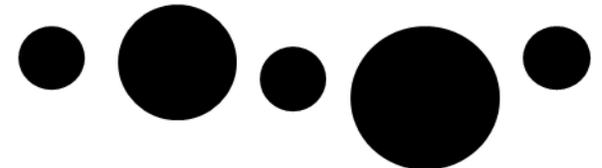
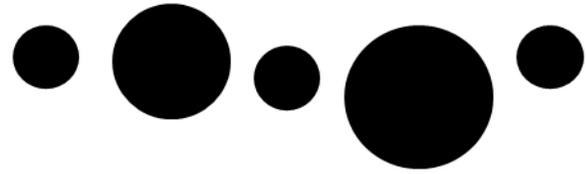




# Welcome to Online Office Hours!

We'll get started at 2PM ET





# Library of Congress Online Office Hours

Welcome! We're glad you're here! Use the chat box to introduce yourselves. Let us know:

- **Your first name**
- **Where you're joining us from**
- **Grade level(s) and subject(s) you teach**

# “Challenges to the Comics Code Authority” and a Glimpse into the Library’s Comic Arts Collection

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Library of Congress Swann Foundation Fellow, 2019-2020

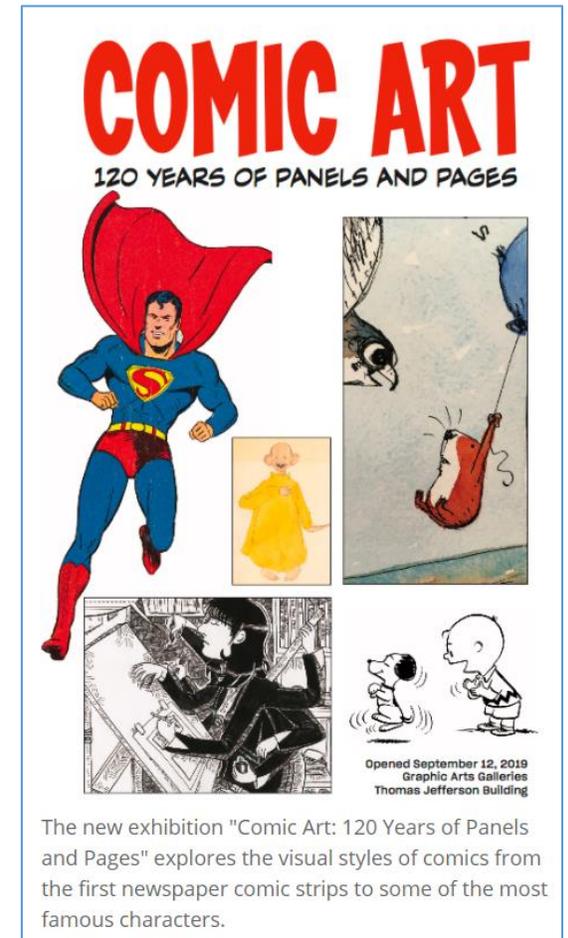
*Brought to you by the Library’s Learning and Innovation Office and the Library’s Prints & Photographs Division in collaboration  
with the Swann Foundation for Caricature and Cartoon*

# Comic Arts Collections at the Library of Congress

**Prints and Photographs Division** holds multiple collections of original art for comics within its holdings of an estimated 129,000 original cartoon drawings and prints, including:

- [Swann Collection of Caricature and Cartoon](#)
  - 400+ records for comic strips; 20+ comic book page drawings
- [Cartoon Drawings](#)
  - 400+ records for comic strips; 50+ records for comic book page drawings
- [Wood Collection of Cartoon and Caricature Drawings](#)
  - 200+ digitized comic strips to date

**Serials & Government Publications Division** holds the largest publicly accessible [collection of comic books](#) in the United States: over 12,000 titles in all, totaling more than 140,000 issues. (Completing a [Comic Book Request form](#) is required for use of the collection.)



