Welcome to Online Office Hours!

We’ll get started at 2PM ET
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

Martha Kennedy
Curator of Popular & Applied Graphic Art, Library of Congress
Prints and Photographs Division

Richard D. Deverell
PhD Candidate, Department of History, SUNY Buffalo
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
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.)
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](#)
  - Try search terms: `comic, comic strips, funnies, commix, comic books`. You might also consider searching for particular cartoonists, by name.

Related Resources on the Library’s Website
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

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, NYWT&S Collection, LC-USZ62-135434
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)
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.
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.

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!