

“VULGARIZING AMERICAN CHILDREN”: NAVIGATING RESPECTABILITY
AND COMMERCIAL APPEAL IN EARLY NEWSPAPER COMICS

by

Ralph D. Suiter III
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of
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Committee:

_____ Director

_____ Department Chairperson

_____ Program Director

_____ Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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by

Ralph D. Suiter III
Master of Arts
University of Massachusetts, Boston, 2006
Bachelor of Arts
Simon’s Rock College of Bard, 1999

Director: Paula Petrik, Professor
Department of History

Spring Semester 2016
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Fairfax, VA



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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated my parents, Ralph and Dianne Suiter, from whose example I learned to love learning, to value the life of the mind above all else, and to never give up on my goals. I love you both so much.

I would also like to dedicate it to my nephew, Theo Kuruvilla, because a family's only ever as good as its next generation. Go do cool things, little man.

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ABSTRACT

“VULGARIZING AMERICAN CHILDREN”: NAVIGATING RESPECTABILITY AND COMMERCIAL APPEAL IN EARLY NEWSPAPER COMICS

Ralph D. Suiter III, Ph.D.

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Paula Petrik

Between the first appearance of the Sunday newspaper comic supplement in 1895 and the early 1920s, the status of the comic supplement in the field of cultural production was being questioned and navigated by publishers, editors, cartoonists, and the reading public. Looking at the first years of the comic supplements, this dissertation argues that the early supplements, as emulations of comic weekly magazines such as *Puck* and *Life*, may have been an attempt to make the yellow journals more palatable to a middle-class audience. This attempt became moot after the “second moral war,” a campaign against the yellow journals undertaken by more “respectable” newspapers in 1897, which made comics a metonym for yellow journalism.

Turning to the moral panic that surrounded the supplements between 1907 and 1912, this dissertation digs into primary source materials from the women’s

organizations that advocated the suppression or improvement of the supplements, looking at the rhetoric that surrounded the movement. This rhetoric connected a whole host of interrelated Progressive Era concerns, including immigration, working class leisure, and new scientific attitudes around child-rearing. It also looks at how the press pushed for this movement, as a reaction to the circulation that comics brought the papers that ran them.

Investigating the cartoonists who participated in the Armory Show of 1913, this project explores how cartoonists who had believed themselves illustrators with a certain degree of social and cultural capital within the world of high art were not only able to utilize this capital but also began to see its limitations. Finally, at the end of the 1910s, the emergence of continuity strips, daily comics that took advantage of conventions of seriality and melodrama, brought further economic success for cartoonists while simultaneously further ghettoizing the medium as “low culture.”

INTRODUCTION

The history of the twentieth century newspaper is inextricably tied to the history of the newspaper comic strip. From the birth of the comic supplement in the 1890s, comics have been major drivers of newspaper sales, and continued to be throughout much of the century. The circulation war between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst inspired Hearst to mimic Pulitzer's (at the time unique) Sunday comic supplement and to steal his star talent, Richard Felton Outcault, in 1895. In the decades that followed, comic strips became a major driver of newspaper readership nationwide. Based on industry estimates, the writer of a 1934 article in *Fortune* asserted that between 70 and 75 percent of newspaper readers read the comics on a regular basis, and that the newspaper comic industry grossed six million dollars a year.¹

Researcher Charles Swanson undertook another, more scientific study. Between 1939 and 1950, Swanson interviewed fifty thousand adult newspaper readers about their reading habits. Reporting what they regularly read in their newspaper of choice, the most popular response among these readers was "the comics," by a large margin; averaging men's and women's responses puts the number of comics readers at about 57.45 percent. By comparison, the next most

¹ "The Funny Papers," *Fortune*, April 1933, 45.

popular response—war coverage—garnered only a response of 34.6 percent, barely more than half of the number that reported reading the comics regularly. It is worth noting that this survey was conducted over the period during which World War II took place.² A Boston University study, published in 1962, found that approximately 90 million Americans were regular readers of the Sunday comics—literally more than half of the U.S. population reported in 1960.³

These numbers point to more than simply the impact of comic strips on the newspaper industry. They point to reader engagement. For many Americans, throughout the twentieth century, reading the funnies was an integral part of the newspaper reading experience. Looking at the vast amount of licensed (and sometimes unlicensed) merchandise based on comic strip characters, adaptation of comic strips into various other media, and mail to newspapers regarding the plots of comic strips, the importance of comic strips and their characters to the American mass audience is evident.

These strips, these characters, were a part of the American psyche, part of the shared culture. After interviewing working-class New Yorkers about how they read and discussed newspaper comic strips in the late 1940s, sociologist Leo Bogart determined that comics provided a “common universe of discourse” that allowed semi-anonymous urban residents to connect and talk in a “secular industrialized society [that] has brought about increasingly impersonal human

² Edward J. Robinson and David Manning White, “Who Reads the Funnies-- and Why?,” in *The Funnies: An American Idiom*, ed. David Manning White and Robert H. Abel (London: Collier-Macmillan, Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 180.

³ *Ibid.*, 183.

relations, specialized, and segmentalized.”⁴ A construction worker described reading the comics and then discussing them “. . .with a bunch of fellows on the corner. I’d say, ‘Dick Tracy is in another scrape; I wonder how he’ll get out of it.’ Of course we all laugh at it. And a guy will say, ‘Bet you half a dollar he gets out of it.’” Another respondent, a janitor, described reading two comic strips regularly out of interest, but admitted to reading the rest of the page in case it comes up in social situations: “The other things I just read in case of conversation. When someone talks about them, you’ll know about them . . . Almost everybody reads the comics. Somebody says, ‘Did you read this, and did you read that?’ and you can have a conversation for two hours after that on the funnies.”⁵

In this way, comic strips for these working-class, midcentury New Yorkers occupied a similar position to the one that television shows would have a century later: they were part of a universe of uncontroversial, interesting, and familiar topics of conversation with strangers, neighbors, or coworkers. Or, as one writer put it in 1937, if a “social historian of the U.S.” looking back at that time were to dismiss “the comic page as mere juvenile entertainment irrelevant to his serious purpose he will be missing what may be the clue to the nation’s adult dream life.”⁶

Despite their obvious relevance in culture and the newspaper industry, histories of the industry have regularly given the topic of comic strips little attention. Even histories of the “yellow” newspapers that first featured comic

⁴ Leo Bogart, “Adult Talk About Newspaper Comics,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (July 1955): 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶ “Fortune Survey VI: The Comic Strips,” *Fortune*, April 1937, 190.

supplements, Pulitzer's *World* and Hearst's *Journal*, have tended to give surprisingly little attention to the importance of comics to these papers. Nicholson Baker and Margaret Brentano's *The World on Sunday*, a book dedicated to reproducing color pages from the *World* between 1898 and 1911, years of key importance to the evolution of newspaper comics, contained very few reproductions of the "funnies." The editors instead privilege front pages, pictorial journalism, charts, typographic stunts, and other curiosities. While all features are important and deserve study, the low number of comics pages among the 144 reproduced pages is striking, especially given the connection between that the phrase "yellow journalism," embodied by Pulitzer's and Hearst's papers, and the popular character that appeared in both journals, the "Yellow Kid."

Meanwhile, histories of comics and cartoonists tend to give a little more attention to the newspapers that the comics appeared in. This is likely due to the undeniable influence of editors and publishers on the comics industry.

Traditional comics historiography acknowledges the roles of Hearst and Pulitzer, as well as the impact of figures like Morrill Goddard, Sunday *World* editor who first introduced the humorous Sunday supplement, or Rudolph Block, the *Journal's* comics editor. The influence of features syndicates on comics is much less studied, however. Syndicates represent a rich field for future scholarship both in comics history and the history of the newspaper as a medium.

Likewise, in both of these fields, there is little scholarship that examines newspaper comics in an integrated manner, or looks at the comics pages as part

of the paper they inhabited. As a historian of the media who also has a lifelong love of the comics, producing scholarship that begins to address that lacuna has been one of my chief goals since beginning this dissertation. The first chapter of this work examines how the comics fit in with larger trends of the newspapers in which they first appeared.

Comics and Cultural Capital

Bart Beaty's 2012 *Comics Versus Art* may be the only English language book that looks at the history of American comics in terms of the medium's relative cultural prestige over time. Building on the works of George Dickie and Howard Becker, Beaty describes comics as one of many "art worlds," social networks that create, consume, and otherwise participate in the production of artistic meaning and value. In the world of fine arts, this would include museum curators, artists, art dealers, art collectors, critics, and the art press. For comics, this would encompass editors, collectors, cartoonists, publishers, comic shop owners, and the like.

Essentially, in Beaty's formulation, "comics" is understood to be what the social sphere of those with a vested interest in the term determines it to mean at a given time. The ability to sidestep formalist debates about the structural elements that define comics is a valuable contribution, especially for those more interested in looking at comics historically rather than as a purely formal and aesthetic concern. It is a definition of comics that can allow for the inclusion of a number of different types of "comics," allowing for problematic categories for more formalist definitions, such as silent comics or single-panel gag strips.

In Beaty's work, the "worlds" of high art and comics seem to be almost inherently antagonistic. They are moreover mutually antagonistic. Beaty argues that art critics have contended that "the aesthetic and artistic issues raised by other forms are totally alien to comics, which exist on an entirely different plane," while cartoonists and others in the comics world, as a product of a sort of Nietzschean *ressentiment*, have taken comics' status as "anti-art" as a point of pride. "Largely ignored by critics and art historians," Beaty observes, "and consequently disdainful of the interests of those groups, comics have long reveled in their lowbrow, bad boy image."⁷

Nevertheless, for a book that claims to attempt to interrogate "the specific historical and social processes that have led to the devaluation of comics as a cultural form,"⁸ *Comics Versus Art* is strangely almost ahistorical as to the causes of this antagonism. Beaty's periodization is curious. He begins in the middle of the twentieth century, at a time when Fredric Wertham was already testifying to the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency and Roy Lichtenstein felt free to appropriate the mechanically-reproduced images from comics uncredited, without regard for provenance or authorship. In short, the book begins at a time when historical forces had already determined the (relatively low) "place" of comics as a cultural form.

⁷ Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

Choosing this historical moment to begin his book gives Beaty's argument a certain narrative grace, a triumphalist arc wherein the art world of comics goes from a place of relative abjection to gradually, and reluctantly gaining acceptance within the world of "high art," and the institutions that undergird that world: universities, galleries, museums, and auction houses. This narrative has a neatness to it, and the book does a very good job of describing the changing nature of the relationship between the worlds of fine arts and comics in the last sixty years. But Beaty sets aside the question of why this antagonism began in the first place, almost reifying the relationship as something that "ever was."

It is part of the job of the historian to question that which "ever was," however. Social relations are always in flux, historically contingent, and subject to the power of the past. Beaty's book begs the question: how did this come to be? The "art world" of comics in America shares one common ancestor in the newspaper comic. How did cartoonists come to this understanding that comics were somehow deeply antithetical to "high art?" When newspapers first began to publish comics, how did editors, cartoonists, and the reading public perceive them? How did attitudes toward comics as a form of cultural production change over time? The historic record offers scant evidence, there is really no hope of coming to a conclusive and certain final answer to these questions, but they are still important, and worth asking. And there are scraps of evidence and certain key moments that can help us better understand the answers to these questions. It is these moments that this dissertation tries to interrogate.

The works of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu provided a jumping off point for this project. In *The Field of Cultural Production and Distinction*, Bourdieu focused on questions of how hierarchies develop around different cultural productions: why people perceive the naturalistic and “literary” novel as “higher” than genre fiction, or what separated *avant-garde* theater from bourgeois theater. One of Bourdieu’s chief tenants in these books was that cultural productions, literary or artistic works, could be positioned onto a “field.” As described by sociologist Zander Navarro, Bourdieu’s fields “represent a certain distribution structure of some types of capital and they indicate arenas of struggle around production, accumulation, circulation and possession of goods, services, knowledge or status and the competition among agents to monopolize distinct capitals. They may be thought of as structured spaces that are organized around specific types of capital or combinations of capital.”⁹

Bourdieu acknowledged that these fields were historically determined. Any given field should not be thought of as static over time, but as a site of contestation and constant shifting. The place of individual works or groups of works is determined by a complex of different types of capital—social, cultural, and economic—and are negotiated within the context of the cultural knowledge and habitus of its audience: “The meaning of a work . . . changes automatically with each change in the field within which it is situated for the spectator or

⁹ Zander Navarro, “In Search of a Cultural Interpretation of Power: The Contribution of Pierre Bourdieu,” *IDS Bulletin* 37, no. 6 (November 1, 2006): 18.

reader.”¹⁰ Yet producers of cultural products, such as artists and writers, still have autonomy, and the opportunity to alter the shape of the field by their work: “The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces.”¹¹

Perhaps the easiest way to think of a particular field of cultural production is to imagine a graph. Bourdieu is a very visual thinker, and his books are riddled with graphs and charts. One might imagine a Cartesian plane with four quadrants, where the x-axis represents economic capital, and the y-axis represents cultural capital. Onto this plane, one could plot the relative “value” placed upon a variety of cultural productions. In the first quadrant, on the upper right, are things that have high levels of both economic and cultural capital. This is where we might see the works of acclaimed painters like Picasso—his paintings, even in his lifetime, were sold at high prices and were simultaneously hailed as masterpieces. The second quadrant, on the upper left, contains cultural productions that have cultural capital, but do not get much economic capital. In this quadrant, might be the location of works of poetry, a literary market that is seldom profitable, but is high in cultural capital and prestige. The fourth quadrant, at the bottom right, contains cultural productions that are low in cultural capital but still highly profitable. This is the place of luxury items that do not hold much cultural capital. Finally, the third quadrant, on the bottom left,

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 30–31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

holds the majority of mass culture: low in cultural capital, cheap or freely available. By tracing the career of an artist or writer, or even a particular work, one can moreover establish a “trajectory” that can inform us of shifts in how valued that producer or work is over time.¹²

Part of the utility of this model is that it scales quite well. Because a field is a field of forces, determined by the position taking of other agents in the field, one can easily “zoom in” on a particular field, to look at the relative positions of agents within it. One can just as well “zoom out” from a particular field of cultural production to a field of culture more generally. When looking at the field of literature, one would likely put basically all poetry on the left two quadrants—poetry is not particularly expensive, is not profitable to publishers, and poets seldom make much money from their writing. If one however decides instead to look at the field of poetry, the axes can be re-aligned because the field is constituted of the things within it. And some poets’ work has certainly been more economically profitable than others. A deluxe limited edition printing of the works of T.S. Elliot is different in both cultural and economic capital from a chapbook by an unknown poet.

¹² Bourdieu identifies multiple types of “trajectories” that correspond to his different types of capital. This includes “. . . economic trajectory, social trajectory, and cultural trajectory.” See *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 79. For the sake of simplicity, I will be speaking here of “trajectories” broadly defined, with an understanding that they could include change in time to the economic, social, or cultural capital imbued into an artist, writer, or creation.

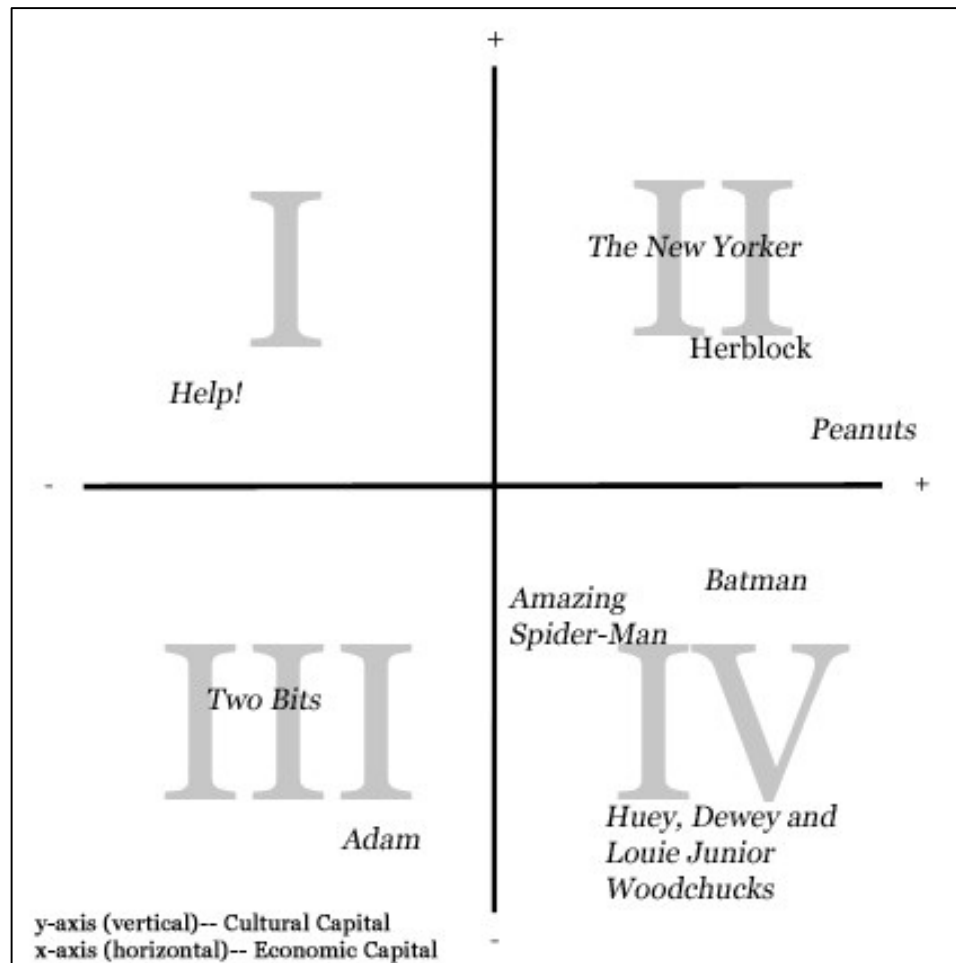


Figure 1: The Comics Field at Midcentury (circa 1964-1965)

In much the same way, it would be a relatively easy task for one familiar with the history of comics and cartooning to begin to chart out the comics field at mid-century, when Beaty begins his book. Figure 1 is a chart of the comics field circa 1964-1966—it is certainly not exhaustive but meant to illustrate the order established by midcentury. One can easily see that, of the selected examples, the *New Yorker* (in the second quadrant) is highest in cultural capital. Editorial

cartoonist Herblock is lower in economic capital, as his position as a syndicated editorial cartoonist for the Newspaper Enterprise Association (NEA) not only meant that his cartoons were bringing in good money, but also that they appeared in a variety of newspapers, some with higher prestige, some with lower. As Bourdieu observed, social capital is deeply interlinked with cultural capital, and the *New Yorker's* readership was distinctly highbrow, while newspapers reached a far wider audience. Exclusivity is always a factor in cultural capital. It is important to reach a small audience, and for that audience to be the *right* audience, one that has the right education, works in the right career, and so forth. Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* is located even further in the same trajectory. That strip was widely distributed and sometimes deeply philosophical, but also appealed to a very wide audience, as evinced by the explosion of *Peanuts* merchandising in that decade.

Moving down to the fourth quadrant, comic books had far less cultural capital than newspaper strips or editorial cartooning. Comic books were less profitable than newspaper comics, and often judged as lowbrow entertainment for children. They were also devoid of any prestige that might come from appearing in a more "literate" venue, whether that venue was *The New Yorker* or the *Washington Post*. *Batman* is a highly profitable piece of intellectual property. In 1966 ABC premiered the television series based on the character. But the television show was also undeniably low in cultural capital, as evinced by the television adaptation's tone, which always danced on the line between camp and

parody. Marvel's *Amazing Spider-Man*, a newer and less established title, from a smaller publisher that at the time paid below industry standard page rates, is marginally lower in cultural capital but much less lower in economic capital. Finally, Western Publishing/Gold Key's *Huey, Dewey and Louie Junior Woodchucks*, a licensed title based on Disney characters, was relatively profitable but extremely low in cultural capital. While *Batman* might be "for children," those children were school-aged to adolescent. Titles like this one from Gold Key were explicitly aimed at very young children. This younger audience coupled with the comic's status as a licensed property contributed to the low evaluation of its cultural capital.

In the first quadrant, we find things that do possess cultural capital, but little economic capital. A good example of a publication so situated would be *Help!*, the satirical magazine edited by former *Mad* editor Harvey Kurtzman. Despite a shoestring budget, Kurtzman used his connections in the field to bring together an incredible stable of cartoonists that included some of the biggest names from his time at *Mad* and *Humbug*, including Jack Davis, Will Elder, and Wally Wood. *Help!* also brought together an assortment of cartoonists who would soon become part of the vanguard of the "underground comix" movement in the late sixties and early seventies, including Robert Crumb, Jay Lynch, and Gilbert Sheldon. The magazine brought together an incredible assortment of humorists and cultural commentators, as well, including Terry Gilliam, Woody Allen, and Gloria Steinem. Despite the exceptionally talented stable of artists that Kurtzman

was able to build, the magazine folded in 1965, never having found a commercial niche. Nonetheless, it was influential on cartoonists of its time as well as current and future tastemakers.

Finally, in the third quadrant, the region of the comics and cartooning field into which we place things that lack both economic and cultural capital, we find *Adam*, a second- or third-rate girlie magazine that also ran cartoons, and John Somerville's self-syndicated strip *Two Bits*, which ran between 1962 and 1965, and seems to have never been profitable nor acclaimed.¹³ Both of these titles are essentially forgotten, but that is the point. Absent cultural or economic capital, cultural productions tend to be rather ephemeral things, and soon forgotten.

The separate "art world" of comics had, by midcentury, established a multivalent hierarchy of works and venues of publication, just as any other art form must. This complex hierarchy can be understood as a "field" in the sense that Bourdieu established. In the period that this dissertation focuses on, however, this hierarchical understanding of the field of comics was less established. In the years between the 1890s into the 1920s, this hierarchical understanding of the "place" of comics in the field of cultural production was still crystalizing in the minds of cartoonists, editors, artists, and the reading public. In the 1890s, the comic supplement seemed simply to be a new venue for

¹³ Allan Holtz, *American Newspaper Comics: An Encyclopedic Reference Guide* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 398.

illustration, just as the comic weekly magazines had been. Later it would become evident that they had become something else entirely, something new.

Between 1889, when Pulitzer first included a (black-and-white) humor supplement to the Sunday edition of *The World*,¹⁴ and 1896 or 1897, the Sunday comic supplement was largely an emulation of humor magazines like *Puck*, *Judge*, or *Life*. Around the turn of the century, the comics page transformed, adopting a format recognizable to modern readers. The basic grammar of the form had been established. This is not to suggest that this grammar had been “invented” in the comics page. Multiple scholars including Pierre Couperie, David Kunzle, and Thierry Smolderen have demonstrated that the foundations of comics art all go back much further.¹⁵ But it was not until around the turn of the century that all of these techniques and grammars come together consistently in one place, on a regular basis in the U.S. The Sunday comic supplement, establishing the format in such a way, forever altered the history of comics as an art form in America.

This new form spread quickly throughout the country. By 1908, nearly 75 percent of Sunday newspapers nationwide had a comic supplement, and around

¹⁴ Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 24.

¹⁵ For just a few of the many arguments about the “prehistory” of the comics art form, see Pierre Couperie, *A History of the Comic Strip*, (2. print) (New York Crown, 1968), David Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet From c.1450 to 1825*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), David Kunzle, *The History of the Comic Strip : The 19th Century* (Berkeley CA: Univ. of California Press, 1990), Thierry Smolderen, *The Origins of Comics from William Hogarth to Winsor McCay*, 2014.

75 percent of *those* came from the same three companies—Hearst, World Color Co., and McClure.¹⁶ What had been a novelty in only a handful of urban newspapers a little over a decade before had coalesced into a nationwide business. One could, by that point, really discuss the comic supplement as a national institution. References to particular characters or strips would resonate across the country.

Navigating Respectability and Commercial Appeal in a New Medium

The rapidity of the adoption of the Sunday comic supplement by newspapers across the country quickly brought a national audience to something new. The comic supplement was regarded as a novelty in much the same way as the motion picture was, and at much the same time. In a country where a national mass culture was beginning to take root, the comic supplement of many newspapers seemed very much a part of it. Because the field of cultural production is determined by the evaluations of artists, audiences, intellectuals, and other agents interacting with it, a new type of art form or new medium is not made out of whole cloth, its cultural meaning and value already established. Rather, it takes time, as these agents come to a consensus about the cultural capital of the art form, and its economic value is established.

Even at the moment of the comic supplement's advent, there were cultural forms that, if not identical to the comics, were definitely adjacent to them. These informed people's reception of the comics from the beginning. The newspapers

¹⁶ Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, 41.

that the comic supplements appeared in, frequently described as the yellow press, were of course a factor. These were newspapers for the masses, often described by others in journalism as unscrupulous, sensationalistic, and generally lacking in proper decorum. The rise of pictorial journalism in the Civil War era and after was another adjacent factor, though it was one that could be seen as cutting both ways—the genteel respectability of *Harpers'* was undeniable, but so was the massive public outcry against newspapers like the *National Police Gazette*. Weekly humor magazines like *Life*, *Puck*, and *Judge* provided much of the earliest talent for the comics page, and the early Sunday comic supplements borrowed heavily from their format. The respectability of such magazines was a subject of debate among librarians and schoolteachers, but their cultural status was undeniably higher than the yellow press newspapers. The supplements were also frequently described within a constellation of working-class amusements such as vaudeville, ragtime, and movies, which rose to national popularity at the same time. Likewise, anti-comics critics often saw the supplements as falling within the realm of children's literature—a comparison that was frequently unfavorable.

This study is an attempt to gain insight into how different agents and audiences viewed newspaper comic strips, the cultural logics in play, and to look at how these logics contributed to the “hostile” position that Beaty describes. By the time Martin Sheridan began to take interviews for his 1942 book *Comics and Their Creators*, this mutual antagonism between cartoonists and fine artists was

well established. Many of his interviewees, primarily with cartoonists who began their careers after 1915 who were part of a second generation of newspaper strip cartoonists, reflect this hostility, minimizing any formal art training. Several even discuss with pride being kicked out of art school. Similarly, *Fortune* advised in 1933, “If you want to become a comic artist the first point is to stay away from art schools,” recommending that aspiring cartoonists instead “get a job as an office boy, preferably in the art department of a syndicate.”¹⁷ This represented a radical shift from twenty years earlier when a number of cartoonists participated in the Armory Show in 1913, a show that altered the history of American art, and a show who counted among its principal architects a newspaper comic strip artist. It may be impossible to understand everything that engendered this change, but this dissertation attempts to explore a few different points where the respectability and cultural capital of newspaper comics come to the fore during that first generation of cartoonists.

Chapter 1 deals primarily with the editors and publishers who began running color humor supplements in their Sunday papers in the 1890s. Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were synonymous with the “new journalism” that is often to this day described using the perjorative “yellow journalism.” This chapter is the most distinctly historiographical in its aims. This chapter argues that, by creating color humor supplements, they meant not only to increase readership and circulation but were attempting to increase the prestige

¹⁷ “The Funny Papers,” 49.

of their newspapers by emulating bourgeois humor magazines of the day, such as *Puck* and *Life*. The comics page quickly morphed into something more. The commercial power of the Yellow Kid was a pivotal moment, and from that point on, the Sunday comics page fairly quickly transformed into something that more and more resembled the Sunday comics that contemporary readers would be more familiar with. This chapter will also look at how these early strips were especially highly consistent with the vision and goals of the “yellow press” more generally, a vision that is often mis-remembered today as being much farther from journalistic norms of the time than it actually was. This new format proved a recipe for success. The comics were so popular that they quickly caught on with other papers, and national features syndicates came in to spread them coast-to-coast.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the nationwide moral panic that revolved around the Sunday comics supplement that emerged in the years around 1907-1912. Chapter 2 explores the organizations that pushed for the suppression or improvement of the comic supplement and at the way the press advanced the cause. This movement seems to have been a genuinely grassroots movement by women’s clubs and professional organizations focused on the teaching of young children. It was also spurred on by publications that were politically opposed to Hearst, as well as the desire by some publishers, most notably the *New York Times*’s Adolph Ochs, to try to pull readership from the circulation juggernauts of Pulitzer and Hearst’s *World* and *Journal*.

Chapter 3 looks at the rhetoric of anti-comics literature of the time. The rhetoric of the movement was not a simplistic, single-issue concern, but a complex of different anxieties, focused around issues of urbanization, working-class leisure, progressive education and child development theory, Sabbatarianism, class anxiety, and the purity of the press movement, among other things. The movement for the suppression or improvement of the Sunday comics page seems to have fizzled out by 1912, but this moral panic gives us good insight into the concerns that were seen as associated with the comics pages of the time. After all the attention given to this movement during this time, it seems impossible to imagine the cultural status of comics rising for some time.

Some cartoonists, however, were not comfortable with this. Chapter 4 deals with the involvement of newspaper comic strip cartoonists in the Armory Show of 1913, through the lens of what Bourdieu describes as “social capital.” I argue that the skills and social capital accrued during his previous employment as a newspaper cartoonist was part of what made Walt Kuhn such an important organizer and promoter of that exhibition. As a cartoonist, he still had social capital within the art world, and used his connections to bring American artists into the exhibition. His experience with newspapers were also a key component of his ability to promote and sell the show. He worked connections with former newspaper coworkers to promote the show, and deliberately sought a mass audience rather than only trying to attract the art world.

The show's popularity led to iterations of the show in Chicago and then Boston, and the response of the public was massive each time. For this reason, the the Armory Show is remembered as the event that introduced American audiences to the new modernist *avant-garde*. Chapter 4 looks at the career trajectories of several cartoonists who participated in the Armory Show. Some, like Walt Kuhn and Marjory Organ, found ways out of the low-cultural-capital world of cartooning, turning their backs on it for the world of fine art. Others, like Rudolph Dirks and Gus Mager, sought to keep a foot in each world. While neither of these cartoonists is remembered as a particularly important artist, they kept producing art throughout their lives, and kept in regular contact with people in the art world.

