The comic book was the direct descendant of the comic strip, which had flourished in American newspapers since the late nineteenth century. As early as 1897, tabloid-sized booklets which reprinted popular newspaper strips such as "The Yellow Kid" and "Buster Brown" appeared. In 1911, the Chicago American issued an eighteen-by-six inch reprint of "Mutt and Jeff" strips bound in cardboard covers. The booklet was available for six coupons clipped from the paper, plus a postage fee. The American ordered an original printing of 10,000 copies from the Ball Publishing Company of Boston. In the first week 35,000 copies were sold and $6,000 profit was realized.¹

Despite the response to the American venture, enthusiasm among publishers was unremarkable and succeeding ventures were sporadic. The first publication to employ all original material did not appear until 1929. The Funnies, a tabloid-sized imitation of the newspaper strip form, was published by George T. Delacorte, Jr., and printed by Eastern Color Printing Company. It folded after thirteen issues.²

In its standard form of 8-3/4 by 10-1/2 inches, later reduced to 7-1/4 by 10-1/2 inches, the comic book was the creation of Harry I. Wildenberg, sales manager of Eastern Printing. Given the responsibility for the development of new ideas to secure additional printing contracts for Eastern, he began to experiment with


standard newspaper sheets. Wildenberg found that by folding the sheets in halves, then quarters, he created a more convenient booklet size. One sheet, folded and trimmed, resulted in sixteen pages which could be printed on existing presses from existing materials. To provide material for the new format, Wildenberg then obtained the rights to Bell Syndicate comic strip features, and Eastern salesman Max Charles Gaines convinced Proctor and Gamble to order 10,000 copies of a new title, *Funnies on Parade*, which utilized the Bell strips. This thirty-two page comic was available for coupons clipped from Proctor and Gamble products. Milk-O-Malt, Wheatena, John Wanamaker, Kinney Shoe Stores, and others were also won over by Gaines and offered *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics* and *Century of Comics*, both newspaper reprint editions, as premiums. They were distributed in editions of 100,000 and 250,000, respectively. As an experiment, Gaines then persuaded several newsstand dealers to display *Famous Funnies* with ten cent labels attached. All copies were sold over one weekend.³

Although Gaines and Wildenberg had proven that comics were popular enough that people would clip coupons or pay a dime to read them, potential publishers and distributors remained skeptical. After unsuccessful attempts to convince chain stories such as Woolworth's, Kress, and McCrory that the books were salable as retail items, Gaines and Wildenberg approached Delacorte, whose earlier venture with tabloid-sized comics had failed. Early in 1934, he ordered 35,000 copies of *Famous Funnies, Series I*, a sixty-four page comic which almost immediately sold out in the chain stores which displayed it. Armed with this success, Eastern Color assailed American News Company with demands for nation-wide circulation of subsequent issues. After some initial hesitation, American signed a contract to distribute 250,000 copies of future issues of *Famous Funnies.*

While Eastern salesmen sought a national outlet for the first regularly published comic book, George Delacorte surveyed advertisers who he hoped would provide part of the necessary revenue for the new project. The advertisers' evaluation of the first issue of *Famous Funnies* and predictions for its future success were less than encouraging. They criticized the poor quality of paper and concluded comic books "had not connection with regular printing." Even more importantly, they predicted the public would not buy reprints of material it had read in another form. As a result, Delacorte discounted the initial sales results and cancelled his option to publish additional issues.

Armed with a distributor for a comic book which had no publisher, Eastern decided a greater profit could be realized if it acted as its own publisher. In May 1934, it issued *Famous Funnies* number one, and in July began monthly publication of the title. Issue one lost $4,150.60, but issues two through six recorded a steadily declining loss. Finally, the seventh issue of *Famous Funnies* cleared $2,664.25. Within a year, nearly a million copies were being sold monthly, resulting in a profit of $30,000 per issue.

Other publishers only reluctantly followed Eastern's tentative lead. For most of 1935, *Famous Funnies* and Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's *New Fun* and *New Comics*, joined later in the year by the recalcitrant Delacorte's *Popular Comics*, monopolized the new field. By 1936, about a dozen titles were available. Most titles, such as David McKay's *King Comics* and United Features' *Tip Top Comics*, still relied on reprints of already established newspaper strips. Two of the earliest regularly published titles, however, were the first comic books to present

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5Waugh, p. 339.

original material in the new standard-sized format. First published in 1935 by Major Wheeler-Nicholson's National Periodical Publications (NPP), both New Fun and New Comics for the most part utilized stories and art prepared especially for those titles. In 1936, Harry Donenfeld, a publisher of men's pulps, bought out the interests of Wheeler-Nicholson and published Detective Comics number one, the first non-reprint title which devoted its entire contents to a single type of story.

