SELLING MORAL PANIC: SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM OF MOVIES AND
COMIC BOOKS FOR CHILDREN, 1925-1955.

by

THOMAS WILLIAM ALLAN HULL

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Daniel Cohen

Department of History
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

May, 2010
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

We hereby approve the thesis/dissertation of

_______Thomas William Allan Hull______________________________

candidate for the ___Master of Arts__________degree *.

(signed)_____Daniel A. Cohen_____________________________
    (chair of the committee)

______ Renee Sentilles______________________________

______ John Grabowski_____________________________


(date) ___January 13, 2010_____________

*We also certify that written approval has been obtained for any proprietary material contained therein.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables 4

Acknowledgments 5

Abstract 6


Bibliography 55
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: The Payne Fund Studies and Their Authors  13
Acknowledgements

In the course of my research I have been aided by a number of people, whom I would like to take a moment to thank. Comic book research is hindered by a lack of available source material, so I would like to thank the staff at the Ray and Pat Browne Library for Popular Culture Studies at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. A special thank you goes out to Amanda Dahlin and Daniel Kavka for providing me with a place to stay when I visited Bowling Green.

In a similar vein, I would like to thank the staff at Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio for their help in accessing the Payne Fund Archives.

Thank you to all the people who agreed to read drafts for me at various times: Mom, Dad, Ellen, Meg and anyone else I’ve forgotten.

Thank you to Dr. Madonna Hettinger, who helped me find my first “Flight of Fancy,” and helped remind me that it is called Action Comics, not Passive Comics.

Thank you especially, to my advisor, Dr. Daniel Cohen, and my readers Drs. John Grabowski and Renee Sentilles, who helped me shape a vague idea into something solid and definitive. I could not have done this without you.
Selling Moral Panic:
Social Scientific Criticism of Movies and Comic Books for Children,
1925-1955.

by

Thomas Hull

ABSTRACT

In the twentieth century, social scientists criticized both the motion picture and comic book industries for their impact on the young. In *Our Movie Made Children* (1933) Henry Forman summarized studies by the Motion Picture Research Council and the Payne Fund that explored the sometimes harmful influence of popular films on children. Similarly, in *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) psychiatrist Fredric Wertham drew on his own clinical work with troubled youth to link comic books to juvenile delinquency. The two books shared many similarities in tone, style, method, intent, and content, but received divergent responses from reviewers, academics, policymakers, and general readers. Those disparities resulted from various factors, including differences in the age composition (and political power) of the audiences for movies and comic books, the varying effectiveness of each industry’s own pre-existing self-censorship organization, and broad changes in American society and culture between the 1920s and 1950s.
In the aftermath of the shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999, Americans looked for something that could have caused two teens to commit murder on such a grand scale. Media outlets and behavioral experts blamed a range of influences, from the teenagers’ upbringings to the gun culture pervasive in the United States at the time. Immediately following the event, however, critics directed their accusations at contemporary popular culture, specifically rock music and violent video games. To many Americans, the theory that violence in popular culture had caused the shooting rampage that left thirteen dead and twenty-four wounded seemed persuasive. Ten years later, as more facts about the shooters and the incident are revealed, the accusations of media influence fall away to reveal a more complex and confusing story of two deeply disturbed adolescents.¹ Nevertheless, the reaction to the Columbine shootings shows a common pattern in which social critics blame newly emerging forms of popular culture for recent societal ills. This pattern is by no means unique to the 1990s; on the contrary, popular culture has been a source of panic for much of the nation’s history. Two notable instances of public concern directed at new media earlier in the century concerned motion pictures during the 1920s and 30s, and comic books during the late 1940s and 1950s.

Motion pictures in the 1920s were both controversial and extremely popular. Millions of Americans of all ages attended movies each week, and what was once simply a marginal amusement became a medium of mass entertainment. The studios attempted to bring in as many people as possible, often by appealing to the prurient interests of potential viewers. The resulting sexual content in films raised concern among social reformers of the decade. Though the studios formed the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) to protect themselves from government intervention, the concern over
movies continued through the late 1920s, with the establishment of the Motion Picture Research Council to study the effect of movies on children. The 1933 book, *Our Movie Made Children*, summarized the group’s findings and received a mixed response from the public.

Comic books, another new form of popular culture, achieved a high level of popularity, starting in the late 1930s. The short, colorful, newsprint pamphlets featured a variety of story types, predominantly of the super hero, detective or adventure genres in the pre-war years. The *New York Times* reported in 1946 that a single company, DC Comics, sold 26 million comics in the first quarter of that year. Crime and horror comic book genres alone soon exceeded those sales figures, and raised concerns among social critics because of their violent content. A number of comic book publishers formed the Association of Comic Magazine Publishers (ACMP) in 1948, in an attempt to create a self-censorship body for the comic book industry similar to the MPPDA. Lack of industry participation in the ACMP made it an ineffective organization that failed to placate those calling for reform. Dr. Fredric Wertham, a German-born psychiatrist who ran a free psychiatric clinic in Harlem, was the most vocal critic of comic books, targeting them for their depictions of violence and of “deviant” sexual behavior. In his view, the problem of juvenile delinquency, a major concern at the time, resulted from the influence of comic books.

Both the motion picture and comic book censorship movements contained many elements of a moral panic. As defined by Stanley Cohen in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), a “moral panic” is a situation where “a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests.” Cohen further adds that politicians, editors, religious figures and “other right-thinking people” act as critics of
the objectionable phenomenon, while “socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions.” In both the film and comic book efforts there was a single work of social science that largely defined the respective moral panics. For motion pictures, that was *Our Movie Made Children*; for comic books it was Dr. Fredric Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). Drawing on observations compiled over a number of years at his psychiatric clinic in Harlem, Wertham’s volume summarized his conclusions about the link between comic books and juvenile delinquency. The two books shared a number similarities; both presented their facts in a manner designed shock the reader, both denigrated opposing viewpoints, both books advocated censorship of their respective industries and both drew on first-hand, anecdotal testimony from troubled youngsters.

One might have thought that the books would have received much the same treatment from the American public. Despite the strong similarities between them, however, the two books produced different results: *Our Movie Made Children* had little effect on the motion picture industry, while *Seduction of the Innocent* helped prompt the establishment of a harsh censorship board for comic books. Those dissimilar outcomes resulted from three main factors. First, the audience composition of the two media differed in a significant way: age. Comic books readers were generally under the age of twenty-one while motion pictures attracted Americans of all ages. In other words, movies had a fan base with the political clout (as voters) to deter draconian efforts at censorship; by contrast, the vast majority of comic book readers were politically powerless juveniles. Second, the two industries’ own pre-existing censorship organizations differed greatly in their effectiveness prior to the publication of the two books. The MPPDA enforced its standards and had industry-wide participation; the ACMP was unable to impose its guidelines even on the small number of
publishers who joined the organization. Third, the national mood changed between the 1920s and 1950s, most notably in terms of what Americans feared. Fears of sexual promiscuity in the decade before the Great Depression gave way to fears of violent juvenile delinquency and Communist subversion in the post-World War II era. These major factors combined to create environments that produced differing outcomes for the seemingly similar exposés.

Movies in the 1920s were an ubiquitous pastime, attended by both young and old. The advent of synchronized sound film with Al Jolson’s *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 added new appeal to the already popular amusement. The content of movies ranged from slapstick comedies to gangster films; from musicals to adaptations of classic books and plays. Frequent attendance prior to World War I was so prevalent among children that social activists like Jane Addams of Hull House were concerned about the content of movies and hoped to transform them into a good influence. As films became more and more popular, concern over their violent and sexual content grew. By the 1920s, a number of states, most notably New York and Ohio, had established censorship boards to ensure that films exhibited within their borders did not violate standards of good taste. The boards edited finished film prints for “inappropriate content,” a term whose meaning varied from state to state; what was acceptable in one state was obscene in another.

Negative press surrounding the state censorship boards, as well as their influence on the art form, prompted the major studios—20th Century Fox, Paramount, Warner’s, RKO and MGM—to form the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1922, a trade organization designed to protect the films from post-release censorship.
organization chose William H. Hays, former Postmaster General and presidential campaign manager for Warren G. Harding, as chairman. The organization considered Hays, a Presbyterian, the perfect choice for the role because of his political clout, and his ability to act as a liaison between the studios and the predominantly Protestant reformers. Americans identified Hays so closely with the MPPDA and its self-censorship office that people often referred to it simply as the “Hays Office” or “Hays Commission.” The Hays Office helped put in place a number of guidelines for on-screen content and the off-screen behavior of actors under contract with the studios. It took a number of years for the industry to reconcile itself with the Association. Initial efforts by the MPPDA in the early 1920s allowed for the defeat of a proposed censorship law in Massachusetts, however many notable producers and directors felt that the guidelines infringed on their creativity as artists. The Hays office distributed a list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” to both the press and the studios in 1927, containing recommendations against depictions or use of “profanity, nudity, drug trafficking, sex perversion, white slavery, miscegenation, sex hygiene and venereal diseases, scenes of actual childbirth, children’s sex organs, ridicule of the clergy,” and “offenses against a race, creed or nation.” Many of the studios simply ignored the guidelines and went on producing films as they saw fit. With roughly two thousand deletions by state censorship boards in the first six months of 1929, it was clear to Hays that the industry needed to change the way it made films. His salvation came via of Martin Quigley, publisher of the Motion Picture Herald. Quigley used his influence to convince the motion picture industry that Hays was the man who could keep the state boards and reformers from crippling their business. It was imperative for the industry to find a way to work with or bypass the state censorship boards,
as it was estimated that sixty percent of revenue came from jurisdictions employing censorship boards.\textsuperscript{11}

