics against comics in scholarly journals and magazines throughout the early fifties, culminating in his landmark work, *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954.⁴⁰ Based on research from his own patients, the text had three clear objectives. First,

³⁸ Fredric Wertham, "Are Comic Books Harmful to Children?" *Friends Intelligencer* 105 (July 10, 1948): NP; Fredric Wertham, "It's Murder." *Saturday Review of Literature* 32 (February 5, 1949): 7-9, 33-34; Fredric Wertham, "The Betrayal of Childhood," *Proceedings of the Annual Congress of the American Prison Association* 78 (1948): 57-59; Fredric Wertham, "The Comics... Very Funny!" *Saturday Review of Literature* 31 (May 29, 1948): 6-10; Fredric Wertham, "The Psychopathology of Comic Books," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 2 (April 1948): 417-434; Fredric Wertham, "What Are Comic Books?" *National Parent Teacher Magazine* 44 (March 1949): 16; Fredric Wertham, "What Your Children Think of You," *This Week* (October 9, 1948): 4.

³⁹ William S. Bush, *Reaction as Image: Comic Books and American Life, 1940-1955* (M. A. thesis. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997).

Wertham set out to establish that comics were detrimental to all children, not only those who already were experiencing mental health or learning challenges. Second, labeling comics as “anti-educational,” Wertham enumerated the ways that comics were detrimental to reading, endorsed racist beliefs and actions, and stunted the development of wholesome, healthy values. And third, he called for additional research on comics’ effects on young people.⁴¹ In addition to passages about his patients, *Seduction of the Innocent* also featured Wertham’s own analyses of some comic books, including those with Batman, Robin, Superman, and Wonder Woman, as well as examinations the advertisements that appeared in them. According to Wertham, they worked in concert to promote violence, drug usage, and deviant sexuality. Teachers, doctors, and parents were the target audience for *Seduction of the Innocent*, and Wertham proved very effective at reaching them.⁴²

At 400 pages and replete with decontextualized references to comics that his audience likely had not seen, *Seduction of the Innocent* was not a short or easy read. It was widely available to most teachers and parents; according to the *New York Times*, it sold well.⁴³ This was despite its hefty \$4 price tag—which would be \$45 in today’s value—an indication of how interested Americans were in Wertham’s analysis. Researchers in the fields of education, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, and visual art published scholarship that engaged the work—mostly to refute it, as will be discussed in the third chapter. The language was not academic,

⁴⁰ Additional articles on the comic book threat written by Wertham include: Fredric Wertham, “Blueprints to Delinquency,” *Reader’s Digest* 65 (May 1954): 24; Fredric Wertham, “Reading for the Innocent,” *Wilson Library Bulletin* 28 (September 22, 1954): 610-613; Fredric Wertham, “What Parents Don’t Know About Comic Books,” *Ladies Home Journal* 70 (November 1953): 50-53.

⁴¹ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*.

⁴² Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, 18.

⁴³ C. Wright Mills, “Nothing to Laugh At,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1954, The New York Times TimesMachine.

though. Nowhere present were the expected methodological markers: footnotes, endnotes or other citations; attributions for quotes from patients; sample or control group information; secondary literature or bibliographic listings; working definitions for newly coined phrases; or broader engagement with academic fields. There were numerous unsubstantiated claims and obvious exaggerations of facts and figures.⁴⁴ None of this affected the book's popularity or framing to the public as a work of legitimate scholarship. And it was taken very seriously. In fact, in his review for the *New York Times*, noted Columbia University professor of sociology C. Wright Mills referred to it as "a most commendable use of the professional mind in service of the public."⁴⁵ Further, it served as both catalyst and centerpiece of the 1954 televised hearings on comic books and juvenile delinquency.⁴⁶

Wertham continued writing and speaking against comics, even after the Comics Code Authority's passage and the furor of the ACC died down.⁴⁷ Largely due to the success of the *Seduction of the Innocent* and his participation in the televised hearing, Wertham developed a reputation as having single-handedly destroyed the comic book industry.⁴⁸ Despite that he wrote about many other topics—and even eventually softened his stance on comics—his legacy

⁴⁴ Dave Itzkoff, "Scholar Finds Flaws in Work by Archenemy of Comics," *New York Times*, February 19, 2013, The New York Times TimesMachine.

⁴⁵ Mills, "Nothing to Laugh At."

⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

⁴⁷ Fredric Wertham, "Do the Crime Comic Books Promote Juvenile Delinquency?" *Congressional Digest* 33 (December 1954): 302, 304, 310; Fredric Wertham, "Horror Comics," *The Lancet* 265 (March 19, 1955): 623; Fredric Wertham, "It's Still Murder," *Saturday Review of Literature* 38 (April 9, 1955): 11; Fredric Wertham, "The Curse of the Comic Books: The Value Patterns and Effects of Comic Books," *Religious Education* 49 (November-December 1954): 394-406.

⁴⁸ Bart Beaty, *All Our Innocences: Fredric Wertham, Mass Culture, and the Rise of the Media Effects Paradigm, 1940-1972*. (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1999).

continues to be connected to his harsh critiques of comics and perceived connections to the postwar anticommunist movement.⁴⁹

2.3 The LaFargue Clinic and Anti-comics Scholarship

Located at 215 West 133rd Street in Harlem and named in honor of Karl Marx's communist son-in-law, the LaFargue Mental Health Clinic itself had a reputation as racially progressive in the decade leading up to the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*.⁵⁰ In particular, periodicals with large Black readerships, including *Chicago Defender*, *Ebony*, and *Negro Digest*, celebrated LaFargue's expert psychiatric care and other services that were made accessible to the African American community. At a time when most psychoanalysts were not accepting Black patients, Wertham saw clients for 25¢ per visit; some even were treated for free.⁵¹

The clinic's intentionality around curbing juvenile delinquency in African American youths was a significant part of its public profile.⁵² At the same time, mainstream newspaper articles about LaFargue highlighted that the clinic was in a Harlem "war-torn by gangs."⁵³ Instead of describing the high-quality therapeutic programs that were launched specifically for New York's Black community, these narratives overemphasized criminality and juvenile

⁴⁹ Fredric Wertham. *The World of Fanzines: A Special Form of Communication* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1973).

⁵⁰ Doyle, "We Didn't Know You Were a Negro."

⁵¹ William Michelfelder, "25-cent Mental Clinic Celebrates 10 Years," *New York World Telegram and Sun*, March 7, 1956, box 3, folder 6, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁵² S. I. Hayakawa, "Second Thoughts."

⁵³ Robert Bendiner, "Psychiatry for the Needy," *Tomorrow* (April 1948), box 3, folder 4, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

delinquency. Nevertheless, Wertham managed to develop an unimpeachable reputation as an expert, scholar, and practitioner. He was able to accomplish all this at LaFargue without the benefit of a well-resourced operation or much more than a skeletal staff of volunteers. Further, it was this commitment to racial equity that initially spurred Wertham's anti-comics stance; he was disturbed deeply by the racist aspects of the genre.⁵⁴

Leaders of PTAs, libraries, Jewish community centers, women's clubs, citizen's advisory groups, and even tenants' associations sought Wertham's perspectives on comics.⁵⁵ PTAs were parent-driven organizations, and the interests of this constituency shaped their fact-finding missions about comics.⁵⁶ They worked closely with elected officials in their municipalities to mitigate the potential damage of the medium on children.⁵⁷ Even still, parents and teachers were curious about what they could do as individuals to combat the threat.⁵⁸ Their anxious attention had been captured since reading the articles Wertham had published in *Ladies Home Journal* and *The Saturday Review*.⁵⁹ For instance, speaking to a local PTA chapter in Rutherford, New Jersey, Wertham and Mosse fielded questions about the effects of comics: Were they permanent? Did they result in destructive consequences for young readers? And what parts of a child's

⁵⁴ Sidney M. Katz, "Jim Crow Is Barred from Wertham's Clinic," *Magazine Digest* (September 1946), box 3, folder 5, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁵⁵ Beatrice Hyatt to Hilde Mosse, October 11, 1954, box 1, folder 4, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁵⁶ Beatrice Hyatt to Hilde Mosse.

⁵⁷ Beatrice Hyatt to Hilde Mosse; Hilde Mosse to Frances Regenbogen, October 24, 1954, box 1, folder 5, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁵⁸ Hilde Mosse to Frances Regenbogen; Ruth Thomas to Hilde Mosse, August 23, 1954, box 1, folder 5, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁵⁹ Wertham, "What Parents Don't Know"; Wertham, "It's Still Murder."

development are hindered most?⁶⁰ This conversation typified the interactions Wertham and his colleagues had with concerned teachers and parents. Wertham and Mosse's apprehensions about children's emotional development extended to other forms of mass media, too—particularly television and radio.⁶¹ And PTA chapters were interested in their perspectives on these matters as well.

Like Wertham, Mosse was in-demand as a public voice on children's welfare. Born into a family of prominent German intellectuals, she was

so terrified and so disturbed by her experience with fascism and economic disparity [prior to emigrating from Germany in 1939] that she devoted almost every waking hour to address these issues in the most fundamental ways that she could—practicing psychiatry for the benefit of those who might not otherwise have access to these resources, helping people learn to read so that they would not fall prey to the next generation of fascists, and alerting people to the threats posed by access to the celebration of violence frequently bombarded into common culture via mass media.⁶²

Mosse took speaking engagements on the dangers of comics with school- and university-affiliated groups across the tristate region, including the Pre-Medical Society of Barnard College, the Union School PTA in Rutherford, New Jersey, and the first academic convening focused on the medium in 1948, entitled the “The Psychopathology of Comic Books.”⁶³ At \$25 per appearance, which is approximately \$280 in value today, Mosse's booking fee was not an inconsequential expense for many of the groups that invited her; there was great public interest in expertise on the effects of comics. PTAs and librarians sought her out to guide their learning

⁶⁰ Beatrice Hyatt to Hilde Mosse.

⁶¹ Ruth Thomas to Hilde Mosse.

⁶² Roger A. Strauch, “Honoring My Aunt, Dr. Hilde L. Mosse,” The Mosse Art Restitution Project (February 7, 2012), <http://www.rodagroup.com/hilde.html>.

⁶³ Leonard Rivas, “Especially Dr. Hilde L. Mosse: Wertham's Research Collaborator.” *International Journal of Comic Art* 8, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 17-44.

about crime comics. She also was employed for the same purpose by the Bronx County Society for Mental Health and the Women's Auxiliary to the Medical Society of the County of Kings. Participants asked her about the lasting influence of violent comics on kids, which parts of young minds were affected most by comics' sexual content, and how parents could partner with teachers to restrict comic book-reading. She made recommendations on means of censoring comics, book swaps, and effective ways to communicate the dangers of comics to media outlets, editorial boards, and retailers. Consequently, her work was referenced regularly by those who resisted comics. Even after the passage of the Comics Code Authority, Mosse continued her opposition to comics for another two decades. In 1955, she used her research to advocate for anti-comics legislation in Los Angeles; though the laws were enacted, they were ruled unconstitutional by the California Supreme Court just four years later. As late as 1977, she publicly was making connections between school-aged bullying and the reading of comics. Shortly before her death in 1982, she attended a comic book convention and described the industry as indecent and seeking to control and exploit children.⁶⁴

The rest of the LaFargue staff was curated carefully to support the research and therapeutic services offered. The clinic had an apparatus in place to weed out potential employees who held racial and socioeconomic biases. This was significant because most contemporaneous psychoanalysts elected not to treat Black patients. Staff demographics reflected the clinic's commitment to the Harlem community; the staff was ethnically diverse and had experience working with all-Black populations, including at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Finally, because he personally met with every new patient, Wertham was able to handpick subjects for his research into comics' baleful outcomes.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Rifas, "Especially Dr. Hilde L. Mosse," 17-18.

2.4 Under the Banner of Science

Wertham uniquely was qualified to be at the vanguard of the anti-comics movement, as he already had prominence, legitimacy, and perceptions of professional rigor, leading a “clinic entirely oriented to psychotherapy.”⁶⁶ It was he who convened “The Psychopathology of Comics Books,” on behalf of the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy and the Academy of Medicine in 1948.⁶⁷ In addition, he frequently appeared on panels and published alongside other early researchers on comics, including Gerson Legman, Paula Elkisch, Marvin L. Blumberg, Johann G. Auerbach, and Augusta Jellinek.⁶⁸ Despite that *Seduction of the Innocent* was not peer-reviewed or subjected to the scrutiny of an academic editorial board, Wertham did not shy away from presenting its conclusions in scholarly settings.⁶⁹

Wertham described his endeavors as “scientific work.”⁷⁰ His supporters asserted that Wertham’s participation in any anti-comics conversation added gravitas due to his status as a well-known “scientist.”⁷¹ However, the quality of his research methodology is a subject of debate for his contemporaries, as well as present-day historians.⁷² A review of the patient records that informed Wertham’s research elicits additional questions about his conclusions in

⁶⁵ “Staff, LaFargue, September 1953,” memorandum, 1953, box 1, folder 12, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁶⁶ “LaFargue Clinic Orientation,” memorandum, September 1, 1952, box 1, folder 11, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁶⁷ LaFargue Clinic Records, “Scientific Work.”

⁶⁸ LaFargue Clinic Records, “Scientific Work.”

⁶⁹ LaFargue Clinic Records, “Scientific Work.”

⁷⁰ LaFargue Clinic Records, “Scientific Work.”

⁷¹ Bruce L. Felknor to Fredric Wertham, January 14, 1955, box 1, folder 5, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁷² Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*; Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*; Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*; Savage, *Teenage*.

Seduction of the Innocent. Many of his patients had other medical or psychological conditions that could have resulted in the issues attributed to comics. On intake forms, patients disclosed longtime medical issues, same-sex attraction, proclivities towards violence and “sexual deviancy,” low IQ, and a range of developmental issues that included vocabulary and arithmetic underperformance, lack of understanding of spatial relationships, and delayed verbal and written communication development.⁷³ These correlate directly with the potential effects of reading comics that had disquieted educators since the late forties.

That a number of patients in the sample had other psychiatric conditions that contributed to whatever behaviors Wertham linked to the influence of comic books is inescapable.⁷⁴ Wertham did not reckon with this whatsoever in *Seduction of the Innocent*. For instance, some patients are described as having poor eyesight in intake records, but this isn’t represented in the analysis of comic book artwork’s effects on children’s vision. Other intake data on sexual and gender identity was collected but never used as data points in *Seduction of the Innocent*.⁷⁵ These preexisting conditions were not considered in *Seduction of the Innocent*, leaving the reader with the impression that comics were the sole or primary cause of the maladaptive behavior described. Additionally, how patients were referred to Wertham was not captured in records, further obscuring key information that could relate to the behaviors attributed to comics. Interestingly, parents, who comprised Wertham’s primary audience, were spared the harshest criticism, perhaps because little family history was collected by LaFargue staff.⁷⁶

⁷³ Fredric Wertham, “Drafts,” original manuscript, N. D., box 4, folder 12, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁷⁴ Wertham, “Drafts.”

⁷⁵ Wertham, “Drafts.”

⁷⁶ U.S. Congress. *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

Additional analyses of Wertham's sample group are important for apprehending a fuller context for his findings. During the years of Wertham's study, LaFargue's staff was large: 23 psychiatrists, 18 psychologists, 17 social workers, three probation officers, three physical therapists, and one nurse. Records don't indicate exactly how many were people of color.⁷⁷ However, it is known from the human resources records that at least some LaFargue staff members were educated at historically Black colleges.⁷⁸ Attention was paid to eliminating from applicant pools any potential employees with racial or socioeconomic biases.⁷⁹ Additionally, between 1946 and 1956, 75 percent of all LaFargue patients were Black, when only about 10 percent of the population was African American.⁸⁰ Even more to the point, between March 1946 and December 1947, during which much of *Seduction of the Innocent* was written, the Clinic saw 2069 patients, including 475 children, 87 percent of whom were Black.⁸¹ Patient records identify people as "Black," but do not clarify which patients may have been Afro-Latinx, although surnames suggest there was unaddressed diversity among Black patients.⁸² This meant that African Americans were represented disproportionately among Wertham's research subjects; for whatever reason, this relevant demographic information on LaFargue researchers and their subjects never was disclosed in *Seduction of the Innocent*. It is unknown whether Wertham and

⁷⁷ "Statistics LaFargue Clinic," memorandum, 1956, box 1, folder 9, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁷⁸ "Staff, LaFargue, September 1953," memorandum, 1953, box 1, folder 12, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁷⁹ "LaFargue Clinic Orientation," memorandum, September 1, 1952, box 1, folder 11, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁸⁰ LaFargue Clinic Records, "Statistics LaFargue Clinic."

⁸¹ "LaFargue Clinic, Total Visits between March 1946 and December 1947," memorandum, N.D., box 1, folder 9, LaFargue Clinic Records, 1946 to 1981, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁸² LaFargue Clinic Records, "Statistics LaFargue Clinic."

his staff explored other sociological or historical implications related to their sample being predominantly Black. LaFargue staff collected large volumes of data on the intellectual and sexual development of new patients. This includes IQ, spatial concepts, vocabulary, communication, and arithmetic tests, as well as other information generated by Wertham's direct interactions with patients, all of whom he met with personally.⁸³ Although, much of it was not standardized, there is a decade's worth of this unintegrated, unanalyzed data, from 1946 to 1956, and it does more to cast doubt on Wertham's methodology than not.⁸⁴

As a researcher, Wertham received strong support from LaFargue staff. In addition to a private psychiatry practice, Mosse held a clinical associate professorship at New York Medical College, where she lectured on child and adolescent psychiatry. She also had direct experience with primary and secondary schools, having spent twenty years working as an in-school psychiatrist for the New York Board of Education and the New York Bureau of Child Guidance. Children's literacy had been a careerlong focus for Mosse, whose earliest publications were based on data collected during her time at LaFargue.⁸⁵ Much of this research countered the idea that comics could be used to teach literacy, a theory popular among pro-comics scholars.

Reflecting on her time with the LaFargue Clinic in 1982, she explained,

In our study of children's eye movements during comic book reading, [LaFargue staff member Clesbie] Daniels and I found that the child usually first scans the entire left-hand page downward, then comes up from the lower left part of the right-hand page. His eyes stop at the picture with the most exciting action, where the murder is being committed or weapons are used, or where he finds a sexually stimulating pose. If he reads at all, he is apt to read the balloon in that picture first. It may be the only balloon he reads on the whole page. Children, as a rule, skip some pictures and balloons. Where a child tries to follow the text conscientiously, his eyes zigzag of necessity.⁸⁶

⁸³ Fredric Wertham, "Drafts."

⁸⁴ LaFargue Clinic Records, "Statistics LaFargue Clinic."

⁸⁵ Rifas, "Especially Dr. Hilde L. Mosse."

Mosse and Daniels's theory never gained much traction in scholarly circles and was disproved by other studies.⁸⁷ However, Wertham did view these findings as persuasive, and they formed the basis of the fifth chapter of *Seduction of the Innocent*, "Retooling for Illiteracy: The Influence of Comic Books on Reading." In fact, Wertham collaborated with Mosse on most of the underlying research in *Seduction of the Innocent*. Like other LaFargue projects, their research had a social function.

Mosse brought to her research a long-time interest in children's literacy, as well as a concern for the ways media could be used by fascists to indoctrinate kids.⁸⁸ Leonard Rifas, a scholar of comics and education and a contemporary of Mosse and Daniels, asserted that the purpose of their research was not "to get children to be more obedient, normal, and law-abiding, but to promote mental health, and thereby protect children from growing up to become racists, sadists, or fascists."⁸⁹ Wertham had been a professional mentor to Mosse, though her views on comics, literacy, and juvenile delinquency were not in lockstep with his. Mosse took a more conservative stance than Wertham on a range of issues, including homosexuality, sexual sadism, antifascism, censorship, and the age when people were old enough to read comics. In a 1953 article in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, using language much stronger than that of Wertham, Mosse analogized superheroes to the master race philosophies that became so popular in the Germany of her youth.⁹⁰ Given that Wertham identified as a progressive, Mosse's views

⁸⁶ Hilde L. Mosse, *The Complete Handbook of Children's Reading Disorders*. New York: Human Services Press, 1982.

⁸⁷ Rifas, "Especially Dr. Hilde L. Mosse," 31.

⁸⁸ Rifas, "Especially Dr. Hilde L. Mosse."

⁸⁹ Rifas, "Especially Dr. Hilde L. Mosse," 20.

⁹⁰ Hilde L. Mosse, "Is There an Ishmael Complex?" *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 7, no. 1 (1953): 72-79.

were more in line with those of the conservative teachers and parents who supported him most staunchly.

2.5 Josette Frank and the Child Study Association of America

Comics did have adherents in the scholarly community, and they were as committed to promoting their research publicly as Wertham and his colleagues were. The Child Study Association of America (CSAA) was one such group. The CSAA was established in 1888 as the Child Study Group by a team of concerned mothers. Their goal was to marshal “medical, psychiatric, and technical resources” to benefit child development against a backdrop of a rapidly changing society.⁹¹ There were four organizational objectives: first, to provide practical guidance for parents; second, to make available in legible and usable form the findings of specialists and researchers; third, to train teachers and leaders relative to children’s issues; and fourth, to cooperate with other community agencies.⁹² Headquartered in busy Midtown Manhattan, the CSAA offered research disseminated through university and school faculty; trainings for schools of social work, public health, and welfare; lectures and discussion groups led by trained staff members; family guidance and consultations; publications, pamphlets, and other library resources; and an organization aimed at youths, Young Friends of the CSAA.⁹³

⁹¹ *Parents’ Question and Helpful Answers: A Handbook by the Staff of the Child Study Association of America*, New York: Harper and Bros. Publishing, 1936, box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

⁹² “Section II,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1940), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

⁹³ Child Study Association of America, “Section II.

Politically progressive, the CSAA also sought to understand the ways that poverty, segregation, and underdeveloped infrastructure affected children in America and other countries.⁹⁴

Women comprised the majority of its brain trust.⁹⁵ Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg served as director, and Josette Frank led its work on reading, children's literature, and behavior. Anna W. M. Wolf and Aline B. Auerbach focused on family counseling and offered classes for parents and teachers. Pauline Rush Fadiman was responsible for the organization's publications, most notably a quarterly journal of parent education, to which parents regularly submitted questions.⁹⁶ Additionally, famed pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock served on the Family Guidance and Consultation Service.⁹⁷ While their work mostly targeted the New York region, Frank was recognized nationally for her measured recommendations on children's literacy.⁹⁸

Josette Frank contributed significant scholarship to the comic book debate, but her path to professional researcher was a nontraditional one. She lacked Wertham's academic training and she never worked as an educator of any sort. Her experience instead was in social justice and political contexts, where she gained practical knowledge about the experience of contemporary children. She was born to a well-to-do Jewish family on March 27, 1893, but she was never interested in organized religion. Instead, she dedicated her time to racial solidarity and feminist

⁹⁴ "Everyday Problems; Understanding Their Causes," *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1945), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

⁹⁵ *Parents' Question and Helpful Answers: A Handbook by the Staff of the Child Study Association of America*, New York: Harper and Bros. Publishing, 1936, box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

⁹⁶ Child Study Association of America, *Parents' Question and Helpful Answers*.

⁹⁷ "Front Matter," *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1940-1941), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

⁹⁸ Child Study Children's Book Committee, meeting minutes, March 24, 1955, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

causes, with none of the objections to homosexuality that were so prevalent during her lifetime.⁹⁹ With her interest in progressive matters, she first worked as Teddy Roosevelt's secretary at age nineteen, before moving on to examining child labor practices in sweatshops, supporting working-class immigrant communities in New York's Lower East Side, and organizing on behalf of the Women's Land Army, an organization that introduced women to agricultural work while men were on wartime deployments.¹⁰⁰ She even kept her maiden name when she married. In a lot of ways, her perspectives were ahead of her time.¹⁰¹

Josette Frank worked for the Child Study Association of America for forty years, from its early beginnings, when the group was known as the Federation for Child Study. Her interest in children's literature led her first to become an assistant editor for the CSAA's research journal *Child Study* in 1923, and then fifteen years later, to writing *What Books for Children?*, where she advised parents on the best ways to guide their children's reading. In the book, she spoke sensibly and realistically about the reasons kids read comics, a tactic that helped cement her as an advocate for the industry.¹⁰² In her time with the CSAA, she conducted research and made pragmatic recommendations to teachers and parents about their children's comic book-reading, including in "Give Them Freedom to Read," printed in the November 1936 issue of *Parents' Magazine*; *From the Records: An Adventure in Teacher Training*, cowritten by Clara Lambert, in 1939; "Let's Look at the Comics" in 1942; "Looking at the Comics" published in *Child Study* in 1943 and updated in 1949; *Parents' Questions and Helpful Answers: A Handbook by the Staff of*

⁹⁹ "Josette Frank, 96, Dies; Children's Book Expert," *New York Times*, September 14, 1999; Yereth Rosen, "Reel Grandma versus Real Grandma," *Anchorage Press*, November 1, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Rosen, "Reel Grandma."

¹⁰¹ Rosen, "Reel Grandma."

¹⁰² Josette Frank, *What Books for Children?: Guideposts for Parents* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, Incorporated, 1937).

the Child Study Association of America, published in 1936 and 1947; “Everyday Problems: Understanding Their Causes” in 1945; and “Chills and Thrills in Radio, Movies and Comics: Some Psychiatric Opinion Reported by Josette Frank,” also in *Child Study*, in 1948.¹⁰³ She consistently asserted that comics were harmless for well-adjusted children; they even benefitted them in processing frustration and anxiety.

Frank spoke nationally about comic books, initially disputing the arguments of Sterling North and subsequently, those of Fredric Wertham.¹⁰⁴ She even created a comic book review form to help teachers and parents classify them and understand their potential benefits.¹⁰⁵ Frank joined the editorial board of National (later renamed DC) Comics in 1941.¹⁰⁶ She was paid for her labor, which included sometimes reviewing comic book storylines. Serving alongside her were educational psychologist and Teachers College faculty member Robert L. Thorndike, New York University literature professor C. Bowie Millican, W. W. D. Sones of the University of

¹⁰³ Josette Frank, “Give Them Freedom to Read,” *Parents’ Magazine* 11, no. 11 (November 1936): 24-25, 108-109; Clara Lambert with Josette Frank, *From the Records: An Adventure in Teacher Training* (New York: Summer Play Schools Committee of the Child Study Association of America, 1939); Josette Frank, “Let’s Look at the Comics,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1942), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; Josette Frank and Mrs. Hugh Grant Straus, “Looking at the Comics,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1943), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; Josette Frank and Katie Hart, “Looking at the Comics,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1949), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; *Parents’ Question and Helpful Answers: A Handbook by the Staff of the Child Study Association of America* (New York: Harper and Bros. Publishing, 1936), box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; *Parents’ Question and Helpful Answers: A Handbook by the Staff of the Child Study Association of America* (New York: Harper and Bros. Publishing, 1947), box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; “Everyday Problems; Understanding Their Causes,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1945), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; Josette Frank, “Chills and Thrills in Radio, Movies and Comics: Some Psychiatric Opinion Reported by Josette Frank,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1948), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁰⁴ Josette Frank, “Comics and Delinquency,” original manuscript, N.D., box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁰⁵ Review Sheet on Comics, original document, 1940, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁰⁶ Hajdu, *The Ten-cent Plague*, 45.

Pittsburgh's School of Education, and Gene Tunney, a boxing champion, decorated marine, and disciplined autodidact who leant his celebrity to Catholic youth groups.¹⁰⁷

She remained on the board until 1944, when a disagreement with Wonder Woman's creator, William Moulton Marston, about the character's oversexualization led to her resignation.¹⁰⁸ After the establishment of the Comics Code Authority and the furor around the genre died down, Frank continued writing on comics and other forms of mass media, especially movies; she remained a vocal advocate for their benefits, contributing scholarship and speaking publicly into the early sixties.¹⁰⁹

Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, Frank's close colleague and author of several popular parenting books, had a similar reputation for making pragmatic recommendations to teachers and parents—though her work was engaged less frequently by other scholars. She argued that parents exaggerated the lack of reading on the part of their children; most actually knew very little about their children's reading. She encouraged them to engage with their children by

¹⁰⁷ Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, 186; Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005: 110; Jay R. Tunney and Christopher Newton, *The Prizefighter and the Playwright: Gene Tunney and George Bernard Shaw*, Ontario: Firefly Books, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, 242-243.

¹⁰⁹ Josette Frank, "How Do Contemporary Children's Books Reflect Modern Patterns of Family Living, and the Realities of Personal Crises and Today's Fears?," paper presented at the Annual Forum of the National Conference on Social Welfare," May 31, 1962, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; Josette Frank, "What Are Children reading in This TV Age," *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1957), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; Josette Frank, "Getting the Most from the Mass Media—How and By Whom," *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 37, no. 3 (Summer 1960), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education; Child Study Children's Book Committee Meeting on Criteria, meeting minutes, May 28, 1963, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

reading aloud and talking about books.¹¹⁰ And like Frank, she was on the board of a comic book publisher, Fawcett Comics.¹¹¹

Notably, Gruenberg asserted that some comics could be constructive, just as others could be detrimental; she understood the debate around “real books” versus comics as being fundamentally about the child’s degree of emotional and intellectual maturation.¹¹² For that reason, all comics did not need to be forbidden. Instead, adults should help children to develop a sense of discernment. She advised that, because tastes mature slowly, parents should take care to be firm and clear with their children about why some comics were more repugnant than others. She encouraged parents to understand that youths would militate against automatically accepting their preferences; it was necessary to factor this into how they addressed their children’s comic book-reading habits.¹¹³ These ideas animated the approach of the Child Study Association of America under Gruenberg’s directorship, during which time the organization frequently advocated for comics. Both she and Frank emerged as national authorities in the comic book debate, due to their reputation for balanced research, advisement, and lectures on reading and behavior in children.

The CSAA’s was not traditional academic scholarship; rather, it was a hybrid between popular self-help manuals and peer-reviewed investigations.¹¹⁴ Their researchers first took an

¹¹⁰ Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, *The Parents’ Guide to Everyday Problems of Boys and Girls: Helping Your Child from 5 to 12*, New York: Random House, 1958, box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹¹¹ Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*, 110.

¹¹² Gruenberg, *The Parents’ Guide*.

¹¹³ Gruenberg, *The Parents’ Guide*.

¹¹⁴ Child Study Association of America, “Section II,” *Child Study*.

interest in comics several years before the start of the ACC. Noting the similar complaints parents of earlier eras held about their children's leisure activities, Frank pointed out, "Concern with the [comic strips] problem in our parent discussion groups dates back in our records to 1911, which, of course, ante-dates 'crime comics' by a great many years."¹¹⁵ Fears about comics' lowbrow content could be found in CSAA literature as early as 1936, though the organization's views on the medium changed over time.¹¹⁶ A 1937 CSAA book on children's reading led to the group collaborating with education and psychiatry professors to develop a code to govern the creation of appropriate comics in 1941. This predated the rise of crime comics and was one of the first efforts to regulate the content of comics.¹¹⁷

During the 1940s, the CSAA's audience of teachers and parents were wrestling with two issues: first, where did the line fall between legitimately dangerous comics and reading material that was different from what previous generations read but ultimately harmless; and where to compromise on their standards of good literature.¹¹⁸ Taking actual questions from parents, Frank, Gruenberg, Wolf, and others provided responses that were sensible prescriptions inspired by their public research.¹¹⁹ The CSAA also provided the valuable service of compiling lists of

¹¹⁵ Josette Frank, "Comics and Delinquency," original manuscript, N.D., box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹¹⁶ *Parents' Question and Helpful Answers: A Handbook by the Staff of the Child Study Association of America*, New York: Harper and Bros. Publishing, 1936, box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹¹⁷ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

¹¹⁸ Child Study Children's Book Committee, meeting minutes, March 24, 1955, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹¹⁹ *Parents' Question and Helpful Answers: A Handbook by the Staff of the Child Study Association of America*, New York: Harper and Bros. Publishing, 1947, box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

acceptable comics, books, and children's radio programs.¹²⁰ In its 1940 pamphlet, "Comics and Delinquency," CSAA researchers clarified that they were not concerned that comics led to delinquency; instead their chief priority was helping parents guide their children's reading. Under their counsel, they claimed, parents could negotiate more easily the morass of contradictory opinions of educational and psychological researchers.¹²¹

The CSAA offered a recurring set of courses on "children and the outside world," conducted by Frank, Gruenberg, and Wolf, between February and April 1941. Discussion topics included comic books, movies, and radio and schools.¹²² Later that year, defining "discipline as the challenge of [their] times," the organization hosted an institute on the topic with the American Museum of Natural History's assistant curator Margaret Mead, Teachers College professor Goodwin Watson, and several CSAA staff members and prominent mothers in the community.¹²³ Unlike other contemporaneous conferences with similar themes, the CSAA's effort focused on children's attitudes toward discipline rather than the purported influence of comics and other mass media.¹²⁴

As early as 1942, CSAA data pointed to the positive emotional effects comics could have on children, irrespective of their initial emotional state.¹²⁵ Similarly, the focus of a summer 1945 publication was recognizing "everyday problems [and] understanding their causes." The CSAA

¹²⁰ "Front Matter," *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1940-1941), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹²¹ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

¹²² Child Study Association of America, "Front Matter."

¹²³ "Child Study Association of America, "Front Matter."

¹²⁴ "Child Study Association of America, "Front Matter."

¹²⁵ Frank, "Let's Look at the Comics."

sought to broach a dialogue on the true root of children's behavioral challenges, rather than merely what was convenient or popular.¹²⁶ A 1943 symposium sponsored by the CSAA brought together a large group of psychologists and psychiatrists to discuss the potential harm posed to kids by comics. The group reached no conclusions.¹²⁷ Another conference they organized five years later elucidated the need for more research in the vein of a recent study on the emotional effects of comics on the communication of ideas, conducted by Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research.¹²⁸ The CSAA's convenings and annual meetings typically were attended by teachers, parents, social workers, therapists, and physicians.¹²⁹

The CSAA helped to normalize comic book-reading by contextualizing it within a longer history of children's reading practices. Reminding readers of comic books' development from the widely accepted weekly comic strip, one of their research publications came with the following stipulation: "Actually, there is nothing new about comics. Ever since the turn of the century, comics have appeared in the colored Sunday supplements of newspapers."¹³⁰ They believed contemporary parents' understanding of comics was clouded by nostalgia for their own childhoods. The now-innocuous comic strips had been concerning to parents a generation earlier, for instance.¹³¹ CSAA also acknowledged that some comics were intended—and even

¹²⁶ Child Study Association of America, "Everyday Problems; Understanding Their Causes."

¹²⁷ Frank and Straus, "Looking at the Comics."

¹²⁸ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

¹²⁹ Gruenberg, *The Parents' Guide*; Child Study Association of America, "Front Matter."

¹³⁰ Frank, "Let's Look at the Comics."

¹³¹ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

fine—for older readers.¹³² Banning the entire medium became more challenging when adults were counted among its readership.

The ubiquity of comics strongly implied to the CSAA that their reading was nothing more than a normal stage of childhood. Their research suggested that “storytelling comics” were no more harmful than radio, television, or film, but picture books were preferable to all.¹³³ CSAA research also supported the theory that comics could be used as a “bridge to other activities and to books.”¹³⁴ The group did note the loss of religious values in society played a role in the increase in juvenile delinquency.¹³⁵ The idea that mass media had an equal effect to that of sound parenting, religious upbringing, or regimented schooling was rejected roundly, though.

The CSAA published research findings and recommendations that were at odds with Wertham and his supporters. The role of “parentally-established discipline” was fundamental to their views on comics, whereas Wertham never mentioned parental culpability in *Seduction of the Innocent* or public speeches.¹³⁶ Their research stated that the role parents played in keeping their children from delinquency was paramount, and even implied that youthful criminality was

¹³² S. Harcourt Peppard, “Science Contributes,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1942), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹³³ Anna W. M. Wolf, *The Parent’s Manual: A Guide to the Emotional Development of Young Child*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951, box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹³⁴ *Parents’ Question and Helpful Answers: A Handbook by the Staff of the Child Study Association of America*, New York: Harper and Bros. Publishing, 1947, box 1, series A, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹³⁵ Wolf, *The Parent’s Manual*.

¹³⁶ Wolf, *The Parent’s Manual*.

the results of parents who were ineffectual in policing behavior.¹³⁷ The CSAA urged parents to consider the actual reasons kids were so interested in comics.

Actually, children seem to get from them some very real satisfactions—thrills, fantasy, adventure, nonsense. The comics may serve as well as other kind of reading to meet these needs. One cannot say that time so spent is wasted if it gives youngsters pleasure and some emotional release, too. Just as we do, they at times need some escape from everyday routine.¹³⁸

Beyond explaining why youths read them, CSAA researchers were careful to note that comics could present some benefits to readers. This position was atypical of what was attributed to teachers and scholars at the time.

Rather than eliminating comics, the CSAA publicly advocated for tactics that balanced their use with other types of reading. Parents were encouraged to read aloud to their children or to stimulate them in creating their own narratives. CSAA research also reinforced the importance of community in keeping a child on the path of rectitude.¹³⁹ Even early in the ACC, they stressed the role parents played in facilitating their children's selection of appropriate reading material, as well as the function of librarians and schoolteachers in making available high-quality books.¹⁴⁰ They also argued that teachers and librarians wielded influence, to be sure, but parents possessed the greatest power to guide children's reading behaviors.¹⁴¹ In short, there was no substitute for parents parenting.¹⁴² The child-rearing manuals they published were perfect instruments for communicating this.

¹³⁷ Child Study Association of America, *Parents' Question and Helpful Answers*.

¹³⁸ Child Study Association of America, *Parents' Question and Helpful Answers*.

¹³⁹ Wolf, *The Parent's Manual*.

¹⁴⁰ Gruenberg, *The Parents' Guide*.

¹⁴¹ Gruenberg, *The Parents' Guide*.

Despite public alarm, it seems highly debatable whether movies—or even comics—in themselves encourage crime and develop unwholesome tendencies in the young. It is also unlikely that they permanently ruin the King’s English and a taste for good literature in a child who is regularly offered something better. Most children sleep soundly even after a hair-raising thriller. Some do not, and we shall have to act accordingly, helping a child see the common sense of our refusal to let him listen to or view a program that always arouses anxiety or terror. Parents are often afraid to take a strong stand when they really should. Let us hope that absorption in ready-made thrills can be postponed for several years and that they do not assume too-large proportions in these early years when, with a little help, a child can find delight and satisfaction through his own activities.¹⁴³

A readership eager to improve its parenting skills was particularly receptive to this form of delivery. However, the common-sense argument made by the CSAA went against the zeitgeist. Their publications tended to frame issues with comics differently than the press did. For instance, CSAA materials might ask, “Are Television and Comics a Problem” right in the title, before printing a set of prescriptions covering activities squarely within parental control.¹⁴⁴ Its anti-paranoic message of parental responsibility and patient, moderated actions was a significantly more complicated prescription than banning or burning.¹⁴⁵ Frank, Gruenberg, and others pronounced the need for nuanced research that considered differences in comic book genres and audiences and their effects on children; realistically, this articulation was not one that would attract broad support in that political moment. Anticommunist fears encouraged hyperbolic stances and sweeping policymaking meant to appease the widest possible range of constituents.¹⁴⁶ CSAA research was too informal to garner much interest from the scholarly

¹⁴² Gruenberg, *The Parents’ Guide*.