The theme of comic book publishing was set and the success of the industry assured with the June 1938 issue of Action Comics. This first issue, published by Donenfeld under the new company name, Detective Comics, Incorporated (DC), features Superman, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. With the debut of Superman, the young industry found its theme and an army of imitators of the Man of Steel populated a flood of titles. In 1939 and 1940, about sixty different titles were available. During the next year this total rose to 168, but dropped to about one hundred in 1942, with the imposition of wartime paper quotas. The annual output of this infant industry was almost 180 million comics, and the dimes spent largely by children on comic books totaled over $15 million. Each month 50 million people read comic books, with each copy read by an average of four

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7The first issue of New Fun reprinted material which had appeared in 1933, in the one-shot, one color Detective Dan, Secret Op. 48. With issue number seven, New Fun was retitled More Fun. New Comics became New Adventure Comics with issue number twelve. Waugh, p. 342.

8Steranko, p. 13.

9Several of the Superman imitations were too similar for comfort. See Detective Comics, Inc., v. Bruns Publications, Inc., et al., 28 F. Supp. 399 (1939) and 111 F. 2d 432 (1940) for the case against Wonder Man, and National Comics Publications, Inc., v. Fawcett Publications, Inc., et al., 93 F. Supp. 349 (1950) and 191 F. 2d 594 (1951) for the case against Captain Marvel.
persons. It was estimated that *Superman* alone grossed $950,000 in 1941. While his four-color feats were imaginary, his appeal as big business was invincible.\(^\text{10}\)

Many of the new titles were published by companies which specialized in another form of cheap, popular entertainment—the pulp magazine. Among the publishers who shifted from the proven security of the $25 million-a-year pulps to the suddenly lucrative comic book field were Aaron A. Wyn's Ace Fiction Group, Martin Goodman, Fiction House, Popular Publications, the venerable Street and Smith, and Standard Magazines. George Delacorte's Dell Publications, a leader in the comic book industry, had published pulps since 1922, and Major Wheeler-Nicholson, who founded NPP, was a pulp writer who specialized in stories with a military or historical slant. Many of these publishers brought to their new venture much of the formulae and philosophy of their former one. The pulps, like the comics, usually sold for ten cents each, and rarely were less than 100,000 copies printed of an edition. Returns up to 50 percent were acceptable. In order to prosper economically, many publishers frequently pursued the lowest common denominator by appealing to current trends in other entertainment, such as movies, and by thinly disguised topics of current interest. The philosophy of Martin Goodman, that "'fans are not interested in quality,'"\(^\text{11}\) was not accepted, at least openly, by all publishers, but the flood of the bad or mediocre tended to overwhelm more meticulous productions. The operation of Wheeler-Nicholson's NPP was typical of many of the early ventures. Because little and infrequent pay failed


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to attract talent, unemployed pulp writers and young art students supplied often aimless stories and barely competent drawings.\textsuperscript{12}

Suddenly awakened concern over the vast circulations and sums involved in the American child's new pastime sparked the first national criticism of the new media. In a 1939 study of vocabulary of the more familiar comic strips, Florence Brumbaugh noted that, in ten stores in the vicinity of the New York public schools utilized in her study, "large numbers" of comic books were purchased. Dealers confessed "they could not keep enough in stock."\textsuperscript{13}

Brumbaugh failed to further investigate the shabby offspring of the comic strip, so that the more sensational revelations of Sterling North in the next year provided the introduction to comic books for many parents. In a widely reprinted editorial entitled "A National Disgrace (And a Challenge to American Parents)" in the Chicago Daily News of May 8, 1940, Literary Editor Sterling North execrated comic books as "a poisonous mushroom growth of the last two years,"\textsuperscript{14} and demanded their destruction. After a survey of 108 titles, begun with the assumption that comic books were similar to newspaper strips, he contended that no reputable newspaper would print 70 percent of the material contained in them. North condemned the violent plots, supermen, scantily-clad females, and vigilante justice; crude art, poor printing, and garish coloring; and "cheap political


