


# Censorship and the Comic Book Code

LIS 9312  
July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010



 **Crystal Mills**  
(The Crypt Keeper) (The Old Witch)



# Comics from 1940-1954

- Pre-WWII limited concern over comics
- Hysteria fostered by Cold War fears and McCarthyism
- Generational divide between parents and children expressing their own taste
- During WWII, comics a source of propaganda







"Virtually every child in America is reading color 'comic' magazines – a poisonous growth of the last two years. Ten million copies of these sex-horror serials are sold every month. One million dollars are taken from the pockets of America's children in exchange for graphic insanity... The bulk of these lurid publications depend for their appeal upon mayhem, murder, torture, and abduction – often with a child as the victim. Superman heroics, voluptuous females in scanty attire, blazing machine guns, hooded 'justice' and cheap political propaganda were to be found on almost every page. ... But the antidote to the 'comic' magazine poison can be found in any library or good bookstore. The parent who does not acquire that antidote for his child is guilty of criminal negligence."

Sterling North (1940)

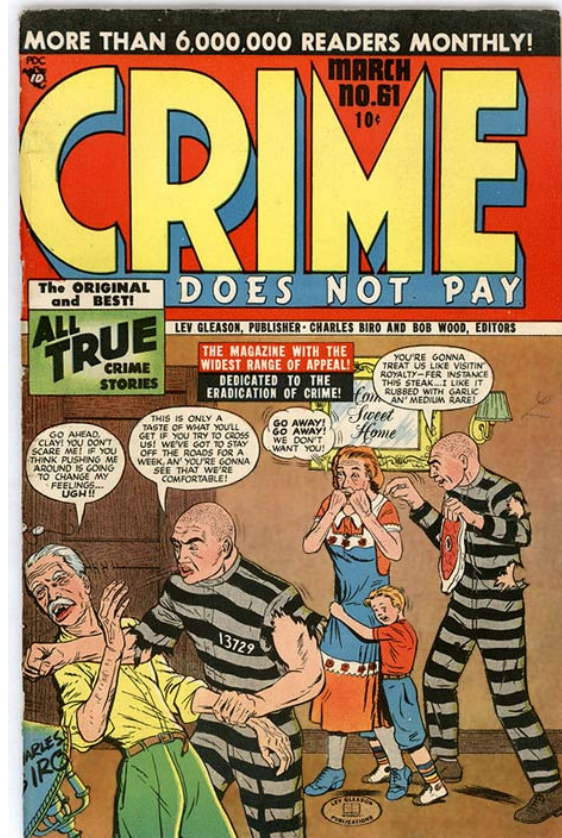
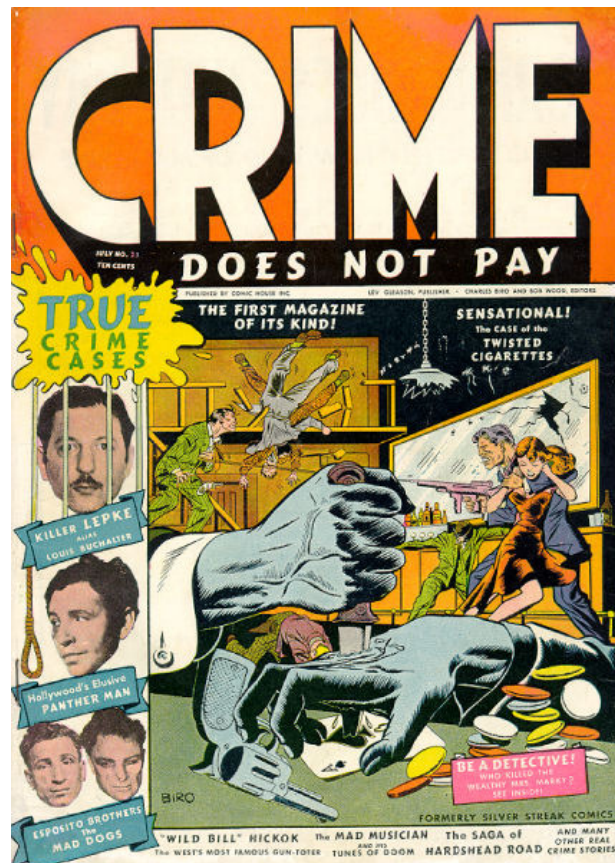






# Crime Does Not Pay

- The first of many crime-focused comics (1942)
- Fictionalized "true stories" of guns, gangsters, gambling, sex, and crime







# Fredric Wertham

- "A one-man crusade against comics"
- "Horror in the Nursery" (1948)
- "Wertham was a nest of contradictions – intelligent and contemplative, yet susceptible to illogic, conjecture, and peculiar leaps of reasoning; temperate in appearance and manner, yet inclined to extravagant, attention-grabbing pontification."



