2003

A comprehensive examination of the precode horror comic books of the 1950's

Gene Marshall Broxson

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project

Part of the American Popular Culture Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/2429

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.
A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF THE PRECODE
HORROR COMIC BOOKS OF THE 1950'S

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication Studies

by
Gene Marshall Broxson
September 2003
A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF THE PRECODE
HORROR COMIC BOOKS OF THE 1950'S

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
Gene Marshall Broxson
September 2003

Approved by:
Fred E. Jandt, Chair, Thesis Committee
Chair, Communication Studies

Stacey Sowards
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the precode horror comic books of the 1950's as an original American art form and as a popular medium in postwar America. This thesis describes and analyzes how the horror comics dominated the American comic book market from 1950 to 1955, becoming increasingly more violent and gruesome, until they reached the point where congress intervened and pressured the comic book industry into self-regulation. This thesis examines the anti-comics crusade that resulted in a strict code of self-censorship that destroyed the horror comic books in 1954, applies critical analysis of the social, cultural, and ideological implications of this McCarthy era political movement, and assesses its impact to the comic book industry and to the development of popular culture in the United States.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Dolores Tanno as the single person most responsible for encouraging and inspiring me to continue my education as a graduate student at California State University, San Bernardino. I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of my graduate coordinator, Dr. Fred Jandt, as well as the other two members of my graduate advisory committee, Dr. Robin Larsen and Dr. Stacey Sowards. I want to also acknowledge the assistance of Ted Krug and Janice Darling, as well as the entire CSUSB Financial Aid Office, for making it possible for me to attend college in the first place. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the financial and emotional support of my mother, Roberta Broxson, and my brother, Bruce Broxson, without whose assistance my continued education at CSUSB would not have been possible. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of super comic-collector, Mike Wills, who graciously lent his materials and his expertise to the completion of this 1950’s horror comic book graduate thesis.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my best friend and little brother, Bruce V. Broxson.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Overview</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Book Culture</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Book Fandom</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodification and National Identity</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Book Shops and Conventions</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Book Language</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comics and Conservative Institutions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarians and Gatekeepers</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Book Effects Research</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Anti-Comics Crusade</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Comic Book Code</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Debate Over Influence of Comics</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Books and Literacy</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Literature Review</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Analyses of Ideology in Comic Books</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Analyses of Comic Book Fandom</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Title</td>
<td>Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Books and Elites: Suppression of Popular Culture</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives and Propositions</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR: HORROR COMICS OF THE 1950'S</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-World War II and the State of the Comic Book Market</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Genesis of E.C. Comics and the New Trend in Comic Books</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Birth of the Horror Comics</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The E.C. Comic Book Titles</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror Hosts: The Three Ghoulunatics</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The High Standard of Quality Set by E.C. Comics</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Greatest Comic Book Artists and Writers in the World</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Writing Team of William M. Gaines and Al Feldstein</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Basic Elements of the E.C. Plot Style</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gory Stories with Gruesome Shock Endings</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotting Corpses Rising From the Grave to Seek Revenge</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Publishers Jump on the Horror Bandwagon and Flood the Market</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other 1950'S Horror Comics</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Analysis of Horror Comics</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE: THE ANTI-COMICS CRUSADE AND THE ANTI-AMERICAN POLITICAL CAMPAIGN</strong></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Comic Book Baseball Game</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public Debate in the Popular Press ........ 144
In the Dark Shadow of the McCarthy Era .... 153
Report by The New York State Joint Legislative
Committee to Study the Publication of
Comic Books .................. 158
The Senate Subcommittee to Investigate
Juvenile Delinquency Hearings ........ 162
The 1954 Comics Code ............ 166
The Death of the Horror Comic Books
of the 1950's .................... 169
The Death of E.C. Comics ............ 171
Dr. Fredric J. Wertham and Critical Analysis
of "The Prude" .................... 173
In Memoriam .................... 176
CHAPTER SIX: THE AFTERMATH ........... 178
APPENDIX A: THE HORROR COMICS OF THE 1950'S ... 194
APPENDIX B: ANTI-CENSORSHIP EDITORIALS ........ 198
APPENDIX C: ARTWORK FROM THE HORROR COMICS
OF THE 1950'S .................. 203
REFERENCES ..................... 225
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Exactly one year ago, I set out upon an odyssey of inquiry to explore the pre-code horror comic books of the 1950’s and the political campaign that killed them. I was guided by two primary thesis questions: why were the horror comics of the 1950’s important to the development of popular culture in the United States, and why was the political campaign that killed them important to the development of pop culture in the United States. Secondary questions that I also wanted to probe revolved around “how,” and “in what ways” were both of the above important to American popular culture. One year later, I believe that all of the above questions have been adequately answered, along with some deep theoretical revelations that I did not expect to find at the beginning of this long, strange journey.

To begin with, comic books have never been taken seriously by either popular writers or scholars. Comic books have been attacked, criticized, and condemned by educators, librarians, and conservative institutions repeatedly throughout their seventy-five year history in
the United States. Arguments against comic books have been made on the grounds that they are morally deficient, socially unproductive, and that they promote illiteracy and juvenile delinquency. However, evidence to support these claims is practically non-existent. Having personally experienced the unfair and unsubstantiated criticisms of comics and the disparaging remarks made about those who read them, I decided to do this in-depth study of them, and the fan culture that surrounds them, giving both the serious consideration that they deserve.

As I prepared to survey, inventory, and assess modern day comic books and the culture of comic book fandom, I noticed and considered the overall similarity of the titles, styles, and themes prevalent in the comic books on the stands today. At the same time, I observed and pondered the common shared characteristics of the fans and collectors who read them, and found there also a very definite sameness. I was then struck with the sudden realization that these young fans and collectors had, in all likelihood, never seen or read any of the old horror comic books of the 1950’s. What was even worse, they probably did not even know that these great and unforgettable horror comics even existed. There was a good
reason for this: these comic books were killed in their prime by a political lynch mob in the United States at the height of the McCarthy hysteria.

These classic horror comics of the 1950’s were scrutinized under the glare of congressional investigation, their publishers were coerced into a code of self-censorship, and the titles were driven out of business by a generation of uptight, conservative, and fear-driven Americans, being blindly led by a few misguided, deceitful, and politically-motivated individuals. These paragons of virtue and American high society rallied public support, intervened, regulated, and dictated the content of children’s comic books for all future generations. They did this to ensure that comic books would conform to their self-appointed standards of “good taste” (under the pretense of serving public interests).

There was a time when comic books were not so very similar. There was a time when they were fresh and new, unique and different, and full of delicious thrills and suspense. The horror comic books of the 1950’s were gruesome, shocking, appalling, and simply wonderful. But the comic code changed all that in 1955. For this reason, kids (and many adults) reading comic books today will never
even know what they were like in the early 1950’s. The fans and collectors are probably not even aware of the fact that the culture of fandom that they are so much a part of originated from and sprang up from the horror comics of the 1950’s.

This thesis provides a comprehensive academic examination and analysis of the social impact of the horror comic books of the early 1950’s. It includes an in-depth literature review that justifies and validates comic books as a true form of American popular culture, worthy of study by social scientists and communication scholars, and relevant to the discipline of communication studies as a form of mass media. This thesis provides a comprehensive overview of what has been written about popular culture in the communication studies literature, and evaluates the way that academic writers have approached the subject of comic books (as a form of American pop culture). In addition, this work assesses the importance of the 1950’s pre-code horror comic books (comics published prior to the institution of the comics code in 1955) to American history (in relation to the development of pop culture in America).

This thesis discusses the writers, artists, publishers, stories, styles, and themes, of the horror
comic books, published from 1950 to 1955. It conveys
descriptive information and employs pop culture theory and
methodology. It also describes and analyzes the horror
comics' total domination of the American comic book
marketplace from 1950 to 1955, and elaborates on how they
became progressively more and more violent and gruesome,
until they finally reached the point where Congressional
intervention and regulation were necessary.

This analysis will assess, for example, the report
made by the New York State Joint Legislative Committee To
Study The Publication Of Comic Books in 1951, as well as
the book, Seduction Of The Innocent, by psychiatrist Dr.
Fredric Wertham, whose attempt to establish a causal
relationship between horror/crime comic books and juvenile
delinquency in children in the 1950's escalated the
political campaign to regulate or self-censor American
comic books in 1954.

This thesis describes in detail the fear, paranoia,
and hysteria of the McCarthy (witch-hunt) era that
eventually led to the destruction of the horror comic books
in late 1954. It includes excerpts from the transcripts of
the 1954 Kefauver Senate hearings (the Senate Subcommittee
to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency) that examined the
horror comic books and subpoenaed the publishers to testify, and will describe how these hearings culminated in the "self regulation" of the comics code which destroyed the horror comic books completely and forever changed the development of pop culture in America.

The foundation of this analysis rests upon two simple thesis questions:

1. Why were the horror comics of the 1950's important to the development of pop culture in the United States?

2. Why was the 1954 anti-comics crusade that killed them important to the development of pop culture in the United States?

Admittedly, the above two primary thesis questions are simple, but what I found in my investigation of them turned out to be quite complex and intricate, deep in its theoretical basis, and vast in its implications for American society.

In my examination of the above two primary questions, I found that the 1950's anti-comics campaign was just as important to the development of pop culture in the United States as the comics themselves. I found that it was, in fact, an overall suppression of popular culture by the elitist power structure in the United States. I found that
it stemmed from the dictates of "good taste" as defined by conservative institutions in the U.S. who implemented it under the guise of public interest. I determined that this suppression of popular culture was based upon the cultural, social, political, and ideological concepts of democracy and capitalism that are the very foundation of American society. These were the real reasons behind the call for comic book censorship in 1954. In this respect, the anti-comic book crusade had its roots deep in the very structure of American society.

I also found that the anti-comics campaign in 1954 could only be properly understood in the context of the dark political climate that it was born in and thrived on--the ugly fear and suspicion of the McCarthy anti-Communist campaign. Without this backdrop of hysteria and panic, reforms calling for censorship, in all likelihood, would not have prevailed.

I discovered that the anti-comics campaign served as a microcosm for the entire McCarthy debacle, a case study for understanding postwar America's search for national identity in a time of crisis--a crisis of panic and hysteria fostered by the unscrupulous Senator Joseph McCarthy and the ugly deception he practiced (shamefully
exposed at his public hearings of Congressional
inquisition). I discovered that both the anti-comics
crusade and the anti-Communist crusade were part of a much
larger crisis of domestic subversion. This larger crisis
was fostered by postwar America’s fear of internal
corruption, moral weakening, and a continuing fear of
ourselves. This larger issue, America’s search for
national identity, fostered the McCarthy senate hearings
that destroyed American lives, and the juvenile delinquency
senate hearings that destroyed the horror comics.

Finally, I found that public and economic pressure on
retailers, as well as the comics code, killed the horror
comics of the 1950’s. Without the public support and media
cooperation that bolstered these public crusades, both of
these destructive political campaigns would have failed.

I think that it is of profound importance to the
subject of comic books and to the history of popular
culture in America, that, at one time, educators and
conservative institutions in the United States considered
comic books to be enough of a threat to the health and
well-being of children that congressional investigation and
intervention were deemed necessary. This thesis examines
and analyzes the infamous and notorious horror comics of
the 1950's that caused this great concern, applies a critical perspective to the anti-comics reform crusade that killed them, and, finally, assesses the impact of this social conflict on both the comic book industry and the development of popular culture in America.
I intend to investigate the above two primary thesis questions from two perspectives and from two bodies of knowledge: popular literature and scholarly literature. I have made the decision to proceed in this manner because this thesis topic cannot be fully explored and understood from one position or the other with any real degree of success. Examination and analysis of the horror comic books, the genre that they defined, the wonder and imagination of the children that they captivated and inspired, and the public outrage and political condemnation that they eventually produced, must be made from the position of mainstream popular media: books, magazine articles, newspaper features, television, and even U.S. government reports and hearings. However, just as important as the above position and sources of knowledge, is the academic approach that will provide a scholarly examination and analysis of the horror comic books and their untimely demise from an academic perspective and from scholarly reference sources. Only an academic approach to the subject matter can assess its importance and
significance in retrospect. I believe that this dual approach, consisting of both mainstream popular reference sources and scholarly literature reference sources, is the only way to get a comprehensive and complete look at the whole picture: an examination of the subject matter from the perspective of the "average person" in the United States in the 1950's, and an examination and analysis of the subject matter from a scholar's perspective fifty years later. I believe that a scholar's analysis of this subject will be of immense benefit in assessing the long-term impact and significance of the horror comics and their political lynch mob fate on the development of pop culture in the United States. Hopefully, my investigation of the above two primary thesis questions will help us to better understand comic books as an original American art form, and as an important part of American pop culture, and will further our understanding of the impact of mass media on society for both communication studies and social science.

Background

Much has been written about comic books in the seventy years that they have existed in the United States. Many mainstream popular books and articles have been
written about them, hailing them as a truly original American art form, since their inception in 1932. Surprisingly, much has also been written about them in the scholarly literature as well. In the academic community, much has been written about comic books as a mass media-driven social force and as an enduring form of American pop culture.

The most relevant and useful research studies and articles on comic books are those that define and describe comic books as a truly original American art form, a form of mass media that falls under the scholarly designation of American pop culture. Some of the very best of these works include: Thomas M. Inge’s *Comics As Culture*; S.M. Gruenberg’s *The Comics as A Social Force*; Neal Harris’s *Who Owns Our Myths? Heroism and Copyright in an Age of Mass Culture*; Mathew P. McAllister’s *Cultural Argument and Organizational Constraint in the Comic Book Industry*; Sharon Lowery’s *Milestones in Mass Communication Research: Media Effects*; Martin Barker’s *Comics, Ideology, Power, and the Critics*, Lang & Trimble’s *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow? An Examination of the American Monomyth and the Comic Book Super-hero*; Arthur A. Berger’s *The Comic Stripped American*; A.W. Sadler’s *The Love Comics and

The above research studies and scholarly writings comprise the essential background literature to build a solid foundation for an academic approach to understanding comic books as an American art form and as a measurable social force in terms of mass media influence. These works are a necessary prerequisite to an in-depth study of comic books in the United States.

Two key studies that constitute the current state of knowledge about comic books in the discipline of communication studies are Jeffrey A. Brown’s (1997) journal article, “Comic Book Fandom and Cultural Capital,” and Mathew Puttz’s (1999) book, Comic Book Culture. The first is primarily concerned with examination of the culture of comic book enthusiasts, and the significance of comic books to American culture as demonstrated by the considerable phenomenon of comic book fandom. The second is more focused on comic books as an American art form, and places much emphasis on the super-hero characters within them as
icons of American pop culture. Both of these exhaustive studies are of monumental importance to the academic treatment of comic books because they provide the most comprehensive and complete scholarly analyses of comic books and comic book culture that have been done to this date.

The above two seminal works are important to the discipline of communication studies because they provide thorough and accurate examinations of comic books as forms of mass media and popular culture, in terms of being an American art form and as icons of Western fantasy and American myth. These two key studies are also just as important to the discipline of social sciences, because both evaluate and discuss the social significance of comic books in terms of the culture of collectors and fandom that surrounds them. Most importantly, both of these studies attempt to ascribe meaning to the culture of comic books and to the culture of comic book enthusiasts and collectors for modern American society. However, neither of these studies touches sufficiently upon my precise area of inquiry. Neither of these works focuses primarily on the horror comic books of the 1950’s, nor does either place any kind of special emphasis on the unique position that these
particular comics hold in shaping American history and in shaping the development of American popular culture.

Most of the studies on comics give a broad overview and general history of comic books and comic book fandom, but fail to give an in-depth analysis of the 1950's horror comics as a distinctly different type of comic book. I would argue that the vast majority of studies that have been done on comics cannot accurately assess and evaluate the true significance of the 1950's horror comic books (as a form of American pop culture) because almost all of these studies are essentially about super-hero comic books that rely heavily on themes of children's fantasy that have no meaningful aspect of realism in them. The colorful exploits and continuing series of fantasy adventures that comprise the storytelling features of super-hero comic books have more to do with cultural heroism, imagination, and fantasy escapism than with the more realistic social evils of death, destruction, and depravity that drenched the pages of the horror comics and made them forbidden fruit for the innocent children of the naive 1950's.

The horror stories in the comic books of the 1950's were completely different from the fantasy exploits and colorful adventures that characterize super-hero comic
books, because they contained an element of frightening realism to them. This element of realism often went to extremes of excessive violence, decapitation, dismemberment, sadism, perversion, and lewd sexuality. However, this same "frightening realism" captured the imaginations of comic book-reading children in the golden age of the early 1950's, and produced an entirely different reaction of outrage and public outcry from parents, teachers, and politicians in this so-called golden age—the relatively tame and innocent era of the postwar years of the early 1950's.

I believe that my thesis will be significant because it will further the existing body of knowledge on comic books in relevant and important areas that other academic writers have investigated, and because it will explore new and interesting areas of inquiry that other academic writers have not investigated. In relation to other key studies done on comic books, my thesis will be similar in that it will examine and analyze comics as an American art form and a powerful social force. In the same respect, my thesis will be different from other studies in that it will focus on only one type of comic book (horror comic books as opposed to super-hero and other common love, war, western,
science fiction, crime, and humor comic books), a completely different type of comic book (independent short horror stories with realism vs. continuing series adventures characterized by super-hero fantasy exploits), from only one genre (new trend 1950 to postcode 1955, as opposed to a general overview of comic book history from 1930's to the present), and with much emphasis placed on the social influence of comic books as in assessing their impact on adolescent literacy and juvenile delinquency.

My approach to comic books will also be different from most other scholarly writings on them, in that I will place more emphasis on analyses of the political campaign and institution of the code that killed the horror comics than on comic books as a socially relevant American art form.

Historical Overview

The facsimile newspaper strip reprint collections constitute the earliest "comic books" (Inge, 1975). Prior to 1932, there were no comic books. There were comic Sunday funnies, daily funnies, even comic sections from newspapers, but there were no comic books as they are commonly known today. Comic books were created simply by collecting comic strips from the "funny papers" section of
newspapers, reprinting them, adding a glossy cover, and binding them into "books" for sale primarily to children in the early 1930's. With thousands of volumes of newspaper funnies already available, it was logical that the first comic book craze would be the reprinted newspaper funnies (Gerber, 1990).

The basic comic book format that was born in the 1930's still prevails today. To millions of readers over the years, the colorful pamphlet with slick colors and pulp-paper interior has been an inexpensive and convenient form of entertainment (Goulart, 1991). Their popularity diminished only by the emergence of mass-marketed popular music and the mass appeal and immeasurable dominance of the new visual medium of television, comic books have survived and are still socially relevant to millions of children and adult enthusiasts across the United States. For nearly seventy years, the comic book has remained a popular and appealing storytelling medium and an enduring American art form.

There are several genres among mainstream comic books marketed regularly in the United States at this time: superhero comics, romance comics, horror comics, mystery comics, crime comics, western comics, war comics, adventure comics,
humor comics, funny animal comics, teen comics, newspaper reprint comics, and jungle comics. Less popular, but no less significant in terms of American culture, are independent comics, adult comics, alternative comics, and underground comics. There is a vast array of titles and a wide variety of themes cleverly marketed to profitably meet every conceivable consumer demand.

Comic Book Culture

There can be no doubt that at this time comic books have become an integral part of American popular culture. They are as much a part of American culture as apple pie, motion pictures, radio, television, baseball, or beauty pageants. But just as much as they are a part of American culture, comic books have acquired a culture that is all their own--a comic book culture. This comic book culture consists of the characters, the artists, the writers, the journalists, the specialty shops, the conventions, the websites, the industry, television shows, cartoons, motion pictures, but, most importantly, the vast community of enthusiasts and collectors that comprise the complex, and intricate network of comic book fandom. Like the larger American culture, though, comics culture is a multi-
culture— an amalgamation of different cultures and communities that is unified by something fundamental, either from within or without (Pustz, 1999). In comic book culture, that fundamental something is a devotion to and appreciation of the comics medium, which nearly all Americans outside this culture lack (Pustz, 1999). Comic book culture is a world unto itself— a world with many smaller worlds that cannot be easily understood by any outsider looking in. The world of comic book culture is one layered with complex and intricate social and ideological strata— and penetrating this world has been a challenge that has held considerable interest and fascination for numerous scholars and academic writers.

Comic Book Fandom

The practice of fandom is a complex intensification of more general aspects of popular culture (Brown, 1997). Comic fandom, like all fandom, is a clear and often exaggerated example of how popular culture functions in society (Brown, 1997). The complex community of comic collectors and fans are perhaps the most defining aspect of comic book culture. It might be easy for critics to dismiss comic books as escapist trash beneath the notice of
most scholars and critics, but it is certainly harder to
dismiss the sincere and very active culture surrounding
comics (Pustz, 1999). It has been said that the community
of collectors and comic book enthusiasts create comic book
culture by being active participants in it rather than just
consumers of it (Brown, 1997). The world of comic book
fandom is one in which its participants take a uniquely
active role. Pustz (1999) states:

In some ways, the productivity of comics culture—
with fans helping to create the culture through
web pages, fanzines, letters to the editor,
amateur comics, and becoming professionals—
makes it a model for cultures in general. Perhaps
American culture would be healthier if more
Americans felt that they were active participants
in it and not merely consumers of it. As Fallow
argues, American public, political culture would
be more vibrant if more people were encouraged to
participate and fewer were lulled into a
superficial cynicism by the media. The culture
of comic books in the United States has
encouraged multiple levels of cultural
engagement. Perhaps comics culture can teach
Americans ways to reintegrate cultural life into an active, participatory whole (p.97).

As described above, close scrutiny reveals that the phenomenon of comic book fandom is intricate and complex. It should also be noted that the world of comic book fandom is a defining component of comic book culture.

Commodification and National Identity.

Ian Gordon defines comic books and strips as less of an American art form and culture unto itself, than as a structural support of common national identity, a "consumer culture" that reinforces and reinvents itself through the purchase of commodities. Western culture and capitalist ideology are based in democracy and business interests, and, in this respect, Gordon sees comic books and the culture that surrounds them as an extension of these values and business interests. Gordon (1996) states:

The structural changes in the economy of the United States at the turn of the century gave rise to as Modernism. The relationship between comic strips and Modernism can be understood through two approaches. First comics can be seen as an outcome of the process of
modernization, and second they can be viewed as a humor-based response to the problems of representation faced by a society in transition. Comic art contributed to the formation and expansion of a culture of consumption and this culture helped to shape a particular ideology of national identity (p. 37).

The writings of Ian Gordon demonstrate that comic art, in the form of comic strips, has become a widely consumed commodity with considerable advertising potential here in the United States. Gordon’s writings place further importance on the commodification of comic books in that they serve to advertise more than mere products—comic books advertise the values and practices of emerging American culture in a way that is meaningful to the development of our national identity.

**Comic Book Shops and Conventions**

Comic Book culture is established, defined, demonstrated, and maintained through comic book specialty shops, comic conventions, the community of comic book collectors and enthusiasts, and the comics themselves. Unknown to most non-readers, comic shops serve as a kind of
cultural clubhouse where fans can spend time being themselves among their friends and other like-minded individuals (Pustz, 1999). But comic book culture really began long before comic book specialty shops began to appear in the early 1980's. Beginning in the 1940's, when as many as 95 percent of all American children were reading comics, the medium had a very distinctive audience (Pustz, 1999). Comic book culture has also been constructed by comic conventions. Comic book conventions, held annually throughout the United States, give fans a place to gather (Putsz, 1999). These conventions unite the creators, collaborators, and consumers of the medium, and play a central role in the unification of the components that comprise comic book culture and the comic book publishing industry.

Comic Book Language

Comic book culture is further constructed by the use of its own distinctive language. This language is demonstrated amongst the community of collectors and also in the comics themselves. Different from prose or film, comic books use a unique language that demands training and experience for full understanding (Pustz, 1999). This
language, commonly referred to as comic literacy, has certain limitations that warrant considerable explanation to non-readers, but is understood by internalization in comics enthusiasts through their experience reading comics. Comic literacy limits and defines the comic book audience as the people who already have the knowledge to understand them (McCloud, 1993). These limitations—often knowingly put there by the creators themselves—work to form some of the most essential boundaries between comic book culture and the outside world (Pustz, 1999)

Comics and Conservative Institutions

While the incorporation of pictorial text with written text is as old as the illuminated manuscript, it is clear that the comic book as pop culture industry is a distinctively 20th century, American phenomenon (Schmidt, 1992). Comic strips and comic books have been hailed as a truly original American art form. Like so many other distinctively American industries, the comic book industry produces a disposable product. Printed on cheap, pulp paper, with low quality color and graphic resolution, the comic book publisher’s primary interest is in keeping cost low enough to provide for maximum distribution at minimum
cost (Schmidt, 1992). Comic books were never intended to be taken seriously as either a high quality pictorial or literary art form. Comic books were created and marketed more as low quality items for profit purposes, than as high quality items for artistic merit.

Despite the fact that comics, as with so many other mass media products, have been marketed as non-serious, inconsequential, and disposable distractions for the "non-literary" public, they often produce extremely serious and concerned responses from authority figures (Schmidt, 1992). Comic books have been attacked by scholars, educators, and conservative institutions for being poor quality reading material, and for being a significant factor in the continuing deterioration of the moral fiber of American children for more than fifty years now. Almost from its inception, the comic book has not been held in high regard by American society's opinion leaders (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000). One of the earliest salvos of the anti-comics campaign was fired by literary critic Sterling North of the Chicago Daily News. His widely reprinted May 8, 1940, commentary, "A National Disgrace" pulled no punches:

Badly drawn, badly written and badly printed-- a strain on young eyes and stimulant. Their crude
blacks and reds spoil the child's natural sense of color; their hypodermic injection of sex and murder make the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories. Unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the "comic" magazine (p.6).

This essay set the tone for the attitude of America's cultural elite toward the infant art form. A dismissive, often actively hostile, attitude toward the comics medium was accepted as a matter of course by many members of the academic community— with a substantial majority of librarians among them (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000). In fact, librarians, as keepers of suitable literature, and as purveyors of what educators and conservative institutions consider proper and academically nourishing reading material, became some of the most vocal and vicious critics of comic books in the early days.