The Conclusion examines the rise of serial storytelling in the “continuity” strip, a development that excelled at encouraging daily readership, but also harkened back to other modes of storytelling that were not particularly high in their cultural capital. Experiments with serial continuity actually began well before *The Gumps* became a household names, but it was with *The Gumps* that editors discovered a that continuity could be a much better tool to encourage regular readership than the “gag-a-day” features that had previously made up the majority of comic strips. This move toward serial continuity would help to make many cartoonists celebrities, their names almost as well-known as their creations.

But this narrative approach came to finally cement the low-cultural status of comics at the same time. Comics appealed to the masses, and this blinded many to the deep well of creativity that they represented. Perhaps this state of affairs was inevitable from the beginning, unavoidable given the papers that first ran comic supplements. But in looking to these particular examples, one can gain a better sense of what was going on during these years, about the position taking and trajectories taking place in the comics field. While comics were treated with disdain by much of the high art establishment throughout most of the twentieth century, the popular-but-low status that comics reached in those years also meant that the anti-comics crusaders' view of the Sunday supplement as "vulgar" must have seemed like hysteria mere years afterwards. The next moral crusade against comics, begun by Frederick Wortham in the 1950s, would by and large bypass newspaper comics altogether, seeing them as relatively wholesome and unproblematic, and instead focus on comic books. The Sunday comics may not have been viewed as "art," but they were still regarded as a wholesome part of many Americans' daily lives.

CHAPTER ONE: “YELLOW JOURNALISM” AND THE YELLOW KID: THE NEWSPAPER BUSINESS AND THE COMIC SUPPLEMENT, 1895- 1900

In 1895, two things happened that were deeply important to the history of newspaper comics. The first, on May 5 of that year, was the publication of “At The Circus In Hogan’s Alley,” the first color cartoon to feature Richard Felton Outcault’s “Yellow Kid” character. It was not the first appearance of the character, and he was not fully developed. Indeed, the “kid” was not yet even “yellow,” his famous nightshirt was actually blue. And rather than sly or clever words written across his chest, there was a sooty handprint. But the appearance of Outcault’s Yellow Kid, along with the other inhabitants of Hogan’s Alley, marked the beginning of the strip’s meteoric popularity. The “Kid’s” short-lived but powerful popularity in New York would prove to newspaper publishers that comic supplements could be a major driver of sales Sunday newspaper. The second event was the arrival that fall of William Randolph Hearst, and his purchase of the *New York Journal*. Hearst soon began to sell a paper that very closely emulated Pulitzer’s, and sold for half the price. Even if these two events had been the only thing that happened in 1895, it would still be remembered as one of the most important years in the history of American newspaper comic strips and, indeed, of American comics in general.

Pulitzer and Outcault

Joseph Pulitzer purchased the *New York World* from Jay Gould in 1883.

Pulitzer was the publisher, at the time, of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, a profitable paper with projected earnings of \$120,000 to \$150,000 that year. Pulitzer did not want to sell off a proven, profitable paper, and ended up borrowing money from Gould himself in order to purchase the *World*. The purchase of the *World* meant that Pulitzer found himself almost \$500,000 in debt to the paper's last publisher. The Jewish-Hungarian immigrant was ambitious, and a risk taker. Five years earlier, he had purchased the *Dispatch*, a paper in bankruptcy, for \$2,500, half his life savings at the time, and turned it into a profitable enterprise.¹⁸

At the end of the day, Joseph Pulitzer was a businessman more than a journalist. As biographer James McGrath Morris described him, "Although he was at times an innovator in journalism, this was not his strength. Rather, he possessed remarkable foresight and had an uncanny ability to recognize value where others did not. He was willing to take risks based on his insights when others remained nervous."¹⁹ This is not to say that he was merely a clever man who made smart purchases. Part of this insight into value was an understanding of the opportunities and constraints inherent in the newspaper business, but it also included a good eye for talent. Pulitzer became, in a matter of years, an almost absentee publisher, working as much as he could abroad or from his home

¹⁸ James McGrath Morris, *Pulitzer: A Life in Politics, Print, and Power* (New York: Harper, 2010), 153–157, 205–206.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 159–160.

office, but his talent for hiring people who could serve him well made this possible.²⁰

One such hire was Morrill Goddard, a young man from Maine who had studied at Dartmouth. Goddard began as a reporter and fairly quickly was promoted to editor. In 1894, while serving as city editor, Goddard coordinated the paper's campaign to elect William L. Strong as New York's next mayor. Pulitzer, impressed, offered him the position of managing editor. Goddard declined, saying he was content running the city desk. Pulitzer shortly came back and promoted him to the position of managing editor of the Sunday edition of the *World*.²¹ At that point, the Sunday *World* was already outselling every edition of every other paper in the United States.²² Morrill was not satisfied to rest on the paper's laurels, however, and he began a campaign to increase readership dramatically. He had an eye for the type of journalism that drove sales, a mix of pseudoscience, spectacle, sex, and amusements, that came to embody the supplement journalism of the day. As a former colleague would recall of Goddard, "He went in for the weird and wonderful and if things were not weird and wonderful enough for him, he made them so."²³ This formula worked. When the Sunday *World*'s circulation topped 500,000, Pulitzer promised to double his

²⁰ Ibid., 258.

²¹ Kenneth Whyte, *The Uncrowned King: The Sensational Rise of William Randolph Hearst* (Counterpoint Press, 2009), 103.

²² Ibid.

²³ Roy McCardell, "Opper, Outcault and Company," *Everybody's Magazine*, June 1905, 763.

weekly paycheck if he could top that. Goddard's weekly payment was doubled frequently in subsequent weeks.²⁴

The *World* had published a one-page comic section in its Sunday supplements as early as 1889. "The *World's* Funny Side," as it was called, was a fairly straightforward emulation of comic weeklies like *Judge* and *Puck*, but lacked their attractive color plates.²⁵ In 1893, when Pulitzer acquired a four-color rotary press, it was Goddard, recently having made the position of editor of the Sunday edition, who decided to change the comic page to a larger colored supplement. Other newspapers had experimented with color, but this new press was a cutting-edge technology that was more precise.²⁶ The higher speed of printing and lower quality of paper that newspapers used at the time would often lead to problems with registration, a term for the precision of the alignment of colors. This could lead to "color-shifting," when one or more color plates were obviously mis-aligned, causing certain colors to seem to jump off figures on the page. This sort of problem was not eliminated by Pulitzers' new presses, but was made much less common. It could not match the color printing used by magazines, that used better quality paper, but it was a notable improvement, a closer product to the humor weeklies that the supplement imitated. The *World* launched its color comic supplement in November of 1894.

²⁴ Denis Brian, *Pulitzer: A Life* (New York: J. Wiley, 2001), 173–174.

²⁵ Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 24.

²⁶ McCardell, "Oppen, Outcault and Company," 763.

Goddard was inventive with the use of color printing for the Sunday edition. One of his most famous and attention-grabbing series under Pulitzer was inspired by a cutaway diorama of a ship with a shark swimming below that he had seen in a shop window. Goddard took the idea and expanded upon it, commissioning a whole series of full-color cutaway drawings of various topics: a chorus girl, a patient in surgery, prehistoric beasts, even a gorilla. Some in the staff found it distasteful but, in Pulitzer's newsroom, nothing was as powerful as circulation numbers. The series brought in four or five thousand more readers during the weeks it appeared. The day the *World* ran the full-page cutaway gorilla, circulation spiked by 10,000 readers. Pulitzer responded with a bonus check and a pair of Grecian urns. Any argument about the "propriety" of such features was effectively quashed.²⁷

Goddard needed more illustrators that were good cartoonists to fill his new color comic supplement. He turned to Roy McCardell, a former coworker at the *World* who had moved over to the comic weekly *Puck*. Both *Puck* and the similar humor weekly *Judge* were at the height of their circulation, and McCardell would later recall that at the time, they "held under contract practically all the comic artists in sight." McCardell suggested Richard Felton Outcault, a talented artist from Lancaster, Ohio, who was working in New York at the time as technical illustrator and draftsman at both the *Electrical World* and

²⁷ Brian, *Pulitzer*, 198.

the *Steel Railway Journal*. Outcault was much more fond of his freelance work drawing cartoons, primarily for the humor magazine *Truth*.²⁸

McCardell recalled that *Truth* was seen by many as somewhat less respectable at that time than *Puck* or *Judge*, due to a stable of illustrators that specialized in beautiful women. He explained that *Truth* was “noted for its dashing color drawings by Charles Howard Johnson, Archie Gunn, and [Walter] Granville Smith, and considered somewhat *risqué* for the subjects illustrated by those skillful artists.”²⁹ Girlie drawings may have helped *Truth* stay in business, but they did not bring it the success that more prominent humor magazines enjoyed; *Truth* consistently undersold *Puck*, *Judge*, and *Life*.³⁰ Outcault’s decision to work for Pulitzer’s high-selling newspaper rather than continue to piece together work with technical illustrations and cartoons for the fourth-place comic weekly *Truth* must have seemed a fairly obvious one.

“At the Circus in Hogan’s Alley,” which appeared in the Sunday *World* on May 5, 1895, would hardly be recognizable as a “comic” to a modern reader, because it really is not a “comic,” in the modern sense.³¹ It does not have sequential panels; there are no word balloons; there is not even a singular recognizable “punch line,” as one would expect to see in a single-panel cartoon. It bears far more similarity to a cartoon in the comic weeklies of the day like *Puck*

²⁸ McCardell, “Opper, Outcault and Company,” 763–764.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 764.

³⁰ Bill Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault’s the Yellow Kid: A Centennial Celebration of the Kid Who Started the Comics* (Northampton, Mass.: Kitchen Sink Press, 1995), 22.

³¹ Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault’s the Yellow Kid*, color plate 1.

or *Judge*. It is a distinctly urban and chaotic scene. Street urchins have set up a makeshift circus for the entertainment of other children in a litter-strewn, bare dirt yard. In the center foreground and to the left, one can observe the performers: one child juggles a tin can and some stones, another boy walks on his hands. A boy in greasepaint and a makeshift collar and pointed hat performs as a clown atop a bucket, holding a “balloon”—the common term for the paper-wrapped hoop used in circus performances.³² Another boy crashes through the hoop—he appears to have jumped off the back of a goat. In the foreground, a girl in a circus costume and ill-fitting tights, her back to the reader, waits with a dog.

The action is reinforced by a bit of text, in typeface, in the upper right corner. This is written in dialect and meant to be read as dialogue, attributed to the child dressed as a clown: “The Clown—Ladies and gents, please note der marvelous grace wid which Herr Svengeli sweeps troo der paper disc. Please—keep yer seats fur next comes Madame Sans Jane der champion bare- (I mean dog-back) rider of der world.” The reference to “Herr Svengeli” seems to be an allusion to Svengali, the anti-Semitic villain of George de Maurier’s *Trilby*. This book had run as a serial in *Harper’s* before being published as a book in September 1894. In February of 1895, shortly before this cartoon was published,

³² S. L. Kotar and J. E. Gessler, *The Rise of the American Circus, 1716-1899* (McFarland, 2011), 92.

Trilby was at the top of the first American best-sellers list.³³ Small allusions like this are often added to comics to keep them timely and topical.

All around the performers are their audience. At the far right there is a bench, lined with children. Behind this group, a hand-painted sign instructs the audience: “Don’t guy the performers.”³⁴ A working-class adult woman, the only grown-up in the cartoon, watches the show approvingly. Other children stand behind the bench, including the child who is a strange proto-form of Mickey Dugan, the “Yellow Kid.” His broad grin, bald head, and lantern ears are all there, though he appears younger than he would in later strips. His nightshirt, as mentioned above, is blue rather than the yellow that would become the character’s trademark, and covered with sooty handprints rather than writing. The performers’ audience is not limited to those sitting in the designated area for the audience, however. Children watch with amusement from a nearby tenement window. Other children peer over the fence that is behind the performers, one actually sitting on the fence itself.

This cartoon contained in it the germ of the series. It brought together all the key elements—the anarchical play of the street children, the name “Hogan’s Alley,” the use of color, and the Kid himself. This is what that makes “At the Circus in Hogan’s Alley” notable, even though each of these things had appeared earlier. The *World* had been running a color comic supplement since May 21,

³³ Avis Berman, “George Du Maurier’s *Trilby* Whipped up a Worldwide Storm,” *Smithsonian*, December 1993.

³⁴ “Guy” is a somewhat antiquated word for mocking or ridicule.

1893, almost two years before the tenement kids of Hogan's Alley appeared in the paper in color. Outcault had likewise been published in the *World* for a little while before "At the Circus" ran. His first known original cartoon for the world was a black and white six-panel narrative with captions, published September 16, 1894. Later in 1894, Outcault would have color, multi-panel comics published in the *World*.³⁵

Nor was it the first appearance of the nightshirted, baldheaded Kid who would eventually come to be known as the Yellow Kid.³⁶ The character, or early prototypes of the character, appeared at least four times in cartoons Outcault drew for *Truth* before "At the Circus." The Kid even appeared in *Truth* after "At the Circus." Comics historian Bill Blackbeard has pointed to one comic from the magazine that featured the Yellow Kid character as late as December, 1895. The Kid had also appeared earlier in the pages of the *World* in black and white cartoons, both in reprints of cartoons from *Truth*, and at least once in an original cartoon for the *World*, in "The Fate of the Glutton," published on March 10, 1895. Likewise, the name "Hogan's Alley" can be traced back to Outcault's work at *Truth*, specifically to "Feudal Pride in Hogan's Alley," from June 2, 1894.³⁷ Even

³⁵ Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault's the Yellow Kid*, 24.

³⁶ It is worth noting that "kid" was a slang term of the time that referred not simply to children, but to a young, poor, urban type-- one that was associated with crime, pugilism, and mischief. See Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 220; And Robert L. Gambone, *Life on the Press: The Popular Art and Illustrations of George Benjamin Luks* (Jackson, Miss.: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2009), 141.

³⁷ Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault's the Yellow Kid*, 26–29.

the basic premise of Outcault's cartoons was not particularly original—his Hogan's Alley cartoons were very strongly influenced by the cartoons of street urchins that Michael Angelo Woolf had been publishing since the 1870s in the early humor magazine *Wild Oats* and, by the 1890s, in *Life*.³⁸

In fact, it seems likely that at first, "Outcault thought of the Kid as a type, not as a character," as historian Ian Gordon has argued.³⁹ While the Kid's appearance might seem unique, almost even alien, to modern readers, he would have been fairly familiar to readers of the day. As Bill Blackbeard has noted, "Baldheaded kids were not uncommon in the Manhattan slums of that decade, when shaving a child's head was the fastest and cheapest way to get rid of head lice. For economy's sake, young children often were sent into the streets to play in cut-down nightshirts or older sisters dresses."⁴⁰ In fact, the Yellow Kid bears more than a passing resemblance to the subject of photographer Jacob Riis's "Baby In Slum Tenement, NYC," that dates back to 1888 or 1889.⁴¹ It is very possible that Outcault, at least at first, thought of the Kid as just one of a cast of urban toughs that inhabited Hogan's Alley, perhaps the most visually recognizable and interesting, but not a full-fledged character of his own.

Being recognizable and visually interesting, however, are cornerstones of marketing, and Pulitzer and Morrill were in the business of selling newspapers. Outcault only produced eight color "Hogan's Alley" pages in 1895, but the Kid

³⁸ Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, 25–26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁰ Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault's the Yellow Kid*, 24.

⁴¹ Jacob August Riis, *Baby in Slum Tenement Hallway, N.Y.C.*, 1888.

appeared on a regular basis in illustrations advertising the comic supplement in the Sunday paper. After January 6, 1896, when “Golf the Great Society Sport as Played in Hogan’s Alley” became the earliest known cartoon to feature the Kid’s nightshirt colored yellow, it was fans of the comic who came up with the name “the Yellow Kid.” The name “The Yellow Kid” did not appear in any of Outcault’s cartoons until October of 1897.⁴²

Hearst Comes to Town

In the fall of 1895, William Randolph Hearst was looking to purchase a newspaper in New York City. Even before he arrived in town, there were rumblings in the trade journals that the young publisher from San Francisco intended to move to New York and acquire a newspaper with which he could establish a foothold in America’s publishing capital. There were three papers for sale at the time in New York. The *New York Times* was, at that moment, grossly overvalued for its circulation numbers, and would be until a year later when it was purchased at a greatly reduced rate by Adolph Ochs. The *New York Recorder* had been founded four years before by tobacco magnate George Duke, but it had never had much success making inroads into the crowded market of New York morning papers. Finally, there was the *Morning Journal*, that had been purchased earlier the same year by *Cincinnati Enquirer* publisher John McLean from its founder, Joseph Pulitzer’s brother Albert Pulitzer. The *Morning Journal* had been profitable until the economic troubles that followed the Panic of 1893. McLean had thought he could turn the paper around but failed to do so. After a

⁴² Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, 28, 31, 179 n.32.

year of hemorrhaging money, McLean was ready to cut his losses. After some negotiation, Hearst was able to secure both the *Morning Journal* and the German-language *Morgen Journal* from McLean for \$150,000—\$50,000 less than McLean’s initial asking price of \$200,000 for the *Morning Journal* alone.⁴³

The *Morning Journal* had been a penny paper, cheaper than many other morning newspapers like the *Times* and Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*, that each cost two cents. In 1894, Albert Pulitzer, in an attempt to keep the *Morning Journal* afloat financially, raised the price to two cents. When he sold the paper to McLean, the new publisher attempted to increase circulation by reducing the price back to a penny.⁴⁴ It was expected, at that time, that the penny papers were somewhat more threadbare than the two-cent papers in terms of volume and quality of content. Hearst decided to subvert this expectation and to offer readers the same amount of news and entertainment as Pulitzer’s *World*, Charles Dana’s *Sun*, and James Gordon Bennett Jr.’s *New York Herald*, for half of those papers’ price.⁴⁵

To achieve this end, Pulitzer knew he needed top talent. He quickly summoned some of his top staff from the *San Francisco Examiner*: reporters Winnifred Black and Charlie Dryden, Homer Davenport, the *Examiner*’s chief illustrator, and Charles Palmer, his business manager from San Francisco. Hearst appointed Sam Chamberlain, who had been an editor in San Francisco, managing

⁴³ David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*, 1st ed. (Mariner Books, 2001), 96–97, 99.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 96–97.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 98–100.

editor in New York.⁴⁶ With a trusted core of employees from San Francisco, Hearst retitled the paper the *New York Journal* and published his first edition on November 7, 1895, only a month after purchasing the paper.⁴⁷

Hearst, like Pulitzer, knew that Sunday newspapers were becoming irreplaceable by the 1890s. They had been uncommon in the first half of the nineteenth century but in the latter half of the century, they became increasingly common. Irish Catholic immigration to New York brought new acceptance of newspapers on the Sabbath, and Civil War era newspapers bringing special editions with news from the front on Sunday had made many Protestant readers less uncomfortable with the Sunday editions. By 1889, half of all New Yorkers read the Sunday paper, more than the number who read daily editions.⁴⁸ Sunday newspapers not only increased in number during the last decades of the nineteenth century, but they also dramatically increased in length. Around 1885, the average Sunday edition numbered around eight pages; by the turn of the century, many Sunday papers published in major cities filled forty to forty-eight pages.⁴⁹

Economic and social changes drove this growth. The role of women was changing. Women were purchasing goods in large department stores rather than

⁴⁶ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁸ Michael Schudson, *Discovering The News: A Social History Of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 99.

⁴⁹ Charles Johanningsmeier, "The Devil, Capitalism, and Frank Norris: Defining the 'Reading Field' for Sunday Newspaper Fiction, 1870-1910," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 93-94.

neighborhood shops. These department stores were designed to be destinations for shoppers from across the city.⁵⁰ Even for the city's poor immigrants, purchases of items that conveyed status became more important and more attainable.⁵¹ America, and especially New York, was becoming a consumer culture in a way that it had never been before. Concomitant with consumption came the need to attract consumers to individual businesses. Between 1870 and 1890, the number of advertising agencies in New York City went from forty to four hundred.⁵² As historian Andrew R. Heinze described this period, looking at the role of consumption in Jewish assimilation, "The dynamic growth of advertising for prepared foods, soaps, dentifrices, skin powder, cigarettes, ready-made clothes, silverware, watches, gas appliances, and bathroom fixtures in the 1880s and 1890s mirrored the entry of America into an age of surplus."⁵³ Those that could afford to were eager to buy in ways that would convey status. Those that could not afford to would, if they could find any way to do so. And for people seeking to see this new abundance laid out before them, there was no better place than the Sunday edition of papers like the *World* or the *Journal*.

Female readers were more likely to make the purchasing decisions for the family, an attractive circumstance for advertisers. But nineteenth-century women

⁵⁰ Schudson, *Discovering The News*, 100.

⁵¹ Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance : Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 5.

⁵² David Ralph Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 56.

⁵³ Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance*, 22.

were not commonly newspaper readers. Newspaper editors devised strategies to change that, and they changed it on Sundays. Editors fundamentally adjusted the tone and appearance of the Sunday paper.⁵⁴ Sunday papers were much more visual and had content that would be of interest to a variety of readers. Features were added that were specifically designed to appeal to women and even to children. The Sunday *World* included sermons, fiction, human-interest stories, travelogues, bold illustrations, humorous pieces, technology and science stories, and society news. In other words, it was designed to have a little something for everybody in the family.⁵⁵ As a result, as literary and newspaper historian Charles Johanningsmeier observed, “During this period the Sunday newspaper . . . became an extremely important organ of American capitalism, aimed at the whole family but especially at women readers.”⁵⁶

To match Pulitzer’s Sunday sales and the ad revenue that would make his one-cent gambit work Hearst decided to begin to poach some of Pulitzer’s top talent. He began by approaching Goddard. Goddard was reluctant to leave the stable of talent he had built up in his Sunday bullpen, but Hearst sweetened the deal by offering to hire all of them as well. Goddard accepted. When Pulitzer heard of this, he made Goddard a generous counter-offer. Goddard accepted again, only to be made an even more generous offer from Hearst the next day.

⁵⁴ Johanningsmeier, “The Devil, Capitalism, and Frank Norris: Defining the ‘Reading Field’ for Sunday Newspaper Fiction, 1870-1910,” 95.

⁵⁵ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 104.

⁵⁶ Johanningsmeier, “The Devil, Capitalism, and Frank Norris: Defining the ‘Reading Field’ for Sunday Newspaper Fiction, 1870-1910,” 95.

Again, Goddard accepted. Eleven artists, writers, and editors—the entire Sunday edition staff but one secretary—had moved to Hearst. Even the office cat was brought over to the *Journal*.⁵⁷ By late January of 1896, Pulitzer had secured the entire staff that had made the *World* the most successful Sunday newspaper in America.⁵⁸

Hearst took very deliberate and specific aim at Pulitzer's readership and staff. His reasons for doing so went deeper than simply trying to beat New York's most successful newspaper at its own game. Pulitzer had purchased the *World* in 1883 when Hearst was still in his first year at Harvard. Even in college, Hearst already begun to have some interest in a career in publishing. When in his sophomore year Hearst was elected the business manager of the *Harvard Lampoon*, his interest in publishing seems to have become more pronounced. Hearst would frequently take the train from Boston to New York, and when he did, he would read the New York papers. During his time at the *Lampoon*, he began to pick up the *World* and read it with ever-increasing interest. Reading the first few years of Pulitzer's *World*, Hearst discovered a new type of newspaper, one he would later emulate.⁵⁹ The *San Francisco Examiner*, after Hearst took over from his father, showed the influence of Pulitzer's New York paper. When Hearst moved to New York, he was no longer satisfied with simply emulating a

⁵⁷ Nasaw, *The Chief*, 103–104; Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 106.

⁵⁸ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 106.

⁵⁹ Christopher B. Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 128–129; Nasaw, *The Chief*, 31–32, 52–54.

formula. He wanted Pulitzer's top staff. Already spending at a loss in hopes of building a paper that could make up for its lower cost, Hearst spared no expense in attracting talent that could bring him readers.

Pulitzer had reason for concern. He convened a meeting with business advisors John Norris and Solomon S. Carvalho. Norris and Carvalho recommended Pulitzer reduce the price of the *World* to a penny to try to stop Hearst from attracting readers with a lower price point. Their logic was straightforward. Pulitzer's paper had better-established relationships with advertisers. Carvalho and Norris reasoned that with the increased circulation the paper would see with at a lower price point, they would be able to attract more ad revenue. Pulitzer was worried by this approach, however. He was making enough with the two-cent paper to cover the cost of each edition and was not eager to operate at a deficit for an uncertain strategy. Eventually, he conceded to the advice of two of his top advisors, and the *World* sold for one cent beginning on February 10, 1896.⁶⁰

The price reduction, in fact, increased the *World's* circulation. In the first day, it climbed from an average of 185,000 to around 373,000, a significant spike. And sales continued to rise, however briefly. But after a certain point, this increase in readership leveled off, leaving Pulitzer with the shortfall he had worried about. Even worse, it created a problem with advertisers. Pulitzer had raised ad rates in anticipation of increased readership, and had publically crowed

⁶⁰ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 107–108.

about the circulation soon reaching a million readers. When those readers failed to manifest, advertisers were left wondering why the paper was charging significantly more for relatively modest gains in readership. Perhaps most frustrating for Pulitzer, his own paper's increase in sales did little to stave off Hearst's growing circulation.⁶¹

Nor could Pulitzer stop Hearst from continuing to poach talent from Pulitzer's stable. In February of 1896, Hearst hired Richard A. Farrelly, the city desk editor for the *World*, the day before Pulitzer had planned a banquet in Farrelly's honor. Less than two months later, on April 1, 1896, Pulitzer hired Solomon Carvalho, one of the two trusted advisors that Pulitzer had met with to decide what his response to Hearst's stealing his Sunday staff would be. Carvalho had begun working under Charles Dana at the *Sun*, and was widely respected throughout the industry for his knowledge of every aspect of the business. Carvalho was frustrated that Pulitzer, while he had eventually been convinced to lower the price as Carvalho and Norris recommended, had disregarded the other half of his advice by raising ad prices.⁶²

Using the older newsman's own staff, young Hearst had in effect begun a circulation war by trying to out-Pulitzer Pulitzer. And it worked. They were matched on price now, at a penny for the dailies and five cents for the Sunday. In the fall of 1896, Hearst decided to launch his own comic supplement. He ordered

⁶¹ Ibid., 108–109.

⁶² Ben Procter, *William Randolph Hearst : The Early Years, 1863-1910* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1998), 86.

top-of-the-line color presses from the Hoe Company and went about luring another talent from Pulitzer: Richard F. Outcault, who was, by this time, one of Pulitzer's most popular artists.⁶³

While Pulitzer's paper had been the first to feature a color Sunday supplement, Hearst appeared to gauge even more clearly the potential of the genre. He was a longtime reader of comic weeklies, including *Puck*, *Life*, and *Judge*, as well as their British and French counterparts. He also had collected German *bilderbuchen*—children's picture books that were very similar to comic strips in many ways.⁶⁴ Indeed, the publisher would remain remarkably hands-on with his comics sections throughout his career. He stepped in to pull Clare Briggs's *A. Piker Clerk*, a strip about a gambler and his fortunes and misfortunes betting on horses that ran daily in the Sports section of Hearst's Chicago *American* in 1904—for being “vulgar.”⁶⁵ Similarly, he directly ordered editors of his papers to run George Herriman's Sunday *Krazy Kat* strips, which Hearst thought were brilliant, despite the editors' contention that neither they nor their readers understood Herriman's work.⁶⁶

On October 18, 1896, Hearst's comic supplement, *The American Humorist*, debuted with an Outcault Yellow Kid cartoon on the front page. In the spirit of self-promotion typical of the “Yellow Journals” of the time, the *Humorist*

⁶³ Nasaw, *The Chief*, 108.

⁶⁴ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 187.

⁶⁵ Moses Koenigsberg, *King News, an Autobiography* (Philadelphia; New York: F.A. Stokes Company, 1941), 381–384.

⁶⁶ Bill Blackbeard and Martin Williams, *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 80–81.

billed itself as “eight pages of polychromatic effulgence that make the rainbow look like a lead pipe.”⁶⁷ The Kid’s appearance in the *Journal* might strike us as strange, as cartoon characters are seen as intellectual property protected as such. In a strip published on September 6, he had inscribed his signature within a box, which was not typical practice for Outcault. Inside the box, above his signature, were the words “DO NOT BE DECIEVED NONE GENUINE WITHOUT THIS SIGNATURE.” Outcault tried further to register his copyright on the character in a letter to the Librarian of Congress dated September 7, 1896. It is not documented with certainty anywhere, but it seems likely that Hearst had approached Outcault in early September and he wanted to do everything he could to protect his claim on the Kid and ensure that he could be brought over to the *Journal*. In any event, his last strip for the *World* was published in early October, and within a matter of weeks, his characters were on the front page of Hearst’s new comic supplement.⁶⁸ Pulitzer maintained the copyright on *Hogan’s Alley*, the former title of Outcault’s strip, and the location where the strip took place place. Outcault’s solution to this problem was simple, and clever: he had the whole cast move. Outcault’s strip in the *Journal* was renamed *McFadden’s Row of Flats*, and the first cartoon in Heart’s paper depicted the inhabitants of *Hogan’s Alley* moving to McFadden’s *en masse*.

The Kid stands in the center foreground, with a green and yellow carpetbag, with a tag attached that reads “De Kid ~~Hogan’s Alley~~ McFadden’s

⁶⁷ Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, 32.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 31.