¹⁴³ Wolf, *The Parent’s Manual*.

¹⁴⁴ Gruenberg, *The Parents’ Guide*.

¹⁴⁵ Child Study Association of America, *Parents’ Question and Helpful Answers*.

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

community and lacking in the anti-comics pathos that appealed to some teachers and others charged with protecting children. Thus, Wertham's reach dwarfed that of the CSAA.

Even still, Frank was an influential voice in the debate. She declared in her essay, "The Reluctant Reader," "Children are contemporary in their interests, and we have no right to scorn their preferences."¹⁴⁷ She continued presenting on the comics and reading for years after the height of the ACC, culminating with a well-received speech at the 1962 Annual Forum of the National Conference of Social Welfare in New York City. Identifying as a mother and educator accorded plenty of credibility with her intended audience.¹⁴⁸ Throughout her career, she challenged comic book publishers to do a better job of demonstrating social responsivity.

2.6 Wertham and Frank in Conversation

Similar to Wertham, Frank was an in-demand speaker. Her tone was more measured than his, and her views on comics were positive, especially as teaching tools. Paul A. Witty, an educational psychologist who published extensively on comics and reading, invited her to participate in a conference at Northwestern University. She was asked to debate a panel of academics on "books versus comics," but she revised the topic to "books and comics" to assert that, like books, comics had educational value.¹⁴⁹ She was rational in arguing that, for all its strengths, much classic literature was ill-equipped to help kids negotiate the modern world.

¹⁴⁷ Josette Frank, "The Reluctant Reader," original manuscript, 1950, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁴⁸ Josette Frank, "How Do Contemporary Children's Books Reflect Modern Patterns of Family Living, and the Realities of Personal Crises and Today's Fears?," paper presented at the Annual Forum of the National Conference on Social Welfare," May 31, 1962, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁴⁹ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

“What do our current books offer children to clarify, to comfort, or at least, to help to understand some of these [harsh] realities?”¹⁵⁰

Frank warned against nostalgia, and instead, urged parents to learn what it was that kids loved about comics. She maintained that it was parents who needed to revise what they knew about good literature.¹⁵¹ Pointing out what she thought of as pointless parental outrage, she reminded teachers and parents of the similarities between turn-of-the-century comic strip characters and their contemporary comic book counterparts, I refer to the Frank Merriwell and Fred Farnot type of literature, most of which is written in execrable English style which my generation of youngsters seem to have survived, or rather, I should say, their good use of English has survived.¹⁵²

In fact, in many cases, children’s book genres simply had been coopted by and reframed as comic book genera: fantasy, adventure, detective, jungle, animal, and slapstick stories.¹⁵³ Frank utilized generational observations to push back against the commonly held ideas that the development of children’s aesthetic discernment was damaged by comics.

Wertham only infrequently addressed Frank and her CSAA colleagues. Just a few months before the Comics Code Authority was ratified, Wertham published an article in the journal *Religious Education* that accused the CSAA of misleading mothers. Before recommending *Seduction of the Innocent* to readers, he characterized the CSAA’s support of comic books as unethical relative to child psychology.¹⁵⁴

With more regularity, Frank refuted Wertham’s theories and observations in her publications. She pinpointed Wertham’s “contradictions around the lack of offensiveness of nudist magazines” as evidence of the logical fallibility of his arguments and the moral

¹⁵⁰ Frank, “How Do Contemporary Children’s Books Reflect Modern Patterns.”

¹⁵¹ Frank, “Comics and Delinquency.”

¹⁵² Frank, “Comics and Delinquency.”

¹⁵³ Frank, “Comics and Delinquency.”

¹⁵⁴ Wertham. “Curse of Comic Books,” 398.

inconsistencies in his stances. She went on to assert that “anything, from nudity to murder, may have a valid place with a valid framework.” Citing the ways that even *Hamlet*’s content could be considered violent, Frank urged restraint in parents and educators in assessing comics.¹⁵⁵ In addition, she understood that comics could be a factor in juvenile delinquency only if the child already were unstable.

I must reiterate that my opinion is based, not on any scientific findings, but on a gleaning of many authoritative opinions, plus my own general understanding of children and the roots of their behavior. It is my belief that a particular child’s delinquent behavior is seldom specifically caused by the reading of a particular comic, or, in fact, by reading comics.¹⁵⁶

This was an important intervention, as theories of monocausality still prevailed among the public and some researchers. Neither Frank nor Wertham shared demographic information about their child subjects, so we are limited in the ways that we can make direct comparisons around their causality findings. It also is a noteworthy point that Frank never worked as a schoolteacher or professor; her authority as a mother and educational advocate was as valuable as that of actual teachers or those who studied them formally.

Frank promoted the theory that some children were attracted to offensive comics while others were put off by them.¹⁵⁷ Bringing in observations about contemporary society, she discussed the prevalence of violence and the stress-inducing conditions children in postwar America were encountering.

...I would certainly think that an unhealthy emotional climate is created by the quantity and prevalence of the portrayal of violence and brutality, vicious people and anti-social behavior in all the ways that reach children’s eyes and ears. Our children are living in a world of confused values: on the one hand, they are bombarded with pictured and

¹⁵⁵ Frank, “Comics and Delinquency.”

¹⁵⁶ Frank, “Comics and Delinquency.”

¹⁵⁷ Frank, “Comics and Delinquency.”

traumatized violence, and on the other hand, they are told that all this is bad and reprehensible and they must not do these things. Crime comics certainly do nothing to decrease this confusion.¹⁵⁸

Though not an endorsement of crime comics, Frank's comments didn't make them into a scapegoat either. She kept the focus on sociological phenomena.

Many of her other public statements were intended to quell what she thought of as overreaching. Frank noted that "gangster jargon and dropping g's from verb endings may complicate, but would not inhibit, the teaching of English."¹⁵⁹ She went on to note that some comics even featured appropriately challenging vocabularies.

She argued against the notion that traditional literature would be supplanted completely by comics, pointing out that most children read a mixture of comics and traditional children's books.¹⁶⁰ And for that small percentage of young readers who required a bridge between comics and novels, she recommended kids magazines that focused on pets, numismatics, theatre, photography, chemistry, and mechanics.¹⁶¹ Frank's "Getting the Most from the Mass Media—How and by Whom" was designed to assist parents who sought to monitor their children's popular culture intake.¹⁶² For anxious parents, the pamphlet elucidated that the emotional catharsis achieved by Superman and Batman saving the downtrodden resembled that of Robin Hood or Ivanhoe. Frank's point was that the action of comics appealed to children, much in the

¹⁵⁸ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

¹⁵⁹ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

¹⁶⁰ Frank, "Let's Look at the Comics."

¹⁶¹ Magazines for Children and Young People, memorandum, 1949, box 5, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁶² Josette Frank, "Getting the Most from the Mass Media—How and By Whom," *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 37, no. 3 (Summer 1960), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

same way as the escapism provided by science fiction, magic, and heroism.¹⁶³ Most importantly, comics reflected contemporary society. Children selected comics to read and heroes to celebrate with an eye towards their own emotional needs.

Frank did produce comic book scholarship that did not address Wertham as well. “Concerning Children’s Prejudices,” Frank’s earlier article, which appeared in the fall 1939 issue of *Child Study*, documented kids’ ethnic, racial, and class biases, an area where teachers increasingly grew concerned about comics’ negative influence.¹⁶⁴ Throughout the forties, the CBC published Frank’s study, “Looking at the Comics,” to probe for teachers and parents the long- and short-term effects of comic-book reading on children. Based on “actual case studies,” the handbook was touted as one of the CSAA’s most widely read texts, with multiple print runs.¹⁶⁵ Some of the questions from parents that were to be answered were advertised on the back cover of the handbook.¹⁶⁶ Parents were urged not to judge their kids for valuing comics.¹⁶⁷ In 1955, Frank lobbied for a study on the effects of fantasy literature on children’s development. The issue was debated thoroughly by the CSAA, but ultimately, it was deemed financially imprudent.¹⁶⁸

Qua her position with the CSAA, Frank led the Children's Book Committee (CBC) as its staff advisor, studying comics to find criteria and standards that parents could use to probe their

¹⁶³ Frank, “Comics and Delinquency.”

¹⁶⁴ Josette Frank, “Concerning Children’s Prejudices,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 16, no. 3 (Fall 1939), box 1, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁶⁵ Frank and Straus, “Looking at the Comics”; Josette Frank and Katie Hart, “Looking at the Comics,” *Child Study: Quarterly Journal of Parent Education* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1949), box 2, series B, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁶⁶ Child Study Association of America, *Parents’ Question and Helpful Answers*.

¹⁶⁷ Child Study Association of America, *Parents’ Question and Helpful Answers*.

¹⁶⁸ Child Study Children’s Book Committee, meeting minutes, March 24, 1955.

content directly.¹⁶⁹ The CBC made only positive recommendations for children's reading, which was tonally different from most other lists on the topic.¹⁷⁰ The CBC attempted a monthly review of comics with the code they developed, though it proved too expensive to maintain and they reduced its frequency.¹⁷¹ The CBC conducted its own research into comics: first, modestly in 1941; and then a more robust follow-up survey eight years later, examining 213 comics. The research project reflected the steady increase in the focus on crime, sadism, and sexual content in comics created during the forties and early fifties. Frank asserted that these genres were not aimed at children, and perhaps were not even that interesting to them.¹⁷² She expressed her own surprise at the lack of self-censorship on the part publishers, a reaction that implies that DC Comics, which she advised, might have been proceeding with more circumspection than many other publishers.¹⁷³

Beginning in 1943, Frank organized the Children's Book Award to recognize authors and editors whose work helped kids deal with the challenges of the real world. The awards committee praised "authenticity and accuracy."¹⁷⁴ Acknowledging the influence her research had in promoting positive and educationally beneficial children's literature, the CSAA renamed the annual award in her honor in 1997, seven years after her death. Since its inception, the Josette Frank Award has recognized works by Eleanor Roosevelt, Pearl S. Buck, and Margaret and H.

¹⁶⁹ Josette Frank, "The Beginning and History of the Child Study Children's Book Committee, as Remembered by Josette Frank," original manuscript, 1985, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁷⁰ Frank, "The Beginning and History."

¹⁷¹ Frank, "The Beginning and History."

¹⁷² Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

¹⁷³ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

¹⁷⁴ Child Study Children's Book Committee Meeting on Criteria, meeting minutes, May 28, 1963.

A. Rey for literary merit and stimulating emotional and moral development in younger children. Despite her pro-comics stance in the ACC, the Josette Frank Award has yet to recognize a comic book or graphic novel.¹⁷⁵

The CSAA and its supporters wanted many of the same elements to be present in children's literature and comics.¹⁷⁶ Some of these ideas ultimately made it into the Comics Code Authority, including greater attention on quality artwork, proper grammar, and the integration of educative content. In these ways, the CSAA was in line with teachers' aspirations for the medium. The spirit of the CSAA's recommendations were present in the Code, especially in the ways that the Children's Book Committee sought to develop criteria for evaluating comics that would pass teachers' and parents' suitability tests.

As the nation became increasingly comfortable with the genre, their research on comics remained popular among adults, and was reprinted into the early Seventies, throughout the entire Silver Age.¹⁷⁷ Even still, the organization's prominence waned somewhat, and by the sixties, the CSAA had relocated to a smaller headquarters on the Upper East Side, just at the border of Spanish Harlem.¹⁷⁸ In 1977, the CSAA ended its programming due to financial challenges, and the Children's Book Committee, the most successful remaining entity, was absorbed by Bank Street College of Education.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ "Past Winners," Children's Book Committee Awards, Bank Street College (2022), <https://www.bankstreet.edu/library/center-for-childrens-literature/childrens-book-committee/awards/>.

¹⁷⁶ Frank, "Comics and Delinquency."

¹⁷⁷ Frank, "The Beginning and History."

¹⁷⁸ "Criteria, 1961-1977," original manuscript, 1977, box 4, series C, Child Study Association of America, Bank Street College of Education.

¹⁷⁹ Frank, "The Beginning and History."

Wertham's research, specifically *Seduction of the Innocent*, was at the very center of the anti-comics crusade. His ideas were more popular with the general public and press than the academic community. Much of the scholarly attention around *Seduction of the Innocent* and Wertham's other articles was focused on disproving his assertions or discrediting his methods. There were exceptions, though, most notably, independent scholar and cultural critic Gershon Legman, psychoanalyst and literary scholar Paula Elkinsch, child abuse expert Marvin L. Blumberg, and Wertham's close collaborator at the LaFargue Mental Health Clinic, Hilde L. Mosse.¹⁸⁰

Scholars were debating comics' educative value before Wertham, certainly, but once he entered the fray, the attention followed him. For example, the entire December 1941 issue of *The Journal of Experimental Education* and the December 1944 issue of the *Journal of Educational Sociology* probed comics' effects on kids, but by the time the *Journal of Educational Sociology* revisited the topic in December 1949, the bulk of the articles were devoted to rebutting Wertham's writings.¹⁸¹ One of the earliest graduate theses on comics, written by Sylvain Bernstein in 1949, argued that the "brutality, cruelty, and violence" that Wertham ascribed the comics were also present in fairy tales and other nonthreatening children's literature.¹⁸² Some researchers even wrote multiple articles rebutting Wertham, the most influential of which included University of Chicago sociologist Frederic M. Thrasher and director of the Psycho-Educational Clinic at Northwestern University, Paul A. Witty. A large

¹⁸⁰ Fredric Wertham, et al. "The Psychopathology of Comic Books." *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 2, no. 3 (1948): 472-490.

¹⁸¹ A. S. Barr, ed. *The Journal of Experimental Education* 10, no. 2 (December 1941): 91-113; Harvey Zorbaugh, ed. *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, no. 4 ("Comics as an Educational Medium," December 1944): 193-256. Harvey Zorbaugh, ed. *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 4 (December 1949): 197-243.

¹⁸² Sylvain Bernstein, *Behavior and Interest Patterns of Comic Book Readers and Non-Comic Book Readers in a Tenth Grade* (M. S. thesis. University of Southern California, 1949).

portion of Wertham's support was concentrated in schoolteachers and administrators, but his detractors represented the spectrum of academic disciplines. It is worth highlighting that, since the early 2000s, a small group of contemporary scholars, such as Bart Beaty, James Gilbert, and Chris and Rafiel York, have found merit in some points in *Seduction of the Innocent*.

While some current scholars, such as Beaty, have criticized Frank's work as more opinion than scholarship, her essays, books, and articles were cited regularly by her contemporaries, including Gruenberg, Bender, Witty, Robert L. Thorndike, and W. W. D. Sones—all of whom were comic book advocates. It was comic book publishers, though, who were the most interested in her work. Given her credentials as an expert on children and reading, hers was an opinion that was persuasive to parents and useful to an industry trying to save itself from ruin.¹⁸³ In the fifties, the comic book industry embarked on a campaign to reframe the public's view on the artform. Perspectives like Frank's, which articulated that comics were not only harmless but potentially benefitted the educational attainment of young readers, became a critical piece of the medium's identity beginning in the fifties.

2.7 Scholars on Trial: The 1954 Senate Hearings on the Comic Book Industry

The maelstrom around comics continued unremittingly from approximately 1948 to 1954, climaxing in sensationalized televised congressional hearings that starred Wertham and a host of other researchers. State and local governments in more than 50 municipalities already had passed legislation regulating the sale of comic books. Wertham had been the national spokesperson for the ACC for several years at the time of hearing, and his research indicating

¹⁸³ Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*, 122-123, 126.

that comic books were the gateway to delinquency was not at all on trial. Instead, it was comics' proponents who were tasked with proving the genre wasn't debasing American society.

Comic books received a high-profile Washington, D.C. trial that matched the notoriety of the rest of the debate. It marked the second time in American history that a Senate hearing was televised nationally. The first time was in March 1951, the culmination of the United States Senate Special Committee to Investigate Crime in Interstate Commerce. The committee was charged with probing organized crime that allegedly was happening across state lines, for fifteen months between 1950 and 1951. Its work was expansive and covered extensively in the press.¹⁸⁴ Over the course of the investigation, the five-member committee interviewed over 600 witnesses in fourteen cities.¹⁸⁵ When the congressional hearings were televised, approximately 30 million viewers watched live.¹⁸⁶ An estimated three-quarters of Americans were familiar with the work of the committee; schools and businesses closed early to accommodate the great interest in watching the hearings.¹⁸⁷ The experience made Senator Estes Kefauver, the Tennessee Democrat chairing the committee, in a well-respected political figure. By the end of 1951, Kefauver had made the list of the 10 people most admired, alongside General Douglas MacArthur, Albert Einstein, and Pope Pius XII.¹⁸⁸ As his political star rose, Kefauver twice ran

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Senate Historical Office, "Special Committee on Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce," Notable Senate Investigations: Washington, D.C., N.D. <https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/kefauver.htm>.

¹⁸⁵ C. J. Larson and G. R. Garrett, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2003), 152.

¹⁸⁶ U.S. Senate Historical Office, "Special Committee on Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce."

¹⁸⁷ Joseph Bruce Gorman, *Kefauver: A Political Biography* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971), 92.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Senate Historical Office, "Special Committee on Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce."

for president, and Illinois governor, Adlai Stevenson II, selected him as his running mate for his 1956 bid for the White House.¹⁸⁹

By the time the United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency convened for its televised hearings on comics on April 21 and 22, and June 4, 1954, Kefauver already was one of the most trusted political leaders in the country.¹⁹⁰ Further, the similar format and presence of Kefauver with the gavel with both hearings, the issues of comics and juvenile delinquency likely were linked with other serious crimes in the minds of at-home viewers. In some ways, the very existence of the hearings was another strike against the embattled industry.

Politicians were searching for the root causes of delinquency; this included understanding the role of crime comics. In launching the hearing, Kefauver connected the issue to the nation's broader crime problem. Three themes contoured his approach. First, criminals are plentiful. Second, crooked politicians are just as abundant. And third, their frequent collaborations were highly detrimental to the nation.¹⁹¹ It was the latter piece that allowed juvenile delinquency to thrive, in particular.

Scholars did not receive an objective reception from the senate committee. Research indicating that comics did not lead to delinquency—which was argued by multiple experts and comic book artists and executives—was dismissed summarily.¹⁹² More political theatre than genuine inquiry, the investigation produced no conclusive evidence of causality. The senators' political objectives remained consistent throughout the hearing, and what should have been

¹⁸⁹ Gorman, *Kefauver*.

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Senate Historical Office, "Special Committee on Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce."

¹⁹¹ Estes Kefauver, *Crime in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

¹⁹² U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

considered probative evidence was suppressed.¹⁹³ The idea that crime and sex comics were hurting the nation's youths was accepted widely and this popular idea became an effective straw man for most elected officials.

A series of researchers, experts, and other industry professionals argued about the merits and menaces of comic books. The question of whether comics had any educative value drove the conversations around the genre's suitability for redemption. Citing figures that far exceeded those put forth by other sources, Wertham testified that American children read more than a billion comic books per year, framing the problem as a nigh-insurmountable one.¹⁹⁴ He also claimed that three-quarters of teachers, librarians, experts in sociology, and parents supported his theory that crime and horror comics were detrimental to young people. It is unclear how he arrived at that percentage, as archival evidence suggests that the split between comics' supporters and detractors was much less one-sided among educators, but his sway was considerable and the finding wasn't challenged during the hearing.¹⁹⁵ In addition, Wertham also either was guilty of dissembling or woefully uninformed about other scholarship on comics. His claim that there was a lack of published research on comics did not hold true, given the list 34 articles and monographs that was entered into evidence. To be sure, not all the research was of high-quality or reflected methodological rigor, but much of it was peer-reviewed or published by professional journals and readily available to the public.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

¹⁹⁴ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*.

¹⁹⁵ Ridenour, "Dangerous Comic Books."

¹⁹⁶ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

Kefauver's committee seemingly neglected to include any mention of the educational purpose or credentials of major publisher EC Comics and its leadership.¹⁹⁷ EC Comics' gory art and explicit storylines were much maligned during the hearings; had more information about the publisher's educational bona fides been entered into evidence, perhaps the testimonies would have been received differently. In another instance, only the favorable portions of a New York State Legislature study that suggested a causal relationship between comics and delinquency were discussed on the Senate floor. The study also indicated comics many educative attributes, but these were never mentioned.¹⁹⁸ Kefauver was clear about his aims and his knowledge of the medium was more thorough than the at-home audience of fretful teachers and parents. Appreciating that there were nuances between different comic genres, he elected not to make the funny animals in Disney and Warner Bros. comics the targets of his inquest.¹⁹⁹ He kept the focus on the most prurient comics.

During the hearings, the industry's own self-regulation techniques were weaponized against it.²⁰⁰ The very fact that they had educational researchers on retainer was seen as discrediting evidence of the scholars' biases in favor of comics, a major talking point of Kefauver.²⁰¹ Years before either the ACMP or the CCA, publishing houses had their own advisory councils that were designed to regulate the content. Under M. C. Gaines, there was an education department at EC Comics. Around the same time, Josette Frank administered a book

¹⁹⁷ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

¹⁹⁸ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

¹⁹⁹ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

²⁰⁰ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

²⁰¹ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

review column in the pages of DC Comics to get more kids interested in libraries and reading beyond comics books.²⁰²

At the time of the hearing, a star witness, neuropsychiatrist Laretta Bender had headed the children's psychiatric service at New York's Bellevue Hospital for two decades. Bender was born on August 9, 1897, in Butte, Montana. Though her parents recognized that she was intellectually gifted, she struggled in school. Her teachers labeled her as developmentally delayed and would have made her repeat the third grade but for an intervention from Bender's father. He felt that her condition required "supportive help rather than punitive restriction."²⁰³ With the help of her parents, she learned to negotiate her dyslexia successfully and went on to obtain bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Chicago and a medical degree from Iowa State University.²⁰⁴ The experience inspired in Bender a lifelong interest in aiding young people with learning disabilities.

As a graduate student, she developed the Bender-Gestalt test, which measures visual-motor functions in the diagnosis of neurodivergence, as well as measuring intelligence quotients in children and adults.²⁰⁵ Bender had a broad research agenda, writing articles about schizophrenia, autism, suicide, art therapy, literacy, and violent behavior in children. Beginning in the early forties, Bender also explored the educational benefits of comic books, offering

²⁰² M. C. Gaines, "Youth and the War Effort," *Children Also Are People*, radio transcript, April 22, 1942, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁰³ Archie A. Silver, "Laretta Bender's Contribution to Understanding Language Disorders," *Annals of Dyslexia* 39 (1989): 24-33.

²⁰⁴ Regina Cicci et al, "Remembering Laretta Bender," *Annals of Dyslexia* 37 (1987): 3-9; Joan Cook, "Laretta Bender, a Psychiatrist, 88," *New York Times*, January 17, 1987, New York Times TimesMachine.

²⁰⁵ Chris Piotrowski, "A Review of the Clinical and Research Use of the Bender-Gestalt Test," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 81 (December 1995): 1272-1274.

counterarguments to some of the most common concerns of teachers and physicians.²⁰⁶ With DC Comics, Bender served as a paid advisor and editorial board member, replacing Josette Frank after her resignation.²⁰⁷

After a yearlong stint at the Phipps Clinic of Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1929, Bender served as a staff psychiatrist at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan. Like Wertham, she primarily treated African American children. She generally rejected the idea that African Americans were of lower intelligence, though her messaging about non-American Blacks was less consistent.²⁰⁸ Bender was an early proponent for the idea that children's behavioral issues could be rooted in mental illness rather than environmental factors alone. Similarly, she refuted the idea of the monocausal factor in disorders, setting her apart from Freud, Wertham, and their adherents.²⁰⁹

At the Senate hearing, Bender testified that the comic book offered catharsis, not long-term damage, to its young readers.

Well-balanced children are not upset by even the more horrible scenes in the comics, including extraordinary excitement, gruesomeness and torture, as long as only the threat of torture, for instance, is made, and not actually carried out.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Lauretta Bender, "The Psychology of Children's Reading and the Comics," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, no. 4 (December 1944): 223-231; Lauretta Bender and Reginald S. Lourie, "The Effect of Comic Books on the Ideology of Children," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 11, no. 3 (July 1941): 540; Lauretta Bender, *Child Psychiatric Techniques: Diagnostic and Therapeutic Approach to Normal and Abnormal Development through Patterned, Expressive, and Group Behavior* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd., 1952).

²⁰⁷ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*. Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, 244.

²⁰⁸ Lauretta Bender, "Behavior Problems in Negro Children," *Psychiatry* 2, no. 2 (May 1939): 213; Dennis A. Doyle, "'Racial Differences Have to Be Considered': Lauretta Bender, Bellevue Hospital, and the African American Psyche," *History of Psychiatry* 21, no. 2 (June 2010): 206-223.

²⁰⁹ Lauretta Bender, "Anxiety in Disturbed Children," in *Anxiety*, ed. P. H. Hoch, et al. (New York: Grune 7 Stratton, 1950), 119-139.

²¹⁰ "Comic Books Held Beneficial by Psychologist," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1941, personal archive of David Hajdu.

Nevertheless, Kefauver punctuated her status as a paid educational advisor to DC Comics' editorial board as a means of smearing her.²¹¹ Rather than framing the publisher as engaging experts to help keep comics appropriate for young readers, several anti-comics senators peppered her with questions designed to imply something misleading and transactional about the relationship. Through Bender's cross-examination, Kefauver and his cohort established for most Americans that scholars worked for comics could not be trusted and called into question the comics industry's extant self-regulatory efforts, of which advisory education boards had been a significant part.

Frank was not called to testify, but she did participate in the hearing as an *amicus curiae*. In her letter to Senator Kefauver, her points are balanced and unexaggerated; she does not attempt to redeem crime, horror, or sex comics. Nevertheless, she does state plainly, "I do not believe that reading about crime, whether in comics or elsewhere, will cause children to commit crime."²¹² Whatever credibility she should have been afforded by the quality of her statement certainly was undermined by her acknowledgment that she formerly had been a paid advisor of D.C. Comics.²¹³

Wertham's prominence overwhelmed the proceedings. His perspectives were so dominant in the media that no other scholarship seemed to matter to the general public, irrespective of the sophistication of the methodology, consistency of findings with other studies, or profile of the researcher. Even an expert like Bender, whose professional qualifications to speak on comics' value rivaled Wertham's, was vilified easily by anti-comics factions. No good

²¹¹ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*.

²¹² U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, 186.

²¹³ U.S. Congress, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, 187.

faith efforts were made to present pro-comics research. The hearings were proof that Wertham had neutralized his academic rivals.

2.8 Conclusions

The lack of institutional affiliation allowed Fredric Wertham and Josette Frank to express their perspectives on comics without many of the pressures that limited or influenced the participation of many educators. As discussed in the first chapter, anticommunist motivations were pervasive in school settings and schoolteachers' behavior and public stances were expected to comply with the typically conservative perspectives of administrators. Those who worked in Catholic schools faced a similar set of restrictions. For publishing research or speaking in ways that were not consistent with school leaders or the communities they represented, there were real consequences, including the loss of their jobs or credibility. Traditional scholars with university affiliations had to meet strict editorial and methodological standards in order to publish in their disciplinary journals. Free of the constraints that her audience of teachers experienced, Frank was able to articulate unpopular or uncommon arguments in favor of comics, with the full support of her home institution buttressing her efforts. Similarly, with commercial presses, Wertham was able to publish research unfettered by disciplinary standards, fieldwide conversations, or bodies of existing literature requiring adherence to principles that would have affected his research protocols or conclusions. Nevertheless, like university faculty, independent researchers had more freedom to express their perspectives than schoolteachers.

Further, Frank and Wertham may have appeared free of the baggage that contoured public opinions when the perspectives belonged to teachers or professors. Writing in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* just after the height of the ACC, historian

Richard Hofstadter articulated a difference between experts and intellectuals that captures what is essential about why the public privileged the perspectives of independent scholars over teachers and professors.

Compared with the intellectual as expert, who must be accepted even when he is feared, the intellectual as ideologist is an object of unqualified suspicion, resentment, and distrust. The expert appears as a threat to dominate or destroy the ordinary individual, but the ideologist is widely believed to have already destroyed a cherished American society.²¹⁴

Unaffiliated, Wertham, Frank, and others of their ilk were less threatening and more reliable than the throngs of educators jockeying for influence with teachers and educators. They were able to operate according to their own unique lights and that allowed them to stand out from those educators bound by their affiliations and lead each side of the comic book debate.

²¹⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1966), 38.

Chapter 3: Academe Responds to Comic Books

3.1 Introduction: A Different Kind of Debate

When the Connecticut chapter of the Intercollegiate Student Legislature had its annual convening on Friday, February 25, 1955, participants from Yale, the University of Connecticut, Albertus Magnus College, and other institutions from around the state, spent the cold, hazy afternoon in mock disputation. Before their professors, parents, peers, and the press, the undergraduates simulated legal debates around contentious contemporary issues that included mandating teaching certifications, lowering the drinking age, expanding unions, and limiting veterans' benefits. However, no topic garnered as much attention from students or audiences as the conjectural conversation on comic book censorship.

Patricia Crotty and Elizabeth McCauley, two undergraduates from Albertus Magnus College, a thirty-year old Catholic women's college less than a mile from Yale, debated the advantages of legally requiring every comic sold in Connecticut—not only those of member publishers—to carry the seal of approval of the Comics Code Authority (CCA). In the first bill introduced at the conference, the anti-comics crusade (ACC) was discussed thoroughly by the students, including arguments for and against censorship and the research that informed each. Arguing in favor of regulation, McCauley and Crotty described lurid stories with titillating images and murderous characters as rightfully resulting in “public indignation.”¹ Despite the fact that only five months had elapsed since the Comics Code Authority had been adopted by publishers, McCauley attributed to it a turnaround in the industry already. Both students observed that the CCA had checked the glorification of crime, flouting of traditional values, and

¹ Irving M. Kravsov, “Comic Books under Mock Hearing Fire,” *The Hartford Courant*, February 26, 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

publication of unsettling advertisements. They also noted a recent reduction of juvenile crime. For McCauley and Crotty, these successes were completely attributable to the brand-new Code, and they advocated for giving its head, Judge Charles F. Murphy, the legal right to restrict all comics.

Mock debaters on the opposing side lobbied for more stringent interdiction. Allyn Hartman, a student at the Teachers College of Connecticut in New Britain, reasoned that centralized oversight was the appropriate avenue, but she advocated for state intervention if the Code's early successes proved to be short-lived. She catalogued the many societal challenges ascribed to comic books as evidence. An unnamed third student contended that McCauley and Crotty's bill vested too much power in the publishers. He asserted, "An authority to regulate the industry in Connecticut... should be in the hands of the people of the state."² He went on to note that the establishment of a statewide appointed review board also could be necessary, to ensure that comic books would remain available to youthful readers.

The mock debate encapsulated the spirit of the comic book conversation on college campuses. Though it was the one most closely associated with the anti-comics activism, Fredric Wertham's name made only infrequent appearances in the pages of college newspapers, even during the most active years of the anti-comics crusade, between 1948 and 1954. This isn't to imply, though, that this national debate circumvented college campus. It did not. Quite the contrary, college campuses participated in the discussion comprehensively, with faculty, administrators, doctoral candidates, and undergraduates focusing on different facets. There were four defining features of the comic book conversation on 1940s and 1950s college campuses: a wholesale rejection of the argument that comics led to delinquency; a genuine desire to explore

² Kravsov, "Comic Books under Mock Hearing Fire."

the medium and its uses; a refusal to embrace censorship; and an effort on the part of students to assert their right to choose to read comics or not.

Without parents and classroom teachers of young children participating in the debate, emotions did not run as high, and the focus remained on practical considerations. Coeds took exception to the tactics and views of anti-comics activists. They dismissed connections between comics and juvenile delinquency while researchers tested the validity of those arguments. And in many ways, the ACC played out obliquely in high education settings. College students were pragmatic and sober-minded about comics, and generally, campuses took a pro-comics stance, with faculty and student research in journals and opinion pieces in campus publications being the primary modes of persuasion and disputation. Unlike the general group of anti-comics crusaders, the majority of college students were open about having grown up reading comics and did not feel they had been harmed by the experience.

The most articulated concerns about the books struck college students as farcical. Their tone was different from many adults, with palpable exasperation and open scorn after years of the ACC's increasingly aggressive and irrational rhetoric. These actions negatively shaped perspectives of comics-reading college students and threatened to limit their access to materials that large numbers of them read. Yet it wasn't that all college students enjoyed comics. When they did express anti-comics viewpoints, college students tended to echo their professors, placing more emphasis on the morality than literacy issues. A brouhaha around a statement made by Syracuse's chancellor shed light on the nuance views: even if collegians found comics puerile, the idea that they led to juvenile delinquency was a ridiculous one.³ What's more, coeds didn't problematize even young children reading comics.

³ Dennis Lynds, "Small Standing Army Will Not Solve Our Problems, *Syracuse Daily Orange*, March 10, 1951, The Daily Orange Collection.

Because the campus dialogues around comics featured no substantive arguments in favor of censoring comics, students interpreted the motivation behind the ACC as the older generation's desire to control them. They found it was easy to connect the ACC's strongarm tactics with those of their campus administrations, which regulated access to anything deemed too mature for students. This was less about the culture wars than students and their teachers negotiating the bounds of authority in a period of significant social change. Efforts to regulate comic book-reading seemed uncomfortably close to censorship—particularly, the type that delimited access to sexually explicit material. One Syracuse student asked, “Do they suppose that censorship of words will censor acts? If so, they are too far removed from human nature to be critics of it.”⁴ The anti-comics actions of college administrators were inspired by neither reading skills nor delinquent behavior. They were motivated by morality, and they unfavorably reflected the provocations of the anti-comics factions. College students' comics activism highlighted the generational divide that existed between educators and their pupils and heralded the broad acceptance comics would receive from future teachers and parents.

A review of literature on the development of the teenager elucidates what informed 1940s and 1950s college students' perspectives on the ACC. In order to understand their reactions to the ACC, it is critical to understand this generation as one defined by its independence from adults. A few ideas, in particular, come through clearly. First, historians are argued that 1940s and 1950s teenagers comprised a consumer group with sufficient free time, freedom from responsibility, and disposable income to lead lives of leisure; the term “teenager” even was coined by 1940s advertisers. Grace Palladino, Jon Savage, and Elliott West and Paula Petrik contend that the forces that shaped teenagers' development as a distinct demographic category

⁴ “Prissy Prutch and the Sex Lectures,” *Syracuse Daily Orange*, January 18, 1949, The Daily Orange Collection.

have been primarily materialist.⁵ In *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, Thomas Hine sees the very concept of the teenager it as a New Deal project, intent upon keeping adolescents out of the workforce so that more jobs were available to adult men with families. The contemporary conception of the teenager also was a product of the experiences of urban immigrant families, the children of which were accorded additional authority, as they helped socialize their parents to life in the United States.⁶ Teenagers needed protecting from any number of threats, including dangerous pop culture forces, and teachers understood this to be their responsibility.

Second, other scholars agree about the independent identity of this generation, but credit it to the establishment of universal high school. Stephen Mintz and William W. Savage more persuasively name compulsory high school as the defining reform, one thought to guarantee a healthier adolescence.⁷ In *The Greatest Generation Grows Up: American Childhood in the 1930s*, Kriste Lindenmeyer asserts that it was not until the 1930s that the infrastructure was in place to establish the teen years as a discrete period of childhood and the normative experience for all American youths. Some of the most significant changes were realized in education; by 1940, children spent more time in the classroom than the workforce, which was a noteworthy change in the adolescent experience.⁸ The universality of the high school experience drew new groups—including African Americans, the children of immigrants, and working-class youths—

⁵ Palladino. *Teenagers*; Savage. *Teenage*; Elliott West and Paula Petrik, eds., *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in American 1850-1950* (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1992).

⁶ Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000).

⁷ Stephen Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006). Savage, *Comic Books and America*.

⁸ Kriste Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up: American Childhood in the 1930s*. (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2005).

into the market for the first time. Paula S. Fass and Michael Grossberg build on this idea, noting that the desire to create a new postwar national identity via educational policy.⁹ Expanding on the secondary school experience as the unifying force for teenagers, James Gilbert and Marjorie Heins frame high schools as the battlegrounds for American morality, and youth culture as a recurrent scapegoat for any number of social ills; when the focus on one source of conflict faded, the attention of the moral crusaders shifted to youths' new area of interest. They note that each generation's mass media was described by censorship proponents as dangerous contagions that drew young people towards delinquency.¹⁰ Other scholars challenged this notion, pointing out the ways that gender, race, and region excluded many youths from the benefits of this extended phase of childhood.¹¹ Even still, that large numbers of teenagers suddenly were in one place—high school—made it easier to problematize comics as their shared interest and regulate them.

Third, another corpus of literature centers changing racial and class dynamics as having had the greatest influence on this generation's perspectives. To combat encroaching communism, public institutions and mass media sought to reinforce middle-class values, Ann Marie Kordas notes in *The Politics of Childhood in Cold War America*.¹² Despite rhetoric to the contrary, ethnic and racial inclusiveness did not increase substantively in schools, in the name of maintaining the values of the white middle-class. Khalil Gibran Muhammad engages David

⁹ Paula S. Fass and Michael Grossberg, eds. *Reinventing Childhood after World War II* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*; Heins, *Not in Front of the Children*; Heins, *Priests of Our Democracy*; Marjorie Heins, *Sex, Sin, and Blasphemy: A Guide to America's Censorship Wars* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

¹¹ Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing up in the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015); John L. Rury and Shirley A. Hill, *The African American Struggle for Secondary Schooling, 1940-1980: Closing the Graduation Gap* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012); Lawrence Blum and Zoë Burkholder, *Integrations: The Struggle for Racial Equality and Civic Renewal in Public Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

¹² Kordas, *The Politics of Childhood*.

Roediger, Karen Brodtkin, and Noel Ignatiev in exploring the ways that immigrant whites were able to transcend perceptions of their criminality, while Black crime statistics have been ubiquitous. He contends that Black criminality became tied to notions of racial inferiority, while immigrant and working-class white crimes were interpreted as a function of socioeconomic class and the manner in which industrialization affected otherwise good people.¹³ Elaine Tyler May's work on whiteness and suburbia touches upon similar themes. She suggests that Americans embraced the idea that raising their children in an environment of affluence, consumerism, traditional roles, and constancy would inoculate them from the dangers of political disruptions like communism.¹⁴ Accordingly, there was a racialized facet to juvenile delinquency that accorded white college students some distance from it. In this chapter, I argue that, in the 1940s and 1950s, college students' opinions on comics differed from those of schoolteachers due to generational shifts that reframed conversations around teenagers, self-definition, and authority figures, like teachers and professors.

College students were not experiencing the ACC in a vacuum; as their interests dictated campus activities and as previously noted, the research of their professors and other scholars shaped their perspectives. The era's comic book scholarship can be subdivided into three distinct branches: one, research that established any detrimental effects comics induced in young readers were no worse than previous generations' leisure literature; two, research that established comics were innocuous, neither benefiting nor impairing student learning; or three, research that

¹³ Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 2008); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2007); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Karen Brodtkin, *How the Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1998); Brodtkin, Karen. "Whiteness: A Mixed Bag," in *The New Black Renaissance: The SOULS Anthology of Critical African-American Studies* (2005), ed. Manning Marable, 227-231.