Librarians and Gatekeepers the 1940's and 1950's is fraught with "anti-comic books" writings -- articles, books, and essays that categorized
comic books as nothing more than ephemeral trash (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

In retrospect, the strong opposition to comic books by librarians in the 1940's and 1950's should be understood and viewed in the context of the early postwar years: comic books were a relatively new medium at that time and they were marketed and widely proliferated as reading material for children. Dismissed as being of little or no value in strengthening reading habits or improving reading skills, comic books were for many years considered to be unworthy of inclusion in library collections, be they public, school, or academic (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

The treatment of comic books in library literature seems to mirror the attitudes toward them by parents, teachers, and others of the American elitist power structure of the time period (1940's and 1950's). Some of these criticisms were clearly unfair in terms of the writers' qualifications. In a 1949 piece entitled "The Comics Dilemma," Elizabeth S. Margulis wrote:

Comic books are sensational and unrealistic in content with a lurid emphasis on crime and sex ... badly drawn and poorly printed so that the reading of them causes eyestrain and headaches.
Of course, many of the claims made against comic books in library literature were unfounded and are quite simply untrue. In a 1942 piece entitled, "How Many Comic Magazines Does the Child Read and Why," Sister M. Katherine and Marion W. Smith wrote:

one of the major dangers in comic reading, especially for the nervous child, is the almost inescapable deep thought day dreaming' (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

Neither of these authors was qualified to draw such an unsupported conclusion nor to make such an unsubstantiated claim.

In a 1948 piece entitled, "Children and Comics," author Mary Crutchfield wrote:

We are not sure of just what effect the comics magazine is having on our children, but we know that they are not helping in any way (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

Incredibly, the above author openly admits that she has no foundation upon which to base her claim, nevertheless, she boldly proclaims that comic books have adverse harmful effects of on children. This kind of unfair, unjust and unwarranted criticism of comic went on for years.
In a 1943 piece entitled, *A Public Library Experiments with the Comics,* author Ethel C. Wright wrote:

The child born in sordid surroundings, with impulses toward cruelty, stealing, revenge, etc., will find unwholesome stimulation for those lower instincts which may unrestricted reading of comics. Without good influences in his life to counteract the abnormal suggestions, disastrous results may follow (Ellis and Highsmith p.13).

Here the author makes incredulous assumptions that those children born of lower economic status are expected to be more inclined toward abnormal psychological and even criminal behavior, and that the reading of comic books, if not counteracted with more wholesome influences, may bring out these negative tendencies already inherent in the child (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

In a 1946 piece entitled, "The Librarian Looks At the Comics," published in the *Illinois Catholic Librarian,* author Catherine E. Adamson wrote:

It is the child who lives in sordid surroundings and subsists almost entirely upon a diet of the comics for whom we must feel concern. Without the wholesome family influences to counteract the
suggestions of the undesirable comics, he may put himself into a state of excitement which can find satisfaction only in further reading of the comics or similar books, or worse still, he may pattern his own behavior after that of his comic book heroes (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

Again, it is assumed that the reading of comic books is done by those from a lower economic status, and it is also assumed that the subversive and negative effects of reading comic books will in some way be of detriment to the child (if not counteracted by more wholesome influences). Again, the above claims are clearly unsubstantiated and paved the way for years of academic scorn.

There are several important messages in the early librarian literature that play into the history of comic books, the anti-comics crusade against them, and the social and ideological basis of my proposed thesis. The first message is that comics are bad for children. The second message is that comics are undesirable for children. The third message is that comics are read by children of lower economic status. The fourth message is that children of lower economic status have inherent abnormal and criminal inclinations, and that the reading of comic books will
bring out these negative tendencies in the child. The fifth message is that reading comic books is harmful to the welfare of the child, and that wholesome or positive influences must be introduced to counteract the negative effects of reading comic books. The sixth message is the single most important message to be derived from the library literature claims against and condemnation of comic books in the 1940's and 1950's. This most significant message is that comic books are undesirable (their negative effects must be counteracted with positive influences) and, finally, because comic books are harmful to children, they must be suppressed (some action must be taken to counter the detrimental effects of comic books on children). In the United States, attacks on comic books have been sanctioned as a necessary means of "protecting the children."

All of the above claims, conclusions, and counter remedies play into my thesis that, for political, ideological, and socialization purposes, the elite social class seek to suppress the mass media popular culture allegiances and indulgences of the lower socioeconomic class beneath them in the societal structure. This elite suppression of popular culture media is political and
economic in nature, and, in the case of the horror comics of the 1950's, this political and economic base lies in America's cultural axis of Western ideology and capitalism.

Comic Book Effects Research

A review of research into the effects of comic books suggests that most of the early critics exaggerated the effects of comics on children (Nyberg, 1998). Even though there was little or no concrete data to support their claims, critics in the 1940's and 1950's continued to insist that comic book reading was harmful and that parents and educators should do whatever they could to redirect their children's interest in the medium (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

At the height of their popularity in the 1940's and 1950's, the comics became subject to the moral crusades of the McCarthy era (Brown, 1997). From the beginning, Conservatives and educators were against comic books. The macabre story lines and the graphic depictions of violence in the early horror comic books caused comic book publishers to run afoul of social reformers in the 1950's (Brislin, 1995). Nyberg (1998) states:

Evidence suggests that the "problem" of comic books entered public discourse only after those
seeking to control children's culture, allied with church and civic groups that traditionally enforced standards of public morality, were able to gain the attention of the popular press. The major factor in the success of the campaign against comics was the linkage of comic book reading to juvenile delinquency, a problem representing the ultimate loss of social control over children (p. 64).

The above analyses by author Amy Nyberg is quite simply brilliant, and provides real insight into the machinations of the anti-comics crusade and the American ideology that was the real motivating force behind it. The American media empowered the civic leaders and morality mongers of the early 1950's to take publicly-supported action against comic books. The organizing principle in all of the hysteria was morality, but its real roots ran deeply into that fundamental American concern--the social control of our children. When the antecedents of the postwar campaign against comics are understood, it becomes clear that while the debate shifted from an emphasis on education and morality to one of law and order, the fundamental concern--
the social control of children—remained the same (Nyberg, 1998).

The debate about the adverse affects of comic books on children and what action should be taken to counteract them went on without reaching any ultimate conclusion for several years. The impetus for the shift in the debate was the emergence of experts such as psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, whose crusade against comics was a significant factor in focusing public attention on the medium and in legitimating the views of those who saw comic books as a threat to children (Nyberg, 1998).

In the early 1950's, a respected psychiatrist and well-meaning reformer named Fredric Wertham published a book entitled Seduction Of The Innocent: The Influence Of Comic Books On Today's Youth and nearly destroyed an indigenous American art form (Siano, 1954). Critics have noted that one of the most striking and bizarre collisions of cultural ideology in the U.S. occurred in the 1950’s when a number of educators, parents, and teacher’s groups, spearheaded by the influential book, Seduction Of The Innocent, by Fredric Wertham, mobilized an aggressive campaign to rigidly control the content of comic books in the U.S. (Brislin, 1995). The 1954 Book Of The Month Club bestseller, Seduction Of The
Innocent, laid the blame for the growing incidence of juvenile delinquency squarely on the pages of comics that glorified crime and horror (Brislin, 1995). A major component of the backlash against comic books in the 1950’s was the increasing concern that a connection existed between comic books and the rising occurrences of juvenile delinquency (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000). There was a wave of public criticism and condemnation of comic books in the early 1950’s that threatened the comic book publishing industry. Riding the crest of this wave was noted psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, a published critic of comic books who began to achieve prominence in the late 1940’s (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

The focus of Wertham’s inquiry was what he called “crime comics,” a classification that included cops-and-robbers, superhero, science fiction, western, jungle, horror, and even romance comics (Brown, 1997). Wertham condemned all comic book genres for just about every kind of atrocity imaginable: bondage, sadism, perversion, gore, decapitation, bodily dismemberment, dissection, mutilation, eyes gouged out, acid in the face, face carved with knife, blood drainage, cannibalism, disembowelment, tongues ripped out, severed head covers, heavy sexual connotations, etc.,
all beckoning to innocent American children from the lurid and violent pages of the postwar comic books of the early 1950’s. Wertham claimed that all comics contained glorified images of criminal violence that inspired children to behave in a similar manner (Brown, 1997). Wertham documented cases of children reading as many as 75 comic books a week. Interest in reading all but disappeared as, to the horror of social theorists, children revealed over and over again their fascination with the sensational violence, semi-nudity, and defiance of authority in comics (Schmidt, 1992). Dr. Wertham focused adult attention on children’s comics.

The full impact of Dr. Wertham’s anti-comics crusade was felt in 1954, with the publication of his magnum opus, Seduction Of The Innocent (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000). The book gained national attention and promoted widespread influence amongst parents and teacher’s groups, and was instrumental in arousing public scrutiny and moral outrage against comic books and publishers in the 1950’s. This book, along with the masterful manipulation of the media conducted by Wertham and like-minded critics, fueled public sentiment against comic books and helped lead to congressional investigation of the comic book industry (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).
Dr. Wertham was absolutely convinced of the relationship between comic books and criminality. "If one were to set out to show children how to steal, rob, lie, cheat, assault, and break into houses, no better method could be devised" (Wertham, 1954, page 165). In this respect, Wertham believed that comic books were a literal training ground for instruction in criminal activity and deviant social behavior. Wertham (1954) summarized the negative effects of comic book reading as:

1. The comic book format is an invitation to illiteracy.
2. Crime comic books create an atmosphere of cruelty and deceit.
3. They create a readiness for temptation.
4. They stimulate unwholesome fantasies.
5. They suggest criminal or sexually abnormal ideas.
6. They furnish the rationalization for them, which may be ethically even more harmful than the impulse.
7. They suggest the forms a delinquent impulse may take and supply details of technique.
8. They may tip the scales toward maladjustment or delinquency. (Wertham, 1954, p.168).
In summary, Dr. Wertham felt that comic books were bad for children for all of the above reasons, and he felt a moral obligation to make parents and teachers aware of the perceived dangers that he felt comic books presented to their children.

It is now quite well known that Wertham’s methods and logic were far from being scientific. Since its original publication in 1954, *Seduction Of The Innocent*, has been highly criticized as alarmist propaganda (Brown, 1997). Lowery outlines the faults in Wertham’s work, including its inconsistent theory of effect, overgeneralization, lack of evidence, selective illustration without story context, absence of a control group, and complete disregard for the complex nature of juvenile delinquency (Brown, 1997). However, in the early 1950’s, the public was not concerned with methodology, rather, they were inflamed, upset, and outraged at the expose of the unsuitable reading material being sold and widely proliferated to children in America.

The Anti-Comics Crusade

*Approval: The History Of The Comics Code*, author Amy Kiste Nyberg provides excellent analysis and perceptive insight into the machinations of the public political campaign
against the 1950’s horror comics and on the powerful social forces behind that machine. Nyberg (1998) states:

At the local level, civic and religious groups acted to impose standards on comic books and brought pressure to bear on the retailers in their communities. These groups, which had no real legal power, used the economic threat of boycotts to force retailers to remove from their shelves comic books deemed unsuitable. Such decency crusades were aided by ratings lists published by the Catholic Church’s National Office of decent literature and by the Cincinnati Committee for the Evaluation of Comics, whose lists were published in Parents’ Magazine. These efforts attracted the attention of lawmakers at the state and national level. In the years following World War II, several states appointed legislative committees to study the problem and recommend laws aimed at curbing undesirable comic books. At the national level, the investigation of comic books was carried out by the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, which undertook
a study of the relationship of the mass media to the problem of delinquency (p. 68).

While the investigation of comic books was focused on all types of comic books, it was primarily the horror comics that drew most of the attention and caused most of the public outrage. The national hysteria inspired by Wertham lead to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee's hearings on juvenile delinquency in 1954 (Brown, 1997). With the formation of this political entity, and public pressure on retailers, the comic book publishing industry was only one step away from regulation and censorship. The major objective of the Senate Subcommittee was to root out the evil influence that comics held over American youth (Brown, 1997). Threatened with governmental intervention, most publishers of comic books banded together to save themselves with a self-policing code for comic book content (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000). This was a turning point in the history of American comic books and the deathblow that destroyed the horror comic books of the 1950's forever. The Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) drafted the comics code in 1954 (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000). For the comic book publishing industry, it was a landmark event. For American popular culture, it was the end of an era.
The Comic Book Code

The Comics Code brought about major changes in the entire comic book publishing industry. Critics have charged that its effects were more negative than positive. The sweeping changes brought about by the Comics Code of 1955 were less about high publishing standards and more about restriction of creativity and restraint upon artistic expression. Authors Allen Ellis and Doug Highsmith (2000) state:

The Comics Code established standards for such aspects as depiction of crime, authority figures, religion, weapons, violence, sex, and marriage. It also placed restrictions on dialogue, costume, and advertising matter. Its seal on the cover of comic books would serve as a symbol of quality and wholesomeness for seventeen years (p.29).

The CMAA’s role was to enforce a highly restrictive code of content by reviewing all comic books their release (Brown, 1997). The Comics Code was extremely strict and unflinching in matters of adherence to its staunch restrictions and reforms. The restrictiveness of the Code forced some of the major publishers out of business.
altogether (Brown, 1997). Among other things, the Comics Code insisted:

1. Policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions shall not be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.

2. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal be punished for his misdeeds.

3. No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.

4. All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be omitted.

5. Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.

Much of the above was open to interpretation; in effect, the standards of morality and public decency were determined by strict religious paragons of virtue, such as Father Charles Murphy, who headed the code in its early formative years.

In the opinion of many, the Comics Code served to squelch creativity in the comic book medium (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000). Creativity and freedom of expression would not return to the comic book publishing industry for another seventeen years, and some maintain that the
institution of the Comics Code was a blow from which the industry never did fully recover. Along with a number of other factors, such as changes in magazine distribution and competition from television, the Code and the anti-comics controversy that led to its creation books in the resulted in a significant drop in the popularity of comic United States (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000).

Academic Debate Over Influence of Comics

The assumption that the “reading” of comics is a frivolous and inferior activity seems a given even among those who do not see them as a threat (Schmidt, 1992). But in fact, those conservative educators who do see the effects of comic books as a threat are probably more correct in their assumptions than those who dismiss this very influential and powerful art medium of the 20th century as frivolous (Schmidt, 1992). Some academics (Millard & Marsh, Malter, Zorbaugh, DeLara, Dorrell, Curtis, & Rampal) see the proliferation of comic books as a non-threatening, frivolous pursuit, while others (Wertham, Rosecrans, Reynolds) perceive them as a potential deconstructive threat to adolescent morals and values. Some scholars (Saltus, Richler, Lewis, Schmidt) believe
that comic books are more of a threat to traditional literacy than to adolescent attitudes and behaviors.

Some scholars (Whitehead, Mitchell, Wible) still assume that the effects of comics on youngsters are quite subversive, but not in the moral, behavioral sense that most conservative educators perceive, but rather in their effects on traditional, hierarchical modes of reading and on the entire notion of literacy (Schmidt, 1992). Concerns that comic books are a threat to children's literacy are frequently based on a deficit model whereby those who choose to read books in graphic form are seen as denying themselves encounters with more "nourishing" material, just as children who eat beefburgers and chips are imagined en masse as rejecting green vegetables and citrus fruit (Millard & Marsh, 1999). The issue has always had less to do with illustrations than with the contents of the new medium, its influences, and its educational value (Dorrell, Curtis, & Rampal, 1995). It would seem that the entertainment value of comic books, as reading material for children, is in stark contrast and direct opposition to the educational values that we strive to instill and reinforce in our children in this country.
Whether threatening, nonthreatening, inconsequential, or just plain frivolous, comic books are now being taken seriously in academic circles. In recent years, comic books have come to be collected and treasured, recognized as an American art form and culturally significant—comic books are no longer considered a throwaway product. Comic books are now receiving some discussion in academic circles as a socially and culturally relevant form of mass media (Wertham, 1948; Berger, 1973; Barker, 1989; Fiske, 1992; Schmidt, 1992; Siano, 1994; Brislin, 1995; Ludwig, 1996; Brown, 1997; and Randall, 1998. Scholars have noted that it is in the “best scientific tradition” to consider a social phenomenon so enormously widespread as comic books.

Some scholars and even mental health professionals have expressed grave concern about explicit violence, sadomasochistic themes, and negative stereotyping in comics, video games, and animated films, and their potential detrimental effects on children and society (Ludwig, 1996). The aggressive content of comic books is so conspicuous that most people fail to notice that this aggression is rigidly channelized, that the willingness of any reader to accept a fantasy escape from his/her frustrations presupposes a willingness to achieve something
less than total and actual escape (Legman, 1948). Comic books concentrate on aggressions which are impossible under civilized restraints— with fists, guns, torture, killing, and bloodshed (Wertham, 1948). The internalized censorship of both artist and child makes this attack respectable by directing it against some scapegoat criminal or wild animal, or even against some natural law like gravity, rather than against the parents, teachers, and policemen who are the real sources of the child’s frustration and therefore the real objects of his aggression (Legman, 1948). The disparity of conclusions among scholars about the influence of comic books on children suggests that more research needs to be done in this area.

Comic Books and Literacy

Of all the forms of popular culture with which children engage, it is perhaps the comic book which has attracted the strongest opprobrium, receiving not only the sharpest criticism, but also repeated calls for censorship, even at times outright banning (Millard & Marsh, 1999). It has been said by educators that, “comics are death on reading,” and that “children deserve better quality reading matter.” There is something about the combination of
cartoon images and racy colloquial language that distresses a significant portion of the adults who concern themselves with the consequences of children's reading choices for their academic and social learning (Millard & Marsh, 1999).

For many years, scholars and educators have attacked comic books for being bad for children, who are highly impressionable in their young formative years. Psychologist Fredric Wertham, M.D., believed that comics were not only a significant contributor to juvenile delinquency, but that they were also a great threat to American society because of their affects on children's reading abilities. Wertham claimed that the balloons containing the written portion of comics were creating poor reading habits among children by preventing the development of left-to-right eye movement necessary for good reading (Dorrell, Curtis, & Rampal, 1995). From the outset, symbols of social authority over childhood and children's reading, particularly teachers and librarians, have defined comic book reading as a problem (Kiste, 1998). However, it should be noted that despite all of the evils attributed to comic books, little empirical data exists to support the hysterical claims made against them by educators and conservative institutions. In fact, when academic
researchers began to test some of the assumptions that educators were making about comic books, their findings demonstrated that comic book reading made little difference in the acquisition of reading skills, in academic achievement, or in social adjustment (Kiste, 1998).

Ronald Schmidt (1992) believes that comics are an important deconstructive and revolutionary medium in the 20th century cultural transference from the hierarchical domination of the printed book as the exclusive medium of literacy to an inclusion of concept of audio-visual (television and film) "literacy." In this respect, comic books are not so much a threat to literacy as they are part of a much larger transformation in the evolution of American popular culture toward an eventual, and inevitable, audio-visual "technological literacy" in the modern age.

In conclusion, the consensus seems to be that scholars are uncertain about the actual affects of comic books on children's literacy at the present time. However, the fact that educators, conservative institutions, and elites have condemned comics repeatedly for concerns over harmful effects (literacy, moral decline, and juvenile delinquency), with no evidentiary basis for these concerns,
suggests that the hostility toward comic books may actually be an expression of high cultural values, in effect, the continuing attempt by elites to suppress the popular mediums of the lower classes.

Summary of Literature Review

I have presented the most important writings and studies done on comic books to this date. I have drawn from both popular and academic sources to provide an accurate and complete overview of the history and impact of comic books in the United States. I have provided an in-depth analysis of the existing academic literature to provide insight into the current state of the body of knowledge on the subject of comic books. Finally, I have followed, in a consistent direction, the current line of extant theory in the literature to a point of departure for my own research: exploration of the ideological suppression of pop culture in the United States.

Within the discipline of communication studies, scholars are primarily concerned with the way that theories of ideology talk about persuasive forms of communication. Comic books are culturally significant as a form of mass media and are socially significant for their widespread
appeal and influence on the masses of people that make-up American society. The scholarly literature describes how comic books have been attacked by educators, librarians, and conservative institutions repeatedly throughout their seventy-year history in the U.S. Scholars and educators have criticized comic books over the years for graphic depiction’s of explicit and excessive violence, sadomasochistic themes, and sexual perversion. Some of these concerns are compelling in relation to the many young children that regularly read comic books and are, at least to some extent, influenced by them.

I believe that the criticisms and condemnation of comic books by scholars, educators, and conservative institutions have their basis in the cultural, political, and ideological structure of Western civilization (in effect, American society built upon the ideals of democracy and capitalism). I also believe that these deep cultural, political, and ideological roots were at the core of the political reform campaign that killed the horror comic books of the 1950’s. This thesis will examine the 1950’s horror comic books as an important part of American popular culture, and will analyze and assess the ideological structure behind the political campaign that killed them.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Methodological Analyses of Ideology in Comic Books

From an academic viewpoint, the most meaningful way that comic books become socially and culturally important, is in the area of ideology. Communication scholars and social scientists are concerned with the way that "ideology" influences us in society. More precisely stated, within the discipline of communication studies, scholars (Barker, Berger, Cullen) are interested in the way that theories of ideology talk about persuasive forms of communication in our society. Mass media is one of the very most persuasive forms of communication in our society today, and comic books are, along with radio, films, video games, and television, one of the most powerful social forces (in mass media) that influence our nation's youth.

Comic books are culturally significant and socially relevant in terms of their mass media appeal and influence, and as such are worthy of serious discussion and study. There is debate over how comics should be studied. Some scholars (Berger) believe that the emphasis should be squarely placed upon the storytelling aspect that is
common, in one way or another, to all comic books. Scholars are interested in finding out what are the messages in a comic book story and to study how they might be received. Some scholars (Barker) have proposed that we study comic books in terms of influence and ideology. Other scholars wonder how we might be persuaded into views, attitudes, reactions, or behaviors, which we might otherwise not have had. There are also scholars (Brown) who believe that there are a multiplicity of interpretations in comic book analyses, and that none of these are entirely satisfactory. There are multiple possible meanings to be derived from a given comic book story, and we need a theory and a method to advise us on how to look at such a story (Barker, 1989).

Martin Barker is a scholar who has attempted to analyze comic books from the critical perspective of power, ideology, and social influence. Barker, in his comprehensive study of comic books and ideology, *Comics: Ideology, Power, and the Critics*, demonstrates that the history of comics is fraught with controversy, and that every controversy has involved claims about the meanings, messages, and potential influence of some comics.
Methodological Analyses of Comic Book Fandom

Apart from what has been written about comic books as an art form and as American pop culture, and from what has been written about comic book culture itself, scholars must contend with the considerable social force and cultural phenomenon of comic book fandom. The excessive, obsessive, and fanatical hysteria of enthusiasts that surrounds American pop culture fandom has been described by scholars and other critics as "blind devotion." Rather than blind devotion, fandom is a means of expressing one’s sense of self and one’s communal relation with others within our complex society (Brown, 1997).

Individual fans and entire fan communities develop intimate attachments to certain forms of mass-produced entertainments that, for whatever reasons, satisfy personal needs, and define as well as describe contemporary culture in our society. These fan communities construct a world as rich and intricate as any traditional perception of high or real culture (Brown, 1997). As Fiske (1992) argues, the culture of fandom is associated with the tastes of the disempowered, of people who are subordinated by the socio-economic system that determines the status of individuals
within the general community. The institutionalized image of fans as social misfits devoted to accumulating worthless information about "crass" entertainments has caused fandom to be devalued as one of the basest and most superficial aspects of popular culture (Brown, 1997). However, the complex system that comprises comic book culture and comic book collectors is quickly gaining recognition as a viable and valid expression of American popular culture. Recent cultural studies work, both in the United States and Great Britain, has opened the door for understanding fandom as a legitimate form of cultural expression (Brown, 1997).

Mathew Pustz (1999) states:

American culture comes from more than just race and ethnicity. It is also born out of groups of people whose expressive lives center on particular interests or activities. Being involved in a culture based in popular media is central to the lives of many Americans, allowing them to identify themselves with fans. American comic book readers and fans have also created a distinctive culture with its own language, knowledge, and practices—all based on their favorite texts. Most Americans may not be familiar with this comic book culture,
but it is well known to those participating in it and to those creating the texts for it (p.98).

The characteristics of fandom are complex, systemic, and intricate. These characteristics define and describe the cultural structure of medium and enthusiasts that they are built upon. Nowhere are the traits of fandom more clear than within the culture of comic book enthusiasts (Brown, 1997). The community of comic book fans offers communication scholars and social scientists a unique opportunity to study the complex culture of fandom at its most extreme and most clearly-defined. Brown (1997) states:

The well-defined community of comic fans allows a unique insight on "how" and "why" fandom is an important aspect of contemporary culture. Comic fandom, and the practice of comic-book collecting in particular, is evidence of the complex and structured way that avid participants of popular culture construct a meaningful sense of self. They create a culture that simultaneously resists the tyranny of high culture and forms what Fiske calls a "shadow cultural economy" that mimics bourgeois standards (p. 11).
Fiske's term (shadow cultural economy) is derived from Bourdieu's (1984) metaphor of culture as an economic system divided along twin poles of cultural and economic capital. Bourdieu's theory provides an apt language for discussing how people attempt to invest in and accumulate qualities that are perceived as valuable within a culture (Brown, 1997).

All of the above analyses touch upon the cultural significance of comic books and the reasons why elites frown upon both comic books and the culture of fandom that surrounds them. The problem is that fan cultures challenge what the bourgeois have institutionalized as natural and universal standards of "good taste" (Brown, 1997). It would appear that the qualities determined to have real value within a culture seem to be inextricably linked to economic interests and high society, both in the minds of elites and in the ideology of the Western power structure.

Comic Books and Elites: Suppression of Popular Culture

Following in the footsteps of the above writers, my method of inquiry in this study of the 1950's horror comics (and the political campaign that killed them) is based upon
the critical perspective of ideology, power, and social influence. More precisely, my methodology employs analyses of the political ideology and social structure upon which the crusade to kill the horror comics was based. Understanding the underlying political and cultural ideology that spearheaded the unjustified criticism and condemnation of comic books by conservatives in the 1950's is the key to understanding why the horror comics were considered such a serious threat and why the postwar elites feared them so much. Brown (1997) states:

Like our capitalist economy, the cultural system distributes its resources on a selective basis to create a non-fiscal, distinction of the privileged and the deprived. The system ascribes value to certain "tastes" and devalues others. Typically the tastes that are privileged are those associated with the upper class. Dominant tastes are seen as superior by the entire culture (if indeed they are) because the ruling class naturalizes their tastes through the control of institutions such as universities, museums, and art galleries. High culture is socially and institutionally legitimated as the "official"
culture, distinguishing between the "haves" and the "have-nots". Thus, like economic capital, one can invest in an education or invest in a good suit to better one's chances of advancing socially and economically up the ladder of official culture (p.127).