From "Comic Art" Exhibition [press release](#), 2019

# Related Resources on the Library's Website

## Selected Library of Congress exhibitions online that feature comics:

- [\*Comic Art: 120 Years of Panels and Pages\*](#)
- [\*Drawn to Purpose: American Women Illustrators and Cartoonists\*](#)
- [\*Cartoon America \[Selections from the Art Wood Collection\]\*](#)

## Other Library of Congress freely accessible digital collections containing comics:

- [Webcomics Web Archive](#)
  - Focuses specifically on comics created for the web.
- [Chronicling America](#)
  - Gives access to millions of pages of historic American public domain newspapers. More than 2,100 titles, published in 40 states and territories and the District of Columbia.
  - Try search terms: *comic, comic strips, funnies, commix, comic books*. You might also consider searching for particular cartoonists, by name.
- *\*Coming soon\** LibGuide – Caricature and Cartoon: A Resource Guide

# Challenges to the Comics Code Authority

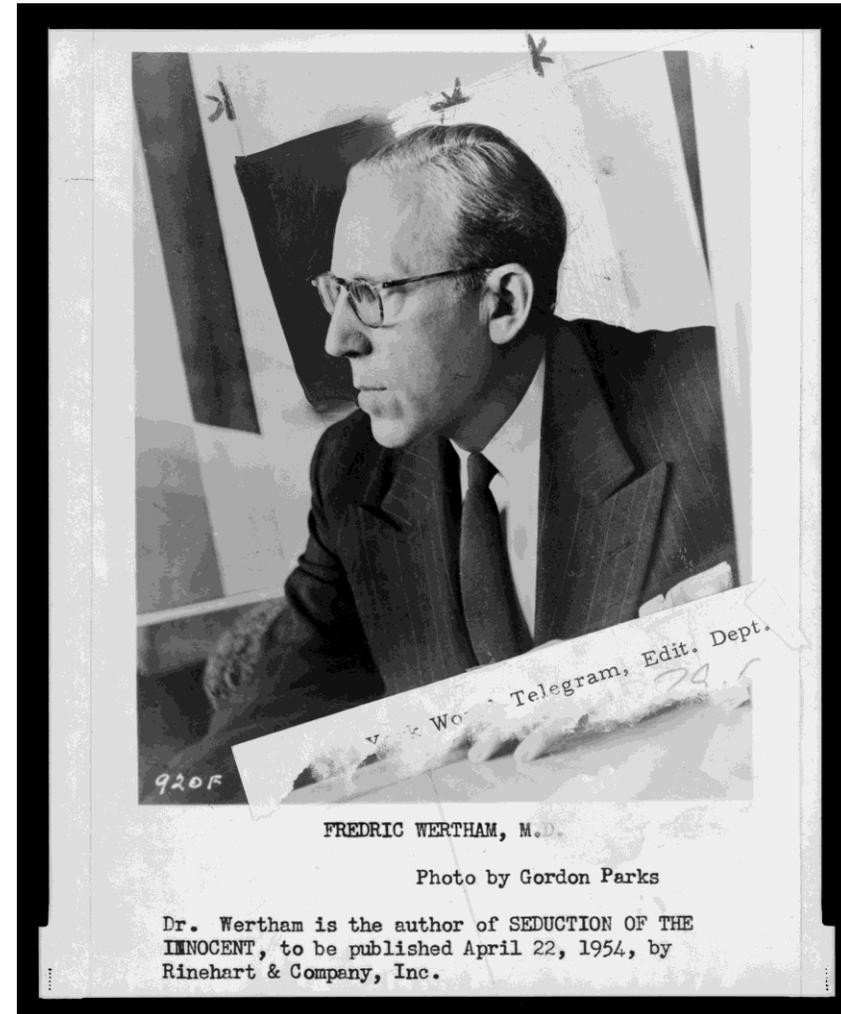
Presented by

**Richard D. Deverell**

PhD Candidate, Department of History, SUNY Buffalo  
Library of Congress Swann Foundation Fellow, 2019-2020