\textsuperscript{13}Florence Brumbaugh, "The Comics and Children's Vocabularies," \textit{Elementary English Review} 16 (February 1939): 64.

propaganda"\(^{15}\) because of the physical, mental, and emotional damage they probably caused. He blamed the proliferation and continuation of the comic book and the possible effect upon the upcoming generation on parents who failed to care about what their children read. They were, in the opinion of North, guilty of criminal negligence. Teachers were also criticized for their failure to instruct the child to appreciate better reading material, and he pronounced "the completely immoral publishers . . . guilty of a cultural slaughter of the innocents."\(^{16}\)

While the intercession of World War II prevented a concerted response, isolated municipal activity and occasional critics kept the fears alive. In 1941, the legislature of New York—where many of the publishers and printers maintained offices and plants—enacted Section 22-a of the Code of Criminal Procedure. This section empowered the chief executive of a municipality "to seek an injunction against the sale or distribution of comic books which are obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent or disgusting."\(^{17}\) Although a potentially effective weapon against questionable comics, New York officials laxly enforced it and some legislators expressed doubt about its constitutionality.\(^{18}\) Despite the lack of organized opposition, individual critics kept the issue alive. They denounced the improbabilities of story, abundant use of slang and absence of educational value of most comics. Excessive reading of comic books, they charged, would

\(^{15}\)North, p. 56.

\(^{16}\)Ibid.


desensitize the appreciation a child might develop for more accepted and durable literature. The critics also decried the vast amounts of time children devoted to reading the comics, which robbed them of opportunities to pursue more worthwhile activities. Some persons held that such reading isolated children from the world of reality and submerged them in a fantasy world of cheap and simple solutions to complex and understated problems.19

While World War II offered a reprieve to publishers from the threat of organized critical scrutiny, it also marked a change in the focus and fortunes of comics. The comic book ceased to be only entertainment and dispensed four-color patriotism. Readers were bombarded with pleas to buy war stamps and aid the war effort in other ways.20 Most comic book heroes also went to war. The monster and criminal antagonists of the pre-war period were suddenly transformed into Japanese and German ghouls upon whom the heroes were free to vent their bloody wrath. Such treatments furnished sufficient examples for detractors to label them as fascist and reminiscent of German propaganda. Margaret Frakes expressed the concern that the attitudes they fostered would impress upon an entire generation "a hate and a color prejudice which will make post-war tolerance and understanding a practical impossibility."21 Walter Ong, former professor of English at Regis College in Denver, criticized the focus of the war-time comic upon fantastically powerful beings whose triumphs were the result of superior or super-natural forces. Ong


20Readers of All-Star Comics no. 21 (Summer 1944), for example, were informed that "Bottom Lines On Following Pages Tell What To Do While Battle Rages." The slogans which followed included: "Every Time You Buy A Stamp, You Feed The Flame In Freedom's Lamp!" "Boys Are Smart, Girls Are Wise, Black Markets Not To Patronize," and "Tin Cans In The Garbage Pile Are Just A Way Of Saying Heil!"

regarded the centralization of power and action in an individual or a group of standardized individuals as an appeal to the totalitarianism practiced by Hitler and Mussolini.\footnote{"Are Comics Fascist?" \textit{Time}, October 22, 1945, pp. 67-68.}

Parent's Institute, the publisher of \textit{Parent's Magazine}, believed that Sterling North was too harsh in his criticisms and preferred to dismiss most comics as simply "lurid, fantastic, cheap, terrifically time-wasting and over-stimulating."\footnote{Littledale, p. 26.} In March 1941, the Institute countered with the publication of \textit{True Comics}. In an attempt to retain the appeal of the action and color of comic books, \textit{True Comics} featured history and current events rather than superheroes and violence. Its first issue offered stories about Winston Churchill, Simon Bolivar, George Rogers Clark, and others. To ensure the appeal of its contents and to suggest topics for stories, the Institute retained Advisory Editors such as Shirley Temple, Mickey Rooney, George E. Gallup of the Institute of Public Opinion, and Dr. David S. Muzzey, Emeritus Professor of History at Columbia University. Later Advisory Editors included Karl S. Bernhardt, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto; the Reverend Frederick G. Hochwalt, Director of the Department of Education of the National Catholic Welfare Conference; Arthur T. Jersild, Professor of Education at Columbia University's Teachers College; Daniel C. Knowlton, Professor of Education at New York University; \textit{Parent's Magazine} editor Clara Savage Littledale; Rudolf Modley, President of Pictograph Corporation; movie stars Margaret O'Brien, Roddy McDowall, Peggy Ann Garner, Bobby Blake, and Darryl Hickman; and Quiz Kid Joel Kupperman. Within the year, Parent's Institute launched two additional publications, \textit{Real...
Heroes, a comic book similar to True Comics in format, and Calling All Girls, a combination of comic book and magazine designed to appeal to young girls.\textsuperscript{24}