¹⁴ May, *Homeward Bound*.

established comics could be used to teach or improve literacy skills. These studies are not of interest because of their findings—it is no longer in dispute that there is no negative correlation between reading comics and intellectual or psychosocial development—but rather, as evidence of the opinions held by educators on comics. Research findings like these were readily available during even the most contentious years of the anti-comics debate.¹⁵

The university was an important site where the ACC was fought and students and faculty both contributed to higher education's relationship to comic books. For those reasons, it is instructive to consider each of those populations. First, administrators, faculty, and other researchers were responding to the interests and actions of the student populations they served. Second, college students were more agentic in their school experiences than their younger counterparts. They had a much bigger role in independently expressing their perspectives in campus publications and planning and attending campus activities. And third, they were often researchers rather than merely the subject of studies on comics. For instance, theses and dissertations, like Florence Anna Heisler's "Characteristics of Elementary School Children who Read Comic Books, Attend the Movies, and Prefer Serial Radio Program," Harlan Lewis Harrington's dissertation, "Comic Books and Children's Reading Interests," Margaret Lyle McClellan's "A Survey of the Extent of Children's Interests in the Comics," Sylvain Bernstein's "Behavior and Interest Patterns of Comic Book Readers and Non-comic Book Readers in a Tenth Grade," Mary Anne Brown's "A Study of Interest in and Use of Literature among Children of the Intermediate Grades," and Elzada M. Reynolds's "Comics: A Teaching Aid for Slow Learner," provide an even more substantive set of contemporaneous research findings on

¹⁵ Sones, "The Comics and Instructional Method."

the educative value of comics than reviewing the publications of faculty alone.¹⁶ Further, the range of institutions and variety of questions interrogated in these graduate projects are strong indications of academe's interest in the genre.¹⁷

Chapter three interrogates the comics activism in the higher education sphere between 1948, when Sterling North's landmark editorial criticizing the genre, prompted a spate of reactions from educational researchers who sought to prove or disprove his points. This chapter first examines the roles college students played in the comics debate, how these roles came to be, and the ways that they influenced educators. Additionally, I probe the reasons behind coeds' rejection of the ACC's tactics and rationale. I also examine the on-campus activities conducted by faculty and administrators. Finally, I scrutinize the scholarship that animated the ACC. Researchers were testing hypotheses around the benefits and dangers of comics, administrators were experimenting with them as a communicative tool, and faculty members were debating their constitutionality. I argue that, while there was pro- and anti-comics research produced, university campuses generally were oriented towards establishing that the genre had a place in American society.

¹⁶ Florence Anna Heisler, *Characteristics of Elementary School Children who Read Comics, Attend the Movies, and Prefer Serial Radio Programs* (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1944); Harrington, *Comic Books and Children's Reading Interests*; Margaret Lyle McClellan, *A Survey of the Extent of Children's Interests in the Comics* (M.Ed. thesis, Wayne University, 1947); Dorothea Fields Allen, *The Leisure Time Activities of a Selected Group of Negro Girls* (M.S. thesis, University of Southern California, 1949); Sylvain Bernstein, *Behavior and Interest Patterns of Comic Book Readers and Non-comic Book Readers in a Tenth Grade* (M.S. thesis, University of Southern California, 1949); Mary Anne Brown, *A Study of Interest in and Use of Literature among Children of the Intermediate Grades* (M.S. thesis, University of Southern California, 1949); Elzada M. Reynolds, *Comics: A Teaching Aid for Slow Learners* (M.S. thesis, New Jersey State Teachers College at Newark, 1951).

¹⁷ Allen, *The Leisure Time Activities*; Bernstein, *Behavior and Interest Patterns*; Brown, *A Study of Interest in and Use of Literature*; Harrington, *Comic Books and Children's Reading Interests*; Heisler, *Characteristics of Elementary School Children*; Margaret Lyle McClellan, *A Survey of the Extent of Children's Interests in the Comics* (M.Ed. thesis, Wayne University, 1947); Helen K. Micka, *History of the Parent-Teacher Association in Montana, 1914-1964* (M.A. thesis, Montana State University, 1964); Reynolds, *Comics*; John E. Twomey, *The Anti-comic Book Crusade* (M. A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1955).

3.2 Higher Education and Comics

Educators outside of primary and secondary school contexts were worlds away from their counterparts in their engagement with comics. The university environment was likelier to be one of openness, with interested parties asking questions before proclaiming judgments. For instance, investment in the educational uses of comic books at Columbia University dates back to at least 1947, with the founding of the Communications Materials Center, which later was rechristened the Center for Mass Communication.¹⁸ A corollary of the Columbia University Press, the Center was established to produce and disseminate “public education materials in all mass media including motion pictures, radio programs, television shows, phonograph records, display cards, leaflets, comic books, and other materials.”¹⁹ Its products were intended to address contemporary social issues of grave concern.²⁰ The University demonstrated its serious commitment to developing the educative value of these emergent art forms through the appointment of influential faculty and administrators to the advisory committee, including the directors of its Press, Institute of Arts and Sciences, and School of Arts and Sciences, as well as the dean of the Faculty of Architecture.²¹

University faculty and graduate students across a range of disciplines were researching comic books. The potential educational uses of comics were a frequently interrogated topic, but scholars’ interest in comics was broader than that. In particular, researchers at Teachers College also devoted significant energy to understanding the new medium. For example, Irving D.

¹⁸ Ira Silverman, “Lion about Video,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, December 10, 1953.

¹⁹ “Advisory Committee Set Up for Communications Center,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, January 12, 1951.

²⁰ “Press Activities Not Limited to Books,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, January 10, 1955.

²¹ “Advisory Committee Set Up for Communications Center,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, January 12, 1951.

Lorge, a prominent psychometrician with Teachers College's Institute of Educational Research and innovator of intelligence tests, was funded by the Thomas A. Edison Foundation to conduct an inquiry into the educational benefits of comic books.²² He examined comics to create indices of word frequency and readability. He argued for comics' ability to teach facts and concepts, not just words and reading skills.

In terms of our researches [sic], comics can make a fruitful appeal to the interest of children. Comics can give children a very sound and thorough orientation into the facts of biography, the appreciation of the outdoors, understanding of science enjoyment of a plot, or the appreciation of humor. The amount of incidental information youngsters are likely to pick up is considerable.²³

Contemporaneously, Robert L. Thorndike, another prominent Teachers College psychologist whose work focused on cognition and standardized testing, pronounced research findings that countered those of Fredric Wertham and encouraged schoolteachers to reconsider the value of comic books.

Superman and other 'comic' books provide a substantial amount of reading and vocabulary-building experiences for children who might otherwise not get it. That these books are widely read by children of limited, as well as average, reading ability, is common knowledge. The teacher, librarian, and parent should be aware of the positive contribution of these materials as an out-of-school supplement to the child's reading experience.²⁴

Findings like these by influential scholars legitimated research on the genre, encouraged others to conduct investigations, and challenged popular beliefs of the dangers of comics.

²² "Comics Can Make Fruitful Appeal to Children's Interests, Columbia University Researchers Find," *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 1, original manuscript, February 1960, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

²³ John L. Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors: Twenty Years of Self-regulation by the Comics Magazine Industry* (New York: Comics Magazine Association of America, 1974), 27.

²⁴ M. C. Gaines, "Youth and the War Effort," *Children Also Are People*, radio transcript, April 22, 1942, personal archive of David Hajdu.

Given Teachers College's research output and stature in educational fields, it is not surprising that it was a leading producer of comic book scholarship. Nevertheless, Columbia was not the only institution where serious research on comics was being conducted. Boston University's Communications Research Center's staff investigated why 90 million people identified as daily readers of comic books. With grant monies from the Newspaper Comics Council, the Center published scholarship that pronounced comics as the same sort of uniquely American cultural contribution as jazz and film; as such, they warranted serious study.²⁵ Increasingly, comics also were being studied in classroom settings. Among the first institutions to offer seminars on comics were the Universities of Virginia and Texas, Michigan State and Bowling Green Universities, and the American Institute at the University of Munich.²⁶ In addition, to teach creative thinking to fifth and sixth graders, the Carnegie Corporation printed comics featuring research based on University of California studies.²⁷ Lastly, W. W. D. Sones, a professor of education and the director of curriculum study at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education, utilized professional journals to communicate with schoolteachers and librarians about comics' educative potential.

Many upper-grade teachers are now making use of comic books as a part of their teaching method. They have found that upper-grade children have a strong interest in this form of reading, from which many lines of growth may be promoted. Other teachers are seeking ways and means by which they may capitalize this interest for school purposes. Comic books, like radio programs, movies, and games and sports, are now a

²⁵ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 3, original manuscript, October 1959, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

²⁶ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 33, original manuscript, April 1970, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

²⁷ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 27, original manuscript, June 1966, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

part of the child's current environment and life activity and must be recognized as such."²⁸

This was published in *The Instructor*, which was "read by approximately half of the schoolteachers throughout the country."²⁹ This tactic proved an effective means for researchers to be in conversation with other educators and these journals became a key battleground where the ACC was argued, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

3.3 Campus Activism: Students and Comics

The tone of college newspaper articles on comics was decidedly one-sided. Unlike the local press and national magazines, which featured a mix of reporting and opinion pieces on comics, the majority of what appeared in college newspapers was editorial in nature. These periodicals differed not only in their content and audience, but also in their reach. That is, college newspaper circulations numbered in the hundreds, while local newspapers were read by thousands, and magazines had millions of subscribers. Because of their frequent publication schedules and readerships that were smaller in scale, local newspapers could dedicate significant time to reporting on comics and doing so in aggressive tones that might have played less well with magazine's wider audiences. Comic book burnings, bans, and boycotts made only infrequent appearances in the pages of college newspapers, even during the most active years of the anti-comics campaign, between 1948 and 1954. This isn't to imply, though, that this national debate circumvented college campus. It did not. Quite the contrary, the college campuses

²⁸ M. C. Gaines, "Youth and the War Effort," *Children Also Are People*, radio transcript, April 22, 1942, personal archive of David Hajdu.

²⁹ Gaines, "Youth and the War Effort."

participated in the discussion comprehensively, with faculty, administrators, doctoral candidates, and undergraduates focusing on different facets.

Certainly, professors didn't have the same sort of custodial responsibilities for college students that schoolteachers had for younger children. They weren't expected to protect college students, who had a different disposition to the medium at any rate, from the dangers of comics. In fact, for most undergrads, the movement to censor comics represented yet another effort to limit their autonomy. They were patently uninterested in the sordid stories of children driven by comics to commit grisly murders, and the campus newspapers they wrote and edited reflected this. By the late forties, a generation of them had grown up reading comics; they found it risible that their beloved fare could cause any substantive long-term damage, as evinced in the tone of their editorials and reporting. Many of them openly mocked the very idea of an anti-comics campaign of any sort. The unifying theme between what appeared in college newspapers was that comics already were a legitimate form of literature to the younger generations. With regards to college-affiliated publications, it is worth noting that the most critical takes on comics were published in alumni magazines, which had adult audiences.

In a January 1949 essay by the editorial staff of *Syracuse Daily Orange*, the student journalists made connections between the ACC and Syracuse University's efforts to limit access to other mature material.

Our University has encountered severe censure for its new-found attitude toward frank and open discussions of pre-marital sexual relations. Why, we ask. Do our critics deny the existence of such relations? If so, they are either fools or misinformed idealists. Do they suppose that censorship of words will censor acts? If so, they are too far removed from human nature to be critics of it. Do they interpret discussion as approval or sesame? Do they feel then that syphilis, the word, has encouraged syphilis, the disease? Do they believe that by saying the act violates the rule of God, the act will be outlawed by man? We know it is wrong to have pre-marital relations, but we have them nonetheless. That is a fact. Is it not better to work with facts toward a solution than to create a solution without regard for facts? There can be no real solution without facts, if they exist—as

indeed they do. Would it not be better to view the facts clearly, analytically, objectively, and then act upon them with respect to the rule of God? From another point of view: In making His decisions, God takes all into consideration. Why then should we be asked to pass judgment with but partial information?³⁰

This editorial was not an isolated episode. The following academic year, an incident involving the university's chancellor elicited a similar editorial response in the *Syracuse Daily Orange*. William Pearson Tolley had been chancellor of Syracuse University since 1942; a cornerstone of his tenure was enrollment expansion via the G. I. Bill. The student newspaper ran an article about one of Tolley's recent magazine interviews, in which he made an offhand remark analogizing those under-prepared for college to "a mass of comic book readers on the moral level of the lowest common denominator."³¹ Tolley connected comic book-reading with a "deterioration of character" he saw among new students, many of whom were veterans taking advantage of the G. I. Bill's higher education benefits.³² Comics had been extremely popular among soldiers during WWII, but even the most vigilant moral crusaders did not describe comics as compromising the decency of the U.S. military. And Tolley had been a consistent supporter of veterans. Nevertheless, the issue here was a generational one. Tolley's comment revealed the strength of the bias against comics and fit into a pattern of strictness with students' social activities. For students, Tolley's equating of moral degradation and comic book-reading was objectionable, irrational, and discordant with their values.

What happened that left undergrads feeling frustrated and cynical about the anti-comics crusade? Children were afforded more independence as the decades progressed, which produced

³⁰ *Syracuse Daily Orange*, "Prissy Prutch and the Sex Lectures."

³¹ Dennis Lynds, "Small Standing Army Will Not Solve Our Problems, March 10, 1951, The Daily Orange Collection.

³² "Tolley Scores UMT in Magazine Story," *Syracuse Daily Orange*, March 8, 1951, The Daily Orange Collection.

mixed results, including an increase in delinquency.³³ These college students were less willing than their predecessors to accept the stringent regulating of their leisure time. They resented their freedoms being limited by regulatory efforts, and they maintained that their reading habits were their own personal business.³⁴ This generation's teenagers had a unique set of experiences. It was not until the 1930s, though, that the infrastructure was built to make this the normative experience for most American youths.³⁵ Some of the most significant changes were realized in education; by 1940, children spent more time in the classroom than the workforce, which was a noteworthy change in American adolescence.³⁶ After World War II, governmental and commercial entities alike started recognizing adolescents as a distinctive group, with its own values, interests, and modes of expression. The most salient and consistent characteristics of the group have been its twin desires for autonomy and self-definition.³⁷ And specifically with products like comic books, teenagers retained an increasingly significant share of the market and wielded a newfound influence over adults. There was contradiction inherent in the experience of the American teenager, fueled by the understanding that preparation for adulthood must be happening at the same time as enjoying leisurely life.³⁸ As college students, they were clear and emphatic in their response to the ACC. West and Petrik argued that youths were the shapers of

³³ West and Petrik, *Small Worlds*.

³⁴ "What's So Funny?," *Syracuse Daily Orange*, September 27, 1950, The Daily Orange Collection.

³⁵ As discussed in the second chapter, Black teenagers enjoyed the same access to neither educational opportunities nor youthful diversion as their white counterparts.

³⁶ Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up*.

³⁷ Savage, *Teenage*.

³⁸ Palladino, *Teenagers*.

popular culture, and college students resented adults' attempts at asserting authority in this sphere.³⁹

Because they needed to spend no time convincing their audience of the artform's harmlessness, college newspaper writers were able to focus mostly on the attributes of comics. Nevertheless, because they understood that some undergrads were still on-the-fence about comics and faculty and staff readers were not sold on comics' inoffensiveness yet, writers occasionally argued that comics were legitimate sources education, communication, and general entertainment. To counter what they saw as absurd objections to comics, humor and satire were regular features of their articles and editorials. For college students, it was a ridiculous proposition the children's reading material had set into motion societal ruination. Indeed, the tonal difference from local newspapers was striking. In a January 1951 opinion piece about the NCAA and financial aid, *Cornell Daily Sun* writer Michael Scott described comics as leading more to puerile than violent behavior.⁴⁰ Other writers made similar assertions in college newspapers around the country.⁴¹ In a comedic rejoinder to claims linking comics to pornography, Lehigh University student editors rebutted the major postulations of the ACC; this typified the responses many college essayists took.⁴² In each of these, the writers used humor to

³⁹ West and Petrik, *Small Worlds*.

⁴⁰ Michael Scott, "Oh Sanity...", *The Cornell Daily Sun*, January 15, 1951, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive.

⁴¹ "Look Ma, I'm Santa Claus...", *The Cornell Daily Sun*, December 18, 1950, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive; "It's All for Art's Sake," *Columbia Spectator*, February 13, 1952, Columbia Spectator Archives; Stephanos C. Tavuchis, "Praises Spec's Correct Quoting," *Columbia Spectator*, November 30, 1951, Columbia Spectator Archives; "Turn Spare Time into Money," *Columbia Spectator*, February 6, 1951, Columbia Spectator Archives; "A Catastrophe," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, December 3, 1951, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive; "Reynolds, Carlson, Landsman Perform for Ithaca Children," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, November 20, 1948, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive.

⁴² El Cornog, "Kinda Corn-o-Graphic," *Brown and White*, February 15, 1949, The Lehigh Digital Archives.

highlight the logical lapses in the anti-comics movement. These were predicated on the notion that the student readers agreed that comics were innocuous and that the perspectives of comics' opponents were shockingly, pitifully antiquated.

Historically, teenagers have been more capable decision-makers than contemporary expectations and restrictions allow them space to be.⁴³ In conservative periods of American history, popular culture often has been a lightning rod that has drawn youths to progressive causes.⁴⁴ Throughout the 1920s, most American youths believed that they had greater control over their lives than those who preceded them had.⁴⁵ So, by the postwar period, college students were speaking out about the censoring of sexual education content and distasteful depictions of Black people. These were all of a particular moment for the students.⁴⁶ Reviewing college newspapers from the region, including those at Bard College, Barnard College, Binghamton University, City College of New York, Cornell University, Ithaca College, Princeton University, Syracuse University, Teachers College, and Vassar College, the rejection of any sort of proscription against comics is remarkably consistent.

In the minds of postwar college students, comic books were ubiquitous but juvenile crime was not. There was ample evidence of the centrality of comic books in the lives of students. The aforementioned sample of college newspapers featured casual references to comic-reading as fully embedded in the university experience. An ad in *The Daily Princetonian* listed comics

⁴³ Hine, *The Rise and Fall*.

⁴⁴ Paul J. Ramsey, ed., *Learning the Left: Popular Culture, Liberal Politics, and Informal Education from 1900 to the Present* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2015).

⁴⁵ John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴⁶ Cohen, "The Delinquents."

among the seven essentials for the Princeton Man and the editors of *The Columbia Spectator* joked that comics were America's largest exported good.⁴⁷ It should be noted that articles about comics became a regular presence in college newspapers beginning in 1950, about two years after their dangers had become a permanent fixture in the broader press. That these articles did not become common in college newspapers until a few years after anti-comics hysteria had begun is indicative of how removed students were from the ACC perspectives.

College newspapers also carried stories about how comics were being used as educational tools. Columbia's Center for Mass Communication received substantial coverage in *The Spectator* for its work its pioneering collaborations with the U.S. Public Health Service, elected leaders, civil servants, and researchers to distribute public health information and academic content via comic books, television, and motion pictures.⁴⁸ Other college newspapers reported on similarly focused research institutes at their own universities.⁴⁹ A December 1948 article in the *Syracuse Daily Orange* captured Professor Manfred Frank DeMartino's confession that "comics are read by a great many adults," as well as his psychology research findings that stipulated,

⁴⁷ University Shop, "Everything the Princeton Man Needs," Advertisement, *The Daily Princetonian*, March 3, 1948, The Larry DuPraz Digital Archive; "It's All for Art's Sake," *Columbia Spectator*, February 13, 1952, Columbia Spectator Archives; Tavuchis, "Praises Spec's Correct Quoting"; "Turn Spare Time into Money," *Columbia Spectator*, February 6, 1951, Columbia Spectator Archives; "A Catastrophe," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, December 3, 1951, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive; Michael Scott, "Sanity, Oh Sanity..." *The Cornell Daily Sun*, January 15, 1951, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive; Larry Luce, "Look Ma, I'm Santa Claus...", *The Cornell Daily Sun*, December 18, 1950, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive; "Reynolds, Carlson, Landsman Perform for Ithaca Children," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, November 20, 1948, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive; Strand Movie Theatre. "Road House/Disney Comic-Cartoon." Advertisement. *The Cornell Daily Sun*, November 20, 1948, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson '56 Archive.

⁴⁸ Ira Silverman, "Lion about Video," *Columbia Spectator*, December 10, 1953, Columbia Spectator Archives; "Advisory Committee Set Up for Communications Center," *Columbia Spectator*, January 12, 1951, Columbia Spectator Archives; Jim Dalrymple, "Press Activities Not Limited to Books," *Columbia Spectator*, January 10, 1955, Columbia Spectator Archives.

⁴⁹ "CHNO Research," *Syracuse Daily Orange*, October 21, 1954, The Daily Orange Collection.

There is no need for a drastic move like taking [comics] off the market, their quality and moral value should be improved tho [sic]. We can have a great deal of learning thru [sic] comics—they are vivid and realistic... Moral teaching would be of value.⁵⁰

That there were faculty members who enjoyed comics and researched them was a legitimating force. To those who had grown up reading comics—behind closed bedroom doors, with groups of friends after school, or thumbing through pages but not buying from drugstores—the sight of comics as items of serious inquiry among a campus community was thrilling and legitimately interesting. It affirmed what many of them knew already: comics had become permanent fixtures in American society, capable of communicating clearly and effectively with audiences. For some, it was vindication. After a childhood being ridiculed by their teachers and parents for their reading preferences, accomplished academics were unveiling the fruits of their research that showed comics had value and much of it was educative.

Another major point for the baccalaureate satirists was that criminology was the way to understand the rise in juvenile crime, rather than anything associated with comic book-reading. These writers sometimes supported their assertions with facts or footnotes, and at other times used rhetorical or comedic flourishes to discredit the ACC. In the 1954-1955 academic year, a multi-part series on the “causes of crime” ran in the *Columbia Spectator*. The tone of these articles was measured; the student journalists gave thorough details of social conditions based on interviews with law enforcement officers, social workers, and other individuals directly involved.

There were other ways college newspapers’ coverage of the ACC differed from the mainstream press. College students did not embrace Wertham’s ideas, and accordingly, his name, ubiquitous elsewhere, seldom appeared in the college newspapers reviewed for this project. To some college students, he may have been just another histrionic adult who hated

⁵⁰ Al Hazen, “Not So Funny,” *Syracuse Daily Orange*, December 10, 1948, The Daily Orange Collection.

comics. To others, he was a dangerous personification of authoritarianism. College kids were never Wertham's primary audience, so it's understandable that he was not central in the conversation among young adults.

Nevertheless, the ACC was a regular topic in the editorial sections of college newspapers. These discussions centered around cultural criticism. There was less interest in debating anything about the legitimacy of comics or their perceived threat to civilized society than asserting that comics were not inherently immoral. The point wasn't to prove it, though; editorials assured their audiences understood that already. The editorialists only endeavored to point out that the scapegoating of comics signified a societal failing all on its own, often with sardonic commentary. Branding anti-comics crusaders as bleakly outdated, one student writer hyperbolically described most youths' ideal of the American Dream as having morphed into "a sex-minded Horatio Alger story," and that most adults had not kept up with the times.⁵¹ Another employed satire to point out that his generation had not descended into lawlessness, despite the ubiquity of their comic book-reading.

Youngers who once enjoyed watching Donald Duck outwit his nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louis [sic], have evolved into a generation of children with blood-pursed lips and of college students and adults who carouse around waiting for the moment when furry bat's wings will sprout from their shoulders and carry them away to the lands of ghouls and ghosties and little spooks who own four-color presses.⁵²

A very small subset of articles promoted comics' positive attributes explicitly. In an article published in *The Cornell Sun* in the lead-up to the establishment of the ACMP code, Eve

⁵¹ Pete Model, "Kultur' of Comic Books Gets Rough Treatment," *Syracuse Daily Orange*, April 10, 1951, The Daily Orange Collection..

⁵² Art Siegel, "Children Still Read, but Content Different," *Syracuse Daily Orange*, February 7, 1952, The Daily Orange Collection.

Weinschenker anticipated a body of comics that would promote “a higher moral tone.”⁵³ While not plentiful, news articles occasionally did reflect the broader debate around comics. They zeroed in on the issues of greatest interest to college students. *The Cornell Daily Sun* covered the local teachers’ union rejecting proposed anti-comics legislation on the grounds of censorship, which was a perspective shared by many faculty and students as well.⁵⁴ The paper also discussed New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey’s 1952 veto of a proposed law to ban explicit comics, another move that lacked the support of college communities.⁵⁵ In 1950, *The Syracuse Daily Orange* published an extensive editorial discussing the opposition to censorship on campuses that made anti-comics provisions so unpopular.⁵⁶

The most critical takes on comics were printed in other types of university publications. Alumni magazines, which had totally different writers and readerships, were spaces for writing that more closely approximated the mainstream press. These articles warned parents of the dangers of the form. They traded on the publication’s proximity to their institutions to emphasize their concerns. For instance, a feature in the June 1949 issue of *Vassar Alumnae Magazine*, offered a courtly dissuasion of comics as reading material that reflected nuance.

They run the gamut from the wholly innocuous Walt Disney books about familiar cartoon figures to the murderous “crime comics” now banned in some communities, and in like manner I believe that their effects of children’s minds vary considerably.⁵⁷

⁵³ Eve Weinschenker, “There’s Good News Tonight...,” *The Cornell Daily Sun*, January 19, 1949, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson ’56 Archive.

⁵⁴ “Teachers Union Votes to Oppose Censorship of Comic Literature,” *The Cornell Daily Sun*, January 19, 1949, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson ’56 Archive.

⁵⁵ “World News Summary,” *The Cornell Daily Sun*, April 15, 1952, The Cornell Daily Sun Keith R. Johnson ’56 Archive.

⁵⁶ *The Syracuse Daily Orange*, “What’s So Funny.”

⁵⁷ Polly Allis Cowan, “Instead of the Comics: Children’s Magazines?” *Vassar Alumnae Magazine*, June 1949, 7.

The writer goes on to recommend that kids interested in comics be encouraged to read *Collins Magazine*, *Highlights*, *Jack and Jill*, and other similar fare instead, a method also popular with classroom teachers.⁵⁸ While the tone was tempered for a more mature, genteel audience—a sensationalized screed could turn off the well-to-do Seven Sisters alumnae—many of the points were the same. Calibrated to inspire action in their readers, these articles shared a mission, tone, and audience with the ladies’ auxiliaries that were organizing across the country and of which many women’s college alumnae were active participants.⁵⁹

The answer is not to suppress these facts but to present them vividly in all their naked reality, free of adventure and glamour, and, at the same time, to present an alternate way of life—to suggest a path for better, more intelligent and mature living. It is far better to know the whereabouts of the enemy, his strength and tactics, than to approach him blindly with idealism an only weapon.⁶⁰

The editorial reflected not only a denunciation of censorship, but also an acknowledgment that the attitude that comics’ value lay in their ability to reveal an accurate picture of society to its readers. The methods of regulation being employed only obscured facts about life to which young people should be exposed, the student writers argued. “To do away with comics, filled with violence, crime, murder, and worse, would be to deny that there is life and that it is filled with violence, crime, murder, and worse.”⁶¹ Furthermore, they noted that the ACC ignored known research about how children develop emotionally and mentally, though they offered no evidence in these fora.⁶²

⁵⁸ Cowan, “Instead of the Comics,” 7-11.

⁵⁹ Susan D. Barnes, “Rise and Resilience of Women’s Colleges,” *Journal of Intercultural Disciples* 14 (January 2014): 74.

⁶⁰ *Syracuse Daily Orange*, “Prissy Prutch and the Sex Lectures.”

⁶¹ *Syracuse Daily Orange*, “Prissy Prutch and the Sex Lectures.”

⁶² *Syracuse Daily Orange*, “Prissy Prutch and the Sex Lectures.”

Faculty also participated in the on-campus discourse in the student press. Manfred Frank DeMartino, a professor of psychology, focused on claims around comics' and reading. He posited,

In a way, comics help stimulate child interest in reading. They are a good means of escape. They help one to forget his troubles. Even Admiral [William Frederick] Halsey carried them with him on active duty with the fleet... We can have a great deal of learning thru [sic] comics—they are vivid and realistic.⁶³

He went on to point out the difficulty in actually keeping interested kids from getting their hands on comics, with or without a ban. DeMartino was plainspoken about the content of comics and acknowledged ethical and presentational shortcomings; these perspectives would have been shared by most of the students and faculty readers. He also confirmed that there were many adult comic book readers, including professors and college students. This was not a generally known fact at the time.⁶⁴

Another article conceded that comics had taken a gruesome turn recently, but located it within a much broader trend of Americans of all ages reading macabre stories across genres. There also was ironic acknowledgment that comics were so effective at deploying messaging that presidential campaigns soon would utilize them.⁶⁵ The college press explored logical inconsistencies within the arguments of anti-comics crusaders. For instance, one writer observed that kids exploring their curiosity by playing doctor were problematized less than kids discovering the same topics via comics.⁶⁶ Editorials also highlighted hypocritical stances within

⁶³ Hazen, "Not So Funny."

⁶⁴ Hazen, "Not So Funny."

⁶⁵ Art Stegel, "Children Still Read, but Content Differs," *Syracuse Daily Orange*, February 7, 1952, The Daily Orange Collection.

⁶⁶ *Syracuse Daily Orange*, "What's So Funny."

the anti-comics movement. One student writer alleged that many of comics' opponents indulged in other forms of prurient literature and expressed dubiety that they were concerned at all about children's literacy.⁶⁷ Students also used their newspapers to share research that demonstrated comics' harmlessness or even value. *The Syracuse Daily Orange* reported on the research of an unnamed Occidental College psychologist who found that comics were "a definite aid to parents who [wanted] to understand the mental processes of their children."⁶⁸ College students favored casually sharing common-sense research, such as those studies that indicated maladjusted behaviors were due to a flawed homelife.

Tellingly, despite the ways that he was a key leader in the ACC, Fredric Wertham's name was not mentioned once in *The Syracuse Daily Orange* between the years of 1948 and 1955, when students were expressing thoughts about comics regularly and he was ubiquitous elsewhere in the media. Similarly, despite her busy speaking schedule, there is no record of Josette Frank on Syracuse's campus in the same period. Coeds were processing the ACC very differently from parents and teachers.

3.4 Published Research and Educators' Perspectives on Comics

Wertham and Frank represented two dialectical poles, with most educators existing somewhere between the two. Newspapers' overreporting of bonfires and trading programs in parochial schools all over the country contributed to a sense that educators opposed comic books. The image of the censorious schoolmarm—disciplining boys for their comic book-reading habits—captured only part of the whole picture. Expressing themselves in professional and

⁶⁷ *Syracuse Daily Orange*, "What's So Funny."

⁶⁸ *Syracuse Daily Orange*, "What's So Funny."

scholarly journals, classroom teachers, school librarians, educational researchers, and university faculty registered a panoply of concerns about and attributes of the medium. What was consistent, however, was these educators representing their professional perspectives and interests.

The college campus activism around comics differed from that of elementary and secondary schools in terms of substance, motivation, and intention. In that some educators sought to prove, disprove, or support various assumptions on comic books, published research by university faculty can serve as a proxy for the perspectives of those in the profession. Much of this research was intended to prove one of three theories:

- (1) Comics were totally innocuous, neither benefiting nor impairing student learning.
- (2) If comics actually produced deleterious effects in young readers, they were no worse than those of the dime novels or penny dreadfuls that preceded them.

These first two theories also were explored by classroom teachers in the pages of their professional journals.

- (3) Comics could be used to teach reading or improve literacy skills. A full decade before the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, major journals made available the results of multiple university-based studies that obliterated the notion that comic books hurt literacy.

This third question was taken up frequently by educational researchers and had obvious relevance for the training for future elementary school teachers.

The articles examined in this chapter chronicle the development of 1940s and 1950s educators' ideas on comics. The preponderance of articles in educators' professional and research journals focused on the role of teachers relative to comics, which is logical, given that

many of these scholars were faculty or graduate students in schools of education or teachers colleges. The questions that drove their research were many: Do comics hinder the teaching of reading? Do they create other sorts of cognitive delays? Do comics influence kids' behavior? Do they influence the development of morality? These articles interrogated the nature and scope of teachers' work, as well as their responsibility to guide young people even outside of the classroom. The issue was not one of whether teachers should intervene in the debate, but rather, what those interventions were and where they should happen. As will be explored in the following section, scholars published in journals that allowed them to speak directly to the specific audience of educators they sought to influence. And while the body of research produced university-affiliated researchers always leaned pro-comics, as the ACC progressed, the research presented increasingly favorable conclusions about the artform.

B. "Are Comics Harmless?"

A full decade before the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, major journals made available the results of multiple university-based studies that obliterated the notion that comic books hurt literacy:

Their idiom has left its mark on our language—in “heebie-jeebies” and “time’s a-wastin’” (*Barney Google*), “goon” and “jeep” (*Popeye*), “let George do it” (*Jiggs*), “foo,” “twerp,” “bodacious,” “discomboobrate,” “banana oil,” and many other words or phrases... They have invaded campus and classroom. “Sadie Hawkins Day” is celebrated at 500 schools and colleges. In more than 2,500 classrooms children are learning to read from “Superman” workbooks. The comics are teaching French, Spanish, and the social studies. *Ivanhoe*, and other classics, over which our generation pored late into the night, are now reduced to comic form. The Chicago Museum of Natural History’s “Joe the Elk” teaches paleontology and anthropology. “Private Pete” and his colleagues are playing a major role in the educational program of the armed forces. Even the Sunday school is not exempt. In some 2,000 Sunday [schools] children are studying *Picture Stories of the Bible*.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Zorbaugh, Harvey, “The Comics—There They Stand!,” *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, no. 4 (December 1944): 201-202.

As early as 1944, *The Journal of Educational Sociology* was publishing radical research findings on comic book readership that demonstrated that comics were innocuous across a range of demographic groups:

Comic books, like comic strips, are read by all the sorts of people who make up America— young and old, poor and rich, those who never got beyond the sixth grade and Ph.D.'s, soldiers and civilians... True, education and economic and occupational status somewhat influence the reading of comic books. But their influence is less than one might suppose.⁷⁰

The work of prolific comic book researcher Paul A. Witty frequently represented a key vantage point: comic books could play a positive role in the educating of young people, if guided attentively by their teachers. In the conclusion of one of the earliest comparative studies on reading and comics, he stated, "...a small amount of reading of comics may be associated with a desirable or with an undesirable total pattern."⁷¹ This perspective was a critical part of the pro-comics argument for a large number of educational researchers, who sought to substantiate that comics could benefit children's learning. It became even more influential in the mid-fifties, when it was adopted by the comic book industry as the core of its strategy against the ACC. Given the range of opinions held by educators, it can be assumed that their personal experiences with comics and other forms of children's literature contoured their perspectives on the dangers posed by comics.

In a *Peabody Journal of Education* article published nine months after the Code was adopted, Robert L. Coard of the North Dakota State Teachers College speculated that most

⁷⁰ Zorbaugh, "The Comics," 199.

⁷¹ Paul Witty, "Reading the Comics: A Comparative Study," *The Journal of Experimental Education* 10, no. 2 (December 1941): 109.

people were still unsure of comics' value despite so many scholarly opinions on the matter. He added his voice to the chorus, with a familiar perspective:

The bulk of comic books are [not bad], though few can claim to be anything more than harmless... Comic books on the whole are worthless, but the same might be said of other mass media forms, which the comic books parallel closely in subject matter and in treatment. There is little point in trying to ban one of these forms as such.⁷²

He went on to conclude that teachers and parents needed to invest time in guiding their children to higher-quality reading material.⁷³ For most scholars, disregarding the medium did not equate to censoring or eliminating it.

However, this was an issue that lacked consensus among educators. Even for those who saw some benefit in censorship, very few felt it was worth risking academic freedom to do so. In this corpus, legal scholars and law faculty were active, and debated the legal basis for censoring comics. In a 1955 article that appeared in the *Stanford Law Review*, the editorial board laid out the path to legislative and judicial prohibition of comic books at the state, federal, and local levels.

Although the Supreme Court has interpreted the First Amendment as prohibiting almost all prior restraints on expression, it has indicated that states restricting free expressing by imposing criminal responsibility for its exercise will be upheld under certain circumstances... Even though the evils attributed to crime and horror comics are serious, state regulation is not justified unless the comics are likely to cause these evils. To date no satisfactory study has been made of the effect that portrayals of brutality, violence, crime, and lust have on a child's mind. No one suggests that they are the sole cause of juvenile delinquency and immorality. But the extent of their influence is a disputed matter.⁷⁴

⁷² Coard, "The Comic Book in Perspective;" 21-22.

⁷³ Coard, "The Comic Book in Perspective;" 21.

⁷⁴ "Crime Comics and the Constitution," *Stanford Law Review* 7, no. 2 (March 1955): 244, 249.

The editorial board did not attempt to predict how the Supreme Court might rule on a censorship case involving comics. It did, however, offer nonlegal options for limiting comics' influence. They suggested retailers voluntarily abstain from selling comics, as well as a campaign around educating the public as to comics' dangers.⁷⁵ Grace W. Gilman, an Illinois librarian and a leader in the American Librarian Association, suggested censorship as hazardous, but comics as even more dangerous. Instead, librarians needed to be proactive in sharing high-quality literature with students and proselytizing Fredric Wertham's gospel to their parents.⁷⁶ James Rorty disagreed in *The Antioch Review*, arguing that the actions of citizens groups like the National Organization for Decent Literature were tantamount to censorship and therefore a threat to American society.

Upon the sufficiency of these laws to protect not only the morals of the young but also the freedom of all age groups to buy good books at a small price, the pocket-book publishers have taken their stand against a spreading sea of troubles. To surrender by instituting the kind of stultifying self-censorship that has so largely sterilized the cultural potential of the movies, the radio and television, would probably satisfy both the official and unofficial censors and the distributors who have become increasingly their pliant collaborators. It would also be disastrous, for the inexpensive book, more than other modern instruments of mass communication, is today an outpost of freedom in our democratic culture.⁷⁷

Many researchers looked at the numbers of kids who were reading comics *and not* committing crimes to provide evidence that no real damage was being done. According to Evelyn I. Banning, who had surveyed existing literature on the relationship between comic-reading and crime, "Recent claims of the effect of comics in causing delinquency have not been

⁷⁵ *Stanford Law Review*, "Crime Comics and the Constitution," 252-253.

⁷⁶ Gilman, "Bread or Stones?"

⁷⁷ James Rorty, "The Harassed Pocket-book Publishers," *The Antioch Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1955): 427.

substantiated by valid research.”⁷⁸ In studies published in separate sociology journals, Frederic M. Thrasher, Florence Heisler, Thomas F. Hoult, and Edith Z. Sperzel found that it was societal ills and psychological disorders that led to delinquency; Katherine M. Wolf and Marjorie Fiske added that comics only were harmful to children who were “already maladjusted,” and the excessive reading of comics was a symptom rather than a cause of developmental issues.⁷⁹ At the time, most kids read comic books, but very few were delinquents; this reality undermined the comics-cause-criminality argument.