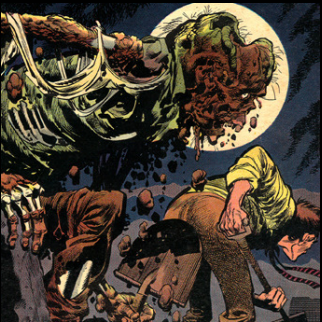
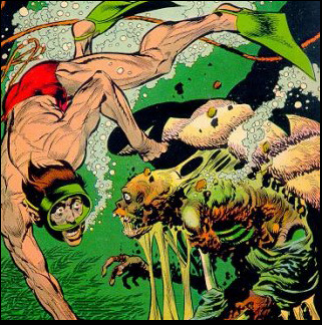
# Legislating Against Comics

- Detroit first to “outlaw” and seize titles (1948)
- Followed by over 50 cities implementing measures to restrict sale of comics
- Winters v. New York (1948)
  - A book dealer fined for possession of Crime Stories with intent to sell
  - Found in favour of Winters due to vague language of legislation





# The “Grassroots” Movement



# EC Comics

- *Crypt of Terror, Vault of Horror, Tales from the Crypt, Crime Suspense Stories*
- 1/3 of comics on stands by 1952 were horror
- “Poetic justice”, murderous spouses, zombies, corpses, constant one-upmanship in graphic violence
- “Now no holds are barred. Horror, crime, sadism, monsters, ghouls, corpses dead and alive – in short, real freedom of expression. All this in comic books addressed to and sold to children.”





# Seduction of the Innocent (1954)

- Wertham advertised in Ladies' Home Journal
- Not the results of scientific study
- “Obdurate infantilization of the comics readership”
- Legitimized the hysteria



**Sadomasochist**



**Fascist**

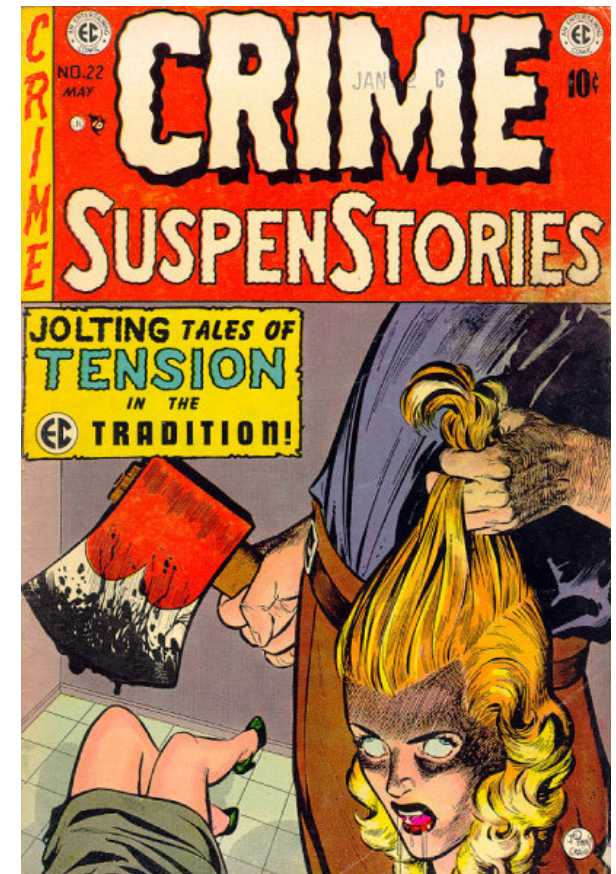


**Homosexual**



# Senate Hearings on Comics (1954)

- Expert testimonies on both sides, including Wertham and Bill Gaines (EC)
- Resulted in further legislation restricting comics
- Led to formation of Comics Magazine Association of America and Comics Code Authority
- EC discontinued all horror titles







## The Code (1954)

- Updated in 1971-  
<http://www.reocities.com/Athens/8580/cca2.html>
- Updated in 1989-  
<http://www.reocities.com/Athens/8580/cca3.html>





# Contemporary Challenges

- Comics more or less challenged?
- Issues with a visual medium

	Graphic Novels	Text-Format Books
Sex	60%	32%
Nudity	28%	3%
"Unsuited to Age Group"	25%	17%
Violence	18%	13%
Offensive Language	13%	27%
Depiction of Minority Group	8%	3%
Magic and Occult	5%	8%





# Case Study I

- Apple's censorship of nudity on mobile apps (2010)
  - *Ulysses* and *The Importance of Being Ernest* removed until "black-barred"
  - Public response led to comics being restored