Scholars (Berger, Barker, Schmidt, and Cullen) have already determined that elites fear that comic books convey a false sense of values and a distorted view of reality. Certain activistic groups seek regulation to regulate the kinds of information that can be disseminated to impressionable youths (Ludwig, 1996). Arthur Asa Berger, in his analysis of comic books and comic strips, The Comic Stripped American, outlines the progression and development of some of the most familiar and influential comics, and makes several brilliant observations and analyses about the cultural, ideological, and social significance of comic books. Berger (1973) notes that comic book characters reflect and reveal essential myths and ideologies of the cultures in which they are produced, but their popularity clearly stems from the fact that they offer alternatives to and escape from the ideology of the status quo. Far from being a watered-down, inferior substitute of "high" cultural
art, they are distinct, alternative visions which reveal more about the fears, neuroses, and power struggles of the populous than high art does (Schmidt, 1992). Berger (1973) makes the important insight that the "high" literary perspective (existentialist, absurd, and cynical) is primarily a European import that did not fit pervasive pre-World War II American attitudes.

Comics have always had a strong tradition of being satirical, erotic, and a medium that has used its marginality to celebrate that which is unacceptable in "serious" discourse (Berger, 1973). This fact is fundamental to understanding the cultural, ideological, and social significance of comic books in relation to American pop culture. When the discourse of the political status quo becomes tyrannical and suffocating, then pop culture must choose between falling lockstep into repressive patterns (a position quite alien to all forms of humor and fantasy) or reacting to the repressive status quo with equal vehemence and, perhaps, paranoia (Berger, 1973).

It should be quite obvious to anyone with any sense of history that elites have always feared the media of the lower classes, not as a form of undeserved artistic expression, but as a threat to the social, economic,
cultural, and political power structure. The sophisticated tastes of elites do not smile upon the social expression of the lower classes, and strongly resent and resist any threat to their social hierarchy. When there is any real or perceived serious threat to the political and cultural ideology, the actions and reactions of elites can become hysterical and even dangerous.

Scholars have observed that the suppression of pop culture can be traced historically from the Industrial Revolution, with far less interest in it prior to that time (Schmidt, 1992). Clearly, this is due to the acknowledgment by conservative institutions of the tremendous power now available in the proliferation of various mass media "texts" (Barker, 1989). Educators and conservative institutions have been almost universal in their condemnation of comic books over the past seventy-five years, whether for reasons of belief that comics promote decreased literacy or increased juvenile delinquency. This would seem to be a continuation of the suppression of pop culture in the twenty-first century. Cullen (1996) states:

New forms of popular culture are almost always resisted by elites. For centuries, there have been consistent-- and strikingly similar--
criticisms of those who make and use such forms. The argument that popular culture expresses the brazen excesses of urban life, seduces and corrupts young people who need to be quarantined from it, and functions as an enervating substitute for more "serious" forms of culture is made again and again in a variety of contexts. . . (p. 95).

History seems to repeat itself in higher cultures. The repetition is unwitting, but suggests class, racial, gender, and other ideological interests that are often a smokescreen for the more frankly political interests in some way threatened by popular culture (Cullen, 1996). Comic books were the popular medium of the young masses in the postwar, pre-television years of the early 1950's. On this basis, it is therefore not surprising that comic books were greeted with disdain and outright hostility by many of the (largely self-appointed) arbiters of American cultural tastes and values (Cullen, 1996).

I believe that puritan mindset, Western ideology and social conformity within our capitalist economic system, are the basis for the suppression of pop culture in the United States in the 20th century, and were the root of the political reform crusade that killed the horror comic books
of the 1950’s. There are a growing number of scholars and social scientists that subscribe to the notion that the suppression of pop culture by the elitist power structure is deeply rooted in ideology, sociology, and culture. Brown (1997) states:

As Bourdieu tells us, the economy of culture is so powerful that any aesthetic tastes not conforming to the established norms of high culture are devalued to the point of being socially unacceptable. Any practices that do not adhere to the dictates of “good taste” are taken as markers of an individual’s inferiority. Fans and then their subject of enthusiasm are necessarily looked down upon by the greater society because their aesthetic preferences amount to a disruption of, and threat to, dominant social hierarchies (p. 89).

The writings of Jeffrey A. Brown are especially useful in understanding how comic books have been regarded by elites and conservative institutions in the twentieth century. Brown provides keen insight into the suppression of popular culture in the twentieth century as well. Brown (1997 states:}

63
Because pursuing a leisure activity that is in "bad taste" is considered detrimental to one's development, society often adopts a paternalistic attitude of wanting to save fans from the harmful effects of popular mediums. There is a moral backlash that accompanies all new and suspect forms of entertainment, from the early pulp novels and turn-of-the-century movies to modern music videos and role-playing games. Materials viewed as undesirable within a particular aesthetic are often accused of harmful social effects or negative influences upon their consumers (p. 90).

Brown's writings clearly demonstrate the fact that higher cultural tastes determine, dictate, and enforce aesthetic preferences. The cultural and political ideology of a given society continually reinforces aesthetic preferences through the social and economic structure of that society.

Throughout the course of history, dominant cultural and political institutions have effectively approved and encouraged certain aesthetic preferences and disapproved and discouraged others. Time has proven that popular cultural texts widely circulated among the masses are often deemed
undesirable or inappropriate by the dominant social class or ruling elite. History also shows that the desires and dictates of the ruling social class can often become overbearing and restrictive to the point of imposing extreme measures of social control that can become absurd and even dangerous. Brown (1997) states:

Aesthetic preferences are imposed through legislation and public pressure; for example, in the cause of protecting children from the "corrupting" influence of undesired cultural materials. This moral condemnation of undesirable aesthetics and institutionalized regulation of the medium is particularly clear in the history of comics. The criticism of comics under the guise of "protecting children from the corrupting influence of the medium" was almost solely responsible for the drastic decline in sales and the near death of the industry in the early 1950's (p.89).

It is precisely the above elitist criticism of comic books and the ideological suppression of pop culture that will form the foundational basis of my thesis on the pre-code horror comic books of the 1950's and the political campaign that killed them. As illustrated above, my
methodology provides an adequate framework for thorough examination and evaluation of these culturally and socially relevant horror comic books, as well as analyzes and assessment of the ideological significance of the political reform crusade that killed them.

This methodological approach will also provide some insight into the United States search for national identity in the 1950's. Because the anti-comics crusade that killed the horror comics is deeply rooted in the fear and paranoia of the McCarthy era, I believe that study of it offers scholars an excellent opportunity to probe our country's search for national identity during the McCarthy era through the comics themselves, and through the debate over them in the popular press. There are some very interesting parallels in the condemnation of the horror comics in the popular press and the condemnation of certain individuals deemed to have leftist affiliations in the popular press (during the McCarthy period). There can be no doubt that the anti-comics crusade (a suppression of popular culture) was entirely political in nature and can only be properly understood in the context of the McCarthy era in which it occurred. In this thesis, my intention has been to examine the horror comics and their demise as a suppression of
popular culture and as a case study of the United States search for national identity in the larger context of the McCarthy era in which the anti-comics crusade occurred. Hopefully, my thesis will further the existing body of knowledge on comic books as an enduring American art form and will provide a comprehensive analysis of the social, cultural, and ideological significance of the political campaign that destroyed them.

Objectives and Propositions

In my proposed methodology of inquiry (comics, ideology, power, and social influence), I most definitely have two distinct academic objectives. First, I want to apply an academic perspective to examination and analyses of a single comic book genre: the pre-code horror comic books of the 1950's. These comic books are arguably the most important comic books ever published (certainly in terms of sociopolitical impact) and no one has ever produced an academic study of them as a separate and distinctly different type of comic book. Second, I want to examine the public and political campaign that killed the horror comic books in 1954. I believe that the hysteria and paranoia of this (McCarthy era) period played into communication
theories about the suppression of popular culture that has its roots in the cultural, political, and ideological structure of America, as well as the rest of Western Civilization. I am convinced that I can demonstrate that my theories of cultural, political, and ideological suppression of popular culture in Western society were the primary driving force behind the reform campaign in America that destroyed the horror comics of the 1950's.

To a lesser extent, I also want to continue to validate comic books as an important part of American popular culture and American history. I believe that the literature that I have already researched and described is proof positive that the above assertion is demonstrably true and correct. I am confident that further research in this area will extend the existing body of knowledge on this subject and will provide additional insight on how comic books, as a media-driven social force, have helped to form and shape what might be referred to as "American Culture." Finally, I believe that my analyses in this thesis will be of academic benefit in that it will show how these cultural, political, and social forces form and shape the structure of the society we live in.
CHAPTER FOUR

HORROR COMICS OF THE 1950’S

Post-World War II and the State of the Comic Book Market

In order to understand and assess the significance of the horror comics of the 1950’s, it is essential to understand the state of the comic book market conditions that caused them to be conceived and born. After World War II, the golden age comic book super-heroes returned home to U.S. shores only to discover that the aftermath of the war had entirely changed the dynamic of the comic book market. The war was over and there were no more evil villains to fight and overcome. America’s fight for truth, liberty, and justice had come to an end for youngsters in both the pages of the golden age comic books and in the real world all around them. Home grown criminals were in no way comparable foes to replace the colorful images of the evil axis legions. Interest in costumed super-heroes waned and virtually died out, and as a result comic book titles began to fold at an alarming rate. Sales of comic books dropped drastically and seriously threatened the comic book industry. Much of the action and momentum that was prevalent in comic books during the War seemed to be lost.
(Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). By 1948, the comic book industry was forced to admit that the first heroic age was over (Goulart, 1991).

During this period, nearly all of the classic golden age super-heroes were either discontinued or removed from their own titles as publishers struggled to regain sales profits with some other replacement theme. It was time for a real change in the comic book industry, and the publishers of the late 1940’s were well aware of this fact. Necessity is the mother of invention, and it was under these conditions that the horror comic was born.

The Genesis of E.C. Comics and the New Trend in Comic Books

The genesis of the “new trend” that would establish the horror comic books’ total domination of the American comic book market from 1950 to 1955, really began with a boating accident. Max C. Gaines, publisher of Educational Comics and one of the original comic book founding fathers, was suddenly killed in a boating accident. In 1948, his son, William M. Gaines, would inherit his father’s faltering line of mediocre comic book titles, and, in 1950, would make changes that would shake the entire comic book industry and introduce a new kind of comic book that would
completely dominate the American comic book market for the next five years.

William M. Gaines inherited one million dollars and his father’s string of failing comic book titles in 1948. Gaines changed the name of the company from Educational Comics to Entertaining Comics (E.C. Comics) Gaines would transform this failing line of titles into the most imaginative, best written, and superbly illustrated line of comic books ever to be introduced in the American comic book market (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). This was accomplished with the introduction of short horror stories told by horror hosts (the Crypt Keeper and the Vault Keeper) in his two crime titles (Crime Patrol and War Against Crime), followed shortly by the introduction of a whole new line of horror, science-fiction, and crime suspense titles to the comic book market. This whole new line of titles was a radical departure from anything that had gone before in American comic books. They initiated a completely new direction in concept, cover design, story format, and reading level. William M. Gaines referred to this major change in comic books as the “new trend.”
The Birth of the Horror Comics

Gaines’ "new trend" comic books were an entirely new concept. There were no continuing series characters or costumed super-heroes fighting for truth and justice. Instead, the E.C. Comics line featured four independent horror stories per issue, each introduced by wisecracking horror hosts. This concept was something completely new and different to the comic book scene which, in the past had been predominantly characterized by returning hero figures and continuing series adventures each month. The short story format had been effectively explored in comic books at this point. But even more importantly, these stories were extremely well-written and were designed to appeal to a more adult audience. Rather than weak dialogue, as was typical of most comics during this period, the E.C. Comics featured long descriptive captions and adult level dialogue that was miles above their competitors and way ahead of their time (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). The other comic book companies wrote on a level that was strictly kid stuff.

The main characters in the E.C. stories were not fantastic costumed super-heroes, but rather everyday, ordinary people in casual dress who were put into
frighteningly realistic horror situations. The E.C. Comics featured an element of frightening realism that gave their stories the thrilling appeal of horrific reality. While comic book stories are essentially dominated by wonder and fantasy escapism, the E.C. Comics featured a new dimension of frighteningly real horror and terror in their stories. As shall be explored further, this element of frightening realism, in conjunction with graphic depictions of violence, became the downfall of the E.C. Comics new trend line of titles, and the destruction of all the competitor publishers that followed after them.

Many collectors and comic book historians believe that the most significant change that the E.C. Comics' new trend brought about in comic books was the spectacular advancement in artwork. The graphic change in cover design and interior artwork was extraordinary to say the least. Common comic book publishers in the 1950's employed ordinary artists who often produced mediocre work, but Gaines E.C. Comics office boasted the greatest team of top comic book artists ever assembled under one roof. This upper echelon of comic book artists at one time included: Al Feldstein, Johnny Craig, Harvey Kurtzman, Graham Ingels, Jack Davis, Wallace Wood, Al Williamson, Jack Kamen, Reed
Crandal, Alex Toth, Frank Frazetta, John Severin, Bill Elder, George Evans, Joe Orlando, Angelo Torres, Bernard Krigstein, Roy G. Krenkel, and colorist Marie Severin. The above group of artists are generally considered to be the very best group of artists to work together for a single company in all of comic book publishing history.

The E.C. Comic Book Titles

The line of E.C. Comics’ new trend titles was preceded by, and initiated by, the introduction of short horror stories in the two crime titles Crime Patrol and War Against Crime. In Crime Patrol #15 October-November 1949, the Crypt Keeper makes his historic first appearance, in the debut of the feature The Crypt of Terror, introducing the horror classic “Return From The Grave.” This first appearance of the horror host, the Crypt Keeper, is truly historic in that it establishes, for the first time, the precedent of the wisecracking horror host introducing the short horror story-- a trend which almost all rival publishers would unabashedly follow in the future.

Crime Patrol #16 February-March 1950, despite the title, was more of a horror comic book than a crime comic book. This issue leads off with “The Corpse in the
Crematorium," followed by "Trapped In The Tomb." The next story is "Graveyard Feet," which is followed by the second appearance of the Crypt of Terror feature (hosted again by the Crypt Keeper who introduces the story "The Specter in the Castle"). With the commitment to horror made, and with letters pouring in from readers applauding the new Crypt of Terror feature, the title of the comic book changes from Crime Patrol to the Crypt of Terror with issue number seventeen (Benson, 1979).

The first three issues of the Crypt of Terror (numbered #17, #18, and #19) were all classic horror comic books that pioneered the short horror story format and defined the horror genre in comic books from 1950 to 1955. Under pressure from newsstand dealers to eliminate the word terror from the title (or at least from the cover), the title was changed to Tales From the Crypt with issue number 20. Tales From the Crypt was the most popular of the three E.C. horror titles and is considered among collectors to be the finest horror comic book title ever published.

At the same time that Crime Patrol was becoming the Crypt of Terror, another historic transformation took place in the early E.C. Comics line. In War Against Crime #10 (December 1949-January 1950), the Vault of Horror feature
made its first appearance with the chilling horror story "Buried Alive," which was introduced by the second E.C. horror host, the Vault Keeper (who also made his historic debut in this landmark horror issue).

War Against Crime #11 (February–March 1950), featured the second appearance of the Vault of Horror feature as well as the second appearance of the horror host, the Vault Keeper, who regularly introduced this feature in all three of the E.C. horror titles for the next five years. Reader response to the Vault Keeper was so enthusiastic and the new Vault of Horror feature so enormously popular that War Against Crime was changed to the Vault of Horror with issue number twelve. The Vault of Horror quickly became the second best-selling E.C. horror comic book title and contains some of the finest horror tales ever to be published in any comic book.

The following month, E.C. Comics introduced a third horror comic book title, the Haunt of Fear, which contained The Witch's Cauldron feature, and was hosted by a third horror host, the Old Witch. It was in this third horror title, the Haunt of Fear, that the horror artwork of Graham Ingels was displayed in E.C. Comics for the first time.
Many comic collectors and comic historians consider Graham Ingels to be the very finest horror artist of all time.

For the young E.C. Comics fans, Graham Ingels was the twentieth century Hieronymus Bosch (Stark, 1971). He would ride the train in from Long Island to the E.C. Comics offices in New York City with his nightmare visions of horror. The Ingels horror stories featured panels of agony, of decay and rot, of yawning ghouls, black chimerae, vampires in the vestibule, and crazed senilities in sitting rooms of despair (Stewart, 1971). Even the splattered word balloons that shrieked and screamed out of the panel frames in sheer, utter horror contributed effectively to the overall mood, atmosphere, and dark sense of dread that permeated a Graham Ingels horror story.

Ingels' drawings of the Old Witch horror host were the "locus classicus" of the E.C. Comics three horror comic book titles (Stark, 1971). As Ingels drew the Old Witch issue after issue, she cackled insanely and came grotesquely to life on his drawing board, until finally, on the splash page of the story "Horror We? How's Bayou?" her fetid breath wafted right off the page at the reader (Stewart, 1971). Ingels usually signed his stories "Ghastly," the nickname given to him on the pages of
letters from readers (Stark, 1971). Both The Witches Cauldron feature in the Haunt of Fear title, and the Haunt of Fear feature in the Crime SuspenStories title, were done exclusively by Graham Ingels (and also nearly all of the covers for the Haunt of Fear title were done by Ingels as well).

During the same month that E.C. first published the Haunt of Fear horror comic book title, they also produced two science-fiction titles that many collectors feel were even superior to the horror titles. The E.C. science-fiction titles went far beyond the "space opera" titles of rival publishers of that time (which, William M. Gaines claimed were not really science-fiction at all). The two science-fiction titles, Weird Science and Weird Fantasy, were the perfect showcase for the vastly talented staff of E.C. artists (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). Both of these titles contained masterfully written science-fiction stories (both titles featured a series of excellent Ray Bradbury story adaptations) that were far superior to anything else being done at that time.

The real forte of the E.C. science-fiction stories was the futuristic, cosmic artwork inside of them. Within the space age panel borders slithered disgusting forms of alien
beings, crawling obscenities with tentacles reaching outward, and hideous, menacing carnivorous vegetables capable of devouring and regurgitating cosmic astronauts. The E.C. artists rendered highly-detailed vistas of outer space: distant stars, exploding planets, crashing asteroids, cosmic meteors shooting through space, deadly gaseous vapors, and fiery comets streaking across the galaxy. There were also flying saucers, rocket ships, intricate spaceship gadgetry, futuristic pleasure domes and far off planets of lush vegetation and foggy craftint mist (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). The primary artists to bring these other worlds to the pages of the E.C. Comics' science-fiction titles were Wallace Wood, Roy G. Krenkel, and Al Williamson. These artists magnificent contributions made the E.C. science-fiction titles the forerunners of modern comic art (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973).

The E.C. Science-fiction titles did not sell well at the time they were produced in the early 1950's. E.C. Comics made its most substantial sales revenues from the three horror comic book titles: Tales From The Crypt, Vault of Horror, and Haunt of Fear. It was the three horror titles that made enough money to keep the science-fiction titles afloat (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). Despite
the fact that the E.C. science-fiction titles did not sell particularly well when they were originally produced, they have since become recognized as some of the best comic book titles ever published.

In October 1950, E.C. Comics published the first edition of their highly-acclaimed crime comic book, Crime SuspenStories. This, E.C. Comic's only pure crime title, was the undisputed best-seller of the crime comics that flourished alongside the horror comics, that is, until the restrictions of the Comics Code put them all out of business in late 1954. Crime SuspenStories was different from the routine crime comics that were saturating the comic book market at the time. The stories were imaginative and relied on plot evolvement rather than unnecessary violence and tired, over-used themes (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). The complexity of the story structure and the impact of the truly shocking story endings, gave Crime SuspenStories a distinct advantage over the other crime comics of the early 1950's.

Without a doubt, the most important title of the entire E.C. line of titles was Shock SuspenStories. The reason for this is that this comic book was way ahead of its time in story content. The title, Shock SuspenStories,
explored complex issues and social problems that no one had ever dared to tackle in a comic book before. It is widely regarded in comic book fandom as the single greatest comic book title ever published (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973).

Shock SuspenStories was quite different from all of the other E.C. comic book titles. The seriousness of the stories and the complex social problems that they dealt with went far beyond the common comic book subject material that was standard in the 1950's. Shock SuspenStories was first published in the winter of 1952 and was originally conceived as an E.C. sampler, a horror story, a science-fiction story, a crime story, and a war story (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). The war story was dropped after one issue and replaced with a "shock" story. These stories were indeed quite shocking. The stories dealt with drug addiction, corruption of public officials, hypocrisy, transvestitism, bigotry, and racism. There were powerful stories done on rape, murder, genocide, and nuclear war.

In the story "Undercover," a newspaper reporter witnesses the Ku Klux Klan killing a woman. He sees the (grand wizard) leader without his mask, and so can identify him to the authorities. When the Klan members discover him crouched in the bushes, they pursue him, catch him, and
beat him senseless. He awakes in a hospital bed where FBI agents are there to interview him. When he reveals to them that he saw the murder and can identify the leader, the phony FBI agents (actually Klan members who are posing only to discover if he would expose the leader) shoot him to death in his hospital bed.

In the story, "Yellow," an army general sentences his cowardly son to death by firing squad as penalty for desertion of his fellow troops under fire. The morning of the execution, the general visits his son who is waiting to die in a makeshift cell not far from the front-line combat. He assures his son that he has nothing to fear because the guns will be loaded with blanks and that, when the troops move on later that day, he can escape alive and seek refuge somewhere. Thinking that the guns will not have real bullets, the general's son goes before the firing squad with confidence and bravery. The troops shoot him dead with real bullets. In the final panel of the story, The General comments to the troops that "at least my son died like a man"

The other stories in E.C.'s Shock SuspenStories were equally as powerful. A heroin junkie commits murder to obtain a fix, only to discover later that he has killed his
own father. A Canadian fur trapper, who relishes trapping and killing animals for pelts, is caught in his own steel bear trap and is forced to chew his leg off in order to free himself. A girl is raped and the sheriff coerces a confession from a stranger and then allows him to be lynched by a mob of outraged townspeople. At the end of the story it is revealed to the readers that the sheriff was actually the rapist. A man is beaten to death by a crowd of overzealous "patriots" because he fails to remove his hat before the American flag during a parade, and at the end of the story it is revealed that the man beaten to death was actually a blind war veteran). In another shocking story, an innocent Negro is shot and killed by a mob of bigots who claimed that he was trying to escape.

The stories in Shock SuspenStories were years ahead of their time as evidenced by the complex story themes and social commentary they dealt with in almost every issue. This was really strong story material for the early 1950's. It was not universally popular, but Shock SuspenStories managed to last eighteen issues and died only when comic book censorship came along to put an end to the entire E.C. Comics line (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973). These stories were the first unmistakable attempt in comic books to confront
complex social problems and raise public awareness ofigotry, racism, injustice, inequality, and hypocrisy in
American society. In retrospect, the story content in
Shock SuspenStories does not seem as potent, but back in
the early 1950’s, this kind of material was staggering to
the young comic book reader (Thompson & Lupoff, 1973).

In addition to the horror stories that E.C. Comics
published in the three horror titles, they also published
horror stories in a yearly annual edition titled Tales of
Terror Annual (a combination of four complete comics that
did not sell on the stands which were rebound in the annual
format, minus the covers, and sold from the E.C. office and
on the stands in key cities), and two editions of three
dimensional comic books, Three-Dimensional E.C. Classics
#1, and Three-Dimensional Tales From the Crypt of Terror #2
(previously published horror stories redrawn in the three
dimensional format in 1954).

Horror Hosts: The Three Ghoulnatics

Just prior to E.C, Comics’ launching the “new trend”
line of titles, publisher William M. Gaines and his editor,
the enormously talented and versatile Al Feldstein, had
been ponderously searching for something fresh and new.
The real break for them came with the introduction of the three horror hosts, the "ghoulunatics."

"We knew immediately that we had something in them," Gaines said. "The response was trickling at first--then the mail came in bundles!" (Benson, 1979, p. 7). With the new E.C. Comics' short horror story format, and the addition of the horror hosts to introduce each separate story, the entire comic book industry was in for a sudden and drastic change.

The evolvement of the three ghoulunatics, the Crypt Keeper, the Vault Keeper, and the Old Witch, was largely responsible for the E.C. horror stories eliciting such an enthusiastic fan response. The elated young readers bombarded the E.C. offices with fan mail applauding the three horror hosts and the exciting horror stories that they introduced. It was the tremendous fan response to the Ghoulunatics that prompted E.C. to start its hugely successful E.C. Fan-Addict Club which still has a cult following thirty-six years after E.C.'s demise. It is very important to note that the E.C. Comics staff is largely credited with the birth of modern day comics fandom with the creation of the E.C. Fan-Addict Club. E.C. developed the first fan group in comic book publishing. This was
accomplished by fan letters sections, bulletin news features, artist and writer biographies that introduced the readers to the staff, story voting contests, and encouragement of fan input, interaction, and feedback. Considering the importance of modern comics fandom to the establishment and reinforcement of comic book culture, E.C. Comics must be hailed as the innovator, and it should be remembered that it was the three Ghoulunatics that sparked the whole concept of comics fandom in its infancy, from the pages of the earliest E.C. horror comic books.

and also the *Haunt of Fear* feature in the *Crime SuspenStories* comic book. From mid-1950 until the end of the horror comic book era in late 1954, the faces of the three Ghoulnatics appeared in three circles inset at the left hand side of the cover of each E.C. horror comic book. Like the E.C. emblem and the title logo, the familiar faces of the Ghoulnatics on the cover helped the young reader to distinguish the authentic E.C. Comic book from the many imitation titles that soon sprang up. Competitor publishers tried to capitalize on E.C. 's success by deliberately imitating E.C. Comics' cover design and by using key words in the title, in the hopes that some readers would mistake them for the genuine article (Stark, 1971).