## Dr. Fredric Wertham

- March 20, 1895 – November 18, 1981
- Founded Lafargue Clinic in Harlem, NY in 1946
  - Supported in this by Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison
- Testified with Hilde Mosse (also of the Lafargue Clinic) about the effects of segregation in Wilmington, Delaware
  - This case was combined with *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Primarily known for *Seduction of the Innocent* and his testimony at the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency hearings in 1954



## *Seduction of the Innocent*

- Published in April 1954
- Argued that Wonder Woman “is a frightening figure for boys, [and] she is an undesirable ideal for girls, being the exact opposite of what girls are supposed to want to be.” (pg. 33)
- Argued, “Comic books create sex fears of all kinds.” (pg. 185)
- Said that Batman and Robin’s lives as Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson were “like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together.” (pg. 190)
- Analyzed advertisements in comics for zip guns, knives, and diet pills (pg. 199-201)

The author of **THE SHOW OF VIOLENCE** and **DARK LEGEND**

# SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

**Fredric Wertham, M.D.**

*the influence of  
comic books on today's youth*

# Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency

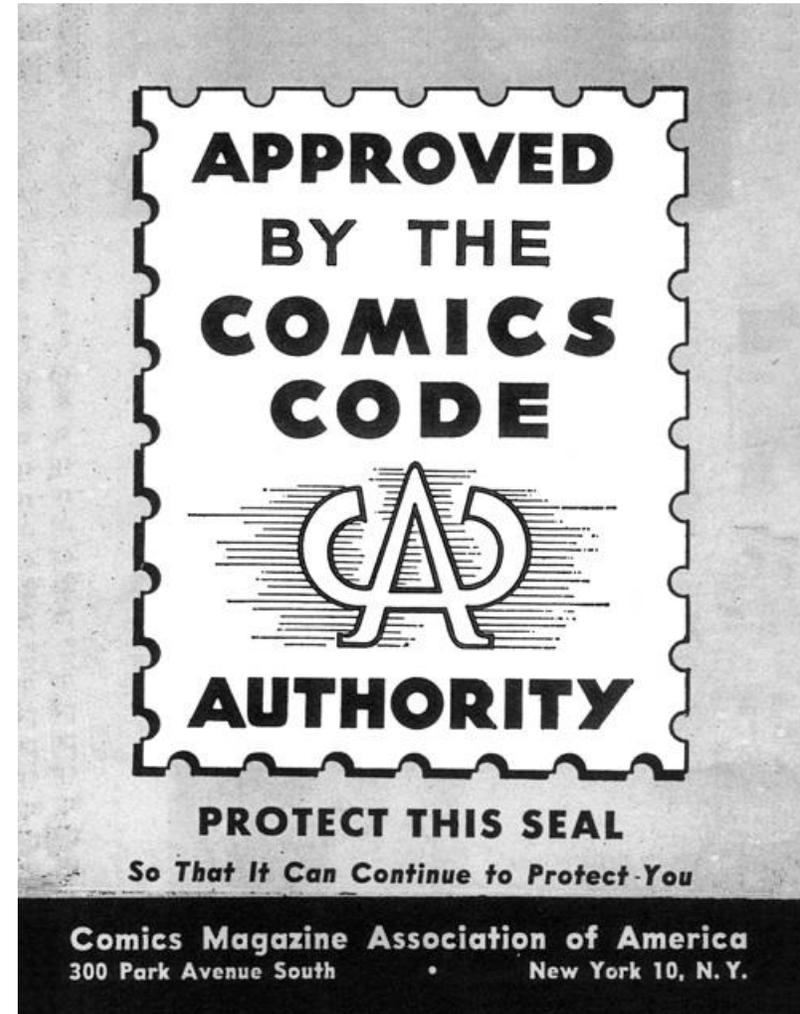
- Met on April 21, 22, and June 4, 1954
- Fredric Wertham's testimony reiterated many points from *Seduction of the Innocent*
- William Gaines, publisher of EC Comics, tried to defend the content of horror comics as appropriate to the horror genre, but his testimony received unfavorable reactions in the press
- Senator Estes Kefauver warned the comic book industry, "any action on the part of the publishers of crime and horror comic books, or upon the part of distributors, wholesalers, or dealers with reference to these materials which will tend to eliminate from production and sale, shall receive the acclaim of my colleagues and myself."