To demonstrate comic books’ harmlessness, another cohort of scholars sought sociological causes for juvenile delinquency. For instance, in the December 1952 issue of *Elementary English*, John J. DeBoer, a professor of English at the University of Illinois, wrote of the need for “a study of the sociological factors operating in childhood” as “essential to an understanding of the development of language.”⁸⁰ DeBoer went on to assert that comic book-reading played no role in youthful criminality.

The effects of comic book-reading on children has been the subject of much debate. Expert opinion tends to favor the view that comic books serve the maladjusted child as an escape device, but are not in themselves a cause of delinquency.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Evelyn I. Banning, “Social Influences on Children and Youth,” *Review of Educational Research* 25, no. 1 (February 1955): 40.

⁷⁹ Florence Heisler, “Comparison between Those Elementary School Children who Attend Moving Pictures, Read Comic Books, and Listen to Serial Radio Programs to an Excess, with Those who Indulge in These Activities Seldom or Not at All,” *The Journal of Educational Research* 42, no. 2 (November 1948): 182-190; Heisler, “Comparison of Comic Book and Non-comic Book Readers of the Elementary School,” *Journal of Educational Research* 40 (February 1947): 458-464; Florence Heisler, “Comparison of the Movie and Non-Movie Goers of the Elementary School,” *Journal of Educational Research* 41 (March 1948): 541-546; Sperzel, “Effect of Comic Books,” 109-113; Thomas F. Hoult, “Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency,” *Sociology and Social Research* 33 (March 1949): 279-284; Frederic M. Thrasher, “The Comics and Delinquency: Cause of Scapegoat,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 4 (December 1949): 195-205.

⁸⁰ DeBoer, “Some Sociological Factors,” 482.

⁸¹ DeBoer, “Some Sociological Factors,” 489.

This was not an uncommon perspective among educators, but it was underreported in the press. In a similar vein, other journals aimed at teachers and researchers alike, including the *Journal of Experimental Education*, *Journal of Educational Sociology*, and *The Elementary School Journal*, published articles that argued that comics did not lead to juvenile delinquency, but did not offer alternative causes for the issue.⁸²

Beyond addressing comics' harmfulness, DeBoer made specific policy suggestions to preempt kids from ever becoming interested in them.

One remedy, of course, is better support for public libraries and systematic efforts on the part of teachers to induce young people to make use of them. Another is to educate the public, boards of education, and school administrators to spend more money on books, which now account for an infinitesimal fraction of school budgets. But the basic problem remains ones of making books available directly to boys and girls at prices that they can afford to pay.⁸³

In a similar way, a 1946 study by Witty and Sizemore quickly claimed comics' innocuousness before instead focusing on the roles household resources and demographics played in the reading of comics. They found that African American children read more comics than their white counterparts due to "the more restricted reading opportunities of the Negro pupil, the fewer good, interesting books in the typical home and school, and the inadequate funds to purchase many desirable books."⁸⁴ How socioeconomic factors shaped kids' access to comics and their parents' perspectives on their reading were underexplored areas of research.

Race and the comic book threat was taken up by other scholars. These educators believed that prejudiced views of people of color—especially Black people—presented in

⁸² Burton, "Comics Books: A Teacher's Analysis," 73.

⁸³ John J. DeBoer, "Editorial," *Elementary English* 28, no. 5 (May 1951): 305.

⁸⁴ Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation I," 503.

comics were damaging to young people. To progressives like Wertham, Mosse, and their adherents, these depictions were contrary to American values.⁸⁵ African American teachers and scholars were present to these realities, but generally, did not accept that comics alone led to delinquency.⁸⁶ Instead they argued that comic books were valuable to society because of their potential as an educative tool.⁸⁷ This conversation largely occurred in a separate sphere for Black educators, in publications specifically aimed at them. Relatedly, Witty and Dorothy Moore's 1945 study on the comic book reading habits of African American children found that they read more comics than their white counterparts. Though their research also indicated that the main reason for this had to do with "the more restricted reading opportunities of the Negro pupil," given the political environment, it was easy for findings like these to support linkages between Blackness, criminality, and comics.⁸⁸ That said, they articulated that comics were not injurious in the process.

Writing for *Elementary English*, May Hill Arbuthnot, author of a popular college textbook on children and reading and cowriter of the *Dick and Jane* series, framed the issue as "books children like and the books they ought to like are two different things for most children," a fact that didn't render the former necessarily as bad.⁸⁹ While not denying the frivolity of the genre, she referenced the Child Study Association of America's research to point out comics'

⁸⁵ Fredric Wertham, "Curse of Comic Books," 395; Wertham, "The Betrayal of Childhood: Comic Books," 57; Hilde L. Mosse and Emma Brown, "The Quiet One," *The American Journal of Psychotherapy* 3, no. 2 (April 1949): 315-318; Mosse, "Is There an Ismael Complex"; Fredric Wertham, Gerson Legman, Hilde L. Mosse, Paula Elkisch, Marvin L. Blumberg, "The Psychopathology of Comic Books," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 2, no. 3 (1948): 472-490.

⁸⁶ These perspectives are covered in detail in the second chapter's general discussion of the press.

⁸⁷ Bernice Grohskopf, "The Preacher's Son," *The Phylon Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1957): 379.

⁸⁸ Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation I," 501.

⁸⁹ May Hill Arbuthnot, "Children and the Comics," *Elementary English* 24, no. 3 (March 1947): 171.

educative attributes. Arbuthnot concluded that comics had been used as scapegoats for America's juvenile delinquency problem, and that a healthy diet of good literature would balance out any of comics' adverse effects.⁹⁰ Edward S. Noyes, a professor of English at Yale, came to a similar conclusion, where he noted that children had more options for their leisure time than ever before and it was the responsibility of teachers to guide young people's reading of them as they had the potential to be either academically useful or detrimental.⁹¹ It is worth noting that, within the corpus of articles reviewed for this project, this perspective was one espoused exclusively by university faculty members. Teachers of younger children had to be concerned about the process of how they learned as well as students' conduct in the classroom. They were conditioned to pay more attention to the intricacies of how comic book-reading affected students.

Articles discussing comics' value as a mirror to contemporary American life comprised a small but critical subset of studies. At the time, this research was innovative and progressive, and demonstrated an understanding of the sociological forces at play in everyday life. This shifted the conversation from comics *influencing* the actions of society to comics *reflecting* the actions of society. The public was slow to embrace this view, but it contributed to the eventual end of the ACC; in the intervening years, the Code's influence over comics increased as well. Along these lines, some scholars noted that children were attracted to comics because they revealed present-day issues in language easily understandable by readers.⁹² Others found that

⁹⁰ Arbuthnot, "Children and the Comics."

⁹¹ Edward S. Noyes, "Reading and the Study of English," *The English Journal* 39, no. 4 (April 1950): 190-195.

⁹² Frank, "What's in the Comics."

kids were compelled by the modernness of comics, not only in the content of their storylines, but their format and language as well.⁹³

Some journal articles sought to catalogue arguments on comics' dangers. Rather than presenting a given scholar's new research findings, they either offered the results of a meta-analysis or recapitulated existing research to support or dispute Wertham. For instance, pro-Wertham arguments typically claimed comics exacerbated children's inability to separate fantasy from reality; the genre presented kids with adult themes before they are prepared emotionally; and it was prolonged exposure to a range of mass media—rather than any specific comic book—that did so much damage to the development of young people.⁹⁴ Alternately, those opposing Wertham consistently communicated the lack of correlation between academic achievement and comic book-reading; the effect of comics was no greater than that of parents or other societal forces; comics had little effect of developing minds, except in kids with preexisting emotional issues; comics were no worse than children's literature from previous generations; or that the creation of the Code effectively dealt with the comic book problem.⁹⁵ Still others made available the range of pro- and anti-comics ideas for those wishing to understand the debate independently.⁹⁶ Years later, the CMAA used this tactic to help parents arrive at a place of

⁹³ William S. Gray, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," *The Elementary School Journal* 42, no. 9 (May 1942): 641-655.

⁹⁴ Hilde L. Mosse, "Aggression and Violence in Fantasy and Fact," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 2, no. 1 (January 1948): 477-483; Paula Elkisch, "The Child's Conflict about Comic Books," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 2, no. 1 (January 1948): 487; Marvin L. Blumberg, "The Practical Aspects of the Bad Influence of Comic Books," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 2, no. 1 (January 1948): 489; Dallas W. Smythe, "Dimension of Violence," *Audio Visual Communication Review* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1955): 58-63.

⁹⁵ Kenneth D. Norberg, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," *The Elementary School Journal* 51, no. 6 (February 1951): 301-311; Ralph D. Rabinovitch, "Our Adolescents and Their World: Aspirations and Difficulties," *The English Journal* 44, no. 5 (May 1955): 261-267, 283; Banning, "Social Influences"; Coard, "The Comic Book in Perspective"; Jenkins, "The Educational Scene."

⁹⁶ Reef Waldrep, "I Am a Core Girl in a Cal Tech Family," *The Clearing House* 28, no. 4 (December 1953): 216-218; Sones, "The Comics and Instructional Method"; William F. Swindler, "An Annotated Bibliography of

acceptance, either through direct repetition of the genre's attributes or by countering point-by-point the arguments of anti-comics activists. This idea will be covered in greater detail in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

Most research found that comics were not dangerous, though not all researchers agreed that comics posed no threat to children. Less commonly articulated in journals was the argument that, because teachers had a holistic role in shaping children into functional adults, a concerted effort was necessary to keep comics out of their hands. The matter of comics' harmfulness was not settled completely by the creation of the Code for some particularly staunch critics. In an editorial exemplifying this perspective in the magazine of Phi Delta Kappa, a professional organization for male schoolteachers and administrators, educational psychologist and national youth organization leader Max F. Baer wrote,

It can only be done by strengthening educational services all the way from the early years of childhood through parenthood. This requires not only more and better teachers and school plants but more emphasis on the moral and ethical values that should undergird our civilization.⁹⁷

The approach epitomized in Baer's article was the one that press represented as the most common among teachers, though the evidence for this popularity isn't present in the conversations within the profession. Published three years after the establishing of the CCA, Baer's article lent strong support to the perspective that teachers had been and continued to be

Journalism Subjects in American Magazines," *Journalism Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (May-July 1949): 349-359; William S. Gray, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," *The Elementary School Journal* 42, no. 9 (May 1942): 641-655; William S. Gray, "Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading, July, 1, 1958 to June 30, 1959," *The Journal of Educational Research* 53, no. 6 (February 1960): 203-222; William S. Gray, "Summary of Reading Investigations, July 1, 1950 to June 30, 1951," *Journal of Educational Research* 45, no. 6 (February 1952): 401-437; William S. Gray, "Summary of Reading Investigations, July 1, 1949 to June 30, 1950," *Journal of Educational Research* 44, no. 6 (February 1951): 401-441.

⁹⁷ Baer, "Our Responsibility," 27.

anti-comics. And because teachers viewed themselves as arbiters of children's leisure time even outside of school, the responsibility to dictate the options that were made available to young people was not changed by the Comics Code Authority.⁹⁸ For instance, in a study for the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Vera J. Diekhoff tried to connect the abundance of leisure time and comic book-reading to delinquency more than two years after the Code's establishment.⁹⁹ Accordingly, comic book defenders like Dallas W. Smythe, an economics professor at the University of Illinois, wrote to PTA members in 1955 that comics largely had been scapegoated and were harmless as a pastime for kids.¹⁰⁰

B. "Are Comics Worse than Earlier Genres of Children's Literature?"

In the *Journal of Educational Sociology*, Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, a professor at New York University, drew a clear lineage from fairy tales to comics to normalize the genre and warn educators of their permanence.

Cooler heads, more objective, point out that the comics deal with age-old themes familiar in the folklore, mythology, fairy tales, puppet shows, and even the nursery rhymes of all peoples. That, like folklore, the comics are an outgrowth of the social unconscious, and the problems of the relationship of the individual to his social world find expression through them. Their hold on their readers, child and adult, reveals that their appeal is deeply rooted in our emotional nature. Like folklore and the fairy tale, they have cathartic meaning. Certain it is that the comics have emerged as a major institution of our American culture. They are here to stay.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Barker, *The Lasting of the Mohicans*, 36; Kliebard, *Changing Course*.

⁹⁹ Diekhoff, *What P.T.A. Members Should Know about Juvenile Delinquency*.

¹⁰⁰ Smythe, "Television."

¹⁰¹ Zorbaugh, "The Comics," 199.

For many researchers, whether comics were good or bad was immaterial. They believed that comics were only the latest in a long history of adolescent-aimed material which adults always found objectional. They seldom noted how much more graphically sexual and violent comics were than penny dreadfuls or dime novels, but the point was that the literature merely reflected this stage of development. Alice N. Fedder, a librarian at Teachers College, Columbia University, stated,

Almost every generation since printing became common has had its own version of trash reading. In this one, it is the comic magazine; in ours, as in the generation before, it was the series book.¹⁰²

Like penny dreadfuls and fairy tales, comics engaged contemporary society, demonstrated its values, and replayed its debates. Proponents of comics maintained that without these lessons, children had less of a grasp on the inner workings of society.¹⁰³ English professor Earl J. Dias, who was among those advancing the idea that comics were no worse than other literature aimed at kids, reasoned,

...[The] matter is so obvious, that many of the most popular children's book are filled with violence—to name but a few: *Treasure Island*, *The Jungle Book*, *Alice in Wonderland* (“Off with his head!”), *Robinson Crusoe*, and many of the most widely read fairy tales.¹⁰⁴

Agreeing with Josette Frank and Laretta Bender, scholars Reginald S. Laurie and Lovell

Thompson published research articulating similar perspectives.¹⁰⁵ Marvin L. Blumberg was a

¹⁰² Fedder, “Children’s Books and Bridges,” 301.

¹⁰³ Lent, *Pulp Demons*.

¹⁰⁴ Dias, “Comic Books,” 142-143.

¹⁰⁵ Frank, “What’s in the Comics”; Lovell Thompson, “Not So Comic,” 105-107. Reginald S. Laurie, “Let Children Read the Comics: Science Gives Its Approval,” *Science New Letters*, no. 40 (August 1941): 124; Robert Vigus, “The Art of the Comic Magazine,” *The Elementary English Review* 19, no. 5 (May 1942): 168-170; Arbuthot, “Children and the Comics.”

rare dissenting opinion. He saw comics as fundamentally different from earlier forms of children's literature. He described them as more explicit and having a more direct influence on the behavior of readers.

There is little left to the fantasy by the over-realistic presentations of cruelty and sex (and their combination) in comic books, other than the easy task of substituting the heroes and victims in the books by persons in the child's environment, including himself. Instead of 'satisfying' the undesirable impulses, instead of giving them a substitute outlet, they only stimulate the desire to translate fantasy into reality.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, most scholars and many teachers agreed these stories often taught enough literacy to facilitate the reading of more mature texts. Their thinking was that comics shared enough with classic literature for schoolteachers to inspire an interest in advanced novels that allowed young readers to move into the realm of Hugo, Stephenson, and Twain, and from the distasteful crime-filled universe of Dick Tracy, Batman, and The Spectre. To many teachers, this represented an important and potentially very effective engagement activity.

One of the largest corpora of research explored the reasons kids read comics. Dating back to 1939, these studies were among the earliest publish research on comic books and reading. In particular, studies by Witty and Frank were the most influential, regularly referenced and debated by other researchers. Anti-comics activists maintained that *any* comics-reading somehow indicted pathologies. Scholars challenging this view argued that the widespread reading of comics only reflected the medium's omnipresence—nothing about character, intelligence, or childrearing was to be gleaned. The implication was that kids read comics for the same reasons previous generations had read their preferred literary genres. This became a go-to argument for pro-comics educators. That *Elementary English*, *The English Journal*, *The*

¹⁰⁶ Blumberg, "The Practical Aspects," 489.

Elementary English Review, and *The Elementary School Journal* were so active in this conversation reflected the investment by reading teachers on both sides of the issue.¹⁰⁷

Another category of research were those articles that sought to establish the comic book as a legitimate literary genre. In his defense of comic books as a valid artistic medium, Professor Robert Vigus of the George Peabody College for Teachers wrote,

The principal purpose of the comic book seems to be to portray the amazing adventures of fantastic characters in a lurid pictorial style; to this end the format is devoted. ...Comic books are justified on the grounds that they provide emotional release for the reader, a needed escape from reality, that they are, as a matter of fact, only modern fairy tales...¹⁰⁸

This connection to folk stories, along with details about the industry and its motivations, made comic book creators seem less nefarious and centered the entire endeavor within the safe and familiar confines of children's literary publishing. English professor William A. Jenkins explained trends in comic book sales and young people's reading preferences.¹⁰⁹ He also kept readers of *Elementary English* apprised of instances of comics being endorsed by various

¹⁰⁷ Nancy Larrick, "What Parents Think about Children's Reading," *Elementary English* 33, no. 4 (April 1956): 206-209; Florence Brumbaugh, "Children's Choices of Reading Material," *The Elementary English Review* 16, no. 6 (October 1939): 226-228; Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation II"; William S. Gray, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," *The Elementary School Journal* 42, no. 9 (May 1942): 614-655; Richard H. Bloomer, "Children's Preferences and Responses as Related to Styles and Themes as Illustrations," *The Elementary School Journal* 60 (March 1960): 334-340; Dennis L. Hogenson, "The Role of Interest in Improving Reading Skills," *Elementary English* 37 (April 1960): 244-246; Benjamin F. Jefferson, "Some Relationships between Parents' and Children's Preferences in Juvenile Literature," *The Elementary School Journal* 58 (January 1958): 212-218; Margaret T. Browman and Mildred C. Templin, "Stories for Younger Children in 1927-1929 and 1952-1955," *The Elementary School Journal* 59 (March 1959): 324-327; Elliott D. Landau, "The Children and the Experts Agree," *Elementary English* 34 (December 1957): 51-563; Charlotte L. Millman, "An Individualized Reading Program," *Elementary English* 35 (October 1958): 386-388; Alex F. Perrodin, "Televiewing, Reading Habits, and Children's Social Values," *Elementary English* 37 (February 1960): 86-90; Vera Slover, "Comic Books vs. Story Books," *Elementary English* 36 (My 1959): 319-322; Paul A. Witty and Paul Kinsella, "Children and TV—A Ninth Report," *Elementary English* 35 (November 1958): 450-458; Arbuthnot, "Children and Comics"; Hardy R. Finch, "Munro Leaf, Writer for All Children of All Ages," *Elementary English* 30, no. 7 (November 1953): 405-411; David H. Russell, "Some Research on the Impact of Reading," *The English Journal* 47, no. 7 (October 1958): 390-413; Josette Frank, "What's in the Comics."

¹⁰⁸ Vigus, "The Art of the Comic Magazine," 168.

¹⁰⁹ William A. Jenkins, "The Educational Scene," *Elementary English* 33, no. 2 (February 1956): 116-119.

establishment figures. For example, he listed the educational comics that received citations from the Thomas Alva Edison Foundation in 1956.¹¹⁰ In *The Elementary School Journal*, William S. Gray described the educational aims of comic book publishers and informed a likely dubious audience that DC Comics' editorial advisory board was comprised of educators, child psychiatrists, and other researchers.¹¹¹ These techniques were successful with the audience of teachers who read the journals where these articles were published; the CMAA adopted this approach and employed it in its own publications to influence educators' and parents' opinion of comics.

Another facet of the reading conversation explored how children were affected when comics were their primary leisure activity; this was a separate discussion from their use as teaching tools. Some articles considered the ways that comics reflected the values of contemporary society, like the children's genres that predated them. In conversation with Josette Frank and her CSAA colleagues Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg and Clara Lambert, Katharine H. Hutchinson and Henry Schultz argued in favor of comics as beneficial reading material for children's free time, citing improvements to their intellectual and social development.¹¹² Harvey Zorbaugh conducted more than two hundred interviews to establish that most adults were completely fine with comics as children's entertainment, offering a counterweight to the

¹¹⁰ William A. Jenkins, "The Educational Scene," *Elementary English* 33, no. 6 (October 1956): 390-396.

¹¹¹ Gray, "Educational News and Editorial Comment."

¹¹² Clara Lambert with Josette Frank, *From the Records: An Adventure in Teacher Training* (New York: Child Study Association of America, 1939); Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, "The Comics as a Social Force," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, no. 4 (December 1944): 204-213; Josette Frank, "Some Questions and Answers for Teachers and Parents," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 4 (December 1949): 205-214; Katharine H. Hutchinson, "An Experiment in the use of Comics as Instructional Material," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 4 (December 1949): 236-245; Henry E. Schultz, "Censorship or Self-Regulation?," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 4 (December 1949): 215-224.

prevailing media portrayals.¹¹³ And Alice N. Fedder, Marshall B. Clinard, and John C. Raymond and Alexander Frazier posited that comic books were no worse than the pleasure reading options children had in prior generations.¹¹⁴

Finally, the range of entities beyond schools that employed comics to teach eventually was harnessed by the Comics Magazine Association of America as part of their legitimization of comics campaign after the ratification of the Comics Code Authority. That universities, the military, and federal, state, and local agencies were able to utilize comics to communicate ideas, advocate for various perspectives, and shape public perceptions, evinced a usefulness heretofore unforeseen for the genre. In that they could impart values successfully, comic books were not different from earlier forms of children's literature. This became a key attribute cited by the medium's defenders in the subsequent years.

B. "What Effects Do Comics Have on Literacy?"

Reading was a contested site because it directly engaged teachers' expertise and authority, but was the type of universal skill on which many people felt comfortable registering an opinion. Researchers were especially active in this area, and *The English Journal* and *Elementary English Review* were their journals of choice. Major studies on comics and reading included Paul A. Witty's study on the volume of comics read per child; an additional project by Witty and Dorothy Moore that compared the comic book-reading habits of African American and white children; Willard Abraham's investigation of comic book-reading and psychological

¹¹³ Harvey Zorbaugh, "What Adults Think of Comics as Reading for Children," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 4 (December 1949).

¹¹⁴ Clinard, "Secondary Community Influences"; Raymond and Frazier, "Reading Pictures"; Alice N. Fedder, "Children's Books and Bridges."

test scores; a self-evaluation of comic book readers' literary skills and patterns, developed by Aubrey Shatter; Edward Noyes's exploration of comic book reading's effect on male student performance in English classes; and Florence Brumbaugh's efforts to correlate reading choice, socioeconomic status, and the acquisition of literacy.¹¹⁵ Generally, they found that comics did not hinder intellectual development.

Between 1943 and 1955, a ubiquitous topic discussed by classroom teachers, university researchers, and librarians was the adverse effects of comics had on literacy and learning. Scholars published research to persuade teachers of the threat comics posed to their students' behavior, literacy rates, vocabulary, and even eyesight. Cataloguing existing studies on comics and reading in 1943, Professor William Louser Werner of Pennsylvania State University connected comics with reading difficulty and also described near consensus around the idea that "[uneven] lettering and colored background make most comics books injurious to children's eyesight."¹¹⁶ He went on to suggest numerous reforms the industry could undertake to mitigate these challenges—some practicable, some not. This approach of framing a broad issue with comics, summarizing existing research, and then offering a few remedies was employed commonly by educational researchers. Werner also was the first scholar to engage the work of Matthew Luckiesh and Frank Kendall Moss. Luckiesh and Moss conducted a study in 1942 to test Sterling North's assertion that comics damaged the eyes of young readers; they concluded that most comics were harmful to children's eyesight and that "unless comic books can be

¹¹⁵ Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation II," 46; Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation I"; Frank, "Some Questions and Answers"; Willard Abraham, "The Reading Choices of College Students," *The Journal of Educational Research* 45, no. 6 (February 1952): 459-465; Aubrey Shatter, "A Survey of Student Reading," *The English Journal* 40, no. 5 (May 1951): 271-273; Noyes, "Reading and the Study of English"; Florence Brumbaugh, "Children's Choices," 226-228.

¹¹⁶ W. L. Werner, "The Task of Reading," *The English Journal* 32, no. 9 (November 1943): 517.

greatly improved from the viewpoint of visibility and readability, they should not survive.”¹¹⁷

The results of this study subsequently were debated by Paul A. Witty and Robert A. Sizemore, John J. DeBoer, Arthur C. Hoffman, Willard Abraham, and Lester R. Wheeler and Viola D. Wheeler, between 1945 and 1955.¹¹⁸

One of the largest categories of published research included studies on how comics affected the development of young people’s reading skills. Graduate students who also were classroom teachers participated frequently as researchers on this topic. Reading was squarely the domain of teachers, and despite some unreliable or unorthodox methodological approaches, many of the studies utilized the data that the teachers personally collected from their own students.¹¹⁹ Because of this personal connection, the intended audience—other schoolteachers—viewed these studies as trustworthy, precise, and relatable. The methods utilized included interviews; control and experimental groups; surveys and questionnaires; observation, data-collection, and analysis; and teachers reading large numbers of comics and assessing their quality. The studies were published between 1940 and 1957, and generally fell into one of five categories: cognition; therapeutic tools; language development; teaching tools; and vocabulary.

¹¹⁷ Matthew Luckiesh and Frank Kendall Moss, “Legibility in Comic Books,” *Clinical and Experimental Optometry* 25, no. 11 (November 1942): 502; North, “A National Disgrace,” 56.

¹¹⁸ Abraham, “The Reading Choices of College Students”; John J. DeBoer, “Using Modern Channels of Communication: Magazines,” *Elementary English* 27, no. 2 (February 1950): 107-125; Arthur C. Hoffman, “Luckiesh and Moss on Reading Illumination,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 31, no. 1 (February 1947): 44-53; Lester R. Wheeler and Viola D. Wheeler, “Newspapers in the Classroom,” *The Elementary English Review* 22, no. 8 (December 1945): 324-329; Witty and Sizemore, “Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation II,” *Elementary English* 32, no. 1 (January 1955): 43-49; Paul A. Witty and Robert A. Sizemore, “Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation III,” *Elementary English* 32, no. 2 (February 1955): 109-114.

¹¹⁹ Beryl K. Sullivan, “Superman Licked: Junior-high Teacher ‘Frames’ and Defeats the Invincible Characters of the Comic Books!,” *The Clearing House* 17, no. 7 (March 1943): 428-429; Raymond and Frazier, “Reading Pictures; Report of a Unit,” *The English Journal* 37, no. 8 (October 1948): 394-399; Grohskopf, “The Preacher’s Son”; Gray, “Educational News and Editorial Comment”; Friedman, “Toward Bigger and Better,” 166-168; Eliot Freidson, “Consumption of Mass Media by Polish-American Children,” *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 9, no. 1 (Autumn 1954): 92-101; Brumbaugh, “The Place of Humor”; Armstrong, “How Good Are the Comic Books,” 283-285, 300.

Claude Mitchell, Katherine Wolf and Marjorie Fiske, Helen M. Robinson, Robert M. Sekerak, W. W. D. Sones, Margaret Stewart, Edith Z. Sperzel, William A. Jenkins, Marshall B. Clinard, Earl J. Dias, Lena Denecke, and Alice Sterner conducted inquiries into the effects comics had on cognition.¹²⁰ They all determined that the effect of comics on students' intellectual development was minimal, though the parameters of their studies varied. Robinson, Mitchell, Stewart, Sterner, Dias, Sekerak, and Sones studied at junior high and high schoolers, while Sperzel and Denecke focused on primary school students. Most of the researchers utilized questionnaires and surveys, but Robinson, Mitchell, and Sperzel measured intelligence with vocabulary acquisition assessments and Sekerak used IQ tests.

In a 1941 study published in *The Journal of Experimental Education*, Paul A. Witty found that there were no observable differences between the grades and classroom behavior of avid and infrequent comic book readers.¹²¹ That same year, Teachers College professor of educational psychology, Robert L. Thorndike, conducted a comic book vocabulary analysis that challenged the notion that comic books damaged children intellectually. In fact, Thorndike estimated that comic books were written at a fifth- or sixth-grade reading level. Concluding that comics actually had some educative value, he wrote:

In view of the apparent interest and appeal of this material for the child, the facts presented above suggest that this supplementary resource may have real value for the educator who is interested in working with the child as he is and in leading him on from his present status to higher and better things.¹²²

¹²⁰ Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation I"; Claude Mitchell, "Comic Strips: How Well Can Our Pupils Read Them?," *The Clearing House* 24, no. 7 (March 1950): 415-418; Helen M. Robinson, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," *The Elementary School Journal* 55, no. 9 (May 1955): 489-500; Sekerak, "Mass Communication Media"; Sones, "The Comics and Instructional Method"; Stewart, "The Educational Scene"; Sperzel, "The Effect of Comic Books"; Jenkins, "The Educational Scene"; Clinard, "Secondary Community Influences"; Dias, "Comic Books"; Denecke, "Fifth Graders," 6-8.

¹²¹ Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation III," 110.

¹²² Thorndike, "Words and the Comics."

Research findings like these, by scholars like George E. Hill, Harriet E. Lee, and Lawrence Kessel, were readily available even during the most contentious years of the anti-comics debate.¹²³

Scholarship on the effects comics had on the development of language grew out of a body of research that dates back to the turn of the century. Studies by M. V. O'Shea (1907, 1924), Jean Piaget (1926), Dorothea McCarthy (1930, 1946, 1950), and A. F. Watts (1944) led to published research arguing that sociological influences affected language development more than comics.¹²⁴ John DeBoer examined the effects of socioeconomic forces, Helen Anastassiadis investigated the contents of comic books, Ruth Strickland looked at other emotional stimuli, and W. W. D. Sones probed how the genre could be used in the classroom to aid in language development.¹²⁵

Another subset of articles was created to dispel the notion that comics hurt the acquisition of vocabulary. Beginning in 1941, educational researchers like Irving R. Friedman, Robert L. Thorndike, and Florence Heisler published studies that demonstrated that there was no difference between the typical vocabulary of comic books and other children's literature.¹²⁶ Alongside Josette Frank, David T. Armstrong and Martha M. Schlegel found that comic books utilized

¹²³ Sones, "The Comics and Instructional Method."

¹²⁴ See note 297 on page 124.

¹²⁵ Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation II," 46; Robinson, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," 494; DeBoer, "Some Sociological Factors," 482; William A. Jenkins, "The educational Scene," *Elementary English* 32, no. 8 (December 1955): 553.

¹²⁶ Thorndike, "Words and the Comics"; Witty and Sizemore, "Reading the Comics: A Summary of Studies and an Evaluation II," 46; Friedman, "Toward Bigger and Better," 168.

more advanced vocabulary than other literature aimed at children of the same age.¹²⁷ Joe Park surveyed existing research to show that movies tended to have more limited vocabularies than comic books.¹²⁸ The CMAA eventually picked up on these points, which made it harder for anti-comics entities to argue that comics were destructive to the educational attainment of young people. The rare dissenting voices included Edith Z. Sperzel and Arthur W. Reynolds, both of whom were school principals.¹²⁹ Publishing his research in the January 1952 issue of *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies* to an audience of teachers and those who trained them, Reynolds wrote, “I am equally unable to find more than limited evidence that comic books have added to the mastery of vocabulary, language, social studies, or even reading comprehension.”¹³⁰ In accordance with the other occasional research published by administrators, this study was decidedly anti-comic book.

Closely thematically related was another corpus of articles and editorials that interrogated classroom teachers’ and school librarians’ role in developing literary taste and aesthetics in children. One camp argued that teachers and librarians needed to be buffers against the dangers comics posed to young people developing sophisticated literary tastes. The other recited the oft-stated perspective that comics were no more dangerous to kids’ aesthetic development than the children’s literature of previous generations. Writing in the first of a series of articles published in the professional journal *Elementary English* in 1951, Constance Carr, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota and editor of the journal *Childhood Education* recommended

¹²⁷ Armstrong, “How Good Are the Comic Books,” 285; Martha M. Schlegel, “Family Living Vitalize the Language Arts,” *The Clearing House* 24, no. 5 (January 1950): 264-270.

¹²⁸ Park, “An Analysis”; Frank, “What’s in the Comics,” 221-222.

¹²⁹ Sperzel, “The Effect”; Reynolds, “Comics, Radio, and Their Pretensions.”

¹³⁰ Reynolds, “Comics, Radio, and Their Pretensions,” 256.

...starting with children's present interest in comics, then leading them into worthwhile books that contain the same elements of adventure, excitement, and humor. And analyzing the appeal of comic books, she presented a list of substitutes—children's books of recognized quality that contain similar elements of appeal.¹³¹

Carr's ideas were so persuasive that her research still was being quoted by scholars more than a decade later.¹³² With the mainstreaming of comics that occurred after the CCA, Carr's suggestion became a common practice.

Born out of research looking at comics' success at teaching reading, the idea that they were potentially effective tools for imparting any number of other skills was explored thoroughly in educational journals. Students preparing to be classroom teachers published inquiries into the use of comics to develop kids' reading interests. These studies were reliant on observational and anecdotal data from their own classrooms. According to David H. Russell, professor of education at the University of California, Berkeley and chair of the National Council of Teachers of English's Committee on Research, teachers benefitted from the study of comics and reading because item to allowed to gather more information on their students' behavior and to understand better medium's long-term effects on literacy.¹³³ Another group of researchers postulated that comics could be used to treat certain traumas in young people. As perceptions of comics' educative potential evolved, some scholars found that comic books didn't cause mental ailments, but could be used to treat them. Mardi J. Horowitz's work is the most prominent example of

¹³¹ Helen Huus, "Development of Taste in Literature, II: Developing Taste in Literature in the Elementary Grades: Part II," *Elementary English* 40, no. 1 (January 1963): 62; Constance Carr, "Substitutes for the Comic Books I," *Elementary English* 28, no. 4 (April 1951): 194-200, 214; Jennie Campbell, "Constance Carr Becomes Editor of 'Childhood Education,'" *Childhood Education* 27, no. 7 (1951): 296.

¹³² Huus, "Development," 62.

¹³³ David H. Russell, "Some Research on the Impact of Reading," *The English Journal* 47, no. 7 (October 1958): 399.

this, though other scholars also studied the topic.¹³⁴ Ethel Newell and Dom Thomas Verner Moore each explored bibliotherapy and comics and Jean M. Lepere analyzed data related to the reasons kids opted to read them.¹³⁵ Though covered regularly in scholarly publications like *Review of Educational Research* and *Journal of Art Therapy*, read by teachers and researchers alike, the concept of comics as therapeutic tools never gained popularity among the general public. For most, Wertham's perspective on comics and mental health was the only authoritative one.

Studies on the effect the genre had on learning supported both pro- and anti-comics activities. Researchers advocated for permitting kids to read comics, the reasons that they read comics, and why comics were the gateway to more mainstream literature. In *The Elementary School Journal*, Florida State University's Dwight K. Burton wrote,

Once a teacher has made an analysis of the basic appeals of the comic books, he is in a position to construct a ladder out of the aesthetic wasteland which they represent by steering pupils to selections which contain the same basic appeals yet represent a step upward toward a more mature and wholesome reading experience.¹³⁶

Even for researchers who took issue with comics' quality recognized their potential to provide an entrée to better literature. And by "better literature," teachers typically meant more familiar, more established genres—namely, more canonical works.

The perspectives of university researchers stayed reasonably consistent during the ACC, and there was little support for the notion that comics led to crime. Scholars were more divided

¹³⁴ Mardi J. Horowitz, "The Use of Graphic Images in Psychotherapy," *American Journal of Art Therapy* 10, no. 3 (April 1971): 153.

¹³⁵ Ethel Newell, "At the North End of Pooh: A Study of Bibliotherapy," *Elementary English* 34, no. 1 (January 1957): 22-25; Dom Thomas Verner Moore, *The Nature and Treatment of Mental Disorders* (Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1944), 216-232; Jean M. Lepere, "Literature in the Elementary School," *Review of Educational Research* 31, no. 2 (April 1961): 188-196.

¹³⁶ Burton, "Comic Books," 74.

on whether comic books had any value, though. On the other hand, teachers, principals, and librarians held a spectrum of opinions about comics, and these opinions shifted over time; they were never uniformly negative or positive, despite how the media portrayed these sentiments. There was inconsistency in the methodologies utilized, and in some instances, case studies were very informal without reliable results. Even still, research conducted at schools of education tended to be pro-comics. This trend in research contributed to a campus ethos that felt pro-comics.

Other patterns are harder to discern. In some instances, educators' dispositions towards comics were not fixed; for instance, one could be pro-comics when considering their effect on literacy and anti-comics when considering their impact on behavior. Similarly, many journals printed articles that were favorable to comics as well as those that were disparaging. It is clear that educators were active in the comics debate and their perspectives were not homogenous.

3.5 Conclusions

Although Fredric Wertham and his camp had won the debate, there was considerable pro-comics research and it influenced the Comics Code Authority as well. In fact, campuses were busy with pro-comics activity, and college students were vocal in asserting their right to choose for themselves whether to read comic books. Just as classroom teachers, principals, and school librarians were drawn into the debate by fears of how comics affected literacy and threats to their influence over children's leisure time, a desire to understand and even harness the educative potential of the genre inspired university personnel's studies. Colleges and universities made a more significant investment in comic books than has been described by researchers previously or

than was suggested in contemporaneous press reporting. In particular, scholarly interest in the genre has a longer and broader lineage than earlier understood by historians of comics.

Even if the range of perspectives college and university faculty and teachers held during the anti-comics crusade were similar, their contexts and the reactions they evoked were not. Society placed limitations on teachers' expertise and maintained expectations around their moral rectitude. Academic freedom accorded faculty more space and even resources to ponder the value of comic books, and a significant proportion of the research they published encouraged scholarly investment in the artform. Their university affiliations may have limited their influence with the general populace, but within academe, there was a robust debate that extended across disciplines, especially English, psychology, sociology, and education.

Many contemporary researchers attribute the gradual increase in recent college courses on comic books to the critical success of 1980s and 1990s graphic novels like *Maus*, *Palestine*, *Persepolis*, and *Fun Home*, but in fact, since the 1940s, colleges and universities had employed comics to communicate with various constituencies. Moreover, large numbers of college students were comic books readers, which guaranteed the medium had a central and secure place on campuses.¹³⁷ The reading of comics normalized among their populations, undergraduates viewed the ACC in a broader context of control. Confident in their own cognition and morality, they cut through the noise of the delinquency and illiteracy arguments, and clearly articulated a view of comics that ultimately would become the prevailing one for most of the public: large numbers of people of all ages read comics and there is nothing remarkable about that fact. The following generation of schoolteachers had fewer issues with comics in the classroom.

¹³⁷ Saul Braun. "Shazam! Here Comes Captain Relevant." *New York Times*. May 2, 1971. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Concerning both classroom teachers and college professors, there was a panoply of opinions on comics that belied the one-sided media portrayals. There were key differences, though, in the educational contexts that contoured their reactions. First, college students were legal adults and their instructors did not have the same level of responsibility for their welfare and development. Secondly, college students were literate and numerate, and damage to those skills was not a present threat. Thirdly, the principle of academic freedom ran counter to efforts to censor literature of any kind. And finally, public schools are different from universities, as one of their primary purposes is to inculcate civic values. Normal schools trained its students to teach “general scholarship and broad culture,” and pre-Code comics did not fit easily into that rubric of what its graduates taught.¹³⁸ Schools were dedicated to inculcation and indoctrination while universities promoted free inquiry and critical thinking; unless comics also were dedicated to instilling the same values, they had no place in primary and secondary education. This reality would inform the work of the CCA beginning in the mid-Fifties.