The Ghoulnatics set the eerie mood for the horror stories with chilling opening statements at the beginning of the tale, witty remarks during the tale, and wisecracks with biting sarcasm at the shock ending of the tale. The horror hosts with their wisecracking commentary during the horror tales were essential elements of the E.C. horror comics. These characteristics became E.C. trademarks that nearly all of the rival publishers tried to imitate.
E.C. Comics published an origin of the three Ghoulunatics titled "Horror Beneath the Streets," published in the third issue of the Haunt of Fear. In another unique and original E.C. story idea, publisher William M. Gaines and editor Al Feldstein depicted themselves in the origin story, which explains to the readers how they were compelled to publish the Ghoulunatics thrilling terror tales. Later, E.C. did separate origin stories for the Crypt Keeper (born of a female Egyptian mummy and a pickled two-headed man in a cave) and the Old Witch (born of a vampire mother and a werewolf in a cemetery ceremony attended by the risen dead). The presence of the three Ghoulunatics greatly enhanced the three E.C. horror comic book titles. After a while, they seemed to take on personalities of their own, and the young readers looked forward to seeing them every other month as each new issue hit the stands. The fans would write to the Ghoulunatics, and with each new issue, selected letters were printed in the letters column. The Ghoulunatics also answered the fan letters in the letters columns. The E.C. cult following printed the first fanzines (fan magazines) which gradually evolved into the thriving world of comic book fandom that exists today (Stark, 1971). The E.C. Comics were the first
to establish an interactive relationship with the readers, and from this interaction was born the modern day fan movement and collector community that comprises comic book culture today. The letters columns inside of the E.C. Comics revealed that their audience was not limited to children, but included many adults as well.

Along with the short horror story format, the concept of the Ghoulunatics was an original idea that would set the trend that almost all of the other comic book companies would follow. The Ghoulunatics were a major factor in the initial success of the three E.C. horror titles and were soon imitated by competitor publishing companies. They ushered in the era of the "new trend" that would dominate the comic book market for the next five years.

The High Standard of Quality Set by E.C. Comics

As stated previously, E.C. Comics achieved a level of quality that had never been reached and has never been matched in comic book publishing. The E.C. line of new trend titles is generally considered by comic book collectors and comic historians to be the best series of comic books ever published in the United States. E.C.'s new style heavily influenced the other comic book companies
and initiated the era of the horror comic books in the early 1950’s. E.C.’s new approach to comic book writing and art set a new standard that the comic book industry tried to maintain through the 1960’s and 1970’s (Stewart, 1971).

The Greatest Comic Book Artists and Writers in the World

There can be little doubt to anyone seriously interested in the history of comic books that at one time the E.C. office employed the greatest team of artists and writers ever assembled in the same company (Stark, 1971). Together they created masterworks of imagery and imagination (Benson, 1979). Publisher William M. Gaines and his editorial staff—writers Al Feldstein, Harvey Kurtzman, and Johnny Craig, were totally serious in their approach to comic book writing (Stark, 1971). This was an art to them, nothing to be sloughed off carelessly because it was just for comics. What is even more incredulous, is that the writers kept up their enthusiasm and level of quality even under the most grueling production schedule imaginable. Al Feldstein alone was required to turn out five stories per week, and that while holding conferences with artists and doing layout work on most of the pages as
well (Stark, 1971). In spite of all of this, Al Feldstein came up with unique, thought-provoking, original stories that never compromised for four years (during the last year E.C. elicited the help of outside writers to come up with fresh stories and new ideas for readers).

The artists were no less compromising than the writers for E.C. Comics. It seemed to be a general rule that every artist who worked for E.C. on a regular basis showed exceptional maturity and improvement in style (Stewart, 1971). Every E.C. artist seemed to give each story illustrated a special flavor (Stark, 1971). Their individual styles seemed to contrast and complement each other perfectly, giving the E.C. stable of comic artists a diversity of styles while still maintaining a certain wholeness collectively.

The E.C. Comics group was different from other comics outfits. The style of E.C. Comics storytelling was a bold departure from the previous genre of Golden Age superheroes. Instead of never-ending adventures with continuing series characters, each E.C. comic book presented four new short stories with truly shocking surprise endings in the final panels. In place of pages of unexplained fist fights, thought balloons examined the psychological
motivations of a single character (Stewart, 1971). Rather than scant single-sentence story introductions, richly-detailed story captions and descriptive introductions accompanied each story. Instead of bright patriotic rainbow costumes, the characters wore drab gray and brown, ordinary clothing. In contrast to simple line drawings, the artists researched carefully for specific details of historical and contemporary costumes and backgrounds (Stewart, 1971). The artists took the time and extra effort to add low-key lighting effects, distorted viewing angles, and rich black shadows (Stark, 1971). They created effective mood and atmosphere.

Even though it hardly seemed possible, the stories later became even more engaging and complex, sometimes weaving through familiar themes, but always climaxed with a new surprise (Stewart, 1971). It was obvious to the readers that something very special happened in the E.C. Comics offices in New York. The comic books were completely different than anything that they had read before, and the readers recognized this. In the pages of the E.C. Comics, creative artists had arrived to revitalize the stagnant and dying comic book industry (Stewart, 1971).
While the E.C. Comics initiated and maintained a frightening aspect of realism to them, there still existed an almost magical fantasy escapism that filled the reader with wonder and did not insult their intelligence with tired, unrealistic themes, unbelievable to even the youngest of readers. Bhob Stewart (1971) states:

... the ruled panel borders became windows to dark carnivals, dandelion summer miracles, and red Martian canals. The captions became almost poetic and increased in length, describing a wealth of detail and emotions for the illustrators to bring to life in each story. Stories were written with a specific artist in mind, and this, too, had an influence on the words. And, in a continuous feedback process, the artist, knowing that a story had been created for his own talents, did a better job because of this (p. 7).

Part of the creative genius of the E.C. Comics production team lay in the fact that material was developed to highlight the specific talents of each individual artist.
The Writing Team of William M. Gaines and Al Feldstein

The primary writers for E.C. Comics were publisher William M. Gaines and editor Al Feldstein (both of whom would create Mad Magazine after the Comics Code put their entire line of comic books out of business in 1954). The scheduling of the comics required that they create a fresh, new story everyday. Sitting at his desk, Gaines would introduce a story "springboard," a gimmick on which a plot might pivot (Stewart, 1971). From this point, a story would develop and come to life. At the drawing table facing him, Al Feldstein would suddenly get caught up in the enthusiasm of the idea (Stewart, 1971). Al Feldstein would breathe life into the story with his unique style of descriptive narrative that read like prose—a quality that was unheard of in comic books in the 1950's. Larry Stark (1971) states:

Together the two [Gaines and Feldstein] worked out the plot development, assuming the roles of different characters and shouting lines back and forth at each other in glee. Afterwards, Feldstein would begin to write, dividing panels and penciling words directly on the same sheet of
kid finish stock to be used for the final inked art. "If we didn’t have a story idea by two o’clock," recalls Gaines, "we knew we were in trouble." By four o’clock the story was finished and off to be lettered (p. 4).

The E.C. writers produced a story of excellent quality at the rate of one per day for nearly five years. The words flowed in a furious torrent, bulging the word balloons (Stewart, 1971). The writing team of William M. Gaines and Al Feldstein was a perfect combination of ideas and execution (Stark, 1971). The stories that they created remain horror classics that clearly defined the horror comics genre from 1950 to 1955.

The Basic Elements of the E.C. Plot Style

Some of the stories in E.C.’s three horror titles included many of the classic horror themes of Hollywood popularized during the 1930’s and 1940’s. Bestial werewolves prowled through dark, moonlit forests in search of human prey. Blood-draining vampires rose from their caskets seeking to quench their insatiable thirst for blood. Ancient Egyptian mummies crawled from the sarcophagus to wreck vengeance upon those who had violated
their tombs. Flesh-eating ghouls staggered through graveyards looking to appease their appetites for dead flesh. Witches cast spells and incantations that brought death and destruction. Voodoo rituals in Haiti summoned the living dead as zombies to serve them in tropical island jungles. Vicious murderers met their deaths in ironic twists of fate at the guillotine in France and the electric Chair in the United States: Part of the E.C. Comics magic was the eerie mood and futuristic themes that were developed so well in the stories. Stewart (1971) states:

Hitchcockian terror trains sped through the night. Spacemen in skintight suits flipped toggle switches on control panels. Protoplasmic blobs jellied to life in mossy swamps. Perspiring villains fled wildly down deserted city streets. A Frankenstein monster brooded silently and waited patiently for the ice that encased him to melt and set him free. Men trapped in coffins screamed hysterically with the realization that they were buried alive. A woman 'whirlpools' through the psychological terror of her own insane mind. And all of the while, the
Ghoulunatics leered upward, beckoning . . .
beckoning . . . (p. 7).
The atmosphere in the E.C. Comics stories was a special enticement for readers. As expressed in the letters columns, the fans were enthralled with the eerie mood and haunting realism of the E.C. Comics style of storytelling.

Gory Stories with Gruesome Shock Endings

Perhaps the most frightening aspect of the E.C. horror stories were the grisly shock endings. These stories usually involved violent retribution from a wronged character that ended up in some kind of horrific body mutilation such as decapitation or dismemberment. Some of these stories were extremely gruesome and excessively violent. Some examples of the classic E.C. comics shock endings are given below:

A man who sells horse meat for red points during the war, is carved up and put on display in the butcher-shop showcase after his wife discovers he has inadvertently poisoned their son with "tainted" meat. A man stumbles into a restaurant run by vampires and ends up strung upside down with a tap in his neck, and, at the end of the
story, each vampire comes by to fill a glass from his blood. A fisherman’s wife repays his infidelity by having him mounted on a plaque like one of his prize fish trophies. A man whose hobby is taxidermy, ends up stuffed himself after he kills and stuffs his wife’s pet kitten. A restaurant owner who relishes broiling lobsters is broiled alive himself. An unfaithful circus performer has her head crushed under the hoof of a giant elephant. A medical student who commits murder to acquire body organs, is strangled to death by some vengeful intestines. A man murders his wife and disposes of her body by feeding her piece by piece to pigeons on the roof. A man whose obese wife is eating him out of house and home kills her and puts her dismembered body in a huge Witman’s chocolate sample box. A perverted undertaker, who mutilates the corpses of the townspeople who ridiculed him, is killed and buried in several separate graves with the epitaph “rest in pieces” (Stark, 1971, p. 18).

As described above, the E.C. horror stories were truly horrible and quite shocking in their conclusions.
Enthusiastic reader response to the stories made it clearly evident that the fans loved the gory story endings that played out regularly on the terror-filled pages of E.C. Comics.

In a particularly gruesome story titled "A Grim Fairy Tale," a pompous and cruel king and queen, who refuse to protect their poverty-stricken kingdom from being overcome with rats, are forced to swallow two starving rats whole, then their mouths are sewn shut and they are made to suffer the agony of the rats eating their way out of their stomachs. In another grisly story, a man kills his wife and disposes of her body piece by piece down the garbage disposal; he is tripped up later when, because the garbage disposal unit is not installed properly, her flesh, blood-slime, and crunched bone fragments stream sickeningly out of his kitchen faucet to the amazement and horror of his dinner guests. In yet another story, titled "Last Respects," a man who is trapped in a locked mausoleum with the body of his dearly beloved, but recently deceased wife, ends up devouring her corpse to keep from starving to death and is killed by embalming fluid poisoning. The shock endings in the E.C. horror comics were truly horrifying and original. Kids in the early 1950's just loved them.
In an interview with John Benson in 1979, editor Al Feldstein explained the E.C. approach to the horrific shock endings as a gradual build-up to a sudden "lapse of taste." An excerpt of this rare interview is included below:

I like the idea of a build up to a sudden 'lapse of taste.' It's like when you stick your finger into an electric light socket. You're O.K. until you touch it, and then it gives you the shock of your life, and so you back off real fast. And that's really what we did. We just gave them one shock to really scare them or to horrify them. It might be referred to as a sudden 'lapse of taste.' I'm not sure that we tried to make it real. We may be accused of making it real, but in our mind it was more like the punch-line of a joke (p. 89).

It is interesting to note that while conservatives of the early 1950's found the E.C. story conclusions appalling and reprehensible, the primary editor (Al Feldstein) revealed in later interviews that the E.C. office staff considered them to be more of a harmless joke that was never intended to be taken seriously by anyone back then or even at the present time. Publisher William M. Gaines also later
expressed puzzlement and disbelief that conservatives took them so seriously as to consider them a social threat back in the 1950's.

Rotting Corpses Rising From the Grave to Seek Revenge

The reanimation of dead tissue was one of the most recurrent themes in the E.C. horror comic books. Fetid, decaying corpses rose from the stinking mire of their graves to stagger through misty, moonlit cemeteries seeking revenge for wrongdoing. The nauseating stench of death almost seemed to waft up from the pages of these truly frightening E.C. horror comics. The violent acts of vengeance that these moldering corpses inflicted upon the E.C. characters who had wronged them were graphic and gruesome. In one of the most memorable stories, titled "Poetic Justice," a kindly garbage collector is driven to suicide by malicious acts, most notably vicious valentine cards. At the story's conclusion, on the anniversary of his death (St. Valentine's Day), the corpse rises from the grave to find its tormentors and leaves its own grisly valentine card— the ripped out heart of the villain.

The above story affords the perfect opportunity to study the formula of the E.C. horror story; to examine the
mechanics of the E.C. plot in order to see how the writers moved the reader along toward the gradual build-up to a "sudden lapse of taste." First the reader is introduced to a kindly old garbage collector, Abner Elliot. A humble, gentle, and good man, Abner Elliot lives alone in the house where his wife has died, with only a small group of stray dogs that he feeds and cares for, for company. At Christmas time, he makes toys for the children of the town who all love him for the kind and generous man that he is. Henry Burgundy is the wealthy, snobbish, and mean-spirited neighbor of Abner Elliot who wants to drive him out of the neighborhood because his modest home is an "eyesore," and because he detests the idea of living next to a garbage collector. Henry Burgundy goes on a hate campaign to drive Abner Elliot out of the neighborhood. First, he has Abner's dogs impounded for having no licenses. Second, he pressures the town council to fire Abner for being too old for the job so that Abner loses his pension. Third, he starts rumors that Abner is really an old pervert, with less than honorable motivations toward the children, so that the town parents forbid their children from visiting Abner anymore. Finally, Henry Burgundy sends malicious valentines to Abner on St. Valentine's day. Abner, now
completely alone, feeling old and worthless, and believing that the entire town has turned against him (he thinks that they sent him the valentine cards because they don’t want him in the town), hangs himself that day.

At this point, careful analysis of the E.C. story dynamics can be made. The reader, at a very early point in the story, is made to feel sympathy for Abner Elliot and strong dislike for the villain, Henry Burgundy. By a continued series of malicious acts, filled with malevolence and extreme injustice, the reader gradually becomes increasingly angry and outraged at the unfair and cruel acts of the villain Henry Burgundy. As the story becomes progressively more provocative, the reader is finally ready to applaud Abner Elliot’s retribution when his rotting corpse rises stinking from the grave to rip out Henry Burgundy’s heart and place it in his own grisly valentine card. The story dynamic revolves around a gradual build-up to a sudden “lapse of taste” (gruesome shock ending) where the reader is not so much disgusted or appalled at the gory conclusion, but feels rather that the just deserts are well-deserved and even justified. The violent retribution at the end of an E.C. story left the reader feeling more satisfied and content, than horrified and shocked. It was
"poetic justice," and so, in this sense, the E.C. story shock endings (often carried out by the rotting corpses of the victims) were a form of catharsis for the reader (because the real villains always got what they deserved at the end of the story).

The above analysis reveals some very interesting insights to understanding why the E.C. comics were so loved by children and so hated by adults. To the children who read the story, "Poetic Justice," the violent retribution that occurred in the story's gruesome conclusion was well-deserved and satisfying. But to the adult paging through the comic book (without the benefit of having read the story), it was just a revolting climax in which children were exposed to a graphic depiction of a human heart being ripped out of a chest. To the reader, the story has one effect, but to the critic, the story, or at least its extreme conclusion, is interpreted an entirely different way.

The rotted corpses in the E.C. horror stories were most effectively drawn by the incomparable Graham Ingels. His meticulous attention to detail and melancholy use of shadows made the nightmarish walking dead truly revolting. When the classic period of the horror comics came to an end
in 1954, "ghastly" Graham Ingels, the great master artist of the macabre and the grotesque, retreated to live in seclusion and obscurity, never to work in comic books again. William M. Gaines said that the horror comic book art that Graham Ingels did for E.C. Comics in the 1950's really bothered him. He was bothered by what he had done for E.C. Comics and later refused to even discuss it (Cochran, 1979).

The following excerpts from the E.C. horror comics show the masterful descriptive prose of Al Feldstein and the E.C. preoccupation with the dead rising from the grave to seek revenge, both of which were essential ingredients of the E.C. horror story formula:

The rotted, decayed thing grinned . . . reaching outward. It's flesh crawled with the slime of death. It's voice rasped like a worn out gramophone cylinder . . . The thing closed its flesh -tattered boney fingers around his wrist in a vice-like grip and dragged him from the car. The female thing dragged the screaming man into the satin-draped mausoleum with the stained glass window . . . across the marble floor and into the hard wood, bronze-trimmed casket. And all the
while, as it closed the lid down, it kept murmuring, spewing its foul-smelling breath upon his terror-stricken face . . . (Tales From The Crypt #33 January 1953).

The above excerpt demonstrates the E.C. style of descriptive narrative that made the use of reanimated corpses so effective in their stories.

A hoarse, almost unintelligible voice calls her name . . . Roger stands before her. His decayed and rotted body carries the putrid odor of death. She screams! Her terrified shriek echoes across the lake. Roger does not understand. He moves toward her. Lillian’s puny fists beat against Roger’s tattered chest as he draws her to him. Confused . . . bewildered . . . the corpse of Roger Kane tries to comfort the hysterical screaming woman. Suddenly the screaming stops. Lillian sobs quietly, staring at the decomposed face so close to hers. Poor Lillian. She recognizes Roger now. She sees him clearly . . . not the ugly rotting hulk before her . . . but as he was long ago. The shock has been too much for
Lillian. She has gone completely out of her mind. She is stark raving mad. The night drags on, and day dawns over the lake . . . (Vault of Horror #19 June-July 1951, p. 8).

The story excerpt above is a good example of how the reanimated corpses added effective mood and nauseating revulsion to the horror stories in the E.C. Comics.

Tension and suspense built up to a terrifying level in the E.C. walking dead horror stories as demonstrated below:

Suddenly Irma heard footsteps outside the huge oak door. The knob rattled . . . she swung it open . . . the thing moved toward her. It stank from oozing grave mud. clods of rancid, crawling, rotted flesh fell from its eyeless face . . . Behind the man-thing came the woman-thing. It’s hair was matted with the cemetery ooze . . . It’s cheeks sunken . . . it’s whitened teeth grinning idiotically . . . It’s boney, decomposing fingers reaching for her . . . Irma rushed up the staircase. The things slopped after her . . . (Vault of Horror #23 February-March 1952, p. 8).
The excerpt given above conveys the stark terror experienced by the protagonist in an E.C. walking dead horror story. Further evidence of the recurring theme of violent retribution in the form of a rotting corpse reaching out for revenge from beyond the grave is given below:

The soil of Abner Elliot's grave cracked open. A fetid, rotting hand reached up . . . Another followed. The thing pushed up into the brisk winter air. It got to it's feet, swaying uncertainly . . . then it stumbled off toward town. Crawling clods of grave mud fell away as it tottered along. Bits of muddy, moldy, foul-smelling flesh dropped in its path. It seemed to know . . . to sense where it was going . . . Henry spun around as the searing stench burned his nostrils . . . (Haunt of Fear #12 March-April 1952, p. 9).

It should be noted that the panic, fear, and revulsion experienced by the unfortunate villain (Henry spun around...) of the above story excerpt can only be fully appreciated by viewing the actual panel (depicting the raw emotion of the moment) in this most frightening part of the
story. This is part of the special magic of comic books as a pictorial medium-- the visceral reaction of the reader relies almost entirely on the illustration for effect-- a visual phenomenon that is a unique aspect of storytelling found only in comic books. It should also be noted that the heart ripped out of the chest of the victim at the end of the story clearly demonstrates the gruesome shock ending and violent retribution so frequently depicted in the E.C. horror stories involving the revenge of a rotting corpse.

The stories that E.C. Comics did involving the reanimation of dead tissue were classic horror tales, but by no means were they the cream of the crop as far as what they were capable of (in terms of versatility and social commentary). In later issues they would explore unique horror themes that were totally original and that have yet to be equaled in the comic book context.

Competitive Publishers Jump on the Horror Bandwagon and Flood the Market

When E.C. Comics first introduced its unique horror comic books to the market in 1950 they were an immediate success. They became immensely popular almost overnight. The other comic book publishing companies quickly
recognized that E.C. had a good thing going, and had provided a new direction for them as far as marketable product. Almost at once, the vast majority of comic book companies began publishing their own brand of E.C.-styled horror comic books in an attempt to cash in on E.C.'s phenomenal success. For the most part, these new upstarts were shoddy imitators of the concept that E.C. had originated. The rival publishers flooded the market with close to fifteen hundred comic books in more than one hundred ten different titles, all modeled after the E.C. line of "new trend" titles. The E.C. success formula was neatly copied right down to the concept of the Ghoulunatics, as the competing publishers incorporated horror hosts to introduce their horror stories. There can be no doubt that E.C. Comics initiated the horror comic book craze (as is evidenced by the obvious way that the other publishers closely mimicked E.C. in order to capitalize on their success).

From 1950 through 1955, the horror comic books totally dominated the American comic book market. Almost every established comic book publisher entered the horror foray, and new publishers jumped on the bandwagon as well. It was a glorious time in the history of American comic books.
As stated previously, most of the rival publishing companies borrowed from E.C. themes, but lacked the quality of artwork and story development that made E.C. comics the most respected and most popular comic books of the early 1950’s. The other publishers substituted plot evolution with unnecessary action and excessive violence. The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide, (which catalogs these many horror comic book titles and chronicles the entire horror comic book era in the 1950’s), is full of references to: excessive violence, torture, females in bondage, cannibalism, severed head panels, perversion, eyes gouged out, acid in the face, tongue ripped out, face carved with knife, blood-drainage, decapitation, electrocution, dismemberment, disembowelment, hearts ripped out, man stabbed in face, people cooked alive, head split open, fried body organs, intestines pulled out, bullet in head cover, etc.

If E.C. Comics used a gradual build-up to a sudden "lapse of taste" at the shocking climax of a story, then the rival publishers certainly used senseless, excessive violence and sadistic bodily mutilations to become "utterly tasteless" all through their stories. The competitors sacrificed plot development and redeeming value in exchange

111
for gratuitous violence and shock value. E.C. may have done some of the same sort of thing, but they did it with class. The competitors became increasingly violent and vulgar in an attempt to outdo one another. It was precisely this kind of tasteless indiscretion that was to be the downfall of the horror comic books of the 1950’s.

Other 1950’s Horror Comics

Atlas Comics (previously Timely Comics and later to become Marvel Comics, the biggest comic book publishing company in the U.S.) was the second most important publisher of horror comics in the 1950’s. The reason for this is that Atlas published more horror comic books in the early 1950’s than any other publisher in the United States. The first Atlas horror titles were Amazing Mysteries, (Captain America’s) Weird Tales, and Marvel Tales. It is interesting to note that, as far back as 1949, horror comics were already so popular that Atlas replaced Captain America (a golden age comics World War II superhero veteran) with Weird Tales in an attempt to cash in on the lucrative horror craze.

In 1950, Atlas published three more horror titles: Suspense; Journey Into Unknown Worlds; and Adventures Into
Terror. The following year, in 1951, Atlas published several more excellent horror titles: Venus; Mystic; Astonishing; Strange Tales; Space Worlds; and Adventures Into Weird Worlds. 1952 was the most prolific year for Atlas horror comic books. In 1952 Atlas published a total of 115 horror comic books. Also in 1952, Atlas added four more horror titles bringing their total up to thirteen: Amazing Detective Cases; Mystery Tales; Spellbound; Journey Into Mystery; and Uncanny Tales. In 1953, Atlas Comics published another new title, Menace, bringing them up to sixteen regularly published horror comic book titles in that year. Sales must have been doing very well for Atlas to publish that many titles when there were about seventy-three other horror comic book titles being published that same year. By 1954, with pressure from parents, vendors, and the ant-comics crusade itself, Atlas began to taper off its horror output to only eleven horror titles. The Atlas horror comic book titles improved with each year. They were not unnecessarily violent and showed excellent use of dark, luminous color, and heavy mood and atmosphere. Weird spooky covers were Atlas' forte and their walking corpses were trademarks that defined their horror output throughout the five years that they dominated the stands. One Atlas
cover (typical of the period) depicted a spaceship landed at a moonlit cemetery where its insect inhabitants were infesting the buried dead and reanimating the rotting corpses. Atlas published three hundred and ninety-nine horror comics in eighteen titles from May 1949 to March 1955.

Avon Periodicals, a paperback book publisher, might be considered the third most important comic book publisher in the early 1950’s, as they published the very first single comic book entirely devoted to the horror format, Eerie, in 1947. This single issue did not sell well at the time and was discontinued the same year. However, after the horror craze took the comic book market by storm, Avon revived the Eerie title and it published seventeen issues, from 1951 to 1954, to become Avon Periodicals longest running and most successful horror title. The majority of Avon’s horror output were one-shot (single issue) titles such as: The Dead Who Walk; City of The Living Dead; Diary of Horror; Night of Mystery; Phantom Witchdoctor; and the jumbo-sized Secret Diary of Eerie Adventures. Avon also published a six-issue title, Witchcraft, and a science-fiction title, Strange Worlds, with heavy horror overtones. Avon
Periodicals published forty-seven horror comics in nine titles from January 1947 to September 1954.

American Comics Group should be considered the fourth most important horror comics publisher in the early 1950’s because they were the first to establish a continuous running horror comic book title, *Adventures Into the Unknown*, in 1948. The American Comics Group were very mild in terms of violence and adult themes, apparently conscious of the fact that, in the early 1950’s, the majority of comic book readers were younger children. American Comics Group also published four other horror comic book titles in the early 1950’s: *Forbidden Worlds*, *Out of the Night*, *The Clutching Hand*, and *Skeleton Hand in Secrets of the Supernatural*. The American Comics Group published one hundred and twenty-three horror comic books in five titles from Fall 1948 to November 1954. The American Comics Group titles are of somewhat diminished status amongst modern day precode comic book collectors for the primary reason that their output was so tame and watered down in comparison to other 1950’s horror comic book publishers.