Despite the failure of a large organized to develop, some established publishers were also sensitive to the continuing criticism. Those who did respond were generally the most conservative and least offensive and some reactions were limited. For example, Novelty Press, following complaints by parents about the fantastic outer space setting of Spacehawk in Target Comics, shifted that character's adventures to the more mundane war-time Earth.\textsuperscript{25}

Two of the largest established publishers also recruited boards of editorial advisors to offset criticism. Fawcett Publications declared that its advisors were employed "to help . . . maintain high standards of wholesome entertainment."\textsuperscript{26} The advisors conferred with artists and writers to set criteria for comic stories and reviewed them on publication to ensure that they were maintained. Eleanor B. Roosevelt, president of the Girl Scouts Council of Greater New York; Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd; Dr. Alan Roy Dafoe, physician for the Dionne quintuplets; and Rev. John W. Tynan of Fordham University made up the first Fawcett advisory board. Later members included Professor Harvey W. Zorbaugh of New York University; Dr. Ernest G. Osborne, professor of education at Columbia University; and Major Al Williams, a pilot and author. Sidonie M. Gruenberg, the director of the Child Study Association, served as Consulting Editor for ten months in 1944-1945.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.; True Comics number 47 (March 1946); and Frakes, p. 1351.


\textsuperscript{26}Captain Marvel Jr. no. 1 (November 18, 1942), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{27}U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books): Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, Pursuant to S. 190, 83rd Cong., 2d sess., 1954, p. 136, hereafter cited as Senate Subcommittee, Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books); Captain Marvel
In 1941, Detective Comics, renamed Superman DC, requested aid from the Child Study Association to improve its comics and to ensure that they were "safe for young readers." The board of directors of the association delegated the responsibility of working with the publishers to Josette Frank, a part-time staff member and advisor to their Children's Book Committee. In addition to her service on the board, Frank also contributed children's book reviews to DC comics. Other members of the Advisory Board were Dr. William Moulton Marston, member of the American Psychological Association; Dr. C. Bowie Milligan, professor of English Literature at New York University; Ruth Eastwood Perl, member of the American Psychological Association; Dr. W.W. Sones, professor of education at the University of Pittsburgh; Dr. Robert Thorndike, professor of Educational Psychology at Columbia University; and former heavyweight boxing champion Gene Tunney. Early membership fluctuated, however. In the April-May 1942 issue of All-Star Comics, Marston, who had served as a consulting psychologist, was no longer listed as an advisor, and Perl was dropped in the October-November listing. Alice Marble, a former World Amateur tennis champion, and novelist Pearl S. Buck served briefly on later boards. From the mid-1940s to 1955, Dr. Lauretta Bender, senior psychiatrist at Bellevue Hospital in New York, was employed as an editorial advisor.

Jr., p. 3; and Master Comics no. 61 (May 1945).


