

EVIL HARVEST: INVESTIGATING THE COMIC BOOK,

1948-1955

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

Arkansas State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Steven E. Mitchell

Arkansas State University

January 1982

This Thesis is Approved by the Thesis Committee.

*Lucy J. Ball*

CHAIRMAN

*William M. Clements*

MEMBER

*Charles K. Kinner*

MEMBER

*C. K. McFarland*

CHAIRMAN OF THE DEPARTMENT

*Frederick W. Smith*

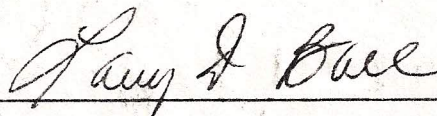
DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

EVIL HARVEST: INVESTIGATING THE COMIC BOOK,

1948-1955

Steven E. Mitchell, M.A.  
Arkansas State University  
January 1982

Signature of Adviser for the Thesis



As early as 1941, the relatively recent phenomenon of the comic book reigned as both a universal juvenile experience and a financially lucrative business. Alarmed by the pervasiveness of the unsupervised medium, critics speculated that the comic book concealed and nurtured corrupting and debasing influences. The wholesale disruption of American society during World War II precluded efforts to regulate the industry, but a few publishers responded to the disorganized outrage with individual advisory boards and endorsements by educators and public figures.

With the advent of the Cold War and the multiplication of domestic fears, the incidence of delinquency increased following a brief post-World War II decline. In 1947, the first industry-wide publishers' group was created to offset or minimize criticism. The following year attacks by drama critic John Mason Brown and psychiatrist Fredric Wertham inspired nationwide, organized reaction by concerned citizens.

In the same year the Supreme Court's Winters decision resulted in an increase in the number of comic books which dealt with crime, the focus of the renewed controversy.

From 1948 to 1954, formal and informal censorship and evaluation groups and municipal, county, state, and national investigations debated the question of the comic book as a factor which contributed to juvenile delinquency. By 1954, the weight of inquiry became insupportable and, in the wake of severe Senate hearings, continuing efforts by a committee of the New York legislature, and shriller public indignation, publishers created a nominally independent, self-regulatory authority. The most vocal and sincere critics were not appeased, but the gesture served to eliminate or isolate publishers of the most objectionable comics. Official reservations were also satisfied, although the connection between delinquency and the comic book remained unresolved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
2. "SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS": ORIGIN OF THE CONTROVERSY . . . . .	4
3. THE "RED-HOT THRILL": THE CONTROVERSY REVIVED . . . . .	23
4. SUPERMAN IN DISGUISE: THE NEW YORK STATE INVESTIGATIONS . . . . .	63
5. "THE FIFTH HORSEMAN": THE FEDERAL INVESTIGATIONS . . . . .	83
6. "'OPERATION CLEAN-UP'" AND AFTER: THE CONTROVERSY RESOLVED . . . . .	111
APPENDIXES . . . . .	130
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	135