Terrifying Tales from The Code: The Anti-Comics Movement, Mass Culture, and the Impact of the Comics Code on American Comic Books

KC Welsh

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Reader 1
Julia Liss

Reader 2
Andre Wakefeld

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Abstract
This thesis details and analyzes the history of the Comics Code of 1954 and its impact on American comics as a whole. Included is the history of the anti-comics movement and an analysis of 20th-century mass-culture debates. This thesis also argues that the underground comix movement was an unwitting successor to pre-code comics and was responsible for growth in the comics medium by working around the oppressive Code. The second argument is that the Code’s impact is still present in current comics, and issues of mass culture still hang over the medium’s head, resulting in stagnation and an ongoing dismissal of comics as legitimate art.

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American comics, in particular with Marvel and DC, has blown up since the beginning of the 21st century when Spiderman, starring Tobey Maguire, was released in 2002. Everybody and their mother has heard of Superman or Iron Man. But when did the story of comics begin? How did it get to where it is today? Are comics popular outside America? The anti-hero genre (Alan Moore’s Watchmen) tore apart the Good vs. Evil stories. It instead put in complex and radical storylines like where Superman dies and superheroes killing each other. Unfortunately, this age did not bode well with the popularity of comics and even led to Marvel declaring bankruptcy in 1996. Modern Age (1985 — Present Day). Credit: The Walking Dead/Image Comics. Comic books provided the perfect platform for the broad strokes of anti-Communist propaganda. As psychiatrist Fredric Wertham waged war against the corrupting influence of comic books, advertisers and the government found them increasingly effective at spreading messages. "If there was any entity that believed in the power of comic books to indoctrinate and instruct as Wertham did," writes Greg Beato at Reason, "it was the U.S. government." But private entities did their share in the comic book war against Communism as well. Witness a particularly wild example, Is This Tomorrow?, above. Comics took their inspiration from art movements of the past, most notably surrealism, to illustrate the strange worlds in which their heroes lived. With comics now established as a lucrative medium, cover images relied less on cheap, attention-grabbing tactics and instead became an artistic representation of the issue’s themes or a protagonist’s state of mind. Comics traded in surrealism and experimentation for photorealistic depictions of the urban landscape. The alter-ego side of the superhero’s life is given more panel time, and sensational costumes took a backseat to depictions of everyday people. Plus, the impact of Image Comics is still being felt, as readers continue their interest in indie books fueled by the industry’s rampant commercialization. Nowadays comics play a significant role in popular culture. But how did these drawn stories become so popular? Let’s explore the periods of comics history! This was the reason behind the forming of the Comics Code Authority (CCA) in 1954 as an alternative to government censorship and regulation. The CCA allowed publishers to self-regulate the content of comic books in the United States. Meanwhile in Japan… This and the revival of a
couple of other superheroes, including Green Lantern, initiates the “Silver Age” of American comics. That’s when a lot of new characters are created: The Fantastic Four, The Hulk, The X-Men, a bit later – the Avengers. Yeah, the same guys that became a basis for lots of modern movies.