29 Ibid.; All-Star Comics no. 8 (December 1941-January 1942); Ibid. no. 10 (April-May 1942); Ibid., no. 13 (October-November 1942); Ibid. no. 21 (Summer 1944); and Ibid. no. 23 (Winter 1944). Marston, under the pseudonym of Charles Moulton, was the creator of Wonder Woman, who debuted in Sensation Comics no. 1 (January 1942), also a Superman DC comic (reprinted in Famous First Edition no. C-30 [1974]). Her creation was the result of a suggestion Marston offered to M.C. Gaines to develop "a feminine character with all the strength of a Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman." (William Moulton Marston, "Why 100,000,000 Americans Read Comics," American Scholar 13 [Winter 1943-1944]: 41). The appearance of Wonder Woman was greeted with special endorsements by Tunney, Marble, and Jack Dempsey (All-Star Comics no. 10). Marble was also Associate
While the board met infrequently and its members were generally consulted on matters of policy individually, it aided Superman DC in drafting a code of standards for its comics. The code stipulated that the lead character in a comic, or any character children might identify with themselves or their family, could not be killed or otherwise harmed, nor could the character harm or kill other characters. It also prohibited the graphic depiction of hangings or knifings and the inclusion of sexual references. Although the advisors did not preview the comics, they did receive them for their opinions after publication. In 1944, Marston proclaimed that many of the worst offenses and defects of DC comic books had been corrected and cited improvement in the standards of printing, art, and story. He added that, in an effort to increase and strengthen their vocabulary, in each story a certain percentage of words were included which were above the reading level of the average child.

Editor of the Wonder Woman quarterly, which added Helen Wainwright Stelling, Olympic swimmer and diver, to its endorsers (Wonder Woman no. 1 [Summer 1942], reprinted in Famous First Edition no. F-6 [1975]).

Bill Finger, a writer for DC, recalled that DC's code of standards resulted from reader reaction to Batman's use of a machine gun in Batman no. 1 ([Spring 1940], reprinted in Famous First Edition no. F-5 [February-March 1975]).

Items from a "1942 intra-office code of a big publisher" included in Fredric Wertham, "It's Still Murder," Saturday Review of Literature, April 9, 1955, p. 46, were probably from the DC code. They were:

Item "3. Never show an electric chair or hanging. If we must show a hanging, a silhouette will do the trick. If we must show an electrocution, have the light dim and go on again. This will not offend the mothers and fathers of our readers."

Item "7. We must not roast anybody alive."

Item "11. Little children are not to be killed. On rare occasions—not too often—it may be necessary to threaten their lives, but that's all."

Item "12. We must not chop limbs off characters. The same goes for putting people's eyes out."

The Gaines All-American line of DC comics adhered to a similar but apparently separate code drafted by editor Sheldon Mayer. Its provisions forbid the depiction of scenes of shooting, stabbing, torture or mutilation, hypodermic needles and coffins. Jacobs, p. 74.

Senate Subcommittee, Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books), pp. 156-161; and Marston, pp. 41-42.
More educational comics were also developed to counter charges that comics were, at best, a waste of time. In 1941, the first Classics Comics, a comic book adaptation of The Three Musketeers, was published by Albert L. Kanter, a former sales representative for a textbook publishing company. Other adaptations, such as Ivanhoe, Don Quixote, and Oliver Twist, followed. By 1946, almost one hundred million copies of Classics Comics had been sold. M.C. Gaines, president of All-American Comics, a part of the Superman DC group of companies, published the first issue of Picture Stories From the Bible, Old Testament Edition, in late 1942. Gaines promised his readers "the exciting and daring stories of the Old Testament heroes in the same color continuity which you like to read." Publication of the New Testament Edition was begun in 1944. The two series boasted an impressive council of ten religious advisors who represented the Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic faiths. Three secular educational series, Picture Stories From American History, Picture Stories From World History, and Picture Stories From Science, were initiated by Gaines in 1945 and 1947.


33All-Star Comics no. 14 (December 1942-January 1943).

34In 1943, Gaines divided the $3,500 profit realized by sales of one million copies of the Picture Stories From the Bible series among the ten groups represented by the advisors. He described the publication of the Bible comics as "a public service." New York Times, December 30, 1943, p. 15; "Comic Book Scriptures," Newsweek, October 16, 1944, p. 88; and M.C. Gaines, ed., Picture Stories From the Bible: The Old Testament in Full-Color Comic-Strip Form (New York: Scarf Press, 1979), p. 223.

35"Comic-Coated History," Newsweek, August 5, 1948.
Several Catholic educational groups also conceded the instructional potentials of the successful new medium and added variations of the comic book form to their ventures. In September 1941, *Catholic Boy* contained biographies of Commodore John Barry and St. Paul in a comic insert, as well as humorous and fiction strips. The Catechetical Guild Educational Society, founded by the Reverend Louis A. Giles of St. Paul, Minnesota, issued the first Catholic comic magazine, *Timeless Topix*, in November 1942. Giles, the publisher and editor of *Catholic Digest*, described the Guild's product, later renamed *Topix*, as "tales that . . . grip the attention of boys and girls with mystery, action, adventure [,] but . . . true stories of real people who loved and fought for God and country and the good."