The moral panic of the 1920s did not restrict itself to movies; rather, it focused more broadly on the young people of the nation. Much of the criticism aimed at the films of the 1920s condemned the excessive sexual content of many pictures. Big-name actresses like Joan Crawford, Clara Bow, and Mae West were reviled in some circles for appearing in films featuring raunchy dialogue, suggestive action and risqué costuming. Indeed, throughout the 1920s and 30s, many of the battles between the studios and the Association would be over sex-related issues, as opposed to crime and violence. This fear of changing sexual mores, especially among the young, was a commonly voiced concern about youth in the 1920s. In her book \textit{The Beautiful and the Damned}, Paula Fass notes that the greatest concern among social critics was the immorality of the young and society’s failure to produce moral progeny.\textsuperscript{12} The behaviors that caused the greatest concern among the “traditionalists,” according to Fass, were smoking, dancing, petting and drinking (illegal until 1933).\textsuperscript{13}

These fears were perhaps best expressed in the 1929 \textit{Middletown} study of Muncie, Indiana conducted by Robert and Helen Lynd.\textsuperscript{14} The parents of Muncie complained about the behavior of their children, especially those who went out on numerous dates rather than spending time at home.\textsuperscript{15} Fass acknowledges, however, that the revulsion toward freer sexual mores was not universal. In fact, the group she terms “progressives” looked to the youth of the nation as exemplars of the way people should live.\textsuperscript{16} While movies were a source of entertainment for the young and a source of concern among religious groups as well as state and local governments, it does not appear that motion pictures were a major point of contention for much of the decade. More often than not, automobiles were blamed
for the increase in promiscuity, which a Muncie judge referred to as “houses of prostitution on wheels.” This view was not limited to adults; a New York City youth said that “there wouldn’t be a virgin left in town,” if he had a car. To say that the moral panic of the 1920s centered on movies would be, at best, an exaggeration. While progressives and traditionalists debated the morality of youth and, by extension, the nation, they did not argue over the specific effect of motion pictures on children. However a new concern over crime and violence in the late 1920s changed the way critics framed their objections to movies.

Even as the MPPDA fought the studios and the state censorship boards, another organization questioned the influence of movies on children. The Payne Fund and the Motion Picture Research Council (MPRC), founded in 1926, grew out of the National Committee for the Study of Juvenile Reading (NCSJR). Formed the year before by Frances Payne Bolton, the goal of the NCSJR was to fund studies that researched methods to raise interest in reading among children, a goal that the Payne Fund would return to after its work with motion pictures. The MPRC chose William Short, a stridently anti-movie minister, as its chairman; Short had devoted himself to creating a government censorship office for the motion picture industry. Past attempts at legislation had failed due to a lack of scientific evidence to support claims of negative influence, something Short hoped the MPRC would provide with its Payne Fund Studies (PFS). After his appointment to the Council, Short set about compiling a collection of the “existing opinion” of motion pictures which film historian Robert Sklar later described as a scrapbook of anti-movie propaganda that was “hardly worth the paper it was printed on.” Short’s relentless hostility toward movies would cause problems prior to the publication of the Payne Fund Studies.
The Payne Fund researchers conducted studies between 1928 and 1931, and published most of their results in 1933. The studies attempted to answer a number of questions about movies and their effect on both adults and children. In the planning stages of the PFS, Short expressed the need to obtain six basic pieces of information about the effect of films on children: (1) how many children were reached; (2) a quantitative measure of the movies’ influence; (3) the positive, negative or neutral qualities of said influence; (4) the difference in influence based on gender, age, intelligence or “temperament;” (5) the influence on children’s informational processing, attitudes, emotions, conduct and aesthetic and moral standards, and (6) the influence of film on such “important matters” as respect for authority, marriage, forms of crime, health, hero worship and international understanding.

Table 1: The Payne Fund Studies and Their Authors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Title of Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Blumer</td>
<td>Movies and Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Blumer and Philip M. Hauser</td>
<td>Movies, Delinquency and Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. W. Charters</td>
<td>Motion Pictures and Youth: A Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Cressey and Frederic Thrasher</td>
<td>Boys, Movies and City Streets (unpublished)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar Dale</td>
<td>Children’s Attendance at Motion Pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar Dale</td>
<td>The Content of Motion Pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar Dale</td>
<td>How to Appreciate Motion Pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. S. Dysinger and Christian A. Ruckmick</td>
<td>The Emotional Responses of Children to the Motion Picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry James Forman</td>
<td>Our Movie Made Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. W. Holaday and George D. Stoddard</td>
<td>Getting Ideas from the Movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark May and Frank Shuttleworth</td>
<td>The Social Conduct and Attitudes of Movie Fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles C. Peters</td>
<td>Motion Pictures and Standards of Morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth C. Peterson and L. L. Thurstone</td>
<td>Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Renshaw, Vernon L. Miller, and Dorothy Marquis</td>
<td>Children’s Sleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Payne Fund Studies were conducted by psychologists and sociologists from a number of institutions, including Yale University and Ohio State University, and the studies.
themselves were conducted predominantly in New York City and Columbus, Ohio. This approach disregarded possible regional differences in taste and opinion; however, some of the studies dealt with that as a variable, most notably Mark May and Frank Shuttleworth’s study of movies’ influence on personal opinions. The Payne Fund produced nine studies, eight of which would eventually be published.  


Overall the studies came to the general conclusion that movies did exert some influence on children, as well as on the entire movie-going audience. Children attending movies gained information and would correctly retain it at a rate of roughly sixty percent the rate of adults.  

The May and Shuttleworth study showed that movies had a negligible effect on the attitudes of children. The researchers concluded that the effect of movies hinged on specific films and specific audience members, and that negative behavior could be both produced and negated by any number of factors.  

In another study, Ruth Peterson and L. L. Thurstone questioned junior high and high school students on their reactions to movies and verified May and Shuttleworth’s findings. For instance, the opinions on “Negroes” of sixth to twelfth graders shown the unrelentingly racist *The Birth of a Nation* shifted significantly in an unfavorable direction, while students shown the pacifist leaning *All Quiet on the Western Front* had a less favorable opinion of war after viewing the film. Other studies found that films showing dangerous or erotic situations excited children, with variations based on age groups; the scenes did not significantly stimulate the youngest age group, while the 13- to 15-year-old age group exhibited the most extreme reactions.  

Yet another study found that
viewing movies disturbed sleep, concluding “that seeing some films does induce a disturbance of relaxed, recuperative sleep in children to a degree which, if indulged with sufficient frequency, can be regarded as detrimental to normal health and growth.”

Two other Payne Fund studies addressed a common fear about popular culture: that it led people, especially children, to immoral or criminal behavior. In America, this fear of dated back hundreds of years, to Cotton Mather’s accusation that ballads of the era were a corrupting influence. Herbert Blumer’s study, Movies, Delinquency and Crime, used high school and university students, as well as office workers and factory workers, as subjects; the school children lived in neighborhoods with varying levels of delinquency. Blumer and his assistant, Philip Hauser, examined written autobiographies, supplemented by interviews and questionnaires, to determine whether movies led to juvenile delinquency. The two researchers also studied responses to movies by prison inmates. Their conclusions roughly coincided May and Thurstone: movies exerted an influence on the viewer that could be either negative or positive, and different individuals reacted differently. The MPRC never published Fredric Thrasher and Paul Cressey’s study, “Boys, Movies and City Streets,”, though the results of the study were incorporated into Our Movie Made Children, the popular summary of the Payne Fund Studies by Henry Forman.

Once most of the Payne Fund Studies were completed and ready for publication, William Short, on behalf of the Payne Fund, chose journalist and author Henry James Forman to write the popular summary of the studies. Our Movie Made Children was actually published prior to the appearance of the underlying research reports, and its purpose was to provide a more accessible version of the results and conclusions for a non-academic audience. Forman’s final product reflected the data of the studies; however, most of the
book’s conclusions were his own, a point noted in an introduction written by PFS Director W. W. Charters. Forman’s argument stretches across sixteen chapters, each of which pose and then answer a question related to movies. His early chapters established the size and make up of the motion picture audience (“Who Goes to the Movies?”), the objectionable content (“What Do They See?”), and what viewers retained from their movie going experience (“How Much Do They Remember?”). The first two chapters were essentially summaries of Edgar Dale’s two studies, stating that children comprised thirty-seven percent of the movie audience, and that thirty-two percent of children attended alone. Dale concluded that, by 1930, nearly seventy-five percent of films dealt either with crime, sex or love, with another eight and a half percent dealing with mystery or war. This saturation of films with sex and violence would be the crux of Forman’s overarching argument that movies were a negative influence on the nation’s children. He spoke directly to parents, his intended audience, in the chapter “What Do They See?” painting a picture of a parent’s decision to allow his child to attend a movie on a weekend; the section implied the youth would inevitably see a picture with harmful content, rather than one of the few inoffensive films. When discussing the Holaday study on what viewers remember, Forman seemed particularly upset that children learned incorrect historical facts from movies, and that they accurately remembered sixty percent of what they saw.

Once Forman established his conclusions that motion pictures were widely attended and included significant harmful content, he explored various negative effects of the movies, including an increased propensity toward crime, sexual delinquency, disturbed sleep, and negative racial or ethnic stereotypes. His special concern with horror and “fright pictures” stemmed from children’s lack of what is referred to as the “adult discount”— the ability that
adults have to remember that the films they view are works of fiction. Forman held up *The Phantom of the Opera* (the 1929 re-release with sound) as the standard for a horror movie that scared both adults and children. The Lon Chaney film reportedly led to eleven instances of fainting (including four men, Forman was quick to note) and one miscarriage in a single day at a Chicago theater. The overall conclusion of the middle section of the book was that movies excited children to the point of harming them physically and mentally.