Flats.” The rest of the scene is—in typical Outcault style—a tumultuous scene of raw chaos. Children hold all their earthly possessions in bundles. One child falls from a fire escape, while another man is defenestrated (as he falls, he is saying “She will never trow me out of thot winder again”), and people throw all manner of refuse out their windows, including a small wood stove. Young children form a marching band of drums and crude horns and accompany the exodus. Other children hold placards. One reads “Say! Hogan’s Alley has been condemned by de Board of Helt an we was gittin tired of it anyway.” Another contains verse, with the title “A Foxey Move—Be Gee!”: “From de alley now we go / Down into McFadden’s Row / Mickey Dugan – Molly Bogan an de rest / But we’ll be de same ole crowd / Where no quiet ain’t allowed / And te make ye laff we’ll allus do our best [...] ARE YE WIT US? / Next Sunday come an see us in /McFadden’s Row of Flats.”⁶⁹

Pulitzer and the *World* were not going to let go of one of their most popular features so easily, however. While Oucault had secured the right to the name “The Yellow Kid,” the Kid’s image and likeness were not likewise secured.⁷⁰ This left Pulitzer free to continue to run a strip under the title *Hogan’s Alley*, and to continue to feature the Yellow Kid in the strip. Outcault’s final *Hogan’s Alley* ran in the *World* on October 4, 1896. On October 11, a week later, before Pulitzer had even published his first comic supplement, George B. Luks debuted as the

⁶⁹ Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault’s the Yellow Kid*, color plate 40.

⁷⁰ Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, 32.

new artist on *Hogan's Alley*.⁷¹ Like Outcault, Luks was a veteran of *Truth*, and had been hired from that magazine after a three-year stint there by the *World* shortly before taking the reigns on *Hogan's Alley*.⁷²

Luks's Yellow Kid cartoons were very similar to Outcault's, he had even done a single half-page *Hogan's Alley* cartoon in May of 1896 while Outcault was still at the *World*.⁷³ But to the connoisseur's eye, there were differences: Luks's figures loom slightly larger, meaning that the pages, while still crowded and chaotic, often had fewer characters than in many of Outcault's pages. Luks's backgrounds were often more detailed. Art historian and curator Robert Gambone noted that "Luks's line is always broad and never assumes the pencil-like detail evident in Outcault's early cartoons."⁷⁴ Comics historian Richard D. Olson observed that ". . . Luks drew the ears of the Yellow Kid in a much more pronounced and comical fashion . . ."⁷⁵ Luks also introduced several new residents to *Hogan's Alley*, most notably, a pair of smaller Yellow Kid clones, known as the "Little Nippers" or the "Yellow Kids."⁷⁶ The *Journal's* Yellow Kid feature had one other difference: accompanying each page was a brief, typeset story, written in dialect, by E.W. Townsend. Townsend had achieved some fame

⁷¹ Richard D. Olson, "George Luks: The 'Other' Yellow Kid Artist," *Hogan's Alley*, 2005, 113.

⁷² Gambone, *Life on the Press*, 50, 130.

⁷³ Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault's the Yellow Kid*, color plate 110.

⁷⁴ Gambone, *Life on the Press*, 131.

⁷⁵ Olson, "George Luks: The 'Other' Yellow Kid Artist," 113.

⁷⁶ Cf. Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, 33; Olson, "George Luks: The 'Other' Yellow Kid Artist," 113.

earlier with similar stories featuring a character named “Chimmie Fadden,” published in the *Sun*.⁷⁷

The two artists, the addition of new characters, and the addition of short typeset text likely seemed like minor differences to readers. With two Yellow Kid cartoons running in competing papers, the Yellow Kid soon lost its appeal, and the both the *Journal* and *World* stopped running the cartoon in 1898. A flood of unlicensed merchandise featuring the Kid’s likeness likely exacerbated this sense of over-saturation. Ian Gordon, in his book *Comics and Consumer Culture*, list unlicensed Yellow Kid merchandise that included “. . . songbooks, buttons, chewing gum, chocolate figurines, cigars, and ladies’ fans.”⁷⁸ In the collection of Geppi’s Entertainment Museum in Baltimore, patrons can see a bottle for an unlicensed “Yeller Kid High Ball.” While the fad passed relatively quickly, however, it was a powerful one. New Yorkers were inundated with the Yellow Kid. As it happened, between October of 1896 and January of 1898, when the term “yellow journalism” began to enter popular usage, both of the papers that best embodied “yellow journalism” were running rival Yellow Kid strips.⁷⁹

“Yellow Journalism” and the Yellow Kid

It is a commonplace frequently repeated in histories of both comics and the newspapers associated with “yellow journalism” that the term is derived from

⁷⁷ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 187–188.

⁷⁸ Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, 32–33.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 179, n33; W. Joseph Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism: 1897 and the Clash of Paradigms* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

the Yellow Kid.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, the accuracy of this claim may be lost. Comics historian Bill Blackbeard connected the phrase “Yellow Journalism” to the “*Journal-Examiner* Yellow Fellow Transcontinental Bicycle Relay,” a marketing stunt engineered by Hearst’s papers in the summer of 1896. Over two weeks, a relay begun by a yellow-suited bicyclist took a small mailbag from the postmaster in San Francisco to New York. Bicycling was very popular and still novel at the time, and this two-week relay was a major marketing event for Hearst’s papers, so large that other newspapers had to report on it. Blackbeard claimed that the earliest published use of the phrase “yellow journalism” was in the *New York Press*, whose editor Evan Wardman on September 2, 1896 used the phrase pejoratively, in describing this stunt. Because the Bicycle Relay happened before Hearst hired Outcault, it seems unlikely that the phrase came from the character.⁸¹ W.A. Swanberg’s *Citizen Hearst* also supports this version, although that book also relates the phrase’s beginnings to the Yellow Kid.⁸²

Journalism professor W. Joseph Campbell, in one of his two excellently researched histories of “yellow journalism,” dismisses Blackbeard’s claim as “unsubstantiated,” as he was unable to find it on microfilm. In a conversation with Blackbeard in 2001, Blackbeard told Campbell that the reason for this was that the edition that the phrase appeared in was not microfilmed. This seems

⁸⁰ See, for example, Nasaw, *The Chief*, 108, and Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 6.

⁸¹ Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault’s the Yellow Kid*, 59.

⁸² W. A. Swanberg, *Citizen Hearst: A Biography of William Randolph Hearst* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1961), 82, 88–89.

completely possible, as newspapers of the time often ran multiple editions per day and could change content fairly radically from one edition to the next.

Blackbeard said that the reference had been given to him by a third party, who later was unable to locate the clipping.⁸³ Of course, the then-seventy-five-year-old historian and collector was not the first person to make the connection between “yellow journalism” and the “yellow fellow,” and had a few years before donated his entire collection to the libraries of the Ohio State University—a collection that took six semi trucks to transport and came without a finding aid or written inventory.⁸⁴ This collection is still to the day of this writing being processed, and it is entirely possible that one day a researcher or archivist will find the clipping in question within that collection.

Campbell instead pointed to the earliest published example of the phrase he was able to find, one from Ervin Wardman, editor of the *New York Press*, on January 19, 1897. In that instance, Wardman referred to “yellow-kid journalism,” a phrase that was shortened to “Yellow Journalism” eight days later in the same paper. Wardman, editor of a Republican morning daily, seemed to have been deeply disdainful of Hearst and Pulitzer’s Democratic morning papers, having first modified the phrase “new journalism”—a term being used by proponents at the time for the style that we now identify as “yellow journalism”—into “nude journalism” earlier that month. Campbell does not give Wardman credit for

⁸³ W. Joseph Campbell, *Yellow Journalism : Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), 29–30.

⁸⁴ Jenny E. Robb, “Bill Blackbeard: The Collector Who Rescued the Comics,” *The Journal of American Culture* 32, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 244–245, 254.

originating the phrase, however. Pointing to personal correspondences by Richard Harding Davis and Frederic Remington, at the time on assignment in Cuba for the *Journal*, that both predate Wardman's use of the phrase, Campbell suggests that the phrases "yellow journalism" and "yellow kid journalism" may have both been in use by the community of New York journalists before Wardman used the phrase in print.⁸⁵

Comic Historian Mark D. Winchester, to his credit, does not try to determine with certainty the origin of the term "yellow journalism," preferring instead to trace its popularity. "A review of late nineteenth century newspapers and periodicals" he writes, "reveals that the phrase became established in 1897 and entered general usage by 1898."⁸⁶ Winchester takes a national approach, including many newspapers from the Midwest in his analysis, and arguing that critiques of the *Journal* and *World*'s jingoism during the Spanish-American War made the phrase "yellow journalism" commonplace nation-wide in 1898.⁸⁷ Nonetheless his analysis understates the importance of the "second moral war" in New York journalism.

Whether the phrase "yellow journalism" actually came from the Yellow Kid or whether this is a mistaken piece of folk etymology, the association seems to have been made very early, and it is one that has persisted. This seems the most

⁸⁵ Campbell, *Yellow Journalism*, 30–33.

⁸⁶ Mark D. Winchester, "Hully Gee, It's a War!!! The Yellow Kid and the Coining of 'Yellow Journalism,'" *Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies* 2, no. 3 (November 1995): 27.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 29–35.

important thing to take away from any historiographical debates on the issue. The phrase came into fairly common usage in New York papers around 1897, the same time that the Yellow Kid was running in both the *Journal* and the *World*. To contemporary and later readers, as well as to the community of journalists at the time, the Yellow Kid was almost synonymous with the yellow journals, and the new journalism these papers championed. That the comic strip character could so readily serve as metonym for the papers he appeared in suggests just how deep the connection between the two was in the eyes of readers and newspapermen at the time.

Defining Yellow Journalism

First, however, it is necessary to go into a brief examination of what constituted “yellow journalism” in 1897: what it was, what it was not, and how the comic supplement fit into those patterns. What made a journal “yellow?” The definition of “yellow journalism” is a matter that has been debated among historians of journalism for some time. Most agree that the yellow journals have several features in common: visual experimentation, a flair for self-promotion, and a distinctive approach to journalism, a crusading style, described by Hearst as the “journalism of action,” and described by others as sensationalism.⁸⁸

Visual experimentation was the chief identifying feature of the yellow journals. One of the big changes that the yellow journals pioneered was in the formatting of headlines. Headlines in the 1870s and before were generally single-column, concise, and relatively small. Through most of the 1880s, Pulitzer

⁸⁸ Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism*, 75.

remained fairly conservative and traditional about headline size. The *World* of the 1880s preferred to grab attention for important stories by adding extra lines of subheads under the initial single-column headline. By 1889, however, the *World* ran its first two-column headline. Through the 1890s, headlines on the *World* grew ever larger and darker, occupying multiple column-widths and eventually the entire front page.⁸⁹

These headlines were a frequent target of criticism from non-yellow journals. The *New York Sun* in May 1898, for example, ran an article on tug boat pilots taking advantage of captains coming in from foreign harbors. The article claimed that these tug operators were using the headlines from the yellow journals in order to extort high fees for tugging them from Sandy Hook into New York Harbor. These tugboat captains would lie to the ships' captains, claiming that the waters were mined and that Spanish vessels laid in wait. They would use the front page of yellow journals as corroborating evidence. The *Sun* made sure to imply that, in addition to the tugboat captains' dishonesty, the dishonesty of the yellow journals' headlines was just as much to blame: "Tugboats who cruise seaward in these perilous times for incoming sailing craft from far away ports are supplied with a stock of afternoon editions of the yellow journals," the *Sun* reported in the first line of the story, "whose flaring headlines, at a distance, may be interpreted to mean almost anything less than the extinction of the solar

⁸⁹ Schudson, *Discovering The News*, 96; Daly, *Covering America*, 127.

system.”⁹⁰ To newspapermen of the old order, the yellow journals’ blaring headlines were not only an aesthetic sin but also a dishonest tactic.

The yellow journals were also frequently and often lavishly illustrated.⁹¹ Newspapers in early America were largely bereft of illustration. The penny papers of the 1830s, especially James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald*, broke with that tradition, by offering illustrated news. After several years, however, Bennett and others ceased running illustrations. Wood engraving was still painstaking and labor-intensive, and slowed the process of printing. The publishers of the penny press eventually realized that it was more profitable to use the limited space in their newspapers for paid advertisements and typeset text.⁹²

The popularity of pictorial weeklies like *Harper’s* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, that came of age during the Civil War continued after the war. These weekly papers added value to daily news by providing deeper context as well as illustration. As one history of the press explained, “Illustrated newspapers presupposed that their readers read daily newspapers. They therefore conceived of their own function as complementary.”⁹³ These ten-cent weeklies were strong sellers into the twentieth century. But there was an opportunity for daily papers to supply illustrated news, and some saw it. The five-

⁹⁰ “Tugs Work the War News,” *The Sun*, May 2, 1898.

⁹¹ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism; a History, 1690-1960* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 539.

⁹² Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded-Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 12–14.

⁹³ Kevin G. Barnhurst and John C. Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), 117.

cent *New York Daily Graphic* was one of the first to take advantage of illustration, in 1873. The *Daily Graphic* was an illustrated newspaper with a strong emphasis on the “graphic.” In fact, the paper ran relatively little text. When Pulitzer bought the *World* in 1883, he did not initially think of the *Daily Graphic* as a competitor. By 1884, however, Pulitzer was describing both papers as “illustrated daily journals.” The *World* began to incorporate more and more illustrations, and doing it at a lower price point. By 1889, the *Daily Graphic* had folded as a direct result of Pulitzer’s competition.⁹⁴

Similarly, when the Sunday comic supplement was launched by Pulitzer, it was imitative of the illustrated comic weekly magazines popular at the time. Illustrated daily newspapers built their circulation by providing their readership with something that had previously been supplied only by one sort of weekly magazine. The comic supplement aimed to further enlarge readership by again providing something that had previously only been available in more expensive comic weeklies.

It is important, when we look at the adoption of weekly Sunday comic supplements by the yellow press, to place them in terms of the spirit of visual experimentation that they exhibited. Hearst and Pulitzer’s newspapers were like machines, constantly iterating visual innovation during the last decade of the nineteenth century. When editors stumbled upon an innovation that drove sales up, they usually adopted it. When an experiment reduced sales, they quickly

⁹⁴ Schudson, *Discovering The News*, 96.

discarded it. Thus it should come as no surprise either that they would try to borrow a visual strategy from another area of the press, the comic weeklies. When they discovered that regular comics that repeatedly featured the same cast of characters, they quickly began to leave the poetry and light prose of those early supplements behind, for something that more closely resembled the modern Sunday comics.⁹⁵

As Michael Schudson has pointed out, even the visual experimentation should be understood as a manifestation of the yellow journal's propensity for self-promotion, or as he described it, "self-advertisement." Schudson defined the term as "anything about newspaper layout and newspaper policy, outside of basic news gathering, which is designed to attract the eye and small change of readers."⁹⁶ In this sense, the use of larger, darker headlines, the use of illustration, and the yellow journals' propensity to promote their own exclusives all fit under the same rubric of self-advertisement or self-promotion.⁹⁷ The yellow journals' self-promotion also ran the gamut of advertising and spectacle. After Hearst poached Outcault, both the *World* and the *Journal* filled New York City with posters and billboards featuring the Yellow Kid.⁹⁸ When Hearst first purchased the *Journal*, he not only put up posters featuring the Sunday *Journal* but also hired brass bands and made other spectacular efforts to gain readers'

⁹⁵ Robert C. Harvey, *Children of the Yellow Kid: The Evolution of the American Comic Strip* (University of Washington Press, 1999), 18.

⁹⁶ Schudson, *Discovering The News*, 95.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96–97.

⁹⁸ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 188.

attention.⁹⁹ Both Hearst and Pulitzer attempted to make the stories they covered, and indeed their very papers themselves, not just a daily piece of printed ephemera, but an *event*, one that occurred over and over again. They wanted people to feel that failure to pick up their paper would result in missing something.

The yellow papers—especially Hearst’s *Journal*—were populist in their politics, outspoken in their self-promotion, and driven always by a desire for a wide readership. This often took the form of an activist editorial policy, which Hearst himself would call “journalism that acts,” or the “journalism of action.” Hearst particularly felt that it was the responsibility of the press to advocate for change, right wrongs, and expose government corruption, greed, or incompetence.¹⁰⁰ By encouraging reporters to go out and get stories that appealed to populist tendencies, exposing the powerful and corrupt, and putting themselves and their paper in the center of the story, Hearst refined an approach that Pulitzer had pioneered with stunts like sending Nellie Bly on a trek around the world in an attempt to best Phileas Fogg in 1889.¹⁰¹ Crusading journalism was a way to build readership. Exclusives, especially ones that might scandalize, draw readers. This crusading philosophy was also not without precedent, beyond simple stunt journalism: W. Joseph Campbell pointed to the similarities between

⁹⁹ Ibid., 92.

¹⁰⁰ Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 80.

this mode of journalism and the notion of “government by journalism” pioneered by British editor William T. Stead in the 1880s.¹⁰²

This approach, however, coupled with the oddball pseudoscientific articles like Goddard’s use of cross-sections, or articles with titles like “Can Scientists Breed Men From Monkeys?” led many to dismiss the entirety of “new journalism” as “sensationalistic.”¹⁰³ Popular descriptions of the yellow press almost always emphasize this interpretation. Yet the term had different connotations in the 1890s than it does today. When historian Frank Luther Mott described some of the types of stories commonly associated at the time with “sensationalism,” he included many qualities that became common in twentieth-century journalism: “crime news, scandal and gossip, divorces and sex, and stress upon the reporting of disasters and sports.”¹⁰⁴ The yellow journals were not without their excesses, but on the whole they were not that different from many other papers of their time. There has been a growing trend in the history of journalism toward providing correctives to this notion of the yellow press as particularly or exclusively sensationalistic.

In his pioneering history of journalism *Discovering the News*, Michael Schudson frames the late 1890s as a contest between two paradigms: the yellow journals’ “story” based journalism against Adolph Ochs and the *Times*’s

¹⁰² Ibid., 80–82.

¹⁰³ “Can Scientists Breed Men From Monkeys?,” *New York Journal*, August 22, 1897.

¹⁰⁴ Mott, *American Journalism; a History, 1690-1960*, 539.

“information” based approach.¹⁰⁵ Schudson describes these different paradigms rather poetically, using a metaphor from music: “The two journalisms differ intrinsically . . . not according to what physical tones they include, but according to the dynamic quality of the tones. ‘Information’ aspires to the position of twelve-tone music—music without an inherent, psychologically significant order to it. The ‘story,’ on the other hand, plays intentionally on connections to human experience, just as seven-tone music counts on the states of tension, unrest, and resolution it excites in listeners.”¹⁰⁶ While careful to clarify that the modern notion of journalistic objectivity does not come into being until after World War I, Schudson points to class differences between Ochs’s readership and Pulitzer’s and Hearst’s to explain their differing appeal. He suggests the possibility that the *Times* established itself as a “higher” form of journalism “because it adapted to the life experience of persons whose position in the social structure gave them the most control over their own lives.” Middle- and upper-class *Times* readers, he argues, were more independent, more in control of the world around them. The working class immigrant readers of the yellow journals were less so.¹⁰⁷

W. Joseph Campbell has argued that this class-based interpretation is erroneous. Comparing readership of several newspapers widely identified with the yellow press to the census numbers in the cities in which they were distributed, Campbell claimed that the association of these newspapers with

¹⁰⁵ Schudson, *Discovering The News*, 89.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 119–120.

poor, immigrant readers has been vastly overstated, and that the yellow journals must have sold to a wide cross-section of the population in order to achieve their circulation rates.¹⁰⁸ Campbell has also pointed out that the *Times* did many things to increase its readership that were associated with the yellow press, including holding a reader contest to find a new motto, and including illustrated supplements, albeit somewhat more self-serious supplements of a “higher sort.”¹⁰⁹

Other scholars contest the rigid line in the sand that Schudson describes using content analysis. Randall Sumpter has examined the coverage of the commemoration of the turn of the century, looking at the “yellow” *World* and *Journal* on one hand, and the “serious” journalism of the *Times* and the *Evening Post* on the other. He found that there were some differences—the yellow newspapers ran more stories on the topic, and tended to have a more patriotic lens, where the serious papers focused more on intellectual achievement. But he also found many similarities. In fact, the special edition published by the *Evening Post* had much more in common with the yellow journals’ own special editions than with the *Times*’s coverage.¹¹⁰

Jean Marie Lutes attempted a similar analysis, looking at the coverage of the 1907 trial of Henry Kendall Thaw for the murder of Stanford White. Looking at coverage by the group of women reporters known in popular parlance as the

¹⁰⁸ Campbell, *Yellow Journalism*, 51–63.

¹⁰⁹ Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism*, 91–92, 95–97.

¹¹⁰ See Randall S. Sumpter, “Sensation and the Century,” *American Journalism* 18, no. 3 (July 1, 2001): 81–100.

“sob sisters,” who covered the story for the yellow press, and comparing their coverage to that of more “restrained” newspapers, Lutes found little stylistic difference in reporting. Rather, she argues, the chief difference between the “sob sisters” and the men reporting for more respectable papers like the *Times* was the spectacle of their own physical presence, and the expectation that they, as women, would be better able to mediate the trial through a lens of emotion and sympathy.¹¹¹

If a stylistic analysis of the yellow journals reveals that the claims that the yellow journals were sensationalistic have been somewhat exaggerated, and that the “respectable” press of the day engaged in more “sensational” self-promotion than had been previously thought, how are we to account for this? Obviously, there is some truth to claims about the yellow press’s sensationalism. If it is taken as a given that the yellow journals were sensationalistic and that the other newspapers of the time were not, it makes sense to posit that, given the differences of tone and the occasions of real and unmistakable sensationalism, confirmation bias may come into play. People looking at the press of this time period see what they expect to see, because it is there, even if it is not the whole story. But where does this false—or at least incomplete—narrative come from? One could argue that it can be traced back to the rhetoric of the “second moral war,” a campaign against the yellow press in 1897.

¹¹¹ See Jean Marie Lutes, “Sob Sisterhood Revisited,” *American Literary History* 15, no. 3 (2003): 504–32.

The yellow journals were, in many ways, the spiritual descendants of the penny press of the 1830s; both made strong use of illustration, reported on society news, scandal, and sports as well as more staid political news, and both were sold for aggressively low prices. Both also experimented with new modes of journalism and new formats to increase readership.¹¹² The first “moral war” took place in 1840. It was a campaign against the penny press, specifically James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald*, by the publishers of New York’s “respectable” six-cent newspapers. Bennett was dramatically outselling the six-cent publishers and doing so using a variety of untraditional methods. Finally, the more reputable publishers of New York responded, ending an informal agreement to omit mention of Bennett’s paper with a campaign of editorials that accused the *Herald* of a variety of sins, ranging from lies and libel to blasphemy and even blackmail. They encouraged their readers to boycott any newsboy who sold the *Herald* in addition to their own newspaper. Not content to condemn the *Herald* in their own papers, the publishers pressured hotels, social clubs, and reading rooms to stop taking the paper. Some papers even refused to sell ads to advertisers who also bought space in the *Herald*.¹¹³ The *Herald* refused to fold, and the six-cent publishers eventually relented.

On February 4, 1897, the board of trustees of the Newark Free Public Library voted to cancel the library’s subscription to both the *Journal* and the

¹¹² An excellent overview of the penny press is given in Schudson, *Discovering The News*, 12–60.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

World and to cull all back issues of the papers from the library's collection.

Charles A. Dana's *New York Sun* praised the move lavishly in an editorial that extended over two columns in length. And with this editorial, a second moral war in New York journalism was underway, this time targeting Hearst and Pulitzer's newspapers. This was, not incidentally, the same year that the phrase "yellow journalism" became common in the New York press. While the publishers of rival newspapers did not use such underhanded means this time, the pressure to join the boycott seems to have been a matter of moral suasion as opposed to the direct pressure applied by publishers in 1840, it was notably vast in scope. By May of 1897, almost ninety institutions had joined the boycott, including not only New York organizations from the Century Club to the Harlem branch of the YMCA, but also organizations far afield of New York City, as far away as Portland, Oregon. The library reading rooms at Yale University even joined the boycott, which the *Sun* described as a "protest of decency."¹¹⁴

Other papers signaled their support for the boycott campaign, most notably the *New York Times*, that had been purchased the year before by Cincinnati-born publisher Adolph Ochs. While Dana, the elder statesman of the New York Press, had instigated the second moral war it was the newcomer Ochs who would be the most strident and outspoken critic of the yellow press in 1897.¹¹⁵ It would be hard to deny that, while they may have had real moral qualms with the yellow journals, both Ochs and Dana were also motivated by

¹¹⁴ Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism*, 25.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24–25, 90.

sales. Dana was being outsold regularly by relative upstarts, while his paper was a longstanding institution in New York. Ochs, in contrast, had only recently arrived in New York and had purchased a struggling newspaper, one that Hearst had passed up, and was eager to gain readership.

When the *Times* ran editorials denouncing the yellow journals, it was clear that the yellow press was being used as a foil to the *Times*'s own more high-toned journalism.¹¹⁶ The *Times* was engaging in a rather blatant type of self-promotion, much like the yellow journals his paper condemned. The difference was that Hearst and Pulitzer's papers would happily tout their own scoops and "blow their own horn," while the *Times* primarily focused on denouncing and denigrating the competition. There was a qualitative difference between the *Times* and the *Journal* and *World*, but this difference was at times somewhat overstated by Ochs's paper. On February 12, 1897, for example, just days after the Newark Free Public Library had decided to purge itself of the yellow papers, the *Times* ran an editorial titled "Freak Journalism and the Ball," criticizing the *World*'s extravagant, illustrated coverage of the Bradley Martin Ball, which had recently been held at the Waldorf hotel. The editorial alleged that the *World*'s artist had begun their illustrations of the ball before it took place. What it did not mention was that the *Times* had covered the ball almost as extravagantly, albeit without

¹¹⁶ Schudson, *Discovering The News*, 112.

illustration. The ball and its goings-on had occupied an entire column of the front page of the *Times* on February 11, 1897, and all of page two.¹¹⁷

Eventually, the second moral war died down much as the first had, without knocking the new dominant newspapers, or the new modes of journalism that they advanced, from their position at the top of the market. The boycotts lost momentum. Dana passed away later that year.¹¹⁸ Ochs, however, continued to target the *World* and the *Journal* for years to come. An advertisement for the *Times* found in the advertising trade journal from the end of 1910 made this very clear: it claims that the *Times*'s circulation is "greater than the combined city sales of the three other New York morning papers popularly classed with it"—a very cautiously-constructed sentence that is designed to exclude the *Journal* and the *World*. The ad copy continues, with much the same sort of rhetoric that had begun to appear in the *Times* in 1897: "The only inducement to buy and read the Times is the exceptionally high character of the paper itself. 'It does not soil the breakfast cloth.'—'All the news that's fit to print.'" The ad further claimed "Every publication draws itself to the class of circulation and of advertising patronage to which its policy entitles it. One reason that The New York Times produces such

¹¹⁷ While this basic story can be found in *ibid.*, 113, he gets a couple key facts wrong, including the date the paper covered the event. ; Cf. "Freak Journalism and the Ball," *New York Times*, February 12, 1897, and; "Bradley Martin Ball," *New York Times*, February 11, 1897.

¹¹⁸ Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism*, 23–24.

great results for HIGH-CLASS ADVERTISERS is that it is itself a HIGH-CLASS NEWSPAPER.”¹¹⁹

While scrupulously avoiding identifying papers of a “low-class” sort, the advertisement made clear to advertisers that the *Times* is more desirable to advertise in, even if yellow papers outsold it, due to the “quality” of its readership. That Ochs continued to use the yellow journals as a foil with which to promote his own paper will become important in later chapters, when I discuss his paper’s role in the anti-comics crusade that began around 1907.

Conclusion: The Comic Supplement as a Stab at Respectability

The comic supplement first appeared in both the *World* and the *Tribune* before the “second moral war.” It would be demonstrably false to claim that it was in any way a response to that campaign of criticism for that reason. It is however not unreasonable to assume that Pulitzer and Hearst, intelligent and shrewd publishers both, might have assumed that something like the second moral war might occur. Pulitzer shook up the norms of the newspaper industry with the *World*, and Hearst took the lessons learned from Pulitzer’s example and perfected them. They were aware of the treatment that Bennett received at the hands of his competition in the New York newspaper market in 1840 and that they must have seen clear historical parallels.

While Pulitzer and Hearst’s papers engaged in a form of crusading, proto-muckraking, it is also true that they committed a great deal of column inches to

¹¹⁹ “The New York Times (Advertisement),” *Printer’s Ink*, December 15, 1910, 27; Schudson, *Discovering The News*, 112, points to similar claims about readership that avoid mentioning the yellow press in 1902.

society events, yacht races, theatrical events, and other events that were designed to appeal to an upmarket readership. The goal of the yellow press was not to appeal to a certain reader—it was to appeal to *all* readers. While coverage of the doings of Manhattan society’s “Four Hundred” was aspirational in its appeal for most, if not all, readers of the yellow journals, it is likely that it was just as appealing to middle-class readers as it was to the papers’ working-class immigrant readership. Hearst biographer Kenneth Whyte has drawn attention to this attempt to gain readers of a better class, countering the common misconceptions about the *Journal* by explaining that “Rather than racing to the bottom, [Hearst] drove the *Journal* and the penny press, as a class, upmarket. The *Journal* was a demanding, sophisticated paper by contemporary standards.”¹²⁰

It is a nearly universal assertion in the historiography of newspaper comics that they were modeled after comic weeklies like *Puck*, *Judge*, and *Life*.¹²¹ But little attention has been paid to what that association might mean in terms of cultural capital and “respectability.” Magazines like *Puck*, *Life*, and *Judge* attracted a primarily middle-class audience.¹²² It seems likely that, given the way

¹²⁰ Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 92.

¹²¹ See, for example, Richard Marschall, *America’s Great Comic-Strip Artists* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 12–13; Brian Walker, *The Comics : The Complete Collection* (New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2011), 10; Harvey, *Children of the Yellow Kid*, 14.