¹³⁸ Fraser, *Preparing America's Teachers*; Jones and Woglom, “Dangerous Conversations.”

Part III

Amazing Fantasy

Chapter 4: How the Comics Magazine Association of America Won over Educators

4.1 Introduction: The First Press Conference

December 29, 1954 was a critical day in the fledgling Comics Magazine Association of America's (CMAA) history. It marked Judge Charles F. Murphy's first press conference as Code Administrator, and it was just days before the first crop of Code-approved comics landed on newsstands. Although he had taken office on September 16, the event introduced Murphy to teachers, principals, and parents as the person who would keep kids safe from dangerous comics.¹ Its handling of the press also was the first test of the CMAA's organizational effectiveness. Only two months into the Code's existence, Murphy stood at a lectern before a throng of eager reporters and proclaimed the self-regulatory initiative as successful, touting that publishers had learned "that it is possible to write effective, best-selling comic-book stories without in any way violating accepted standards of good taste."²

Public relations were a key priority from the very beginning.³ And like all CMAA media efforts, the press conference was orchestrated carefully. After the brutal treatment comic book publishers received in the press in prior years, Murphy felt that there was no room to make an error, as he assumed the media would have seized the opportunity to resume its attacks on the industry.⁴ Reporters arrived at the CMAA's Midtown East offices already familiar with the

¹ Stafford Derby, "Newsstand Test Due on Comics Cleanup," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 29, 1954.

² Derby, "Newsstand Test Due on Comics Cleanup."

³ "Comics Adopting Dior Look for Their Ladies in Clean-up Campaign," *Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 1954.

⁴ Mort Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books: A New Code with Teeth in It," *Better Homes and Gardens* 33, no. 3 (1955): 58-59, 254-255, 263.

Code and many of its early accomplishments.⁵ Copies of the Code had been distributed to thousands of comic book artists, educators, clergy, police officers, and civic leaders, who became ambassadors for the organization's good work.

Murphy highlighted three key points. The mission of the CMAA was born out of "the comics-magazine industry [fully accepting] its responsibility to the parents and youth of America."⁶ The self-censorship angle was a major talking point, and the press glommed onto this and reported it enthusiastically.⁷ In addition, no CMAA member could use the words "terror" or "horror" in titles anymore, per the Code.⁸ Murphy also elucidated the approach he would take to publishers.

The comics need a face-lifting. It is not enough that horror and sex must be outlawed from your pages... From cover to cover, we must eliminate any nuances that may tend to violate the standards of good taste. For example, we must discourage bad grammar. I'm against stereotyped characterizations which tend to portray Italians as organ-grinders, Jews as pawn-shop owners, Greeks as restaurant owners, and Negroes as porters. We must work out a code of do's and don'ts with teeth, steel-sharp teeth, in it. And you must grant me carte blanche authority to administer this code in respect to everything that goes into your publications, from a cover to a caption. Unless you promise me this privilege with no strings attached—you'll have to get yourself another boy!⁹

The new guidelines already were superior to earlier efforts. According to Murphy, the 1948 regulations were less successful than the 1954 Code because "there was neither the widespread public demand for reform nor the large membership in the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc., which exists today."¹⁰ He described having created a stringent

⁵ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

⁶ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

⁷ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

⁸ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

⁹ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

¹⁰ Derby, "Newsstand Test Due on Comics Cleanup."

Code that rejected just under five percent of the 2,640 comics and 5,656 individual images submitted for review in the first two months.¹¹ That translated to his team of six reviewers scrutinizing more than 114,000 panels in a matter of weeks. It was a massive undertaking, and Murphy described his role in the review as substantial and direct.¹²

Murphy spoke confidently about the organization's founding. The votes to create a seal of approval and hire an individual unaffiliated with the industry to run it were unanimous.¹³ At the time of its creation, the CMAA had 28 member organizations, which accounted for 285 series and a circulation of sixty million comics each month. Joining the more than two dozen publishers forming the CMAA were seven distribution corporations, six printing companies, and five engraving firms.¹⁴ Only three publishing companies had elected not to join the CMAA: Dell, EC, and Classics Illustrated. Though these publishers were few in number, the reach of these unregulated comics was significant.¹⁵ With its stable of intellectual property including Westerns and Disney characters, Dell had great and consistent appeal to families.¹⁶ At the time, it was the nation's largest publisher of comics books. Its circulation size and revenues meant that it could afford to continue operating even without the Code. The same was true for Classics Illustrated.¹⁷ As its name implied, Classics Illustrated published comic-book adaptations of works like *The Three Musketeers*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Ivanhoe*, each of which sold more

¹¹ "Comics Adopting Dior Look for Their Ladies in Clean-up Campaign," *Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 1954.

¹² Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

¹³ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

¹⁴ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

¹⁵ *Wall Street Journal*, "Comics Adopting Dior Look for Their Ladies in Clean-up Campaign."

¹⁶ Derby, "Newsstand Test Due on Comics Cleanup."

¹⁷ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

than 15,000,000 copies.¹⁸ Dell and Classics Illustrated were confident enough in their established audience and their existing reputation as wholesome entertainment that they saw no need to join the CMAA. After the public thrashing it had received during the 1954 Senate hearings on comics and juvenile delinquency, EC was interested in transitioning to magazines, in order to publish more mature content with fewer connections to children's leisure time.¹⁹ Some twenty million comics per month were published by non-members, Dell Comics, EC Comics, and Classics Illustrated.

In addition to curiosity about the efficacy of the Code, the legitimacy of the CMAA's intentions and the processes undertaken by reviewers, the press took special interest in the staff composition and Murphy's personal integrity.²⁰ He was a logical choice for the role, though not the first one. CMAA leaders initially asked Frederic Wertham, but he declined. Their second choice was 44-year-old Judge Murphy, a well-regarded New York City magistrate who had been appointed by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, another figure known for his stances against corruption.²¹ A juvenile court judge, a father of three, and a devout Catholic, Murphy had been on the bench for nearly a decade before his CMAA tenure.²² He subsequently accepted an offer of \$17,000 per annum—approximately \$194,000 in current-day value—to run the organization for two years. Murphy was well-known for his work with youthful offenders, and also had close

¹⁸ Peter C. Du Bois, "Superman, Batman and Ivanhoe: Comic Books Have Become Both Profitable and Respectable," *Barron's National Business and Financial Weekly*, September 18, 1961.

¹⁹ *Wall Street Journal*, "Comics Adopting Dior Look for Their Ladies in Clean-up Campaign."

²⁰ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

²¹ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

²² Derby, "Newsstand Test Due on Comics Cleanup."

ties with a range of child welfare agencies and advocacy groups.²³ He was the founder of Teen Plan, Inc., an organization dedicated to helping high school students identify suitable careers. Murphy also had received favorable press for convening high school teachers and administrators to develop programs that reduced juvenile delinquency and truancy.²⁴

Educational matters were central in the reporting about the press conference. Reporters highlighted the education background of the reviewers. For example, they latched onto one reviewer's PhD and experience teaching ethics and morality in Hunter College's English department, a second reviewer's years as a librarian, and another's time with the Catholic Youth Organization. That some of them were mothers was mentioned less frequently, but still portrayed as consequential.²⁵

The press conference was the opening salvo in a carefully coordinated, preemptive strike against the comic book industry's adversaries. The nationwide publicity campaign made significant inroads within the new organization's first three years. The press conference directly led to follow-up articles, which further explored themes from Murphy's speech. Major publications aimed at wives and mothers reversed course on comics. In its frequent screeds against comics, *Ladies Home Journal* shifted the focus from the genre's negative influence to the importance of parental responsibility in guiding kids' behavior. One article encouraged parents to support local books-for-comics swaps and devote time to reading aloud as a family. Partnerships between parent-teacher associations and public libraries were encouraged.²⁶ A

²³ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

²⁴ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

²⁵ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

²⁶ Hickey, Margaret. "Vigilance Continues." *Ladies Home Journal* 74, no. 1 (January 1957): 19.

second article in the same issue praised a coalition of Midwestern housewives whose comic book-reviewing activities complemented those of the CCA. Appearing alongside an orange-almond coffee cake recipe and advertisements for a lightweight vacuum cleaner and a rotary phone, the article placed the responsibility on mothers to collaborate with their local PTAs, civic organizations, libraries, and women's groups to make quality reading material available to children; the issue was placed squarely at the center of domestic life.

The article also featured praise for the efforts vendors took to limit the access young people had to potentially dangerous comics. The mothers interviewed believed the CCA, with its thoughtful, compassionate leadership, had been successful in weeding sex and gore and hazardous ads from comics, but some violence remained. "Now, they kill only one person every ten pages instead of one every page."²⁷ The need for parental circumspection was demonstrably less pronounced and more manageable at the individual level. The CMAA had put forth a new idea: it was cleaning up comics, ensuring that they had educational value, and thereby allowing parents to make simple, informed decisions about their children's reading without the instruction of experts like Wertham.

So successful was the CMAA's media strategy that the news outlets were reflecting a reappraisal of the anti-comics crusade (ACC) only a year after the Code was founded. Writing for *Better Homes and Gardens* in 1955, Mort Weisinger acknowledged to his audience of parents that it only had been the minority of companies that published offensive comics in the first place. He went on to imply that there had been an unjust element to the ACC.

As a result of this grass-roots rebellion against offensive comic books, even the ethical publishers started to suffer. Circulations dipped. It was paradoxical that while parents would allow their children to enjoy the six-shooting adventures of Hopalong Cassidy on

²⁷ Margaret Hickey, "Mothers Enforce Cleanup of Comics," *Ladies Homes Journal* 74, no. 1 (January 1957): 19-20, 122.

the TV screen, following his exploits in a comic magazine was verboten. The crusade against bad comics had caused thousands of parents to indict the harmless ones. All the publishers were depicted as “monsters,” despite the fact that the majority of them are responsible citizens.”²⁸

The court system also became more tolerant of comic books and softened its language on the roots of juvenile delinquency. For instance, at a March 1956 panel hosted by the Long Island Federation of Women’s Clubs, Nassau County District Attorney Frank A. Gulotta accused the press of having sensationalized teen criminality for the purposes of selling newspapers. Another panelist, Devin Garrity of Devin Adair Publishing Company, also indicted the education community for its anti-comics activities as well.²⁹

The CMAA had done the work of publicizing the support it received from prominent organizations, and that put a greater burden on its critics.³⁰ Generally, publishers enjoyed a new position that required less defensive posturing. In stating, “We are not afraid of, but rather welcome, an alert public and an alert press,” the CMAA stood confidently by its product.³¹

In this chapter, I argue that publishers employed the Comics Magazine Association of America and the Comics Code Authority to reframe public perceptions on the medium. In particular, after years of being eviscerated in the press, comic book publishers had learned to use the power of the print media to their own benefit. As much as the Code existed to clean up comics, making those efforts legible to the public was just as key an organizational function. The attitudes, actions, and research of educators animated the Code, and they also led the review

²⁸ Weisinger, “How They’re Cleaning up the Comic Books.”

²⁹ Pat Herman, “Child Crime in Nassau ‘Grossly Exaggerated,’ Gulotta Tells Federation,” *Newsday*, March 29, 1956.

³⁰ John L. Goldwater, “Comics Magazines Will Hold to Their Pledge,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 12, 1956.

³¹ Goldwater, “Comics Magazines Will Hold to Their Pledge.”

process itself. The principal driver for this was the realization that engaging educators throughout the structure of the CMAA and reinforcing that fact repeatedly to the press would create a new impression of comics among parents and teachers, who would then begin registering their approval in significant numbers. It was a plan that worked.

This chapter seeks to answer the following question: how did educators influence the Comics Code Authority? I will begin with an analysis of the failure of the industry's first attempt at self-regulation, the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers. Subsequently, I will explore the founding, funding, and administration of the CMAA, including the many ways the organization sought to be in conversation with educators. Additionally, I will provide a detailed survey of the Code itself and the review mechanisms. The bulk of the chapter will be devoted to the probing of the CMAA's media relations strategies, particularly the ways that approaches were contoured around the interests of educators as primary constituents. This includes a brief examination of how the CMAA used academic research to shape public opinion. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the media tactics publishers utilized to combat the scrutiny of federal agencies. Understanding educators' influence on the Comics Code Authority provides a new vantage point to their function arbiters of kids' leisure time, even out of school.

4.2 The Association of Comics Magazine Publishers Code

The idea of a regulatory body for comics was suggested frequently by teachers, parents, politicians, and even publishers, given the success of the Hays and Breen Offices in cleaning up the motion picture industry.³² The Association of Comics Magazine Publishers (ACMP) was established in 1947, for the purpose of regulating comic books. Four months after Wertham's

³² Frank, "Comics and Delinquency"; Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books," 254.

presentation at the 1948 meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy, the ACMP unveiled its “six-point code [that] forbid nudity, portrayal of methods of committing a crime, scenes of sadistic torture, obscenity, humorous treatment of divorce, and ridicule of religious or racial groups.”³³ After two years, though, the ACMP folded. The affiliation of publishers was a loose one and the code lacked effective means of enforcing its regulations. The organization’s failure only emboldened critics’ opposition to comics, resulting immediately in increased attention from lawmakers and Wertham alike.³⁴ The press, publishers, and others agreed it was a failure, as it failed to affect much about the comic book industry.

The comics debate heightened in the years following the dissolution of the ACMP, and the desire for some sort of regulatory body struck many as the most plausible remedy. Several publishers already had consultative relationships with outside advisors. DC’s editorial board was counseled regularly by a half-dozen child welfare experts, including Josette Frank; education professors Robert Thorndike of Teachers College and W. W. D. Sones of the University of Pittsburgh, and tenured NYU philologist C. Bowie Mills; Ruth Eastwood Perl of the American Psychological Association; and Lieutenant Commander Gene Tunney of the Boy Scout Foundation and Catholic Youth Organization.³⁵

The collapse of the ACMP certainly was not the end of comic book regulation. As discussed in earlier chapters, in cities across the United States, groups of citizens established commissions to develop regulatory codes for comic books. Unable to govern the content of

³³ Nyberg, “Censoring Comics.”

³⁴ Nyberg, “Censoring Comics.”

³⁵ Gaines, “Youth and the War Effort.”

comics, these collectives instead focused on monitoring their sale and distribution.³⁶ While most of these efforts were short-lived and did not get to the root of most-expressed issues, they did reflect a belief that the artform could be reformed and the industry could be managed.

4.3 How the Comics Code Authority Worked

A result of William Gaines's damning and well-publicized 1954 Senate testimony that reinforced the tastelessness and vulgarity of some comics, publishers saw no option but to disavow suspense and horror comics publicly; they also agreed to place tight restrictions on the crime genre. The summer after the hearings, publishers resolved to create the Comics Magazine Association of America, which was constituted to develop and operate a regulatory body for the industry. The three publishers that did not join the CMAA each had their own decency guidelines, and Dell's were considerably stricter than those of the CMAA, for instance.³⁷

Attendees also agreed to finance the CMAA at \$200,000 per year, or about \$2,300,000 in today's currency. Half was to fund the organization's operations, and just as much supported a set of robust efforts to communicate its work to the public. From the beginning, the CMAA's organizers viewed as inescapable the need to gain buy-in for the Code from the educators and parents.³⁸ Using the Motion Picture Production Code as a template, the organizers worked with Ruder and Finn, a public relations firm, to draft the Code's language, and then to identify a chief executive.³⁹ The CMAA's engaging of Ruder and Finn is indicative that strategizing on

³⁶ Henry E. Schultz, "Censorship of Self Regulation," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 4 (December 1949): 217-220.

³⁷ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

³⁸ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

³⁹ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

changing the public discourse on comics was its primary function. John L. Goldwater, formerly with Archie Comics, and a key facilitator in the industry-wide discussions that established the CMAA, was appointed the group's first president.⁴⁰ Judge Murphy composed the text of the Comics Code Authority with Elliott A. Caplin, a comic book editor and younger brother of *Li'l Abner* creator Al Capp. Caplin also worked for *Parents* magazine, which had straddled the line between producing kid-friendly and adult-approved fare.⁴¹

The Code's review process was straightforward but highly detailed. Prior to publication, the entire comic had to be submitted by its creators to the CMAA for review. The proofs were delivered months before their scheduled publication dates, to permit time for iterative rounds of feedback. Every panel of every page was reviewed, and all forty-one of the planks had to be met for approval.⁴² Any story element—plots, characterization, and images—could be rejected in part or in toto. Those that met the reviewers' criteria were stamped; those that did not were returned to the publisher with a punch list of items requiring correction. Reviewers sent artists copious notes on flagged items, and artists sometimes sought compromises that allowed them to maintain the integrity of the stories they wanted to tell. There were significant implications for publishing deadlines, but the CMAA prioritized their regulatory process over the publishers' schedules; the burden for working within the guidelines was placed on the artists.⁴³ Although creators sometimes sought to negotiate the staff's adjudications, the CMAA had final say. It was only when publishers had made all the requested changes that they were permitted to print the

⁴⁰ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

⁴¹ Michael Schumacher and Denis Kitchen, *Al Capp: A Life to the Contrary* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2013).

⁴² "Administrative Procedures," original manuscript, N. D., box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

⁴³ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

issue with the Comics Code Authority seal of approval on the cover, which indicated to teachers, parents, and other interested parties that it was safe for young readers.⁴⁴

Figure 3. The Comics Code Authority’s Seal of Approval only was placed on the covers of comic books that satisfied each of the forty-one stipulations.



Source: Nyberg, Amy Kiste. “Comics Code History: The Seal of Approval.” CBLDF. Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, September 29, 2011. <https://cblddf.org/comics-code-history-the-seal-of-approval/>.

The CMAA provided a clear rationale for its entire review structure:

Recognizing that no document can address all the complex issues and concerns that face our changing society, the member publishers have established a permanent committee composed of the senior editor of each member staff. The committee will meet regularly to review those issues and concerns as they affect our publications, and to meet with and

⁴⁴ Nyberg, “Censoring Comics.”

guide the Administrator of the Comics Code, and will replace the previous written guidelines of the Comics Code.⁴⁵

The CCA administrator led the review of submitted comics with guidance from a broader committee of industry professionals.⁴⁶ In order to maintain the independence of its reviewers from the sway of publishers, the Code stipulated that its administrator would have no formal ties with the industry, a fact that was at the fundamentals of its mission.⁴⁷ In selecting Murphy, “a jurist and expert on juvenile group activities,” as its inaugural administrator, the CMAA was making an effort “to tell the public we mean business.”⁴⁸ And as an architect of the Code, he was well-positioned to direct it.

Murphy maintained a commitment to identifying “wholesome and entertaining material.”⁴⁹ The articles and advertisements in the newsletters, which sought to elucidate basic aspects of the writing and publishing of comic books and the CCA’s review process, underscored that the intended audience was not comprised of industry insiders, who would have been aware of these facts already. In fact, features like, “The Code Administrator’s Column,” “What Are Comic Books REALLY Like?,” “The Comics Magazine Industry – Its Origins,” and “Utah PTA Cites CMAA for Serving Public Interest,” addressed teachers and parents directly.⁵⁰ In

⁴⁵ “What Do You Know about This: The Story behind the New Comics Code Authority,” original manuscript, N. D., box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

⁴⁶ CMAA, “Administrative Procedures.”

⁴⁷ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

⁴⁸ Weisinger, “How They’re Cleaning up the Comic Books.” 254-255.

⁴⁹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1, original manuscript, December 1955, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

⁵⁰ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 21, original manuscript, December 1963, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 20, original manuscript, August 1963, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library;

December 1955's "The Code Administrator's Column," Murphy described his intentional recruitment of educators to serve as comic book assessors. "My first move was to assemble a capable staff of reviewers. I selected five women varied in age and background, with experience in the fields of teaching, library work, creative writing, government, and social services."⁵¹ Murphy had sought to create a review board with absolute professional authority to respond to the complaints of teachers and principals. Consequently, the women on his staff had a set of educational credentials and personal reputations that were meant to strike teachers, parents, and the rest of the public as unimpeachable.

Sue Flynn, a graduate of Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart and a government publicist for thirteen years with the Department of Agriculture and the Voice of America; Marj McGill, a recent graduate of Albertus Magnus College who had done social work while going to college and who had specialized in juvenile delinquency; Esther L. Moscow, librarian and researcher; Dr. Joan Thellusson Nourse, professor in the Department of English at Hunter College and a lecturer and writer on the theater; and Dene Reed, a woman's magazine editor and radio writer who had served as assistant editor in the story department in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for a number of years.⁵²

Educators might have noticed that there was a lack of representation at the level of primary and secondary teachers, but this was not highlighted in the plentiful press materials. In his frequent public appearances, Goldwater referred to this team of reviewers as "qualified," reinforcing the integrity of the process.⁵³ Murphy claimed that reviewers were instructed to reject even comics adapted from recognizable source material, in instances when Stevenson, Twain, or the Brothers Grimm were more violent than contemporary standards of good taste allowed.⁵⁴ The presence of

Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter, vol. 3, no. 21, original manuscript, December 1963, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

⁵¹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁵² Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

⁵³ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

⁵⁴ Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning up the Comic Books."

educators in the administrative apparatus was not performative, as they were able to draw from their professional experience and training in review process.

Murphy was intentional in hiring an all-female staff, explaining that he “felt that they were more sensitive to the situation.”⁵⁵ *Ladies Home Journal* credited women’s groups as “spearheading a nationwide club movement against crime and horror comics.”⁵⁶ Further, women on both sides of the debate were particularly vocal, given their traditional role in caring for young children and overrepresentation among the ranks of classroom teachers. Educators were understood to be an important constituency and projecting a comic book-review process where schoolteachers were integrated fully was vital for obtaining their support—and the Code’s overall success.

Murphy’s priority was in engaging reviewers who were new to the industry and whose perspectives on the techniques, resources, and limitations had not ossified after years of toiling for a publisher. Three of the five reviewers were academics, with one from the public relations field and the other a professional editor. The educational credentials for four of them were promoted as they signaled to teachers, researchers, and administrators that their concerns were at the forefront of the CMAA’s regulatory approach. Lastly, Goldwater chose to make the educational possibilities of comics the focus of the CMAA’s public relations campaign, instead of the mental health or behavioral issues that also had been central to the ACC.⁵⁷

The planks of the Code were oriented primarily towards regulating the genres that received the most scrutiny during the ACC: horror, suspense, and crime. The Code was

⁵⁵ Nyberg, “Censoring Comics.”

⁵⁶ Hickey, “Vigilance Continues,” 19.

⁵⁷ Nyberg, “Censoring Comics.”

organized around intended audience and story elements, with superhero, detective, cowboy, and adventure stories covered in Section A; terror and suspense tales in Section B; general guidance applicable to all genres in Section C; and romance in Section D. Murphy and Caplin included a clause with generic language designed to give the CMAA the authority to regulate any material the administrators believed ran counter to its “spirit and intent,” even if there weren’t specific stipulations for it in the text. Pragmatism was a key facet of this; the capacious interpretation of guidelines permitted dispensations for non-graphic panels in Western and superhero comics and non-explicit images for romance comics without violating its own standards.⁵⁸ Additionally, Section E focused on the treatment of advertisements in comics.⁵⁹

The CMAA set as its first programmatic effort the elimination of crime and horror comics. These genres had few defenders. Publishers were willing to sacrifice them in favor of superhero and funny animal comics and literary adaptations, which had more money-making potential in this era of increased regulation. By 1956, crime and horror effectively had been eradicated. Some series, such as *House of Mystery* and *Journey into Mystery*, changed their focus to science fiction from terror and gore, and the unregulated EC Comics discarded their entire line of horror comics in favor of humor magazines, most notably *Mad*, aimed at older adolescents. Stamping out lewdness was more challenging. A quarter of the Code infractions were related to the oversexualization of female characters. The remedy usually involved artists adding more clothes or deemphasizing anatomical features.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, comics continue to retain this quality to the present day.

⁵⁸ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

⁵⁹ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

⁶⁰ “Comics Adopting Dior Look for Their Ladies in Clean-up Campaign.” *Wall Street Journal*. December 29, 1954.

“High standards of morality and good taste” were the goals for not only reviewed comics, but everything associated with the industry.⁶¹ The issue of unacceptable advertisements, including those for “switchblade knives, whips, and gun facsimiles,” was an evergreen one, and publishers requested reviews to loosen those parameters at frequent intervals.⁶² As with comics, the guidelines around advertising were derived from existing standards of decorum.⁶³ The review of advertisements was no less stringent than that of the rest of the comic books.⁶⁴ At the same time, the CMAA was producing brochures to encourage companies to advertise in comics, which they promoted as reaching 94 percent of children in some markets. The close management of what got advertised in comics was part of the industry’s financial model.⁶⁵

There was a mechanism in place for publishers to challenge a CCA ruling—at least in a limited sense—and perhaps even negotiate concessions on the presentation of questionable content.⁶⁶ A CMAA staff member noted, “This privilege has been rarely used. In almost every instance, the decision of the administrator has prevailed.”⁶⁷ The CMAA had the last word on what was published, and in spite of carping from artists and writers about the loss of creative autonomy, publishers were compliant. The financial benefits of adhering to the Code’s mandates

⁶¹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁶² *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁶³ Comics Code Authority pamphlet, original manuscript, 1971, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

⁶⁴ Federal Trade Commission to the Comics Magazine Association of America, May 22, 1979, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

⁶⁵ “CMAA Issues Brochure that Promotes Advertising in Comics.” *Comic and Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, no. 30 (December 1967), General Research Division, New York Public Library.

⁶⁶ Weisinger, “How They’re Cleaning up the Comic Books,” 263.

⁶⁷ Lawrence van Gelder. “A Comics Magazine Defies Ban on Drug Stories.” *New York Times*. February 4, 1971. The New York Times TimesMachine.

became apparent quickly. The CCA seal was a major selling point for Silver Age comics. Those without the seal didn't make it off newsstands.

4.4 CMAA's Publicity Campaign

More than 2,300 books were reviewed in the Code's first year, close to three-quarters of the total number of comics published in that 12-month period.⁶⁸ Six months later, Senator Kefauver was reporting that the Code had brought the comic book crisis under control. The chorus of legislative, judicial, and media voices expressing public support for the CMAA grew substantially between 1954 and 1956.⁶⁹ And interest in anti-comics legislation began receding by the end of 1956. Both the New York Joint Legislative Committee and Commission of the State of Rhode Island to Study Comic books, Magazines, and Publications reported that the CCA had improved the situation with comics. Parent-teacher groups in states as far-flung as California, Missouri, and Minnesota publicly praised the CCA.⁷⁰ The Utah PTA cited CMAA for its efforts serving the public good. The National Catholic Youth Connection invited the CMAA to present to their annual meeting.⁷¹ The Protestant Episcopal Church honored the CMAA for its work cleaning up the periodical industry; the American Legion and the New York

⁶⁸ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1; as described earlier in this chapter, Dell, EC, and Classics Illustrated were not members of the CMAA and still sold large numbers of comics.

⁶⁹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 2; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁷⁰ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 2.

⁷¹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 21.

City Federation of Women's Clubs followed suit.⁷² Comics' staunchest critics had been converted.

Colorado's General Assembly praised the CCA as well, stipulating that its successful work was not censorship.⁷³ Prior to the establishment of the CMAA, some publishers expressed concerns that any regulation was tantamount to bowdlerization. This idea caught on in the press, with William Gaines and Fredric Wertham arguing against censorship from opposite ideological poles.⁷⁴ The General Assembly's statement was useful for dispelling the idea that the Code was a form of suppression. More importantly, within two years of its creation, the public felt the Code had been successful at cleaning up comics and did not care how it was accomplished.

Publishers believed that the survival of the industry was tied to teachers and parents perceiving comics as educational as well as amusing.⁷⁵ An elaborate media campaign was organized by the CMAA; their goal was to ensure teachers, politicians, and parents all were informed of their effective self-regulatory efforts, which notably included the educators. For example, CMAA leadership fashioned "The Code Administrator's Column" specially for interested teachers and parents; Murphy and his successors used it to exalt their own good work to stakeholders.⁷⁶ Radio and newspaper reports described the CCA as having been created with the precise aim of responding to public concerns about comic books.⁷⁷

⁷² *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3, original manuscript, February 1957, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

⁷³ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁷⁴ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁷⁵ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 5, original manuscript, October 1957, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

⁷⁶ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁷⁷ CMAA, "What Do You Know about This."

Murphy kept the lines of communication open with the broader body of CMAA members, elucidating the staff's activities, priorities, and accomplishments. In the first three months of the Code, reviewers reported that most of their time was spent making portrayals of women appear less sexualized, eliminating racy innuendo from the dialogue, and reducing the frequency violence in the stories.⁷⁸ In addition, the CMAA's ability to function independently of the publishers was stressed in a variety of ways in promotional materials.⁷⁹ A broad coalition of "29 publishers, five engravers, six printers, and eight distributors" had formed the organization, and that cross-field cooperation that went into its creation was a major part of this publicity campaign. CMAA leaders emphasized the rigor of their process, and by extension, the likelihood of its continued success. They asserted that theirs was a "strict code... tougher than any one adopted by other media of communication."⁸⁰

The CMAA painted a picture of almost-instant success in eliminating filth in comics. Though there had been a considerable culling of the field, which saw 66 percent of the publishers close in the immediate wake of the CMAA's founding, Goldwater and his colleagues spoke only of a healthy, functional industry. In an October 1958 article entitled "Educational Values Blend with Entertainment in Present-day Comics Magazines," the CMAA described the improvement in quality that resulted from the recent reduction in publishers and titles as circulation numbers increased.⁸¹ Perhaps spin, the suggestion was that the remaining publishers were those focused

⁷⁸ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

⁷⁹ CMAA, "What Do You Know about This"; CMAA, Comics Code Authority pamphlet; Facts about the Comics Code, original manuscript, 1956, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

⁸⁰ CMAA, "What Do You Know about This."

⁸¹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 8, original manuscript, October 1958, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

only on appropriate content.⁸² Local PTAs across the nation were a special target of the messaging around the benefits of comics. Favorable articles about the Code's success at cleaning up comics and appeasing teachers and parents ran in newspapers and magazines across the country, including the *New York Times*, *Reader's Digest*, *Instructor Magazine*, and *Today's Family*.⁸³ CMAA staff traveled around the United States convincing local school boards and civic groups of that fact. Because they proved to be effectual messengers about comics' new tone, schoolchildren also were objects of the campaign; comic books about the CMAA's positive contributions were made specially with young readers in mind.⁸⁴

The CMAA also had a significant apparatus in place to respond to critics of the Code—and to do so long before another Wertham was empowered with public support. When Murphy resigned from his post, he cited a lack of sufficient funding and challenges getting some publishers to comply with the reviewers' recommendations.⁸⁵ *The Hartford Courant* published an editorial wary of the Code's stability in light of claims made by Murphy in his resignation letter. Even still, Murphy intervened one final time to uphold the organization's integrity. He responded by describing the administrative successes of the CMAA and changes in public perception of the comic book industry. He praised the credentials of the newly appointed Code Administrator, Mrs. Guy Percy Trulock, and Mrs. Jesse Bader, the incoming chairperson of the

⁸² John L. Goldwater to J. Edgar Hoover, January 25, 1960, Comics Magazine Association of America, 1960, Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Security Archive, George Washington University.

⁸³ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 2; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 27; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 22, original manuscript, April 1964, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 23, original manuscript, August 1964, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

⁸⁴ Michael Z. Hobson to Marvel Comics, October 17, 1988, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

⁸⁵ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

CMAA's National Advisory Committee on Comic Books.⁸⁶ Even in his parting words, Murphy kept the focus on assuaging teachers' and parents' concerns, as he explained the Committee was compromised of "feminine, civic, and religious leaders throughout the country, who, we believe, certainly represent the public interest."⁸⁷ Further, CMAA president John L. Goldwater pointed out *The Courant's* reproach only served to undermine the CCA unnecessarily, and then questioned their motives outright.⁸⁸ *The Courant* tersely responded that its original statement would not be retracted.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Murphy's point was a resonant one, and the appointing of a pair of women to direct the CMAA likely was not lost on teachers or mothers.

A bit of propaganda produced by the CMAA for comic book readers, teachers, and parents, "What Do You Know about This: The Story behind the New Comics Code Authority" painted the CCA as an eliminator of filth in its wares. It was written from the perspective that most comics were good, and the Code was the most efficacious means of eliminating the few that were not. Certain of its ultimate audience, the fictional story was framed around an active local PTA, looking to cleanse the town of dangerous comics. The illustrations accurately displayed Murphy working with his staff of female educators to rid comics of their negative content.⁹⁰ One picture even showed Murphy meticulously poring over a comic book adaptation of *Treasure Island*, suggesting, "nothing can avoid the scrutiny of the CCA, not even the classics."⁹¹ The CMAA also produced another fact book on the Code that conveyed the impact

⁸⁶ Goldwater, "Comics Magazines Will Hold to Their Pledge."

⁸⁷ Goldwater, "Comics Magazines Will Hold to Their Pledge."

⁸⁸ Goldwater, "Comics Magazines Will Hold to Their Pledge."

⁸⁹ Goldwater, "Comics Magazines Will Hold to Their Pledge."

⁹⁰ CMAA, "What Do You Know about This."

⁹¹ CMAA, "What Do You Know about This."

of comics. This one was crafted directly for classroom teachers and educational researchers. Published research based on the fact book appeared in publications widely read by teachers, including *Elementary English*, *The Instructor*, and *English Journal*.⁹²

Newsstands pledged not to sell any comics that did not possess the Code's Seal of Approval, which meant that they could not be placed in the hands of readers.⁹³ In the first five years of the Code, typical print runs averaged between 250,000 and 1,000,000 copies per issue, and ninety percent of these were sold at newsstands, with pharmacies making up the remaining sales.⁹⁴ This partnership was critical for the success of the endeavor and dependent upon the CMAA managing its image well.

The CMAA's publicity campaign produced immediate benefits. From the beginning, the CMAA was careful to represent the wide support it enjoyed from key constituencies. "Civic groups, school authorities, church councils, and many others gave their wholehearted endorsement to this program of self-regulation," they reported in press materials.⁹⁵ They carefully manufactured an image of a well-organized cooperative that shared the wholesome values and had the express support of mainstream organizations, including the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Incorporated; Police Athletic League; Boys Scouts of America; the American Legion; the Council of Churches of Greater Trenton; the National Council of Catholic Men; the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary and its Subcommittee to

⁹² *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 20, original manuscript, August 1963, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

⁹³ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

⁹⁴ Du Bois, "Superman, Batman and Ivanhoe."

⁹⁵ CMAA, "What Do You Know about This."

Investigate Juvenile Delinquency; and the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York.⁹⁶ In conjunction with the American Library Association, they also enacted a national press plan to communicate the Code's successes to its members, an important means of claiming a new sort of relationship between comics and librarians.⁹⁷

As early as 1956, concerns about how bad comics could affect children abated with the news that the Code had controlled the problem.⁹⁸ An April 3, 1956 article in the *New York Times* described comics as “an important track to the education of children,” and disputed resolutely the notion that comics lead to delinquency. Further, it quoted a public health official who argued that comic book reading was a leisure activity that could assist with educating about mental health. In front of an audience that included CMAA staff, educators, medical professionals, and comic book creators, leading psychiatrist Dr. William C. Menninger asserted that comics actually benefitted mental health and education and even could prevent some disorders. At the same event, sponsored by the Thomas Alva Edison Foundation, educators lauded the publishers who had developed the best science, history, and fiction comics.⁹⁹

That comics could carry important civic messages was established firmly by the mid-fifties. In 1956, the Social Security Administration partnered with the New York City fire department to create educational comics in English and Spanish to raise awareness around the dangers of kerosene heaters.¹⁰⁰ Smokey the Bear debuted in a comic book about wildlife and

⁹⁶ CMAA, “What Do You Know about This.”

⁹⁷ Wakeman Chapter of the American Legion Auxiliary, meeting minutes, April 11, 1955, personal archive of David Hajdu. *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 25, original manuscript, June 1965, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

⁹⁸ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 2.

⁹⁹ “Comic Books Held Aid to Education,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1956.

¹⁰⁰ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 2.

watershed management, published collaboratively by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, State Foresters and the Advertising Council, Inc.¹⁰¹ The following year, the Crime Prevention Bureau of Illinois struggled to keep up with the demand for “This Is for You,” an in-home safety comic published collaboratively by members of the board of education, civil servants, and Stateville Penitentiary staff.¹⁰² The buy-in of these governmental entities was further evidence of comic book’s newfound social status. Despite the polarized rhetoric surrounding comics, the military and various federal and state agencies were early adapters of comics as educational tools.

The use of the comic book techniques in booklets sponsored by governmental and private agencies and by leading industrial firms to instruct, to dramatize a principle, or to explain a service or a product or even an abstruse scientific discovery, is perhaps the best evidence of its quality as a communicative medium.¹⁰³

The CMAA’s own newsletter articles cited the newfound quality of character development, complexity of plots, and sophistication of the vocabulary. These arguments carried weight internationally, with educators in the UK and Mexico integrating comics into their lesson plans.¹⁰⁴ The CMAA also reported on favorable research in its newsletters. In the Christmas 1957 issue, research projects conducted by faculty and students at Princeton, Fordham, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were described.¹⁰⁵ In an October 1958 article entitled “Educational Values Blend with Entertainment in Present-day Comics

¹⁰¹ Smith, J. Morgan. “The Story of Smokey the Bear,” *The Forestry Chronicle*, June 1956.

¹⁰² “Comic Book Tells Don’ts for Kids.” *Chicago Daily Defender*. June 17, 1957.

¹⁰³ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*, 26-27.

¹⁰⁴ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 27.

¹⁰⁵ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 6, original manuscript, December 1957, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

Magazines,” the CMAA described the improvement in quality that resulted from the recent reduction in publishers and titles as circulation numbers increased.¹⁰⁶

Publishers recognized the financial and reputational benefits of the public believing in the efficacy of the Code, and the CMAA found multiple ways to celebrate it. In 1956, the CMAA published *Facts about the Comics Code*, the first in a series of pamphlets extolling its own virtues. Though the CMAA already had produced a “fact kit” that reflected the broad contours of its regulatory function, *Facts about the Comics Code* went much further to frame the Code as a highly successful intervention in making the medium safe for kids. The pamphlet also targeted key groups of stakeholders with specific arguments tailored to their concerns and interests. One section, “Educational Values in Code-approved Comics,” was directed at those teachers and parents who had crusaded so intently against the medium. Another section of the 31-page text explained to anti-censorship activists why self-regulation was the best option for the industry.¹⁰⁷

The CMAA’s gamble that Americans would support cleaned-up, educative comics paid dividends. A 1961 analysis published by *Barron’s* described the medium’s embrace by commercial entities for training and promotional purposes as evidence of a much broader public acceptance. It attributed the about-face to the Code’s success in retaining a product that still appealed to kids, but also no longer turned off adults. Between 1956 and 1960, revenues at DC Comics doubled and stock values increased fourfold. The publisher felt confident enough to raise the per-issue price from 10¢ to 12¢. Licensing its intellectual property for television, film,

¹⁰⁶ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 8.