Harvey Publications was one of the most important comic book publishers as their total output was so much (ninety-six horror comics) and their level of quality was
consistently excellent. Harvey Publications horror stories dealt with psychological terror and ironic twists of fate that gave their horror comics uniqueness and originality. Harvey published four great horror comic book titles: *Witches Tales; Chamber of Chills; Black Cat Mystery;* and *Tomb of Terror.* Harvey Publications published ninety-six horror comic books in four titles from January 1951 to December 1954.

Following close behind Harvey is Ace Periodicals, another great pre-code horror publisher. Ace Periodicals produced excellent quality horror comics that also dealt with fate and the strange irony of human destiny. Ace Periodicals produced five great horror comic book titles: *Challenge of the Unknown; The Beyond; Web of Mystery; Hand of Fate;* and *Baffling Mysteries.* Ace Periodicals went out of business soon after the institution of the comics code. Ace Periodicals published a total of ninety-six horror comic books in five titles from September 1950 to March 1955.

Another great pre-code horror comic book publisher was Story Comics (including the pseudonym subsidiaries Master Comics, Merit Publications, Trojan Magazines, and Ribage Publishing Corp.). Story Comics borrowed heavily from the
E.C. Comics success formula in terms of story format, style, themes, cover design, and horror hosts. In fact, Story Comics actually swiped several E.C. stories and artwork practically word for word and panel for panel. These swipes are so obvious that the Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide includes notations to this effect, even citing specific issues and covers that were identical to E.C. Comics. The Story Comics tried to imitate the E.C. style, but was in no way comparable.

Story Comics horror stories were excessively violent and brutally graphic. With the institution of the comic code in 1955, Story comics and its entire line of subsidiaries was put out of business. Story Comics published two excellent horror titles, Mysterious Adventures and Fight Against Crime. Its subsidiary Master Comics published the great horror title, Dark Mysteries. Another subsidiary, Ribage Publishing Corporation published a horror/science-fiction hybrid title, Crime Mysteries. Finally, Trojan Magazines published the classic horror comic book title, Beware (which was purchased and continued from Youthful Magazines. Altogether, Story Comics published 96 horror comic books in five titles from March 1951 to March 1955.
Youthful Magazines produced seventeen well-written and well-illustrated horror comics over three years and several title changes. They initially published the horror-influenced Captain Science, then changed the title to Fantastic with continued numbering, then changed the title to Beware with continued numbering (before the title and logo were sold to Trojan Magazines which continued the numbering), and, finally, changed the title one last time to Chilling Tales before ceasing publication in mid-1953. Youthful Magazines published seventeen horror comic books in four titles from November 1950 to October 1953.

Superior Publishers, a Canadian publisher, produced some of the very finest horror comic books ever published in the 1950's. The Superior horror stories dealt primarily with supernatural themes (ghosts, haunted castles, demons, vampires, etc.) and were illustrated with beautiful artwork from the Iger art studio. Superior Publishers also published reprints of E.C. horror comics by license in Canada. The Superior published E.C. reprints were lightly inked from asbestos plates and so are of inferior quality for purposes of collecting. Superior Publishers produced three excellent horror titles: Journey Into Fear; Strange Mysteries, and Mysteries Weird and Strange. The Superior
publishing company was put out of business with the institution of the comics code in 1955. Superior Publishers published fifty-three horror comic books in three titles from May 1951 and January 1955.


Gilmor Magazines was another very important horror comic book publisher in the early 1950's. Gilmor published under several pseudonyms: Stanmor Publications, Media Publications, Aragon Magazines, and Key Publications. The Gilmor horror stories were extremely violent and lacked
serious plot development. The Gilmor horror comics are most interesting in that they contain artwork from two of the most important 1950's horror artists, Basil Wolverton and Bernard Bailey. Gilmor was put out of business by the comic code in early 1955. Gilmor published four horror comic book titles: *Mister Mystery, Weird Mysteries, Weird Thrills*, and *Weird Tales of the Future*. Gilmor magazines published forty-two horror comic books in four titles from September 1951 to November 1954.

Fawcett Publications (publisher of the enormously popular golden age superhero Captain Marvel in the 1940's) produced some very good horror comics during the early 1950's. Fawcett published seven successful horror comic book titles: *This Magazine is Haunted; Beware Terror Tales; Strange Suspense Stories; Worlds Beyond; Worlds of Fear; Unknown World; and Strange Stories From Another World*. Fawcett Publications was put out of business by a stunning and devastating court ruling litigated by D.C. Comics over copyright infringement over their character Superman in 1953. This court decision is largely considered by comic collectors and comic historians to have been completely unfair, but it forced Fawcett Publications out of business in late 1953. Fawcett sold all of its

Charlton Publications (also known under the pseudonyms Song Hits, Capitol Stories, and Charlton Comics Group) also published some very good horror comic books in the early 1950’s. The Charlton Comics Group produced two of its own horror titles, The Thing and Lawbreakers Suspense Stories, then bought out the Fawcett Publications remaining horror titles: Strange Suspense Stories and This Magazine is Haunted (both with continued numbering). The Charlton horror comics died with the code, but the Charlton company survived for decades afterward. Charlton Publications published thirty-two horror comic books in four titles from February 1952 to February 1955.

Standard Comics, an older publishing company from the golden age of comics in the 1940’s published several very interesting horror comic book titles in the early 1950’s. Standard produced six horror comic book titles: Out of the Shadows; The Unseen; Adventures Into Darkness; Fantastic Worlds; Lost Worlds; and Who is Next? Standard Comics, an established publishing company for nearly twenty years, was


St. John Publishing Company was another fine precode horror comic book publisher. Their stories featured less violence and gore, in exchange for more adventure and story development. St. John Publishing Company bought out the remaining Ziff-Davis comic book titles in the winter of 1953. St. John produced seven horror comic book titles: Strange Terrors; Weird Horrors; Nightmare; Amazing Ghost Stories, All-Picture Adventures, House of Terror 3-D, and another Nightmare (continued from the defunct Ziff-Davis
Publishing Company). This company became another casualty of the comic code soon after it was implemented in 1955. St. John Publishing Company published twenty-six horror comic books in seven titles from June 1952 to February 1955.

D.C. Comics (under the publishing name of National Periodical Publications) was one of the few publishers that tried to resist the horror craze in the early 1950's. D.C. tried to sustain itself solely on its considerable stable of established superheroes (Superman, Batman and Robin, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, the Flash), but was finally compelled to publish some very mild horror comics in 1952. The D.C. Comics "mystery" titles are extremely well-written and well-illustrated, but are considered by most collectors to be simply too tame to be evocative of the great horror comics of the 1950's. The D.C. Comics "mystery" titles are: House of Mystery, Sensation Comics, and Sensation Mystery.

Prize Publications published two very good horror titles: Frankenstein Comics and Black Cat Mystery. Both of these titles were of excellent quality and original in content. Prize was able to survive the code for nine years, before folding in 1963. Prize Publications, under
the pseudonyms Creston Publishing Company and Headline Publishing Company, published forty-nine horror comic books in two titles from October 1950 to December 1954.

Star Publications was primarily a jungle and crime comic book publisher that tried to capitalize on the horror craze with several deceptively titled comic book series. Many collectors argue that the Star Publications were not actually horror comic books at all, but should be more properly classified as jungle or crime comics. However, some of the titles should be considered horror in their format. Star Publications horror-influenced comic book titles were: Terrors of the Jungle; Terrifying Tales; Thrilling Crime Cases; Shocking Mystery Cases; Shock Detective Cases; Spook Detective Cases; Spook; Blue Bolt Weird Tales; Ghostly Weird Stories; and Startling Terror Tales. Star Publications published sixty-two horror-influenced comic books in ten titles from November 1951 to September 1954.

Two jungle comics golden age publishers, Fox Features Syndicate and Fiction House Magazines, entered three short-lived horror comic book titles in order to capitalize on the horror craze in the early 1950’s. Fox published A Star Presentation, featuring a graphic adaptation of “Dr.
Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde (later reprinted in Star's Startling Terror Tales), and Fiction House published The Monster and Ghost Comics. None of these titles were very successful as the combined horror output of both companies totaled only thirteen issues.

A latecomer to the horror comic book scene was Comic Media. While this company only published two titles, both of them were excellent and had much potential for the future (if the comic code had not driven them out of business in late 1954). The two Comic Media horror comic book titles were: Horrific and Weird Terror. These two titles are some of the most highly sought precode horror titles amongst comic collectors today. Comic Media published twenty-seven horror comic books in two titles from September 1952 to December 1954.

Another late-arriving, but very promising, horror title killed prematurely by the comic code was Quality Comics' Web of Evil. The horror stories in this title are some of the best from the era of the precode horror comic books. Quality Comics also produced a second horror title, Intrigue, that was born and died the same month (January 1955) with the institution of the comic code.
Minoan Publishing Corporation, also known as Toby Press, published three horror comic book titles in 1953. These horror titles were: *Tales of Terror* (discontinued due to objection by E.C. Comics that it infringed upon the title of their horror annual editions); *Tales of Horror*; and *The Purple Claw*. These titles were generally mediocre and only moderately successful. Minoan Publishing Corporation published seventeen horror comics in three horror titles from winter 1952 to October 1954.


The horror craze was unlike anything that had gone before in American comic books. The craze swept over the entire comic book industry, dominating it for five whole years and ending only with the regulation and censorship of the comic code in 1955. At its zenith in the early 1950's,
hundreds of horror comics were being published per month in New York City and kids all over the country were buying them up, reading them, and loving them. Statistical analysis of this unique time in American history reveals that close to fifteen hundred horror comics were published by twenty-eight publishers in eighty titles from 1948 to 1955 in a wave of popularity that was epidemic in proportion and did not end until governmental intervention and regulation brought it to an end.

As stated previously, the wave of competing horror comic book titles flooded the American comic book market. The rival publishers would try to outdo one another each month. In order to top the numerous competitors, the comic publishers began to make their horror comics progressively more gruesome, more graphic, and more violent. Things began to snowball unbridled—until the situation was simply out of control. Late in 1954, pressure from retailers and the implementation of the comics code would bring the golden era of the 1950’s horror comic books to an abrupt end. Stark (1971) states:

Even back as far as 1952, the seeds of doom were in the air. The era of Senator Joseph McCarthy was being ushered in, along with a whole age of
fear that would spread to every aspect of our lives. Unjustified public criticism and a demand for comic censorship were already beginning to spread across the country like a plague (p. 7).

Critical Analysis of Horror Comics

While other scholars have approached the subject of comic books from a perspective of form, content, and aesthetics in the literature, the horror comics of the 1950’s do not lend themselves to such analysis quite as easily. A critical perspective of power, ideology, and influence as a methodology for analysis of the horror comics has proven to be more useful. Critical analysis of the horror comics of the 1950’s reveals that they are less of an expression of cultural values and aesthetics than the inevitable outcome of market changes, a sweeping new direction in comic books that emerged as a response to these market changes.

While colorful costumed super-heroes flourished as a cultural form of patriotism and fantasy escapism for the nation’s youth during World War II, the horror comics were the direct result of drastic changes that took place in the
market when the golden age heroes had served their purpose and become obsolete after the war was over.

Market changes in style and theme swing from one extreme to another in a pendulum motion over time, in comic book publishing as well as many other American commodities such as fashion, music, dancing, and other popular trends. The horror comic books were born and sustained out of the competitive marketplace. The horror comics were equivalent to a twentieth century “gold rush,” a sweeping change that caught on and flourished as a new craze (initiated and quite appropriately named the “new trend” by the originators of the phenomenon, E.C. Comics).

It is important to understand that the birth of the horror comics era of the early 1950’s was a direct result of the ending of the previous trend in comics, the golden age heroes that flourished abundantly during the war. Placing proper significance on both genres (Golden Age super-hero comics of the 1940's and the horror comics that followed them in the 1950's) requires understanding that the golden age genre came about as a form of cultural expression and national search for identity during the war, and that the horror comics arrived just in time to fill the gap left by them after they declined and died as a result of having
outlived their usefulness. America's search for national identity during World War II produced the Golden Age super-hero comic books of the 1940's, and the search for America's national identity during the McCarthy debacle produced the crusade that killed the horror comic books of the 1950's.

If the above analysis of changing trends and search for national identity serves to provide insight into the genesis of the 1950's horror comics genre, then an adequate critical perspective to analyze their wide appeal, the social controversy associated with them, and their ultimate political demise is somewhat more difficult. How should we examine and explain their immense and sustained popularity for the five years that they totally dominated the American comic book market from 1950 to 1955? How should we evaluate the storytelling aspect of the 1950's horror comics and the messages contained in these stories? Why were these horror stories so inflammatory to postwar American conservatives in the 1950's? Why were these comics more socially relevant than any that had gone before (in that they generated such controversy that congressional intervention and regulation were deemed necessary)? I believe that the answers to these complex questions are best addressed in terms of power, ideology, and social influence.
First of all, I believe that the horror comics craze in the early 1950's can only be understood in the context of two important factors: postwar United American audiences and pre-television American audiences. I believe that the social controversy caused by the horror comics is just as important as the comic books themselves, and that this social controversy can only be understood in the context of the McCarthy era in which it occurred.

Critical analysis of the horror comics themselves reveals that they were like gruesome fairy tales. Most Americans do not realize that the fairy tales we tell our children are watered-down versions of European fairy tales which were originally quite violent and gruesome. This fact is the key to understanding the controversy that the horror comic books caused in America in the early 1950's. From a puritan mind-set, we changed the violent and gruesome European fairy tales because Americans have always been very cautious and apprehensive about the material we approve for our children to read.

The original European fairy tales (such as Little Red Riding Hood) were violent and gruesome not for shock value, but for moral and instructional purpose-- to teach children lessons about life. The horror comic books in the 1950's
were deliberately violent and gruesome for purposes of marketing and profitability rather than teaching lessons—and American conservatives in the 1950's found this excessive violence to be inappropriate, objectionable and even outrageous. For the same reasons that American conservatives watered-down and sanitized the European fairy tales, American conservatives reacted with hysteria and alarm when the strong content of its children's reading material was discovered and scrutinized. In this context, we can see and understand the strong objection and even outrage that characterized the controversy in the early 1950's and resulted in the anti-comics crusade in 1954.

Why did the children of the early 1950's love the pre-code horror comics so much? I believe that there are three reasons that provide a definite answer to this well-deserved question. First, the horror comics were a higher quality comic book than anything that had been seen before. The artwork and writing in the horror comics was miles above the golden age comics of the 1940's. Kids loved the horror comics and collected them like treasures. The stories with the gruesome shock endings were more tantalizing and exciting for kids to read than the highly formulaic adventures and fantasy exploits of super-hero comic books.
The second reason that the horror comics were so popular was that they were a new and different kind of comic book. The golden age super-hero comics had been around for more than ten years and kids were tired of them. The end of the war demonstrated this fact to comic book publishers with painful clarity. The horror comics presented a new and different type of comic book that was fun to read. Also, it should be mentioned that the horror craze was a new thing, and that kids are quick to seize upon and explore something new that their peers are discovering and enjoying for the first time.

Finally, one must not forget that in pre-television America, comic books were a much wider medium than they are in today’s technologically advanced society. Now children have television, video games, cellular telephones, and the internet; whereas in the 1950’s, comic books were a much more important part of their lives.

Were the horror comic books of the 1950’s socially powerful and adversely influential? The answer to this question is a definite “yes,” but not for the behavioral reasons (juvenile delinquency) and attitudinal reasons (moral deterioration) that Dr. Wertham proposed in 1954. The horror comics of the 1950’s were very definitely both
socially powerful and adversely influential in terms of the controversy that they caused in 1954. The anti-comics crusade in America in 1954 serves as a microcosm for the much larger crisis that America faced in the early 1950’s. The 1954 anti-comics crusade serves as a revealing case study of the irrational, hysterical, paranoia-driven, vigilante-styled mob mentality that punctuated the McCarthy era in the early 1950’s. I believe that both the anti-comics crusade and the McCarthy political campaign were an important part of American history in terms of the nation’s search for identity in the 1950’s. The impact of the horror comics was not so much a destructive effect on children as it was on adults, and the significance of this destructive impact can only be adequately assessed in the context of the McCarthy hysteria in which it occurred. The next section of this thesis will examine both the anti-comics crusade that resulted in the comic code which destroyed the horror comics, and will examine the McCarthy era political campaign that resulted in the fear and paranoia that destroyed American lives.
One can only assess the impact of the anti-comics crusade that killed the horror comics in the dark shadow of the McCarthy political campaign that engulfed the country at that time. The intense scrutiny and glare of the McCarthy political campaign was sweeping across the United States like a cancerous growth gone wild. The McCarthy anti-American “communist” scare was in full bloom, spreading hysteria, suspicion, and paranoia across the country in 1954. It was a mockery of justice and a shameful time for the United States. There was strong unjustified public criticism going on and ruthless probing into innocent people’s lives with no just cause (Hill, 1969). Most of the charges being leveled were unfounded, but they succeeded in destroying many people’s lives nonetheless. The McCarthy political “witch hunt” reached its zenith with the televised congressional hearings in 1954. The highly-publicized congressional hearings, led by the unscrupulous Senator Joseph McCarthy, were nothing more
than a farce (Hill, 1969). The panic and hysteria of the "red scare" was a witch hunt in every sense of the word. It was also a national tragedy--an overreaction to the threat of communist insurgency which, in fact, did not even exist at the time.

It was against this backdrop of fear, paranoia, and the glare of congressional investigation, that the anti-comics crusade took place. The feeling of fear and suspicion was widespread in the country at that time, and this hysteria played an integral role in the way that the campaign-to-destroy-the-comics unfolded.

Things had been building up for some time before the campaign really escalated in 1954, culminating in the institution of the comic code and the destruction of the comics in early 1955. Dr. Fredric Wertham had been studying comic books and trying to establish a causal link between them and rising juvenile delinquency as far back as 1947. It was his hypothesis that the sex and violence in comic books were largely responsible for the increasing rate of juvenile delinquency in the United States (Hill, 1969).

One of the ways that comic books served as a scapegoat for social problems in Dr. Wertham's book, Seduction of the
Innocent: The Influence of Comic Books on Today's Youth, was that he concluded the book by declaring that the problem was not in any way the parent's fault. Wertham (1954) states:

One evening at the Lafargue Clinic, a young woman came to see me. She was the mother of a boy who, after some delinquency, had been referred to the clinic and been treated there. She told me that the boy had got into trouble again, this time picked up with a switchblade knife. She was crying... by that time she had managed to control her sobbing, but she could not talk. So I consoled her again and told her we would do whatever we could. Then I added, 'I know what you've done for this boy. Don't think that it's your fault.' (p. 169).

The above is exactly what thousands of American mothers wanted to hear in the early 1950's. They wanted to hear that it was not their fault. They wanted to hear that they had not failed as parents. In the book, Seduction of the Innocent, the mother at Dr. Wertham's clinic said to him at the conclusion of the above episode, "tell me again that it's not my fault" (Wertham, 1954, p. 170). In this
respect, comic books were a scapegoat for social problems in the U.S. in the 1950's, in just the same way that innocent people were a scapegoat for Senator Joseph McCarthy during his congressional inquiry during the same time period. The two persecutions during this same period seem to be inextricably intertwined, and, for this reason, the anti-comics crusade serves well as a (microcosm) case study for understanding America's search for identity during the dark period of the McCarthy era. Even though both injured parties were largely innocent of the crimes for which they were accused, they both served as scapegoats to deflect attention away from much more serious social evils in America such as racial inequality and economic inequality in the structure of our capitalist system.

In the early 1950's, America faced two primary fears: communism and juvenile delinquency (Reibman, 1999). The axis on which these two met found Senator McCarthy and Dr. Wertham. Dr. Wertham was well-intentioned and sincere, but Senator McCarthy perpetrated a deliberate fraud; nonetheless, critics and historians have not been kind to either of them-- both have been condemned as purveyors of destructive alarmist propaganda.
Dr. Wertham’s book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, would just about turn any average, unsuspecting reader against comic books. This being due to the many cases, examples, and incidents which the good doctor has brought out in his book (Hill, 1969). However, many leading experts in child psychology (such as Dr. Lauretta Bender and Gunnar Dybwad) believe that comics “serve as a release from children’s aggressive tendencies, and that delinquent children are usually predisposed to delinquency and are unstable to begin with” (Hill, 1969). Many critics have dismissed Wertham as a naive social scientist working from simplistic cause-and-effects theories about mass media (Nyberg, 1999).

Instead of setting up control groups of children who read comics and children who did not, and then comparing how they turned out, Dr. Wertham found juvenile delinquents and asked them if they read comic books (Hill, 1969). Since nearly every kid read comic books in the days of postwar, pre-television America, the answer was almost always a resounding affirmative. Rather than establishing a causal link in the relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency, what Dr. Wertham really established was that most juvenile delinquents did, in fact, read comic books. For the above reasons, Dr. Wertham has been
severely criticized by his both his peers and writers in the popular press. However, in fairness to the doctor, Wertham’s theories on comic books and juvenile delinquency needs to be understood in the broader context of his work on violence and society. Wertham was convinced that the solution to stemming violent behavior lay not with treating the individual, but reforming the society that shaped those individuals (Nyberg, 1999). In this light, it is then understood that Dr. Wertham’s position on the detrimental effects of comic books on children were just one element in a much larger picture of societal, environmental influences that needed to be addressed in order to change the way that youth are directed toward violence in society.

Some of the things that Dr. Wertham pointed out in his work did make good sense. The situation in American comic books in the 1950’s had gotten out of hand and some sort of action needed to be taken to counter it. Children are influenced by what they read at such an early age and some of the examples cited in Dr. Wertham’s book (Seduction of the Innocent) certainly were not appropriate reading material for young children.
A Comic Book Baseball Game

A perfect example of what Dr. Wertham was disturbed by (and what angry parents were outraged by), is found in the chapter of his book titled "A Comic Book Baseball Game," which describes and reproduces the last page and final shocking panels of the appalling E.C. horror story "Foul Play" (Haunt of Fear #19 May 1953). In this most revolting of all E.C. horror stories, a devious baseball player (appropriately named Herbie Satten), who is determined to win the pennant at any cost, kills the opposing team's star player by sliding into him with poisoned cleats. The murderous Herbie Satten does win the pennant for his team, but when the opposing team discovers that it was him who killed their star player, they decide not to go to the police, but instead to take matters of revenge into their own hands. They tricked Satten into returning to the Central City ballpark under the pretense that he was to be honored with a special plaque commemorating his many achievements as a baseball player. The appalling, shocking, and outrageous conclusion of the story are given below in an excerpt from Dr. Wertham's "Seduction of the
Innocent" (which was originally taken directly from the pages of E.C. Comics' Haunt of Fear #19 May 1953):

... so now you know friends. Now you know why there is a ballgame being played in the moonlight at midnight in the deserted Central City ballpark. Look closely. See this strange baseball game. See the long strings of pulpy intestines that mark the baselines. See the two lungs and the liver that indicate the bases. See the heart that is home plate. See Doc White bend and whisk the heart with the mangy scalp, yelling 'play ball! Batter Up!' See the batter come to the plate swinging the legs, the arms, then throwing all but one away and standing in the box waiting for the pitcher to hurl the head toward him (the pitcher holds the mangled head against his mit, one eyeball dangles from the socket of the battered head). See the catcher with the torso strapped on as a chest-protector, the infielders with their hand-mits, the stomach-rosin bag, and all the other pieces of equipment that was Central City's star player, Herbie
Satten. And in the morning, watch the faces of the fans as they pack the park and see the green grass now stained red, and see the hastily-substituted pitcher step to the rubber and stare down at the stone plaque embedded there with the engraved words memorializing the gory remains buried beneath the pitcher’s mound . . . the plaque reads "Herbert Satten. Pitcher-Murderer. Rest In Pieces" (p. 145).

This particular chapter of Dr. Wertham’s Seduction of the Innocent" was probably the most inflammatory portion of the entire book. When this gory story was brought to light, parents, teachers, and church groups were outraged. The book, Seduction of the Innocent, did more to alert parents and teachers to what was going on inside comic books than anything else going on at the time. The book received wide circulation and raised quite a commotion across the United States. Dr. Fredric J. Wertham became something of a celebrity himself, appearing on television talk shows to promote his book and to expound his theories on comic books and juvenile delinquency. Portions of the book, Seduction of the innocent, appeared in the November
1953 (Volume #70, pages 50-53, 214) issue of the Ladies Home Journal under the title "What Parents Don't Know About Comic Books."

Attacks on comic books started as far back as 1940, but it took until 1951 to really get the ball rolling (Hill, 1969). The rise in popularity of crime and horror comics paralleled increasing public attention to juvenile delinquency in postwar America (Nyberg, 1999). It should be understood that the suspected link between comic books and juvenile delinquency was the catalyst of the anti-comics crusade that lead to the investigation, intervention, regulation, and ultimate destruction of the horror comics in the shadow of the McCarthy era.

Public Debate in the Popular Press

Although articles about comics appeared sporadically in the popular press during and after the war, the connection between comics and juvenile delinquency did not come until 1948, when the national spotlight was focused on comic books (Nyberg, 1999). The public discourse about comic books was rather loud and inflammatory before Wertham, before the first code, and before the 1948 town
meeting debate (Lent, 1999). In fact, there were two major waves of anti-comic book activity, one in 1948 and another in 1954, marked by publication of Seduction of the Innocent (Nyberg, 1999). But both of these two major attacks were first preceded by some preliminary debates in the popular press during the 1930's and 1940's about the influence and possible harm of comic books in the U.S.

There was much criticism of and debate over comic books in the late 1930's and early 1940's. At times, it was difficult to determine whether the critics were talking about newspaper comic strips or comic books—understandable, in that the latter evolved from the newspaper funnies (Lent, 1999). Writing in 1936, John Ryan had scathing remarks for what he regarded as comic strips, stating:

The repetition in word and picture of sadism, bestial and degenerate scenes and characters are a more serious matter. Such things make their deep impressions on the plastic minds of growing children and have their dangers for the never-too-mature minds of countless adults. The effects of the worst types of comic strips upon
immature minds should prove an enlightening study to educators and psychologists (Lent, 1999, p. 10).