¹²² William Robert Taylor, *In Pursuit of Gotham: Culture and Commerce in New York* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 42; Christina Meyer, “George Benjamin Luks and the Comic Weeklies of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 3, no. 1 (June 1, 2012): 72.

that the introduction of the comic supplement fits into the history of the American newspaper, the comic supplement might have been thought of initially by the editors and publishers who included it in the *World and Journal* as an attempt at respectability. The comic supplement, as an emulation of the comic weeklies, was likely an effort to include more respectable content that could be enjoyed by a middle-class readership. If this strategy were the case, it would counter the traditional narrative that the comic supplement owed its appeal to the limited literacy of immigrant readership.¹²³

In the name of “purity of the press,” pictorial journalism, in the form of newspapers like the *National Police Gazette*, was under attack from organizations like the Women’s Christian Temperance Union through the 1880s and 1890s. It would have been important to Pulitzer and, later, to Hearst to distinguish the daily pictorial journalism that their papers championed from the scandal and violence ridden of that *Police Gazette*, to make sure that it was evident that they were trying instead to emulate *Harper’s* and *Frank Leslie’s*. By emulating weekly humor magazines like *Judge* and *Puck* in their Sunday comic supplement, Pulitzer and Hearst were making a gesture toward respectability. Libraries, at the time one of the chief gatekeepers of respectability in literature,

¹²³ See, for example, William Aspray and Barbara M. Hayes, *Everyday Information: The Evolution of Information Seeking in America* (MIT Press, 2011), 279.

commonly subscribed to the popular humor weeklies during this time period, whereas they would never carry the likes of the *National Police Gazette*.¹²⁴

Indeed, the yellow journals set their eyes very deliberately on the humor weeklies. After all, once they had introduced the Sunday comic supplement, the middle-class humor magazines were the competition. An advertisement for the *Sunday World*, drawn by Luks and featuring the Yellow Kid, featured the Kid in a Santa hat, pushing a massive snowball. On his nightshirt was inscribed, "Say! We ain't doing a ting to 'em wid our eight funny pages!" Caught up in the growing snowball was the detritus of the old humor weeklies: copies of *Life* and *Truth*, a man's head stuck out of the snowball with the word "Puck" written on his hat, and the slogan of *Puck*, "What fools these mortals be," written around it. A single foot protrudes from the snowball, inscribed "Judge."¹²⁵ Clearly, the yellow journals were taking aim at the comic weeklies. Indeed, Roy McCardell, a graduate of the *World* who was working at *Puck* during the early years of the Sunday comic supplements, directly correlated the rise of the yellow journals' comics pages with the decline of the weekly comic journals: "the Sunday circulations increased; and as they went up, the circulations of *Puck* and *Judge* declined."¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Charles Johanningsmeier, "Welcome Guests or Representatives of the 'Mal-Odorou Class'?: Periodicals and Their Readers in American Public Libraries, 1876–1914," *Libraries & Culture* 39, no. 3 (2004): 270, 274, doi:10.1353/lac.2004.0054.

¹²⁵ Reprinted in Marschall, *America's Great Comic-Strip Artists*, 24.

¹²⁶ McCardell, "Opper, Outcault and Company," 766.

The next two breakout cartoonists for Hearst's Sunday supplement reflected the changing economic landscape for cartoonists. When Goddard had hired Outcault, he had been able to hire him because Outcault had only been a freelancer, and had worked for *Truth*, the sales of which were consistently the lowest of the top four comic weeklies. Rudolph Dirks began *The Katzenjammer Kids* in December 1897.¹²⁷ Like Outcault and Luks, Dirks had freelanced for *Life*.¹²⁸ But by 1899, when Hearst hired Fredrick Burr Opper, he was able to compete with the top comic weeklies: Opper was already considered one of the top cartoonists in the country. Opper had worked for the early comic weekly *Wild Oats*, before moving to *Leslie's Magazine*, and finally *Puck*, where he had been on staff for years. In 1900, he premiered his best-known work, the strip *Happy Hooligan*, in Hearst's papers.¹²⁹ The growing profile of the comic supplements meant that publishers could, by 1900, attract top talent from national magazines.

The comic supplement may have been created as an emulation of the comic weeklies of their day in an attempt to attract more middle-class newspapers and to give the yellow journals a veneer of respectability. This strategy, however, seems to have been doomed by 1897 when the second moral war made the phrases "yellow journalism" and "yellow kid journalism" commonplace in the New York press. Hearst and Pulitzer, however were always

¹²⁷ Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, 34.

¹²⁸ M. Keith Booker, "Dirks, Rudolph," in *Comics through Time: A History of Icons, Idols, and Ideas*, ed. M. Keith Booker (Greenwood/ABC-CLIO, 2014).

¹²⁹ Ron Goulart, *The Encyclopedia of American Comics* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 280.

quick to pivot when sales showed new opportunities for expanding readership. In the next few years, the Sunday comic supplements shifted form. Gone were the poems and the typeset humorous stories. The comic supplements gave up the pretense of emulating the weekly comic magazines, because they had discovered an even better way to increase readership: the use of recurring characters and gags in recurring features. The Yellow Kid reached a saturation point and fizzled out, but cartoonists brought new characters, each with their own distinct comic “businesses.”

Not long after the turn of the century, a new genre had been created: something that modern readers would recognize as the Sunday comics. Comics sold newspapers, and continued to be a driving force in selling them throughout the twentieth century. But even as they began to show up in more and more newspapers, how audiences received them—what they thought of them, who they thought they should be oriented toward, and how much cultural capital they were assigned—had yet to be fully determined.

CHAPTER TWO: “WHEN YOU DON’T LIKE A THING, SAY SO.” FOMENTING A CRUSADE AGAINST THE COMIC SUPPLEMENT, 1907-1912

In the May 1907 issue of the *Woman’s Home Companion*, in the monthly “Our Own Page” column, a column that served as the magazine’s primary editorial soapbox, a little over a quarter page was dedicated to an attack on the Sunday comics. “Some of us do not read the Sunday papers at all; some do not think it right, still more do not think it wise,” the editorial stated, further insisting that “We all know the harm they do.” The author of this column argued that the readers of the *Woman’s Home Companion* should “Take a canvass of your neighborhood, and you will find that your neighbors don’t like them. . .” The author further advocated for a campaign against the comic supplements, exhorting readers: “Well, the remedy is in your own hands. We have only to quote one of the cardinal prescriptions of modern life: ‘When you don’t like a thing, say so.’ In this case ‘say so’ to the editor of your paper; write it to him, get your neighbor to write him, too. Build up an endless chain of criticism and protest if you will; and see how soon the objectionable pictures will be dropped.”¹³⁰

The *Woman’s Home Companion* was a magazine known for its “homey, yet wide-ranging . . . content, edited for the socially conscious, intelligent

¹³⁰ “Our Own Page,” *Woman’s Home Companion*, May 1907, 16.

homemaker.”¹³¹ In addition to the wide-ranging and eclectic editorials of “Our Own Page,” it ran multiple columns related to different specific social actions and movements, and a column written by Unitarian minister Edward Everett Hale directed overtly at club women. This particular issue included columns on the movement against child labor, a column “For the Girl Who Earns Her Own Living,” and a column by Margaret E. Sangster on “The Mother in Society.” In short, by publishing a call to action in the *Woman’s Home Companion*, the editors intended for their call to be met by socially-minded, moderate and progressive women, women who were members of clubs that advocated for issues. And it seems to have reached that target audience. This piece was certainly not the first article to criticize the Sunday comic supplement. Indeed, there had been an increasing number of editorials against the comics in the last few years. But this piece in *Women’s Home Companion* is perhaps the first that actively advocated for a *campaign* against the comics. This seems, moreover, to be the article that launched what became a five-year moral campaign against comic supplements.

This crusade, fueled by a moral panic about the comic supplement, was supported by women’s and professional organizations and driven by major publications including the *New York Times*, the *Woman’s Home Companion*, the *Lady’s Home Journal*, and others. Yet it is a relatively neglected topic among

¹³¹ Mary Ellen Waller-Zuckerman, “‘Old Homes, in a City of Perpetual Change’: Women’s Magazines, 1890-1916,” *The Business History Review* 63, no. 4 (December 1, 1989): 728.

comics historians. When the crusade does get attention, it is usually at most a few pages.¹³² Likewise, it is often absent or given short shrift in the literature on moral panics and moral crusades from the time period.¹³³ Nonetheless, it is a moment that presents itself as ripe for analysis. This chapter is an attempt to address this gap in the literature, to try to contextualize this moral crusade, in terms of what groups and organizations drove it.

Who were these moral crusaders? That the movement began with a piece in the *Woman's Home Companion* was hardly a coincidence. It was driven primarily, though by no means exclusively, by club women and primarily-female professional organizations like the International Kindergarten Union and the Playground Association of America. The concerns of members of these organizations were hardly uniform, however. There was a laundry list of complaints against the comics, and few anti-comics advocates in the period between 1907 and 1912 were concerned with any one single issue.

These individuals and organizations did not work within a vacuum. Looking at the way the crusade against the Sunday comics was reported, it quickly becomes clear that a highly invested press spurred reformers on. Some

¹³² See, for example, Brian Walker, *The Comics : The Complete Collection* (New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2011), 22–25; David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America*, 1 Reprint (Picador, 2009), 11–13. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium* (University Press of Mississippi, 2005), is a reader that includes early criticisms of newspaper comics, but none are actually from the 1907-1912 period that constitutes the apogee of this moral crusade.

¹³³ For a rare example of the topic getting any treatment, see Steven Starker, *Evil Influences: Crusades against the Mass Media* (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 74–76.

magazines seem motivated by the same concerns that motivated the crusaders, notably women's magazines like the *Woman's Home Companion* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, as well as crusading progressive magazines like *The Outlook*, and Christian weekly newspapers. But there was also a segment of the press that seems to have supported the movement due to their own direct competition with the journals that ran them. This was particularly the case with the *New York Times*, whose publisher Adolph Ochs was still fighting to chip away at the circulation numbers of the *World* and *Journal*. The *Times* was perhaps the single most vocal newspaper supporting the anti-comics crusade, and its reasons in hindsight seem distinctly cynical.

Comic Characters as Metonym for the Yellow Press

Comic strips had been used as metonym for Hearst and Pulitzer's newspapers since the second moral war in 1897. The trope became a national one in 1898, as editorial cartoons across the country that used the Yellow Kid character to mocked those papers' enthusiasm for the Spanish-American War.¹³⁴ This association did not end with the Spanish American War, however. Throughout the years between 1898 and 1907, Sunday supplement characters were deployed rhetorically to strike out at yellow journalism. The cover image of *Harper's Weekly* from January 9, 1904 (figure 2) was a striking example of this. Drawn by W.A. Rogers, who had taken over the cartoon covers at *Harper's* after Thomas Nast's departure, and published while Hearst was actively courting the

¹³⁴ Mark D. Winchester, "Hully Gee, It's a War!!! The Yellow Kid and the Coining of 'Yellow Journalism,'" *Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies* 2, no. 3 (November 1995): 31–35.

Democratic presidential nomination, the cartoon showed a parade of “Citizens of Journalville” supporting “Hearst for President,” led (not coincidentally) by Grand Marshall Mr. E.Z. Mark, a character notable for his gullibility.¹³⁵ The Hearst “supporters” in this parade were certainly a motley group, and seem deliberately selected to suggest that nobody should be following this parade’s lead.

¹³⁵ Walt Reed and Society of Illustrators (New York N.Y.), *The Illustrator in America, 1860-2000* (The Society of Illustrators, 2001), 64.



Figure 2: W.A. Rogers, "Mr. Hearst's Boom," *Harper's Weekly* January 9, 1904

E.Z. Mark was followed by Frederick Oppen's Irish hobo character Happy Hooligan, a well-meaning but buffoonish schlimazel, a vagrant whose every good intention always ended in disaster, and often jail time. Readers would immediately recognize that the walrus-mustachioed police officer advancing on Mr. E.Z. Mark's right as Happy's frequent nemesis. Next came James Swinnerton's Mr. Jack, a character whose central gag of infidelity eventually led it to be moved to the Sports page, curiously mislabeled "Katzenjammer Kids." Next in the parade were Reggie and the Heavenly Twins, along with two suitors. In Marjorie Organ's strip, the beautiful "Heavenly Twins" take advantage of the doting Reggie's attention but frequently leave him in the lurch to go out with suitors in whom they are more interested. The Twins constantly neglected, exploited, and generally treated poor Reggie badly, but he is blinded by their beauty and keeps trying to win them over, though they make it clear by their actions that there is no hope. After that comes Foxy Grandpa, carrying his signature bunny,¹³⁶ and his grandsons, Chub and Bunt. The two boys were constantly pulling pranks on their grandfather, but Grandpa always outsmarted them, getting the better of them instead. Last in the parade, two cavemen are followed by two creatures that appear to be making the first steps out of the primordial oceans: these would be recognizable to contemporary readers as characters from one of Oppen's other cartoon features, *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*.

¹³⁶ "Bunny" was the pseudonymous signature of *Foxy Grandpa* cartoonist Carl Schultze, creator of the strip, who often drew Grandpa accompanied by a bunny.

The parade of supposed Hearst supporters, creatures drawn from his own newspapers, created a narrative of untrustworthiness. Led by a dupe, the parade featured simple-minded criminals, philanderers, devious women, families where proper respect was never paid to elders, and the (very literally) less evolved. Such political cartoons, which used Hearst's comic strip characters to emphasize his unfitness for office, reoccur often throughout the Progressive Era—a period during which he was frequently running for office. When Hearst decided to run for Governor of New York in 1906, *Collier's* ran a multipart article on the dangers of "Hearst and Hearstism," and in one issue ran a cartoon that, while quite different, took similar advantage of Hearst cartoon characters to highlight his unsuitability for office.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Edward Windsor Kemble, "Comic Section of the New Yoik Choinal, Sunday September 1906," *Collier's*, October 13, 1906, 11.



Figure 3: Edward Windsor Kemble, "Comic Section of the New Yoik Choinal, Sunday September 1906," *Collier's*, October 13, 1906, 11.

Another cartoon, this one from *Collier's*, used comic supplement characters to impugn Hearst's candidacy in a similar way two years later. (See figure 3.) Drawn by E.W. Kemble, best remembered as the original illustrator of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The cartoon takes the form of an endorsement for Hearst's gubernatorial run in the comics section of the "New Yoik Choinal," a rendering in dialect of the *New York Journal's* name that points to the lower class associations with its readership. In the center of the drawing is an abstracted drawing of Hearst, his suit made of appropriately scandalous newspaper headlines: "Prize Fight for Love," "Pretty Chorus Girl Murders Rich Young Man," and perhaps the most telling, "Millionaire Reported Shot," with the "reported" part in an extremely small type between the larger "millionaire" and "shot," with the subhead "Served Him Right."

Hearst's head, above his suit of sensationalistic reporting, is a moneybag. This seems a deliberate reference to "The 'Brains,'" the 1871 cartoon where Thomas Nast portrayed Boss Tweed with a moneybag for a head, hands in pockets.¹³⁸ Indeed, the pose is almost identical, although Hearst is portrayed with far less girth than Tweed and turned slightly to the right, where Tweed faced the viewer head-on. While the Nast cartoon appeared thirty-five years prior, it was widely reprinted and remains iconic to this day. The reference seems like one that both Kemble and his audience would have recognized. It was a strange choice of

¹³⁸ Thomas Nast, "The 'Brains,'" *Harper's Weekly*, October 21, 1871.

inspiration, as Hearst had run for Mayor of New York City the year before in a campaign that deliberately undermined and attempted to siphon votes from Tammany Hall, but the image still works on the level that it points to the corrupting force of money on the mind of the politician, and Hearst was of course a man of notable wealth.¹³⁹

Though Kemble's foreground figure of Hearst himself is quite evocative, Kemble's use of well-known figures from the comics pages is less successful than Rogers's. While Kemble was undoubtedly a good illustrator, he did not have the feeling for the comic strip characters that Rogers did: the linework is distractingly oversimplified, and the distinctive physiognomy of each character seems slightly off. In Roger's cartoon, by contrast, while he maintains his own style and the linework is consistent, each character looks strikingly similar to the way they were portrayed in the hands of their original artist. Moreover, where the parade of Hearst cartoon supporters told a story about what Rogers thought of actual Hearst supporters, the nominations of various characters for appointed state offices in Kemble's cartoon have nothing to do with the specific traits of each character. There is little funny about the Katzenjammer Kids occupying the role of State Engineer and Surveyor, because there is nothing about the mischievous children that provides an especially strong counterpoint to the character traits we associate with that role. Likewise, the bug-eyed, quick to anger Leander of *Lulu and Leander*, a strip by Franklin Morris Howarth, creator of Mr. E.Z. Mark, is no

¹³⁹ David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*, 1st ed. (Mariner Books, 2001), 194–203.

worse suited for State Treasurer than any other role. In this way the use of comic characters is less successful in Kemble's cartoon, but it still illustrates the repeated use of the comic characters as metonyms for their publisher, ones that undermined his political aspirations in their vulgar simplicity.

Competing Newspapers Attack the Comics

If attacks on the comic supplement were sometimes metonymic attacks on the publishers of the "yellow press" and if the *New York Times* was not altogether different from the Yellow Press at this point in its history, the *Times's* pronounced opposition to the comic supplement is at best problematic. The "informational model" that the *New York Times* trumpeted at the time was hardly journalistic objectivity. It was, at best, a "naïve empiricism" which had a simple, unquestioning faith in the importance of "facts."¹⁴⁰ At its worst, it was a rhetorical smokescreen, a manner by which reporters could serve as advocates for a particular cause while obfuscating their support in a veil of "facts." When reporting on anti-comics activity, the *Times* was clearly doing the latter, an act that was all the more hypocritical because its advocacy for the anti-comics crusaders can be interpreted as a backwards form of self-promotion, one of the journalistic sins often attributed to the yellow journals.

From the time Adolph Ochs bought the *Times*, he sought to distinguish himself from Hearst and Pulitzer's papers, presenting his paper as absent of the sins of sensationalism and advocacy that tainted the "yellow press." Instead, he

¹⁴⁰ Michael Schudson, *Discovering The News: A Social History Of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 7, 106–109, 120.

painted the *Times* as a higher-minded paper, objective, and more wholesome than its Yellow competitors. When a movement against the comic supplement began to foment, Ochs seems to have seen an opportunity and ran with it. The *Times* seemed to give column space to any “expert” with something bad to say about the comics, and his writers endeavored to report on anti-comic resolutions from women’s groups across the country.

The reporting by the *Times* on the topic definitely remained within the realm of the informational model. The paper rarely if ever indulged in outright advocacy. In avoiding direct editorial comment, they may have hoped to discourage readers from noticing their commercial stake in the matter. Such obvious advocacy would have also served to dissolve the line between their informational model of journalism and the “crusading” story-based journalism of the yellow journals. While avoiding outright advocacy, however, the *Times* gave disproportionate coverage to the anti-comics movement while it lasted, often taking brief, even tangential, attacks on the comics out of context and featuring headlines centered around the attack on the comic supplement rather than the majority of the substance of what a speaker had discussed. Likewise, the *Times* published many letters to the editor about the evils of the comic supplements, letters which seem likely to have been relatively rare since the *Times* published no Sunday supplement. These letters, however, often pointed to the *Times*’s Sunday “Pictures” supplement and other features as more wholesome alternatives to the comics.

When the Second Annual Playground Congress occurred in September of 1908, Maude Summers, a member of the organization's Committee on Storytelling in the Playground, spoke out against the comics. The *New York Times* ran a story on it, with the headline "Woman Hits Out At Comic Supplements." Over half the story, in column inches, was dedicated to Flanders's attack on the comic supplement, in part due to the level of attention given to her comments on the comics compared to other issues addressed, but also due to the line leading that the *Times* typesetters used. Printers would insert small strips of lead between lines of type to increase the vertical distance from one line to the next. The greater the line leading, the more distance between lines, which in turn made the text easier to skim quickly, and more inviting to read. In the case of this story, the typesetters at the *Times* gave the section that described her anti-comic rhetoric spacious leading, making it far more inviting and easy to read. When the article switched to other topics addressed at the conference that day, the leading becomes much tighter, conveying to the reader that this later portion of the article was much less important. Interestingly, comparing the *New York Times* article to the official proceedings of the congress, it was evident that the *Times* was not interested in the fact that her attack on the comics was part of a larger argument about the appropriate types of literature for children. For Flanders, problematic children's literature included the comic supplement, but it also included penny dreadfuls and even "sentimental literature."¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Cf. "Woman Hits Out at Comic Supplement," *New York Times*, September 10,

Similarly, when the General Federation of Women's Clubs met in San Francisco in 1912, out of a day's worth of reports on wide-ranging topics, a single anti-comics resolution that only occupied two small paragraphs of the article nevertheless was highlighted in a large subhead, ascribing undue importance to a casual reader.¹⁴² In another case, when Reverend Charles Aked gave a lecture on Sabbatarianism and the evils of Sunday papers that involved a single sentence denouncing the comics in 1908, the times headline ran, "Dr. Aked Raps the Comics: Clergyman tells his congregation they imperil Sunday purity." At every chance, the *Times* demonstrated a strong bias against the comics and an abundance of enthusiasm for reporting anyone who might attack them.

Sometimes the promotional bias of the *Times* was subtler. While its reporting on the inaugural meeting of the League for the Improvement of the Children's Comics Page was some of the most complete reporting on the topic, it was also distinctly self-serving. Rather than simply reporting on the organization's goal of improving the comic supplements, the *Times* found a way, by the second paragraph of the sixteen-paragraph article, to engage in fairly flagrant self-promotion. The *Times* accomplished this by pointing to the portion of the proceedings most congratulatory to their paper. *Collier's* editor Norman Hapgood, who had run a multipart article on the dangers of "Hearst and

1908; and Playground Association of America, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Playground Congress, New York City, September 8-12, 1908, and Year Book, 1908* (New York: Playground Association of America, 1908), 335–338.

¹⁴² "Credits Club Women with Many Reforms," *New York Times*, January 27, 1912.

Hearstism” as early as 1906 that included attacks on the comic supplement, praised the *New York Times*’s non-humorous illustrated supplement: “I think the standing of *The New York Times* in the community has been clearly raised by its illustrated supplement, in which it depends for its interest among children and adults upon the best results of modern photographic processes . . . I think people should encourage that kind of thing, and show their disapproval of the other sort of supplements by supporting the right kind of endeavor,” the *Times* quoted Hapgood as saying.¹⁴³

Hapgood was the editor who brought *Collier’s* its reputation for investigative journalism, and during his editorship he was one of the most powerful managers in America. The staff writer for the *Times* must have seen Hapgood’s statement free publicity, one of the most respected editors in the country giving high praise to their supplement while castigating their competitors. The *Times* ran Hapgood’s statement it high in the article, before the fourth paragraph or so where conventional wisdom tells news writers that a certain portion of the population will already have stopped reading. Again, the line leading is telling. While it was customary for longer stories to begin with larger line leading in the initial paragraphs of the article before switching to tighter leading later in the article, it is notable that in this article the *Times*

¹⁴³ Frederick Palmer, “Hearst and Hearstism,” *Collier’s*, September 22, 1906; Frederick Palmer, “Hearst and Hearstism,” *Collier’s*, September 29, 1906; Frederick Palmer, “Hearst and Hearstism,” *Collier’s*, October 6, 1906; Frederick Palmer, “Hearst and Hearstism,” *Collier’s*, October 13, 1906; “Comic Supplements Publicly Denounced,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1911.

typesetters made that transition after the high praise for the *Times* from Hapgood, but before quotes from people at the meeting who were more ambivalent about the ills of the supplements.

They also refrained from quoting Hapgood when he professed his fondness for several features, and said that “Nothing is required to bring about improvement in the supplement except thought and intelligence and a little courage.”¹⁴⁴ There were many papers that took an anti-comics editorial stance, but the *New York Times* seems unique in its commitment to the cause, and the reason for this seems to stem from anxiety about market share rather than moral standards. The *Times*’s opposition to the comic supplement mirrors their anti-yellow press campaign of the “second moral war,” and their refusal to editorialize about the evils of the supplements seems to point to a desire to distance themselves from the crusading journalism being championed by Hearst and Pulitzer.

Another paper that seems to have tried to make commercial gain by making a stand against the Sunday comic supplements was the *Boston Herald*. In an editorial on October 25, 1908, publisher William E. Haskell announced that the *Herald* was eliminating its comic supplement: “Today the Herald abandons the comic supplement. That accompaniment of Sunday newspaperdom has had its day . . . Comic supplements have ceased to be comic. They have become as

¹⁴⁴ “Comic Supplements: League for Their Improvement Discusses Subject at Mass Meeting,” *Editor and Publisher*, April 8, 1911, 3.

vulgar in design as they are tawdry in color. There is no longer any semblance of art in them, and if there are any ideals they are low and descending lower.”¹⁴⁵

Haskell’s decision was widely lauded by opponents of the comics. *The Outlook* described it as “evidence of returning reason among reputable newspapers.”¹⁴⁶ The Ethical Culture School’s Percival Chubb, in an address to the International Kindergarten Union, said that the example of the *Herald* showed that “better counsels are beginning to prevail among us.”¹⁴⁷ Boston College’s *Sacred Heart Review* observed “The *Boston Herald* is to be commended for abolishing the comic department of its Sunday edition. The comic supplement of the Sunday papers is an inartistic monstrosity . . . The fact that it is intended for and read almost entirely by the young, adds to its pestiferousness. We hope many papers will follow the lead of the *Herald* in this matter.”¹⁴⁸ Newspapers across the country reported on the *Herald*’s decision, whether they were for or against the comic supplement editorially themselves.

While Haskell’s editorial pointed to lack of quality and poor moral influence as the main reasons for his decision, this was likely only a partial truth. Comic historian Allan Holtz argued that economics were at the heart of Haskell’s choice to eliminate the comics section. Noting that the *Boston Herald* took

¹⁴⁵ Article quoted in International Kindergarten Union, “Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the International Kindergarten Union,” *Kindergarten Review*, June 1909, 632.

¹⁴⁶ “The ‘Comic’ Nuisance,” *The Outlook*, March 6, 1909, 527.

¹⁴⁷ Percival Chubb, “The Comic Supplement, The Newspaper, and the Child,” *Kindergarten Review*, September 1909, 4.

¹⁴⁸ “Editorial Notes,” *The Sacred Heart Review*, October 31, 1908.

syndicated strips at times, “on three separate occasions they tried to make a go of using their own in-house material. Whether due to salesmanship or quality, they had very limited luck syndicating [that material].”¹⁴⁹ Without the supplemental income from syndication, few newspapers could afford to keep a stable of cartoonists producing a supplement of any quality. When Haskell, who had a clear personal antipathy toward the supplements himself, decided to disinvest from comics while a movement against them was beginning to take shape among club women, he decided to do so in a way that would win the approval of those protesting against the supplements.

The *Herald* apparently tried to capitalize on their decision to eliminate the section, publicizing the choice even well after the fact in letters to organizations that were adopting anti-comics stances. Half a year after the decision, the *Herald*’s Arthur Warren wrote a letter to members of the International Kindergarten Union to be read to the annual conference. In it, he wrote that “[w]e have ever since had reason to congratulate ourselves upon the change. No criticism of any consequence has reached us; on the contrary, the disappearance of the colored supplement has been heartily approved by our public, by many social and other organizations throughout the country and by a great many newspapers.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Allan Holtz, “Email Message to Author,” October 19, 2014.

¹⁵⁰ “The Comic Supplement,” *The American Educational Review*, July 1909, 480.

The Comic Weeklies Take Aim at the Comic Supplement

Competing newspapers were not the only vocal opponents of the comic supplements. The comic weeklies seem to have resented the success of their younger cousins the comic supplement. Their interest in poking fun at the funnies began before the anti-comics crusaders, although their mockery makes sense given that some within those magazines blamed the comic supplements for slumping sales.¹⁵¹ Some gags from the weekly humor magazines focused on the immorality or vulgarity of the comics strips. A brief gag in *Puck* in 1910 featured two men looking at a newspaper. The first man expressed his horror at a picture of a strike riot. The second, looking on, replied, “Ha! Ha! That’s the comic supplement you’re looking at. Those boys are simply putting their grandmother in a cistern.”¹⁵² This brief joke, in just five lines, brought together multiple tropes associated with the anti-supplement crusaders. The comics are here seen as violent, anarchical, and deeply disrespectful of the elderly and aged.

Another *Puck* cartoon from 1911, titled “The Comic-Supplement Artist and His Ancestors,” similarly spoke to anti-comics crusaders’ concerns that the supplements were violent, cruel, and lawless. “G. McSwat Smirks,” a milquetoast-looking cartoonist, glasses, pens in pocket and with a comics page leaning against the wall behind him, stands to the far left. To his right appear a line-up of his supposed ancestors. Going back further in time as the reader moves to the right: there is a pirate, “Capt. Kidder,” a pirate; “Dirgo Tortuo, The Inquisitor, who

¹⁵¹ Roy McCardell, “Opper, Outcault and Company,” *Everybody’s Magazine*, June 1905, 766.

¹⁵² “The Red Terror,” *Puck*, April 6, 1910, 6.

chuckled at agony”; a knight of the round table “whose favorite outdoor amusement was a nice, bloody tournament”; “Zero Sneezer,” a Roman emperor; and finally a caveman, “Harold Rocsmasher, of the Stone Age, the original slugger.”¹⁵³ The cartoon’s gag is somewhat heavy-handed and not particularly funny, but it was printed during the time of the moral panic around the comic supplement and speaks to concerns of some of those moral reformers. It portrays the comic strip cartoonist (as differentiated from the respectable *Puck* cartoonist) as sadistic, violent in impulse, and even atavistic.