The latter third of the book dealt with the effect movies exert on children’s behavior and opinions. Forman acknowledged the conclusion by the PFS researchers that films may have both positive and negative effects, but nonetheless highlighted the dearth of “good” films. Despite acknowledging the positive effects, however briefly, Forman spent the rest of the chapter “Molded by the Movies” detailing the negative effects. While summarizing Blumer’s results, the book quoted heavily from the autobiographies used for the study in order to “show what a tremendous part the movies play in the major as well as in the minor things of life of American youth.” While Blumer’s conclusions were mixed, Forman implied that the majority of movies were “bad” films. Empirical evidence from the Dale studies appears to support Forman’s conclusion, and is arguably the book’s most solid argument.

In his next two chapters, Forman proceeded to describe how depictions of criminal behavior could lead children to commit crimes. Drawing on the studies of Blumer and Thurstone, Forman described one young man who attributed his first attempted robbery to seeing Lon Chaney’s *The Unholy Three*. Other boys offered up similar admissions about their path to crime; for example, a boy of sixteen told the researchers “from these criminal pictures I got the idea that I wanted to participate in crime, robbing stores preferably.”
Readers of the 1930s were, no doubt, shocked by such anecdotes. Forman summarized his feelings about movies, saying that “at best [movies] carry a high potential of value and quality in entertainment, in instruction, in desirable effects upon mental attitudes and ideals,” but that “at their worst they carry the opposite possibilities.” Forman called the results of the Payne Fund Studies “grave,” a term that highlights his personal bias and certainly over-dramatizes the findings.

Forman’s arguments seldom focused on issues of gender. Though he rarely differentiated between boys and girls, save for treating them as different demographic groups when establishing rates of attendance at movies, Forman did distinguish between the sexes in discussing delinquency. In his chapter, “Movie Made Criminals,” he focused solely on male criminals and juvenile delinquents, pointing out that “numerous minor delinquencies are attributed by boys to the movies—stealing small sums, robbing a chicken coop, a small newsboy or a fruit vendor—little is thought of these acts by the boys or even their elders.” His use of the term “boys,” a change from his earlier use of “children” or “youths,” indicates an assumption that property offenses and violent crimes were predominantly committed by males. Every example used in that chapter centers around a young male criminal; females are only occasionally mentioned as victims.

The following chapter “Sex-Delinquency and Crime,” however, focuses solely on females. Forman opened with the claim that truancy “used to be a simple thing,” perpetrated mostly by boys, but that “today it is the girls who play truant most frequently, and generally the temptation is strengthened in the movies.” The chapter detailed how the movies created a desire among young women and girls for “the gay life,” including clothes, money, cars and attention. One example is an eighteen-year-old white “sexual delinquent” who, enticed by
the movies, wanted “a car and lots of money,” which she “most always” got through sex. Forman also made assertions about the link between romance and love pictures and sex delinquency—a euphemism for premarital sexual contact and perhaps also prostitution—among young women. A seventeen-year-old “negro” girl confessed to wanting to live like the actresses she saw, admitting “I used to go and get men to support me for a month or so and then change around and get me another man to live with.” Forman clearly differentiated the criminal influence of movies by gender, with property and violent crime attributed to men, and sexual delinquency to young women. By contrast, Forman did not discriminate racially; though he designated his subjects as “white” and “negro,” he did not describe different patterns of delinquency based on race.

Judging by its sales, *Our Movie Made Children* seems to have been a success; the book went through seven printings in less than two years. However, critics and reviewers were not fully convinced by Forman’s conclusions. Concurrent with the release of *Our Movie Made Children*, William Short presented a paper to the New York Section of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers entitled “Unoccupied Motion Picture Fields: Some Discoveries of the Payne Fund Research.” This paper summarized the various conclusions of the studies in much the same manner as Forman’s book, and it provoked a response. A month later, an electrical engineer at the College of the City of New York, Alfred Goldsmith, presented a paper to the same group entitled “Avoiding-Pseudo Scientific Studies of the Movies” (sic). Goldsmith attacked the validity of the Payne Fund Studies, saying “true scientific research is made to suffer by the orgy of surveys, investigations and studies undertaken to forward self-centered rather than altruistic and scientific movements.” He also criticized the studies’ lack of peer review, an accepted part of the scientific method.
This portion of the process was omitted in favor of allowing journalists to release their interpretations of the data before verifying that the tests met standards of scientific rigor.\textsuperscript{59} The lack of control groups, testing multiple variables in a single experiment, and Short’s use of his personal collection of anti-movie propaganda served to cast further doubt on the validity of both Short’s paper and the research as a whole.

Even Payne Fund insiders expressed skepticism concerning the objectivity of \textit{Our Movie Made Children}. PFS director W. W. Charters expressed these doubts in a letter to Forman: “being so extremely anti-movie, I do not feel that the manuscript [accurately] interprets the position of the investigators.”\textsuperscript{60} Fredric Thrasher also wrote a letter to Reverend Short that included a number of criticisms of an early draft of the book. Thrasher told Short that he felt Forman gave “the impression of selecting damaging material to the movies.”\textsuperscript{61} He continued, stating that “there is no impartial discussion of any of the problems that might present themselves to the makers of motion pictures which would indicate the attitudes of impartial approach.” Thrasher worried that this lack of objectivity would weaken the Payne Fund’s case against movies.\textsuperscript{62} Other researchers also objected to the use and interpretation of their data either to members of the MPRC or the Payne Fund. Some even took their complaints public; for example, Mark May published a letter to the editor of the \textit{Christian Science Monitor} refuting claims in other newspapers that the PFS had definitively linked movies to delinquent behavior.\textsuperscript{63}

\textit{Our Movie Made Children} had been challenged both by academics and some of the very social scientists whose studies it purported to summarize. The journalistic response to the book was mixed at best. Some journalists, such as \textit{Chicago News and Post} columnist Sterling North, found vindication for their previously held beliefs. North felt that “scientific
observation evidently justifies our worst fears,” concluding that “we have turned over the education and discipline of our children to the movie producers.”64 In his article, North summarized the book and highlighted his own prior criticisms of movies. (North would later aim similar accusations at comic books.) Other journalists criticized Forman for his lack of objectivity. Kaspar Monahan of the Pittsburgh Press, for example, approvingly cited Alfred Goldsmith’s rejection of Forman’s conclusions.65 Others, like James Gray of the St. Paul Dispatch, also refuted Forman’s claims, pointing out his clear bias. Gray admonished Forman and the entire MPRC for placing too much blame for juvenile crime on movies; he felt that films were no worse in their content than books, plays or music.66 Some reviewers agreed with Forman’s intention, but disagreed with his presentation. W. Ward Marsh of the Cleveland Plain Dealer praised Forman for writing the book, and was surprised that nothing had been written sooner.67 Marsh nevertheless went on to say that while he agrees movies are a bad influence, he was reluctant to go as far as Forman in blaming the movies for social ills like juvenile delinquency.68 Even though the journalistic response varied greatly, a common thread ran through all of their assessments. Regardless of their stance, reviewers invariably grounded their discussion in their own existing attitudes or experiences with the movies. Both North and Marsh discussed how they had previously spoken out against movies, while Gray and Monahan cited their own independently formed opinions on the matter. Movies had become such a pervasive form of entertainment by the 1930s that nearly every American could view him or herself as an expert on the subject.

While the Motion Picture Research Council conducted the Payne Fund Studies, the Hays Office responded to criticism in its own way. By 1929, it was obvious to Will Hays that the studios were ignoring the MPPDA list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” and that the
organization needed a new code. Hays enlisted Martin Quigley, publisher of the *Motion
Picture Herald* and Jesuit priest Father Daniel Lord to write a new production code that
would satisfy both the studios and the increasing criticism from religious and social groups. The code, approved in 1930 by the MPPDA and studios, followed three principles: no picture
would lower the standards of the viewer; correct standards of life should be presented; and no
law, either natural or human, should be ridiculed or sympathetically violated. Quigley and
Lord included specific restrictions against depictions of crime that encouraged imitation,
strong sexual content, improper language, ridicule of religion, or “repellent subjects.” The
restructuring of the Studio Relations Committee of the MPPDA into the Production Code
Administration in 1934 allowed for full enforcement of the code. The stronger production
code and the establishment of the Production Code Administration were important steps for
the industry, as they demonstrated a willingness to produce films that did not violate the
public’s moral sensibilities.

The official MPPDA response to *Our Movie Made Children* came in 1938 with the
publication of Raymond Moley’s *Are We Movie-Made?* The Hays Office commissioned
Moley, a professor of law at Columbia University and speechwriter for President Franklin
Roosevelt, to write a summary of philosopher Mortimer J. Adler’s book *Art and Prudence: A
Study in Practical Philosophy* (1937). Originally conceived to justify motion pictures as an
art form, Adler’s book was, as the title suggests, a philosophical treatise. The 686-page tome
included an extensive discussion of the Payne Fund Studies. Adler’s feelings on the PFS are
revealed in two chapters, both titled “Attempts at Scientific Research.” He divided the
studies into two groups: those he felt were good quality science, subtitled “The Mature,” and
those he felt failed basic scientific rigor, subtitled “The Immature.” He held up the study
by Thurstone and Peterson as an example of good science on the basis of its scientific technique and its inclusion of results that did not fit its authors’ original thesis. Much of Adler’s book is devoted to the philosophical aspects of the motion picture debate about whether movies are art, and, at times, the high academic language obscured the response to specific criticism. In much the same way that the Payne Fund used *Our Movie Made Children* to present their results to the public, the MPPDA used *Are We Movie-Made?* as a popular summary of Adler’s argument.