Five years later, another writer warned about the funnies' impact on how children perceived American society:

How deeply is this artistic fare registering on the young mind? No one as of yet has measured the impression. But certainly the "funnies" demonstrate all the arguments a child ever needs for an omnipotent and infallible 'strong man' beyond all laws, the nihilistic man of the totalitarian ideology. In his comic strips, the modern American child sees an America tottering and over-run by criminals. "politician" in the child stories means 'crook,' and 'policeman' means 'idiot.' Expressions like 'racketeering union' and 'filth columnist' are used indiscriminately. If any hope for normal democratic society exists at all, it is in the goodness and might of some superman (Lent, 1999, p. 10).
Silas Bent and Chester Gould (creator of Dick Tracy) engaged in a debate that characterized much of the issues and concerns of comic book effects in a piece titled “Are Comics Bad for Children,” in the pages of Rotarian in 1940. So, it can be seen that the debate over comic books that flared up most noticeably in 1948 and 1954, had it’s origins much earlier.

The titles of most of the citations in the popular press leave no doubt that a controversy over comic books in the U.S. existed long before the two major anti-comics movements got rolling in 1948 and 1954. An examination of some of the citation titles clearly demonstrates a pre-existing controversy over comics and illustrates much of the debate in the popular press of the time: “Are Comics Bad for Children?”; “Need to Combat the Comics;” “How Much of a Menace are Comics;” “Comics Menace;” “The Effects of Comic Books on the Ideology of Children;” (all 1941); The Case Against Comics;” “Books for Fun and Adventure as a Substitute for Comics;” “Shall Our Children Read Comics? Yes!;” “Comics Are No Longer Comic;” “Good Triumphs Over Evil;” all 1942; 1943; “Those Vicious (?) Comics;” and “Are The Comics
Harmful Reading For Children?" both 1944; "Comics and the Super State;" and "Comics, Radio, Movies: What Are They Doing to Our Children?" all 1945; and "Comic Books in Whose House?" 1946 (Lent, 1999, p. 11). These revealing titles demonstrate the comic book controversy in the U.S.

Debate in the popular press continued to escalate up to and during the two major movements to regulate comic books in 1948 and 1954. The crusade against comics began in earnest March 2, 1948, when the ABC radio program "America's Town Meetings of the Air" featured a debate between John Mason Brown, drama critic for the Saturday Review of Literature, and Al Capp, creator of Lil' Abner, on the question: "what's wrong with the comics?" (Nyberg, 1999). Writer Marya Mannes aided Brown, while George Hecht, publisher of Parent's Magazine and of a line of educational comics, stood with Capp (Nyberg, 1999). The magazine reprinted the opening statements of Brown and Capp. Nyberg (1999) states:

Brown dismissed the comics as 'the lowest, most despicable, and harmful form of trash,' asserting that comics made everything 'too easy,' reducing narratives to nothing more than 'printed motion pictures.' In an often repeated statement, he
labeled comics the 'marijuana of the nursery, the bane of the bassinet, the horror of the house, the curse of the kids, and a threat to the future.' Capp provided a colorful parable of the Kinsey family trying desperately to find some reading material for their son that wasn’t filled with violence and/or sex, rejecting in turn the daily newspaper, classic literature such as 'Alice in Wonderland,' and even Shakespeare, until there was nothing left in the house but the phone book. Comic strips, argued Capp, are an offshoot of ancient forms, a simple combination of pictures and text that tell stories (Nyberg, 1999, p. 92).

If the primary argument against comic books was to be a debate over its literary merit, then the debate over them may have proceeded no further than the most rudimentary discourse as illustrated above. The missing ingredient in the ongoing debate over comic books in the 1940’s was the link between them and juvenile delinquency. That would be provided by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham with the publication of an article by Judith Crist in the March 1948 issue of Collier’s, titled "Horror in the Nursery"
(Nyberg, 1999). The Crist article in Colliers was widely read and was instrumental in raising awareness and anti-comic book sentiment. Nyberg (1999) states:

For her article, Crist interviewed Wertham at length, noting that he was an 'authority on the causes of crime among children' and had spent two years studying the effects of comic books. 'His findings,' she wrote, 'published here for the first time, constitutes a warning to the parents of the nine out of ten American homes into which the comic books eventually find their way.' The article was based almost solely on Wertham's observations and commentary.

The Crist article also asserted Wertham’s conclusion that he had determined that the effect of comic book reading was a distinct influencing factor in the case of every single delinquent or disturbed child that he studied, and that his solution to the epidemic influence of comic books was to 'legislate these books off of the newsstands and out of the candy stores' (p. 44).

Dr. Fredric J. Wertham was quite clear in his position against comic books and his solution to rid American cities of this scourge on society:
The publishers will raise a howl about freedom of speech and of the press. Nonsense. We are not dealing with the rights and privileges of adults to read and write as they choose. We are dealing with the mental health of a generation—the care of which we have left too long in the hands of unscrupulous persons whose only interest is greed and financial gain (Wertham, 1948, p. 49).

The entrance of Wertham into the debate over comics was significant. His credentials as a leading psychiatrist assured him of media attention for his anti-comic book crusade, and his study linking comic books to juvenile delinquency meant that his call for legislation would be heeded (Nyberg, 1999). The fact that Dr. Wertham, a credentialed M.D., was making an alarming, though unsubstantiated, claim, guaranteed also that he would be given an audience in the media, and so the debate over comic books continued in the popular press. Nyberg (1999) states:

The popular press, eager to capitalize on public interest, provided a steady stream of articles on comics, most of them citing Wertham’s findings. The Saturday Review of Literature invited Wertham to write his
own article, and 'The Comics ... Very Funny' was published in the May 1948 issue of that magazine. Wertham opened his article with a series of cases where youngsters had committed crimes, suggesting that the common denominator in all of these cases was comic book reading. Following that, he systematically refuted seventeen arguments in favor of allowing children to read comics, ranging from 'They are good for reading,' to which Wertham responded, 'But all of the emphasis is on the pictures and not the written matter,' to 'Comic books are socially harmless,' to which Wertham answered, 'On the contrary, they immunize a whole generation against pity and against recognition of cruelty and violence' (Nyberg, 1999, p. 46).

This unfounded link between the comics and juvenile delinquency was to be the catalyst in the volatile anti-comics crusades in the same way that the unjustified accusations of Senator McCarthy was the catalyst in the volatile McCarthy political crusade. Both of these political movements were based on unsubstantiated fear, paranoia, and contrived hysteria.
In the Dark Shadow of the
McCarthy Era

The unjustified criticisms and claims against comic
books regarding causation of juvenile delinquency and the
subsequent regulation (censorship) of comic books in 1954,
can best be understood in the context of the McCarthy era
which defined the American search for identity in the early
1950's. Lent (1999) states:

The ant-crime comics and anti-juvenile
delinquency campaigns that were germinating
competed, according to Steven E. Mitchell, very
actively for 'a share of national suspicion with
the dominant theme of national politics in the
late 1940's and early 1950's.' Mitchell, as did
others, showed how 'the battle against crime,
horror, and other objectionable comic books
shared many of the popular aversions and tactics
of the anti-communist purges' (p. 19).

Both McCarthyism and the anti-comic book hysteria
were only parts of a larger, more encompassing crusade of
domestic subversion in all its varieties. The postwar
surrender to fraternal suspicion and ideological
fratricide, which Historian David Caute labeled the third
of America’s ‘Great Fears,’ was characterized by apprehension of both overt action and unsanctioned thought. It reflected America’s concern with internal corruption, a continuing fear of ourselves, and a dread of internal moral weakening and, eventually, collapse (p. 12).

The above quotation captures perfectly what I mean when I say puritan mind-set (dread of internal moral weakening) and The United States’ search for identity in the dark shadow of the McCarthy era (America’s concern with internal corruption and a continuing fear of ourselves). When one considers the parallels of the anti-comics crusade and the anti-Communist crusade, we can see that the controversy over comic books served as a (microcosm) case study for much larger issues regarding the nations’s search for identity in one of the darkest periods in its history—the McCarthy era. During this dark period, innocent lives were destroyed as a result of rampant fear, paranoia, and hysterical overreaction to unjustified accusation and suspicion. When viewed in this light, we see that the horror comic books were just another casualty of the McCarthy era, and that both the anti-comics crusade and the anti-Communist crusade were manifestations of deep societal
concerns that had more to do with America’s search for identity than with any real physical threat.

Of course, the anti-comic book campaign was most closely linked to the unsupported fear that the United States was producing a generation of juvenile delinquents—blamed on the disruption of the family during World War II and on portrayal of violent images in the mass media, especially the comics (Lent, 1999). As of this date, there is an enormous amount of research suggesting that the reading of comic books does not cause juvenile delinquency in children, but in the early 1950’s, comic books were a relatively new medium and little actual research had been done on them, so the threat that they might have an adverse effect on children was a very real concern. Another very important factor to consider in evaluating the campaign against comic books in the 1950’s, is that, in pre-television America, the medium of comic books was much more widespread than in the technologically-advanced modern age that we live in today. In the early 1950's, television was in it’s infancy and there were no video games. The concerns about the influence of comic books were further magnified by the fact that almost every child in the U.S. read comic books in the early 1950’s.
Author Roger Hill has chronicled the development of the first Comics code. Hill (1969) states:

The first investigations to be held on the comics industry was by the General Federation of Women’s clubs in 1946. This pressure forced the formulation of a code which was headed by the comic book publishers themselves (Association of Comic Magazine Publishers or ACMP). This first code was considered to be too poorly enforced to stem the tide of bad pictorial fiction (p. 69). Although the intent was to have publishers submit comics for pre-publication review by a staff supervised by the association’s director, Henry Shultz, only about a third of the publishers actually joined the organization (Nyberg, 1999). The 1948 code had little impact beyond some short-lived favorable publicity for the comic book industry.

Political pressure and economical pressure gave the crusade against comics its leverage and effectiveness as a public reform movement. Nyberg (1999) states:

Publishers were not the only ones to respond to the outcry over comics. In a number of American cities, decency crusades were organized by
religious and civic groups Using the tactics perfected by the Catholic Church's National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL), groups armed with lists provided by NODL or its counterpart, the Cincinnati Committee for the Evaluation of Comics, formed in June 1948 (whose lists were published by Parent's Magazine), visited retailers and asked them to remove objectionable comic books from their shelves (p. 67).

Unlike the publishers, the retailers were vulnerable to economic pressure and the threat of boycotts and usually complied. The National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT) drafted a plan of action against unwholesome comics, films, and radio programs, urging members to press for improvement and enforcement of laws against objectionable literature (p. 47).

The national magazine of the NCPT carried an article by Dr. Fredric Wertham that featured a "Study Course Outline" that included discussion questions, one of which asked "What is your PTA doing to carry out the recommendations of the special action committee of the National Congress to outlaw objectionable comics?"
Continued public pressure, stimulated by the Womens Clubs, caused many state governments to assign joint legislative committees to look into the comic book situation (Hill, 1969). One of these was the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics.

Report by The New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comic Books

The report by the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comic Books was submitted on March 15, 1951. The findings of the report are reproduced below:

From its studies from the testimony of experts and from its painstaking examination of all the factors involved, the Committee finds:

1. A substantial majority of the publishers of so-called comics are responsible, intelligent, and right-thinking citizens with a will to improve the industry.

2. A small, stubborn, willful, irresponsible, minority of publishers of so-called "comics" whose brazen disregard for anything but their profit, who recognize no duty to anyone and whose sole objective is financial gain
without thought of the consequences of their depredations, are responsible for the bad reputation of the publishers of all comics.

3. The entire industry is remiss in it’s failure to institute effective measures to police and restrain the undesirable minority.

4. So-called “comics” are a most effective medium for the dissemination of ideas and when such a medium is used to disseminate bad ideas which may leave deep impressions on the keen, absorptive minds of children, the unrestricted publication and distribution of “comics” becomes a matter of grave public concern.

5. “Comics” which depict crime, brutality, horror, and which produce race hatred, impair the ethical development of children, describe how to make weapons and how to inflict injuries with these weapons, and how to commit crimes, have a wide circulation among children.

6. The reading of crime “comics” stimulate sadistic and masochistic attitudes and interfere with the normal development of sexual habits of children and produce abnormal sexual tendencies in adolescents.

7. Crime “comics” are a contributing factor leading to juvenile delinquency.
8. Instead of reforming their bad practices, the publishers of bad crime comics have banded together, employed resourceful legal and public relations counsel, so-called "educators" and experts in a deliberate effort to continue such harmful practices and to fight any and every effort to arrest and control such practices.

9. The evidence adduced makes some action by the state imperative to protect its children (p. 71).

The committee recommended that a reasonable time be given to the publishers of comic books to clean house. If, in that time, efforts to rectify the situation failed to be sufficient, the Committee was prepared to recommend regulatory measures (Hill, 1969).

In 1951, the New York Legislative Committee met several times to review the progress of the comic book industry toward self-regulation (Nyberg, 1999). These proceedings established that the publisher's attempts at self-regulation had proven to be insufficient, and so the Committee recommended six laws targeting the comic book industry. Two bills related to regulation of comic books were introduced but were defeated on constitutional grounds.
The failure of state and federal lawmakers to act after all the press attention to comic books in the late 1940's killed the momentum of the first anti-comic book crusade, and the issue dropped from the national agenda (Nyberg, 1999). Despite all of the controversy and public outcry, it appeared that no concrete regulatory measures would be enacted. This reflected both the lack of consensus about how the "problem" of comic books should be handled and the related difficulties in drafting legislation that would withstand constitutional challenge (Nyberg, 1999).

The comic book controversy was reborn in late 1953, due in large part to the considerable efforts of a single individual—Dr. Fredric J. Wertham. Discouraged by the progress of the anti-comic book campaign, Wertham once again took his case against comics to the public, this time with the publication of his book, Seduction of the Innocent (Nyberg, 1999). This time he was successful. Excerpts of the book in magazine articles, television appearances to promote the book, and wide circulation of the book itself stimulated a enormous amount of public awareness, public condemnation, and public outcry. In the dark shadow of McCarthy-induced fear and suspicion, a wave of anti-comic...
book sentiment spread across the land. There was
tremendous public pressure on vendors and on officials to
take some sort of action against "dirty" comic books. Such
interest prompted the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate
Juvenile Delinquency, formed in April 1953, to announce an
investigation into the relationship between the mass media
and juvenile delinquency, beginning with the comic book
industry.

The Senate Subcommittee to
Investigate Juvenile
Delinquency
Hearings

It is not surprising that Wertham was one of the
witnesses to testify when the Senate Subcommittee
investigating juvenile delinquency opened its hearings in
April 1954 (Nyberg, 1999). The hearings were held in the
United States Court House in New York City (home to the
entire horror comic book publishing industry) and were
chaired by Senator Estes Kefauver. The groundwork for the
hearings was done by Richard Clendenen, executive director
of the subcommittee. Clendenen began his presentation by
showing examples of the horror and crime comic books under
investigation, many of which had been singled out as
flagrant violators of decency and good taste by Dr. Wertham himself and others like him. Nyberg (1999) states:

In an appearance of fairness, the committee called two experts to speak against comic books, Wertham and Dr. Harris Peck, director of the Bureau of Mental Health Services of the Children’s Court in New York City, and two who spoke in defense of comics, Dr. Lauretta Bender, a senior psychiatrist at Bellvue Hospital in New York, and Gunnar Dybwad, executive director of the Child Study Association of America. But committee chairman Senator Estes Kefauver discredited both “pro comics” witnesses by pointing out that the comic book studies for the Child Study Association were done by Josette Frank, who was also employed as a consultant by a comic book publisher and that Bender worked for the same publisher (p. 52).

This was a very serious setback to any slight chance that the comic book publishers might prevail at the extremely conservative Senate Subcommittee hearings. The New York Times headlines the following day trumpeted: “Senator
Charges ‘Deceit’ on Comics” and “Kefauver says Child Study Group’s Experts Were in Pay of Publishers” (Nyberg, 1999).

The other major blow to the comic book industry during the hearings came from the publisher of E.C. Comics, William M. Gaines. His testimony was given wide play in the media, including front page coverage in the New York Times (Nyberg, 1999). Gaines had originally been scheduled to testify early in the hearings, but other witnesses, including Dr. Wertham, took longer than expected, so Gaines testimony was rescheduled for much later in the day. Gaines had been taking amphetamine diet pills, and by the time he was called to testify, they were wearing off, leaving him tired and weak. Gaines later explained his predicament in interviews with his biographer and various fan journals. In an interview given in 1983, Gaines recalled: “I felt that I was really going to fix those bastards, but as time went on I could feel myself fading away, I was like a punch-drunk fighter. They were pelting me with questions and I couldn’t locate the answers” (Jacobs, 1972, p. 107).

An excerpt of William M. Gaine’s testimony during the Senate Subcommittee hearings is given below:
I am proud of the comics I publish. Some may not like them. That’s a matter of taste. My only limits are the bounds of good taste . . . (Hill, 1969, p. 72).

At that, Senator Estes Kefauver held aloft an Entertaining Comic Magazine (Crime SuspenStories #22) showing on its cover a man holding a bloody hatchet in one hand and the severed head of a woman in the other. "Is this in good taste?" asked the Senator. Gaines replied:

Yes, for the cover of a horror comic. I think it would be in bad taste if the head were held a little higher so the neck would show with the blood dripping from it (Hill, 1969, p. 72).

This just about finished any chance that the comic book publisher’s testimony be given the weight of any real credibility.

In the opposite corner from William M. Gaines sat Dr. Fredric J. Wertham, New York psychiatrist, and for twenty years senior psychiatrist of the Department of Hospitals for New York City (Hill, 1969). Dr. Wertham offered to the Senate Subcommittee, case after case to refute the claim that children do not imitate what they see in comic books.
During the hearings, the investigations were played up big by the majority of the magazines and newspapers, and most of them supported banning the "dirty" or "juicy" comic books (Hill, 1969). A Newsweek magazine, dated May 3, 1954, stated that within the first week of hearings, the Senate Subcommittee had collected some pretty frightening comic book literature . . . much of it having a heavy emphasis on sex and murder (Hill, 1969). The Newsweek article also reported that some of the Senate Subcommittee's most hardened investigators were revolted at what they had found in children's comic books.

The 1954 Comics Code

As a direct result of the Kefauver Senate Subcommittee hearings, the comic book publishers were forced to set up a "self-regulating" comic code that expressly forbid all of the necessary ingredients of crime and horror comics. The 1954 comics code went far beyond addressing concerns of crime and violence in the comics to imposing standards designed to ensure that the content of comic books would reflect only mainstream American values (Nyberg, 1999). This would not only censor comic books, it would destroy
the horror comic books completely. It would also destroy creativity in comic books completely. Nyberg (1999) states:

Although there was a detailed section on how crime comics were to be handled, the publishers agreed that horror comics would have to be sacrificed in order to demonstrate that the industry was serious about its pledge to clean up comics. The words horror and terror were banned from comic book titles, and scenes dealing with the walking dead, vampires, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolves were prohibited (p. 55).

The code was presented at the organizational meeting of the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA), held August 17, 1954, in New York (Nyberg, 1999). John Goldwater was made president of the group. Henry Shultz would serve as attorney for the group. Dr. Fredric Wertham was offered the position as "czar" of the new comics code, but turned it down, so the publishers appointed Judge Charles F. Murphy as the administrator of the code. The group's statement of purpose reflected its determination to be the policeman of the industry, as well as its desire to function more broadly as a trade association:
To improve and raise the educational and literary standards of the contents of comic magazines; to foster and protect trade in the field of comic magazine publication; to avoid threatened abuses and to reform present abuses in the industry; to procure and diffuse accurate information with respect to all phases of comic magazine Publication and sale; to permit a more large and friendly intercourse among participants of the industry (Nyberg, 1999, p. 55).

The new comic code expressly forbid scenes of excessive gunplay, physical agony, gory or gruesome crimes, seduction, rape, or perversion (Hill, 1969). With the strict regulation of the new comic code, the horror comics were effectively destroyed and nearly all of the horror comic book publishers were put out of business in less than a year.

Suddenly, comics were strictly for kids again. The Comics Code Authority insisted that the nine-year-old mentality was the only one that comic books should satisfy, and they insisted that the values of uptight adults should dictate what they read (Hill, 1969). Fifteen years would
pass before college undergraduates would find comic books intellectually stimulating again (Stark, 1971).

Soon after the 1954 Kefauver Senate hearings, newspaper headlines trumpeted the progress of reforms in the comic book industry with staunch approval. Typical headlines in early 1955 read: "Cleaning Up the Comic Books;" "New Czar Elected To Clean Up the Comics;" "New Code Passed to Clean Up the Dirty Books;" "Will the Comics Code Work"; and an article in Readers Digest reported "Progress In Cleaning Up the Comics."

The comic book publishers had been forced to act, not so much by governmental intervention, nor even by public scrutiny, but by public pressure on retailers who faced tremendous economic pressure to no longer carry the "juicy" or "dirty" comic. The comic book publishers had been forced to take explicit action (self-censorship) or face legislative regulation. It was not much of a choice.

The Death of the Horror Comic Books of the 1950's

Almost all of the horror comic book titles ceased publication with the institution of the comic code at the beginning of 1955. Several leading horror titles were discontinued at the time of the Kefauver Senate hearings in
1954, and any titles that remained after the code was implemented were so watered-down that they were no longer horror comics at all.

The 1955 comic code not only killed the horror comics, it was also a deathblow to many of the publishers that their sales had sustained. Many publishers had been forced out of business late in 1954 due to public and economic pressure, and with the enforcement of the comic code in 1955, the few that remained were soon to capitulate. It was the end of the horror comics of the 1950’s. They were gone forever. It was the end of an era in comic books. The comic book industry would never be the same again.

It was a profound time of change in the United States, both in terms of the development of American popular culture and in the nation’s search for identity. In retrospect, it becomes clear that the Wertham anti-comic book campaign and the McCarthy anti-Communist campaign had very much in common. When the smoke cleared and the paranoia died down, the horror comics were destroyed with one campaign, and several American lives were destroyed with the other. Perhaps something more was also lost— that golden sense of promise and innocence that defined the early 1950’s of postwar America seemed to have vanished as
well. It seemed to have been inadvertently lost amid the hysteria of suspicion and the glare of congressional investigation that characterized both of these hatred-based political campaigns.

The Death of E.C. Comics

The comic code was directed more at E.C. Comics than any one single publisher. E.C. Comics had given birth to the horror comic book craze and would now be put to death along with them. The code expressly forbid key words found in the titles of the E.C. comic books, as well as all of the necessary ingredients that formed and defined them exclusively.

It has since been intimated that the comic book publishers who instituted and administered the comic code in early 1955, deliberately structured it in such a way as to put E.C. Comics out of business in particular. There was a feeling among publishers that E.C. Comics had initiated the trend that had ended up subjecting the entire industry to intense public scrutiny, and that it would have to be sacrificed in order to soothe public tension and avoid more serious government intervention. Another factor to be considered, is that E.C. Comics dominated much of the
market sales in horror and crime comics in 1954, and this also may have motivated the other publishers to effectively knife E.C. in the back. What is not in dispute, is the fact that the other publishers banded together to save themselves and that E.C. Comics was excluded from the group, and the "self-regulating" comic code that they put into place was designed to positively discontinue the E.C. Comics line of "new trend" titles.

Late in 1954, E.C. Comics published an anti-censorship editorial in the three horror titles, Tales From the Crypt, Vault of Horror, and Haunt of Fear. Shortly afterward, a second anti-censorship/anti-comic book cartoon was published that announced "the group most anxious to destroy comic books is the communists!" In the last issue of the Haunt of Fear, #28 December 1954, E.C. published its obituary notice announcing the death of its entire line of horror and crime comics, and introducing a new line of titles. The new titles would all fail soon afterward; the comic code rejecting many of the most innocent stories in them. William M. Gaines would become enraged with the comic code restrictions and frequent rejections of his stories, and in 1955, he folded the entire E.C. Comics line
of titles and focused all of his energies on his new creation, Mad magazine.

Dr. Fredric J. Wertham and Critical Analysis of “The Prude”

In the final issue of the Haunt of Fear, that carried the E.C. death notice, “ghastly” Graham Ingels drew one last sad visage of his classic caricature, the Old Witch, giving the tearful comments of a final “farewell” to readers along with biting sarcasm toward Wertham and a story of necrophilia directed straight at him, titled “The Prude.” In the original opening patter, changed before being published, the Old Witch refers to the readers as “wicked tots,” and to the main character as a blue nose reformer, a headline hunter, a liar, a bigot, a hypocrite, full of deceit, who is “Wertham” his weight in mold”.

Though these original opening remarks were not published, the character in the main story, “The Prude” (originally titled “Blue Nose”) was easily determined to be a thinly-veiled parody of Dr. Fredric Wertham.

In the censorship classic, “The Prude,” (illustrated by Graham Ingels, an uptight, old-fashioned, rigid reformer, Mr. Forbisher, a staunch church fundamentalist,
from the most conservative old school of thought, pushes hard for town legislation that forbids hand-holding in public. Next, he pushes hard for an ordinance that forbids kissing in public. Finally, consumed with self-righteousness, he demands that all females be removed from the town cemetery in order to stop any fornication or adultery that may be going on in the afterlife. The town council realizes that he has gone too far, but no one will oppose him for fear that the glare of his "inquisition" may be turned on them. Forbisher holds considerable power, in that whoever he accuses falls under intense scrutiny as a "purveyor of indecency."

When the males and females are buried in separate graveyards, the corpses rise to be reunited where they were buried before. This infuriates Forbisher who demands that they be dug up again and re-buried decently in accordance with the new ordinance. During this highly introspective story, it is revealed that, long ago Forbisher had an extramarital affair, and when his mistress became pregnant, he refused to divorce his wife and marry her, so she committed suicide. After this tragedy, Forbisher, consumed with guilt, becomes an ultra-strict "prude", denying himself any pleasure in life, refusing to even have
intercourse with his own wife as a way of punishing himself for his sin. But this is not enough for the guilt-ridden, tortured Forbisher— not only must he deny himself pleasure, he must also impose his strict regiment of decency and abstinence on others as a way of punishing and purging them.

As the story unfolds, we see that, in reality, Forbisher is punishing himself and everyone else as a result of his own self-guilt. In the shocking conclusion of the story, the dead corpse of his mistress comes for him and pulls him down into her cold grave. The following morning, the cemetery groundskeeper sees the dead Forbisher entwined with the rotted corpse of his mistress in the grave, and, with an obvious implication of necrophelia, he admonishes, "Mr. Forbisher, shame on you! Don’t you know there are laws against that sort of thing!" It is quite apparent that, in this final E.C. horror story, E.C. made a powerful statement on the ridiculousness of the entire anti-comic crusade and the uptight conservative reformers behind it. This statement also serves as a metaphor for the entire McCarthy era in which the anti-comic book sentiment was born and festered. The main character, Mr. Forbisher, is quite obviously a pointed parody of their
detractor and accuser, Dr. Fredric Wertham. This character also serves as a metaphor for the grand inquisitor of the anti-Communist hate-campaign, Senator Joseph McCarthy. Some of the deep answers to the dark mystery of one of America’s most shameful periods of fear and hypocrisy are revealed in this story also, as the source of persecution comes not from outward uncleanness, but from inward uncleanness.