Similarly, a centerspread cartoon from *Puck* in 1910, “The Yellow Press: Those Who Feed It And Those Whom it Feeds,” by Louis Glackens, showed an oversized Hearst in a jester’s costume, throwing literal yellow newspapers from a printing press to the motley crowd of his middle- and working-class readers. In the background, a small group of businessmen carry moneybags up to be fed into the printing press. These business men are labeled. Among them the reader can locate a “Gullible Reformer,” the “Business Man,” and the “Man Who Buys The Comic Supplement For The Kids.” The yellow newspapers Hearst tosses to his readers contain a litany of Hearst and the Yellow Press’s supposed journalist sins: “Sensationalism,” “Attacks On Honest Officials,” “Appeals To Passion,” and “Distorted News” among others.¹⁵⁴ By portraying Hearst as a court jester and by portraying the man who buys the Sunday comic supplement for his kids, this

¹⁵³ Barton, “The Comic-Supplement and His Ancestry,” *Puck*, February 22, 1911, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Louis Glackens, “The Yellow Press: Those Who Feed It and Those Whom It Feeds,” October 12, 1910.

piece is asserting that those seeking entertainment from their newspapers are contributing to the corruption of journalism. Perhaps readers would be better off seeking their entertainment from weekly humor magazines like *Puck*.

Attacks such as these, on the moral character of the yellow press generally and the comic supplement more specifically, can be found in the weekly humor magazines. But more commonly, the humor magazines's jabs portrayed the comic supplement as simply inartful, an inferior product. This is a critique employed by the weekly humor magazine dated back almost to the beginnings of the Sunday comic supplement. An 1897 page from *Truth*, the magazine for which Luks and Outcault had only recently stopped freelancing, provided a wonderful illustration of this how long-lived this criticism was, in a cartoon published the same year as the second moral war.

"From the Sunday Supplements" mocked the inferior printing techniques used by the newspapers and their frequent color shifting. The page, by artist Frank Ver Beck, portrays different well-known newspaper cartoonists of the day, pseudonymously indicated with signatures in thinly-veiled versions of their name, that still faithfully mimic the style of their signatures: C.G. Bush becomes "C.G. Blush," E.W. Kemble's ascending "Kemble" signature becomes "Krumble," and so on. In each of the five vignettes on the page, the gag is that the color has shifted quite dramatically. A picture that is signed by "R.F. Outcast," an obvious reference to R.F. Outcault, shows a man leaning over to mix paste to affix a bill on a wall. The checkered pattern of his pants hovers in the air next to his rear end.

The caption, “He is on ‘The Journal’ but his color is trying to get back on ‘The World,’” is a clear reference to Outcault’s leaving of the *World* for the *Journal* the year before. Another vignette, clearly aimed at b *Journal* illustrator and former *Truth* employee Archie Gunn’s drawings of beautiful women, is signed “Archie Gone.” This vignette is an image of a woman on a bicycle, the image’s color again shifted practically off the figure. The caption reads, “She is trying to overtake the color that should have been on her bloomers.”¹⁵⁵ Early on, it seems, a color shift alone was enough for the weekly humor magazines to feel that they had illustrated the difference between their higher quality, higher class product and the cheaper knockoff that the Sunday supplement represented. Ver Beck seems, with this cartoon, to be taking aim at some former fellow *Truth* cartoonists, asserting that they had left the magazine to work for an inferior competitor.

Later on, the humor magazines would not only continue to mock color shifting and inferior printing but would also lampoon the very humor of the supplements. A series of three mock supplement pages from Louis Glackens published in *Puck* between 1905 and 1906, “Puck’s Sunday Supplement,” make a point of referencing specific comic pages and of making jokes about the supplements’ general lack of sophisticated humor, while still using the visual joke of severe color separation “errors” to reinforce the idea of the supplements being cheaply and clumsily produced. The color shifting in these strips was severe, sometimes almost to the point of illegibility. The second and perhaps the most

¹⁵⁵ Frank Ver Beck, “From The Sunday Supplements,” *Truth*, January 7, 1897.

successful in the series appeared on the back cover of January 17, 1906. (See figure 4.) “The Slapstick Kids,” two Katzenjammer Kids stand-ins, smash a wall, knocking over their father. They proceed to move his unconscious body into a pile driver, smashing their father before blowing up their own house. As their father is blown from the house, his wife scolds him, “Don’t be angry! Boys will be boys,” while one of the boys breaks the fourth wall to address the audience, “Ain’t we cute? Pa is a pauper now!”¹⁵⁶ The moral and aesthetic critique is clear here: the comic supplements were inartfully produced, their humor was low, and the argument that they were harmless amusement for children held as little water as the mother’s belief that the boys’ behavior could be excused as harmless boyish mischief.

¹⁵⁶ Louis Glackens, “Puck’s Sunday Supplement: The Slapstick Kids and Their Purple Pa,” *Puck*, January 17, 1906.



Figure 4: Louis Glackens, "Puck's Sunday Supplement: The Slapstick Kids and Their Purple Pa," *Puck*, January 17, 1906.

The argument that the color comic supplements were simply an inferior product was not limited to the humor magazines, though it was one of their specialties. An editorial in *The Printing Art*, an industry journal for printers, argued that “The arraignment of the color supplement is not because there is objection to color, but on account of the debasing quality of both color and humor. Color is the symbol of life. It may be made one of the greatest factors for giving pleasure and exerting a refining influence.” Color was not the problem, but the fact that the comic supplements used color unskillfully and without discrimination. Rather, printers should be more subtle, more proficient, in their use of colors: “...regard must be paid to the discriminating use of color in every form,” the editorial argued. “Instead of the broad use of red, yellow, blue, and green for display in decorations, less color, more refined, gives the touch of life, interest, and pleasure, without shock or nausea.”¹⁵⁷

While the *Printing Art* editorial raised some interesting issues, it was somewhat disingenuous. *Printing Art* was a magazine that focused primarily on high-quality and art printing, fields in which major improvements had been made in preceding decades. And its pages were full of high-quality reproductions that were quite aesthetically pleasing. But its attack on the comic supplements overlooked many economic and structural issues that led to the comparatively lower quality of color printing in newspapers of the time. High quality printing was prohibitively expensive for newspapers, given their low cover price. The high

¹⁵⁷ “The Passing of the Color Comic,” *Printing Art*, December 1908, 252.

volume printing and low-quality newsprint paper, both economic considerations, caused of the oft-maligned color shifting especially prevalent in early newspaper comics. It was simply impossible to throw away every printed page on which the plate or the paper had shifted. The practice of printing comic strips in just one or two colors was a cost-saving measure popular in comic supplements. But the newspapers' version of "less color" fell short of *Printing Art's* definition of "more refined."

"Improvement" as an Alternate Model to Suppression

Newspapers that featured Sunday comic supplements themselves were, perhaps unsurprisingly, biased for the comics, though they took several approaches, ranging from mocking the anti-supplement activists to trying to show a good-faith effort to improve the comic supplements, while still maintaining their value. An article in the *Atlanta Constitution* from 1907 quoted R. F. Outcault himself, stating that "the comics section is only a thing of recent years with the newspapers. Its origin was not more than twelve years ago, and in another five years I think it will have run its course and will be a thing of the past . . . It is becoming entirely too common, and when people come to see so much of work that is not comic at all, or that does not cause a laugh when glanced at, it will begin to retrograde." The author countered Outcault's assertion, arguing that comic supplements had continued to become more popular around the country and that "humor is as necessary an ingredient for life as salt is of our daily food." The author continued, "Had Mr. Outcault forecasted an improvement, an evolution in the comic supplement, instead of its decline and fall, we would have

agreed with him. It is undeniable that many of the topics now utilized by pictorial funnymen are somewhat threadbare and that others are meaningless. The same criticism could be passed, justly, on much of our current art, literature, and clothes.” The author defended the comic supplement, claiming that rather being a vulgar or debasing form of entertainment, “The comic supplement, and the illustrated newspaper joke, are positive havens of rest and refreshment for millions of men, women and children who would not, could not, and will not wade through columns of printed matter, however tastefully selected and arranged, for more substantial entertainment.”¹⁵⁸

That the comics of the day were imperfect but improving and that they were popular and generally decent entertainment was a common argument among papers that featured comic supplements. Papers defending the comic supplement often explained that the problem was *other* papers’ comic supplements. “[I]f all the Sunday comics were like those of the *Constitution*, there would be no objection,” explained the *Atlanta Constitution*.¹⁵⁹

Likewise, many papers were quick to try to promote any “improvements” made to the comic supplement to show women’s organizations that they were earnestly complying with their calls for change. The *Chicago Tribune* was another paper that attempted to advance the narrative that their comics were of a “better sort” than those of other newspapers. Again, the paper was more than willing to admit to the problematic nature of the comic supplements, generally:

¹⁵⁸ “The Comic Supplement,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 4, 1907.

¹⁵⁹ “The Comic Supplement,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 28, 1907.

“Its influence upon children has been declared to be distinctly injurious,” the *Tribune* admitted, bowing to the comic supplement’s most vociferous critics. “The mischievous propensities of childhood have been stimulated. Wrong ideas of the artistic have been inculcated. The standard of humor has been low. The possible utilization of the natural interests of boys and girls in developing taste for better things has been hindered.” However, the author of the editorial went on, the *Tribune* “has been studying the subject with care. It has noted with satisfaction the approving words of those who have commented favorably upon the changes made in recent weeks.” The author closed with the hope that the paper’s efforts had “. . . approached more nearly to the wishes of its patrons,” noting the satisfaction “which always comes when a newspaper reflects the popular opinion of the day, and, in its planning, anticipates the trend of the people’s thought as it leads its readers in the direction of progress and helpfulness.”¹⁶⁰

Generally, the *Tribune* took a more ameliorating tone, trying to “work with” their readers who objected to the comic supplements by offering a more palatable option as opposed to the *Atlanta Constitution*’s more defiant tone toward its critics. And there were indications that the reading public took articles making statements that papers were trying to comply with anti-comics crusaders as not simple public relations, but a sincere commitment by the newspapers to work with their readers to make the supplement better. Andrew Woodman’s

¹⁶⁰ “Setting a Good Example,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 9, 1909.

letter to the editor published several days after the *Tribune's* editorial advised the staff that "I shall look forward confidently to the next step which I am sure you will take at no distant date, and substitute for all the inartistic, the improbable, and the impossible stories told in so-called 'comic' picture form something which will add not only to the pleasure and entertainment of the child readers of your paper but also to their education and cultivation."¹⁶¹

Woodman's tastes in comic strips were somewhat surprising given his declared distaste for "improbable" and "impossible" stories. He gave high marks to the *Tribune's* inclusion of "'The Exploits of Pinocchio'. . . for there is probably no fairy tale which so faithfully and judiciously teaches children the importance of truthfulness and obedience," a comment that demonstrated that Woodman was more interested in the story's moralism than its "realism." He also liked *Billy Possum: His Life and Adventures*, a strange and short-lived strip that was an attempt to sell William Howard Taft-themed "Billy Possum" dolls as the next teddy bear.¹⁶² One reason that Woodman may have appreciated the possum feature was that it had voluminous typeset verse interspersed with illustrations. In other words, "Billy Possum" in many ways imitated a traditional children's book rather than a comic strip.

¹⁶¹ Andrew W. Woodman, "Approves Change in Sunday Paper," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 13, 1909.

¹⁶² For a brief piece from the time discussing the "Billy Possum" craze in 1909, see "Billy Possum Deposes Teddy Bear," *The Wenatchee Daily World*, March 11, 1909.

While most publications were fairly consistent in their defense or condemnation of the comics, not all were strictly partisan. *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* was one such publication. In 1909, it ran Herman Scheffauer's rather biting critique of the comic supplement, which described the comic supplement as "a debauchery of fancy" and "a hypnotic moral poison," among other things.¹⁶³ The same magazine, however, also ran a brief piece by Edwin Sabin the same year, in defense of the comic supplements. Sabin concluded, ". . . while careful guardians of the country's morals may decry the supplement because it does tend to raise mirth over mishaps, and thus (theoretically) hardens the heart, on the other hand it is pleasant to reflect that once a week, at least, a laugh is brought into practically every household in the land. Therefore let us pause, and relax, and be silly, when we can."¹⁶⁴ Such balanced editorial policy and calls for sanity were unfortunately rare during the anti-comic supplement campaign, as is often the case during moral panics.

Not all defenses of the comics page were entirely self-serious. A defense of the comics page in the *Washington Post* made light of many of the common tropes of comics-page criticism with mocking exaggeration. The author criticized the artwork of a fictitious comics page for inconsistencies like ". . . Bud in Fig. 1 [who is pictured] with freckled hands, and then in Fig. 6 . . . another Bud sans freckles. The artistic verities are clearly outraged—not to mention the fact that we

¹⁶³ Herman Scheffauer, "The Comic Supplement," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, March 1909, 382.

¹⁶⁴ Edwin L. Sabin, "The Comic Supplement," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, November 1909, 638.

pay for the freckles and naturally expect to get our money's worth." Likewise, "‘Glub’ and ‘Woof’ are words of recognized meanings, but now and then an ambitious contributor offers a new one" unintelligible "to the regular everyday patron of the page."¹⁶⁵

The latter example may seem ridiculous on its face, but the invented language of comics was actually a topic of criticism for some opponents of the Sunday supplements. An editorial against comics in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1909 quoted the following, supposedly from a panel from a newspaper comic: "ICK IBBITY BIBBITY GLIBBITY WOCK DOOBY IP MUGGLE ZOP OOP GULLOOP BUZAM UZZO BIP WOP KERBUMP WUGGY BOW-WOW." The editorial's writer then asked, ". . . in all possible fairness, where is the first glint of humor, of fun, or the comic element in this gibberish?"¹⁶⁶ In an environment where such criticism was being taken seriously by detractors—the same passage was even reprinted in a different article by *The Outlook*—the *Washington Post* writer's critique of onomatopoeia shifts from simple absurdity to rather biting satire.¹⁶⁷

The writer of this article closed with a defense of the comics that classified it in a catalog of small vices and other cultural concerns of the day: "Reform the page—yes. Abolish it—never! As well give the play without Hamlet, remove the Police Gazette from the barber shop, or take away the pink sheet from the

¹⁶⁵ "The Comic Supplement," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1910.

¹⁶⁶ "A Crime Against American Children," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1909.

¹⁶⁷ "The 'Comic' Nuisance," 529.

incorrigible fan." It was a commonplace assertion of the day, one that persists to today, that one could have Hamlet without the play, but one could not have the play without Hamlet. In referring to this, the author points to the importance of humor, of playfulness, and even of vice, as not simply diversions but as important occupations in themselves.

The *Post* writer evokes the idea of removing the popular *National Police Gazette*, a men's crime and sport paper that was popular for its sensationalistic coverage of crime as well as boxing and other sports, from barber shops. The barber shop was a refuge of masculinity and homosocial men's culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and many barber shops carried the *Police Gazette* precisely because of its marked appeal to male readers. When the *Police Gazette* became one of the first targets of the W.C.T.U. and other women's organizations' campaigns for pure literature, many saw it as an attack on a masculine bastion.¹⁶⁸ The author then brought up the "pink sheets," the sporting supplements included by many newspapers that contained not only articles but dedicated a considerable amount of space to baseball box scores, horse race results, and other wins and losses of importance to sports betting.

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion of the placement of the Gazette primarily in locations of homosocial socialization, see Joseph Valente, "The Novel and the Police (Gazette)," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 29, no. 1 (1995): 14–15; For discussion of the role of the paper in the W.C.T.U.'s campaign for suppression of impure literature, see Alison M Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 50–51.

The writer stopped short of endorsing vice or frivolity wholesale, there is no mention of alcohol, or prostitution, or bloodsports. But in setting up this constellation of minor, more or less controlled vices and frivolities, the author is implicitly argued that there must be a release valve, that not all culture can be pure, and that readers should embrace our culture's minor vulgarities, if only to avoid worse vulgarities. As America urbanized, questions of vice and purity became ever more vexing to many, and the author of this *Post* article seems to be arguing for a cultural middle ground, a centrism between highbrow and lowbrow, between purity and vice.

“A Work for Women of the Most Pressing and Practical Kind”

The first organizations to garner press attention for their anti-comics advocacy were primarily-female professional associations that dealt with children. The Playground Association of America, a group advocating for properly managed and staffed playgrounds—a new and progressive idea just beginning to make headway in urban areas at the time—was perhaps the first to get the attention of the press. At the organization's American Playground Congress in September, 1908, Maud Summers lashed out at the comic supplement: “The comic supplement of the Sunday newspaper is lowering the standard of literary appreciation . . . and debasing the morals of the children of this country . . . Humor has its place in the literature of childhood, and it would

be well if gifted writers for children could be found capable of substituting genuine fun for the coarse, vulgar type now so prominent.”¹⁶⁹

In December of the same year, the Public Education Association of New York City hosted a conversation featuring, among other speakers, Percival Chubb of the Society for Ethical Culture, who addressed the moral and religious training of children. Chubb used this forum to launch his own campaign against the comics. “The Sunday school is having a hard time because the atmosphere of the home does not chime in. Sunday begins influenced by the colored supplements, and who can see them and not say they are a great danger,” he asked.¹⁷⁰ Chubb quickly became one of the foremost voices against the comics page through his position on the International Kindergarten Union’s (I.K.U.) Committee on Literature. The I.K.U. moved to the forefront of the movement, using its primary publication, the *Kindergarten-Primary Magazine*, as an organ for anti-comics advocacy beginning in 1909. Chubb argued against the comic supplements through a variety of means. For example he addressed the New York Child Welfare Committee on the dangers of the comics page at the Child Welfare Exhibit in 1911, and he founded and led “The League for the Improvement of the Children’s Comic Supplement” that same year.¹⁷¹

Although Chubb was a man, the membership of the I.K.U. was predominantly women, as were most kindergarten teachers, and the organization

¹⁶⁹ “Woman Hits Out at Comic Supplement.”

¹⁷⁰ “Say Child Must Learn in the Home,” *New York Times*, December 16, 1908.

¹⁷¹ Ellen E. Kenyon-Warner, “The Comic Supplement,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1911; “The Comic Supplement,” *The Outlook*, April 15, 1911.

must be understood in the context of other women's clubs and women's professional organizations during the Progressive Era. When Chubb spoke against the comics, he did so in a language that was deeply evocative of the concerns of the women he both represented and addressed, focusing on the moral education of children as well as the role of the church and home in early education. For these reasons, in his rhetoric Chubb appealed to what historian Molly Ladd-Taylor has identified as an ideology of "maternalism" in Progressive Era rhetoric.

Progressive Era maternalism was a series of beliefs, undergirded by a set of rhetorical strategies, that make the following claims: "(1) that there is a uniquely feminine value system based on care and nurturance; (2) that mothers provide a service to the state by raising citizen-workers; (3) that women are united across class, race, and nation by their common capacity for motherhood and therefore share a responsibility for all the world's children; and (4) that ideally men should earn a family wage to support their 'dependent' wives and children at home."¹⁷²

While this ideology was informed by notions that carried over from "republican motherhood" and the cult of domesticity, as well as the rise of "scientific motherhood" in the late nineteenth century, it was different from earlier conceptions of women's role and identity in the way it creates a space for a distinctly public role for women. Under Progressive Era maternalism, there is an

¹⁷² Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 3.

inherent and compelling argument for an activist role for women within the public sphere, because their roles within the home as domestic protectors of morality could be seen as universal. Middle- and upper-class women believed they had a duty to advocate for women and children who could not, especially the children of the nation's swelling population of immigrants.¹⁷³

An editorial in the *Lady's Home Journal* from 1909 spelled out how the campaign against the comics page fit into this larger ideology. "Here, indeed," the editor wrote, "is a work for women of the most pressing and practical kind; a chance for a rational crusade to protect the children of the country from a most demoralizing influence."¹⁷⁴ The nineteenth-century belief in "separate spheres," which championed the role of women as moral overseers in the home still held currency, even among women in progressive reform movements. As historian Paula Baker has argued, "Aiming their efforts at matters connected with the well-being of women, children, the home, and the community, [Progressive Era] women fashioned significant public roles by working from the private sphere." The enlargement of the "domestic sphere," by means of arguing for its intersection with portions of the "public sphere," allowed women's groups in the Progressive Era a space for public advocacy. In short, they became civic housekeepers.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Ibid., 3–7.

¹⁷⁴ "A Crime Against American Children."

¹⁷⁵ Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1, 1984): 621, doi:10.2307/1856119, also see ; Maureen A. Flanagan, "Gender and Urban

Mary Garvin Pedrick, in an address to the Pennsylvania Federation of Women's Clubs, made perhaps the most direct appeal to this concept of women as protectors of the morality of children: "How shall we minimize this menace to the children of today? For its demoralizing influence has crept into the homes of all classes. Here is work for women's clubs and one in which they should joy, for it is work for children. For women are the guardians of the purity of children, the ideals of childhood, and in their hands, it is said, 'rests the great trust of keeping the American home clean and wholesome.'"¹⁷⁶ Pedrick went on to lay out a four-point action plan that involved boycotting papers with Sunday supplements, hiding supplements from children if this proved impractical, and advocacy both to newspaper publishers and neighbors against the comics, a plan that brought together both public and domestic strategies.

The centrality of women's clubs and women's advocacy can likewise be seen in contemporary accounts of the anti-comics crusade. The *Chicago Tribune* noted that "Women especially, all over the country, have been declaiming with steadily increasing force against the comic supplements, until a hostile sentiment

Political Reform: The City Club and the Woman's City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1, 1990): 1032–50 While some scholars have argued, accurately, that this separate spheres argument does not reflect the rifts between women based on race, class, or ethnicity, this does not diminish that this sort of position-taking was rhetorically prevalent during this time period, and could be quite effective for upper and middle-class women's organizations.

¹⁷⁶ Mary Garvin Pedrick, "The Comic Sunday Supplement," *Good Housekeeping*, May 1910, 627.

has been created which must be recognized and respected.”¹⁷⁷ A rather biting satirical response to moral crusaders in the *Washington Post* began with a resolution against the comics supplement made by “A ladies’ organization—we forget which one, but God bless the ladies!”¹⁷⁸

At the the I.K.U.’s annual convention in Buffalo in April of 1909, Percival Chubb described the Sunday comics page as “a form of intemperance to which our W.C.T.U.’s might well pay more attention; a debauch of the mind which is as ruinous as the more obvious and inconvenient debauch of one of the appetites . . .”¹⁷⁹ Chubb’s evocation of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, while it may seem hyperbolic to modern readers, found enthusiastic support within that organization. Indeed, by the time the National W.C.T.U. meeting in Omaha, Nebraska six months later, the organization had become deeply invested in the anti-comics crusade.

At the Omaha meeting, three different national departments of the W.C.T.U. commented on anti-comics activity that year. Clara Wheeler, superintendent of the Kindergarten Department, strongly recommended “that our state and local unions cooperate with the International Kindergarten Union in their efforts to displace the so-called comic supplement of the Sunday newspapers.” Wheeler’s home state of Michigan had already passed a resolution to that effect, which she read verbatim into the proceedings of the national union:

¹⁷⁷ “Setting a Good Example.”

¹⁷⁸ “The Comic Supplement,” November 15, 1910.

¹⁷⁹ Chubb, “The Comic Supplement, The Newspaper, and the Child,” 2.

“*Resolved*, That this convention place itself on record as directly opposed to all course and vulgar illustrations on billboards or elsewhere, and most strongly opposed to the colored and illustrated comic supplement of modern newspapers as a menace to the morals of our youth and a disgrace to journalism.”¹⁸⁰

Wheeler’s resolution evokes many of the key points of the anti-comics crusaders: the comics were inartful, crassly commercial, and a threat to the moral purity of America’s children.

The W.C.T.U. Press Department’s Minnie Barker Horning noted that “The agitation against the so-called comic supplement of the Sunday papers has usurped the time of the state press workers this year. Resolutions have been presented to churches, ministerial associations, to teachers, to clubs and societies of all kinds and to parents, asking their cooperation in exterminating the inane, inartistic, glaring, demoralizing sheet; which, while appealing to children, appeals only to a lowering of their moral standards.”¹⁸¹ The brief summaries of different state Press Departments’ activities included multiple accounts of anti-comic agitation. The District of Columbia alone estimated that “About fifty resolutions were sent out against the comic supplements of the Sunday

¹⁸⁰ Recording Secretaries of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, ed., *Report of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union: Thirty-Sixth Annual Convention* (Evanston, Ill.: Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1909), 276.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 264–265.

papers,”¹⁸² while the Virginia Press Department reported that “The comic supplement resolution has been presented to every union in the state.”¹⁸³

Emilie Martin, National Secretary of the Department of Purity in Literature and Art, was relatively quiet on the topic, despite the fact that much of her department’s focus that year concentrated on “purity of the press.” This was an ongoing set of concerns, mostly related to issues surrounding crime and scandal reporting as well as inappropriate advertisers, such as those advertising liquor or vice. This ongoing movement did undergird arguments about the impurity or vulgarity of the comic supplements, however. The secretary for the state of New York, sent word of state-level action noting that “The Sunday comic supplement has caused an arrest of thought, and many are modified,” a comment that suggests that at least on the state level, attention was being paid to the issue by that department as well.¹⁸⁴

The attention of the Department of Purity in Literature seems to have been comparatively short-lived, despite seeming to be a natural fit. When the national convention was held in Milwaukee in 1911, they made no mention of the anti-comics movement, while Clara Wheeler of the Kindergarten Department repeated her call against the comic supplement, saying that she “...would urge special effort to abolish the so-called ‘comic’ supplement from the newspapers.

¹⁸² Ibid., 265.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 267.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 337.

Every W.C.T.U. woman should refuse to receive these supplements.”¹⁸⁵ Phoebe Wilbur Griffin of the New York W.C.T.U. Press Department likewise reported that “Resolutions against the comic supplement and towards the elevation of journalism and in appreciation of the friendly attitude of most of the papers have been passed at nearly all county institutes and conventions.”¹⁸⁶

After 1911, the energies of the National W.C.T.U. seem to have been largely redirected away from the anti-comics crusade, although some regional interest continued in New England for a little while longer: the Maine Department of Purity in Literature and Art reported in 1912 that they “. . . had comic Sunday supplements discontinue[d] in [the] press . . .”¹⁸⁷ They reported the same news the next year in 1913 along with reporting their efforts for the prohibition on liquor ads in newspapers. The Massachusetts Department of Purity in Literature and Art, meanwhile, reported the same year that “[o]ne superintendent persuaded a little girl to refrain from reading the Sunday paper with its comic supplement.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Recording Secretaries of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, ed., *Report of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union: The Thirty-Eighth Annual Convention* (Evanston, Ill.: Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1911), 288.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 272.

¹⁸⁷ Recording Secretaries of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, ed., *Report of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union: The Thirty-Ninth Annual Convention* (Evanston, Ill.: Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1912), 331.

¹⁸⁸ Recording Secretaries of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, ed., *Report of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union: The Fortieth Annual Convention* (Evanston, Ill.: Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1913), 341.

That interest in this particular campaign, or any campaign endorsed by the national organization of the W.C.T.U., would vary on a state-to-state basis was hardly surprising. The W.C.T.U. was headed by a national Union that established a wide range of committees and suggested projects and campaigns for each to pursue. The states, in turn, mirrored the national Union's organizational structure, and the local chapters were likewise independent of the state organization. State Unions had much more control over local matters than the national organization. And, of course, the attention paid to a particular issue was often ultimately a matter of the level of interest in that particular issue within local chapters. The local chapters chose from a menu of committee work determined at the state or national level and, in some cases, when they felt an issue was not being addressed sufficiently by the national organization, would create their own committees. In some cases state unions would then reproduce these local committees if they proved popular. Historian Alison M. Parker has argued that this is part of the reason that the spirit of Frances Willard's "Do Everything" philosophy, an approach that understood the purview of the W.C.T.U. to encompass far more than simply advocating for temperance and prohibition, including purity of the press and other reform issues, continued on well past Mrs. Willard's death.¹⁸⁹

This sort of structure was not uncommon. Due to the hyper-localism of many women's clubs, it was hard to get a good idea of the number of

¹⁸⁹ Parker, *Purifying America*, 28–29.

organizations participating in the campaign against the comics from press reports, or of the membership numbers of participating organizations. Many newspapers and magazines only reported on major organizations of national or regional import. Nevertheless, by looking at those, we get some sense of some of the stakeholders in the campaign. Along with the W.C.T.U., clubs that made resolutions or advocated against the comics included: the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; the Pennsylvania Federation of Women's Clubs; the Era Club (described by the *New York Times* as "the largest woman's club in the South" at the time); and the General Federation of Women's Clubs.¹⁹⁰

Maternalist women's organizations, as well as professional organizations like the International Kindergarten Union, used the rhetoric of women's natural place as protectors of the domestic sphere to assert increasing pressure over the public sphere in a world where they still did not have a voice in the form of the vote. It is important to understand this both as a strategic decision and as a genuinely felt sentiment among women in these groups. The comic supplement, appearing in the Sunday paper, the one edition of the paper most targeted at a general audience of men, women, and children, was seen as a threat to the domestic sphere, and the organizations that began to criticize the comic supplement saw the negative influence on the domestic sphere as dangerous to

¹⁹⁰ "Sunday Comics Are Attacked," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 17, 1909; "Fight Comic Supplements," *New York Times*, January 30, 1912; "Credits Club Women with Many Reforms."

the American public. Many of the women who advocated against the comics were in part informed by the pernicious link between Sunday supplements and yellow journalism, a connection that had been kept alive in print media, especially by publications that were in competition with the “yellow journals.”

Meanwhile, color comic supplements were rapidly increasing in number and spreading across the nation. In the first three-quarters of 1895, Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* was the only newspaper in the nation to feature a color comic supplement. By 1903, 15.5 percent of the U.S. population lived in cities and towns with comic strips in at least one of the newspapers. By 1908, that number had increased to over 19 percent. This growth was not merely in large metropolitan papers; syndication was growing significantly the early twentieth century. In the same years, the number of newspapers that were purchasing syndicated comics from other newspapers nearly doubled, from forty-five to eighty-one.¹⁹¹ Clearly, to some of the middle-class women who led a crusade against the comics, the comic supplements represented a creeping urbanity that was moving across the country, into smaller towns and cities that had not been impacted by the anarchical goings-on of the Yellow Kid strips. And along with this creeping urbanity came the vulgarity of the city. Maternalist activism sought to mitigate these forces, to protect the middle-class households of America’s small towns and sleepy cities, to provide a bulwark against vulgarity.