Moley’s summary was an accurate representation of Adler’s arguments; however the former made his points with more vitriol than the latter. Where *Art and Prudence* had been a slow-paced, well thought out argument, *Are We Movie-Made?* was a combative critique of the Payne Fund Studies. Moley reserved most of his bile for Forman, saying that *Our Movie Made Children* was “not a genuine summary,” but that the Motion Picture Research Council had presented it as such. Forman’s accusations of “movie made criminals,” attracted special attention: “There are many crimes in America. Seventy-seven million people (his figure) go weekly to movies. Thirteen delinquent witnesses testify that movies taught them criminal ways. Ergo criminals are ‘movie-made.’” Moley is, in effect, the polar opposite of Forman; the argument of the former exists to tear down that of the latter. The fact that the Hays Office felt that *Our Movie Made Children* needed a response five years after its publication suggests that the motion picture industry’s own censor may have resented the intrusion of a potential rival. The lack of any major MPPDA policy changes as a result of the studies, however, conveys confidence in the strength of the industry’s position.

The Motion Picture Research Council’s focus on the effects of movies on children is worthy of note. While prior criticism of movies inevitably included arguments about the
deleterious effects on young people, it had never been the main focus; generally the debate looked toward broader social consequences. By concentrating solely on children, the Payne Fund Studies ignored a large portion of the movie-going audience. Assuming that Forman (and Dale) were correct in stating that children were thirty-seven percent of the motion picture audience, the other sixty-three percent were adults. These adults, some of whom were inevitably parents (Forman’s target audience), attended the movies for pleasure, just as children did. This created a problem with the reception of Our Movie Made Children; the parents of movie-going children, the target audience for the book, were movie attendees as well, and formed their own opinions on the motion picture industry and its product. It was easier, then, for readers to discount Forman’s dire conclusions about the negative influence of the movies as incorrect or exaggerated, based on their personal observations, in much the same way as some of the reviewers had done. Further, in theory, parents could always decide which movies their children could and could not attend. While many children attended movies unaccompanied by their parents, it is naive to think that no parent held any authority over what movies the children viewed. Additionally, the movies used in the studies were pre-Hays Code (made prior to 1934) and may have contained objectionable content not found in post-Code films. Thus, parents could dismiss the Payne Fund Studies as outdated, since Hollywood had already cleaned up its act in the interim. Despite its commercial popularity, the combination of these factors contributed to the failure of Our Movie Made Children as an effective piece of anti-movie propaganda.

A few years after the appearance of Our Movie Made Children, a company called National Allied Publications released a small, pulp-paper booklet entitled Action Comics #1,
ushering in the Golden Age of comic books. These small, pulp paper magazines with colorful pictures—which soon became known as comic books—quickly captured the attention of a vast, largely juvenile audience, with an estimated seven to ten million copies sold each month by 1941. The medium offered a wide variety of genres, from the dark mysteries in *Detective Comics* (1937) to the lighter humor of Archie’s Riverdale High School in *Pep Comics* (1941). Other popular topics included westerns, jungle themes, Disney characters, and space adventures. Costumed superheroes such as Batman, Superman and Captain Marvel, however, dominated the market for most of the 1930s. Publishers constantly looked for the new “hot” genre to sell.

In 1942 the industry began to branch out from the superheroes who had previously dominated the market, turning especially to the “true crime” and, later, horror genres. While superhero comics usually included criminals for the heroes to fight, the new “true crime” comics featured ultra-realistic plots and did not resort to superhuman justice. Lev Gleason Publications first published *Crime Does Not Pay* in 1942, and for a dime anyone could get sixty-five pages of profusely illustrated crime stories at their local newsstand. Every issue contained a variety of “True Crime Cases,” ranging from tales of Wild West outlaws to contemporary gangsters. The covers often featured action-oriented and violent images that did not always relate to the stories contained inside; *Crime Does Not Pay* also featured a list of the stories contained within, adding further incentive for people to buy the magazine.

On May 8, 1940 the *Chicago Daily News* printed a column by Sterling North titled “A National Disgrace (And a challenge to American Parents).” This article heralded the beginning of the anti-comic book movement in the United States. The article attacked comics as “badly drawn, badly written and badly printed—a strain on young eyes and young
nervous systems.”\textsuperscript{84} “The effect of these pulp-paper nightmares,” North continued, “is that of a violent stimulant.”\textsuperscript{85} North’s hard line against what he called “sex-horror serials” focused on their tendency to draw children away from wholesome literature.\textsuperscript{86} Though North’s editorial raised awareness of the problem, the outbreak of war with Japan and Germany diverted the American public’s attention.\textsuperscript{87} After the war, however, Catholic periodicals began featuring articles attacking comic books, such as one in 1945 by Robert E. Southard, a Jesuit priest and college professor, who railed against the over-emphasis on sex and the allegedly fascist anti-Americanism of superheroes.\textsuperscript{88} Many of the accusations against comic books at this point were similar to those made against movies a decade earlier. Critics boldly stated that comic books strained children’s eyes, over-excited them, and led them to premature sexual behavior, criminal activity, and bigotry toward minorities.\textsuperscript{89}

By 1948, reports of accidental deaths blamed on comic books began to appear in such newspapers as the \textit{New York Times} and cities began to crack down on comics using the 1873 act for the “Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use,” more commonly called the Comstock Act.\textsuperscript{90} Many critics felt that enforcement of existing laws would be a sufficient response to the problem. In 1948, however, the Supreme Court struck down the Comstock Act in a case between a New York City bookseller and the State of New York. The court worried that the vague wording of the law might easily be misapplied to non-objectionable content; they did not, however, disagree with the law’s intent.\textsuperscript{91} This ruling came at a time when individual states and municipalities were banning specific comic books for their objectionable content, in effect replacing the Comstock Act. Some of these efforts were based in legislation, while others were simply police orders urged on by concerned citizens. By the time elementary schools held highly
publicized comic book burnings in New York State, the comic publishers knew they needed to take action.92 A group of comic publishers sought a solution in the Association of Comic Magazine Publishers (ACMP), established in 1948 as a censoring body to preside over as many publishers as would join. As it turned out, however, only six publishers, notably Lev Gleason Publications (Crime Does Not Pay) and the increasingly popular EC Comics, joined, along with two distributors. The ACMP created a sort of balance between the critics of comic books and the supporters. For the next few years, the publishers continued to publish unhindered, and those who objected continued to do so, without a large-scale push for censorship.

The complaints about the violent content of crime comics in the 1940s were not completely unwarranted. Charles Biro, the editor of Crime Does Not Pay, insisted on extreme realism from his authors and artists, demanding that items such as cars and guns look exactly as they did in real life. His approach also included “ripped from the headlines” true stories and colorful drawings in lieu of the gritty chiaroscuro art of other crime comics.93 Biro insisted that the point of stark realism was to discourage criminal activity by showing “the horror of the crooked path to crime.”94 The stories were simple but moralistic; often, they would detail the career of a criminal and highlight the one incident that pushed him to a life of crime. One issue on the dangers of gambling told the tale of Snookie Peters, who shot craps too many times, ending in a murder plot to pay off his debts. Narrated by a personified Death, the conclusion states that all the criminals involved in the murder plot died in the next few years and that “Death, the winner, took all!”95 Contrary to the claims of some critics, the criminals in such stories rarely triumphed in the end, though they were not always brought to justice legally. While crime comic books may have depicted criminals as monsters who
always received their just desserts, both crimes and punishments were often depicted in luridly violent detail. In many cases the less popular comics attempted to raise their sales by introducing even more violent content than their better-selling counterparts. This inevitably led to a disparity between the less popular comics with the most offensive content, and the less offensive, but more popular ones. Not surprisingly, comic book critics focused on the most offensive examples—and sometimes exaggerated their popularity.

The postwar resurgence of the comic book controversy began with a March 1948 article in Collier’s magazine entitled “Horror in the Nursery.” The author, Judith Crist, focused on a new figure in the debate, Dr. Fredric Wertham, and the work that he did with juvenile delinquents at his Lafargue Psychiatric Clinic, in Harlem. Wertham would bring the conflict to national attention with his psychologically-based criticism of comic books. Wertham was a German-born psychiatrist, educated in Germany and England, who worked at Johns Hopkins University and New York University prior to opening the Lafargue Clinic for underprivileged patients in 1946. His prior works, Dark Legend and The Show of Violence, dealt mainly with the nature of human aggression. In these books Wertham expressed his belief that violence was not inherent to the human condition. His work at the Lafargue clinic helped to form his opinions on comic books; he is quoted in the Collier’s article as saying “we found that comic-book reading was a distinct influencing factor in the case of every single delinquent or disturbed child we studied.” Crist’s article, complete with color photographs of staged recreations of real crimes involving children, detailed the observations of Wertham and his volunteers, noting that enforcement of “the present penal laws” (presumably a reference to the Comstock Act) would greatly reduce the influence of comics on American children. It also mentioned the upcoming psychological symposium on comic
books that Wertham had organized; Wertham later summarized his remarks at the symposium in a piece entitled “The Comics… Very Funny!” in the May issue of the *Saturday Review of Literature*. The article alternated sarcastic comments with lurid anecdotes about the horrible things that comic book readers did to other children. Despite his tendency toward sensationalism, Wertham’s writing typically exuded expertise, self-righteousness, and conviction. This characteristic may have aggravated his critics, but it helped promote his reputation as an authoritative expert on the topic of comic books and juvenile delinquency. Wertham’s critique helped launch the moral panic over comic books during the late 1940s—and it would frame the debate for the public next several years.