¹⁰⁷ CMAA, *Facts about the Comics Code*.

newspaper comic strips, and toys generated significant revenue for DC.¹⁰⁸ By 1960, sales had increased by 50 million dollars.¹⁰⁹

Ten years after the Code was ratified, the CMAA published a retrospective on its work that explained the organization's inner workings and strategic motivations. *Americana in Four Colors* was written by Goldwater in 1964 and reprinted with additional material a decade later, to continue reinforcing among stakeholders the educational power of comic books. The cover of *Americana in Four Colors*, with its full-color renderings of top money-making characters like Superman, Archie, Casper the Friendly Ghost, Fred Flintstone, and Spider-Man, was a celebration of Silver Age successes made possible by the Code. The book was dedicated to the CMAA members, noting the "responsibility to the public" they demonstrated when they "voluntarily adhered to a stringent Code."¹¹⁰ Goldwater wanted to make it abundantly clear to his audience that publishers' adoption of such a strict set of guidelines was an intentional, measured act of responsible professionals, and not merely desperation and self-interest.¹¹¹ Throughout the text, Goldwater reinforced that publishers had elected to participate in the Code's regulatory process out of an interest in producing decent fare for young people. He even extrapolated that "the influence for good exerted by the program has had considerable social significance, reaching far beyond the industry it has regulated."¹¹² He reached that conclusion based on the sheer numbers of comic book readers.

¹⁰⁸ Du Bois, "Superman, Batman and Ivanhoe."

¹⁰⁹ Facts about the Code (Spanish edition), original manuscript, 1960, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

¹¹⁰ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*, 4.

¹¹¹ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

¹¹² Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*, 5.

Goldwater stated plainly, “The acceptance of the comic magazine as an educational resource has grown remarkably since the Code was adopted.”¹¹³ He saw the Code as the immediate catalyst for the interest university faculty held in comics, though research on the medium had existed for decades. He also cited the Code as causing the Library of Congress and several university library systems to begin building collections of comics. By 1966, more than 2,500 titles dating back to the 1930s had been acquired. The Library of Congress’s imprimatur was a critical step towards the recognition of the academic value of comics.¹¹⁴ Similarly, the exhibitions of comic book art at leading art galleries were framed as a direct consequence of the aesthetic improvements brought about by the Code.¹¹⁵

He went on to explain the reasons that comics were perfect teaching tools: first, their popularity, and second, their ease of reading. He rationalized that, while intended for entertainment purposes, Code-approved comics had both implicit and explicit educative content.¹¹⁶ Goldwater and his colleagues at the CMAA understood that their efforts would not please everyone, and they moderated their expectations around public reactions. The goal of the Code was “to make certain that comics are reasonably acceptable, morally, to reasonable people.”¹¹⁷ By the mid-sixties, the CMAA had received “literally thousands” of correspondences from classroom teachers who used comics as teaching aids.¹¹⁸ Remedial reading was a

¹¹³ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*, 26.

¹¹⁴ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 27.

¹¹⁵ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

¹¹⁶ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

¹¹⁷ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*, 33.

¹¹⁸ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*, 28.

particularly common usage. The CMAA published a brief literature review, sharing with the parents the research of pro-comics research of Paul A. Witty, Katherine Hutchinson, and Robert Thorndike.¹¹⁹

Goldwater endeavored to give publishers cover frequently. Taking an entire chapter of *Americana in Four Colors* to define comic books, Goldwater clarified that there were multiple genres with different audiences and varying levels of quality. This accorded the CMAA a means of claiming the successes of those publishers making good use of the Code, while disavowing others.¹²⁰ While reflecting on the ways the Code was more stringent than analogous regulations for film and television, he celebrated its sturdiness in the face of America's evolving sexual mores.¹²¹ Goldwater's claim was that the existence of the Code not only promoted more accountability, it also inspired greater creativity. With ten years of evidence supporting the assertion, he explained,

It stimulated the inclusion of additional education and character-building material in many comics magazines, not the least of which has been the inclusion of stories dealing with contemporary social problems, such as race relations, pollution, women's rights, the dangers of drug addiction. The net result has been that comics magazines compare more favorably with all other media competing for the attention of young people.¹²²

According to Goldwater, the whole purpose of the Code was the communicate to authority figures which comics were acceptable reading materials for children.¹²³ The industry's values were reflected in the Code, which made it easier for publishers to follow. And because the

¹¹⁹ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

¹²⁰ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

¹²¹ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

¹²² Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*, 6.

¹²³ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

stipulations were not imposed by any external body, there was less resistance from CMAA members.¹²⁴

By making educators the primary constituency alongside parents, the CMAA created a new image for the industry and propelled a number of changes to comics that made them more palatable and useful to those groups. They needed to appease these groups as a means of stabilizing the industry, and accordingly, the CMAA prioritized responding to their concerns. This meant changing the features of comics that didn't suit educators; incorporating elements that made comics effective educational tools; and communicating broadly that comics had this new functionality. The CMAA also engaged educators directly, hiring them as content reviewers, where their expertise could affect change in the medium. This effort complemented the individual publishers' longstanding practice of employing educators as advisors. What had changed was the industry had developed coordinated, intentional strategies to inform the public of this commitment to addressing educators.

4.5 The Comics Magazine Association of America's Utilization of Academic Research

The comic book industry's long feud with Wertham was an object lesson in the influence of experts. Publishers used the CMAA to curate their own specialists. Getting their research to the public in digestible form was key. The CMAA scaffolded much of their operations around promoting research that argued for comics as teaching aids. Early comics researcher Elzada M. Reynolds's 1951 contention that the medium was an effective tool for remedial readers had taken hold fully by 1967. The CMAA reported receiving "literally hundreds" of reports "from teachers through the country in recent months" that comics could be used effectively for this purpose.

¹²⁴ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

Schoolteachers cited reading published research shared by the CMAA that described how comics affected reading skills and practices in their students.¹²⁵

In fact, the CMAA received regular requests for curricular and pedagogical advice from teachers.¹²⁶ The organization sought out opportunities to contribute to academic research that presented comics in a positive light. It ballyhooed a program at University of Pennsylvania that had been organized by undergraduate Byron Preiss, Dr. Mary Coleman, and Professor Morton Botel, who also served as the president of the International Reading Association. The aim of the volunteer-run group was to teach reading to struggling youths. Preiss, Coleman, and Botel all maintained that comic book-reading was preferable to watching television.¹²⁷

As described in the second chapter, Josette Frank became known for her independent research supporting comics' educational uses and her long-time advisory relationship with DC Comics. In her exploration of comic book reading, Frank highlighted the increased interest in nonfiction science books that it usually elicited. She described comic books as benefitting from a larger cultural moment that celebrated science fiction, as represented in television and movie plots, including Murray Leinster's *The Forgotten Planet*, Richard Fleischer's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, and Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale*. The influence of science fiction and the range of emotions it prompted in audiences permeated comic book plots.¹²⁸

This era of "big science" generated ambivalent depictions of scientific endeavors in American popular culture... Some people found scientists eccentric, obsessive, or worse.

¹²⁵ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 30, original manuscript, December 1967, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

¹²⁶ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 30; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 33.

¹²⁷ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 33.

¹²⁸ Andrew J. Huebner, "Lost in Space: Technology and Turbulence in Futuristic Cinema of the 1950s," *Film & History* 40, no. 2 (2010): 6-26.

In the June 1958 edition of the pulp monthly *Science Fiction Adventure*, the editor reflected on a new study out of Purdue University, which showed that among 15,000 representative high school students, “14 percent thought there was something evil about scientists; 30 percent believed that one could not raise a normal family and become a scientist; 25 percent thought scientists were more than a little ‘odd’; 28 percent didn’t believe scientists had time to enjoy life.” All of this seemed “a little frightening” and “grim” to the editor. Despite the high demand for and prestige of scientists in Cold War America, “it looks as if a good quarter of our youthful population would run screaming if they ran into a scientist on the street.”¹²⁹

These themes will be probed in greater detail in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here that publishers were able to capitalize on the connection between science education and science fiction in many people’s minds. In many ways, science fiction substituted for horror and terror as a source of plotlines and lurid visuals.

4.6 Federal Scrutiny Continues

Acknowledging the strong participation of local authorities, politicians and civic and community groups in ACC, J. Edgar Hoover still was calling for stronger action against comics as late as 1960.¹³⁰ A public memorandum from Hoover to “all law enforcement officials,” drafted on January 1, 1960, saw the FBI Director lumping comics in the same group as pornographic media.¹³¹

While our schools, churches and youth organizations conscientiously strive to improve the morals and thinking of our juvenile citizens, forces of evil are working on the other side of the fence to contaminate all that we hold decent. The most disgusting part of this assault is that our youth is subjected to lurid exhibitions of obscenity in many of the places where they seek clean entertainment.¹³²

¹²⁹ Huebner, “Lost in Space.”

¹³⁰ J. Edgar Hoover, memorandum, January 1, 1960, Comics Magazine Association of America, 1960, Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Security Archive, George Washington University.

¹³¹ Hoover, memorandum.

¹³² Hoover, memorandum.

This was quite out of step with the general perception of comics at that point. More than five years after the ACC had begun to wane, Hoover still framed comics as an existential threat to the American way of life. He also suggested that the sale of comics and obscene magazines made pharmacies and candy shops breeding grounds for iniquitous behavior, places where children could be preyed upon by unscrupulous adults.¹³³ He attempted to correlate the rise in sexual assaults between 1957 and 1958 to the depiction of lewd behaviors in comics and other magazines.¹³⁴

So convinced of his organization's good work, Goldwater felt comfortable informing Hoover that they were "justified in receiving a commendatory statement" from the FBI.¹³⁵ In a letter postmarked three weeks later, Goldwater reminded the FBI director that there was no justifiable evidentiary basis for linking comics and pornography. He went on to note the harm done to entire industry when someone of Hoover's stature made a disingenuous claim. Given the inroads comic book publishers had made with teachers and parents, Goldwater was ready to battle with the FBI to preserve their hard-fought reputation.

For the CMAA, there were only benefits in having significant distance between comics and randy material.¹³⁶ To differentiate the now-mainstream comics from more illicit media aimed at adults, Goldwater argued that the Comics Code Authority instead was the instrument that allowed publishers to eliminate smut. Within two years of the enactment of the Code, comic books no longer made regular appearances on the National Office for Decent Literature's

¹³³ Hoover, memorandum.

¹³⁴ Hoover, memorandum.

¹³⁵ Hoover, memorandum.

¹³⁶ J. Edgar Hoover to John L. Goldwater, February 1, 1960, Comics Magazine Association of America, 1960, Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Security Archive, George Washington University.

“Objectionable Magazines” list; and after six years with the Code, the NODL found no objectionable comics for the first time.¹³⁷ Throughout this period, “[the] Code remains unaltered in every one of its tenets,” and more than 150 comics appeared on its list of *acceptable* reading material for children.¹³⁸ He also touted the testimonials of public figures whose views on comics had become more favorable due to the Code’s work.

The director of the NODL, Msgr. Thomas J. Fitzgerald, who perhaps more than any other person in the United States, scrutinizes the output of all publishing media in this country and is most vigilant in condemning what he considers obscene, has stated categorically on a number of occasions, in print and on the public platform, that the “Comics Code Authority has definitely cleaned up the comic magazine field,” and has done a “wonderful” job.¹³⁹

With his letter to Hoover, Goldwater included a new pamphlet that celebrated the Code for its effectiveness. *Facts about Code-approved Comics Magazines* proved incredibly useful to the organization’s aims, with additional copies simultaneously distributed to local leaders, libraries, journalists, and even the Department of Justice. The booklet included “the complete text of the Code, a description of how the Code Authority functions, and references to some of the agencies and individuals who have commented upon the results of this industry self-regulation program.”¹⁴⁰ Goldwater argued its success was evinced in the “decency and good taste” the Code brought to comics.¹⁴¹

In response to Goldwater, the staff of the FBI’s associate director, Cartha Dekle DeLoach, denied that anyone at the Bureau had attempted to connect “legitimate comics” with

¹³⁷ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 3.

¹³⁸ John L. Goldwater to J. Edgar Hoover.

¹³⁹ John L. Goldwater to J. Edgar Hoover.

¹⁴⁰ John L. Goldwater to J. Edgar Hoover.

¹⁴¹ John L. Goldwater to J. Edgar Hoover.

pornographic literature.¹⁴² He argued that the FBI made distinctions between the legitimate publishers of the CMAA and the proscribed “under-the-counter” comics book trade.

Repudiating Goldwater’s claim, DeLoach pointed to the FBI’s own participation in a Dell comic from September 1959, which explained the organization’s history and accomplishments.¹⁴³ He also noted the positive relationship the FBI had with previous CMAA leaders. Within a month of DeLoach’s response to Goldwater, the FBI publicly labeled the upsurge of pornographic material as the new scourge of youth. The agency’s leadership specifically worried about an illicit trade of amateur comics that featured wholesome characters like Li’l Abner and Blondie and Dagwood engaged in lewd acts.¹⁴⁴ And the Bureau was careful to note that not all comics were considered offensive at this juncture. It is unknown if the FBI’s statement was satisfying to Goldwater, but it was the last such public word on comics as corrosive to kids. And it was clear that the CMAA’s communications apparatus was effective at rebutting even the most politically influential forces in the country.

4.7 Conclusions

Comic book publishers’ major strategy was reintroducing the industry as one in lockstep with the interests of educators. It presented itself as engaged with schoolteachers and research throughout the operation of the Comics Magazine Association of America and the design and administration of the Comics Code Authority. Industry leaders believed that representing that they had appeased educators was the key to the survival of the comic book. The press’s positive

¹⁴² M. A. Jones to Cartha Dekle DeLoach, January 28, 1960, Comics Magazine Association of America, 1960, Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Security Archive, George Washington University.

¹⁴³ M. A. Jones to Cartha Dekle DeLoach.

¹⁴⁴ M. A. Jones to Cartha Dekle DeLoach.

response was quick, and the Code was declared a success. The public rapidly embraced the industry's new image as educational, wholesome fare.

The early years of the Code were defined by an emphasis on reporting the success of their self-regulation program.¹⁴⁵ And communicating this continuously to the press remained a major component of organizational operations. Legislators had become vocal about their support for the Code. They noted sufficient improvement in the quality to warrant that all comics be reviewed by the CMAA, irrespective of genre or publisher.¹⁴⁶ There was corporate recognition of the CMAA as well, with commendations from the American Society of Associated Executives and the US Secretary of Commerce.¹⁴⁷ Even more importantly, the Code actuated a feedback loop between educators and comic book creators. By late 1958, comic book authors were adding educative content—specifically from the fields of history, geography, and the physical and biographical sciences—to stories.¹⁴⁸ In addition, the Code was translated to Spanish in 1960, reflecting the increasingly broad audience for comics as educative tools.¹⁴⁹

In noting comics' "considerable value" for developing literacy skills, the mid-sixties saw former opponent, *Reader's Digest*, recommending comic book-reading for children. A series of articles by educational researchers carefully connected these literacy skills to college-going rates.¹⁵⁰ Also identified was an additional metric of success: comic books also promoted a

¹⁴⁵ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 5; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 8.

¹⁴⁶ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 7, original manuscript, April 1958, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

¹⁴⁷ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 5.

¹⁴⁸ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 8.

¹⁴⁹ CMAA, Facts about the Code (Spanish edition).

¹⁵⁰ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 23.

general interest in reading periodicals that was necessary for the health of the overall publishing industry. “They develop in the youngster the newsstand-buying habit, which is so important to the future expansion of the newsdealers’ business.”¹⁵¹ The CMAA did represent a group of publishers, after all.

The improvement of the industry’s reputation and the augmenting of sales were tied together closely.¹⁵² This increase was attributed to the ways that CMAA had reframed the public’s perceptions on the tone and intended function of comics.¹⁵³ Publishers were eager to hitch their reputations to the Code’s success. In his “Stan’s Soapbox” column, Stan Lee described Marvel and the CMAA as sharing the same “good taste” objectives, noting that they were “thrilled” to participate in a self-regulatory process that did not impinge upon artistic freedom.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, during this period, editors’ notes were a space for playful conversations with young readers. Marvel developed deep connections through sustained engagements with readers and consistent messaging across its series.¹⁵⁵ The close of the decade saw the expansion in the number and range of vendors selling comics, particularly supermarkets. And this growth in market share signaled to all that the comic book trade had moved squarely into the omphalos of family entertainment.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 8.

¹⁵² *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 2, original manuscript, August 1960, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

¹⁵³ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 2, original manuscript, June 1959, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

¹⁵⁴ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 30.

¹⁵⁵ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Fantasy*, vol. 1, no. 15, New York: Marvel Comics, August 1962.

¹⁵⁶ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 3.

The mainstreaming of comics only accelerated in the sixties. CMAA studies indicated that schoolteachers still were embracing the potential benefits of comics even nine years after the Code's establishment. Accordingly, the CMAA introduced an updated version of *Facts about Code-approved Comics Magazines* in 1963. This edition featured information for educators by educators and was made available to them free of charge.¹⁵⁷ *Americana in Four Colors* was acquired by numerous school and university libraries, as educators continued embracing the comic book industry's self-regulatory triumph.¹⁵⁸ In 1964, a decade of the Code was recognized by both the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and *Today's Family*, a leading Catholic magazine. Monsignor Thomas J. Fitzgerald hailed the Code's process as well as its results.¹⁵⁹ Broad cultural acceptance of comics' educational potential took fifteen years. The American Cancer Society built an anti-smoking campaign for kids with comics books. The city of Philadelphia used comics to educate school children on water conservation.¹⁶⁰ A 1971 exhibit celebrating "75 Years of the Comics" at the New York Cultural Center evinced a mainstreaming that only was possible because the CMAA had shifted the perception that educators rejected the artform.¹⁶¹ The potential to educate held by comics was not seen as beneficial internationally, however. A November 1965 newsletter reported that Fidel Castro banned comics in Cuba, as he felt the ease with which they communicated ideas was an existential threat to Communism.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ CMAA, *Facts about the Comics Code*.

¹⁵⁸ Goldwater, *Americana in Four Colors*.

¹⁵⁹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 22.

¹⁶⁰ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 26, original manuscript, November 1965, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

¹⁶¹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 34, original manuscript, May 1971, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

¹⁶² *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 26.

While this may have been factually dubious, it does reflect publishers' desire to distance the industry from anything unamerican.¹⁶³

Changes in leadership at the CMAA did not affect comics' progression into a perfectly acceptable form of kids' entertainment. Judge Murphy elected not to renew his contract in October 1956, citing concerns about an insufficient budget and disagreements with editors about his approach. He was followed by Mrs. Guy Percy Trulock, the immediate past president of the New York City Federation of Women's Clubs, which had a quarter-million members in the tristate area. Her appointment reflected an ongoing engagement with women as key stakeholders whose support meant the approval of mothers and grade school teachers alike. And moreover, education and literacy had been two of the five pillars of the Federation since its founding.¹⁶⁴ During Trulock's tenure, the work of the Code was strengthened by the addition of the National Advisory Committee on Comic Books, a consultative body comprised of religious and civic leaders.¹⁶⁵ Mrs. Jesse Bader, an ordained minister who had been active in Protestant groups that sought to police the motion picture industry in the 1940s, organized the Committee.¹⁶⁶ The press celebrated her appointment. After nine years of service, Trulock left the CMAA to attend to her health. Rather than replace her as administrator, her duties were folded into those of the current executive director, Leonard Darwin.¹⁶⁷ Darwin was a lawyer, lobbyist, and literary scholar.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Gilbert Borrego, "Cuban Comics in the Castro Era, Version 40," University of Southern California (September 23, 2019), <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/comics-in-the-castro-era/cuban-comics-in-the-castro-era.40>.

¹⁶⁴ Fanny H. Carpenter and Mary Wood, *Sketch of the History of the New York Federation of Women's Clubs* (New York: NP, 1914).

¹⁶⁵ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3.

¹⁶⁶ "Group to Publicize 'Good' Movies Only," *New York Times*. March 9, 1948.

¹⁶⁷ Nyberg, "Censoring Comics."

¹⁶⁸ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 26; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 29, original manuscript, June 1967, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of

Prior to his CMAA tenure, Darwin was a trade association executive. His professional profile was quite a bit different from those of Murphy and Trulock, as he had made his name in a field closely related to the publishing industry; were it not for the Code's success in its first thirteen years, Darwin's appointment could have been viewed as conflicting with CMAA's public image as a completely independent entity.¹⁶⁹ Darwin also lectured at colleges and universities on the CMAA's commitment to facilitate teachers incorporating new media into existing curricula.¹⁷⁰

The original version of the Code remained in effect until 1971, at which time it received considerable updates, but stayed in effect. Comics remained wholesome while television, film and music increasingly pushed boundaries in the seventies and eighties. Even through the nineties, the Code looked remarkably similar to that of the fifties.¹⁷¹ The CMAA had been able to reframe public opinion on comics by telling a different story, one where comic book publishers and educators worked in concert to realize a more positive version of the medium. Those efforts were sufficient to satisfy much of the public, but the generational shift that welcomed a new crop of educators who had grown up reading comics cemented the change.

America, New York Public Library; *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 32, original manuscript, June 1969, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

¹⁶⁹ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 29.

¹⁷⁰ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 32.

¹⁷¹ Update to the Comics Code Authority, original manuscript, June 23, 1992, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library; CMAA staff to Members of the Board of Directors of the CMAA, May 4, 1994, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Chapter 5: The Influence of Educators on Silver Age Comics

5.1 Introduction: No Longer Only for Kids

In the March 27, 1969 issue of the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, the student-run newspaper included a four-page spread on Silver Age comics. Published in “Connection,” the magazine supplement, the feature covered the maturation of comic book art, the treatment of women and people of color, methodologies for reader engagement, and new approaches to character development. The observations were buttressed by an interview with Marvel Comics editor-and-chief Stan Lee, conducted by *Spectator* student reporter Michael Stern. Although academic analogies were used to explain the comic book industry to the uninitiated, the casual references to DC and Marvel characters and plotlines suggested a broad familiarity among the paper’s readers. If they weren’t exactly universally accepted reading material among college students, comics certainly weren’t contemptible to most.

There was good reason for the *Spectator* to devote so much time to Lee. Not only had Marvel adapted successfully to the mandates of the Comics Code Authority (CCA), the publisher also increased its market share and enraptured a previously untapped demographic group, the educated adult reader. Stern argued that Lee’s innovations had rendered the genre not only acceptable to young adults, but that the age group actually was the target demographic. Columbia students cited the first issue of *Fantastic Four* as the beginning of a new era of comics, where “topicality, psychology, and graphic artistry steadily transformed the old self-enclosed, timeless comics universe.”¹ In fact, college students were expressing a clear preference for

¹ Michael Stern, “Marvel Comics Are for Real,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, March 27, 1969.

Marvel's stories—which were rooted in the real world—to DC's “apolitical super-villains.”

Simply put, DC lacked the sophistication of Marvel. Stern explained,

DC artwork changed somewhat from Bob Kane's original early-Egyptian style Batman, but it too solidified by 1955, with six rectangular panels per page, a minimum of differentiation of characters' facial and muscular structure, and untextured, two- or three-color layouts. Plots became either convoluted whodunits with deus ex machina solutions, or ritual battles with ever-recurring villains who miraculously kept escaping from the prisons they had been consigned to a few issues before... Instead of DC's standard poles of the mad and altruistic scientist, Marvel's staple is the modern researcher who gets into something over his head and, instead of creating a separate Frankenstein, transforms himself into the other.²

At this juncture, DC Comics had been the most dominant force in the comic book industry for decades, with popular series like *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Wonder Woman* resulting in 75,000,000 issues sold annually. By contrast, Marvel's sales were a third lower, but its bestsellers—*Amazing Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four*, and *X-Men* among them—were viewed as groundbreaking. Comics no longer were only for little kids. Internal polls by individual publishers revealed that adults made up 20 percent of Marvel's readership, five times the share DC had. DC took note of Marvel's success and sought to emulate aspects of the latter's Silver Age output.

Lee, who wrote nearly all Marvel series at this time, prioritized creating superpowered characters with relatable problems and recognizable personal lives; the Marvel style was defined by its characters' interpersonal relationships. He explained,

[...] try to write as though he's a real person. What would happen if you—you—had the strength of fifty men? Isn't there still a chance you might have acne or athlete's foot or trouble with girls?³

² Stern, “Marvel Comics Are for Real.”

³ Stern, “Marvel Comics Are for Real.”

The tone of his comics was defined by the political turmoil that gradually became ubiquitous as the decade progressed. He added a sense of temporality, whereby the social forces of the sixties guided the storytelling; this had been missing from Golden Age comics. His editorial staff engaged readers on social issues—even polling them on what Spider-Man’s disposition to the Vietnam War should be—and began asserting political stances upon realizing the extent of their influence. Lee claimed to read over 2,000 fan letters weekly, and he allowed their perspectives to shape some decision-making. This was a meaningful change for readers, who suddenly found their experiences represented in the pages of Silver Age comics that focused on youthful heroes, like *Fantastic Four* and *X-Men*.

Marvel’s modernizations did not end there. Lee and his principal collaborator, Jack Kirby, were intentional about centering compelling art. His unique editorial approach allowed artists to illustrate stories first and then writers created text based on those drawings; this artist-driven creative process was unlike anything else in the industry and cemented Marvel as a driver of creative change. Adventurous with layouts, staff artists jettisoned the standard six panels in favor of experimental designs, unique angles and perspectives, and photographic elements added for texture. Series like *Doctor Strange* and *Silver Surfer* were known for vibrant visual storytelling. Lee’s approach to drafting comics was the first major reimagination of the form since DC initially introduced the costumed superhero in the thirties, and Marvel’s popularity among older adolescents was attributed to it.

The article went on to cover Lee’s long history with Marvel (he’d been with the publisher since he was seventeen), his range of literary inspirations (which ranged from Shakespeare to Yiddish theatre), and his political views (he labeled himself a “conservative radical,” capable of

responding to youthful and adult stakeholders).⁴ Stern compellingly described Lee as pushing the genre forward by his exploration of imperialism, the military-industrial complex, counterculture, and Black militancy in his comics. Neither connected these developments to the Code's reshaping of the comic book landscape; instead, Lee expressed exasperation with the constraints it placed on creativity. And yet, the very existence of this interview—with comics' most inventive thinker discussing his motivations and creative process in Columbia's premier student-run newspaper—and the content of Lee's oeuvre indicated that the Code had been effective in clearing the way for comics' mainstream acceptance. The CCA required comics to depict heroes as good citizens in wholesome stories; utilize proper grammar; portray characters of color and women with sensitivity; and present quality art and legible lettering. Marvel was excelling in each of these areas. Indeed, the comics of these two most influential publishers, Marvel and DC, responded to the Code differently in many ways.

In this chapter, I argue that, in compliance with CCA regulations, publishers synthesized the concerns of teachers into Silver Age comics and in the process expanded their audience base. The CCA mandated improvements to the grammar, vocabulary, art, treatment of race and gender, and deportment of characters for all comics published. The changes to comic-book plots made them more appealing to older adolescents and young adult readers. College students were attracted to plotlines that represented their experiences more accurately. The infusion of new readers was an invaluable lifeline to an industry mortally wounded by the anti-comics crusade of the forties and fifties. Silver Age comics demonstrate a synthesis of educators' concerns with targeted marketing at older readers who required less supervision, all of which resulted in increased sales and unprecedented influence. Teachers' desire to see more sophisticated art,

⁴ Stern, "Marvel Comics Are for Real."

better grammar and vocabulary, characters who were respectful of authority figures, and more thoughtful depictions of gender and race, were the key aspects of the Code that publishers used to redefine the genre.

Generally, the Silver Age is defined as the years immediately following the 1954 ratification of the CCA through 1971, when the Code was updated for the first time. The Silver Age was characterized by a close adherence to the guidelines set by the Comics Code Authority. The industry was in recovery after years of attacks for its violent and sexualized content. Publishers quickly saw the keys to success involved appeasing anti-comics crusaders—primarily educators, who were the gatekeepers for children’s reading. The era gave rise to many of the most recognizable facets and tropes that have been associated with comics: squeaky-clean teen protagonists; science fiction-inspired *dei ex machinis*; and patriotic heroes consumed with defeating Cold War villains. Two publishers exerted considerable influence over the superhero genre: Marvel, which drove innovation in the industry, and DC, which maintained a larger market share. They addressed educators’ concerns through plot points, characterization, and extra-narrative means, like editorial footnotes, advertisements taken out by publishers, and the breaking of the “fourth wall,” all of which pushed the boundaries of the form itself. These permitted comic books to grow in popularity among older readers, to operate with the support of teachers who recognized the educative possibilities of the form for preadolescents, and to be recognized for having satisfactorily improved in quality from its meretricious immediate past. Other companies found success with non-superhero comics—notably those with *Archie*, Disney, or Warner Bros. cartoon characters—but Marvel and DC’s influence over superhero comics was so outsized during the period studied that they receive exclusive attention in this chapter. The

emergence of Marvel Comics, in particular, as an industry leader heralded a new period in the evolution of the comic book—so much so that the period sometimes is called “The Marvel Age.”

In order to probe the impact of educators’ influence on Silver Age comics, I conduct textual analyses on five series that typify how comic creators adjusted to meet their concerns. First, efforts to be balanced and progressive in discussing race and gender are examined through *Fantastic Four* (November 1961). The second textual analysis examines the ways that science and social studies shaped the worldview of *Iron Man* (March 1963) and attracted a more mature readership. Third, I explore how technology and science fiction factored into plotlines of *Doom Patrol* (June 1963). Fourth, with *Doctor Strange* (July 1963), I consider efforts to present more refined art. And finally, I analyze the deportment and good citizenship among youths depicted in *Teen Titans* (July 1964). In addition, other comics from major publishers are discussed for context and comparison.

5.2 Silver Age Comics Textual Analyses

In the years prior to the Comics Code Authority, many educators took exception to the values and behaviors portrayed in comics and how characters’ deeds were depicted graphically and textually. With the implementation of the Code, these elements abated as comics synthesized the qualities for which educators had advocated. There was a fundamental desire for comics to discourage misbehavior, whereas they had been thought to encourage it in the recent past. Additionally, Silver Age comics, like other postwar art, were not spared from the influences of individual and cultural insecurities, and Cold War and nuclear anxieties.⁵ These

⁵ William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

showed up differently based on the audience, but they were consistent features of the era. These forces worked in tandem with the influence of educators to shape the content of comics and the direction of the industry.

A. Textual Analysis #1: *Fantastic Four*

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby broke ground in late 1961 with *Fantastic Four*. A deliberate attempt to present a superhero team that functioned like an actual family with real interpersonal challenges, Marvel Comics sought to put forth a new kind of hero—one distinct from Superman, Wonder Woman, and other DC Comics' faultless paragons—whose foibles and insecurities were as much on display as their skills and virtues.⁶ This setup allowed *Fantastic Four* to address social issues much more directly than its contemporaries.

The very first issue cemented identity and social difference at the center of the team's dynamic. During a scientific mission into space, exposure to cosmic rays mutated the quartet: the muscles of Reed Richards (Mister Fantastic) became endlessly elastic; Sue Storm (Invisible Girl) developed the ability to manipulate wavelengths of light, thereby making objects unseeable; Johnny Storm (Human Torch) gained the power to control fire; and Ben Grimm (The Thing) was transfigured into a giant rocklike creature with unlimited superstrength. The Fantastic Four's acts of heroism gain the team fame, and Reed, Sue, and Johnny live as celebrity superheroes; Ben, a working-class Jewish pilot, becomes more of an outcast after being superpowered made him into a literal monster.

Black Panther was introduced in *Fantastic Four* #52 in July 1966. His creation predated the founding of the political party of the same name by nearly four months, though it followed

⁶ Stan Lee, *Origins of Marvel Comics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974).

the use of the black panther in the Lowndes County Freedom Organization's 1964 logo.⁷ The first Black costumed superhero, Marvel planned his rollout carefully. They were very aware of the political sensitivities of the moment and made decisions accordingly. Unused cover art showed Black Panther's actual face (rather than one covered by a mask) and revealed his race. This ultimately was decided against, allowing for a dramatic reveal within the story that challenged the expectations of the readers and characters alike.⁸

Black Panther smashed stereotypes, as T'Challa was the prince of a fictional nation known as Wakanda, the wealthiest man in the world, and a super-genius.⁹ T'Challa had an interest in international affairs, but also was compared to Hugh Hefner, considering the lavishness of his lifestyle. The Wakandan aesthetic was a mélange of technology, primitivism, and capitalistic decadence.¹⁰ In the scene that introduced the nation, there were references to Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, exotic mammals, and futurist technologies and architecture, all against a backdrop of leopard-printed sofas and green bankers' lamps.¹¹ Colonialism was the true villain of *Black Panther*, well timed with the liberation of struggles of West, Central, and Southern Africa and the Caribbean, as well as the Civil Rights Movement. Further driving the plot was the invaluable natural resource, Vibranium, available exclusively in Wakanda, and sought after to make powerful weapons.¹²

⁷ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi: Protest Politics and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1960-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2013), xv.

⁸ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52 (July 1966).

⁹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52.

¹⁰ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52.

¹¹ Stan Lee. *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 54 (September 1966).

¹² Stan Lee. *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 53 (August 1966).

There was massive symbolic significance in showing an underrepresented Black character as having created the Marvel Universe's most sophisticated technology. One character even underscored the irony of the situation by stating, "The jungle looks so primitive... so undeveloped! Are you sure we have reached Wakanda territory?"¹³ The relationship between the white humans of *Fantastic Four*, the Black Wakandans, and the human mutants known as the Inhumans, accorded Marvel's writers multiple avenues through which to explore racial relations.

In issue #21 of *Fantastic Four*, their super-spy ally, Nick Fury, took on racism. In that issue, there were no Black characters, which allowed the editors to address the issue without indicting the bulk of its readership directly. In a hooded costume and surrounded by burning crosses, a new villain, The Hate Monger was depicted on the cover as an obvious Ku Klux Klan proxy. Nearly 20 years after the end of World War II, Hitler still was terrorizing comic book plots when he was shown to be the alter ego of Hate Monger, reinforcing the impermanence of identity that loomed so large in Silver Age comics. It is noteworthy that supervillains of color were nonexistent at this juncture. Black and Latinx antagonists tended to be organized criminals or mere street thugs.¹⁴

An effort at inclusion, Wyatt Wingfoot, a Native American friend of Johnny, was integrated into *Fantastic Four* in May 1966, beginning in issue #53.¹⁵ Wyatt regularly was essentialized. "But, Wyatt Wingfoot, with the blood of Comanche warriors flowing through his veins... with the eye of an eagle... the spirit of a lion... Wyatt Wingfoot does not miss!"¹⁶ In

¹³ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52.

¹⁴ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 21 (December 1963).

¹⁵ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 53.

¹⁶ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 54.

that his portrayal was much less progressive than that of Black Panther, Wyatt more closely resembled other contemporary characters of color. Within the story, Johnny Storm and Wyatt drew uncomfortably frequent comparisons to the Long Ranger and Tonto, simply because of their races and perceptions about the existing power gradient between them.¹⁷

On balance, African and Native American tribal groups were represented as primitives. In *Fantastic Four* #9, the Brown savages are shown needing the leadership of the white heroes to organize themselves.¹⁸ Like other comics, racial issues sometimes were discussed obliquely. Silver Surfer, a contemplative alien refugee who was traversing the universe alone, first appeared in *Fantastic Four* #48.¹⁹ He lacked a real place in his own society, which inspired him to resettle on earth.²⁰ Another fictionalized minority race, the Inhumans, were celebrated, exoticized, and feared by their alien creators and normal humans alike.²¹

DC creatives worked hard to avoid reinforcing racial and gender stereotypes, but were less successful than Marvel's editorial staff. The only sign of African civilization in the DC Universe was the Central African metropolis, Gorilla City, inhabited by literal simians that gained intelligence through scientific experimentation.²² These intelligent apes were led by the genius gorilla named Grodd, who sought to use an "evolution-accelerator" to allow animals to take over the world. Given the anticolonial revolutions actually happening in the region, the

¹⁷ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 54.

¹⁸ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 9 (December 1962).

¹⁹ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 48 (March 1966); Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 54.

²⁰ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 57 (December 1966).

²¹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 57.

²² Robert Kanigher, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 13 (March 1958).

comparisons were racially insensitive. The attempt at parable was naïve at best.²³ In 1960, Green Lantern was given a sidekick, Thomas “Pieface” Kalmaku, an Inuit aerospace engineer. Though his name was problematic, Pieface’s depiction was progressive for the time, and writers managed to skirt the most noxious stereotypes. However, the high-quality artwork that was hailed elsewhere did not always extend to the visual representation of people of color. The colors were not mixed well enough to represent realistic diverse skin tones.²⁴

Sue was a core member of the Fantastic Four, yet she was essentialized to her gender. Her primary function in the story was being the female member of the team. She was, in turns, wife, mother, nurturer, damsel-in-distress, and object of desire for a host of different male characters.²⁵ While the rest of the Fantastic Four would spend their free time training in the gym or laboratory, Sue was depicted getting tea and otherwise conducting herself more like a society lady than a superhero. Even Sue’s superpowers were passive: her invisibility was used to hide and her forcefields served as shields.²⁶ Like other members of the team, Sue received a full-page pinup at the end of the tenth issue. However, hers was fundamentally different from those of her male counterparts, whose posters showcased chemical compounds and technical specifications. The focus was on her looks, and the only text read: “Love and kisses to my wonderful fans.”²⁷

Stan Lee took a unique track to engage older readers. *Fantastic Four* represented an effort at rendering a more sophisticated matrix of relationships between teammates. The group

²³ John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 108 (September 1959).

²⁴ John Broome, *Green Lantern*, vol. 2, no. 2 (October 1960).

²⁵ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1962); Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 3 (March 1962).

²⁶ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 8 (November 1962).

²⁷ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 10 (January 1963).

was meant to evoke a familial structure, with Reed and Sue as the parents and Johnny and Ben as their comically feuding children.²⁸ Additionally, Silver Age comics embraced metanarrative possibilities to promote their aims. In *Fantastic Four* #5, Johnny was depicted reading an *Incredible Hulk* comic, for instance.²⁹ Lee also employed direct address quite a bit in *Fantastic Four* scripts, where the action of the story was narrated, interrupted, and commented upon by an unseen figure; this was advertised to readers as the voice of Stan Lee himself; Kirby actually drew Lee into a scene in issue #10 of *Fantastic Four*.³⁰ Marvel editors also found ways to assert the quality of their own product in their footnotes; by 1964, the publisher was celebrating the “Marvel Age of Comics” in the pages of its own series.³¹ In *Fantastic Four* #4, a footer on page 37 advertised, “You’ve never seen anyone like the Hulk.”³² Comics regularly ran ads for the publisher’s other comics, but this use of storytelling space for promotion and branding of something unrelated to the script was new. Sometimes, the structure of the story was explained for the sake of younger or less sophisticated readers.³³

Fantastic Four creators employed a range of tactics to attract more mature readers. First, Golden Age characters, including Captain America, Namor, and Nick Fury, were reconceived to fit into Silver Age narrative constructs. Key elements of Captain America’s anticommunist characterization were highlighted. Nick Fury was modernized from a rowdy G. I. into a

²⁸ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 1.

²⁹ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 5 (July 1962).