In "The Prude," the town is turned upside down following a misguided reformer, tortured by his own self-guilt and self-doubt. In the early 1950’s, America was turned upside down by following a deceitful accuser, motivated by his own unscrupulous ambition. In a much larger context, during the disgrace of the McCarthy inquisition, it was America’s self-guilt and self-doubt that turned a country against its own citizens in a crisis of national identity.

In Memoriam

With this final issue of the Haunt of Fear, the E.C. horror comic books of the 1950’s died an untimely and undeserved death. For five years they dominated the American comic book market. They initiated an innovative
new trend that changed the history of comic book publishing. The E.C. comics caused such a controversy that they changed the history of America by way of public outrage, congressional investigation, and forced comic book censorship in a land founded on and committed to liberty and freedom, including freedom of the press. No one can dispute the social importance that these comic books hold in American history or the impact that they made in the development of American popular culture.
CHAPTER SIX

THE AFTERMATH

The horror comic books of the early 1950's were important to both American history and to the development of American popular culture for several reasons. First, they raised the standard of quality in American comic books to a level that had never been reached previously and is seldom matched even today. Initiated by E.C. Comics, the horror comic books produced some of the very best artwork to ever grace the pages of comic books, and some of the most superbly written horror stories ever published—many of them easily on a par with the best pulp fiction in the U.S. E.C. Comics initiated the horror comics craze with its innovative line of "new trend" comic titles that swept postwar America like a new medium and dominated the comic book market for the next five years. No other trend in the history of comic book publishing has ever made such a significant impact on either the audience of readers or the comic book industry. All of the above considerations demonstrate the importance of the horror comic books to American history and American popular culture.
The horror comic books reflected the spirit and optimism of the time that they were popular, a sense of wonder and innocence that characterized postwar America in the early 1950’s. In just the same way that the golden age super-heroes, fighting the evil axis powers during World War II, defined American popular culture during the 1940’s, so did the more simple stories of the walking dead and gruesome shock endings of the horror comics define American popular culture in the early 1950’s. They were simple and scary. They were fun to read. They were shocking and appalling. They were gory and violent. But there is something to remember here-- the gore and violence in the horror comics of the 1950’s was only delicious fantasy and thrilling imagination. This is in sharp contrast to the golden age super-heroes of the 1940’s, who fought more serious battles while a very real war raged across the globe, a war in which millions died in battle, and in which millions were put to death in concentration camps.

Compared to the reality of the second world war that was so much a part of the golden age of comics in the 1940’s, the frightening realism in the pages of the horror comics of the 1950’s seems childish and harmless. Yet, these horror comics of the 1950’s were so alarming and appalling to
mainstream American values that they provoked widespread public outrage, governmental intervention, and coercive regulation in America, the land of liberty and freedom. This fact alone is of enormous cultural and social significance.

Something also has to be said for aesthetics. The styles and themes found in the yellowing pages of these old horror comic books also have merit and value to American popular culture. They were truly beautiful. The wondrous four color panels filled with rich, gorgeous detail were like looking into a window of another world. Beauty does have value in our society. This is something more than just simple nostalgia and remembrance. These old horror comics once sold for a dime at the corner drugstore, now they are sought after by collectors and auctioned for thousands of dollars, even in their tattered and faded condition. Despite the fact that they were printed on cheap paper as a throwaway product, their timeless value has finally come to be fully realized and appreciated at this late date. The fact that these comic books are collected, treasured, and cherished by so many, after so long, is testament to their worth as artifacts of American popular culture.
The importance of these comic books to American popular culture can also be assessed in terms of the subculture that has grown up around them. The seeds of fandom were sown in the early fan groups that sprang up around E.C. Comics, a phenomenon that was created and encouraged by interaction with its audience. This interactive aspect of comic book fandom has come to define comic book culture, in that the fans are active participants in creating their own culture. The way that comic book enthusiasts create their own comic book culture is special and unique. This active subculture is supported by its own network of fans, fanzines, fan-groups, comic book specialty shops, and comic conventions. Comic book culture has its own language and style, easily understood by participants, but impenetrable from outside inspection. The fact that comic books have given birth to the distinctive, intricate, and complex subculture that surrounds it, as demonstrated by the considerable phenomenon of comic book fandom, is further evidence of its social significance within American culture.

Some parts of American popular culture have their origins in European, Oriental, or African ancestry. These "imported" materials and qualities have been borrowed and
learned by us, and have evolved to the point where they have been assimilated into modern American culture. They are icons and imports that have become "Americanized". They have become part of our culture. They have become a part of us. But I would argue that the comic book has value far beyond these learned traits and acquired customs of other cultural origins. I say this because the comic book is truly an original American art form. The comic book was conceived, created, and developed entirely in the United States. It is one of the most defining and enduring forms of American popular culture to have emerged from the postmodern age. The comic book has helped to form, shape, and sustain American culture in the evolution of modern mass media. This fact is evidenced in that it has survived forms of high culture such as printed texts, and newer, more technologically-advanced forms of mass media (popular to children), such as television, video games, and the internet. For all of the above reasons, the comic book, a truly original American art form, has come to be recognized as an integral part of American popular culture, a stylized form of mass media that has endured for seventy-five years, despite the criticism and condemnation of educators and elites.
If the American comic book is of aesthetic value and has cultural and social importance, why then, has it been so widely condemned by educators and conservative institutions here in the United States? In the answer to this question, is the foundation of my thesis and the key to understanding what really happened to the horror comics of the 1950's. The answer to this question involves elitist suppression of popular culture and its roots run deep into the very structure of American society.

The scholarly literature documents that the suppression of popular culture can be traced historically from the Industrial Revolution, and that, from that time, elites have been quick to suppress new forms of popular culture (Cullen, 1996). The argument is made that popular culture expresses the brazen excesses of urban life, seduces and corrupts young people who need to be protected from it, and denies them the benefit of more serious forms of high culture. Elites shun, 'frown upon, and discourage any products or practices that do not adhere to, or reinforce, their dictates of "good taste". Educators, librarians, and conservative institutions have continuously attacked and condemned comic books throughout their seventy-five year history for being morally reprehensible,
socially unacceptable, a threat to literacy, and for promoting juvenile delinquency—even though there is no evidence to support any of these assertions. The attacks and condemnation of comic books in the United States have not been based on rational thought and logical argument, but rather have been made on irrational, self-serving assumptions, that have their roots in our elitist power structure that is based upon ideology, socialization and Western dominance.

High culture seeks to assert dominance, superiority, and authority over what they consider to be the lower masses (Brown, 1997). The “greater” society discourages and often condemns popular mediums because the aesthetic preferences of the masses are perceived as a disruption of, and threat to, dominant social hierarchies. As Barker has noted, materials viewed as undesirable are often accused of harmful social effects or negative influences upon their consumers. Much of what I am asserting here originates in the writings of Bourdieu, but is still quite relevant today. The “greater” society often adopts an authoritative, paternalistic attitude of wanting to save the masses from the harmful effects of popular media (Berger, 1973). Undesirable media are effectively
suppressed through public pressure, legislation, and institutionalized regulation, all under the guise of "protecting children from the corrupting influence of undesired cultural materials" (Barker, 1989). This is exactly what happened with the pre-code horror comic books of the 1950's.

As I stated at the very beginning of this undertaking, I believe that Western ideology, socialization, and conformity to puritan values within our capitalist economic system, are the basis for the suppression of popular culture in the twentieth century, and were at the very heart of the political reform crusade that killed the horror comics of the 1950's. My excursion into the literature and extensive exploration of this subject, has served to reinforce my strong suspicion that the anti-comic book crusade of 1954, that resulted in the comic code that killed the horror comics, was a further suppression of popular culture in the twentieth century, and that this movement had its roots deep in the cultural, ideological, and political structure of America.

The anti-comic book crusade of 1954 was an extension of elitist dominance and Western thought that are unavoidable consequences of the American power structure.
The sad fact is that the horror comic books of the 1950's were killed as an inevitable outcome of American society—a society founded on the idealistic principles of democracy and capitalism—but a society that continuously reproduces and must confront the faulted byproducts and ugly consequences of its own cultural and political ideology. These ugly truths that emerge as a natural consequence of our political and economic system (democracy governed by the economic inequality of capitalism) are the dark qualities of elitist socialization and Western dominance. These dark qualities of socialization and Western dominance produce the kind of arrogance and contempt that characterize elitist suppression of popular culture, and are inextricably woven into the structure of American society. When the popular texts or materials of the masses are deemed to be without value or "undesirable" by the social and political hierarchies of the dominant power structure, they are denounced, condemned and suppressed by way of public pressure and legislation (Berger, 1973, Barker, 1989, Cullen, 1996, Brown, 1997,). The ruling class dictates what is socially acceptable or desirable in any society, and those dictates are reinforced by suppressive measures such as public or economic pressure
and institutional regulation. These exercises in power, order, and dominance by the ruling class are justified by moral concern and administered under the guise of public interest. By deeming the horror comics to have been harmful and undesirable (in reality, subversive), conservative forces were able to effectively regulate them out of business by way of public and economic pressure. The horror comics were doomed as far back as 1950, when the conservative institutions and educators of this country first began to notice them and to make a prudent judgment of their desirability or undesirability.

Throughout this thesis, I have adopted a critical perspective of power, ideology, and influence as a methodology of analysis of the horror comics and the anti-comic book crusade that killed them. My examination and analysis of the horror comics has revealed that they were like twentieth century gruesome fairy tales. I have also observed that Americans have cleaned up and sanitized the fairy tales (originally from old Europe) because they were actually quite gruesome to begin with. This tells us a lot about Americans and how we perceive and treat our children. Americans have always felt a need to shelter and protect children from the harsh realities and violence of life. As
Americans, we have always been very cautious and apprehensive about the material we approve for our children to read. This has a lot to do with what we deem desirable or undesirable for our children to read. This fact is the key to understanding what happened to the horror comics in America in the early 1950’s. For the same reasons that America watered-down and sanitized the gruesome European fairy tales, America overreacted with panic and alarm when the strong content of its children’s reading material was brought to public attention. In this light, we can understand the strong objection and moral outrage that characterized the anti-comic book crusade, and resulted in Senate hearings and coercive self-censorship. The elitist power structure (in this case educators, conservative groups, and legislators) deemed the reading material to be inappropriate and undesirable, made the decision to suppress the popular medium, then asserted its authority by forcing censorship upon the comic book industry under the guise of protecting its children. This may sound harsh and inflammatory, but the truth needs to be told and the above assessment is accurate.

A more liberal perspective may question how this could possibly happen in modern America, a country founded upon
the principles of liberty, equality, and freedom. Some might be quick to argue that our constitutional freedoms protect us from such governmental abuses as censorship. But, in this case, comic books were generally considered to be the primarily reading matter for children, and governmental intervention and regulation were deemed necessary to protect children from the evil influence of comic books. Despite the fact that there was no evidence to substantiate the claim that comic books were a significant factor in the rising rate of juvenile delinquency, they were examined, determined to be undesirable, then forced out of business by coordinated public and economic pressure. The furor over comic books in the early 1950's had more to do with the "limits of good taste" and "not being suitable reading material for children," than it did with measurable harmful effects.

For one to understand how censorship could and did occur in modern postwar America, one must examine the political climate in which the anti-comic book crusade was born and flourished. This hysterical and destructive anti-comic book crusade could not have been successful without the fear and suspicion that was fostered by the anti-Communist political campaign of Senator Joseph McCarthy.
The fear and paranoia of the McCarthy era, and the relentless glare of congressional investigation that followed, set the tone and mood under which the anti-comics crusade was born and thrived in the early 1950's. This was the pre-existing condition in the country that facilitated and allowed comic book censorship to prevail in 1954.

As I have stated previously, I believe that the campaign that killed the horror comics was as important as the comics themselves to the development of popular culture in the United States. The horror comics and the campaign that killed them were an important part of American history as well. In this respect, the controversy over the comic books is as much a part of American culture as the comic books themselves. I have stated that I believe the anti-comic book crusade, in the shadow of the anti-Communist campaign, to be one of the defining moments in American history, in terms of the nation’s search for identity and the death of innocence. The whole sad affair provides our Nation a unique opportunity for self-examination and self-reflection. In this respect, it may serve as a beneficial learning experience-- if we place it in proper perspective.
In retrospect, we can see that both the anti-comics and anti-Communist campaigns were over-hyped, over-blown, sensationalized, media-driven, and fear-inspired political movements that were unhealthy and counterproductive to the United States. Both of these destructive crusades were politically motivated and carefully orchestrated by an alarmist spokesperson, the misguided Dr. Wertham in one case and the deceitful Senator McCarthy in the other. The tactics for both of these campaigns were remarkably similar in that they both featured elements of accusation, exposure and alarm sounding, ridicule, public scrutiny, calls for reform, and purging. Both of these campaigns were supported and driven by public discourse, public concern, manipulation of the media, irrational thinking, and a political-lynch-mob mentality. But it should be understood that both the McCarthy anti-Communist campaign and the Wertham anti-comics campaign were both only parts of a much larger, more encompassing crusade against domestic subversion that was, in itself, a crisis of identity in postwar America.

To place both of the anti-comics and anti-Communist campaigns in the proper context, one must examine and evaluate America’s national search for identity after the
second world war. These two destructive political campaigns are clearly evocative of this search for identity in postwar America. They both reflected the nation’s concern with internal corruption, a continuing fear of ourselves, and an ominous sense of dread that internal moral weakening would someday result in collapse. This type of mentality in our nation’s leaders led America straight into the cold war.

In conclusion with all of the above in mind, this is the real lesson in all that has been written about both the anti-comics campaign and the anti-Communist campaign: the dread of moral weakening, concern with moral corruption, and a continuing fear of ourselves is unhealthy, unwholesome, and counterproductive. This is the moral of the story. Hysteria, panic, fear, suspicion, contempt, arrogance, and tactics of political suppression are not in any way productive or beneficial. As a nation, we must learn to recognize this and not be led astray by misguided or ambition-motivated spokespersons with a loud political voice. We must learn to think for ourselves as individuals, not as a collective group with a political lynch mob mentality, eager to blindly follow the next crusader with a loud voice, an accusatory stance, and new
ideas for reform. If this maturity is not successfully achieved, then America will suffer more and greater losses in the future. The costs of McCarthyism and Werthamism were high. Many innocent American lives were destroyed and some of the best comics ever published were discontinued for no good reason. What a shame it was for America. Horror comic books did not cause juvenile delinquency and there was no communist insurgency threat inside of America's borders. These threats were imagined, concocted, and, in reality, did not even exist. Our fears were not justified. There was no external threat to be afraid of. The hysteria and political persecutions of the two crusades had more to do with internal societal concerns (fear of moral weakening, fear of internal corruption, and a continuing fear of ourselves) than with any external threat. The death of the horror comics was a direct casualty of this type of irrational and unhealthy thinking that breeds such counterproductive political campaigns. Let us learn from these mistakes and ensure that this does not happen again.
APPENDIX A:

THE HORROR COMICS OF

THE 1950'S
THE HORROR COMICS OF THE 1950'S

1. The Crypt of Terror
2. Tales From the Crypt
3. Vault of Horror
4. Haunt of Fear
5. Weird Science
6. Weird Fantasy
7. Crime SuspenStories
8. Shock SuspenStories
9. Tales of Terror Annual
10. Weird Science-Fantasy Annual
11. 3-D E.C. Classics
12. 3-D Tales From the Crypt of Terror
13. Amazing Mysteries
14. Marvel Tales
15. (Captain America’s) Weird Tales
16. Suspense
17. Venus
18. Journey Into Unknown Worlds
19. Adventures Into Terror
20. Mystic
21. Astonishing
22. Strange Tales
23. Space Worlds
24. Adventures Into Weird Worlds
25. Amazing Detective Comics
26. Spellbound
27. Mystery Tales
28. Uncanny Tales
29. Journey Into Mystery
30. Menace
31. Eerie
32. Strange Worlds
33. Witchcraft
34. City of the Living Dead
35. The Dead Who Walk
36. Diary of Horror
37. Phantom Witch Doctor
38. Night of Mystery
39. Secret Diary of Eerie Adventures
40. Adventures Into the Unknown
41. Forbidden Worlds
42. Skeleton Hand
43. The Clutching Hand
44. House of Mystery
45. Sensation Comics
46. Sensation Mystery

E.C. Comics
E.C. Comics
E.C. Comics
E.C. Comics
E.C. Comics
E.C. Comics
E.C. Comics
E.C. Comics
E.C. Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Atlas Comics
Avon Periodicals
Avon Periodicals
Avon Periodicals
Avon Periodicals
Avon Periodicals
Avon Periodicals
Avon Periodicals
Avon Periodicals
Avon Periodicals
American Comics
American Comics
American Comics
D.C. Comics
D.C. Comics
D.C. Comics

195
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Amazing Adventures</td>
<td>Ziff-Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Weird Adventures</td>
<td>Ziff-Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Weird Thrillers</td>
<td>Ziff-Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>Eerie Adventures</td>
<td>Ziff-Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>Nightmare</td>
<td>Ziff-Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.</td>
<td>Strange Terrors</td>
<td>St. John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>Weird Horrors</td>
<td>St. John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>Nightmare</td>
<td>St. John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.</td>
<td>Amazing Ghost Stories</td>
<td>St. John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.</td>
<td>All-Picture Adventure Magazine</td>
<td>St. John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.</td>
<td>3-D House of Terror</td>
<td>Fox Features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.</td>
<td>A Star Presentation</td>
<td>Fiction House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.</td>
<td>Ghost Comics</td>
<td>Fiction House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.</td>
<td>Monster</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.</td>
<td>Blue Bolt Weird Tales</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62.</td>
<td>Ghostly Weird Stories</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.</td>
<td>Startling Terror Tales</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.</td>
<td>Thrilling Crime Cases</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.</td>
<td>Shocking Mystery Cases</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.</td>
<td>Shock Detective Cases</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67.</td>
<td>Spook Detective Cases</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68.</td>
<td>Terrifying Tales</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69.</td>
<td>Terrors of the Jungle</td>
<td>Star Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.</td>
<td>Challenge of the Unknown</td>
<td>Ace Periodicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>The Beyond</td>
<td>Ace Periodicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>Web of Mystery</td>
<td>Ace Periodicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.</td>
<td>Hand of Fate</td>
<td>Ace Periodicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74.</td>
<td>Baffling Mysteries</td>
<td>Ace Periodicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Frankenstein Comics</td>
<td>Prize Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.</td>
<td>Black Magic</td>
<td>Prize Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.</td>
<td>Witches Tales</td>
<td>Harvey Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.</td>
<td>Chamber of Chills</td>
<td>Harvey Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Black Cat Mystery</td>
<td>Harvey Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.</td>
<td>Tomb of Terror</td>
<td>Harvey Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.</td>
<td>Thrills of Tomorrow</td>
<td>Harvey Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82.</td>
<td>Captain Science</td>
<td>Youthful Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.</td>
<td>Fantastic</td>
<td>Youthful Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84.</td>
<td>Beware</td>
<td>Youthful Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85.</td>
<td>Chilling Tales</td>
<td>Youthful Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86.</td>
<td>Beware</td>
<td>Trojan Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87.</td>
<td>Crime Mysteries</td>
<td>Trojan Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88.</td>
<td>Secret Mysteries</td>
<td>Trojan Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89.</td>
<td>Mysterious Adventures</td>
<td>Story Comics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.</td>
<td>Fight Against Crime</td>
<td>Story Comics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91.</td>
<td>Dark Mysteries</td>
<td>Master Comics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92.</td>
<td>Journey Into Fear</td>
<td>Superior Publishers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93.</td>
<td>Strange Mysteries</td>
<td>Superior Publishers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94.</td>
<td>Mysteries Weird and Strange</td>
<td>Superior Publishers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
95. Weird Adventures
96. Voodoo
97. Haunted Thrills
98. Strange Fantasy
99. Fantastic Fears
100. Fantastic Comics
101. Mister Mystery
102. Weird Tales of the Future
103. Weird Mysteries
104. Weird Chills
105. This Magazine is Haunted
106. Worlds Beyond
107. Worlds of Fear
108. Beware Terror Tales
109. Strange Suspense Stories
110. Unknown World
111. Strange Stories of Another World
112. The Thing
113. Lawbreakers
114. Lawbreakers Suspense Stories
115. Strange Suspense Stories
116. This is Suspense
117. This Magazine is Haunted
118. Tales of Terror
119. Tales of Horror
120. Purple Claw
121. The Unseen
122. Out of the Shadows
123. Adventures Into Darkness
124. Fantastic Worlds
125. Lost Worlds
126. Who is Next
127. Web of Evil
128. Intrigue
129. Weird Terror
130. Horrific
131. Terrific
132. The Tormented
133. Horror From the Tomb
134. Mysterious Stories

P.L. Publishing
Ajax/Farrell Comics
Ajax/Farrell Comics
Ajax/Farrell Comics
Ajax/Farrell Comics
Ajax/Farrell Comics
Gilmor Magazines
Gilmor Magazines
Gilmor Magazines
Fawcett Publication
Fawcett Publication
Fawcett Publication
Fawcett Publication
Fawcett Publication
Fawcett Publication
Fawcett Publication
Charlton Comics
Charlton Comics
Charlton Comics
Charlton Comics
Charlton Comics
Toby Press
Toby Press
Toby Press
Standard Comics
Standard Comics
Standard Comics
Standard Comics
Standard Comics
Standard Comics
Quality Comics
Quality Comics
Comic Media
Comic Media
Sterling Comics
Premier Magazines
Premier Magazines
APPENDIX B:

ANTI-CENSORSHIP EDITORIALS
HERE IN AMERICA, WE CAN STILL PUBLISH COMIC MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPERS, SLUGS, BOOKS AND THE BIBLE. WE DON'T HAVE TO SEND THEM TO A CENSOR FIRST, NOT YET...

BUT THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE IN AMERICA WHO WOULD LIKE TO CENSOR...WHO WOULD LIKE TO SUPPRESS COMICS, IT ISN'T THAT THEY DON'T LIKE COMICS FOR THEM, THEY DON'T LIKE THEM FOR YOU!

THESE PEOPLE SAY THAT COMIC BOOKS AREN'T AS GOOD FOR CHILDREN AS NO COMIC BOOKS, OR SOMETHING-LIKE THAT. SOME OF THESE PEOPLE ARE NO-GOODS. SOME ARE DO-GOODERS. SOME ARE WELL-MEANING, AND NONE ARE JUST PLAIN MEAN...

BUT WE ARE CONCERNED WITH AN AMAZING REVELATION. AFTER MUCH SEARCHING OF NEWSPAPER FILES, WE'VE MADE AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY:

THE GROUP MOST ANXIOUS TO DESTROY COMICS ARE THE COMMUNISTS!

WE'RE SERIOUS! NO KIDDING! HERE READ THIS:

THE COMMUNIST "DAILY WORKER" OF JULY 15, 1953
BITTERLY ATTACKED THE ROLE OF COMICS

"...SO-CALLED 'COMICS' IN BRUTALIZING AMERICAN YOUTH, THE BETTER TO PREPARE THEM FOR MILITARY SERVICE IN IMPLEMENTING OUR GOVERNMENT'S AIM OF WORLD DOMINATION, AND TO ACCEPT THE ATROCITIES NOW BEING PERPETRATED BY AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND AIRMEN IN KOREA UNDER THE FLAG OF THE UNITED NATIONS."

THIS ARTICLE ALSO QUOTED GERSHON LEGMAN (WHO CLAIMS TO BE A GHOST WRITER FOR DR. FREDERICK WERTHAM, THE AUTHOR OF A RECENT SPEAK AGAINST COMICS PUBLISHED IN "THE LADIES HOME JOURNAL"). THIS SAYS "LEGMAN, IN ISSUE #3 OF "NEUROSIA" PUBLISHED IN AUTUMN 1949, WROTE CONDEMNS COMICS, ALTHOUGH ADMITTING THAT:

"THE CHILD'S NATURAL CHARACTER....MUST BE DISTORTED TO FIT CIVILIZATION....FANTASY VIOLENCE WILL PARALYZE HIS RESISTANCE, DIVERT HIS AGGRESSION TO UNREAL ENEMIES AND FRUSTRATIONS, AND IN THIS WAY PREVENT HIM FROM REBELING AGAINST PARENTS AND TEACHERS...THIS WILL SIPHON OFF HIS RESISTANCE AGAINST SOCIETY, AND PREVENT REVOLUTION."

A SPECIAL EDITORIAL

THE PROBLEM: Comics are under fire... horror and crime comics in particular. Due to the efforts of various “do-gooders” and “do-gooder” groups, a large segment of the public is being led to believe that certain comic magazines cause juvenile delinquency, warp the minds of America’s youth, and affect the development of the personalities of those who read them! Among these “do-gooders” are: a psychiatrist who has made a lucrative career of attacking comic magazines, certain publishing companies who do not publish comics and who would benefit by their demise, many groups of adults who would like to blame their lack of ability as responsible parents on comic mags instead of on themselves, and various assorted headline hunters. These people are militant. They complain to local police officials, to local magazine retailers, to local wholesalers, and to their congressmen. They complain and complain and threaten and threaten. Eventually, everyone gets frightened. The newsdealer gets frightened. He removes the books from display. The wholesaler gets frightened. He refuses shipments. The congressmen get frightened... November is coming! They start an investigation. This wave of hysteria has seriously threatened the very existence of the whole comic magazine industry.

WE BELIEVE: Your editors sincerely believe that the claim of these crusaders... that comics are bad for children... is nonsense. If we, in the slightest way, thought that horror comics, crime comics, or any other kind of comics were harmful to our readers, we would cease publishing them and direct our efforts toward something else!

And we’re not alone in our belief. For example: Dr. David Abrahamsen, eminent criminologist, in his book, “Who Are The Guilty?” says, “Comic books do not lead to crime, although they have been widely blamed for it... In my experience as a psychiatrist, I cannot remember having seen one boy or girl who has committed a crime, or who became neurotic or psychotic... because he or she read comic books.” A group led by Dr. Freda Kehn, Mental Health Chairman of the Ill. Congress of the P. T. A., decided that living room violence has “a decided beneficial effect on young minds.” Dr. Robert H. Felix, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, said that horror comic books do not originate criminal behavior in children... in a way, the horror comics may do some good... children may use fantasy, as stimulated by the “comics” as a means of working out natural feelings of aggressiveness.