Just over a year after the psychology symposium, critics responded. The *Journal of Educational Sociology* published a single issue dealing wholly with the subject of comic books. Fredric Thrasher, former Payne Fund researcher and critic of *Our Movie Made Children*, responded directly to the *Collier’s* article about Wertham. Citing his own research on movies for the Payne Fund, Thrasher attacked Wertham’s lack of scientific rigor in the two-year study that had supposedly led him to his conclusions. Thrasher noted that despite evidence in his own studies that youths had used criminal techniques shown in movies, he specifically emphasized that his co-author, Paul Cressey, did not claim that movies were a cause of crime.99 Thrasher continued that “he does not mean that ‘good’ boys are enticed into crime by gangster films,” only that “boys and young men responsive to crime portrayals have been found on occasion to use ideas and techniques seen at the movies.”100 Thrasher then points out that Wertham’s work contained little analytical thinking or scientific reasoning but rather relied on overblown rhetoric.101 While Thrasher assailed the leader of the anti-comic book movement, other articles in the issue sought to assuage various parental
concerns about comic books. One sociologist, Harvey Zorbaugh, identified by Wertham’s biographer as a constant foil, provided statistics suggesting that only a quarter of adults had unfavorable opinions toward comic books as reading material for children, as opposed to thirty-six percent favorable.\textsuperscript{102} The collected essays did not imply that comic books were completely harmless; however, they all took issue with Wertham’s assertion that the medium caused juvenile delinquency and irreparable psychological harm to American children.

In response to Wertham’s criticisms, the ACMP established a list of editorial standards, similar to the MPPDA code.\textsuperscript{103} The code discouraged glorification of crime, depiction of torture, vulgarity and “sexy, wanton comics.” The association also planned to screen each comic prior to its publication, in a manner similar to the Hays Office.\textsuperscript{104} Despite fashioning itself after an already established and successful model, a number of problems plagued the ACMP. First, the goal of screening all comics for objectionable content was unfeasible because of a lack of manpower and was soon abandoned, leaving the publishers able to print virtually anything they wished with the “Conforms to the Comics Code” stamp on the cover.\textsuperscript{105} Second, the association had only fourteen of thirty-five comic book publishers among its members. It did not include the publishers of the most violent comics on the market, Fox and Harvey; nor did it include the two largest superhero comic publishers National (now called DC Comics) and Atlas (formerly Timely and later Marvel Comics).\textsuperscript{106} The self-censoring group was a good idea with poor planning and execution. Whereas the MPPDA could boast that it screened every film for the five major studios, the ACMP could not claim that it had the support of its whole industry, nor could it even say that it examined all of the products of its own sponsors. While the weaknesses of the ACMP would create problems in 1954, the large-scale push to censor comic books died down for a number of
years, as comic book critics regrouped in the wake of the 1948 Supreme Court decision that repealed the Comstock Act.

Meanwhile, William Gaines, head of EC Comics, looked for a way to increase his market share. The company had a small but fiercely loyal fan base, but its product was hard to distinguish from the hundreds of other crime comics on the market. In 1950, EC introduced its New Trend line, which, over the next few years, introduced horror titles like *Tales from the Crypt* and *The Haunt of Fear*, comics that drew elements from the crime and horror genres like *Shock SuspenStories*, war comics like *Frontline Combat* (capitalizing on the Korean War), science fiction books like *Weird Fantasy*, and satirical comics, most notably *Mad*. The horror and science fiction titles gained popularity, spreading rapidly and displacing many of the crime titles previously on the market. The New Trend line offered stories with bizarre twists and a penchant for gruesome violence and the supernatural. *Tales from the Crypt*, and the other horror titles, *The Haunt of Fear* and *The Vault of Horror*, featured tales of murder, dismemberment and revenge. While the grisly content undoubtedly appealed to young people, it presented mixed messages about violence and crime. One story about a cruel queen murdered by her servants stressed the need to respect one’s underlings; the abusive ruler received her karmic justice in death.\(^{107}\) The removal and public display of the queen’s head as a “portrait” was, however, simply gallows humor.\(^{108}\) In other cases the horror elements simply served to be the hand of justice, as in “Craft in Concrete,” where three city council members and a contractor are killed by outraged corpses who steamroll them into the pavement of a road they knowingly built over a cemetery.\(^ {109}\) Some stories were heavily moralistic, such as one that exposed the ill effects of drug use, while others were educational, such as in the “Special Civil War Issue” of *Two-Fisted Tales*.\(^ {110}\) Other
publishers followed suit, producing their own horror and suspense titles, each attempting to outdo EC in one way or another.  

The popularity of horror comics in the 1950s was somewhat ironic in light of the culture of fear that pervaded American society at the time. Anxieties in the postwar era focused on two main subjects: nuclear war and Communist spies. On September 3, 1949, the Russians performed their first successful nuclear test. With the United States having lost its nuclear monopoly, the fear of annihilation mixed with disbelief. President Harry Truman would later confess that he did not believe Russia truly had an atomic weapon, but he nonetheless authorized the expansion of the American nuclear program to include development of a Hydrogen bomb. Fear of the bomb was everywhere; Americans learned to “duck and cover” in case of a Russian attack. The strategy provided no actual protection, but gave citizens some small peace of mind as they went about their everyday business.

Hand in hand with Russia’s new atomic capability went the fear that Communist agents had infiltrated the United States. While the Red Scare of the 1950s had some basis in fact, it rapidly spun out of control. Klaus Fuchs, a physicist with the Manhattan Project, had been passing nuclear secrets to a Russian agent since his arrival at Los Alamos, including a description of the Plutonium bomb a month before its first test. British counterintelligence officers exposed Fuchs’ betrayal in early 1950; he gave them a full confession. Just over a month later, Wisconsin’s junior U.S. Senator, Joseph McCarthy, delivered a speech in which he claimed to have a list of 205 known Communists in the State Department, ushering in the era known as McCarthyism. The senator soon became known for his aggressive questioning of accused Communists at his televised hearings. The 1951 case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, perhaps the highest profile case of the era, revealed the
depth of American fears over Communists. Questionably convicted of passing information from Lost Alamos to the Russians, the Rosenbergs were executed in 1953, earning a place in history as the only Americans executed for treason in peacetime.

Around the same time of the Rosenberg trial, Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee catapulted himself to national attention with his televised hearings on organized crime. After introducing a bill into the Senate, Kefauver held hearings in New York City where Frank Costello, former lieutenant of Lucky Luciano and reported leader of organized crime in New York, laid bare the city’s corruption. The hearings captivated the nation, especially New York City, where about seventy percent of televisions watched Costello’s restless hands convey his every emotion. This was an important moment for both television and Senator Kefauver as it revealed the power of the former to reach large sections of America, and put the name of the latter on lips across the nation. While McCarthy continued to stir up fears of Communist infiltration well into the mid-1950s, Senator Kefauver turned his focus to another domestic fear: juvenile delinquency.

In light of a documented rise in juvenile delinquency after World War II, the United States Senate formed the Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in the spring of 1953. Whether juvenile crime actually increased in the postwar period is unclear. Senate records present statistics suggesting a thirty percent spike in a six year period prior to 1955. Those statistics, however, have been called into question by some authors, most notably David Hajdu in *The Ten-Cent Plague*. Hajdu pointed out that World War II-era statistics on juvenile delinquency from the FBI focused on arrests rather than convictions and did not account for new categories of crime such as loitering. Additionally, an April 1953 article in the *New York Times* cited recent figures which showed a decline in juvenile crime in
recent years; ironically, the Senate formed the Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency just
days after the article’s publication. The committee, headed first by New York Senator
Robert Hendrickson and then by Estes Kefauver, claimed not to be looking for a single
reason behind the rise in juvenile delinquency; rather, its original purpose was to address the
multiple causes of the problem.

Over the period of two weeks in April 1954, two events convinced the American
public that comic books needed to be censored: the publication of Seduction of the Innocent
and comic book hearings held by the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. Fredric
Wertham published his anti-comic book treatise, based on observations of patients in his
Lafargue Clinic in Harlem, in mid-April 1954. He states in his introduction: “I have come to
the conclusion that this chronic stimulation, temptation and seduction by comic books, both
their content and their alluring advertisements… are contributing factors to many children’s
maladjustment.” Wertham repeats concerns raised by earlier critics, such as the fear that
exposure to violence may lead to violent behavior in children, but adds another element by
claiming that comic books lead to deviant and sadomasochistic sexual behavior. The book
was set up in much the same way as Our Movie Made Children; each chapter dealt with a
specific topic, containing a number of anecdotes and Wertham’s personal conclusions. Some
of the chapter titles were unabashedly sensationalistic, such as “I Want to Be a Sex Maniac!,”
which discussed Wertham’s observations about the sexual influence of comic books. The
overall argument was that crime comic books (and nearly all comic books were “crime”
comics by his definition) harmed American children in a number of ways, resulting mainly in
violent urges, sadomasochistic sexual tendencies, and lower rates of literacy. The book
exploited the fear of juvenile delinquency that was widely prevalent in the early 1950s by
placing the blame squarely on comic books; in his chapter “Design for Delinquency,” he
cConfides that he has seen “many children who drifted into delinquency through no fault or
personal disorder of their own.”