Senator Hendrickson with a display of comic books during the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency hearings, April 1954. (TIME Magazine)

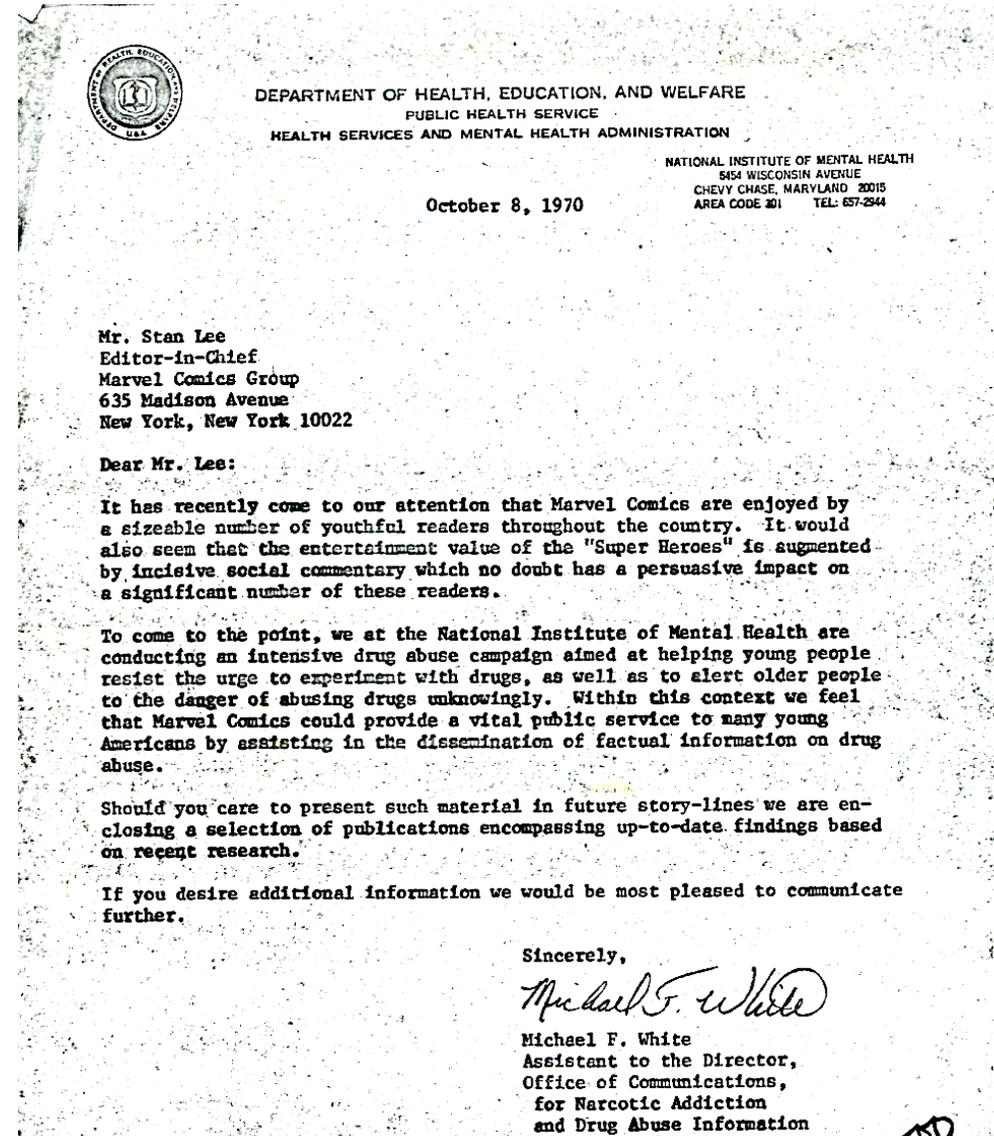
# The Comics Code Authority

- Formed in 1954
  - Banned excessive violence
  - Could not show sympathy with criminals
  - Banned horror and gore
  - Limited the size of the word “crime” on comic book covers
  - Strict limits on depiction of sexuality
  - Banned profanity
  - Controlled what types of products may be advertised



# Health, Education, & Welfare

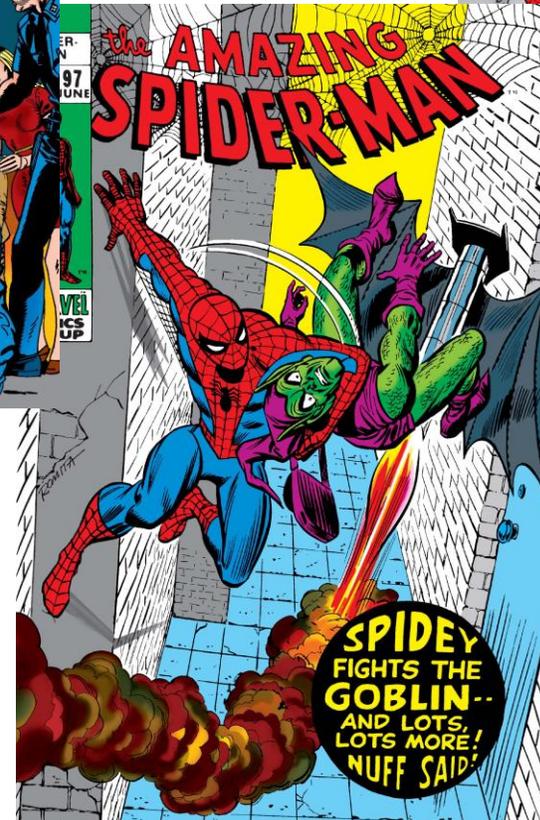
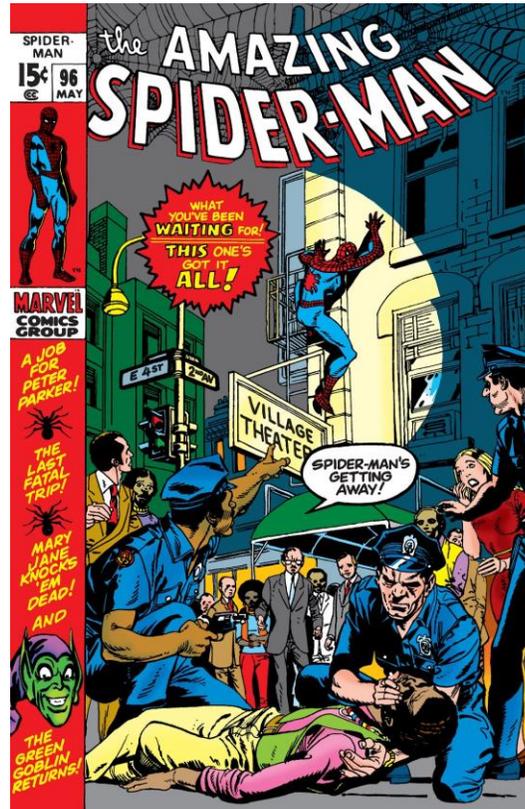
- Michael F. White, the Assistant to the Director, Office of Communications, for Narcotic Addiction and Drug Abuse Information, asked Stan Lee to help warn of the danger of drug use
- Stan Lee decided to incorporate that into the ongoing *Amazing Spider-Man* as a major plot point rather than produce a special promotional comic book



Michael F. White, Letter to Stan Lee, October 8, 1970, Box 12, Folder 1, Stan Lee Papers, Collection Number 8302, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

# Amazing Spider-Man nos. 96-98

- May – June 1971
- None of these three issues received Code approval
  - At this time, Marvel typically placed the Code seal of approval next to the “N” in Spider-Man.