³⁰ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 10.

³¹ Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 118 (March 1964); Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52.

³² Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 4 (May 1962).

³³ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 1.

sophisticated international spy. Namor also received a new origin story that was rooted in genetics rather than fantasy.³⁴ Second, *Fantastic Four* had elements of verité that were absent from other Silver Age comics, especially published by DC, which favored fictionalized locations, government offices, and political figures.³⁵ Facets of New York City life were integrated into the storylines. These included locations, public figures, and the ways characters spoke. Third, *Fantastic Four* artists treated readers to detailed schematics of the team's vehicles.³⁶ And fourth, writers made many nods to youth culture. Johnny was a true teenager, in terms of his interests and activities.³⁷ The campus setting also influenced the plot and students accounted for much of the supporting cast.³⁸

The influence of science fiction could be felt throughout *Fantastic Four*. It shaped characterization: Ben struggled with the loss of his external humanity. Despite being made entirely of rock, his heart and emotions were his most salient characteristics.³⁹ Doctor Doom, their frequent foe, blended the mad scientist and wicked sorcerer tropes.⁴⁰ Antiscientific thinking was used to demonstrate depravity.⁴¹ Science fiction also was present in the artwork. The creators gave *Fantastic Four* a futuristic feel through its astronaut-inspired costumes and

³⁴ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 9.

³⁵ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 4.

³⁶ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 59 (February 1967).

³⁷ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 3.

³⁸ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 51 (June 1966).

³⁹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 2.

⁴⁰ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 5.

⁴¹ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 6 (September 1962).

flying vehicle, the Fantasti-Car.⁴² The costume of Mole Man, one of the team's earliest villains, evoked 3D glasses and the B-movies so closely associated with them.⁴³ It appeared in storylines. Editors also gave a detailed explanation of the science behind Johnny's Human Torch abilities. This was done in a pinup poster. A second one in the following issue explained his flight powers.⁴⁴ Real attempts were made to infuse accurate scientific explanations into the story. Characters saw science as a means of addressing geopolitical threats.⁴⁵ And aliens and shapeshifters were among the ranks of the team's rogues' gallery.⁴⁶

Again, the way language was deployed indicated that the intended audience was older adolescents or even young adults.⁴⁷ The Thing's socioeconomic class was manifest in the way he spoke. His vocabulary, grammar, and syntax were different from his teammates, who either were well-educated or otherwise of means.⁴⁸ The language of Doctor Doom evoked that of Shakespeare.⁴⁹ Lee and Kirby used color in the thought bubbles and text boxes to highlight language for specific effects.⁵⁰ The lettering was especially clear and neat, useful for telling elaborate stories.⁵¹

⁴² Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁴³ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁴⁴ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 8; Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 9.

⁴⁵ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52.

⁴⁶ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 2.

⁴⁷ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52; Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 54.

⁴⁸ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 1.

⁴⁹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 5.

⁵⁰ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52.

⁵¹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 2.

B. Textual Analysis #2: *Iron Man*

Iron Man debuted in March 1963, the brainchild of writers Stan Lee and Larry Lieber and artists Jack Kirby and Don Heck, in the anthology series *Tales of Suspense*. Iron Man's alter ego, Tony Stark, was a brilliant scientist-cum-war profiteer who developed a mechanized suit of armor that supported the functioning of his weak heart while according him superstrength, flight, and military-grade weapons. Lee's storylines showcased Iron Man's commitment to fighting Communism alongside Stark's capitalist priorities.

Iron Man's entire early story was designed to reflect the character and integrity of the eponymous hero.⁵² This was necessary because Tony Stark did not have the type of personal life or career ambitions that typically bred wholesome heroes. Stark was not a military genius, but rather, "just a scientist who realized that the boundaries of science are infinite."⁵³ He also was "one of the wealthiest men in the world... one of the most glamorous bachelors of all time! A man with the world at his feet... and a tragic secret he can never share which haunts his soul."⁵⁴ That capitalistic philosophy added nuance to Iron Man's crimefighting motivations and limitations. His was a style of hero that was not modeled on Superman; he was decidedly a creature of the postwar economic boom.⁵⁵ A foe even labeled him, "The Price of Democracy."⁵⁶

⁵² Stan Lee and Larry Lieber, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 49 (January 1964).

⁵³ Stan Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 63 (March 1965).

⁵⁴ Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 63.

⁵⁵ Stan Lee, and Robert Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 40 (April 1963).

⁵⁶ Stan Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 47 (November 1963).

The epitome of cool, Iron Man was a celebrity superhero who quickly became disinterested in his Iron Man persona being a secret.⁵⁷ Like other Marvel heroes, including Spider-Man and the Hulk, Stark struggled with the high expectations inherent in being a superhero.⁵⁸ The narrative freely explored his challenges balancing a life where he was equal parts dazzling intellect, flashy Lothario, and selfless hero.⁵⁹

A fealty to capitalism drove his anticommunist derring-do.⁶⁰ This was observable in the constant innovation relative to his gear and iron suits, which came directly from the research-and-development unit of Stark Industries, a fictionalized version of the Lockheed Martin Corporation.⁶¹ Stark's ingenuity was harnessed by the US government, which affirmatively acknowledged both his heroism and entrepreneurial spirit.⁶² He dealt with atomic age anxieties, fighting aliens bent on brainwashing humanity at one point and robots masquerading as humans at another.⁶³ Iron Man's portfolio extended beyond crimefighting as he endeavored to solve more realistic problems, like the outbreak of war or dangerous pandemics.⁶⁴ He was a vocal advocate for research and used his largesse to fund it.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 40; Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 41 (May 1963).

⁵⁸ Stan Lee and Al Hartley, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 68 (August 1965).

⁵⁹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 53.

⁶⁰ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 41.

⁶¹ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 41.

⁶² Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 45 (September 1963).

⁶³ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 40.

⁶⁴ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 41.

⁶⁵ Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 46 (October 1963).

Communism remained an ever-present danger during the early years of the comic, and suddenly, Indochina became a regular site of action.⁶⁶ The threat of double agents was set in motion by fears of a Red invasion.⁶⁷ That political element was seen in communist-inspired enemies, like the Mandarin, Red Barbarian, Crimson Dynamo, and a revived Golden Age superpowered Nazi, the Red Skull.⁶⁸ *Iron Man* plotlines put the technological aspects of the Cold War in the spotlight.⁶⁹ Marvel's Hydra, a secret organization that opposed the US and other democratic governments, was intended as a stand-in for the Schutzstaffel.⁷⁰ Hydra also served in the role of Ku Klux Klan in other stories.⁷¹

After sustaining life-threatening injuries in a battle with Wong-Chu, an adversary based in Indochina, Iron Man had to undergo a procedure to keep his heart functional. In a sense, he became one with technology.⁷² What separated him from cyborg-supervillains was his commitment to use technological innovation buttressed by capitalist values to benefit American society. "Nor does scientist Anthony Stark neglect America's Cold War struggle against the communist menace!" the narration read in issue #40 of *Tales of Suspense*.⁷³

⁶⁶ Stan Lee and Larry Lieber, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 39 (March 1963); Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 40.

⁶⁷ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 46; Dunne, *A Cold War State of Mind*.

⁶⁸ Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 42 (June 1963); Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 46.

⁶⁹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 52.

⁷⁰ Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 135 (August 1965).

⁷¹ Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 137 (October 1965).

⁷² Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 40.

⁷³ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 40.

There was consistency in depicting heroes and villains as studious.⁷⁴ Lacking actual superpowers, Iron Man defeated villains by outsmarting them with the aid of superior knowledge of science.⁷⁵ Even beyond human enemies, it was the triumph of science over nature when Iron Man defeated Gargantus, a giant prehistoric insect.⁷⁶ The continuous technological upgrades to his suit were not mere costume changes, but instead evidence of ways that the scientific method of observation and experimentation were advancing Stark's skills as a superhero.⁷⁷ Androids were frequent antagonists of Iron Man, magic versus science was a recurring theme, and espionage played a major role in *Iron Man* story arcs.⁷⁸ The inner-turmoil and innovations of Iron Man's enemies were on display in a manner heretofore unseen in comics.⁷⁹ The writers of *Iron Man* went into great detail reflecting how psychology shaped villainy.

Characters of Asian descent were othered and generally functioned as villains. Memories of the Korean War and Pearl Harbor were still fresh, and prejudices were exploited easily for these sorts of heinous characterizations and treacherous plotlines.⁸⁰ They had essentialized code names, like Sumo and the Mandarin. The latter was even drawn to resemble Sir Christopher Lee's yellowface performances in the *Fu Manchu* film series.⁸¹ Asian mysticism became

⁷⁴ Stan Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 62 (February 1965).

⁷⁵ Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 45 (September 1963).

⁷⁶ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 40.

⁷⁷ Stan Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 48 (December 1963).

⁷⁸ Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 135 (August 1965); Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 43 (July 1963).

⁷⁹ Lee and Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 41.

⁸⁰ Stan Lee and Larry Lieber, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 50 (February 1964).

⁸¹ Stan Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 61 (January 1965); Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 62.

another frequently employed plot device. The inherent orientalism worked at cross-purposes with the CCA's efforts to make comics more racially sensitive.⁸² These portrayals were perhaps slightly less virulent than they had been during the Golden Age, when Asian characters regularly were drawn as subhuman monsters, they evinced the depth of xenophobia and racism in the American consciousness.

In *Iron Man*, adult female superheroes still had preoccupations with stereotypically girlish concerns, such as clothes, crushes, and coiffures.⁸³ Regarding his close ally, Natasha Romanov, the Black Widow, male characters commented constantly on her good looks, but not her other attributes, which were more germane to her superhero function.⁸⁴ "But, cunning and ruthless though she may be, Madame Natasha is a woman, as Iron Man has said... And, as such, she loves pretty things! So..."⁸⁵ She and 007 had exactly the same profession and reputation for effectiveness, but the descriptive language about her makes her appear less serious, merely because of her gender. The same issue also included a cheesecake-style pinup of Tony Stark's secretary Pepper Potts, which somehow made it past CCA evaluators.⁸⁶

Set in a world of science, militarism, technical innovation, and war profiteering, *Tales of Suspense* was more mature in terms of narrative content, art, and vocabulary, which was noticeably elevated relative to Golden Age comics.⁸⁷ Only supporting characters used slang.⁸⁸

⁸² Stan Lee and Larry Lieber, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 39 (March 1963).

⁸³ Stan Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 58 (October 1964).

⁸⁴ Stan Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 57 (September 1964).

⁸⁵ Stan Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 53 (August 1966).

⁸⁶ Stan Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 55 (July 1964).

⁸⁷ Lee and Lieber, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 39.

⁸⁸ Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 45 (September 1963).

Iron Man, which privileged scientific details over interpersonal relationships—at least initially—was a very different series from *Fantastic Four*.⁸⁹ The creators understood the popularity of Iron Man’s equipment and catered to their audience’s interest. In an insert in *Tales of Suspense* #55, they included a guide called “More Info about Iron Man,” where they provided technical specifications of Iron Man’s gear, resources, and relationships in response to readers’ questions.⁹⁰ Marvel quickly saw the narrative and financial benefits of characters crossing over into one another’s storylines. Early on, the X-Men fought Iron Man after exposure to radiation made one of their members evil.⁹¹

The very existence of *Iron Man*’s glamorous, Ian Flemingesque setting of well-dressed spies, technologically advanced weapons, and geopolitical intrigue evinces that publishers knew that there were adult readers.⁹² Marvel exploited the opportunity to develop its most mature tone yet as it catered to the large numbers of college student readers. Stan Lee toured U.S. colleges and lectured to large numbers of excited students.⁹³

C. Textual Analysis #3: *Doom Patrol*

Writers Arnold Drake and Bob Haney and artist Bruno Premiani created *Doom Patrol* in 1963. Initially published in the anthology series *My Greatest Adventure*, *Doom Patrol* followed the exploits of a mysterious scientist, Doctor Niles Caulder, and his three colleagues, Robotman,

⁸⁹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 4.

⁹⁰ Lee, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 55.

⁹¹ Stan Lee and Larry Lieber, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 49 (January 1964).

⁹² Lee and Lieber, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 39.

⁹³ Lee and Lieber, *Tales of Suspense*, vol. 1, no. 39.

Elasti-Girl, and Negative Man. Doctor Caulder had saved each of their lives through fantastical experimental procedures, granting each of them unique but grotesque superpowers: Cliff Steele became Robotman after a car accident destroyed his body and his brain was implanted into a powerful mechanized one; Rita Farr, a one-time Hollywood actress, became Elasti-Girl after volcanic emissions granted her shapeshifting abilities; and Larry Trainor adopted the code name Negative Man after he gained the ability to render himself intangible after exposure to radiation. Each member of the Doom Patrol wrestled with deep ambivalence about these new abilities that both had saved and devastated their lives.

Doom Patrol captured both the satirical and fantastical elements of science fiction. Teen culture was parodied in *Doom Patrol* through conceits like an anthropomorphized jukebox attacking the team.⁹⁴ *Doom Patrol* also embraced wholeheartedly the pablum. Its lead characters, for instance, were the kind who were excited by “an electron microscope... an automatic centrifuge... and an X-ray machine.”⁹⁵ The rapid societal changes to gender and racial roles and the United States’ international reputation manifested as regular musings on the mutability of identity.⁹⁶ A ridiculous example of this was the introduction of the Animal-Vegetable-Mineral Menace, who had metamorphic abilities.⁹⁷ Another character who represented this volatility was Madame Rouge, who experienced a car accident that caused a split personality, which, in turn, led to a botched surgery that gave her nigh-unlimited elasticity in her limbs. The theme recurred frequently, even across publishers, although always as

⁹⁴ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 96 (June 1965).

⁹⁵ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 88 (June 1964).

⁹⁶ Fawaz, *The New Mutants*, 20.

⁹⁷ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 95 (May 1965).

absurdly.⁹⁸ For instance, in Marvel's *Fantastic Four*, villain Puppet Master and his ability to control the bodies of others while their conscious minds were trapped inside embodies this concern.⁹⁹

Appearances by zombies and giant killer animals revealed the influence of B-movies.¹⁰⁰ Aliens were another major trope of the era. Whether friend or foe, the alien typically was used as a tool to get readers to think about social difference—especially race—or to present some cautionary tale about the dangers of technological excess.¹⁰¹ Time travel became a frequently employed plot device that proved popular with audiences and allowed writers to capitalize on the public's interest in technological innovation from the distant future.¹⁰² Even without being the precise root of their superpowers, atomic energy's ability to transmogrify gave it a presence in this science-infused title.¹⁰³ When the Doom Patrol made a guest appearance in *Teen Titans*, which did not share its B-movie orientation, the writing team kept its science fiction elements intact.¹⁰⁴

It was common for comic book creators to wrestle with the post-traumatic stress felt by Americans after World War II and the Korean War.¹⁰⁵ *Doom Patrol* consistently captured the era's angst; stories like "The Night Negative Man Went Berserk," which features both a

⁹⁸ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 93 (February 1965).

⁹⁹ Lee, *Fantastic Four*, vol. 1, no. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 102 (March 1966).

¹⁰¹ Arnold Drake, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 82 (September 1963).

¹⁰² Robert Bernstein, *Superboy*, vol. 1, no. 89 (June 1961).

¹⁰³ Arnold Drake and Bob Haney, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 80 (June 1963).

¹⁰⁴ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 5 (October 1966).

¹⁰⁵ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 89 (August 1964).

disturbed citizen threatening a city full of innocents and a Doom Patrol member losing control of his superpowers due to powerful radio waves, reinforced the uncertainty so many readers were feeling.¹⁰⁶ The plotlines of *The Doom Patrol* were noticeably more mature than those of Golden Age comics. Conspiracy theories, international finance, and political intrigue informed the crimes of the team sought to solve.¹⁰⁷

Burgeoning areas of science were explored in comics with in-story uses and history. These included relativity (time travel), string theory (the multiverse), and quantum mechanics (interdimensional travel).¹⁰⁸ *Doom Patrol* also integrated new technologies, like magnetic resonance imagery (MRI), in its plots.¹⁰⁹ The front cover of *Doom Patrol* #94 even advertised a “schematic diagram” of Robotman’s inner gears. Another effort to retain readers intellectually occurred in *Doom Patrol*, with an in-panel entreaty to readers to solve the same cryptogram that had driven the story’s action.¹¹⁰ The scientific orientation was evident at both the in-story and reader engagement levels.¹¹¹ The action occurred in places like laboratories, university campuses, and the American Museum of Natural History.¹¹² Silver Age comics portrayed the weaponization of the creation of new knowledge.¹¹³ In fact, *Doom Patrol* was predicated on the

¹⁰⁶ Drake, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 82; Arnold Drake, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 83 (November 1963).

¹⁰⁷ Drake, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 82.

¹⁰⁸ Arnold Drake and Bob Haney, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 81 (August 1963).

¹⁰⁹ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 98 (September 1965).

¹¹⁰ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 94 (March 1965).

¹¹¹ Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 94.

¹¹² Arnold Drake, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 84 (December 1963).

¹¹³ Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 98.

notion that science—if left unchecked—somehow would disrupt the natural order; the blurring of the lines between technology and humanity threatened to rend civilization.¹¹⁴ Given the origin stories of *Doom Patrol*'s central characters, the ethical dilemma of creating life artificially was a recurrent theme.¹¹⁵ Radiation's awesome and mysterious long-term effects received a similar treatment.¹¹⁶ Organ transplants and gender confirmation surgery became more commonplace in the 1950s. The idea of the human body's mutability inspired the origins of numerous superheroes and villains.¹¹⁷ Similarly, the threat of completely losing one's humanity and actually becoming a robot, cyborg, or automaton was addressed regularly.¹¹⁸

The unpredictability of science meant that super-geniuses bent on world conquest littered the pages of Silver Age superhero comics. One such *Doom Patrol* villain was known simply as The Brain.¹¹⁹ A mad genius' attack on the Statue of Liberty was a pictorial representation of foreign—and heavily implied Communist—science toppling the American Empire. Relatedly, in *Captain American*, Armin Zola became a literal computer entirely focused on assassinating superheroes. Brainiac, alien-created artificial intelligence in a powerful android body, terrorized the earth with strength that rivaled that of Superman. And in *Tales of Suspense*, super-computer MODOC (an acronym for Mental Organism Designed Only for Computing) becomes sentient,

¹¹⁴ Drake and Haney, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 80.

¹¹⁵ Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 89.

¹¹⁶ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 87 (May 1964).

¹¹⁷ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 86 (March 1964).

¹¹⁸ Drake and Haney, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 81.

¹¹⁹ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 86. New York: DC Comics, March 1964.

rebrands himself MODOK (Mental Organism Designed Only for Killing), and murders his creator.

Beast Boy, whose abilities were the result of genetic experimentation, was introduced to add a teenaged element to *Doom Patrol*.¹²⁰ He was affectionately labeled “that teen tornado, that junior juggernaut, that rotten kid.”¹²¹ And as with other Silver Age comics, the gender roles in *Doom Patrol* remained rigid. Citing that she could not be a wife and a superhero, Elasti-Girl resigned from Doom Patrol when she married another team member, Mento. Her spouse, however, kept fighting crime.¹²² Silver Age naming conventions tended to underscore the subordinate role of female team members: *Doom Patrol* had Negative Man and Robotman but Elasti-Girl; *X-Men* had Iceman but Marvel Girl; and *Fantastic Four* had Mr. Fantastic but Invisible Girl.

Marvel generally spent considerable time building the metanarrative and engaging with readers (and potential readers) through editors’ notes. In DC Comics, editors’ notes tended to read more like stage directions.¹²³ *Doom Patrol* was a notable exception. DC entered a new level of audience engagement when it announced a write-in campaign about Beast Boy joining the Teen Titans.¹²⁴ Based on the sophistication of the vocabulary and sentence structure, the

¹²⁰ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 100 (December 1965).

¹²¹ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 99 (November 1965); Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 102 (March 1966).

¹²² Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 104 (June 1966).

¹²³ Arnold Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 96 (June 1965).

¹²⁴ Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 99.

audience of *Doom Patrol* was at the more mature end of the spectrum.¹²⁵ The text-to-image ratio was high, and the storylines had an international quality.¹²⁶

Doom Patrol delivered the sort of weird, grotesque visuals and storytelling that adolescents loved, but without venturing beyond the boundaries of good taste mandated by the CCA. Some of the more outré villains included Gargaux the Master of the Plastic Men, a very obese and technologically advanced alien, and the Green-Headed League, a trio of extraterrestrials who weaponized politics, money, and science.¹²⁷ The creators of *Doom Patrol* experimented with the shape and layout of panels, in order to emphasize certain themes, ideas, or plot points. Artist Steve Ditko proved especially adept at this, equally evinced in his contemporaneous work on *Doctor Strange*, *The Spirit* and *The Question*.¹²⁸ Viewing *Doom Patrol* relative to Golden Age comics, the art had improved in substantive ways. Simple techniques, such as perspective in the backgrounds, were executed with greater precision. While colorists still used the four-color process, or CMYK model, well into the Silver Age, they became more practiced at color saturation and intentional about the narrative dictating color choices.¹²⁹

D. Textual Analysis #4: *Doctor Strange*

In 1963, Steve Ditko created Doctor Stephen Strange, and his collaborator, writer-editor Stan Lee, with whom he worked on *Amazing Spider-Man*, enhanced the character by bringing in

¹²⁵ Arnold Drake, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 83 (November 1963).

¹²⁶ Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 96.

¹²⁷ Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 89.

¹²⁸ Drake and Haney, *My Greatest Adventure*, vol. 1, no. 80.

¹²⁹ Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 94.

inspiration from '30s and '40s radio shows and newspaper strips like *Chandu the Magician* and *Mandrake the Magnificent*.¹³⁰ Deeply rooted in Western notions of oriental mysticism, *Doctor Strange* recounts the heroics of Stephen Strange, a brilliant surgeon who resorts to sorcery after a car accident destroys his ability to practice medicine.

At Marvel Comics, a character's personal traits and super-abilities influenced the stylization and artistic choices.¹³¹ The look of *Doctor Strange* was a major selling point for the comic. Marvel promoted individual artists for their style, in an era when most publishers did not even mention their names, and Ditko's liberal use of psychedelia to convey the use of magic was admired by audiences and practitioners alike.¹³² Obvious visual references to the work of San Francisco rock poster artists like Bonnie MacLean, Victor Moscoso, and Rick Griffin linked *Doctor Strange* to a countercultural movement that embraced satirical weirdness. Correspondingly, *Doctor Strange* storylines ran the gamut, from "Meet the Beatles" to a battle with a villain called Abestos Man.¹³³ The unique aesthetic allowed the familiar tropes about wizards and dark magic to feel contemporary. The artists experimented quite a bit with layouts and colors, in an effort to push the boundaries of visual storytelling.¹³⁴ Indeed, the comic had a unique look, and the stylized art gave these stories a distinct visual identity within the Marvel Universe.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Chris Galaver, "The Imperial Superhero," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 47, no. 1 (January 2014): 108-111.

¹³¹ Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 119 (April 1964).

¹³² Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 122 (July 1964).

¹³³ Stan Lee et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 110 (July 1963); Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 130 (March 1965).

¹³⁴ Stan Lee et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 117 (February 1964).

¹³⁵ Lee et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 117.

Doctor Strange was driven to sorcery by what was described as a “tortured” soul. Black magic was exotic, mysterious, and dangerous, but not necessarily bad.¹³⁶ Defining the postwar American identity sent comic book writers on the same exploration of foreign mysticism and kitschy orientalist fads that were popular elsewhere.¹³⁷ Ditko’s style created an effective visual lexicon to communicate Doctor Strange’s exploration of the foreign and the taboo. Doctor Strange and his ilk were white men whose connections to the occult all were expressed through a Sinophile aesthetic. Because the dramatis personae lacked diversity, the sorcery read as appropriated, local, and fetishistic.¹³⁸ Further, despite the non-Western origins of his magic, Doctor Strange still displayed antipathy towards indigenous people. Essentialization abounded.¹³⁹ *Doctor Strange* was rife with the issues of representation that *Fantastic Four* challenged more effectively.

The writers explored new narrative directions in *Doctor Strange*, driven by the character’s unique superhero abilities. The narrative approach was more metaphysical.¹⁴⁰ Doctor Strange did not use a code name. And he struggled with a different duality, having lost his civilian life as a surgeon before turning to a professional focus on the dark arts.¹⁴¹ With villains like Nightmare, an omniscient, ubiquitous demon who tormented individuals in their sleep, *Doctor Strange* had a more conceptual take on characters than seen before typically, and

¹³⁶ Lee et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 110.

¹³⁷ Drake, *Doom Patrol*, vol. 1, no. 94.

¹³⁸ Ernie Hart et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 111 (August 1963).

¹³⁹ Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 118 (March 1964).

¹⁴⁰ Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 122 (July 1964).

¹⁴¹ Stan Lee et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 115 (December 1963).

this supernatural landscape was represented visually.¹⁴² Many old tropes were abandoned; villains empowered by science and technology simply were not the focus, though Germans continued to be otherized as rogues as postwar anxieties continued well into the 1960s.¹⁴³

Beyond the art, *Doctor Strange* stories were aimed at older readers. The scripts for *Doctor Strange* and *Strange Tales*, the anthology series in which Stephen Strange also starred, featured sophisticated language and grammar, relatively speaking.¹⁴⁴ There was other evidence of a mature readership, specifically the high text-to-image ratio.¹⁴⁵ The pacing also was quite a bit slower than comics written for younger readers. For instance, the writers gradually built tension by not referring by name to Clea, *Doctor Strange*'s leading lady, for the first two years of her appearances.¹⁴⁶

E. Textual Analysis #5: *Teen Titans*

In the summer of 1964, artist Bruno Premiani and writer Bob Haney created *Teen Titans*, a comic book that put the sidekicks of Batman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, and the Flash in the spotlight. The time was opportune for DC Comics to launch a teen-focused series. The high school and college student demographics were active consumers that made *Amazing Spider-Man* a huge hit for Marvel the year before. Premiani and Haney designed the roster as a youth-focused version of *Justice League of America*, a 1960 series that popularized the concept of a

¹⁴² Stan Lee et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 116 (January 1964).

¹⁴³ Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 118.

¹⁴⁴ Lee et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 110.

¹⁴⁵ Lee et al, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 116.

¹⁴⁶ Stan Lee and Dennis O'Neil, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 146 (July 1966).

team of superheroes defending the globe. The members of the Justice League were prototypical “good guys”; the creators of *Teen Titans* followed this template and created a team—Robin, Wonder Girl, Aqualad, and Kid Flash—of all-American, superpowered do-gooders.

DC Comics placed a major emphasis portraying teens as respectful and obedient.¹⁴⁷ The Teen Titans were teen heroes who displayed the utmost integrity.¹⁴⁸ Through their heroism, they earned the respect and trust of adults.¹⁴⁹ In the early years of the series, the Teen Titans were shown to befriend and defend young people everywhere they went.¹⁵⁰ In fact, in their first appearance, the Teen Titans saved all of the youths in a town and encouraged them to appreciate their teachers and parents more.¹⁵¹ In a subsequent issue, the Teen Titans warned Doom Patrol’s Beast Boy of the inherent perils in neglecting to heed the advice of one’s parents.¹⁵² Issues of importance to teens, such as summer jobs and parent-child relationships, propelled storylines as often as threats from supervillains.¹⁵³ *Showcase* #59 even showed the Teen Titans assisting children who were raising money for scholarships for needy students.¹⁵⁴ The writers sought to develop in teens the ability to keep things in perspective.¹⁵⁵ They also endeavored to assist children who were experiencing stressful home lives. They portrayed the Teen Titans as

¹⁴⁷ Bob Haney, *The Brave and the Bold*, vol. 1, no. 54 (July 1964).

¹⁴⁸ John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 114 (August 1960).

¹⁴⁹ Haney, *The Brave and the Bold*, vol. 1, no. 54.

¹⁵⁰ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 10 (August 1967).

¹⁵¹ Haney, *The Brave and the Bold*, vol. 1, no. 54.

¹⁵² Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 6 (December 1966).

¹⁵³ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 11 (October 1967).

¹⁵⁴ Bob Haney, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 59 (December 1965).

¹⁵⁵ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 11.

respected role models who also had the support of regular teenagers.¹⁵⁶ Most fundamentally, their stories were meant to help kids understand and appreciate adults to a greater degree.¹⁵⁷

The Teen Titans were responsible kids at heart, and they also served as mentors to younger superpowered heroes.¹⁵⁸ Even teen villains, including The Ant, were given redemptive story arcs, unlike their adult equivalents, who usually went to the penitentiaries or sanitarium. The Teen Titans showed that their youthful foes merely were misguided and capable of being reformed.¹⁵⁹ Another storyline revolved around the challenges related to an adolescent being named Mayor for a Day.¹⁶⁰ Its message was clear: kids simply should respect adults' greater knowledge and authority.

The group defended the most wholesome aspects of teen culture to authority figures.¹⁶¹ Moreover, *Teen Titans* held a positive, uncritical view of law enforcement, as expected.¹⁶² Beatniks were presented risibly with regards to their anti-establishment views. By design, they were hard to take seriously.¹⁶³ With the exception of occasional references to President Johnson, *Teen Titans* was an apolitical series.¹⁶⁴ Service to the American government and the upholding of the nation's values was another regular feature of *Teen Titans*.¹⁶⁵ The function of the Teen

¹⁵⁶ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 3 (May 1966).

¹⁵⁷ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1966).

¹⁵⁸ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 6.

¹⁵⁹ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 5 (October 1966).

¹⁶⁰ Bob Haney, *The Brave and the Bold*, vol. 1, no. 60 (July 1965).

¹⁶¹ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 9 (June 1967).

¹⁶² John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 114 (August 1960).

¹⁶³ Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 114.

¹⁶⁴ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 11.

¹⁶⁵ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 3 (May 1966).

Titans was likened to that of the Peace Corps, with an international mission to serve the communities in need.¹⁶⁶ One story featured the US government engaging the team to help combat the high school dropout rate. The storyline underscored superheroes' popularity and role model status with adolescents.¹⁶⁷ References to the United Nations were favorable, and the Olympics were described as "the greatest example of international friendships."¹⁶⁸

The Teen Titans worked closely with authority figures, modeling the behaviors mandated by the CCA even when the content focused on youth culture.¹⁶⁹ And the Teen Titans were depicted in-story as popular celebrities who had the opportunity to experience a lot of it.¹⁷⁰ In addition to the regular roster, many other youthful heroes were introduced or recycled in the pages of *Teen Titans*, including the Million-Year-Old Teen-Ager, Aquagirl, and adolescent caveman Gnarrk.¹⁷¹

While the private lives of adult DC Comics superheroes seldom drove storytelling, editors were intentional in showing the Teen Titans doing the same activities as average American teenagers.¹⁷² Places where kids spent their free time and spare dollars served as settings for *Teen Titans*: soda shops, drive-up restaurants, high schools, beach hangouts, camps,

¹⁶⁶ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 1 (February 1966).

¹⁶⁷ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 3.

¹⁶⁸ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1966).

¹⁶⁹ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 4.

¹⁷¹ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 2 (April 1966).

¹⁷² Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 9.

and even reform schools.¹⁷³ Issue titles like “Dig This Crazy Scene” clarified with precision the intended audience; readers also were referred to as “cats” in the narration.¹⁷⁴

Every feature of superhero comics was rendered more playfully in *Teen Titans*. The nicknames were sillier; for example, speedster Kid Flash was called “the Crown Prince of Whiz.”¹⁷⁵ Like actual teens, these characters were depicted as more playful with one another than their adult counterparts.¹⁷⁶ Even the space race was represented through a fun, teen culture lens.¹⁷⁷ Because of its focus, the writers of *Teen Titans* were able to take a few more liberties with slang and countercultural elements.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, protest culture was evoked only lightly. Publishers did not seek to be overtly political at this juncture.¹⁷⁹

Rock and roll references were an important part of the milieu of *Teen Titans*.¹⁸⁰ The British invasion was personified in the villain called The Mad Mod.¹⁸¹ In another story, the team made use of Beatles songs to rescue a group of teens.¹⁸² Like rock music, beach party films like *Beach Blanket Bingo*, *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*, and *Muscle Beach Party*—extremely popular with teens in the early to mid-sixties—were referenced frequently, in addition to serving as

¹⁷³ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 5 (October 1966).

¹⁷⁵ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 12. (November 1967).

¹⁷⁶ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 12.

¹⁷⁸ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 13 (February 1968); Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 15 (June 1968); Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 17 (October 1968).

¹⁷⁹ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 8 (April 1967).

¹⁸⁰ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 23 (October 1969).

¹⁸¹ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 7 (January 1967).

¹⁸² Bob Haney, *The Brave and the Bold*, vol. 1, no. 60 (July 1965).

constant inspiration for the tone, look, and plotlines of *Teen Titans*. A team of teen villains, modeled after the antagonists these movies, was introduced. Called The Flips, they possessed the floppy-haired aesthetic of a rock band.¹⁸³ Dressed in mod fashions, the Flips evoked the Doors' comic book cousins. The superpowers of the Flips could have been lifted from a *Gidget* movie: Joe is able to play the guitar while surfing; Jack drove a gravity-defying motorcycle; and Jill was a baton-twirling acrobat.¹⁸⁴ Drag racing, another teen craze, also made its way into comics.¹⁸⁵ Robin was a motorcycle enthusiast and even rode his own "Bat-Bike."¹⁸⁶ The look of *Teen Titans* also evinced the ethos of youth culture. *Teen Titans* was colored vividly.¹⁸⁷ Nick Candy, a main artist for *Teen Titans*, was also creative with panel shapes and page layouts, though less so than Ditko.¹⁸⁸

Beyond the core members, the Teen Titans quickly became a wide network of teenaged heroes of different ethnicities and countries of origin.¹⁸⁹ The Teen Titans fought against fascism and xenophobia, especially as they affected children.¹⁹⁰ Even still, issue #23 of *Teen Titans* included a storyline with condescending treatment of Amazonian native with nonsense language and portrayal as complete simpletons.¹⁹¹ Haney used "monster-hatred" as an analogue for the

¹⁸³ Bob Haney, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 59 (December 1965).

¹⁸⁴ Haney, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 59.

¹⁸⁵ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 3.

¹⁸⁶ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 10 (August 1967).

¹⁸⁷ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 13.

¹⁸⁸ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 7.

¹⁸⁹ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 8.

¹⁹¹ Bob Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 23 (October 1969).

racial enmity challenged U.S. society in the sixties.¹⁹² This was a well-trod path for comic book creators, who regularly used non-humans as proxies for people of color, in order to make points about prejudice without indicting readers. For instance, in *The Brave and the Bold*, the Martian Manhunter served as a stand-on for all matters of racial diversity on the Justice League. His green skin, unfamiliar customs, progressive values, and candid assessment of American society rendered Martian Manhunter a recognizable embodiment of ethnic differences in the workplace or classroom.¹⁹³

Wonder Girl, who had emigrated from a magical ancient island untouched by technology, was attracted to teen culture as much as anyone else on the team. Her lack of familiarity provided opportunities for characters to explain and affirm aspects of teen culture.¹⁹⁴ Unlike other women in comics, Wonder Girl was never a helpless damsel-in-distress.¹⁹⁵ Even still, the gender roles of the Teen Titans were very traditional.¹⁹⁶ Wonder Girl's nickname became "Wonder Chick," and it was used quite frequently.¹⁹⁷ She also was called "the Pony-tailed Doll from Paradise Island." Her role as "the girl" of the team was clear, based on her interactions with the rest of the group. Her most significant moment of character development came when

¹⁹² Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 2.

¹⁹³ Gardner Fox, *The Brave and the Bold*, vol. 1, no. 28 (March 1960).

¹⁹⁴ Bob Haney, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 59 (December 1965).

¹⁹⁵ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 10.

¹⁹⁶ Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 114.

¹⁹⁷ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 4.

she changed her costume and hairstyle.¹⁹⁸ These tropes hardly were empowering to the young women who read comics.¹⁹⁹

Figure 4. A panel from a 1963 *X-Men* comic, demonstrating the gendered depiction of superheroines.



Source: Lee, Stan. *X-Men*, vol. 1, no. 1. New York: Marvel Comics, September 1963.

The editorial staff established means to communicate ideas directly with its teenaged readership. Numerous topics were covered. They included footnotes with warnings against groupthink.²⁰⁰ The editors also explained the principles of molecular stability and displacement

¹⁹⁸ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 12; Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 23.

¹⁹⁹ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 4.

²⁰⁰ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 9.

in their notes.²⁰¹ Readers were invited—via direct address that broke the fourth wall—to vote for whether Beast Boy should be offered a place on the regular roster of the Teen Titans.²⁰² Another effort to appeal to youthful readers involved creating in-story narration in the voice of “an average teen guy.”²⁰³ Possibly an acknowledgment of a maturing audience, college-going was mentioned first in *Teen Titans* about eighteen months after the team was introduced.²⁰⁴ Perhaps to keep educators appeased, literary references regularly were worked into scripts. The entirety of issue #13 was an interpolation of several Charles Dickens’s plots.

5.3 Conclusions

A chief concern of a broad group of educators was comics’ capacity to encourage misbehavior. Even those who did not accept the causality argument understood that comics did wield some influence over young readers. The graphic violence and gruesome images were panned universally. Accordingly, creators turned their attention to developing characters and storylines that encouraged good citizenship. The key traits of these characters included regular expressions of passionate patriotism, a demonstrated commitment to anticommunism, and a fierce adherence to the Judeo-Christian values that typified mainstream America. Heroes had all-American good looks, and their lives generally had a wholesome quality.²⁰⁵ Globalist values were presented positively.²⁰⁶ The results were exaggeratedly squeaky-clean, heroic role models

²⁰¹ Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 114.

²⁰² Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 6.

²⁰³ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 3.

²⁰⁴ Haney, *Teen Titans*, vol. 1, no. 9.

²⁰⁵ John Broome, *Green Lantern*, vol. 2, no. 9 (December 1961).

²⁰⁶ Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 139 (December 1965).

who could pass muster with teachers, principals, librarians, and parents. And even when portrayed as fallible, these superheroes learned from their mistakes and made efforts to better themselves.

Amazing Spider-Man demonstrated this commitment to citizenship well. The overarching theme was “with great power, there must also come great responsibility.” This was reinforced regularly across the years, and a major aspect of Spider-Man’s characterization was his continued engagement with this lesson. The editors were intentional about imparting this value to its young readers. It was a true mission statement.²⁰⁷ Further, they showed elder superheroes demonstrating American values for younger ones, who themselves were respectful of authority figures.²⁰⁸ One additional takeaway concerns the unique role the news media came to play within storylines. Reporters were overrepresented as main characters in Silver Age comics. In that real-life reporters had worked to eliminate comics previously, creators now sought to curry favor with them by depicting journalism in a positive light.²⁰⁹ Journalists like *Superman*’s Lois Lane, *The Flash*’s Iris West, *Amazing Spider-Man*’s Robbie Robertson, and *Captain America*’s Leila Taylor were shown to be moral and determined crusaders for the public good.

Publishers substantively addressed concerns about the bad grammar and slapdash art of comics’ early years. The changes to the grammar, vocabulary, and artwork supported the new brand of Silver Age hero. The costumes were colored more vividly; the lines were sharper and landscapes and backgrounds were realized more fully.²¹⁰ At Marvel, content dictated visual

²⁰⁷ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Fantasy*, vol. 1, no. 15 (August 1962).

²⁰⁸ John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 111 (March 1960).

²⁰⁹ John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 115 (September 1960).