Indeed, Wertham lists no fewer than twenty-two different crimes attributed to comic
books either by law enforcement officials, the delinquent themselves, or his own analysis. The examples include an eleven-year-old who killed a woman during a hold up, who, when
arrested, “was found surrounded by comic books.” Wertham continues the anecdote: “his
twenty-year-old brother said, ‘if you want the cause of all this, here it is: It’s those rotten
comic books. Cut them out, and things like this wouldn’t happen.’ (Of course, this brother
was not an ‘expert’; he just knew the facts.)” In another example a thirteen-year-old boy
“committed a lust murder” of a six-year-old girl; in jail, the sheriff refused the boy’s request
for comic books to read. Wertham blames the rise in delinquency on the power fantasies
found in many superhero comics, in what he calls “the Superman formula of winning by
force.” Many of the examples that Wertham provides are similar to those that Henry
Forman presented in Our Movie Made Children; either the delinquent blamed the crime on
the medium, or the author ascribed responsibility to it. Wertham places special emphasis on
stories revealed to him in a co-ed group therapy session which he refers to as the “Hookey
Club,” whose participants told him at various times that comic books had been instrumental
in teaching them how to be criminals.

The sexual aspect of Seduction of the Innocent is implicit in the very title of the book.
Unlike Forman’s arguments about movies, however, Wertham is less concerned with
extramarital sex (or prostitution) than he is with the sadomasochistic and deviant sexual
tendencies, specifically homosexuality, which he feels comic books encourage. He defines
sadism as “the gratification of sexual feeling by the infliction of or sight of pain.” He cites a fifteen-year-old boy who would ride his bike past girls and slap them on the breast, and discusses the ubiquity of erotic spanking in many types of comics, linking the two and stating that comic books encouraged this type of fetishistic behavior. Wertham quotes a twelve-year-old male “sex delinquent”: “In the comic books sometimes the men threaten the girls…[t]hey tie them around to a chair and then they beat them. When I read such a book, I get sexually excited. They don’t get me sexually excited all the time, only when they tie them up.”

Some of Wertham’s most provocative claims deal with the classic superheroes Wonder Woman and Batman. He accused Wonder Woman of encouraging masochistic submission, misandry, and lesbianism: “[she] is involved in adventures with another girl, a princess, who talks repeatedly about ‘those wicked men.’” Likewise, Wertham accused Batman and Robin of being involved in a homosexual relationship. He states, “It is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together. Sometimes they are shown on a couch, Bruce reclining and Dick sitting next to him, jacket off, collar open, and his hand on his friend’s arm.” Wertham states that the overtones in these two comics, and others like them, lead to homosexual confusion and eventually a homosexual lifestyle.

Wertham’s concerns reflected a much wider moral panic over homosexuality during the 1950s. Much of the fear of gays and lesbians in the postwar era was linked to other concerns, such as Communism. Whittaker Chambers was both a former member of the Communist Party and a confessed homosexual. As a high-profile case, Chambers solidified the perceived link between “perverts” (as FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover referred to homosexuals) and Communists. Homosexuals were deemed a “threat to national security;”
by 1950, gays and “Reds” were firmly linked by an accusation of Communists in the State Department and the concurrent dismissal of a number of employees for homosexuality.¹⁴² It was widely believed at the time that homosexuals were slaves to passion and were thus easier to corrupt into spies for Communist governments. Wertham exploited this fear by identifying characters as homosexual and implying that comic books could lead children to a gay lifestyle as adults.

In an argument reminiscent of the Motion Picture Research Council, Wertham’s other major assertion is that comic books hinder literacy and learning. He begins his chapter with an anecdote denigrating the comic book condensations of literary classics. Many children’s magazines at the time included a comic-book-style section, which a publisher speaking to Wertham called “retooling for illiteracy.”¹⁴³ Wertham then goes on to claim that comic books slow learning in that interpreting an image requires less brain function than interpreting the word that represents the same image.¹⁴⁴ Through a series of tables and charts, he further emphasizes his point that reading comic books leads to reading and learning disabilities and lower IQ’s. The rest of Seduction of the Innocent provides information that is supportive of one of these three points, save for a short chapter on the effects of television, which Wertham claims is also bad for children—though not nearly as bad as comic books, due to the broadcast standards for television that restricted objectionable content. In his conclusion, the author claims that nothing short of immediate action will save the nation’s youth from the dire threat of comic books.

Seduction of the Innocent approached the topic of gender in a similar way to Our Movie Made Children; both authors generally concentrate mainly on boys. Wertham, however, focuses even less on the comics’ deleterious effects on girls than Forman had with
movies. He frames most of his argument in terms of “children” in general, though when girls are mentioned it is usually as victims. When presenting a list of comic book consumers with reading problems, only two of the eleven listed are female. Wertham may have been working under one of two assumptions. He may have thought that girls did not read as many comic books as boys, and therefore were less often led to delinquency, or he may have felt that girls responded to comic books the same way as boys—in which case a single theory applied to both genders. Wertham occasionally mentions “love” comics which were targeted at girls; however, he includes them under his “crime” label. When Wertham’s co-ed therapy group “the Hookey Club,” raised the topic of sex in comic books, the doctor dismissed the girls and pre-adolescent boys from the meeting. This suggests that Wertham felt that the topic was taboo for certain children. This is in stark contrast to Alfred Kinsey’s reports on human sexuality published around the same time, which included data from his extensive studies on women and sex.

Wertham’s portrayal of females as victims of both comics and comic-induced crimes shows a failure to consider the effect on girls outside of how it relates to the effect on boys. In his initial discussion of negative content, Wertham presents a list of incidents of women as victims of physical and sexual violence; “in one story there are thirty-seven pictures, of which twelve (that is one in three) show brutal near-rape scenes.” Even the examination of the iconic female comic book character Wonder Woman is distilled down to the anti-male content of her title. This is not to say that Wertham leaves girls out entirely; he expresses concern for the girls who have and will fall victim to the crimes influenced by comic books.

*Seduction of the Innocent* was met with a mixture of qualified acceptance and wholehearted endorsement. The noted sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote a glowing review
for the *New York Times*, saying that “all parents should be grateful” to Wertham for the book and that he did not see that additional studies were needed “before action is taken against comic book manufacturers and purveyors.” Mills did, however, urge continued study to determine how many comic books were published monthly and what the specific effects were on children at different age levels. The *New Yorker* agreed with Wertham’s conclusions, called his evidence “overpowering,” and highlighted large portions of the book.

Other well-distributed reviews expressed similar views, such as that by Frances Ilg and Louise Ames in the *Los Angeles Times*. The two women felt that, despite its flaws, any of their readers who were concerned about the comic book problem would be interested in at least looking over the publication. While not a ringing endorsement, the authors end their review by saying that they agree with Wertham and his conclusions. The *Christian Science Monitor* said that the only possible criticism of the book was that its sensational tone might have undermined the seriousness of the message. Common among supportive reviewers of *Seduction of the Innocent* was their acceptance of Wertham as the expert on both the disturbing content and negative effects of comic books. When reviewers cited “unusual juvenile crimes directly traceable to comic books,” it also signaled a deviation from his prior academic reception. Journalists and academics alike deferred to Wertham rather than form their own, independent conclusions about comic books. By contrast, the reviewers of *Our Movie Made Children* generally felt free to express their own opinions on the social impact of movies.

The harshest criticism of Wertham’s study was leveled in an article in *Commentary* by Robert Warshow, who called the book a “crime comic book for parents.” Warshow is
critical of *Seduction of the Innocent* while still supporting Wertham’s conclusion, referring to it as “firm ground on which to stand,” in the argument over comic books.\(^{157}\) The article, “Paul, The Horror Comics and Dr. Wertham,” criticizes the Doctor’s tendency to “put all phenomena and all evidence on the same level,” and to take everything a child says at face value. Warshow provides an anecdote from his own childhood recalling when he tried to fly after seeing *Peter Pan*.\(^{158}\) While this anecdote supports the conclusion that comic books influence children’s behavior, it also highlights that the problem of childhood imitation is not as dire as portrayed by Wertham. This argument, as well as his genuine concern for his son Paul, marks Warshow as a critically thinking parent, the same type of person who questioned Forman’s dubious claims about the effect of movies. Yet Warshow agrees with Wertham’s conclusions, albeit reluctantly, saying that for all of its faults, none of them could “entirely destroy Dr. Wertham’s case.”\(^{159}\) He closes with a summary of his position on comic books. Knowing that Paul is an avid reader, he nevertheless sheepishly admits he “would be happy if Senator Kefauver and Dr. Wertham could find some way to make it impossible to get any comic books” adding that he’d rather “Paul didn’t get the idea that I had anything to do with it.”\(^{160}\) In the end, even the most critical reviewers grudgingly conceded the validity of Wertham’s arguments.

Critics did not address, however, the legitimacy of *Seduction of the Innocent* as scientific research. In the 1930s, Alfred Goldsmith, Mortimer Adler and Raymond Moley had all attacked the Payne Fund Studies for being unscientific because of, among other things, their lack of control groups, small sample size, and flawed logical leaps. Many of these same criticisms had been directed toward some of Wertham’s earlier works, and could have been repeated in regard to *Seduction of the Innocent*. Robert Warshow briefly touched
on Wertham’s tendency to accept everything that a child told him as truth, but he failed to emphasize how it was indicative of the whole research method. The subjects used for Wertham’s research were predominantly, if not solely, children referred to the Lafargue Clinic for behavioral issues. He may have felt that a control group was not necessary for his research as he conducted no experiments; instead his research team simply observed children in interviews and interactions with their peers. The claim that comic books were the single greatest contributing factor to the rise in juvenile delinquency cannot withstand scrutiny, as all of his patients, comic book readers or not, were juvenile delinquents. The ubiquity of comic books among children and teens meant that most of his patients were readers, but also that a group of non-delinquents of equal size would have had a comparable number of readers as well. The absence of an Adler or Goldsmith to critique Wertham permitted the scientific weaknesses of Seduction of the Innocent to go unaddressed. According to Wertham’s biographer, however, his contributions to popular culture criticism were omitted from the first notable collection on the topic, Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White’s Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America (1957), suggesting that the academic community had little regard for Wertham’s work on popular culture. Further, Seduction of the Innocent’s lack of scientific merit did not preclude the author from testifying in front of a Senate hearing shortly after the book’s release.