¹⁹¹ Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 168.

CHAPTER THREE: “IF NOT ACTUALLY EVIL... VULGARIZING.” THE RHETORIC OF THE CRUSADE AGAINST THE COMIC SUPPLEMENT, 1907-1912

The women’s organizations and primarily-female professional organizations that advocated for the reform or suppression of the comics page were for the most part neither particularly radically progressive, nor particularly conservative. They were primarily organizations of middle-class, reform-minded women, who couched their calls for reform in the language of maternalism. As comic supplements became more common in more towns and cities, anxiety about the influence of this new commercial art form increased. These anxieties were stoked and pushed further by a print media that saw the comic supplement as a threat to their own sales.

“Vulgarity” & “Purity”: Claiming a Place in Cultural Criticism for Middle-Class Women

The rhetoric used by opponents of the comic supplement was not organized around a small number of key issues. The concerns they spoke to were many and varied. Reformers touched on a number of interconnected concerns, social questions, and anxieties that existed during the Progressive Era, including Sabbatarianism, immigration, working class leisure, and general concerns about the preservation of social order, both at home and in society. Most people advocating for a moral reform of the comics would actually adopt several of these

themes at once. The effect, ultimately, was that reformers used a patchwork mosaic of different rhetorical strategies, evoking a range of moral concerns. If the rhetoric of reformers was so disparate in its concerns, however, there was one point upon which most anti-comics crusaders agreed: the most common critique of the comics was that they were in one way or another “vulgar.” This criticism appeared overtly in a great number of articles criticizing the Sunday comic supplement, while other articles made the link implicitly. There seems to have been a great consensus among anti-comics reformers that the comics were influences, as one article for *The Outlook* put it, “which, if not actually evil, [were] vulgarizing.”¹⁹²

The idea of the Sunday comics as “vulgar” was popular precisely because the term itself was quite vague. “Vulgar” was a term that could be applied to a variety of evils, with the only consistent implication being the cultural superiority of the person who could identify vulgarity. “Vulgarity” could simply imply commonness, a favorite of those who saw the comics as an inappropriate use of the Sabbath, a day that was supposed to be set aside from the everyday. “Vulgar” could also mean obscene, and for some crusaders, the supplements certainly seemed to at least border on the obscene in their humor. “Vulgar” was also a term that was class-inflected, to be vulgar was to be of the common people; comic supplements were indeed seen as representing and being sold to appeal to the

¹⁹² “Vulgarizing American Children,” *The Outlook*, May 19, 1915, 123.

common people of the city, and as they became more popular, some critics saw a creeping vulgarity.

Similarly, the adjective was also used in the early nineteenth century to describe works of art or literature that were seen as crassly commercial. And of course, a single use could encompass multiple meanings. When crusaders described comics as vulgar in the same breath as ragtime music or vaudeville, they were criticizing these cultural forms as commercial, indecent, and low-class all at once. It was in this way that the notion(s) of “vulgarity” became a central point for a constellation of criticism of the comics, and in so doing, allowed the movement some rhetorical unity. Couching all of this in the maternalist language of the time, the concern was perhaps best expressed by the title of an article in the *The Outlook* about the Sunday comics: “Vulgarizing American Children.”¹⁹³

The movement started with a flurry of editorials. As those editorials became more regular, educators’ organizations and women’s clubs sponsored resolutions for action. Many of the crusaders against the comic supplement represented an emerging “middlebrow” approach to cultural creation and cultural criticism, one that paradoxically emerged during what Lawrence Levine has described as the “bifurcation” of American culture.¹⁹⁴ While many middle class Americans found a path to new class status by buying into the division of cultural consumption into “high” and “low,” some others, especially reform-

¹⁹³ “Vulgarizing American Children.”

¹⁹⁴ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Harvard University Press, 1990), 60.

minded middle-class women, took a different route, one where both the “high” and “low” culture were divided into “pure” and “impure,” judged not by a class hierarchy, but by a moral standard. In looking at the comic supplements, these middlebrow club women saw a potential tool for moral education being squandered, instead being used for cheap jokes and low humor. It was, in other words, something vulgar, impure, and in need of reform, or even elimination.

Historian Alison Parker has argued that middlebrow culture emerged earlier than the circa-1920s date that Joan Rubin argued in her book *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Parker’s cites the literature and the literary criticism produced by the W.C.T.U.’s Department of Purity in Literature and Art, which “developed a complicated cultural hierarchy where ‘high’ was as suspect as ‘low.’”¹⁹⁵ Morality was central to this emerging middlebrow culture. While the previously dominant narrative about the Progressive Era still had elite men endeavoring to elevate and promote “high” culture and to suppress “low” culture, Parker contended that women’s groups “worked from a distinct set of assumptions about culture. [They] differentiated between ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ within both ‘high’ and ‘low’ genres.”¹⁹⁶

Where Lawrence Levine saw middle class tastes aligning more and more with those of the elites by the early twentieth century, Parker finds a significant number of middle class individuals, primarily women, who rejected the cultural bifurcation of the moment, seeing culture as divided not into “high” and “low,”

¹⁹⁵ Parker, *Purifying America*, 67–68.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

but into “pure” and “impure.” In critiquing both high and low culture from this point of view, and in creating literature that held these tenets, these middle-class female reformers found a way to insert themselves into the field of cultural production. The field of cultural production is a field of relative position-taking by which the cultural status of an art form or piece of art is socially determined. In creating this middlebrow critical mode based around purity in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, reform-minded bourgeois women found a way to insert themselves as agents within the field of cultural production, and attempted to influence it. The moral panic about the comic supplement, while it had class elements against the “low” art of the comics and against the “low” newspapers that ran them, was also very much a result of this middlebrow culture of purity.

The Comic Supplement and its Effect on Children

Some opponents of the comic supplements called for their elimination.

One such call came from William D. Jones, an instructor at the Carnegie Technical Schools (now Carnegie Mellon University) in *The Outlook*: “If commercial expediency is to be consulted, it is to be remembered that no paper would suffer financial loss if the comic supplement were dropped . . . all at the same time—a fact which suggest that some sort of National or State supervision should at once be made suddenly and effectively binding upon all.”¹⁹⁷

Other critics of the comic supplement argued for its “improvement.” Lucy Wheelock, former I.K.U. president and founder of Miss Wheelock’s Kindergarten

¹⁹⁷ William D. Jones, “The Comic Supplements Again,” *The Outlook*, November 25, 1911, 791.

Training School (now Wheelock College), was more than willing to admit that “The picture story has always been a favorite” of children. She argued, however, the demand for picture stories did not mean that the types of picture stories in the comic supplement were what children or parents wanted. “The argument for the Sunday colored supplement rests on the delight of the children in adventure, and it assumed that the rude and disgraceful deeds of Buster Brown and his colleagues, and the sad plight of their venerable victims, is the kind of adventure demanded,” she added that “The flaunting colors are added to satisfy the barbaric taste which is supposed to survive in the young of every generation.”¹⁹⁸

“Would there be a diminution of revenue for the Sunday supplement,” Wheelock asked, “if it gave a course of sketches from *Cinderella*, *Jack and the Bean Stalk*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, tales of Theseus and Perseus, and made a serial story of the adventures of Siegfried, the Cid, Achilles, and King Arthur? Such pictures would be highly desirable for our story group on the playground.”¹⁹⁹ Wheelock wanted to see a color supplement that did away with the cheap jokes and gags, and instead took the opportunity to enculturate children, by providing them with illustrated versions of the Classics.

These campaigners frequently evoked the protection of children as a primary concern, although it is perhaps unsurprising that the notions of childhood evoked in such arguments were often strongly class-inflected.

¹⁹⁸ Lucy Wheelock, “The Mission of the Story,” *Kindergarten Review*, December 1909, 201.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

Reformers were primarily of the middle class, and had very different notions of childhood depending on if they were discussing their own children or urban, working-class children. To put it simply, middle class children were seen as threatened by the comics, whereas working class children were often viewed as a threat made worse by exposure to the supplements.

Reformers, when they looked at the influence of the comic supplements on middle-class children, focused on the moral impact of the comics. As one writer for *Lipenscott's Monthly Magazine* put it, "It is a well-known biological and psychological law that the mimetic tendency of children is particularly strong in the domain of the reprehensible."²⁰⁰ The obvious concern for middle-class parents in the movement was that their children might imitate the adventures of Buster Brown, the Katzenjammer Kids, or the children who tormented Foxy Grandpa. In this reading, reformers seemed to remain steadfastly tone-deaf to the strips in question, to the fact that Buster Brown learned a lesson and made a resolution at the end of each strip, that the Katzenjammers were frequently beaten for their transgressions, and that Foxy Grandpa always got the better of his grandchildren's pranks.

Anti-comics crusaders worried that middle class children might imitate the Sunday supplements and in so doing, that they would subvert the "natural," bourgeois domestic order. An editorial in *The Ladies' Home Journal* fretted that, "Instead of helping to counteract the too-prevalent tendency among children to

²⁰⁰ Scheffauer, "The Comic Supplement," 382.

irreverence and resistance to authority, these pictures and jokes actually teach our children irreverence and lawlessness by ridiculing home discipline, by making cheap fun of age, dignity, good breeding, and all the pieties and amenities which make the family the most sacred and important of all human institutions.”²⁰¹ Mary Garvin Pedrick was likewise convinced of the immoral influence of the comics and the danger they represented to the middle-class domestic order, stating that their “. . . so-called fun consists chiefly in making game of old people, who are always the victims of the young hero, and seemingly imbecile in their inability to count the resource or marvelous ingenuity displayed by the Smart Kid; some wretched animal or harmless individual is being ill treated, or torn to shreds; parents are hoodwinked, or their authority is discountenanced; awful females travesty the marital relation; grandfathers and grandmothers are outraged.”²⁰²

In addition to concerns over the comics lack of proper respect for elders, there was a fear of exposure to the wrong class of people: “Its stock in trade . . . consists chiefly of making fun of old people, deriding parents by representing them in ridiculous attitudes, and vulgar presentations of the lowest kind of marital relations between the cheapest sorts of people,”²⁰³ according to one writer for *The Outlook*. The comics pages were seen as a gateway for children to a world where they were taught to disregard their parents or elders and invited to rub

²⁰¹ “A Crime Against American Children.”

²⁰² Pedrick, “The Comic Sunday Supplement,” 255–256.

²⁰³ “The ‘Comic’ Nuisance,” 528.

elbows with a class of people with whom any self-respecting middle class mother would never dream of letting her child associate.

It is worthy of note that examples of actual imitation or emulation of the comic strips by children almost never come up. The anxieties of parents seem to have gone largely unrealized, though it seems to have mattered little. I have only been able to identify two articles that give concrete examples of children emulating comics to ill effect during the time of the moral panic. One letter to the paper, from 1908, detailed the misdeeds of one boy who, emulating a strip in the comic supplement, “shampooed his sister’s hair, and anointed the poodle with a mixture of ink, glue, and the family hair tonic, leaving the remainder of the compound in the bottle for the use of his father and mother.” The author of the letter went on to say that “Much mischief is suggested in such ways as this, and the suggestions come from artists who have little sympathy with children.”²⁰⁴ Another article from 1910 related the story of a boy from Plainfield, New Jersey, who “. . . called the Public Service Corporation on the telephone and told the clerk that [his neighbor] Mr. Hummell wanted his gas meter taken out right away. Then he called up some twenty merchants and gave orders for goods to be delivered immediately C.O.D.” The boy later told the court that the prank, which included ordering a “ton of coal, a twelve-pound turkey, twelve quarts of ice cream, and other things,” was inspired by a comic strip.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Child Lover, “Mischief In Comic Pictures,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1908.

²⁰⁵ “Imitated Comic Supplement,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1910.

That only two articles would report any concrete examples of children emulating the comics in the *Times*, which was one of the most vigorous champions of the movement against the comic supplement, would seem to undermine the arguments made about the dangers of children emulating comic strips. There are certainly reasons to suspect that it was more common than these two incidents; children's bad behavior is seldom newsworthy. The kindergarteners and middle-class mothers advocating against the comics likely would not give concrete examples from the children under their own care, because it would undermine the moral authority of the woman as moral protector of the domestic sphere. Likewise, they would likely not present examples from their friends' or neighbors' experiences, viewing such stories as inappropriate intrusions into domestic matters. Nevertheless, when the most the *Times* was able to dig up in several years of reporting on this moral crisis was a little girl with gunk in her hair and a few prank phone calls, it seems fair to assume that crusaders were more concerned with the symbolic threat to domestic authority than any outbreak of juvenile delinquency or hooliganism among middle-class children.

In discussing the influence of comics on the morality of working-class city children, on the other hand, reformers frequently cited concerns about the lack of moral education within the home. The reformers pointed to the same cramped conditions and poverty that concerned other urban social reformers of the time. The comic supplement was seen as a bad influence, encouraging the worst in city

children who were already lost in an uncaring cityscape. “[O]nly the cooped-up city children,” opined a 1908 piece in the *New York Times*, “deprived of their normal enjoyments, amusements, and occupations, give . . . [the comic supplement] more than a languid and soon sated interest.”²⁰⁶

Percival Chubb mirrored this sentiment a few months later at the meeting of the Public Education Association, noting that “In the increase of hoodlumism, divorce, child labor, luxury, and extravagance, there is a relaxation of the moral muscle. . .” Another speaker in the panel expressed concern that, “. . . there are many children who have little or no good influence except that which they receive at school.”²⁰⁷ Chubb regarded working-class city children as “more or less degenerate” and as a “product of modern conditions of overcrowding . . .”²⁰⁸ Children without the positive influence of church and school were seen as particularly susceptible to the vulgarizing moral influence of these comics, especially the strips that focused primarily on practical jokes, trickery, and hijinks.

Chubb expressed a particular concern with the “glorification of the ‘smart kid,’ the ‘up to snuff’ type of children, the worst American type of the ‘forward’ child” and the “child who is obsessed by the idea of practical joking, who begins to ‘rough-house’ in the nursery and ‘haze’ in the kindergarten.” His conclusion was that “[v]ulgarity, a flaunting commonness of the mind, appears to be a

²⁰⁶ “Ugliness As An Amusement,” *The New York Times*, September 18, 1908.

²⁰⁷ “Say Child Must Learn in the Home.”

²⁰⁸ Percival Chubb, “The Child As A Literary Personage,” *Kindergarten Review*, September 1909.

product of the great city . . . I would attribute the inroads of vulgarity to the decline of reverence, the lack of any converse with great things, an insensitiveness to what is fine, distinguished, holy.”²⁰⁹ And to Chubb, it was obvious that the comic Sunday supplement only contributed to this overarching vulgarity.

Anti-Comics Advocates Appeal to Scientific Authority

Like many other forms of Progressive Era social advocacy led by women’s groups, their criticism of the “problems” presented by the comic supplement were not simply moralistic appeals to domestic authority but were also couched in language that appealed to certain modes of scientific authority. One striking trope that unites many articles and speeches of the advocates against the Sunday supplement was a particular methodology, one that demonstrated a desire for a certain type of statistical objectivity. For the first couple years of the campaign against the comics, critics were satisfied to cherry-pick a few comics from a couple papers and draw conclusions from their content. But around 1909, a more empirical approach seems to take hold. As it was *The Outlook* explained in one of the earliest examples, in March 1909: “. . . a man interested in this subject secured examples of the Sunday supplement from all parts, from Boston to San Francisco, spread them out on the floor of a room, hoping to find in them some reason for their being, and was appalled at the inanity and vulgarity of illustrations, text, and color which stamped them from the Atlantic to the

²⁰⁹ Chubb, “The Comic Supplement, The Newspaper, and the Child,” 4.

Pacific.”²¹⁰ This approach of spreading out of newspapers on the floor to ascertain the scope of the problem, was quickly appropriated by several other authors soon after.²¹¹ In collecting newspapers from around the nation and surveying them informally, criticisms took on an authority of objective study, even though their methodology was questionable and their conclusions were often highly subjective.

Reformers likewise employed arguments borrowed from the still-nascent field of child psychology. They had a staunch supporter in one of the most prominent child psychologists of the day. G. Stanley Hall, founding president of the American Psychological Association, president of Clark College, and possibly the Progressive Era’s foremost expert on childhood development. What he saw when he approached the comic supplements was a nightmarish saturnalia, a

. . . Walpurgis-night dream of phantasy run mad. Some are violent abstractions of single qualities that are ultra burlesque, and others have no aim or purpose that is intelligible to the ordinary observer. These weird, half-human freaks are put through sets of adventures, the chief feature of which is fooling and being fooled. They are blown into the air, submerged in the sea, dynamited, shot, roasted, transformed, they grow large and tall or shrivel in size, have blood-curdling dreams; indeed, there is nothing in the chronicles of madhouse fancy of crime, war, or disaster that does not befall them, and yet everything is humoresque. The dog, cat, parrot, rabbit monkey, frog, pig, often play the leading rôle. They dance, talk, perform all sorts of human acts and antics, and cut up high jinks and all conceivable didoes, capers, and pranks. Animals do human and humans do animal things and this is supposed to make the fun fast and furious. Both are generally biological impossibilities and their performances have no

²¹⁰ “The ‘Comic’ Nuisance,” 528.

²¹¹ See, for example: Pedrick, “The Comic Sunday Supplement,” 623; “The Comic Supplement,” April 15, 1911, 802; Granville Stanley Hall, *Educational Problems*, vol. II (New York: Appleton and Company, 1911), 322.

relation to facts. From all this sudsy ooze of arrant nonsense, not one in my day's samples has the slightest discernable permanent value.²¹²

Observing children reading the comics, he further explained that “[t]he children interested in it at all show a trace of the same type of shame as do adults who secretly buy and read yellow journals, as if they were indulging in surreptitious and rather discreditable forms of relaxation.”²¹³ Hall’s lack of concern about observer bias on his young subjects is an excellent reminder that psychology was a field still in its infancy in 1911.

Hall was extremely influential, however. He spoke, along with Anthony Comstock, at the first meeting of the National Congress of Mothers, an organization that eventually became the National Parent Teacher Association in 1897. His influence was still strongly felt in that organization into the 1920s.²¹⁴ Not coincidentally, in 1911, the same year that Hall published his anti-comics diatribe in his book *Educational Problems, Volume II*, the National Congress of Mothers issued a resolution condemning the comic supplement, along with resolutions against Mormon polygamy, warnings against “medicate soft drinks,” and a resolution thanking Taft for his work to fight the “White Slave Traffic.”²¹⁵

Hall was also a proponent of another bit of psychological and biological theory that held currency at the time that has since been dismissed as pseudoscience: what is described today as “recapitulation theory.” This belief is

²¹² Hall, *Educational Problems*, II:322.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, II:323.

²¹⁴ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 46–47, 136.

²¹⁵ “Mothers Attack Polygamy: National Congress Also Deprecates the Publication of Comic Supplements,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1911.

commonly expressed by Ernst Haeckel's epigram "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," which is to say that in the course of development, animals and humans go through phases that mirror the distinct phases of evolution of their distant ancestors. To Hall, this meant a belief that curriculums should be shaped around the cultural development of the "race," specifically the "white race." A curriculum that mirrored the development of Western Civilization from "savagery" to "civilization" was essential in Hall's view because he believed that "the origin of language, character temperament, will probably never have any solution unless they are found in the study of infancy, the growth of which epitomizes under our eyes the history of the race, each day sometimes representing perhaps the race-development of centuries."²¹⁶

Given the currency of this belief, it is perhaps not surprising that we should find recapitulation theory in some of the writings of anti-comics commentators. One writer for the *New York Times* opined that "... children are naturally obtuse to delicate distinctions. For wit they have little appreciation and for sarcasm none at all, being in those respects exactly like the savages and barbarians, whose mental states they are duplicating on the well-known principle

²¹⁶ Granville Stanley Hall, "The New Psychology as Basis of Education," *The Forum*, no. 17 (1894): 716; For more on Hall's belief in recapitulation theory and its problematic associations with notions of race and colonialism, see Joshua Garrison, "A Problematic Alliance: Colonial Anthropology, Recapitulation Theory, and G. Stanley Hall's Program for the Liberation of America's Youth," *American Educational History Journal* 35, no. 1/2 (2008): 131-47; Thomas Fallace, "Recapitulation Theory and the New Education: Race, Culture, Imperialism, and Pedagogy, 1894-1916," *Curriculum Inquiry* 42, no. 4 (September 1, 2012): 510-33.

that ontogeny repeats phylogeny.”²¹⁷ Similarly, Percival Chubb argued that “The study of the body of the traditionary literature of childhood will establish . . . [that it] reproduces the characteristics of the literature of early man, of the early Greeks, the singing game of the child being analogous to the choral dance of the Greeks. It should be studied in the light of anthropology in order that its aesthetic significance may be seen.”²¹⁸ It is worth pointing out here that Chubb and Hall were also both deeply interested in *volkkulture* and wrote extensively on that topic.²¹⁹

The combination of belief in recapitulation theory and anxiety about the corrosive effects of exposure to “bad” media by children presents a fascinating possible reading. While Hall, like many, considered the racial hierarchy a “fixed” quantity, it is possible that this was less certain in some other proponents’ minds. Indeed, if children’s development was believed to recapitulate the cultural evolution of the “race,” and people who believed this were concerned about children being exposed to the wrong sorts of media teaching them a lack of morals that could impact society, it is possible to posit a reading whereby racial hierarchy was not at all fixed. Rather, the anxiety may have been produced in part out of a fear that racial hierarchy *was not* fixed, that cultures could degrade and devolve. By exposure to comic strips and other mass media, white children were

²¹⁷ “Ugliness As An Amusement.”

²¹⁸ Chubb, “The Child As A Literary Personage,” 9.

²¹⁹ Both Hall and Chubb deal with these topics extensively when discussing education. Cf. Hall, *Educational Problems*; and Percival Chubb, *Festivals and Plays in Schools and Elsewhere* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912).

risking not mimicking the evolution of previous generations, and by extension the supposed “superiority” of their race. This anxiety would be compatible with some people’s fears about the dissipation of whiteness during the period of massive immigration leading up to World War I.

Even beyond Hall, many arguments against the comic supplements were founded in popular and scientific notions of child development of the day. The nature of children was “. . . imitative. It does not forget, and according to its ability will endeavor to put in practice what has been preached to it, in vivid colors in the supplement it loves,” according to one writer for the *Christian Observer*. “Buster Brown’ is a character which we may well pray the children of the readers of the Sunday paper will never imitate, and other characters are vastly worse.”²²⁰ It is worth noting that Buster Brown, while incorrigible in practice, was also a character deeply engaged in a personal moral struggle. Each strip ended with Buster, at the close of a series of anarchical events brought about by his mischief, making a “resolution” about future decisions and actions. Such a reading obviously fell on deaf ears among the moral crusaders against the comic supplements.

It is worth noting that while opponents of the comic supplement regarded them as the exclusive interest of children and, perhaps, the feeble-minded, this was never the case, something that defenders of the supplement would often point out. An editorial in *The Atlanta Constitution* pointed to “[a] well-known

²²⁰ “A Moral Danger: Colored Supplements to the Sunday Paper,” *Christian Observer*, July 3, 1907.

Atlantan, himself no mean creator of humor, confesses that every Sunday morning he sneaks downstairs in his stockingfeet, to enjoy the ‘comics’ before the children have monopolized them.”²²¹ Similarly, in a generally very anti-comic supplement article for the *Methodist Review*, an author admitted that “When first projected the ‘comic’ was intended for ‘the kids.’ In course of time it was discovered that the elders of the household were also keenly susceptible to its fascinations, so that now the established ‘comic’ is edited with old and young in mind.”²²² Passages like these suggested that, while the opponents of the comic supplement frequently pled that the supplement be reformed or eliminated in the interest of the children, many understood that the comics had a significant adult readership. It was simply easier to dismiss those adult readers as uneducated, dim-witted, or to deny their existence wholesale than to admit that the comic supplement might be a site of pleasure for adult readers as well as supposedly easily-misled children.

While many opponents of Sunday comic supplements claimed merely a desire to reform the comics, rather than get rid of them entirely, and despite pseudo-sociological methods that aimed at giving an air of statistical objectivity, it was quite rare for any comics opponent to point to specific strips beyond brief mentions. Even less common was a speaker or writer who pointed out even a single comic strip that might transcend their general accusations of vulgarity, al

²²¹ “Humor and the Supplements,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1908.

²²² “The American Newspaper,” *The Methodist Review*, November 1911, 845.

though singling out one such comic might have made the argument for “improvement” appear far more sincere.

One opponent of the comics who was willing to point to at least one comic as a paragon of what the supplement could be was humorist, lecturer, and Baptist minister Robert J. Burdette. Of Winsor McCay’s *Little Nemo*, Burdette said, “To the general rule that these comic supplements are atrocious in drawing and banal in humor and that they are a standing reproach to the men who print them in their newspapers there is only one exception, that is ‘Little Nemo,’” Burdette said in an address to a joint dinner of the Associated Press and the American Newspaper Publishers’ Association. “I beg you to give us, if you can, more Little Nemos and less of all the rest, because all the rest are not only worthless but worse than worthless—they are harmful to the children.”²²³

Of course, not even the amazing and inventive work of McCay was immune to all of the critics of the comics page. Frank Foxcroft, former editor of the *Boston Journal*, who in 1907 was working as an editor for the *Living Age*, as well as *Youth’s Companion*,²²⁴ was no fan of McCay’s work. Writing for *The Living Age*, Foxcroft singled out two pieces of McCay’s work in particular for criticism. “Here is a specimen from a metropolitan Sunday paper. One page is

²²³ “‘Little Nemo’ Only Comic Fit to Print,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1909.

²²⁴ Foxcroft also anonymously edited the anti-suffrage newspaper “The Remonstrance”. This editorial duty was kept secret because it was the organ of the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women (MAOFESW), a women’s anti-suffrage organization. See Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck, *Women’s Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), 326–328.

taken up with fourteen images representing a small boy's nightmare. Another series of twelve pictures portrays the inconvenient consequences of 'Little Sammy's Sneeze.' . . . What can be the mental condition of an adult person who thinks them even faintly funny?"²²⁵ The first strip was clearly McCay's *Little Nemo*, which began in 1905. The second is a slight mangling of the title of *Little Sammy Sneeze*, McCay's first sustained strip, which ran in the *New York Herald* from 1904 to 1906.²²⁶ While Burdette, a humorist himself, may have been willing to single out talent in the comics page, Foxcroft, like many critics of the comics at this time, was unwilling to even cite the proper names of the strips he criticized.

The Comic Supplement, the Motion Picture, and Working-Class Leisure

The discourse around the Sunday supplement shared much in common with the discourse around another new form of cultural production that was facing increasing censorship and calls for reform at the same time: the motion picture. Both were facing calls for reform for similar reasons: they were cheap, "vulgar," supposedly taught bad morals, and were easily available to children with modest budgets. While comics were often read openly, in parlors and on street corners that bore little resemblance to early peepshows, nickelodeons, and

²²⁵ Frank Foxcroft, "The American Sunday Newspaper," *The Living Age*, November 2, 1907, 260.

²²⁶ Interestingly, this gives a pretty firm last possible date for the "specimen" selected by Foxcroft as the object of his analysis. It had to have been a Sunday edition of the *Journal* dated no later than December 9, 1906—a curiously early date given Foxcroft's article in the *Living Age* was dated November 2, 1907. Foxcroft must have been working on this article for some time, or perhaps had this comic supplement in his house for a while.

nickel theaters, both proliferated problematic images to impressionable youths with some pocket change. These were the venues where children came into direct contact with creeping modern commercialism, where they were treated as empowered consumers.²²⁷

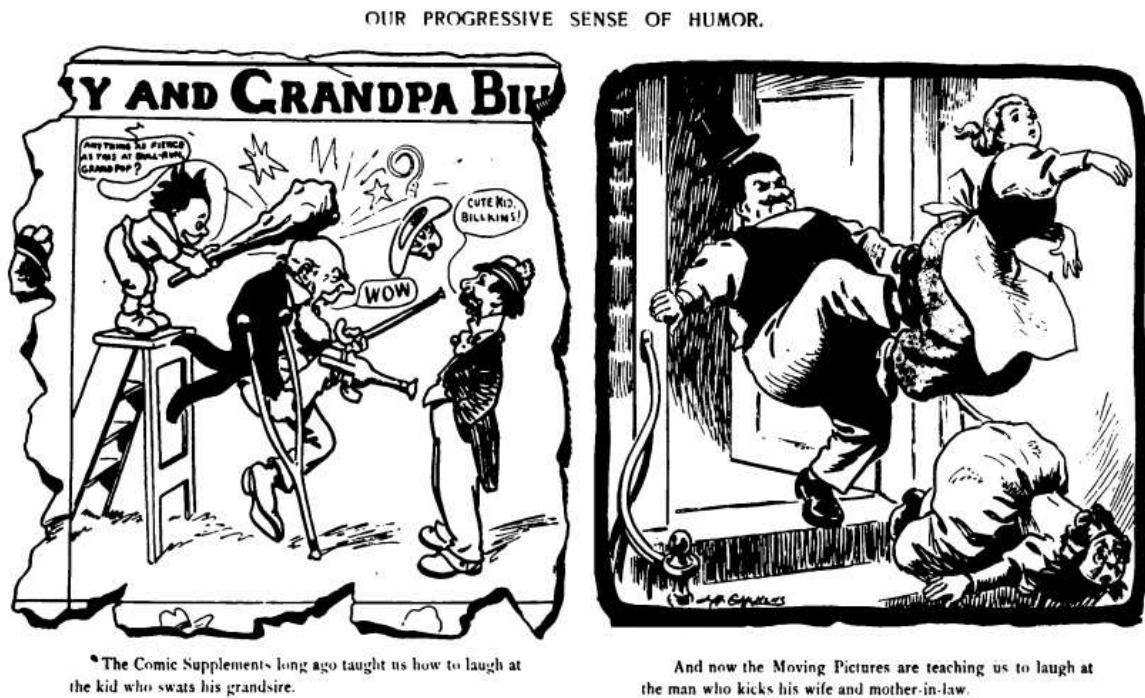


Figure 5: Louis Glackens, "Our Progressive Sense of Humor," *Puck*, November 10, 1909, p.4

²²⁷ The concerns expressed by moral reformers of early motion pictures and the moral reformers who criticized the Sunday supplements were markedly similar. See: David Nasaw, "Children And Commercial Culture: Moving Pictures in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Small Worlds: Children & Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, ed. Paula Petrik and Elliott West (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 14-25.