We also believe that a large portion of our total readership of horror and crime comics is made up of adults. We believe that those who oppose comics are a small minority. Yet this minority is causing the hysteria. The voice of the majority... you who buy comics, read them, enjoy them, and are not harmed by them... has not been heard!

WHAT YOU MUST DO: Unless you act now, the pressure from this minority may force comics from the American scene. It is members of this minority who threaten the local retailers, who threaten the local wholesalers, who have sent letters to the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency (now investigating the comic industry).

IT IS TIME THAT THE MAJORITY’S VOICE BE HEARD!

It is time that the Senate Subcommittee hears from YOU... each and every one of you!

If you agree that comics are harmless entertainment, write a letter or a postcard TODAY... to:

The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency
United States Senate
Washington 25, D. C.

and in your own words, tell them so. Make it a nice, polite letter! In the case of your younger readers, it would be more effective if you could get your parents to write for you, or perhaps add a P.S. to your letter, as the Senate Subcommittee may not have much respect for the opinions of minors.

Of course, if you or your parents disagree with us, and believe that comics ARE bad, let your sentiments be known on that too! The important thing is that the Subcommittee hear from actual comic book readers and/or their parents, rather than from people who never read a comic magazine in their lives, but simply want to destroy them.

It is also important that your local newsdealer be encouraged to continue carrying, displaying, and selling all kinds of comics. Speak to him. Have him speak to his wholesaler.

Wherever you can, let your voice and the voices of your parents be raised in protest over the campaign against comics.

But first... right now... please write that letter to the Senate Subcommittee.

Sincerely,
Your grateful editors
(for the whole E. C. Gang)
### IN MEMORIAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TALES FROM THE CRYPT:</th>
<th>Born January 1950</th>
<th>Died November 1954</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE VAULT OF HORROR:</td>
<td>Born February 1950</td>
<td>Died October 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE HAUNT OF FEAR:</td>
<td>Born February 1950</td>
<td>Died October 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIME SUSPENSTORIES:</td>
<td>Born August 1950</td>
<td>Died October 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES:</td>
<td>Born December 1951</td>
<td>Died September 1954</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may never read this magazine. For that matter, this magazine may never be printed. If it is printed, it may never be distributed. If it is distributed, it may be kept in a bundle behind the counter and never seen the light of day. But if, through some miracle, it does reach the newsstand, this will probably be the last issue of this magazine you will ever read.

As a result of the hysterical, injudicious, and unfounded charges leveled at crime and horror comics, many retailers and wholesalers throughout the country have been intimidated into refusing to handle this type of magazine.

Although we at E.C. still believe, as we have in the past, that the charges against horror and crime comics are utter nonsense, there's no point in going into a defense of this kind of literature at the present time. Economically our situation is acute. Magazines that do not get onto the newsstands do not sell. We are forced to capitulate. We give up. We've had it!

Naturally, with comic magazine censorship now a fact, we at E.C. look forward to an immediate drop in the crime and juvenile delinquency rate of the United States. We trust there will be fewer robberies, fewer murders, and fewer rapes!

We would like to say in passing...passing away, that is!...that if you have enjoyed reading E.C.'s horror and crime efforts over the past five years half as much as we have truly enjoyed creating them for you, then our labors of love have not been in vain.

But enough mush! This is not only an obituary notice; it is also a birth announcement!

**BOY...WHAT WE GOT IN STORE FOR YOU!** (Ya didn't think E.C. was gonna die with the books, did ya? We got talent we ain't even used yet!)

E.C. is planning the NEW NEW TREND. In January of 1955, we hit! In fact, we hit with five (5) sensational new titles. They won't be horror magazines...they won't be crime magazines! They'll be utterly new and different—but in the old reliable E.C. tradition! Naturally, we can't tell you what they'll be YET...we can feel the hot breath of our floundering competitors who followed us into horror on our necks. When the mags are ready to go, they'll be announced in MAD, PANIC, WEIRD SCIENCE-FANTASY, PIRACY, and TWO-FISTED TALES!

We feel it's gonna be a HAPPY NEW YEAR with our NEW NEW TREND!

Your grateful editors
New York Comic Book Czar

Judge Charles F. Murphy, code administrator of the newly formed Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc., New York, shows how the association has removed some of the horror characteristics from one panel of a comic strip. The association was set up by the comic-book industry after much public criticism of some comics. One of the articles in this series will refer to the association in more detail.
APPENDIX C:

ARTWORK FROM THE HORROR COMICS

OF THE 1950'S
HERE ARE TALES THAT WILL USHER YOU INTO

THE HAUNT OF FEAR

FEATURING...

THE OLD WITCH

THE VAULT-KEEPER

THE CRYPT-KEEPER

10¢
Welcome, dear friends! Come in! Come into the Crypt of Terror! I am your host, the Crypt-Keeper! I see it is time to tell you another of my spine-tingling horror stories from my vast collection here in the Crypt! Hmm... let me see! Ah! I know! This one is sure to freeze the blood in your veins... guaranteed to make little shivers run up and down your crawling spine! This little adventure into terror... this chilling ordeal... is about to happen to you! You are the main character! Ready? Get a good grip on yourself! Then turn the page and begin the tale I call... Reflection of Death!
Ah, we meet again, dear reader! Heh, heh, heh... Welcome... welcome once more to the Vault of Horror! This time I have brought out a special story for you that will chill the blood in your veins... and perhaps make you stop and wonder a moment when next you meet your best friend... heh, heh! This literary gem of horrible unpleasanties is, of course, from my private collection, and I call it...

Portrait in Wax!
THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! YEP, IT'S ME... THE OLD WITCH... MISTRESS OF THE HAUNT OF FEAR! THIS TIME, FOR THE OFFERING FROM MY CAULDRON, I'VE DRESSED UP A TALE TOLD TO ME BY LARRY DOUGLAS, A THEATRICAL MAN! IT'S IN HIS OWN WORDS, AND HE CALLS IT...

"The Ventriloquist's Dummy!"

IT HAD BEEN YEARS SINCE I'D SEEN CHARLES JEROME! AS I STUDIED HIS PALE, DRAWN FACE, I WAS SHOCKED TO SEE HOW MUCH HE'D CHANGED! HIS WARM SMILE HAD DISAPPEARED... IN ITS PLACE WAS A TIGHT GRIMACE! HIS EYES THAT ONCE SPARKLED HAPPILY WERE SAD AND BLOODSHOT, ENOICIRCLED BY TIRED LINES.

CHARLES! YOU OLD SON-OF-A-GUN! HOW ARE YOU? I'VE BEEN LOOKING HIGH AND LOW FOR YOU!

LARRY! LARRY DOUGLAS! COME IN! COME IN!
THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! WELL! SO WE MEET AGAIN, DEAR FRIENDS? WELCOME! WELCOME! ONCE MORE TO THE CRYPT OF TERROR! THIS TIME I HAVE A REALLY CHILLING TALE FROM MY COLLECTION OF SPINE-TINGLERS TO RELATE TO YOU! NOW, LIE BACK IN YOUR CASKETS! TUCK YOURSELVES IN WITH YOUR SHROUDS! COMFY? GOOD! THEN I'LL BEGIN! I CALL THIS STORY... THE THING FROM THE GRAVE!
HEE, HEE! I SEE YOU'RE HORROR-HUNGRY AGAIN... BACK FOR MORE SAVORY SERVINGS OF SCREAMS FROM MY CAULDRON! WELL, GOOD! WELCOME TO THE HAUNT OF FEAR! THIS IS YOUR DELIRIUM DIETICIAN, THE OLD WITCH, COOKING UP ANOTHER REVOLTING RECIPE! READY? GET YOUR DROOL CUPS FASTENED UNDER YOUR DRIBBLING CHINS? GOT YOUR SHROUDES TIED NEATLY AROUND YOUR NECKS? THEN I'LL BEGIN DISHING OUT THE TERROR-TIDBIT # CALL...

HORROR WE?
HOW'S BAYOU?

THE MOSS-Laden CYPRESS TREES THAT LINE THE RUTTED BAYOU ROAD SEEM TO PART... AND AN OLD PLANTATION HOUSE, WEATHERBEATEN AND FADED, LOOMS UP IN THE CAR'S HEADLIGHT BEAMS! ITS COLUMNED PORTICO LEERS OMINOUSLY, LIKE SOME GIGANTIC FANGED MONSTER SQUATTING IN THE ROAD, BLOCKING THE AUTOMOBILE'S FURTHER PROGRESS! OFF IN THE DISTANCE A SWAMP BIRD SCREAMS INTO THE NIGHT, AS IF LAUGHING AT THE DRIVER'S DISCOMFORT...

BLAST IT! THIS ROAD ENDS HERE! BUT I'M SURE THAT SIGN BACK THERE POINTED THIS WAY...
In his bedroom, Sidney stirs uncomfortably in his sleep. Suddenly, the door to his chamber bursts open and three figures are framed in it. Shaving unsteadily...

Who... Who's there? Everett? Is that... you? I thought I locked you... in... your... gasp.

The figures move forward... into the light! But there is something strangely wrong about the figures! Sidney stares in horror! A whimper escapes from his throat.

No! No! Oh, Lord...

For the dismembered parts of Everett's three victims have fused incorrectly! The woman's head rests upon the saleswoman's torso...

...while doctor Forman's head rests upon the woman's torso...

...and Mr. Jackson's, the salesman's, head has fused with the doctor's body...

The other parts, the arms and legs of each, are equally as confused! The conglamations move forward... toward the hysterically screaming Sidney...

Clutched in one of the mixed-up-figure's hands is a small black bag... the kind used by doctors to carry their shiny little sharp instruments...

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHH!
THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!


POETIC JUSTICE!

OLD ABNER ELLIOT STOOD ON THE PORCH OF HIS RAMSHACKLE HOUSE DRINKING DOWN AT THE CHATTERING, GIGGLING GROUP OF CHILDREN BEFORE HIM! HIS WRINKLED EYES WERE GLAZED AND WET AS HE STUDIED THEIR BEAMING FACES...

GOLLY, MR. ELLIOT! THEY'RE JUST LIKE NEW!

THEY'RE SWELL! FIXED 'EM UP FINE!

YOU SEEM TO THANKS FOR THE TOYS, MR. ELLIOT!
Now, now, kiddies! Don't peek at the ending! Relax and enjoy it! Don't worry! I'm as mad at Henry Burgundy and his son as you are! We won't let him get away with this...or rather, Abner won't! But it took him almost a year! Let's see: it was a year...a whole year after Abner killed himself!

They buried him in Potter's field, just outside of town! On the eve of February fourteenth, just as the town steeple-bell tolled midnight...on the first anniversary of Abner's suicide, a strange thing happened! The soil on Abner's grave cracked open! A fetid rotting hand reached up...

Another followed! The thing pushed up into the brisk winter air! It got to its feet, swaying uncertainly...

Then it stumbled off toward town! Crawling clods of grave mud fell away as it tottered along! Bits of muddy, mouldy, foul-smelling flesh dropped in its path! It seemed to know...to sense where it was going...

Harold Burgundy was addressing St. Valentine's day cards, when the thing came in! They were left-overs from the previous year! Harold spun around as the searing stench burned his nostrils.

In the morning, old Henry Burgundy looked for Harold and couldn't find him! But in his room, he found a neatly-tied package! The card said...a Valentine's day greeting to Henry! He opened it...

Good lord!

Yep, kiddies, Harold's heart was in the neat little package, all bloody and sticky! Well, don't look so shocked! That's what you send on St. Valentine's Day, isn't it? Hearts? Wha...? Not real ones? Gulp! An' I've been doin' it for years! No wonder I'm not popular! Now...if you can still hold the crummy mag...turn to the vault-keeper! He's got his own yarn to tattoo! 'Bye! See you later!
HEUHEH! COME IN, FRIENDS! COME INTO THE CRYPT OF TERROR! ONCE AGAIN WE MEET FOR OUR SHIVER SESSION! YES, IT'S YOUR HOST IN HORROR, THE CRYPT-KEEPER, OPENING HIS MAD-MAG WITH A TERRIFYING TALE GUARANTEED TO CURL YOUR HAIR AND CURdle YOUR BLOOD! SEVERAL ISSUES BACK, I TOLD YOU A YARN ABOUT A BUTCHER WHICH PROVED VERY POPULAR! ONE AVID FAN EVEN SENT ME A CLEAVER WITH COMPLETE DIRECTIONS FOR WHAT HE WANTED ME TO DO WITH IT... BUT IT DIDN'T SINK IN! So I DECIDED TO TELL YOU ANOTHER STORY ABOUT A BUTCHER... ONE THAT I'M SURE WILL TICKLE YOUR SPARE-RIBS!

I CALL THIS MEATY LITTLE MORbid MELODRAMA...

AS THE NAUSEOUS CANNIBAL REMARKED ON A PARTICULARLY HOT DAY...

"'TAIN'T THE MEAT... IT'S THE HUMANITY!"

NO ONE PAID MUCH ATTENTION TO ZACH GRISTLE BEFORE WORLD WAR II! HE WAS JUST ANOTHER SMALL TOWN BUTCHER! BUT THAT WAS BEFORE THE WAR! SUDDENLY... WITH THE ADVENT OF MEAT RATIONING... RED POINTS... AND CEILING PRICES... ZACH GRISTLE BECAME VERY POPULAR...

HOWDY, ZACH! MORNING, MR. GRISTLE! ZACH! MORNING, ZACH! FOLKS! ON LOCK E'ER YOU SEE!
At that moment, Junior staggered into the kitchen! He looked a little green around the gills...

I...I feel sick, Mommy! I...

Junior! Baby? Gulp!

Little Junior collapsed on the kitchen floor.

He's dead. Zach! Dead! Sarah! You killed him, too... Our son... our son...

When they unlocked Zach Gristle's butcher shop the next morning, they found Mrs. Gristle standing behind the counter... staring into space! She wore a blood-smeared apron around her neck! Before her... in the meat showcase... Zach Gristle had been clumsily carved and laid out in the various trays...

All right, so you ain't hungry! You can window shop, can't you? Not interested, eh? Maybe you'd be interested in attending a formal banquet given by the ghouls, zombies, werewolves, and vampires' black-market-bodies syndicate in honor of Zach Gristle? He will be served! Hmmm! Still not interested, Eh? How about going on to the vault-keeper then? He's not interesting, too! Got a boring story for you? Then I'll dig you later with another creepy-crypt-collector's item!
So now you know, fiends. Now you know why there is a ball game being played in the moonlight at midnight in the deserted Central City Ball Park. Look closely. See this strange baseball game! See the long strings of pulpy intestines that mark the base lines. See the two lungs and the liver that indicate the bases. The heart that is home plate. See Doc White bend and whisk the heart with the manly scalp, yelling...

Play ball... Let's go Philly, boy! Pitch it in...

See the batter come to the plate swinging the legs, the arms, then throwing all but one away and standing in the box waiting for the pitcher to hurl the head in to him. See the catcher with the torso strapped on as a chest-protector, the infielders with their hand-mits, the stomach-robin-bag, and all the other pieces of equipment that once was Central City's star pitcher, Herbie Sattenn...

And in the morning, watch the faces of the fans as they pack the park and see the green grass now stained red, and see the hastily substituted pitcher step to the rubber and stare down at the stone plaque embedded there with the engraved words memorializing the gory remains buried beneath the pitcher's mound...

Good Lord! Heh, heh! So that's my YELP-YARN for this issue, kiddies. Herbie, the pitcher, went to pieces that night and was taken out...out of existence, that is! The plaque turned out to be his grave stone, and the pitcher's mound his grave. Oh, by the way, next time you go see Central City play, be careful where you sit. That night one of Bayville's boys hit a Homer, into the stands. They never found the... Heh, heh... 'Ball!' 'Bye, now. We'll all see you next in my mag, Tales from the Crypt!'
It was a sample-box, all right. Just like the whiteman sample-boxes Hannah had loved so dearly. Only this box was too huge to hold candy. This box was just right for the gory samples it did hold. And the diagram crudely scrawled on the inside of its open cover identified and denoted the exact location of each segment of Hannah's dismembered and dissected body.

Heh, heh, and that's my sweet story for this issue, kiddies. Irwin's in a padded cell now, picking the buttons off the padding and popping them into his mouth, and with each one the guards just peer in through the little glass window in the door, make sure he's not choking to death, and shake their heads. They never saw a boy so crazy over candy! Now, the old witch awaits with her gruesome gruel. I can smell it from here, so... droops, ha-ten-shun! Hold... nose! Eyes... right!
George, the plumber, looked up...

**George went down into the cellar! Henry turned to his guests:**

The well is directly under the house! A pump brings the water up through a pipe in the cellar floor...

*NOPE! Rita made me install our own well years ago. She said we'd save money on taxes.***

They all went into the kitchen, laughing. George looked puzzled...

This well got to taste! When I was a kid... I had to taste the well water... when I was a kid...

**Excuse me!**

George went down into the cellar! Henry turned to his guests...

**George went down into the cellar! Henry turned to his guests:**

The well is directly under the house! A pump brings the water up through a pipe in the cellar floor...

George went down into the cellar! Henry turned to his guests...

Henry? I—I feel terrible! I didn't know about the well! I thought the well water intake was the waste pipe. I attached the garbage disposal unit to it! You... you haven't used it yet, have you?

Henry! What?!

Henry? I... I feel terrible! I... I didn't know about the well! I... thought the well water intake was the waste pipe. I attached the garbage disposal unit to it! You... you haven't used it yet, have you?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

It was George. Henry walked across the kitchen to the cellar door where he stood. The others stared at the flowing tap...

Henry! I... I feel terrible! I... I didn't know about the well! I... I thought the well water intake was the waste pipe. I attached the garbage disposal unit to it! You... you haven't used it yet, have you?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?

Henry! C'mere! For a minute, huh?
In the old days, humans hunted their own food...prepared it themselves! Vampires too! In the legends, hunted their own victims! But now, we, just like modern man, leave the hunting to the professionals! We leave the preparing to the professionals, too...

This restaurant serves blood dishes...like a vegetarian restaurant serves vegetable dishes. Blood-juice-cocktail...not blood-consomme...roast blood-golts...green-fried scabs...blood sherbet...

Oh, Harold! Like the other seventeen that wandered into this restaurant, you will have to be silenced! I cannot save you!

I'm sorry, Harold! Like the other seventeen that wandered into this restaurant, you will have to be silenced! I cannot save you!

Harold was lifted bodily by the giggling crowd of vampires while his sister looked on unconcernedly. One vampire brought a rope! Another...the tap...

Tie up his...String him up...A party!

And so Harold was strung up...head down! The tap was inserted into his jugular vein! And each of the vampires came...one by one...and filled its glass...

Nothin' like the real stuff!

I'll say...

Heh, heh! And that's the story. Kiddies! That's what 'civilized' vampires do these days! They dine in blooditarian restaurants, open sundown to sunrise, where is there one in your town, you ask? Well, some night if you feel up to it, look for it! Can tell it by the sign inside! It's in red...and it says, "Positively no nipping the waiters!" The guy who started this chain of drinkeries is a vampire Barnum! He knows there's a 'sucker' born every minute! Now I'll turn you back to the crypt-keeper! Bye!
The room was empty and she tore the bedclothes from the empty bed and slammed the door of the empty closet and checked the lock on the empty room's window...

She rushed head long from the empty room, clattered frantically down the stairs... and stopped...

She's locked! She's still here! She's still in the house!

It's locked! She's still here! She's still in the house!

Look, Mommy! Look! Santa Claus is here! I let him in!

The room? And what would you like for Christmas? Did you enjoy our little story? Carol's mommy just got the biggest surprise of her life... you see, this Santa loved to Sleigh Bells! And next time you see Santa, better make sure he isn't six foot three with shaggy black hair! That reminds me... I guess it's time for me to remove this mask.

Carol! Carol! Where are you? Here I am mommy! Here I am downstairs!

Heh, heh! Yep! It's me... the vault keeper! You didn't think we'd ever have the real Santa Claus in this horror mag, did you? Oh... I suppose you've been wondering just what I've got in this sack? Heh! It's only what's left of Carol's mommy after that maniac was through with her! Heh, heh, heh, heh... and by the way...

Merry Christmas!
And so, like his father and mother before him... His death certificate signed by a disinterested doctor that had been hastily summoned... Old Joseph was placed in a simple pine box, carried out to the servant-plot, and buried without flowers, without music, without pomp or dignity. And Niles Fairchild and Tom Kelton stood by, smiling...

HIS DEATH CERTIFICATE SIGNED BY A DISINTERESTED DOCTOR THAT HAD BEEN HASTILY SUMMONED...

Old Joseph was placed in a simple pine box, carried out to the servant-plot, and buried without flowers, without music, without pomp or dignity. And Niles Fairchild and Tom Kelton stood by, smiling...

And in the days that followed, Niles Fairchild was able to reestablish his credit, fill the government order, and start the long climb back up the financial success-ladder. One night, months later...

That's it, Niles... the first black-inked entry! You're all clear! I came over tonight to show it to you! I knew you'd be thrilled.

I am, Tom. Thanks. How about a drink... in celebration.

Outside the Fairchild mansion, out in the dismal, unpromising servant-cemetery, below the sparsely-grassed mounds, something stirred... pushing upward... crumbling the surface of it's recently tamped-down grave...

Inside, the two men drank. Tom Kelton turned to go... Good-night, Niles. Night, Tom.

The thing stumbled across the lawns, tottering in the wind, lifting its maggot-covered head, listening... See you in the morning. Sure thing.

Niles Fairchild closed the door behind Tom Kelton and returned to the library. As he opened the door, the stench of rotten flesh and grave-slime seared his nostrils...

What the...? Who's in here? Who...?

No! No! Oh, Lord...

... And Niles Fairchild screamed...
In Hornbriar, Irma paced the huge marble foyer nervously. She shuddered as she stared up at the curving spiral staircase... "I've got to have that monster torn down! It gives me the creeps... keeps reminding me of the lighthouse!"

Suddenly, Irma heard footsteps outside the huge oak door. The knob rattled... She swung it open... "It's about time you came back, Robert! You... oh, my God!"

The thing moved toward Irma! It stank from oozing grave mud! Clods of rancid crawling rotted flesh fell from its eyeless face..."Herman? No! No!"

She swung it open, "It's about time you came back, Robert." She tripped, bruising her face, but got up quickly and continued on up the winding steps...

Behind the man-thing came the woman-thing! Its hair was matted with the cemetery ooze... Its cheeks sunken... Its white teeth grinning idiotically... Its bony decomposing fingers reaching...

Good Lord! Help me!

Irma rushed up the staircase! The things slopped after her! She tripped, bruising her face, but got up quickly and continued on up the winding steps...

Yeeeeejeeeeee eeeeee!

It was then, as Irma tried to open one of the balcony bedroom doors, that she remembered with horrified dismay... "Oh, Lord! I'm locked! I had them sealed shut!"

In the morning, they found the two rotted bodies on the balcony! Below, on the marble floor, was all that was left of Irma...

But a fall like that wouldn't have done this two old corpses any good!"

Hee, hee! What a rhetorical question, eh, kiddies? Where else did they come from? Where do all walking corpses come from? From their graves, of course! So Irma finally had her wind-up... on a winding staircase! Hee, hee! Well... after all... she wasn't expecting Herman and Ethel to come a-round!

And if you haven't gotten around to sending for your 5 x 7 actual photo of me, you'll find out how to go about it in the Crypt-Keeper's corner..."Bye, now!"
The rotted, decayed thing grinned...reaching outward! Its flesh crawled with the slime of death! Its voice rasped like a worn-out gramophone cylinder... Howard...ba-a-arling! Janet! Gasp! No! No! King leaped from the car, howling! The thing closed its flesh-tattered bone fingers around Howard's wrist in a vice-like grip and dragged him from the car toward the open mausoleum... I'm sorry I didn't have a more recent snapshot, my dear! Aren't the grounds just as I described them?

The female-thing dragged the screaming man into the satin draped mausoleum with the stained glass window...across the marble floor and into the hard-wood, bronze-trimmed coffin! And all the while, as it closed the lid down, it kept murmuring...spewing its foul-smelling breath upon his terror-stricken face... "It's been so lonely here... my dear! But now... that's all over!"

Hee, hee! What a love affair, eh, kiddies? All over, now! It's right... for Howie, that is! Oh, by the way! In case you're wondering what happened to King, rest your fiendish minds! Janet had a dog...named Queenie! And now, it's time to close that thieving crypt-keeper's mag! We'll all see you next in the vault-keeper's mess, the vault of horror! Bye, now! And if you get any love letters signed 'Janet' or 'Howie'... hee, hee... well... the end.
Lillian's puny fists bent against Roger's tattered chest as he draws her to him...

Don't you... love me anymore, Lillian?

Eeeeee

Confused... bewildered... the corpse of Roger Kane tries to comfort the hysterical screaming woman...

I knew I had to come... so I came! I walked all the way... twelve miles...

Suddenl, the screaming stops! Lillian sobs quietly, staring at the decomposed face so close to hers...

There! That's better! Isn't it?

Roger?

Poor Lillian! She recognizes Roger, now she sees him clearly... not the ugly, rotting hulk before her... but as he was... long ago...

Roger darling! It is you? Yes, Lillian! It is me!

The shock has been too much for Lillian! She has gone completely out of her mind! She is stark raving mad...

Oh, Roger dearest! We're together now... forever and always! Kiss me...

The night drags on, and day dawns over the lake! Under the old gnarled oak are two bodies... one, a smiling lady, recently deceased... the other, a putrid, decayed, grinning gentleman, long dead...

Hee, hee! I hope you enjoyed this embracing yarn! Dear Roger certainly kept his promise didn't he? He came back in five years as he said he would, even if he had to dig himself up out of a grave to do it! And Lillian? Well, Lillian was crazy to see him, wasn't she? 'Bye now! See you in my own book... 'The Haunt of Fear'!

If you still haven't received real 5x7 photos of the three Ghoulinatics, read the Vault-keepers column and find out how to get yours!

The Prude

On a typical, rainy, blustery, miserable March day in the early nineteenth century, a typical group of elected officials sat in the council chamber of the meeting hall of a typical early American town called Northton, cringing behind their long polished tables and wincing at the thundering words of Citizen Warren Forbish...
REFERENCES