The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency held televised hearings (a Kefauver hallmark) on comic books featuring testimony from both Fredric Wertham and William Gaines, starting on April 21, 1954, just a week after the publication of Seduction of the Innocent. While the book’s publication did not directly influence the decision to include Wertham’s testimony, it is possible that the publisher delayed its release to coincide with the
committee hearings. Wertham’s strong testimony and Gaines’ nervous ramblings lent credibility to the anti-comic book cause. The hearings made the front page of the *New York Times* with an oft-cited exchange between Kefauver and Gaines. The exchange involved a discussion of the cover of *Crime SuspenStories* #22, which featured hands holding a bloody axe, a woman’s severed head, and a partially obscured body on the floor. Despite Kefauver’s open expression of disgust, Gaines claimed it was in good taste for the cover of a horror comic.162 By the end of the hearings, it was obvious that those pushing for censorship looked better in the public eye.

Despite its lack of scientific rigor, *Seduction of the Innocent* ultimately succeeded in its intent. Wertham’s viewpoint was clearly shared by most of the senators who participated in the 1954 hearings and, unlike Gaines, his testimony was never called into question. The widespread distribution and popularity of *Seduction of the Innocent*, including a partial reprint in *Reader’s Digest*, joined with the pressure coming from the Senate hearings, led to the dissolution of the ACMP and the creation of the stronger and stricter Comics Magazine Association of America and the Comics Code Authority. Distributors, fearful of legislation, fines and arrest, refused to carry any comic that did not receive the CCA “Seal of Approval,” which was only awarded once censors had reviewed the submission and changes had been made to the final product. The code included outright bans on the use of the words “horror” and “terror” in titles, excessive bloodshed, the occult, details of crimes, obscene behavior, vulgar language, nudity, and sex. It also featured a catch-all line that allowed the censors to refuse approval to anything that was “contrary to the spirit and intent of the Code.”163 Some publishers simply folded, unable to meet the standards of the code; others changed their content to work within the code; still others, like EC, attempted to publish under the Code.
and eventually failed. William Gaines closed down EC comics in 1955 after the CCA refused to approve a reprinted EC story from 1953; an allegory on the evils of racism, the code administration rejected the story because the protagonist was an African-American. While no part of the code forbade the inclusion of non-white characters, Murphy objected to the skin color and refused approval until Gaines changed it, or at the very least removed the beads of sweat from the character’s face; Gaines refused, and published the story unaltered. In a final act of defiance, Gaines changed the physical size and format of the controversial Mad Comics, and converted it into a magazine, thereby placing it outside the jurisdiction of the CCA; the sole survivor of the “New Trend” line, it is still published today.

Our Movie Made Children and Seduction of the Innocent are two books similar in both goals and execution. Each book singled out a specific popular culture industry as a major contributor to mental illness, immorality, and delinquency among children of its era. Henry Forman presented his conclusions based on the results of the Payne Fund Studies; Wertham relied on his own clinical work with juvenile delinquents. The authors made a combination of valid accusations and questionable criticisms of sexual and violent content in their target industries. The evidence that Forman and Wertham presented to make their points was often anecdotal, sensational and scientifically debatable. Both books also offered virtually identical solutions: strong censorship that would prevent children from accessing objectionable material. In many ways, Seduction of the Innocent and Our Movie Made Children served similar purposes in separate decades.

It may come as a surprise, then, to find out that the two books led to such different outcomes. Our Movie Made Children, despite its seven printings in two years, garnered only
minor support from the general public. Conversely, *Seduction of the Innocent*, despite only gaining two printings, contributed to the establishment of the Comics Magazine Association of America and the Comics Code Authority. The divergent outcomes cannot be adequately explained by differences between the two books. Rather, differences in the age composition and political clout of the audiences for movies and comic books, differences in the effectiveness of the two industries’ pre-existing censorship organizations, and the divergent fears of Americans in the 1930s and 1950s account for the contrary results.

Contemporaneous events exerted perhaps the greatest influence on the reception of each book. *Our Movie Made Children* was published in 1933, four years after the stock market crash and in the worst throes of the Great Depression. The motion picture industry offered an escape from the disastrous problems facing the country. Movies were cheap entertainment that both adults and children could enjoy. The Payne Fund Studies had been conceived in the late-1920s, an era when people saw immoral sexual behavior as ubiquitous, especially among the younger generation. By the time the studies actually appeared, however, people were worried about more pressing issues than the effects of motion pictures on the attitudes of children. The message of *Our Movie Made Children* made little sense in a world where the only enjoyable part of a child or adult’s day might be his or her trip to the theater.

The publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954, on the other hand, took place in the midst of a nationwide panic over the immoral, illegal, violent and delinquent behavior of the younger generation. The moral panic of the 1950s focused on juvenile delinquents and the accompanying rise in crime rates. Additionally, Cold War anxieties and Joseph McCarthy’s Communist hunt created a general culture of fear and distrust of anything
outside the norm. Both teenagers and comic books deviated from established cultural
conventions and, as such, added to parents’ worries. Whether or not there actually was a rise
in juvenile delinquency is irrelevant; the fact remains that Americans were concerned that
their children were running wild. Though youth in the 1950s were probably no more
delinquent than earlier generations, it may have felt otherwise to many parents, legislators
and social critics. At a time when parents felt helpless in controlling their children,
Wertham’s book gave them a target for their fear and the evidence to act.

Forman criticized movies and Wertham assailed comic books for their harmful
impact on children. While each of the two media had large audiences under the age of 21,
the additional adult audience of motion pictures created a buffer from Forman’s criticism.
Adults made up roughly two-thirds of the total audience and thus may have been nearly as
familiar with movies as the Payne Fund Researchers. That prior exposure to movies led
adults to draw their own conclusions, rather than passively accept the results and arguments
presented in Our Movie Made Children. Parents familiar with motion picture content were
more likely to blame a child’s delinquency on other factors in his or her life. Additionally,
and more selfishly, censorship of motion pictures would have deprived adults of a favorite
form of recreation; resistance was not solely “for the children.” The audience for comic
books, by contrast, consisted predominantly of children and adolescents. Unlike movies,
comic books were considered youth fare, and unlikely to be read by anyone older than a
teenager. While public perception deemed comics childish, the publishers did not, and
produced material appropriate arguably more appropriate for an older audience. Wertham’s
in-depth study of comic books gave him a much greater familiarity with the medium than the
average parent, who would (like Robert Warshow) often refuse to read the magazines.
This discrepancy between Wertham’s knowledge and that of the average parent led to the public’s greater deference toward Wertham as a well-informed and authoritative expert on comic books and their content. The amount of first-hand experience parents had with movies probably protected the motion picture industry in the 1930s; during the 1950s, the lack of comparable information aided the critics of the comic book industry.

This is also apparent in the tone of the journalistic response to both books. The reviews of *Our Movie Made Children* tended to reflect each author’s previously held opinions about movies. Reviewers who felt that movies were socially destructive used Forman as evidence that they were correct; those who thought movies were harmless dismissed his claims as incorrect. Because of their familiarity with movies prior to the book’s release, readers did not treat Forman and the Payne Fund researchers deferentially as authoritative experts on the topic. By contrast, the reviewers of *Seduction of the Innocent* treated Fredric Wertham as the unrivaled expert on comic books and their content. Rather than taking a critical look at Wertham’s arguments, journalists raised the alarm about the comic book menace, since they often had little or no independent knowledge of the content of comic books. These reviews, as well as the synopses of the book in *Reader’s Digest*, helped shape public opinion against the comic book industry, just as the critical reviews of Forman’s book during the 1930s helped shield the motion picture industry.

*Our Movie Made Children* and *Seduction of the Innocent* were each published at the peak of the opposition to movies and comic books respectively; however, the two media themselves were at different stages of development. By the early 1930s, the motion picture industry had already established a censorship body that was generally respected by the studios, the reformers, and the public. The Production Code may have been strict, but it was
fairly enforced and adapted to suit the demands and changing tastes of the American public. The code was in place prior to the publication of Our Movie Made Children, which may have changed the way many critics approached the industry. Additionally, the five largest studios in Hollywood accepted the censorship of the Hays Office, as did the major film distributors, allowing for uniform, industry-wide censorship. Conversely, the Association of Comic Magazine Publishers wielded little power within the comic book industry as a whole; many publishers, including National, Atlas and other large publishers were not members, choosing instead to follow in-house standards, which were more malleable. The lack of a strong censoring body for the comic book industry allowed publication of content that went beyond even minimal standards of decency and the unregulated nature of the industry was one of Wertham’s specific complaints in Seduction of the Innocent. In the end, the ACMP proved more hindrance than help because it provided only a flimsy and unconvincing veneer of censorship without much substance. Had the comic book industry regulated itself in the same manner as the motion picture industry, the impact of Seduction of the Innocent might have been no greater than that of Our Movie Made Children.