Some critics of the Sunday colored supplements connected the “movies and comic supplements rather overtly, comparing similar tropes and topics in the two media. In a 1909 cartoon from *Puck*,²²⁸ (see figure 5) the anxieties about both media to upending domestic order are illustrated through highly effective use of juxtaposition. The two-panel strip juxtaposes two images: the first panel is drawn in such a way to suggest a panel torn from a comic strip, where the second panel is framed in such a manner to suggest a still frame image from a peep show film. The first panel shows a wild-haired boy on a ladder bonking the head of an elderly man, with the caption “The Comic Supplements long ago taught us how to laugh at the kid who swats his grandsire.” The second panel, the peepshow panel, depicts a portly man in a top hat kicking a woman into the air from his front door, with another, older woman, having already landed on the stoop. The caption to this panel is “And now the Moving Pictures are teaching us to laugh at the man who kicks his wife and mother-in-law.”

While the figures in this cartoon are not identical to any particular characters, they would have been of familiar types to audiences of the time. The boy on the ladder bears a strong enough resemblance to Hans Katzenjammer—the dark-haired Katzenjammer Kid—to be immediately recognizable. Likewise, his “grandsire” bears a clear resemblance to Foxy Grandpa, though he is distorted to appear more pathetic, given a long beard to suggest age, along with a peg leg and crutches. The spry, merry qualities of Foxy Grandpa have been supplanted by

²²⁸ Louis Glackens, “Our Progressive Sense of Humor,” *Puck*, November 10, 1909, 4.

markers of age and infirmity. This “Grandsire” will not, it is clear, be able to deliver comeuppance to his grandchildren, the signature plotline of “Foxy Grandpa” strips. Likewise, the actor in the peepshow panel is a portly, John Bunny type of actor, with a top hat and mustache: accouterments that evoke a villain of melodrama. The targets of this cartoon would be clear to almost any reader of the day.

It is also worth pointing out that the man in the second panel was not simply kicking his wife and mother-in-law, as the panel’s caption suggested, but actually kicking them physically out of the house. The country’s rising divorce rates at the time were a topic of worry to some, as is illustrated by one letter from educator and author Ellen E. Kenyon Warner to the *New York Times*, where she wonders why nobody had “connected the over-filled divorce-court with the character of the amusement provided for children?” She worried that popular entertainment was making young people lose understanding of all things serious: “[a]ll reverence killed, all ideals forgotten, they marry on a dare, or as a joke or an experiment. When they find that life as a reality is not a joke, they end the experiment, unabashed, in the courtroom. For what fine sense can survive a weekly dose of the comic supplement during the ‘formative years’?”²²⁹ The cartoon’s title, “Our Progressive Sense of Humor,” invited several questions: is this positive or negative progress? Is American culture progressing or devolving?

²²⁹ Kenyon-Warner, “The Comic Supplement.”

And somewhat more subtextually, what can Progressive activism do to lessen, curb, or reverse this cultural devolution?

Other anti-comics crusaders pointed out the similarities between the threat represented by the comic supplement and that represented by the motion picture, to the point of calling for the same boards of censorship that had sprung up in major cities to pass judgement on the comics as well as the motion pictures. A letter to *The Outlook* in 1911 furnished a vignette that highlighted the appeal to young, poor city children: “One Sunday, several years ago, a baby of three or four toddled up to me on the board-walk at Asbury Park to lisp the request that I get him a ‘funny paper.’” The letter-writer went on to plea for the intervention of motion picture censorship boards to supervise comic supplements as well, arguing that “the creation of National or State boards that should do the same work in regard to the pictures which enter so many American homes that certain boards now perform for the moving-picture shows which delight so many children; or the powers of the boards which already exist might be enlarged to include the supervision of the colored Sunday supplement.”²³⁰ Sunday comic supplements and motion pictures were seen by some as presenting similar problems of taste and morality, and these people believed that similar strategies could be put in place to curb the vulgar influence of both media.

Urban popular entertainments, whether in the form of moving pictures, ragtime music, comic supplements, or vaudeville, were seen as a problematic

²³⁰ Jones, “The Comic Supplements Again,” 791.

constellation: popular, commercially successful, new, and vulgarizing. “It is a fair question if the craze for artificial entertainment and vaudeville stage is not a considerable degree to the demoralizing influences of the vaudeville publication,” opined one editorial about the yellow press, and particularly the comic supplements.²³¹ Ellen Kenyon-Warner, writing to the *New York Times*, worried about a generation of children exposed to immoral “low” commercial culture: “‘Debauched’ by the comic supplement and the coarse theatre show, our young people choose ragtime music before the best, and in all their social intercourse continue the education downward.”²³²

This narrative of comic supplements being part of a demoralizing trend in many forms of entertainment in this age when commercial mass entertainment was coming into its own was particularly compelling to reformers like Percival Chubb, who felt that the Classics were key in the education of children. He described his struggle as an urban teacher: “Against these influences the teachers of the city have to wage a grim and uncertain war. The teachers have to counteract the influence of the adult theatre and vaudeville with its ragtime ditties, which heedless parents allow their children to patronize.”²³³ For Chubb, what was taking place was a cheapening of the *volkskultur* by a creeping commercialism. “[W]hat is actually taking the place of the song and carol, ballad and story, epic and drama which fed the soul of the folk in times agone?” Chubb

²³¹ “The Passing of the Color Comic,” 251.

²³² Kenyon-Warner, “The Comic Supplement.”

²³³ “Comic Supplements a Source of Evil,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1911.

writes. "The sad answer is, rag-time ditties; rag-time journalism, the Sunday magazine supplement and comic supplement; our *Saturday Evening Posts* and our *Munseys*; our vaudeilles and 'movies.'"²³⁴

While the inchoate, middlebrow critique of culture among many who opposed the comic supplement held that literature and art should be read first with moral standards, and only after that in light of aesthetic standards, many anti-comics crusaders made explicitly aesthetic arguments against the comic supplement, although it was often couched in language about morality and the responsibility to educate children. *The Ladies' Home Journal* explained how the comics were not meeting the aesthetic educational needs of children: "At a time when they need the influence of good drawing and coloring we give them distortion and crudity; for sound and sweet humor which is droll or kindly we offer them a quality of caricature and exaggeration that would be spurned by the lowest class of negro minstrelsy or in the worst smoke-fumed dance-hall vaudeville."²³⁵ The aesthetic objections to the comic supplement were in no way limited to middlebrow moral reformers. G. Stanley Hall lamented of the comic supplement that "The poetry is doggerel, the art execrable, the bathos of it all about as de-educational as can be conceived."²³⁶

²³⁴ Percival Chubb, "The Blight of Literary Bookishness," *The English Journal* 3, no. 1 (January 1914): 15.

²³⁵ "A Crime Against American Children."

²³⁶ Hall, *Educational Problems*, II:323.

Sabbatarianism and the Sunday Comic Supplements

Many participants in the crusade against the Sunday supplement also used rhetoric that evoked notions of Sabbatarianism. Sunday papers were a major concern in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. At a period of unprecedented immigration, with more non-Protestant and non-Christian immigrants, increasing numbers of working-class folks who did not regularly attend church, or who observed religion in very different ways than the manner of many native-born Americans. At the same time, decreasing hours for workers and a growing commercial culture created a strong anxiety about working class leisure, especially on the Sunday Sabbath. In this climate, many saw the Sunday newspapers as particularly distressing.

Before the Civil War, few daily papers ran Sunday editions. Readers' desire to have daily news during the war, however, gave birth to a new seven-day news cycle, and after the war, Sunday papers continued to grow in popularity. By 1880, there were an estimated 113 Sunday editions of daily papers. By 1899, that figure had ballooned to 567.²³⁷ At the same time, the Sunday edition had grown dramatically in size, as publishers found it a highly effective vehicle for advertising. This growth in Sunday papers led to a situation where, in the words of literary historian Charles Johanningsmeier, "The most commonly given reason for opposing Sunday editions was that they broke the Christian Sabbath by

²³⁷ Charles Johanningsmeier, "The Devil, Capitalism, and Frank Norris: Defining the 'Reading Field' for Sunday Newspaper Fiction, 1870-1910," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 93.

requiring people to work on Sunday in order to produce, distribute, and sell them. In truth, however, few critics were actually worried about the effects of Sunday newspaper *production*; it was their *consumption* on Sundays that most concerned them . . .” Johanningsmeier argued that “What most opponents actually feared . . . was that Sunday newspapers would distract millions of newspaper readers from they deemed most important about the Sabbath: religious observances.”²³⁸

This general concern over the propriety of the Sunday newspaper seems to have gained additional cultural capital when Canada adopted the Lord’s Day Act in March 1907. This strong Sabbatarian law effectively prohibited Sunday newspapers, among many other things. It was this sense of Sabbath-mindedness that the *Woman’s Home Companion* was appealing to when they led off their call for a campaign against the comics with “Some of us do not read the Sunday papers at all; some do not think it right, still more do not think it wise.”²³⁹

As early as July of 1907, other publications were making the link between this newfound Sabbatarian zeal for reform and the growing anti-comics sentiment. An article in the *Christian Observer* drew attention to the comic supplement as an especially dangerous element of Sunday reading. “Apart from the wickedness of the Sunday issue in itself, stands the moral menace of the colored horror that accompanies it,” the *Observer* warned. “What is the nature of their contents? Anything that elevates or that sets a high ideal before the child’s

²³⁸ Ibid., 96.

²³⁹ “Our Own Page.”

mind? Alas, no! Coarse, brutalizing things, unkind things, things suggestive of absolute evil, are found in these caricatures.”²⁴⁰ By framing the comics as a particularly wicked section of a wicked institution—the Sunday newspaper—and one that was targeted primarily at children, Sabbatarian Protestants found a powerful target for reform. Even if reformers could not get a law like the Lord’s Day Act passed in the United States, Sabbatarian critiques was a regular feature of anti-comics rhetoric.

Frank Foxcroft, writing for *The Living Age*, explained that the Sunday newspaper was “. . . ill-suited to Sunday because ordinarily it makes no recognition whatever of the sacred character of the day.”²⁴¹ According to Foxcroft, Sunday papers were vulgar in their rejection of the Sabbath and crass in their commercialism. Foxcroft looked at the advertising content of an average Sunday paper in the New York Sunday edition: “It has exactly one hundred pages, sixteen inches by twenty three, and forty-six of these pages of seven columns each—three hundred and twenty-two columns in all—are devoted to advertising.”²⁴² The effect, in Foxcroft’s eyes, was nothing short of disastrous. The Sunday paper, he argued, “undoubtedly promotes the increasing secularization of Sunday.” Foxcroft paints a picture of a man with every intention of going to church, but “there on his doorstep lies the Sunday paper, with its flaunting comic supplement and its fifty to one hundred pages of miscellaneous material. It offers itself with

²⁴⁰ “A Moral Danger: Colored Supplements to the Sunday Paper,” 2.

²⁴¹ Foxcroft, “The American Sunday Newspaper,” 261.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 259.

jaunty assurance as a substitute for church-going.” To Foxcroft, the Sunday paper presented an alternative, secular vision of how a family might spend their Sunday, “the father tilted back in his chair, reading the news or the stock-market report; the mother absorbed in the fashions and bargain sales; the older children busy with the fiction, society gossip, theatrical news, and answers to correspondents, and the little boy or girl reveling in the comic supplement, puzzle page, or ‘cut-out’ inset from which, with the aid of a pair of scissors, can be evolved ingenious cardboard constructions, squads of soldiers, or hideous masks.” This new vision of the family’s Sunday was dominated by the commercialism of the newspaper, foregoing Sabbath observance for relaxation and leisure. “A family which has saturated itself with the Sunday newspaper is in no mood for church-going, nor for any serious occupation. It is fit for nothing but amusement or sheer idleness.”²⁴³

For Foxcroft, the Sunday paper’s goal of providing entertainment and interest for the entire family was exactly what made it so insidious and dangerous. By appealing to women, men, and children in equal measure with targeted content, the Sunday paper undermined the “natural” place of the church as the unifying force on the Sabbath. The only logical response, he argued, was greater “sensationalism,” although he found the sentiment distasteful. A minister “. . . cannot offer comic supplements or portraits of stage beauties, and he has no prize coupons to distribute, but he may do something by advertising sensational

²⁴³ Ibid., 263.

subjects.” Thus, Foxcroft argues, the rise in sermons on faddish and inappropriate topics like “‘The New Woman,’ ‘Popular Vices,’ ‘Missing His Chance,’ ‘Prize Winners,’ etc.”²⁴⁴

To Foxcroft and many others, the newspaper was a moral threat not due to inherently immoral contents, but because it provided a comfortable and entertaining alternative to “proper” observation of the Sabbath, which might be even more dangerous, as opportunities for relatively wholesome family diversion could possibly lower interest in previously-churchgoing Christians. As commercial culture came more and more into contact with the Sabbath, those who felt that regular church attendance was a moral and spiritual imperative had more and more to fear. Even those who went to church might subscribe to the Sunday newspaper, ride Sunday trains, and pursue Sunday amusements.

As an editorial for the Presbyterian *Christian Observer* asked, “Do church people realize how much of Sabbath desecration is due to them?”²⁴⁵ A report to the *Christian Observer* later the same year from the Synod of Tennessee made these concerns explicit, noting the “. . . popularity of the Sunday newspapers in many Christian homes, afternoon pleasure seeking, evening visiting receiving and reading Sunday mail, forsaking church especially at night and prayer meeting,

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ “Editorial Notes,” *Christian Observer*, August 7, 1907, 1.

which indicate degeneracy and betoken danger and great peril to the church, and that the Sabbath is losing its hold on the masses.”²⁴⁶

Sabbatarian activism was not limited to the religious, however. At the same time, a notion of the “civil Sabbath” that both religious folks and atheists was employed in advocating against the comics. This notion of the “civil Sabbath” was deeply linked to Progressive reformers’ advocacy of reducing the number of workdays and hours worked per day for the working class. Whether one went to church or not was not important, the logic went, what was important was that the Sabbath was a day reserved for contemplation, for rest, for higher things. Spending the day on vulgar activities such as reading the Sunday newspaper, especially the comics, or going to amusement parks, or drinking: all of this completely missed the point. A working-class man or woman should use the day of rest to better him or herself in some way.

Percival Chubb, himself an Ethical Humanist and former member of the Fabian Society,²⁴⁷ was an ardent supporter of the notion of a civil Sabbath. “. . . Heretic though I be in religion, I believe profoundly in Sabbath-mindedness, in the preservation of one day, or part of a day, in the interest of composed reflection, of quiet meditation of reverent converse with the great spirits of the mighty dead and living. And, so believing, I would ask what kind of atmosphere is spread about the home when the day begins with the Sunday newspaper, and is

²⁴⁶ Rev. Joseph H. Lumpkin, “Contributed for the Christian Observer. Synod of Tennessee,” *Christian Observer*, November 6, 1907, 9.

²⁴⁷ See Norman MacKenzie, “Percival Chubb and the Founding of the Fabian Society,” *Victorian Studies* 23, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 29–55.

colored by the flagrant miscellaneousness, the loud secularity, the outrageous vulgarity of the typical Sunday sheet?” To Chubb, the Sunday paper was not conducive to the proper meditateness of the civil Sabbath. As to how he felt people ought to observe the civil Sabbath, Chubb argued for a higher-minded, quiet ritual: “Personally, I would not and I do not go to the extreme of excluding the Sunday newspaper from the house. I would exclude any comic supplement. I would get the quietest paper I could find. I would keep it out of the way in the morning. I would merely glance at it for any important news and any significant or unique contributions, as an interview with any important person (Tolstoy, let us say).”²⁴⁸

Chubb’s vision of proper observation of the Sabbath was telling. He placed importance on meditateness and quietude. His prescription for cultural consumption on the Sabbath was strongly class-inflected, genteel, bourgeois. Middle-class progressive reformers’ concern with how workers spent their Saturday night and Sunday morning was a site of considerable contention during these years. It was also another reason that critics of the comics often brought up the Sunday supplement along with ragtime music, dance halls, saloons, burlesque, and vaudeville, all “vulgar” forms of entertainment, and inappropriate uses of working people’s newfound leisure.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Chubb, “The Comic Supplement, The Newspaper, and the Child,” 3.

²⁴⁹ For more on the link between labor, leisure, and class in the early 20th century-- and on middle-class anxieties surrounding these issues-- see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will : Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and

A Civil Sabbatarian like Chubb saw the scope of the Sunday paper, with its appeal to the whole family, as a key part of its danger: “Behold the picture of family harmony,” he wrote. “Here is the Real Estate section for papa; the Art section for mamma; the Fashion section for sister; for brother the Sport section; and for the babies, the Colored Supplement”²⁵⁰ While Chubb’s ideal use of the day of rest might not have involved churchgoing, it was distinctly meditative, quiet, and perhaps above all, enculturating. “We busy men and women of to-day . . . have only a limited time to give to reading. How much of that do we give to really great things, to the great sages and poets, to the best of the Bible, Homer, the Greek tragedians, Dante, Goethe, aye, even Shakespeare and Milton? Dare we answer frankly?”²⁵¹

In his address to the national convention of the International Kindergarten Union, Chubb illustrated the pitfalls of the failing to observe the Civil Sabbath properly with what he described as “some doggerel which I happened to come upon . . .” The poem was “That ‘Fellow’ Who Came on Sundays” by H.C. Dodge, which was originally published in the nineteenth century British literary magazine *Once a Week*. Mr. Piper, the fictional father of the poem, works long hours and never sees his children except on Sundays, and those he spends reading what Chubb would regard as “light literature.” When one of his sons irritates Piper while he is reading, he spansks the boy, who runs to his

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Temple University Press, 1986).

²⁵⁰ Chubb, “The Comic Supplement, The Newspaper, and the Child,” 1.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

mother. “And hiding his tears in her sheltering lap, / He whispered, ‘Oh, mamma! he hit me slap.’ // ‘Who hit you?’ asked mamma. Wept Johnnie ‘Boo-hoo, / That fellow who comes here on Sundays—he do.’”²⁵² The effect of insufficient time spent interacting with the family and distraction by less than serious reading was clear: it was nothing short of the breakdown of the family itself. While the poem itself was light literature, Chubb thought its theme important enough to read it in its entirety at the I.K.U. meeting.

Even Christian publications like the *Christian Observer* supported the rhetoric of the “civil Sabbath.” “The experience of the ages has shown that the Civil Sabbath is a necessity for physical health and well being,” one editorial in the magazine argued.²⁵³ Many Protestant progressives saw the idea of a civil Sabbath as beneficial to workers, even if some workers might have argued that leisure time was less enjoyable if no amusements were available. Sabbatarians hoped the civil Sabbath would promote the continued strength of the religious Sabbath, by creating prohibitions that would make “proper” religious observation of the Sabbath easier and more appealing to churchgoers.

The League for the Improvement of the Children’s Comic Supplement

The inaugural public meeting of the League for the Improvement of the Children’s Comic Supplement, was held on Thursday, April 6, 1911.²⁵⁴ This first

²⁵² Ibid., 1–2.

²⁵³ “Victories for the Sabbath,” *Christian Observer*, November 20, 1907, 2.

²⁵⁴ Cf. “Comic Supplements Publicly Denounced”; “Make ‘Comics’ Educational,” *The Survey*, April 15, 1911, 103.

meeting seemed to promise a sea change of sorts for the anti-comics movement, a moment when a movement of various organizations became united under one central organizing structure. Held in the auditorium of the New York Ethical Culture Society, and presided over by Perceval Chubb, the event attracted a national interest. It was picked up by the Associated Press, and reported as far away as Chicago and Los Angeles.²⁵⁵ National weekly and monthly magazines printed responses to the meeting in the subsequent weeks. While disparate women's organizations, both professional and religious, had been focused on the movement against the comic supplement since at least 1907, this association was the first one focused solely on the "problem" represented by the comic supplement.

Previously, some anti-comics crusaders had proposed outright elimination of the comic supplement, while others had sought "improvement," changing the content of the supplement so that it better matched their standards of "decent" or "pure" children's literature and art. These two different strategies existed even within individual organizations. The decision to focus exclusively on matters of "improvement," leaving behind the question of eliminating the comics page entirely, seems to have been primarily driven by the League of American Penwomen, a professional organization for women in the press out of Washington D.C.

²⁵⁵ "Sunday Comic Supplement Finds Stanch Defenders," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 8, 1911; "Boosts for the Comics," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1911.

Edith Kingman Kern, chairman of the organization's Committee on the Comic Supplement, spoke about the two-year campaign of anti-comics advocacy that the Penwomen had undertaken. "Beginning with the object of entirely suppressing the comic, this body found not only that this plan was impracticable, but that it was undesirable, as the comic sheet response to a real demand on the part of the public, both young and old. The society therefore turned its efforts to removing vulgar and demoralizing elements."²⁵⁶ Surprisingly, this approach won favor with Chubb as well as with the other members of the League, among whom were members of the Federation for Child Study, the International Kindergarten Union, the Child Welfare Committee, and the Council of Jewish Women.²⁵⁷

Norman Hapgood, editor of *Collier's*, was among the invited speakers. Letters were read from representatives of the New York Public Schools and the School of Pedagogy at New York University.²⁵⁸ Lillian D. Wald of the Henry Street Settlement was among the more widely-quoted speakers. Drawing on her experience working with the poor immigrant children of New York City, Wald argued ". . . that the class of children to be protected from a form of humor which inculcates disobedience, ridicule, trickery, sensationalism, ugliness, and meanness and destroys the exquisite natural qualities of the young mind, are not the children of the sheltered nursery life to whom the Sunday paper is only a seventh day incident after six days of healthy intellectual food, but the children of

²⁵⁶ "Make 'Comics' Educational," 103.

²⁵⁷ "Comic Supplements: League for Their Improvement Discusses Subject at Mass Meeting," 1.

²⁵⁸ "Comic Supplements Publicly Denounced."

the poor to whom the newspaper is the chief intellectual food.”²⁵⁹ She argued that the League should “[t]est the pictures or stories” to see if they were sufficiently moral for their endorsement, as adhering to “the primary requirements of child culture,” a phrase that, as Wald used it, seemed to primarily indicate that the stories ought to be moral and encourage obedience and respect for authority.²⁶⁰

The League invited two artists to speak, presumably to address the aesthetic shortcomings of the comic supplements. Unfortunately for Chubb, he may have invited the wrong artists. Painter and muralist John White Alexander, at the time president of the National Academy of Design,²⁶¹ was actually quite favorable overall toward the supplements. Alexander presumably caused some consternation by saying “Personally I love the Sunday newspapers. I take all of them, and on a Sunday my house is full of the supplements. During the twelve years that I lived in France I had all of them sent to me. . . . In Germany there are lovely children, yet in Germany the houses are filled with illustrated books that deal with matters that the newspapers here do not dare to touch.”²⁶² Alexander was certainly right about this point. Rudolph Dirk’s *Katzenjammer Kids*, for all the ire it drew from anti-comics circles, was far tamer than Wilhelm Busch’s *Max und Moritz*, the children’s book that was the inspiration for the strip. Dirk’s son, John, who eventually took over the strip, later recalled “You know some of the

²⁵⁹ “Make ‘Comics’ Educational,” 103.

²⁶⁰ “Comic Supplements Publicly Denounced.”

²⁶¹ “Comic Supplements: League for Their Improvement Discusses Subject at Mass Meeting,” 1.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 1,3.

Busch things, where the kids would grab something and a nail comes through their hand or the cat's tail is stripped off, leaving only the spine? My father actually couldn't stand that. He was a very delicate guy."²⁶³

"Some of the brightest men in America are working for the Sunday supplement," Alexander continued, "I can't believe that they would do anything to harm children. If they were suppressed, it would be a national loss." The artist took issue with the psychological claims of the League members, including Chubb himself: "A child's mind is naturally clean. If there are vulgarities in the picture sheets, the child doesn't see them . . . I think the league is going about this thing in the wrong way when it tries to educate editors. The editors know [what] the public wants and will change their tactic when the public demands it." The *Chicago Tribune*, which ran a comic supplement and was one of the more vigorous defenders of the comics, as well as one of the papers most willing to try to court anti-comics crusaders with supposed improvements, quoted White at length, describing him as a "stanch [*sic.*] defender" of the comics page, while largely ignoring the content of the meeting as a whole.²⁶⁴

The other artist who spoke at the meeting, George de Forest Brush, is now a largely forgotten artist, remembered by some as an academician most famous for his paintings of Native Americans as well as for his contributions to the

²⁶³ Rick Marschall, "The Captain and the Kid: An Interview with John Dirks about Rudy, Hans and Fritz," *Hogan's Alley*, 2015, 118.

²⁶⁴ "Sunday Comic Supplement Finds Stanch Defenders."

science of camouflage.²⁶⁵ Brush saw the comic supplement as a minor symptom of a larger cultural problem in the arts. While he admitted that there the comic supplements were not as good as they could be, he attributed it to artistic overwork, saying “These artists are human after all . . . They’re sometimes worked to death. When an editor contracts with a man to be funny for thirty years, the artist finds it at times a task.” Brush expressed his belief that “The Sunday supplement has not degraded us. It’s the fine arts. Too many people are engaged in the so-called fine arts who have not the faculty or the patience to create something beautiful. I have seen exhibitions of sculpture that were simply awful. It was degrading.” He then tried to call people at the meeting to action against an exhibition currently being put on elsewhere in New York at the time, saying, “I understand that there is to be an exhibition by these insurgent artists soon in the Union League Club. If there is any member of the Union League Club here tonight, my quiet and friendly advice to him is to have it called off. I saw it last year. It ought to have been stopped by the police.” Brush argued that an obsession with novelty was the real problem, both in the comics and in “insurgent” art. He argued that “The trouble with us as a people and the trouble with the comic

²⁶⁵ Nancy K. Anderson et al., *George de Forest Brush: The Indian Paintings* (Washington, DC; Aldershot, Hampshire, UK; Burlington, VT: National Gallery of Art ; Lund Humphries, 2008); Roy R Behrens, *False Colors: Art, Design, and Modern Camouflage* (Dysart, Iowa: Bobolink Books, 2002), 70–73.

supplements occasionally is that we're trying to turn out too much that hasn't been seen before."²⁶⁶

For Brush, the comics were not a problem in and of themselves. They were simply problematic because they were symptomatic of overproduction and an obsession with novelty. They were a symptom, in other words, of modernism, and inherently linked to "degrading" modern art. Brush found modernity in the fine arts to be a far greater danger. Such an argument against modern art would find far more support from middle-class audiences less than two years later, with the premier of the Armory Show in early 1913. For the time, however, Brush's assertion fell on mostly deaf ears.

The Jesuit magazine *America* took particular offense at the artists' defense of the comic supplements. A writer for the magazine reported that almost the same day, an "enthusiastic mass meeting of men, mostly heads of families" had been held in Munich. According to the article, the artists were unexpected opposition at this meeting too. But in Munich, the artists defending the cartoons got their comeuppance: "The folly of their stand was cleverly shown by one of the speakers at the Munich meeting. He very correctly affirmed that the fight against the hideous comic supplement in no wise touches literature or art, since it revolves about a simple question of morals. Every fair mind must grant, said the speaker, that the smut and trash of the colored supplement pander directly to

²⁶⁶ "Comic Supplements: League for Their Improvement Discusses Subject at Mass Meeting," 3.

what is vulgar, coarse and evil in human nature.”²⁶⁷ The article’s author then strongly encouraged Mr. Alexander to “consult with those who have to do with the training of the child mind before he again affirms that a child does not see vulgarities” in the comics.²⁶⁸

While the author of this article, and indeed Percival Chubb himself, seem to have been surprised that artists were not supporting their moral campaign against the comics, it would have been unsurprising to anybody with an understanding of the clash between middlebrow culture and the arts that was fomenting. In the next few years, as more Americans were exposed to the European and American *avant-garde* through popularizing events like the Armory Show, the situation would only get more confusing for an American middlebrow culture that felt that cultural productions had to be judged by moral standards first, and aesthetic standards second. The lines between “high” and “low” art, between “pure” and “impure” were all about to be challenged by a new group of artists. But in 1911, middle-class American reformers still felt they had a strong purchase on what was high and what was low, on what was pure and what was not. In other words, they had not yet been exposed to the growing experimentalism in Europe. To these middle-class would-be arbiters of taste, it must have been almost incomprehensible to find fine artists appreciating the comics, or perhaps even more confusingly, warning that the comics were not the problem but contemporary paintings were.

²⁶⁷ “The Sunday Comic Supplement,” *America*, April 22, 1911, 40.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The Campaign Ends

Some continued to criticize the comics, most notably the Progressive magazine *The Outlook*, which ran pieces attacking the supplements until at least 1915.²⁶⁹ But the movement to reform or do away with the comic supplement seems to have disappeared quite suddenly by the end of 1912. While it is difficult to know precisely why the campaign ended so abruptly, there are several suggestive details that give some clues.

First, in some ways, the movement for reform was successful. While this change had certainly begun before the reformers' cry had even started, by 1913 there seemed to have been a greater number of comics that differed from the formulaic prank strips that most distressed anti-comics crusaders. By the movement's end more cartoonists were producing strips that were visually and narratively complex, and more strips existed that spoke to the more traditional models of nursery rhymes and folk tales. In this way, reformers had in a limited way achieved what they had wanted, or at least may have been led to believe that they had. Papers like the *Chicago Tribune* repeatedly in the years between 1907 and 1912 made a show of changing up features in their comic supplement and saying it was in response to readers demanding higher quality comics. Likewise, the increasing trend toward daily strips beginning around 1907, including comics in the Sports pages and even the Ladies' sections of the papers, gave lie to the assertions of the reformers that the comics were simply amusements for children.