# A Comics Magazine Defies Code Ban on Drug Stories

By LAWRENCE VAN GELDER

For the first time since its adoption 16 years ago, the Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, which governs the contents of more than 300 million comic books published each year in the United States, has been overhauled.

As a result of revisions adopted last week, comic books now deal more easily with criminal acts by government officials and the police, with sex, with contemporary language and with the occult.

However, despite considerable pressure from some publishers and editors within the industry, the code continues to make no specific provision for dealing with drug abuse.

## Published Without Seal

Although a traditional ban on such stories remains, one publisher has defied the prohibition to publish without the code's seal of approval a comic book containing a story line dealing disapprovingly with drug abuse.

The May issue of *The Amazing Spider-Man*, published by the Marvel Comics Group of Magazine Management Company, a subsidiary



Seal of the Comics Magazine Association, which governs content of most comic books published in the United States.

of Cadence Industries at 625 Madison Avenue, marks the first time since adoption of the code that a subscribing member has published without its seal of approval.

The code was adopted by publishers of 90 per cent of the nation's comic books on Oct. 26, 1954, during a period when comic books were under attack from psychologists, legislators, clergymen and educators. Reminiscent of the strict Hays Code that governed Hollywood for many years, the Comics Code sharply limited depic-

tion of violence, gore and sex in comic books.

Consistent violation of the code could mean expulsion from membership in the Comics Magazine Association, accompanied by notification of newsdealers, many of whom presumably would decline to handle the publishers' wares. In essence, the code is regarded by all its subscribing members as a beneficial standard, safeguarding their industry and prompting their allegiance.

Stan Lee, the editor of *Spider-Man*, said he was impelled to proceed with a story containing a subplot on drug abuse by a letter he received from an official of the National Institute of Mental Health, a branch of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

## Reason for Action

The letter suggested, in part, that a public service could be performed by assisting in the dissemination of factual information on drug abuse.

Although the seal of approval was refused for the proposed story, Mr. Lee said that he and Martin Goodman, *Marvel's* publisher, agreed to proceed with their plans for putting out *Spider-Man*,