²¹⁰ Robert Kanigher, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 8 (June 1957); John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 107 (July 1959).

language, which meant that *Doctor Strange* received a more fantastical layout than *Amazing Spider-Man*.²¹¹ That Spider-Man's alter ego, Peter Parker, was drawn to resemble a real teen, rather than another square-jawed Hercules, was a real inducement to high school- and college-aged readers. Some comics, like *Teen Titans* and *Legion of Super-Heroes*, focused on a universe of adolescent characters; others, like *Fantastic Four* and *Avengers*, had adult rosters, but points of interest to youths were ubiquitous.

Concentrating on older readers gave publishers the opportunity to circumvent the level of gatekeeping that associated with children's entertainment. Scripts received more attention; fewer typographical and syntactic errors were seen. The action and adventure that kids always had loved were enhanced by competently written, detailed scripts that reflected real life. In addition, metanarrative conventions were developed in the Silver Age. *Showcase* #4, traditionally considered the beginning of the period, showed Barry Allen, the Silver Age incarnation of Flash, reading a comic about the Golden Age version of the character.²¹² This proved to be an effective means of capturing and sustaining the interest of teenaged readers. Another engagement technique, editors sometimes commented on the quality of their own work, which brought the readers in on the creation process. In *Amazing Spider-Man* #7, the editors' note read: "We admit it! This isn't a typical ending for a typical super-hero tale! But, we've never claimed that Spider-Man was a typical super-hero!"²¹³ In *The Flash*, when Kid Flash used slang, his mentor, Flash, corrects his grammar. Silver Age superheroes had to be role models in every category.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Spider-Man*, vol. 1, no. 5 (October 1963).

²¹² Robert Kanigher, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 4 (October 1956).

²¹³ Stan Lee, *Amazing Spider-Man*, vol. 1, no. 7 (December 1963).

²¹⁴ John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 110 (January 1960).

In non-dialogue sections of text, Kid Flash's slang words were set apart with quotation marks, underscoring that their use was improper.²¹⁵

Writers were able to cover social issues because they intentionally chose to target high schoolers, college-goers, and young adults. Both content and characterization shifted, with less focus on war stories and more on character development. Existential matters, like morality in contemporary America and man's self-destructive inclinations, increasingly became central to Marvel Comics. Cold War disquietude was ever-present, and was manifest as much in characters' actions as it was in their inner monologues.²¹⁶ Arnold T. Blumberg credits Marvel's Stan Lee and Jack Kirby with having created a universe of characters that reflected the values, experiences, and sentiments of young readers.²¹⁷ Marvel characters lived in New York—a real city with real problems—unlike DC characters, who lived in fictional, idealized versions of Middle America. The creators also lived in the New York region, and they drew on their own experiences here.²¹⁸ Relative to writers at competing publishing houses, Lee's stories featured women, LGBTQ, and people of color whose actions were consequential to the story and often were superheroes themselves; characters with more complicated inner monologues; more realistic lives and relationships; and superpowers that were rooted in science. Marvel Comics had heroes who were at once virtuous and relatable. Lee also worked to made overtures of outreach specifically to girls who read comics, as well as create the appearance of an editorial staff that was responsive and accessible to its readers.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 111.

²¹⁶ Genter, "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility."

²¹⁷ Blumberg, "The Night Gwen Stacy Died."

²¹⁸ Stan Lee, *The Avengers*, vol. 1, no. 5 (May 1964).

²¹⁹ Stan Lee and George Mair, *Excelsior!: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* (New York: Touchstone, 2002).

Lee and Kirby integrated psychoanalysis into their storytelling. The nontraditional families they created—including the Fantastic Four, Avengers, and X-Men—reflected changing notions about roles in contemporary households. Lee also committed to adhering to the strictures of the CCA, while using new narrative elements to critique American society. Historian Robert Genter describes the postwar shift from an industrial to a corporatized economy as causing a crisis of identity in the United States, and Lee used series like *The Incredible Hulk* and *Tales to Astonish* to explore those issues.²²⁰ The genre's conservative disposition in the years immediately after the CCA did not keep pace with the radical zeitgeist of the 1960s and socially relevant storytelling soon became the marker of Silver Age comics. The military and its desire to harness the Hulk's super-strength for its own undefined, but likely nefarious reasons, was a major source of tension. It also was unusual for a Silver Age comic to question the government's intention in its pages, but the writers did capture the ambivalence many felt in the postwar years. Hulk's popularity throughout the decade rode the wave of this change.²²¹ The theme of community responsibility, especially as it was articulated in *Amazing Spider-Man*, became popular among socially conscious college students. *Supergirl*, *Tales of Suspense*, *Green Lantern*, and *Green Arrow* added poverty, drug addiction, the consequences of science and technology, and racism to their rogues' galleries. By the start of the next decade, publishers had begun the practice of producing a limited amount of content without CCA approval due to mature content.

²²⁰ Genter, "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility."

²²¹ Stan Lee, *The Incredible Hulk*, vol. 1, no. 5 (January 1963).

Silver Age creators used knowledge in a radically different manner than their predecessors. Science and academe were made central, not only in the storylines but in how they were told. Scientific definitions were footnoted. Concepts likely to be unfamiliar to readers—absolute zero, the earth’s gravitational field, satellite technology, alchemy, or the periodic table—were explicated in footnotes. In the Golden Age, footnotes only were used to refer to something within the continuity and occurring in an earlier issue or other series by the same publisher.²²² The focal point was new technologies based on actual discoveries, but pseudo-science factored heavily into storylines as well. Lee also made it a part of his mandate to rehabilitate the image of scientists in American society, while still reflecting the Atomic Age angst that plagued the nation. While publishers prioritized presenting heroes as trustworthy citizens drove some story elements, a choice to render villains as the embodiment of scientific excess drove others.

Americans carried many anxieties from the post-World War II and Korean War periods. Just behind communism were the loss of educational attainment, shifts in traditional gender roles, brainwashing, and a general decline in American influence.²²³ Writers used these fears as the fundamentals of super-villainy. For instance, Marvel’s X-men not only fought supervillains, they also dealt with many issues facing their readers, including cigarettes, dating, and fitting into society. Nebbish and sort of nondescript, Peter Parker, also of Marvel, spent his time studying science and avoiding his multiple bullies. These quotidian struggles were highly relatable; he had financial and romantic woes that superheroes typically did not. DC Comics’ Batman, Green

²²² Dave Wood, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 12 (February 1958); Robert Kanigher, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 13 (March 1958); John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 107 (July 1959); John Broome, *The Flash*, vol. 1, no. 109 (November 1959).

²²³ Dunne, *A Cold War State of Mind*.

Arrow, Wonder Woman, and Iron Man all were attractive, wealthy, and popular. Peter Parker barely had friends.²²⁴ Consequently, a comic like *Amazing Spider-Man* felt innovative and relevant because it was so honest about the ways that superhero identity caused its eponymous character ambivalence. The added responsibility disrupted his teenage experience; readers found many parallels with their lived experience.²²⁵

Despite the efforts of the CMAA to impel publishers to present more positive depictions of people of color, essentialized representations remained standard during the Silver Age. As argued by Marc Singer, if the nature of comics is one where superheroes' personality traits, backstories, and special abilities are manifest in their physical appearances, then characters of color are especially susceptible to stereotypical depictions.²²⁶ Singer argues that comics like *Black Panther* and *Black Lightning* tokenized racial and ethnic minorities, with the lead characters' stereotyped Blackness shaping every aspect of the storytelling.²²⁷ Whiteness certainly was the standard in 1960s DC Comics series; these characters lived in fictitious cities where they almost never encountered Black people. Even humanoid aliens were usually white-skinned; people of color simply were not seen.²²⁸ *The Legion of Super-Heroes* encapsulated DC's struggle to deal with social difference, with its equating of actual races with fictional alien cultures as a means of claiming diversity.

²²⁴ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Spider-Man*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 1963).

²²⁵ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Spider-Man*, vol. 1, no. 4 (September 1963).

²²⁶ Singer, "Black Skins' and White Masks."

²²⁷ Singer, "Black Skins' and White Masks."

²²⁸ Robert Bernstein, *Action Comics*, vol. 1, no. 252 (May 1959); John Broome, *Green Lantern*, vol. 2, no. 5 (April 1961).

²²⁹ John Broome, *Showcase*, vol. 1, no. 23 (December 1959).

Marvel demonstrated more nuance. In the early issues of *Amazing Spider-Man*, Peter Parker's neat, middle-class suburban life in Queens was uninterrupted by the appearance of people of color. This did change somewhat over time, though.²³⁰ While the Howling Commandos featured a Black, Asian, and gay teammate, Hydra was depicted as an all-white organization.²³¹ With Namor, themes of race, mixed identity, and their relationship to social isolation were explored.²³² There were Blue Atlanteans who stood in for people of color and allowed creators to discuss discrimination without touching any third rails.²³³ Namor was Marvel's first antihero, with a complicated moral code animated by vengeance after centuries of racial mistreatment. This was balanced by the character's own heroic actions, which challenged readers to understand the perspectives of the oppressed. This became a hallmark of other Silver Age Marvel villains, including Killmonger, Magneto, and Maximus the Mad.²³⁴ Generally, it was not until the 1990s that either publisher produced comics that substantively explored formulations of racial identity.²³⁵ And in the 2000s, the cinematic portrayals of Killmonger, Magneto, and Namor delivered these themes much more explicitly, with their experiences of discrimination and inequality due to their underrepresented identities catalyzing their villainy.

The CMAA was only moderately successful at changing how women and girls appeared in comics, even despite the presence of women in leadership and reviewer roles. The one-

²³⁰ Stan Lee, *The Avengers*, vol. 1, no. 8 (September 1964).

²³¹ Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 138 (November 1965).

²³² Stan Lee, *Daredevil*, vol. 1, no. 7 (April 1965).

²³³ Stan Lee, *Tales to Astonish*, vol. 1, no. 71 (September 1965).

²³⁴ Stan Lee, *Tales to Astonish*, vol. 1, no. 74 (December 1965).

²³⁵ Singer, "Black Skins' and White Masks."

dimensionality of women characters continued, and they were still sexualized in tight-fitting and revealing costumes.²³⁶ One such example was Green Lantern's girlfriend, Carol Ferris, who typified the era's conflicted leading lady: educated businesswoman and makeup-obsessed damsel-in-distress. Carol was a woman with no qualifications for her leadership role at her family's aeronautics company beyond her beauty and nepotism. She further was restricted by her father's demand that she become romantically involved with no one.²³⁷ Female characters also were subordinated in plotlines.²³⁸ *The Avengers'* Wasp was another prominent example. The only woman on the roster, she regularly was left out of team pinups and posters. Publishers didn't understand girls to be reading superhero comics in considerable numbers and comic book creative teams remained all- or mostly-male into the 2000s.²³⁹

²³⁶ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Spider-Man*, vol. 1, no. 6 (November 1963).

²³⁷ John Broome, *Green Lantern*, vol. 2, no. 1 (August 1960).

²³⁸ Dennis O'Neil, *Strange Tales*, vol. 1, no. 149 (October 1966).

²³⁹ Stan Lee, *The Avengers*, vol. 1, no. 1 (September 1963).

Epilogue: The Last Days of the Comics Code Authority

1. The Comics Code Authority in Transition

The regulation of comic books continued through the sixties, but not unchanged. President John F. Kennedy's assassination led to the CCA revising its guidelines to curtail the use of comic book ads for toy weapons, switch blades, and pellet guns. Five years later, after the murder of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, the Code's advertising clauses again were revised, this time adding smoke bombs, flash paper, air rifles, and models of tanks and cannons to the list of verboten advertisements. Leonard Darvin, the CMAA administrator at the time, described a widescale "public revulsion" with toy guns in the wake of a spate of assassinations that spurred the changes. Other youth-focused magazines followed suit, most notably, *Boys Life*, the Boy Scouts' national publication.¹ The comic book industry had adopted some of school's gatekeeping functions by way of the Code.

A. 1971 Update

A generation had passed since the original ACC, and in the minds of most people, comic books no longer threatened the social order. The CMAA's extensive efforts to reframe publicly comics as "a unique and effective tool for instruction and education" was the major driver of this. Besides, the nation also had new preoccupations, like rock and roll, the emerging middle-class drug culture, and geopolitical conflicts in Southeast Asia.²

¹ "Violence Curtailed in Comics," *The Hartford Courant*, July 28, 1968.

² CMAA, Comics Code Authority pamphlet.

Now cleaned-up, comic books had changed the landscape for all literature aimed at juveniles. Other children's books had to follow suit in some ways and now had "large, clear print; the beautiful illustrations and the lively style of writing in modern books for boys and girls."³ Further, comics largely had remained wholesome while television, film, popular music, and even theatre had grown increasingly provocative. This allowed the CCA to assert that comics "compared favorably with other media."⁴ Announcing the first new iteration of the Code since its inception, Darwin boasted the 1971 revision "remains [the] strictest code for any communication media."⁵ Though much had changed in America, publishers felt it necessary to adhere closely to the winning formula already in place.

The optics around the Code's existence were as significant as the Code itself in some ways. As discussed, a range of well-established institutions long had used comics as tools to inform or influence their audiences. For example, a dozen years before the CCA was ratified, the US Treasury saw in comics an opportunity to indoctrinate boys and girls to the American war effort, and partnered with the Army, Navy, Office of Emergency Management, the Red Cross, Children's Crusade, East and West Association, and United Youth for Victory, to do so.⁶ However, the CMAA's initial publicity campaign successfully rendered for most Americans the idea of comics as instructional tools was a result of the Code and its engagement with educators.

While the desire to adhere to good taste persisted, those tastes were changing. The update to the Code mandated the "[socially] responsible attitudes will also be favorably depicted

³ Gruenberg, *The Parents' Guide*.

⁴ CMAA, Comics Code Authority pamphlet.

⁵ *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 34.

⁶ Gaines, "Youth and the War Effort."

and reinforced.” This expressly included “ethnic advancement agencies or organizations such as the NAACP,” a real indication of the industry’s move towards progressive values and an acknowledgment that the original iteration hadn’t gone far enough.⁷ There also was more precision in the language around race and stereotypes.⁸ Characters who were “intended for reader identification” were to demonstrate adherence to “prevailing attitudes” around mores. Further, when characters did not represent those values, it was to be clear that her or his views were “aberrant.”⁹ Also much changed was the CMAA’s stance on language. Most regulations were eased significantly, but some prohibitions around slang persisted.¹⁰ The Code went much further in terms of acknowledging that there were adult readers of comics and the content had to reflect this.¹¹ What once was a readership of young kids who required the protection and guidance of their teachers even in their leisure time had given way to one of adolescents who required much less shielding and wanted socially relevant stories. Accordingly, the dawn of the 1970s saw an uptick in the number of comics addressing of social issues—especially religion and race.¹² A result of educators’ participation in the anti-comics crusade (ACC) was the elimination of the need for their oversight once the industry was reformed.

⁷ CMAA, “Administrative Procedures.”

⁸ Michael Z. Hobson to Marvel Comics, October 17, 1988, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

⁹ CMAA staff to Members of the Board of Directors of the CMAA, May 4, 1994, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

¹⁰ CMAA, Comics Code Authority pamphlet; Update to the Comics Code Authority, original manuscript, August 3, 1974, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

¹¹ CMAA, Comics Code Authority pamphlet.

¹² *Comics Magazine Association of America Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 33, original manuscript, April 1970, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, New York Public Library.

After the ratification of the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, the CMAA began issuing additional guidance and best practices.¹³ In the wake of new entries into the cycles of outrage, the Comics Code Authority (CCA) formally increased its regulation of advertisements with this iteration of the Code.¹⁴ Newly prohibited were liquor, tobacco, sex and sex instruction media, knives, pinups, fireworks, gambling, nontraditional toiletries, and mental and physical hygiene products.¹⁵ In a subsequent update to the Code on August 3, 1974, “another area of great public and official concern in children’s media”—sexual expression—was addressed in depth. Rape, seduction, illicit sexual relations, same-sex desire, and the representation of the sexual act itself all were addressed in this version.¹⁶ With new popular horror comics like *Vampirella*, *Eerie*, and *Creepy* as harbingers of a possible return to the dark days of the early fifties, the 1974 update was designed to slow trends before they got off the ground. Not only were overt depictions of homosexuality, gore, seduction, and rape prohibited, even their suggestion was problematized.¹⁷ What’s more, the words for male and female genitalia were banned specifically.¹⁸ An even briefer set of amendments came thirteen years later.¹⁹ The core of what educators had agitated for remained intact, though.

¹³ CMAA, Update to the Comics Code Authority, 1974; Federal Trade Commission to the Comics Magazine Association of America, May 22, 1979, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Leonard Darvin to Comics Magazine Association of America Members Newsletter, September 28, 1978, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

¹⁴ Federal Trade Commission to the CMAA; Leonard Darvin to CMAA.

¹⁵ Comics Code Authority pamphlet, original manuscript, 1971, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

¹⁶ CMAA, Update to the Comics Code Authority, 1974.

¹⁷ CMAA, Update to the Comics Code Authority, 1974.

¹⁸ CMAA, Update to the Comics Code Authority, 1974.

¹⁹ Update to the Comics Code Authority, original manuscript, 1988, box 1, folder 2, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

B. 1989 Update

Artists and audiences alike wanted more sophisticated content in comic book stories, but publishers, wary of changing their successful formula, still favored moderation. Consequently, the eighties saw many more incremental updates to the CCA than either the sixties or seventies did. The CMAA regularized the review of guidelines as well as other mechanisms for addressing changing mores.²⁰ Efforts to strengthen the Code—which had been weakened by changing distribution models and a maturing readership uninterested in regulation, anachronistically wholesome characters, and comics’ educational functions—were made again in 1986. A vocal group of editors made a push for developing a more efficient system of review with a mechanism to appeal decisions, updated content guidelines, and the hiring of “impartial” reviewers. They suggested that comic book writers and editors, such as Jack Abel and Wally Green, who had years of industry experience, were more suitable content reviewers than the educators who had been hired in the early years of the Code. The following year, the CMAA established an editorial task force, which empowered comics editors and publishers in the running of the organization.²¹ The influence of educators had facilitated the mainstream acceptance of the medium, and now the industry wanted to reclaim more control over its own regulatory processes and content.

Once again, the most noticeable changes were related to social attitudes. The Administrative Procedures section outlined in “Principles and Guidelines” required the favorable portrayal of “socially responsible attitudes.” Various progressive causes also were promoted,

²⁰ CMAA, Update to the Comics Code Authority, 1988.

²¹ Victor Gorelick to Ed Shukin, telephone conversation, September 23, 1986, transcript, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

including positive portrayals of “ethnic advancement agencies and organizations such as the NAACP” and the life experiences of working class, elderly, youthful, and LGBTQ individuals. In an October 17, 1988 letter to the CMAA, Michael Z. Hobson, Executive Vice President of Marvel Comics, maintained that institutions would be portrayed positively. After specifically identifying the FBI, CIA, and Secret Service as institutions that would receive more favorable depictions, he went further in reaffirming Marvel and the CMAA’s shared commitment to America’s democratic ideals.

Socially responsible attitudes will be favorably depicted and reinforced; national, social, political, cultural, ethnic, and racial groups, religious institutions, and law enforcement authorities will be portrayed in a positive light; stereotyped images and activities will not be used to degrade specific national, ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic groups.²²

In a shift from the language of the last formally adopted the Code of 1954, Hobson stated clearly, “good grammar and spelling *should be encouraged*.”²³ Appeasing educators was much less of a priority at this juncture, but teachers and other authority figures were consumed with the war on drugs anyway.²⁴

The 1988 update also acknowledged the centrality of violence to comics book storylines and gave creators more license to use it as a storytelling element. However, Hobson advised that the artists “should avoid excessively graphic depictions of violence” and that writers needed to take care to create appropriately strong contexts and represent the “realistic repercussions of violence.”²⁵ He went on to note that the language in comics had to be appropriate “to a mass

²² CMAA, “What Do You Know about This.”

²³ Michael Z. Hobson to Marvel Comics, October 17, 1988, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

²⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Crime in the United States,” U.S. Department of Justice (2019), <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm>.

²⁵ Michael Z. Hobson to Marvel Comics.

audience that included children,” which informed the tenor of the update.²⁶ Interestingly, Hobson worked for Marvel, not the CMAA; his centrality in the development of the updated Code evinces that successful publishers now wielded the influence that educators once did.

Notably, provisions for the representation of “sexual, political, and socioeconomic and disabled [orientations]” were added to the guidelines. The portrayals of LGBTQ characters had grown significantly more sensitive and nuanced during the 1970s and 1980s, and audiences were less accepting of the kinds of depictions of gays and lesbians in previous decades. Similarly, audience expectations around the behavior of their protagonists had changed fundamentally since even the 1971 version of the Code. While codifying some aspects of the traditional Silver Age heroic archetype, Hobson did reserve some space for artists to “reflect the prevailing social attitudes,” leading to a generation of popular antiheroes congruent with the times.²⁷ The glamorization of drug use and crime were forbidden, though there was a variability in how the latter was interpreted.²⁸ The update included a new provision to encourage the use of contemporary fashion in superhero costumes.²⁹ There also were allowances for publishers of adult-aimed comics, given their different distribution models and regulatory needs.³⁰

Some parts of the Code remained unchanged. The legacies of the ACC were ever-present in regulations of the portrayal of criminals, who always were to be shown “in a negative light,”

²⁶ Michael Z. Hobson to Marvel Comics.

²⁷ Michael Z. Hobson to Marvel Comics; CMAA staff to Members of the Board of Directors of the CMAA, May 4, 1994, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

²⁸ Michael Z. Hobson to Marvel Comics.

²⁹ CMAA Editorial Task Force Meeting, meeting minutes, December 9, 1987, original manuscript, August 3, 1974, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

³⁰ CMAA, “What Do You Know about This.”

and even heroes were to experience the consequences of their actions.³¹ Artists specifically were requested not to depict crimes in such a way that allows them to be replicated. And heroes were to be differentiated clearly from villains by their values.³² Prejudice was to be shown as morally wrong.³³ Good grammar was still the norm, but much space was made to interpolate teenage argot for purposes of character development.³⁴ Even if educators were not participating actively in the administration of the Code anymore, their efforts were not erased completely.

By 1992, comics publishers were more accustomed to addressing social issues, and had learned to use the Code to systemize process and present values. For instance, the CMAA banned substance abuse as a root of superpowers, given the drug epidemics of the seventies and eighties. In addition, the guidelines instructed that comics needed to depict the effects of drug use accurately, and even provide readers with information on local resources and national hotlines.³⁵ The power of comics to teach was called upon still from time to time. The CMAA organized a cross-publisher campaign to educate youths on homelessness, raising as much as \$500,000 to combat the issue.³⁶ In addition, the CMAA much more regularly convened and spoke on behalf of publishers to realize shared objectives. The organization was reviewing between 1,500 and 2,000 books per year by the mid-1990s; many of these were published by nonmembers, including Topps, Dagger, and Bongo.³⁷ The theme here was changing strategies to

³¹ CMAA, "Administrative Procedures."

³² Michael Z. Hobson to Marvel Comics.

³³ CMAA, Update to the Comics Code Authority, 1988.

³⁴ CMAA, "Administrative Procedures."

³⁵ CMAA, "Administrative Procedures."

³⁶ Update to the Comics Code Authority, original manuscript, June 23, 1992, box 1, folder 1, Comics Magazine Association of America, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

³⁷ CMAA staff to Members of the Board of Directors of the CMAA.

survive the changing times, just as it had been when the Code was established in 1954. The difference was that engaging educators was not a solution for contemporary challenges.

2. Wertham's Reappraisal

In a 2013 interview published in the *New York Times*, Carol Tilley, an associate professor of information science at Indiana University, described herself as reviewing methodologies and sources Fredric Wertham employed for *Seduction of the Innocent*.³⁸ His widow, Florence Hesketh Wertham, bequeathed his papers to the Library of Congress in 1987, and recent revisions to the finding aid in 2010 and 2012 had made the collection more accessible to scholars.³⁹ Previously, access had been limited to those approved by Wertham's estate on a case-by-case basis, and only two researchers had been granted that permission.⁴⁰ Tilley, who regularly taught budding librarians classes on media literacy and youth and had been the subject of a recent documentary, *Carol Tilley: Comic Book Crusader*, was working on an article "that documented falsified and distorted evidence in the writings of anti-comics psychiatrist Fredric Wertham."⁴¹ She initially came to the project to understand the roles played by librarians and teachers in Wertham's study.

The Library of Congress held more than 88,000 items in the collection, including "notes, drafts, and related materials for Wertham's major works including *Seduction of the Innocent*

³⁸ Itzkoff, "Scholar Finds Flaws."

³⁹ T. Michael Womack et al, *Fredric Wertham Papers* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress: Manuscript Division, 2012).

⁴⁰ Mike Rhode, "Hate Comic Books? Library of Congress Opens Papers of Comics Opponent Fredric Wertham," *Washington City Paper*, August 11, 2010, DC Public Library People's Archive.

⁴¹ Carol L. Tilley, "Research," Carol L. Tilley: Comics Scholar, Library Educator, Youth Advocate (June 10 2022), <https://caroltilley.net/research/>.

(1954).”⁴² Tilley examined the copious notes Wertham took on vellum, folded and inserted into the pages of the comics he critiqued.⁴³ In her probing of Wertham’s work, Tilley found numerous irregularities with Wertham’s process. She also discovered that Wertham did not provide proper attribution for observations that actually were made by his colleagues, Hilde L. Mosse and Gershon Legman.⁴⁴ She noted that Wertham overcounted the number of subjects, describing having worked with thousands of youths when it actually was a few hundred. Statements made by individuals were misattributed to larger groups—and vice versa—and Wertham recontextualized other quotes to offer commentary never intended by the speakers. For example,

...Wertham argues that the superheroes Batman and Robin represent ‘a wish dream of two homosexuals living together,’ and cited a young gay man who says that he put himself ‘in the position of Robin’ and ‘did want to have relations with Batman.’ But in Wertham’s original notes, Tilley writes, these quotations actually come from two young men, ages 16 and 16, who were in a sexual relationship with each other, and who told Wertham they were more likely to fantasize about heroes like Tarzan or the Sub-Mariner, rather than Batman and Robin.”⁴⁵

Wertham’s research was based on his own clients and conducted by his own staff, and when confronted by contemporaneous scholars, he would cite doctor-patient privilege to avoid answering specific questions about his sources and methods.⁴⁶ At the time of the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, no scholars had access to the data that would permit them to evaluate his work. This effort only became possible once the Library of Congress had deemed comics

⁴² Rhode, “Hate Comic Books.”

⁴³ Rhode, “Hate Comic Books.”

⁴⁴ Tilley, “Seducing the Innocent.”

⁴⁵ Itzkoff, “Scholar Finds Flaws.”

⁴⁶ Tilley, “Seducing the Innocent.”

worthy enough of scholarly attention to make Wertham's papers available to researchers. Wertham's papers were housed alongside the Library of Congress' comic book and original comic art collection in the Serials Department and Prints and Photographs Division.⁴⁷ This was an indirect result of the mainstreaming brought about by educators' influence on the Code.

Tilley's observations made waves across the comic book industry. For many, the discrediting of Wertham was long overdue. DC Comics' former president and publisher and CMAA board member, Paul Levitz noted, that it was "nice to see as a postscript" of the ACC that Wertham had "cheated on his homework."⁴⁸ The anti-comics activism had harmed the industry and damaged the careers and reputations of numerous comic book artists and that was ever-present in the minds of many practitioners. Publishing her analyses in "Seducing the Innocent: Fredric Wertham and the Falsifications that Helped Condemn Comics" in *Information and Culture: A Journal of History*, Tilley suggested that Wertham's personal prejudices and agenda eclipsed his adherence to proper research methodologies.⁴⁹ Commenting on Tilley's article, scholars described Wertham's efforts as "irresponsible," "flawed," and an "obsession, in an almost Ahab-like way."⁵⁰ The tables had turned, and the new conversation was educators critiquing Wertham within the pages of academic journals and university seminars.

It was a significant moment for another reason: the Comics Code Authority had been dissolved by the industry in 2011. Its influence had been waning for decades. Publishers were catering to an adult audience that required fewer guardrails. Comics were incredibly profitable

⁴⁷ Rhode, "Hate Comic Books."

⁴⁸ Itzkoff, "Scholar Finds Flaws."

⁴⁹ Tilley, "Seducing the Innocent."

⁵⁰ Itzkoff, "Scholar Finds Flaws."

sources of television and cinematic entertainment. And while they had not lost their ability to communicate useful information, educators had more technologically sophisticated teaching tools. Realistically, Wertham's greatest accomplishment was being abolished, just as his research was being invalidated.

3. How the Code Changed Education

The Comics Code Authority forever changed the context in which comic books were viewed; without the reputational cleansing and content proscriptions, comics would not have received the imprimatur of the education profession and likely would not have survived the fifties. That educative potential was apparent to some well before publishers banded together to begin their own regulation. As early as 1941, the United States government was using comics to instruct and inform. The National Guard used them as recruitment tools. The Truman administration utilized them for explaining how Social Security worked. Harvey Comics, known for *Mutt and Jeff*, *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, and *Felix the Cat*, was contracted to produce a guide to saluting for new soldiers.⁵¹ General Electric began publishing educational comic books in the mid-Forties. Between 1945 and 1960, its *Adventures in Science* series had a print run of 73,000,000 copies, was translated into eight languages, and experienced great popularity in South Asia and the Middle East.⁵² This was informal education, though, and the context was very different. Adults comprised these readerships, and constituencies of expectant teachers and parents—fearful that any aberration from the traditional would result in a perversion of American values or harm intellectual development—were not dictating every action. Just

⁵¹ Du Bois, "Superman, Batman and Ivanhoe."

⁵² Du Bois, "Superman, Batman and Ivanhoe."

beyond the watchful gaze of the press, organizations had the space to experiment with comics as educational tools.

While American universities have been conferring the occasional doctorate for researching comics since at least 1959, the widespread embracing of them by educators is only a twenty-year-old phenomenon, in actuality. Since the late nineties, college courses on comic books and graphic novels have increased gradually. Similarly, peer-reviewed journals like *International Journal of Comic Art*, *Studies in Comics*, and *ImageText* (published by the University of Florida's comics studies program), and prominent panels at the annual meetings of the Modern Language Association and American Library Association herald an era in which the ambivalence over the educative value of the medium has subsided almost completely. A 1995 article in *The Journal of Popular Culture* detailed increasing efforts to bring comics into the classroom. The Comic Book Project at Teachers College and the state of Maryland's Comic Book Initiative for reluctant young readers lend further credence to the notion that Wertham and his devotees lost the debate. Some cite the critical success of the comics and graphic novels like the award-winning *Maus*, *Palestine*, *Persepolis*, and *Fun Home*—with their nuanced narratives and gripping visuals—as having facilitated changes in perceptions of comic books.

Some of the most important scholarship on Silver Age comics is in the field of literary studies. Recent scholarship like Sheena C. Howard and Ronald L. Jackson, II's *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation* (2013), Marc DiPaolo's *War, Politics and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film* (2014), Ramzi Fawaz's *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (2016), Joseph O. Dewey's *The Graphic Novel and the Post-Col War American Narrative* (2016), C. Foss, Jonathan W. Gray, and Z. Whalen's *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives* (2016), and Samantha

Langsdale and Elizabeth Rae Coody's *Monstrous Women in Comics* (2020) focus on the treatment of ethnic, gender, sexual identity, disability, and neurodiversity.⁵³ These monographs tackle identity without centering the work done by educators during the ACC to challenge how characters were represented graphically and narratively in pre-Code comics. My project elucidates educators' contributions to the articulation of social difference and how stories were told in Silver Age comics, as well as their broader reverberations for American cultural output. The Code democratized the opportunity to research comics for the rest of the world. It successfully defanged arguments that limited educational experimentation.

Educators had a hand in this. "The villain can no longer win the heroine's favor. Parents cannot be shown engaging in any but respectable occupations. In war stories, it is permissible to show a gun being fired, but not a man being hit."⁵⁴ The hard edges of comics had been sanded down, partially by the Code, partially by changing tastes and innovations in entertainment. Newly infiltrating every American living room, television and rock and roll presented an even bigger threat than comics, and teachers, child psychologists, clergymen, and parents had a new bugaboo. Another contributing factor to the end of the ACC was the change in self-perceptions among Catholics. By 1960, Catholic Americans wanted to create distance from the stereotypical image of the moral crusader that had persisted since the 1930s.⁵⁵ And with the moral crusaders

⁵³ Dewey, *The Graphic Novel and the Post-Cold War American Narrative*; West Port, CT: Praeger, 2016. DiPaolo, *War, Politics, and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film*; Fawaz, *The New Mutants*; C. Foss, Jonathan W. Gray, and Z. Whalen, eds., *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Sheena Howard and Ronald L. Jackson, II, *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Samantha Langsdale and Elizabeth Rae Coody, eds., *Monstrous Women in Comics* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2020).

⁵⁴ Du Bois, "Superman, Batman and Ivanhoe."

⁵⁵ Una M. Cadegan, "Guardians of Democracy or Cultural Storm Troopers? American Catholics and the Control of Popular Media, 1934-1966," *The Catholic Historical Review* 87, no. 2 (April 2001): 252-282.

more concerned with rock music and television at this point, comic book publishers contended with less scrutiny in the years after the Code was passed.

4. Conclusions

The range of perspectives college and university faculty and teachers held during the anti-comics crusade did not differ fundamentally, though their contexts and the reactions they evoked were dissimilar. Society placed limitations on schoolteachers' expertise and maintained expectations around their moral rectitude. Nevertheless, their professional knowledge was powerful currency in this conversation, which focused on what kids read inside and outside of school. Educators of all stripes took opportunities to assert their perspectives to sway public opinion. Those opportunities were not distributed evenly among educators, though. Academic freedom accorded faculty more space to ponder the use of comic books, to conduct research, and to speak openly their value.

Educators participated in the debate in multiple ways—as actors, as subjects, as instruments. Teachers occupied a unique space: public servants in one sense, subject matter experts in another. At the same time, they were not immune to the media's treatment of the anti-comics crusade, nor were they immune to the sway of other powerful forces that had an interest in comics' content. Churches, political parties, and other important figures influenced the way the comics debate was presented. Teachers were Catholics, parents, women, readers of newspapers, and concerned citizens, and these identities informed their positions.

Primary and secondary school educators were split in their opinions of comics, with some of the most vocal actively working in the anti-comics campaign, organizing boycotts and agitating for legal restrictions. Others found ways to support researchers who were trying to

demonstrate that comics were harmless or even beneficial to developing literacy. At the level of higher education, faculty members and students opposed anti-comics activism on First Amendment grounds. Additionally, they conducted crucial research that aided in the legitimization of the genre. The research arrived at no consensus, but there were clear themes: comics were effective teaching tools; comics could be used to promote positive reading habits; comics reflected contemporaneous American value; and comics were a reliable means of communicating information to readers of all ages. Scholars from across the disciplinary landscape researched comics; even within fields, methodologies varied, as educators wrestled with how to analyze comics. Educators opined on the possible causal relationships between comics and juvenile delinquency, but most of the research focused on literacy, a topic squarely in the educational domain.

Educators' reactions to comics placed them among the primary drivers of the anti-comics crusade and the subsequent changes to the industry. Because literacy and children's leisure time were fundamental parts of the debate around comics, the public elevated educators' perspectives in a way that seldom occurred. However, academic freedom meant that university faculty had much more space to express their perspectives and participate in activism than schoolteachers, who were beholden to the interests of school district administrators, parents, and politicians, in addition to the need to protect their students. Researchers without institutional affiliations, unfettered by rigid professional and scholarly expectations, had even more space to participate in the ACC and were able to wield great influence with casual research that spoke to large swaths of people.

Appreciating educators' centrality in the conversation, the CMAA similarly privileged them in the design, administration, and content of the Comics Code Authority. The CMAA

engaged educators and other specialists who worked with children to design and operate the Comics Code Authority. Moreover, seventeen of the forty planks of the Code addressed concerns they raised. Consequently, the comic books created in the wake of the anti-comics crusade were direct outgrowths of the anxieties and aspirations of educators.

In addition, they were targets of the industry's campaign to legitimate the genre. If teachers could be convinced of comics' harmlessness and even benefits, then they could give their imprimatur, and thus make parents and other authority figures accept (or at least ignore) the medium. Teachers occupied a unique space as arbiters of kids' free time, the keepers of literacy, the imparters of citizenship, developers of good taste, and specialists in the behavior and needs of students. Theirs was a valuable position, and it was coopted by any number of factions jockeying for influence.

The race of the educators factored into their reactions in a way that many other demographic categories did not. African American educators were sensitized to oversimplistic articulations of social phenomena. They resisted the idea that comic books led to juvenile delinquency. Rather, they insisted that the role of parents was a much greater factor in young people's behavior. Similarly, they pressed for common sense solutions to America's issues with youthful crime. They wanted to see more of an acknowledgment of the systems that led to the issues in the first place.

The other subset of educators with a specific response to comics was Catholic school teachers. The Church tightly circumscribed their public stances. It also provided a set of powerful tools for regulating what students read *and* how they were permitted to talk about their interests and activities. The greater control over schools, curricula, students, and their parents

that the Church exercised meant that there was more that teachers could do to regulate comics in this context.

Content changes made college students a key constituency of comic book readers during the Silver Age, which ultimately was another lifeline for a struggling industry. Few of the stigmas that would disincentivize comic book-reading existed in the postsecondary context. The new demographic of mature readers added legitimacy to the genre, and gave publishers cover, as adults did not require the same degree of protection. This also made youths reading comics more acceptable. Competition from comic books meant that other children's books had to follow suit in some ways: children's books now had "large, clear print; the beautiful illustrations and the lively style of writing in modern books for boys and girls."⁵⁶ The optics around the Code's existence were as significant as the Code itself in some ways. Well-established institutions adopted the medium as a key part of their communications strategies. A dozen years before the CCA was ratified, the U.S. Treasury saw in comics an opportunity to indoctrinate boys and girls to the American war effort, and partnered with the Army, Navy, Office of Emergency Management, the Red Cross, Children's Crusade, East and West Association, and United Youth for Victory, to do so.⁵⁷

In 1972, Marvel finally overtook DC in sales.⁵⁸ The lessons that Marvel learned during the ACC, which led to it catering to larger numbers of young adult readers to circumvent the watchful eye of the CMAA, proved to be a winning strategy. During the Bronze Age (circa 1971 to 1985), DC intentionally began replicating aspects of Marvel's modus operandi; Lee and

⁵⁶ Gruenberg, *The Parents' Guide*.

⁵⁷ Gaines, "Youth and the War Effort."

⁵⁸ Glenn Greenberg, "The Story of Marvel," *Time*, special edition (2021): 4-35.

company's successes had been too numerous for their approach to characterization and storytelling to be left unexamined. To an extent, this was only fitting, as Marvel regularly borrowed concepts from and based characters on DC's work under Martin Goodman's leadership in the 1940s and 1950s. The pattern of using the other's templates proved lucrative for both companies.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Marvel made the stronger pivot after the Code—at some turns, integrating elements of the Code, and at others, finding means to work around them.

⁵⁹ Greenberg, "The Story of Marvel."

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