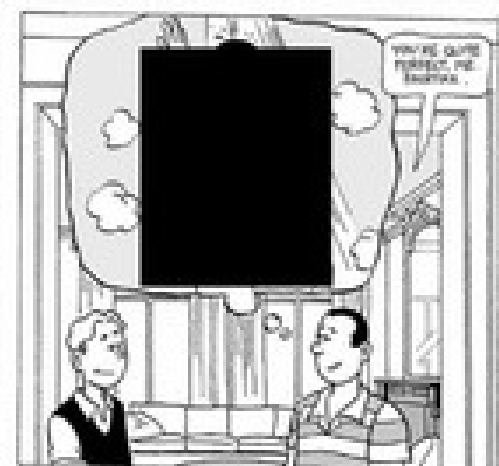
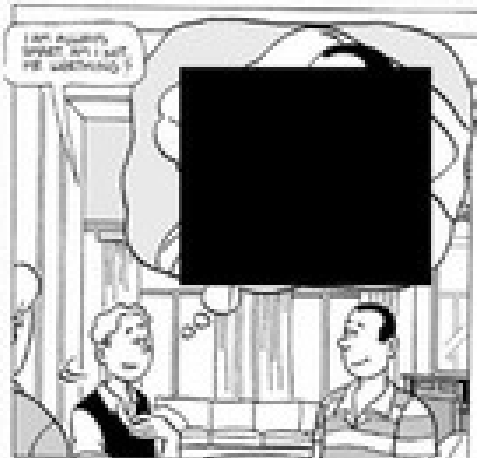
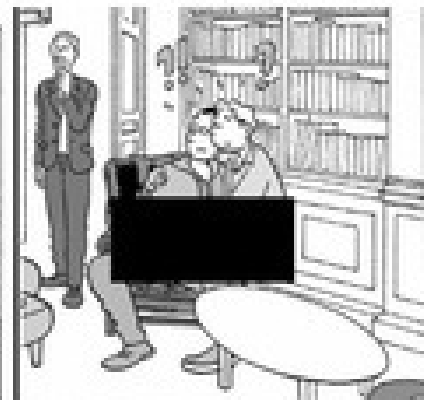
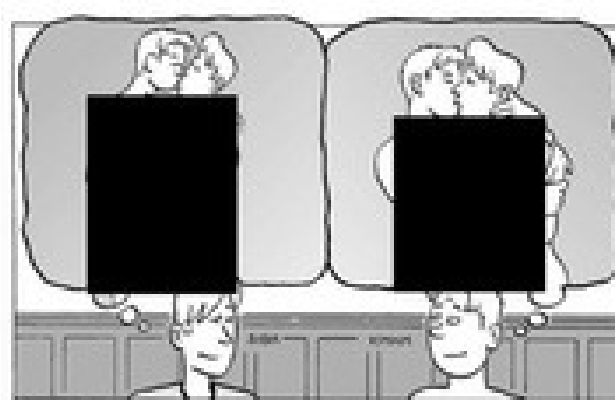


## ***Ulysses Seen Before & After***





# ***The Importance of Being Ernest***





## Case Study II

- U.S. v. Handley (2010)
  - Child sex hentai (manga) collector the first sentenced under the 2003 PROTECT Act
  - Defended by the CBLDF





# Responding to Challenges

- Create a positive service transaction
- Request for Reconsideration of Materials Form to formalize the process
- Develop policy regarding challenges that explicitly mentions graphic novels
- "Build your case on paper"
- Collect diverse materials, including "safe" and (positively) religious comics



# Fighting Censorship

- American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom  
<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/>
- All young adult services librarians need to be familiar with ALA policies and activities relating to intellectual freedom
- Graphic Novel Legal Defense Fund  
<http://www.cbldf.org/>







TRANSIM TROPOLITAN 6, February, 1998. Published monthly by DC Comics, 1100 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to TRANSIM TROPOLITAN, DC Comics, Subscriptions, P.O. Box 928, Baiton, NY 11515. Annual subscription rate \$30.00. Canadian subscribers must add \$12.00 for postage and GST. GST #R123456789. All foreign countries must add \$12.00 for postage. U.S. funds only. Copyright © 1998 Warren Ellis and Barick Robertson. All Rights Reserved. All characters, the distinctive likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Warren Ellis and Barick Robertson. TM, DC Comics is a trademark of DC Comics. The stories, characters and events featured in this publication are entirely fictional. For advertising space contact: Henry Watkins, National Sales Director (212) 636-5520. Printed on recyclable paper. Printed in Canada.

DC Comics, A Division of Warner Bros. - A Time Warner Entertainment Company

Jnx\_Scanz\_HaCSa !!!