The Guild also formulated its own code of standards, which stressed the laws of God, the Constitution, and the sanctity of family life, for application to all comic books. Distributed to parochial schools, within one year *Topix* circulated 200,000 copies, and production eventually increased to 300,000 issues per month. However, the financial success of the Guild was assured with the publication of *Is This Tomorrow?* in 1947, the first of a series of anti-Communist polemics. Although it sold over three million copies, *Is This Tomorrow?* was also denounced as "anti-Semitic, anti-Democratic, anti-Communist, markedly Fascist, Hitlerite, violence-inciting [and] war mongering . . . ."


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37 Jandoli, p. 331; Blood Is the Harvest (n.d.), reprinted in *The Rare Book Portfolio* (Dayton: Sparkle City Comics, 1979); and "A Brief History of These Rare Books" (Typewritten), in *The Rare Book Portfolio*. 
by George A. Pflaum Publishers, were both distributed exclusively to parochial schools. A representative of Pflaum Publishers, which also originated The Young Catholic Messenger, the oldest secular or religious classroom instructional magazine, described the aim of Treasure Chest as exclusively entertainment, "to counteract the influence of the newsstand comic." In 1945, the Reverend Myron F. Florey of Scranton, Pennsylvania, released Pictorial Catechist, a classroom comic, and Paradise on Parade, the first Catholic comic intended solely for newsstand sales. An additional newsstand comic, Catholic Comics, was initiated in 1946 by Catholic Publications. While the Catholic comic received general acclaim from superintendents of parochial schools and other diocese officials, efforts to promote newsstand sales faltered. The belated Catholic Comics was discontinued in 1949, and, by 1951, no Catholic comics were sold on newsstands.

Many of the advisors for the various comic book companies also acted as apologists for and defenders of the medium. In a special issue of the Journal of Educational Sociology, Harvey Zorbaugh, an advisor to Fawcett, defended the comic book by citing the widespread popularity of the comic strip. His confusion of the distinction between the two may not have been innocent. The comic strip had endured a similar trial and emerged as respectable. Zorbaugh and Sidonie Gruenberg, also an advisor to Fawcett, classified the comic book as modern folklore.

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38 Sharkey, pp. 256-257.

39 Jandoli, p. 332; Sharkey, p. 257; and Overstreet, p. 53.

40 Many of the earlier criticisms of comic strips were identical to those applied to comic books. See John K. Ryan, "Are the Comics Moral?" Forum and Century 95 (May 1936): 301-304; and "Funny Strips: Cartoon-Drawing is Big Business; Effects on Children Debated," Literary Digest, December 12, 1936, pp. 18-19. As early as 1908, at the American Playground Congress, Maud Summers, a children's storyteller, denounced the comic supplement because it lowered the standard of literary appreciation and taught "'children to throw water from an upper window on an apple woman, or outwit an old and infirm man.'" New York Times, September 10, 1908, p. 5.
and fairy tale, guilty of the same excesses which were generally accepted in these more traditional children's fare. Dr. Lauretta Bender praised the fantasy elements in comics as useful to children in the solution of everyday anxiety and problems. The advocates of comics also declared that some juveniles--those who experienced difficulty with conventional reading matter--profited from what was often their only experience with the world of books. Some believed the comics could be a transition to better literature. Others praised their potential for improvement of reading skills and vocabulary.41

While the debates raged, many schools adopted the educational comics for use as supplemental texts. Over 25,000 public and parochial schools made use of Classic Comics, while over 1,000 employed some issues of Picture Stories From American History in their sixth through eighth grade history classes. Superman DC advisor Dr. W.W. Sones and Katherine H. Hutchinson of the Falk School of the University of Pittsburgh also prepared a teacher's manual to accompany the Picture Stories From American History series. A copy was supplied free to teachers who ordered a set quantity of the comic book for classroom use. The most famous comic book character, Superman, also hosted a workbook prepared by a Massachusetts teacher for use in that state's English classes.42 "Thousands" of churches ordered Gaines' most highly touted "public service" effort, Picture Stories From the Bible, for their Sunday schools.