Continued on Page 44, Column 5

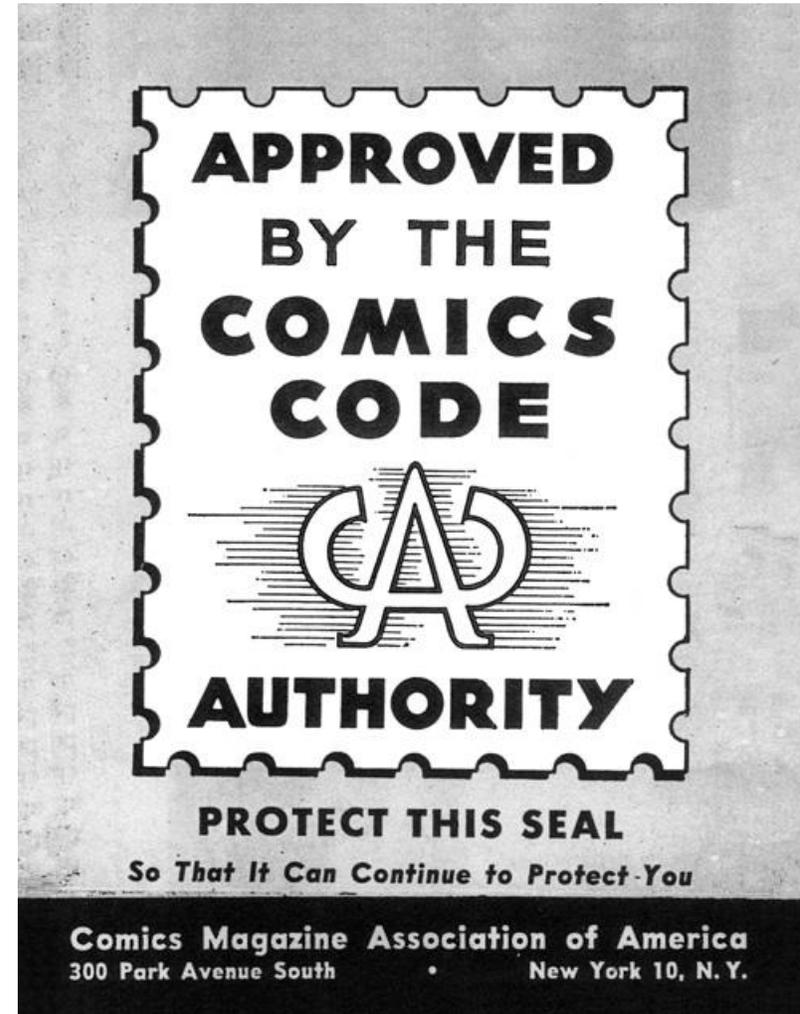
## Positive Press Reaction

- In addition to the *New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, and even college papers like the *Highacres Collegian* (Penn State University) praised Marvel for resisting the Code to publish an anti-drug story
- The *Highacres Collegian* used the headline "Big Brother's Bubble Bursts," even though Marvel published the story at the behest of a government agency

Lawrence Van Gelder, "A Comics Magazine Defies Code Ban on Drug Stories," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), February 4, 1971: 37.

## 1971 Code Revision

- Narcotics and drug trafficking may be portrayed as long as explicitly portrayed as a dangerous and illegal vice
- Vampires, ghouls, and werewolves allowed in the “classic tradition”
  - Continued to limit the amount of gore, however
- Still upheld restrictions on sexuality, profanity, and advertisements



## *Green Lantern no. 76*

- April 1970
- Challenges the failure of comic book superheroes to address social issues
- Discusses housing inequality
  - Housing in the north grew increasingly segregated, sometimes through sundown laws, but more commonly through restrictive covenants and racially discriminatory lending policies



Photograph: Lee A. Deverell/Richard D. Deverell

## Epilogue from *Green Lantern* no. 76

- Engages with 1960s-1970s issues of alienation, civil rights, campus unrest, and the loss of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 – a year seen as one of the most traumatic in U.S. history at the time



Photograph: Lee A. Deverell/Richard D. Deverell

## *Green Lantern no. 85*

- October 1971
- Followed Marvel's anti-drug story and the 1971 Code revision
  - Note the Code seal of approval on the right side of the cover under the "W" in Green Arrow



Photograph: Lee A. Deverell/Richard D. Deverell

## Detail from *Green Lantern* no. 85

- Further evokes youthful feelings of alienation amid the social upheaval of the 1960s-1970s
- Note how the comic portrays multi-racial drug use on the same page
- The depiction of Speedy differs from the cover
  - On the cover, he wears his superhero sidekick costume while he's dressed in civilian clothes here
  - The cover included a needle, bottle, and spoon as part of his drug kit; here he just has a packet



Photograph: Lee A. Deverell/Richard D. Deverell

## The Final Code

- Final revision in 1989
  - Allowed publishers to create more adult material to be sold directly in comic shops
  - Language must be appropriate for intended readers
  - Characterizations must show sensitivity to national, ethnic, religious, sexual, political, and socioeconomic differences; reflect prevailing social attitudes
- Marvel Comics left in 2001
- DC and Archie Comics left in 2011





**Thank you!**

**Questions? Post them in the chat box!**