Criticism of movies and comic books did not end with Our Movie Made Children and Seduction of the Innocent. In the wake of Robert Kennedy’s assassination in 1968, the New York Times published a number of articles asking well known people about their views of movies. This group of “prominent people” included Fredric Wertham, who decried the level of violence in motion pictures as contributing to the rate of violent crime in the United States. The introduction of a ratings system helped placate some critics, though contemporary debate still exists as to whether or not some movies marketed to children are acceptable. Parent groups accused a recent adaptation of Maurice Sendak’s 1963 children’s
book *Where The Wild Things Are* of being too scary, forcing parents to remove their sobbing children from the theater. Modern critics still complain about the content of comic books, but they rarely decry them as obscene. A recent *Captain America* storyline raised the ire of conservative columnist Michael Medved, who objected to what he felt was an anti-American and pro-terrorist message in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. The reforms put in place because of *Seduction of the Innocent* and the Senate hearings lasted through the early 1970s, when consumers and publishers pushed for more socially relevant content. In response to that pressure, the Comics Code Authority loosened their restrictions in 1972, and again in 1989. At present only two major publishers, DC and Archie, still submit their titles to the CCA—and even they still sometimes publish without the seal when they are denied approval.

Since the 1950s, social critics have engaged in debates over violent and sexual content in rock music, hip hop music, and, most recently, video games. Social scientists continue to study the effects of all types of popular culture on children, producing conflicting studies and leaving consumers with no choice but to educate themselves and make their own decisions. The lessons of *Our Movie Made Children* and *Seduction of the Innocent* are important for the development of any popular media. Knowledge of the composition of one’s target audience and contemporary attitudes, and a strong, self-censoring organization are essential for success in popular culture. Today, Internet ventures such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter grow daily by catering to their users wants, while maintaining internal content control that stays current with modern values. The irony of the efforts to censor comic books and movies is apparent from recent trends in today’s motion picture industry. Some of the most popular movies during the past ten years have been based on iconic comic
book characters, and, in a twist that would have likely appalled Wertham, Tales from the Crypt has been adapted into a children’s cartoon television series. It seems that, at this point, motion pictures and comic books are accepted parts of American culture, despite the criticisms of men like Forman and Wertham. The censorship efforts of the 1930s and 1950s are still visible today, however, as the defensive responses to each still influence the everyday business of the two industries.

---

4 Ibid.
5 For further discussion of early sound film, see Robert Spadoni, Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007).
7 Lea Jacobs, The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942, (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 19. The MPPDA shall be referred to by both its acronym and “the Association” within these pages.
9 Ibid., 7.
10 Ibid., 8.
11 Ibid., 7-8.
13 Ibid., 324.
14 Dwight Hoover, Middletown Revisited, (Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University, 1990), 4-5.
16 Paula Fass, The Beautiful and the Damned, 30-31. Fass uses the term “progressives” with the understanding that they are different from the progressives from the turn of the Twentieth Century.
20 The last volume, a compilation of Edgar Dale’s studies Children’s Attendance at Motion Pictures and The Content of Motion Pictures was published in 1935.
22 The study titled Boys, Movies and City Streets, by Paul Cressey and Fredric Thrasher was not published due to delays in writing the manuscript. A full discussion of the unpublished Payne Fund Study can be found in Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller, Children and the Movies.
23 A full list of the Payne Fund Studies can be found in Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*, page xxiv.


26 Ibid., 92-93.


31 Charters, *Motion Pictures and Youth*, 36-37.

32 Ibid.


34 Ibid., 198-202.

35 The unpublished manuscripts can be found in Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*.


37 Ibid., v.

38 Ibid., 17, 23.


40 Forman, *Our Movie Made Children*, 53. It is interesting to note that one of the films that he continually cited as a good, wholesome movie, *The Pony Express*, was in fact written by Forman himself.

41 Ibid., 58-59.

42 Ibid., v.

43 Ibid., 109.

44 Ibid., 91.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 158.

47 Ibid., 167.

48 Ibid., 182 and 198.

49 Ibid., 206.

50 Ibid., 200.

51 Ibid., 273.

52 Ibid., 283.

53 Ibid., 197.

54 Ibid., 214.

55 Ibid., 220.

56 Ibid., 220.


59 Ibid., 2.
60 Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*, 103.
62 Ibid.
63 Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*, 104.
68 Ibid.
69 Leff and Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono*, 10.
70 Ibid., 286-287.
71 Ibid., 287-290. “Repellent subjects included “hanging or electrocutions as legal punishments for crime, third degree methods, brutality or possible gruesomeness, branding of people or animals, apparent cruelty to children or animals, the sale of women, or a woman selling her virtue,” and “surgical operations.”
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 411.
78 Ibid., 51.
81 Ibid., 63.
83 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 This loss of focus on comic books is noted in Henry E. Schultz “Censorship or Self Regulation?” *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 23, No. 4, December 1949.
89 One of the Payne Fund Studies studied the physical response to the act of watching movies, i.e. bright flashing pictures displayed in a dark room.
92 Ibid., 116-117.
94 Ibid., 69.


Ibid.


Fredric M. Thrasher uses the term “forensic” in contrast to “scientific”.

Ibid., 199-200.

Thrasher uses the term “forensic” in contrast to “scientific”.


Ibid., 129.

Ibid., 131.

Ibid., 130.


*Two-Fisted Tales* #35, (New York: EC Comics, October 1953).

Some of the attempts were tame, limiting themselves to unexplained bizarre phenomena, like Atlas’ *Strange Tales*, while others like Harvey’s *Black Cat Mystery* featured bodies decaying from radiation. The difficult part of analyzing postwar comic books today in reference to their critics is that often only the most popular titles, like *Crime Does Not Pay* and the EC titles, are still available today. While they defined their genres, they were not the worst offenders when it came to sex and violence. Their contemporary critics, however, had full access to the worst that comic books had to offer in the postwar era.


Ibid., 26-28.

It should be noted here that at the time Americans assumed that all Communist governments received their marching orders from Moscow and constituted a Communist bloc. In reality, the Russian, Chinese and Korean Communist parties did not consistently act in concert with each other.

Ibid., 40-41.

Ibid., 45.

Ibid., 50.

Ibid., 189-190.

Ibid., 190-192.

Ibid., 192. Costello refused to allow television cameras to show his face, so a cameraman focused instead on his hands.


Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, 84.

Ibid., 213.


Ibid., x.

Ibid., 149.

Ibid., 150-152.

Ibid., 151.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 157.

Ibid., 171.
134 Ibid., 178-179.
135 Ibid., 181-182.
136 Ibid., 183.
137 Ibid., 193.
138 A modern reader familiar with the Batman mythos may see Wertham’s accusation as more serious
that it was; various depictions of Dick Grayson have placed his age anywhere between a boy of ten and a young
man of twenty during his tenure as Robin, “The Boy Wonder.” In the 1950s, Robin was characterized as in his
late teens or early twenties; Wertham calls the relationship “ephebic,” not pederastic.
139 Ibid., 190.
140 Ibid., 189-190.
141 Halberstam, The Fifties, 12.
142 John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, Intimate Matters: A History of Homosexuality in America,
143 Wertham, Seduction of the Innocent, 121.
144 Ibid., 123.
145 Ibid., 129.
146 Ibid., 178.
147 Ibid., 19.
148 Ibid., 193.
150 Ibid.
151 Wolcott Gibbs, “Books: ‘Keep Those Paws to Yourself, Space-Rat!’” The New Yorker, May 8,
1954, 137.
152 Frances L. Ilg and Louise B. Ames, “Comic Book Critic Thought One-Sided,” The Los Angeles
Times, November 10, 1954, B.
153 Ibid.
155 J. A. Wadovick, “Battle Over Comics Rages With Renewed Vigor,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, April
25, 1954.
157 Ibid., 596.
158 Ibid., 601.
159 Ibid., 603.
160 Ibid., 604.
161 Beaty, Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture, 4.
162 Hajdu, The Ten-Cent Plague, 270-271. The cover has become extremely well known, and has been
imitated by many covers since the fall of the CCA, most recently as the cover of Wolverine #55, (Marvel, June
2007).
163 “The Comics Code Authority (as Adopted in 1954),” Comicartville Library,
164 Hajdu, The Ten-Cent Plague, 322.
165 Ibid.
166 Warshow, “Paul, The Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham,” Commentary, 599.
167 Fredric Wertham, “Are the Movies Teaching Us To Be Violent?” The New York Times, June 30,
1968, D.
168 Charlie Jane Anders, Maurice Sendak to Concerned Parents: Go To Hell!,
169 Michael Medved, “Captain America, Traitor?” National Review Online,
http://article.nationalreview.com/?q= NWU4NjM5N2RIOTFIOGZhn2FjMjVIIYjMyYTEyMWFiNTE=. 
54
Bibliography

Archival Sources


Published Primary Sources

A note on sources: Comic books prior to the 1960s rarely credited authors or artists. E.C. Comics is a notable exception. The primary comic book sources were obtained from the Ray and Pat Browne Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green State University.


Secondary Sources
Books


Hoover, Dwight W. *Middletown Revisited*. Muncie, Indiana, Ball State University, 1990.


**Articles**

Anders, Charlie Jane. *Maurice Sendak to Concerned Parents: Go To Hell!*  


“The Comics Code Authority (as Adopted in 1954).” *Comicartville Library*.  


Medved, Michael. “Captain America, Traitor?” *National Review Online*,  
http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=NWU4NjM5N2RIOTFIOGZhN2FjMjVIYjMyYTEyMWFiNTE=.