The most wary critics continued to question the worth and effect of the products of the industry. In 1943, the Children's Book Committee of the Child


Study Association, which supplied three advisors to two comic publishers, issued a survey of comic books. A combination of reprimand and praise, the survey divided comics into ten types and evaluated each type. The committee was critical of scenes of violence or cruelty in the adventure comics and suggestive illustrations in jungle and love interest comics. They also condemned the poor legibility and printing, misleading covers, and questionable advertisements which still characterized most comics. But crime and detective comics received the most detailed criticism. While the committee failed to document evidence to support the connection, it recommended that depictions of various petty crimes be omitted to prevent delinquents or those on the verge of delinquency from emulating them.

In spite of its moderate criticism, the committee counseled moderation. Excessive reading of comic books did not cause fear or emotional distress, the committee concluded. Instead, it was one more symptom of an already present maladjustment. Parents were advised that comics, read in moderate amounts, served as a transitory stage to better reading for most youths. The committee cautioned parents not to attack or prohibit the comics because they did not meet standards of adult taste. Such actions, it was warned, could shake the child's confidence in his parent's judgment and lead to "undercover reading, black market trading, and other evils."

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43The ten types of comic books, as perceived by the committee, were adventure, fantastic adventure, crime and detective, real stories and biography, war, retold classics, love interest, jungle adventure, animal cartoons, and fun and humor. Children's Book Committee, pp. 112-115.

44Children's Book Committee, pp. 112-113. Crime Does Not Pay, published by Lev Gleason, was the first crime comic. It realistically depicted the lives of criminals and devoted the bulk of content of each story to their activities rather than to those of a hero. In an editorial, Gleason dedicated the first issue "to the youth of America with the hope that it will help make better, cleaner young citizens." No. 22 (July 1942). The object of the publication was "to make crystal clear that CRIME DOES NOT PAY! . . . it is a sucker's game." Ibid.

45Children's Book Committee, pp. 113-118.
By the mid-1940s, many critics acknowledged the inevitability of the comic book and cautiously seconded the policy of watchful vigilance urged by the Child Study Association. Most people remained unconcerned. In 1944, a national public opinion poll revealed that 75 percent of all adults thought comic books were "'good, clean fun.'" The end of the war, however, brought a crisis to the industry.

During World War II, comic books, as well as the rest of the magazine industry, were subject to the regulation of the War Production Board (WPB), which established paper quotas. The WPB regulations sought to conserve paper, manpower, and electricity, and to ease transportation difficulties. In 1943, for example, all magazines which used over twenty-five tons of paper per quarter were restricted to 90 percent of the total tonnage used in 1942. The decision to base quotas on tonnage rather than net paid circulation benefited the pulps and comics most because both depended mainly on newsstand and other retail sales and loaded the racks to obtain maximum coverage. The paper reduction was easily absorbed from returns. Publishers who could get the paper and the press time reaped a bonanza. Civilian consumers, burdened with unaccustomed boom wages, avidly bought the limited supplies of periodicals, and servicemen developed an insatiable appetite for comic books. Returns in some cases for periodicals dropped to as low as 3 percent, with one-half of those due to spoilage.

With the end of WPB restrictions and the easing of shortages, the magazine balloon expanded. Retailers were buried under a flood of 1,200 titles, over 200 of which appeared between January and June 1946. They returned many bundles unopened and prematurely and in such numbers that distributors were unable to keep


up with returns. Comic books were the first casualties. Sales which had peaked at 40 million a month during the war fell to 27 million in June 1946. The public, long used to a restricted market and curtailed leisure activities, now found itself with a wider choice and a freedom to discriminate.  

Established titles, such as Superman and Captain Marvel, were least affected, but publishers without the benefit of best-selling characters were forced to retrench. They sought new formulae and, in an industry whose creed continued to be that imitation breeds success, turned to teen-age humor, funny animals and variations of Lev Gleason's quietly prospering Crime Does Not Pay. In a suddenly overcrowded field, "'blood in the title and blood on the cover'" offered recognition and appeal. Production figures seemed to confirm the innovations. In 1946, despite the mid-year slump in sales, production soared to an average of 45 million comic books a month. The yearly total of 540 million was an all-time high and one printer commented that it was only limited by the supply of newsprint.

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49Advertising Age, August 9, 1948, p. 62.

50"540 Million Comics Published During 1946," Publishers' Weekly, September 6, 1947, p. 1030.