²⁶⁹ For example, see "Vulgarizing American Children," which ran in 1915.

Second, five years was a long time for some members of an organization to maintain an interest in a campaign that was somewhat tangential to the organization's primary mission, and it is possible that a loss of leadership contributed to the dissipation of the cause as well. Interest seems to have fallen for several years among members of the W.C.T.U., and it is not difficult to imagine that this may have been the case in other organizations as well, especially since the membership of womens' organizations at the time often deeply overlapped. Those who sought an outright elimination of the comics likely sensed it was a losing battle. Throughout the five-year campaign against the comics, syndication continued to grow and strips continued to proliferate. More and more papers had comics supplements, and more syndicates were pumping out content. The oft-repeated retort to the movement that the comics were published because it was popular and that newspapers were simply responding to market demand seems to have only become more evident over the years of the campaign.

As other organizations started to lose steam on the issue, the truly passionate members would likely have found an organization like Chubb's League for the Improvement of the Children's Comic Supplement to be a new hub to organize around. Unfortunately for anti-comics advocates, Percival Chubb moved from New York to St. Louis around 1912, to run the Ethical Culture Society there.²⁷⁰ This coincides with the end of his tenure with the I.K.U., and seems to

²⁷⁰ The earliest record I was able to locate that puts Chubb in St. Louis rather than New York is "Snap Shots At Home News," *The Topeka State Journal*,

have been a death sentence for the League. While Chubb continued to advocate for purity of the press, the movement to refine or abolish the comics seems to have fallen off his radar at that point. Indeed, an article in the *El Paso Herald* seems to indicate that Chubb had moved on from the issue of the comics issue by 1913, while maintaining his focus on the importance of “high culture” and the vulgarity of mass culture. Speaking before the National Council of Teachers of English, Chubb attacked “ragtime writing and speaking,” claiming that “in destroying the harmonies of speech as well as of song, Americans are the chief sinners. It was declared by Mr. Chubb that the varied graces of the folk cultures of the old world were being melted down by us ‘to the uniform vulgarity of our national culture—the culture of our slums and our great white ways.’” Later in the same speech, Chubb attacked movies. No mention of comic supplements was made, however.²⁷¹ With the women’s organizations focusing their attention elsewhere, and without one of the anti-comic movement’s most vigorous proponents, the movement seems to have lost its way.

Finally, 1912 brought the Armory Show, an event that would shake many middle-class observers’ faith in their ability to navigate culture. With the explosion of the avant-garde onto the American scene, middle-class certainty about the cultural superiority of their still rather Victorian tastes was shaken.

September 23, 1912, Last Edition edition, so it seems clear that he moved sometime prior to that date.

²⁷¹ “Teacher of English Assails Ragtime Writing and Speaking,” *El Paso Herald*, November 29, 1913; See also “Chief Sinners Are Found In America,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 29, 1913.

Many middle class reformers who believed in the middlebrow cultural critique wherein morality was the most important critical tool would soon be echoing George de Forest Brush's moral concerns about the decadence and impropriety of the avant-garde. This loss of faith, this sense of rudderlessness, made these middlebrow progressive reformers face a sort of crisis of faith. Maybe the *avant-garde* made comic strips look less threatening. The "vulgarity" of working class children's entertainment might have suddenly paled by comparison to the vulgarity of a "Nude descending a staircase."

CHAPTER FOUR: THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS AT THE ARMORY SHOW: SOCIAL CAPITAL, CARTOONISTS, AND MODERN ART, 1913

Pierre Bourdieu argued that the old “economic orthodoxy” that put economic capital at the center of all interactions was myopic. He instead argued for “[a] general science of the economy of practices that [did] not artificially limit itself to those practices that are socially recognized as economic . . .” Rather, Bourdieu advanced a model where there are multiple forms of capital. “I have shown that *capital presents itself under three fundamental species* (each with its own subtypes), namely, economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital.”²⁷² Bourdieu defined social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”²⁷³ In contemporary parlance, social capital is your social network: it is who you know, who they know, and how you can benefit from knowing those people. It also must be understood that the strength of those connections is important: how much people you know are willing to do for you, and you for them.

²⁷² Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 118–119.

²⁷³ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.

Bourdieu recognized the importance of social capital to the field of cultural production when he noted the importance of both economic and social capital to experimentation and risk-taking in art and literature.²⁷⁴ It is often only those agents who possess both of these in some quantity that are able to create highly experimental work. But this points to a broader point: social capital is always an important factor in understanding an agent's place in the field of cultural production. It is sometimes said that "It's not what you know, it's who you know," and this point is important in understanding the ability of an artist or author to get their work seen, whether through publishers or gaining a place in an important gallery or exhibition. One more often than not must have a degree of social capital, and be able to leverage that social capital, in order to participate as an active agent in the field of cultural production.

An excellent example of the functioning of social capital can be found in a small handful of newspaper comic strip and comic supplement cartoonists who participated in one of the most important art shows in American history: the Armory Show of 1913. These cartoonists were able to leverage and mobilize social capital in specific ways that likely would have been closed to them due to their profession a generation later.

Walt Kuhn, one of the chief organizers of the Armory Show, had up to that point been a cartoonist himself. He and several of his friends who were also cartoonists participated in the show, including Gus Mager and Rudolph Dirks.

²⁷⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 67–68.

Robert Henri, in many ways the de facto leader of what was sometimes disparagingly described as the “Ashcan School,” was not a cartoonist himself, but many from the Ashcan school were newspaper illustrators. Henri’s newspaper connections might be why he knew Dirks and Mager, who introduced Henri to his wife, Marjorie Organ, who had before their marriage been one of the earliest women to work as a newspaper cartoonist. Among Henri’s students who participated in the show was a young man named Denys Wortman, at the time a painter, but who would later become a prominent cartoonist with a strip called Metropolitan Movies, a comic that in some ways showed the strong influence of the Ashcan artists.

The first twenty five years or so of newspaper comic supplements was a time that overlapped with what has been described as the “Golden Age” of American illustration. Illustrators occupied a space “bound up on the one side with fine art, and on the other side with the development of national advertising,”²⁷⁵ there were many points where the social networks of the world of fine arts and the world of commercial illustration overlapped. At a time when newspapers were taking increasing advantage of illustrations, this meant that there were many people who would hold and mobilize social capital in the world of newspaper illustration as well as fine arts. Cartoonists were certainly still ghettoized within the world of illustration, but nonetheless, the disconnect and antagonism that Bart Beaty describes in *Comics Versus Art* had yet to develop

²⁷⁵ Michele Helene Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 16.

fully, and the cartoonists who participated in the Armory Show had some degree of social capital in each world.

Many of these cartoonists seem to have wanted to have one foot in the world of fine art and another in the commercial world of cartooning to make a living. To maintain a presence in both worlds, they leveraged social capital both within the world of fine arts and the world of cartooning. Their connections can be traced through biographic details, through their participation in artistic social clubs, and even in where they spent their summers. Unfortunately, the desire to keep one foot in cartooning and one in fine art may have seemed to be an increasingly untenable one. While some cartoonists, like Mager and Dirks, maintained an interest in fine art and painting throughout their lives, painting was never much more than an avocation for them. Marjorie Organ left cartooning behind her when she married Henri. And Denys Wortman found that the best market for his Ashcan-influenced work was, ironically, in the comics pages.

The Armory Show, 1913

The International Exhibition of Modern Art, better known as the Armory Show, was a watershed event for American art. It is widely regarded as the first major event that exposed audiences in the United States to the European Modernist avant-garde in Europe. One feature of the show was that it, like the Artist's Association before it, was an attempt to overthrow the bounds placed on artists by the National Academy of Design. The Academy organized juried exhibitions of artists, and only by getting on those juried contests could one reach

a national audience.²⁷⁶ The exhibition was one of the core events in overturning the system of credentialing that was the cornerstone of artistic professionalization in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. As the power of the Academy diminished, many of the same social, economic, and cultural forces still came to bear on whether an artist was accepted among gallery owners and collectors, but the position of the Academy as a credentialing gatekeeper would be replaced with competition in a number of different loci.

It may be surprising to modern readers that there were actually several newspaper cartoonists who exhibited in the Armory Show. These cartoonists were not included to add broad mass-cultural appeal to the show, as they might have been, say, in the 1970s or 1980s—there is little to no mention anywhere of them as cartoonists. Rather, they were included because they, too, were artists, and some of them rather good artists. There were essentially two social nodes of cartoonist participants, although there were some overlaps within them, and there were at least two additional cartoonists who do not fit into either group. The first node centered around Walt Kuhn. Kuhn was one of the primary drivers of the exhibit, from collection of art to promotion of the exhibit. Along with him were Rudolph Dirks and Gus Mager, two of the greats of the early newspaper comic strip. These three were good friends, linked by multiple social connections. The second group were the cartoonists associated with “Ashcan School” artist Robert Henri. The group included his compatriot George Luks, Henri’s wife

²⁷⁶ Martin Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York: Collier Books, 1989), 132–135.

Marjorie Organ (who could actually be connected to both Henri's circle and to Kuhn's), and his student Denys Wortman. Not all participants who were cartoonists fit into this social network. The supplement cartoonists Herbert Crowley and T.E. Powers seem to be unconnected to either of these social circles.

Kuhn, Dirks, and Mager

Walt Kuhn was with the Association of American Painters and Sculptors (AAPS), the organization that began the Armory Show organization committee, from the very beginning: at the very first meeting for the not-yet-extant Association, Kuhn was one of four men present. Also present were Madison Gallery director Henry Fitch Taylor and artists Jerome Myers and Elmer McRae. There was a small show of the Pastellists at the Madison Gallery, a group of which Myers and McRae were members, and with whom Kuhn was showing. The conversation took place in the gallery, and then continued in Myers' gallery. They discussed the difficulty of exhibiting, a pet concern of Kuhn's, as well as others, and talked about putting together a group to exhibit works of more progressive and neglected painters. By the end of the night, they decided to do something.²⁷⁷

They turned their energy toward assembling the group that would constitute the AAPS. In total, the group consisted of about 25 artists,²⁷⁸ many of whom were part of the same group that had participated in the Independent Artists Exhibition in 1910 or were part of the MacDowell Club exhibitions, led by Robert Henri, whose "no jury—no prizes" commandment was an important

²⁷⁷ Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation; distributed by New York Graphic Society, 1963), 29–30.

²⁷⁸ Green, *New York 1913*, 174.

imperative. In many ways, the AAPS was an extension of these two groups.²⁷⁹

Kuhn was elected secretary, a position that would obligate him to several trips to Europe for several months to select art. He also handled much of the promotion for the event as well as more typical duties expected of a secretary.

Kuhn was, at this point, primarily a cartoonist. He was respected for his artistic work, teaching life-drawing courses out of his home in Fort Lee, New Jersey,²⁸⁰ but his cartooning, conducted for magazines such as *Life*, *Puck*, and *Judge*, as well as newspapers, was his primary source of income, and remained so until 1914.²⁸¹ He sold one strip, a children's fantasy about the "elf of sunshine," *Whisk*, which ran in the *New York World* between February 1909 and October 1910.²⁸² After which, Kuhn had a weekly panel in the *Brooklyn Eagle* called *Funny Birds* that ran from April through December of 1912, at which point it was taken over by Bob Addams and the title was changed to *Feathers Family*.²⁸³ Kuhn was in Europe assembling art for the Armory Show as early as September 1912, and was likely too busy with that to continue the strip.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 30.

²⁸⁰ Wood Gaylor, "Reminiscences of Wood Gaylor" n.d., Wood and Adelaide Gaylor Lawson Papers, 1886-[ca. 1986], Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁸¹ Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (The Ohio State University Press, 1978), 18.

²⁸² Allan Holtz, *American Newspaper Comics: An Encyclopedic Reference Guide* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 410.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁸⁴ Milton W. Brown, "Walt Kuhn's Armory Show," *Archives of American Art Journal* 27, no. 2 (January 1, 1987): 5, doi:10.2307/1557428.

Newspaper readers knew Kuhn's friend Gus Mager at the time of the exhibition for his *Mager's Monks* series. Although that title is a bit of a misnomer because the strip ran under no particular title, but rather appeared under the title of whichever of his "monks" that day's strip featured. The "Monks" were characters with enormous lips and noses, "something half duck, half monkey," as Coulton Waugh would later put it. Mager had a seemingly infinite cast of characters, with each Monk named after its particular character traits, with an "o" attached to the identifier. There was "Nervo the Monk," "Groucho the Monk," "Sherlocko the Monk," and so on. This naming device would later inspire the Marx Brothers to choose the names Groucho, Chico, Harpo, and Zeppo.²⁸⁵ Mager's line was sketchy at times, nervous-seeming, and had a definite understated quality. Mager was never one to draw more than needed. His backgrounds were minimal, and his cartoons were simple to the extreme.

Mager's father was a diamond setter and had hoped his son would go into jewelry design. While the young Mager did find work in a jewelry factory, his passions were drawing and painting. He had no formal education in art, though he did take some life drawing classes at the Newark Sketch Club where he fell under the tutelage of Paul Reininger, a mostly forgotten artist who Mager compared to van Gogh "in temperament and genius . . ." Reininger killed himself soon after, but remained among the strongest influences upon Mager, along with,

²⁸⁵ Holtz, *American Newspaper Comics*, 248–249; Coulton Waugh, *The Comics* (Jackson [u.a.]: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 40; Brian Walker, *The Comics : The Complete Collection* (New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2011), 90.

later, Cezanne and especially van Gogh.²⁸⁶ While many American artists of the Armory Show are remembered as somewhat behind the times and conservative, Mager's two pieces are painterly, simple, almost naïve, his paintings from soon after the Show evince a strong postimpressionist influence. While not as bracingly abstracted as the Cubists, this was hardly the academic, representational work or historical paintings that had been predominant in the previous century.

Rudolph Dirks, creator of *The Katzenjammer Kids*, is one of the best-remembered early cartoonists, along with other such pioneers as Richard F. Outcault and Frederick Burr Opper. While the Katzenjammers were modeled on characters from *Max und Moritz*, a well-known German *Bilderbogen*, Dirks's work quickly moved quickly past imitation and helped pioneer the language and grammar of American cartooning. According to comics historian Brian Walker, "Dirks pioneered the use of many comic devices that eventually became part of the art form's visual language. Parallel lines and dust clouds to indicate speed, dotted lines to represent eye contact, and sweat beads to suggest fear or nervousness appeared regularly . . ."²⁸⁷

The Armory Show occurred at a precarious time for Dirks. Like Outcault before him, he had just decided to jump ship to the *New York World* from

²⁸⁶ Guy Pène Du Bois, "Gus Mager," *The American Magazine of Art* 7, no. 7 (May 1, 1916): 277–278; "Draft for a Program on Gus Mager for a 1963 Retrospective" n.d., Robert Schoelkopf Gallery records, 1851-1991, Box 13, Folder 5, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁸⁷ Walker, *The Comics*, 36.

Hearst's *New York Journal*. In 1898, shortly after the strip's beginning, the Spanish-American War erupted, and Dirks took a year off to serve. By 1912, he felt entitled to another break, this time touring Europe with his wife and working on his painting. He attempted to send strips over from Europe, but communications quickly broke down between him and Hearst's comics editor, Rudolph Block. Dirks later recalled that his work was repeatedly sent back for him to redraw while in Europe, an untenable situation which meant that, until he drew it again, he received no pay. Block, on the other hand, rejected that claim. Whatever actually transpired, after about 13 strips were finished, Dirks quit doing the strip altogether, and soon after decided to go over to the *New York World*.²⁸⁸

Dirks's decision to go to Pulitzer set off a legal battle that lasted for about a year, during which nobody published *The Katzenjammer Kids*. This battle was just starting to heat up when the Armory Show opened its doors and would not be resolved for some time. Dirks lost the initial battle, but upon appeal, it was determined that he should be allowed to continue the strip at *The World*, under a different title, *The Captain and the Kids*, but that Hearst's paper would retain the title, and could continue *The Katzenjammer Kids* with a new artist.²⁸⁹ Much like Mager, Dirks was largely self-taught, preferring landscapes and portraits, in a largely post-impressionist style.

²⁸⁸ "New York Supreme Court, *Star Company v. The Press Publishing Company and Rudolph Dirks, Papers on Defendants' Separate Appeals From Order*" n.d., Microfilm Reel 854, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁸⁹ Martin Sheridan, *Classic Comics & Their Creators; Life Stories of American Cartoonists from the Golden Age*. (Arcadia, California: Post-Era Books, 1973), 59–60.

The close relationship between Kuhn, Dirks, and Mager can be traced in multiple ways. The three of them, along with artist “Pop” Hart, were prominent members of a small, dingy social club in New Jersey known as the Pallisades Yacht Club.²⁹⁰ Likewise, they were all members of the Kit Kat Club, an organization of artists and illustrators that began in 1881 that was meant to be “a rendezvous, without being a salon; a sitting-room and not a parlor.”²⁹¹ The Kit Kat Club included a large number of prominent newspaper cartoonists of the time, including *Happy Hooligan* creator Frederick Opper, sports cartoonist “Tad” Dorgan, *Bringing Up Father*’s George McManus, and illustrator Nell Brinkley.²⁹²

The Kit Kat Club was somewhat divided about the new Modernist artists, however, and it eventually came to a head over some watercolors by the French artist Pascin. According to Wood Gaylor, one of Walt Kuhn’s students, “Pascin had a show of his water colors and . . . The regular line members of the Kit Kat did not like what we were doing and said that all Pascin did was draw whores. Pascin got mad and said, when he drew an innocent young girl, he drew an innocent young girl and when he drew a whore, he drew a whore and all they were doing was drawing whores and didn’t know it.” The next time the Kit Kat

²⁹⁰ Gaylor, “Reminiscences of Wood Gaylor.”

²⁹¹ Nym Crinkle and Prominent Members, “Round about the Kit Kat,” *The Quarterly Illustrator* 2, no. 8 (October 1, 1894): 364.

²⁹² Kit Kat Club, “Kit Kat Club Program for the 3rd Annual Artists’ Masque Ball, 1909” n.d., Walt Kuhn, Kuhn family papers, and Armory Show records, 1859-1978, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; Jessie Tarbox Beals, “The 2nd Kit Kat Ball, 1908” n.d., Walt Kuhn, Kuhn family papers, and Armory Show records, 1859-1978, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Club held its annual election, the younger members who had outspokenly supported Pascin nominated themselves for every position, but the old guard of more conservative members prevailed, and none were elected.²⁹³

The dejected supporters of modernism went to a corner saloon and discussed what to do. Wood Gaylor would later recall the discussion, saying, “The older members were right—they only wanted a place to meet and work and we had quite different ideas . . . We decided and of course when I say we I really mean Kuhn decided because he was the moving spirit of the whole group. I must say he was supported by a lot of us but nevertheless he was the one that started things. We wanted sketch classes, exhibitions and all the things we wanted to do but could not do before . . . and started out to do it.”²⁹⁴

From this division in 1916, the Penguin Club was formed. In 1917, they hosted the first and only show by the English Vorticists.²⁹⁵ By the time of its second exhibition, the Contemporary Art exhibit in 1918, the Club showed over 150 members and non-members, including Maurice Sterne, Walter Pach, Man Ray, Diego Rivera, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, Joseph Stella, Pablo Picasso, Picabia, and many others.²⁹⁶ What was particularly interesting about the Penguin Club was not just their commitment to Modernism, but its membership. The

²⁹³ Gaylor, “Reminiscences of Wood Gaylor.”

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ Judith Zilczer, “‘The World’s New Art Center’: Modern Art Exhibitions in New York City, 1913-1918,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 14, no. 3 (January 1, 1974): 5.

²⁹⁶ The Penguin Club, “Exhibition Contemporary Art” n.d., Wood and Adelaide Gaylor Lawson Papers, 1886-[ca. 1986], Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

club, like the Kit Kat Club, consisted primarily of illustrators. The club was said to include “practically every well known illustrator in New York,” including Maxfield Parrish, Charles Dana Gibson, William Zorach, Edward Hopper, and Guy Pène du Bois, as well as core members of the old Kit Kat Club who were aligned with Kuhn, like Mager and Pop Hart.²⁹⁷ The Penguin Club was primarily social in nature and selected its members more by virtue of their fellowship than by artistic merit,²⁹⁸ but that was sort of the point. Just as with the Armory Show and other exhibitions at that time, artists were moving from a more formal membership-and-jury approach to a more open one that was founded on associationalism, likeminded-ness, and conviviality. The Penguin Club would stage large costume balls, with stage shows that were deeply influenced by vaudeville, organized by Kuhn.²⁹⁹ The Penguins were not concerned with the rigid hierarchy of high and low art, they embraced both, from the highly-abstract Vorticist to the mass-cultural pleasures of vaudeville and follies. Social networks were replacing formal ones, and in these overlapping networks, both formal and informal, one can see how much these cartoonists, just as much as painters, sculptors, and the like, were part of these events.

²⁹⁷ Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (University of California Press, 1998), 121; Bennard B. Perlman and Arthur Bowen Davies, *The Lives, Loves, and Art of Arthur B. Davies* (SUNY Press, 1998), 306; “Flyer for the Penguin Club’s Summer Outing, 1919” n.d., Walt Kuhn, Kuhn family papers, and Armory Show records, 1859-1984, bulk 1900-1949, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, accessed March 13, 2016.

²⁹⁸ Sidney Geist, “The Firemen’s Ball for Brancusi,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 1976): 9.

²⁹⁹ Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter*, 88.

This circle's interaction with artists from the world of high art was not limited to clubs in New York City. Kuhn began to summer in Ogunquit, Maine in 1911, and Dirks began to do so shortly after.³⁰⁰ Dirks, in particular, took to summers in the artists' colony. He took part in the golf tournaments with other artists there for the summer, went fishing, and during Prohibition threw clambakes noted for the quality of Dirks's homebrewed beer. In Ogunquit, the small community and sociability of those who spent time there made for an environment where he could be just as serious about his painting as his comic strips, and he spent time socializing with both fine artists and cartoonists. In addition to Kuhn, Ogunquit regulars would include cartoonists like Gus Mager and *Polly and Her Pals's* Cliff Sterrett, and artists like Hopper, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, painter and principal of the Corcoran School Richard Lahey and sculptor Robert Laurent.³⁰¹

The Robert Henri Node: Organ, Luks and Wortman

Three other strip cartoonists were connected to the Armory Show through another key figure, Robert Henri. Henri had been, in 1908, the organizer of the Independent Artists' Show, another show organized in opposition to the Academy. He was also the unofficial head of what became known as the "Ashcan School" of artists. Many members of this group were illustrators for magazines and newspapers, perhaps most notably George Bellows and John Sloan, so it is

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 53.

³⁰¹ Rick Marschall, "The Captain and the Kid: An Interview with John Dirks about Rudy, Hans and Fritz," *Hogan's Alley*, 2015, 104, 112; Richard Francis Lahey, "Artists I Have Known" n.d., Barn Gallery Associates selected records, 1966-1987, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

unsurprising that Henri would have socialized with cartoonists who worked in the comic supplements. The particular ways that these cartoonists were part of Henri's circle was telling.

Marjorie Organ was one of the first women to draw a strip for a newspaper. Her first, and longest-running, strip was *Little Reggie and the Heavenly Twins*, for Hearsts' *New York Journal*, which ran between 1902 and 1905.³⁰² She also ran caricatures of theatrical celebrities for the *World*. In 1908, she married Henri. Walt Kuhn had pointed Henri out to her and encouraged her to go to some of his lectures. They were soon after introduced by Rudolph Dirks, and married within a matter of months.³⁰³ Organ ceased producing comics at this point, and was mostly content to play a supporting roll to Henri. She confined herself primarily to "managing a household, arranging the model's pose when necessary, and providing Victrola music did not help her concentrate on her own work," as Henri scholar William Innes Homer explained, noting that ". . .she was philosophical about it and most of the time considered Henri's art more important than her own."³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, she was still producing *some* art, and exhibited six drawings in the Armory Show, listed as *Drawings Nos. 1-6*.³⁰⁵

George Luks is remembered primarily for his work as a painter, and particularly as a painter in the Ashcan School. However, a recent monograph on

³⁰² Holtz, *American Newspaper Comics*, 242.

³⁰³ William Innes Homer and Violet Organ, *Robert Henri and His Circle*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 148.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

³⁰⁵ Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 273.

the artist by Robert Gambone made a powerful case for the need to see Luks's work as a commercial illustrator as central to his oeuvre. Gambone argued that "[r]ather than forming a preliminary or preparatory footnote to his more well known and successful career as a painter, the journal, book, and newspaper graphics of George B. Luks remain important precisely because they constitute a prime locus where he developed and worked out attitudes and ideas that shaped his entire career . . ." ³⁰⁶

Indeed, Luks seems to have been a man quite bounded by the bifurcation of American culture into high art and popular forms that was growing more pronounced early in his career. As a young man, Luks likely felt this divide very deeply, as he had a foot in each side of the divide. He apparently not only saw the merits of both sides, but to also see them as deeply irreconcilable. During those years, he wildly vacillated between "high culture" and "low." At seventeen, Luks and his brother formed a blackface minstrel act, "Buzzy and Anstock," touring low-class urban theaters. Luks broke up the act a year later when he enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Luks left the academy after a short stint there, and resumed the minstrel act. The act ceased touring again when Luks left for Germany to study at the *Kunstakademie Düsseldorf* where he again remained only a matter of months. ³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Robert L Gambone, *Life on the Press: The Popular Art and Illustrations of George Benjamin Luks* (Jackson, Miss.: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2009), xiii.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–11.

In 1890, when Monet began a public campaign to purchase Manet's *Olympia* for the state of France to exhibit, Luks was in Paris studying informally at museums, and was surely aware of the ensuing bruhaha that came after Monet's public letter about the matter in *La Figaro*.³⁰⁸ If only the most elite American artists were exposed to modernism before the 1913 Armory Show, a figure like the former minstrel, serial art academy drop-out, and newspaper cartoonist George Luks challenges us to broaden our definition of "elite."

Luks began doing cartoons for the magazines *Puck* and *Truth* in the 1890s. As Gambone points out, magazines were middlebrow and middle-class, and may have well been seen as an entree into respectable art by the young Luks. Indeed, top cartoonists like Thomas Nast and *Puck* owner Joseph Keppler were commanding quite a lot for their works, and Nast was supplementing this by working the lecture circuit describing how he had gone *tête à tête*, as it were, against Boss Tweed.³⁰⁹ When Outcault's Yellow Kid began to take off, it was something new, something big, and Pulitzer saw that the newspaper's comic insert could be important too for driving sales. And when Outcault moved to Hearst's paper, Luks saw an opportunity.

Luks's willingness to take over Outcault's duties on *Hogan's Alley* was apparently not well received by others in the *World* bullpen. Theater critic Louis Sobol later recalled, second-hand, an interaction between Luks and a former coworker years later in his memoir *The Longest Street*. Sobol remembered a

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 11–12.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 16.

story told by producer John Golden, who had been in the *World* art department with Luks after Outcault's departure. According to Golden, "Everybody in the business considered [taking over the strip] highly unethical, and in fact many of the boys stopped talking to the young imitator artist." Golden went on to become a producer in the theater. He recalled a visit from Luks in those days: "He said: 'Look here, John Golden, you don't have to be so high-hat with me. I don't do any silly cartoons anymore. I move around with the best of them. I paint kings and queens, and I get more for a single painting than I did for a whole year's cartooning. So don't be so stuck up with me. I'm just as important as you are.'"³¹⁰

Even second-hand, the story resonates as true in terms of Luks's cantankerous personality as well as his ambition. The story was also made more believable by the fact that, even to this day, Luks is often given short mention or even not named in many accounts of the battle over the Yellow Kid. Outcault took center stage in most accounts of the "Yellow Kid." To me, this story has the ring of someone who was deeply hurt by the exclusion from the social network of newspaper artists and cartoonists with whom he was, at that time, in daily contact. He seems to have seen his relative success as a fine artist as a comeuppance to that exclusion, while the anger that he betrays in this story seems to suggest that, while he made a show of his artistic success as a fine artist to salve his ego, he still felt the sting of that earlier exclusion from a group he had thought of as his peers. It seems likely that he may have actually viewed the

³¹⁰ Louis Sobol, *The Longest Street; a Memoir*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1968), 408.

commercial work he did as related to his fine art work, contiguous, if not equivalent.

The last artist within the orbit of Robert Henri was Denys Wortman. Wortman studied under Henri and Kenneth Hayes Miller at the Chase School from 1906 to 1909, attending at the same time as Rockwell Kent, Edward Hopper, and George Bellows. He exhibited with George Luks just a year before the Armory Show.³¹¹ He was primarily a landscape painter until, while he was stationed at Great Lakes Naval Training Station during World War I, some sketches of sailors made their way to the *New York Tribune*. After the War, he began looking for work as an illustrator. When Rollin Kirby stopped working on *Metropolitan Movies*, a slice-of-life single-panel strip, in 1924, Wortman took it over.³¹²

Wortman's one painting in the Armory Show, "Bermuda Waterfront," was a painterly seaport scene.³¹³ While it depicts a working class morning scene on the water, the waterfront street scene is practically without people; there is none of the typical Ashcan School preoccupation with vibrant, chaotic street scenes that reflect the everyday lives of the poor and working class. In fact, in both style

³¹¹ "Around the Galleries," *American Art News*, March 16, 1912.

³¹² National Institute of Arts and Letters, "National Institute of Arts and Letters Nominations for the Award of the Gold Medal for Graphic Arts" n.d., Denys Wortman Papers, 1887-1980, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; "Cartoonist Wortman, 71, Dies at Vinyard Haven," *Standard-Times*, September 20, 1958, Denys Wortman Papers, 1887-1980, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; John O'Connor, "To Diffident Denys Life's an 'Everyday Movie,'" *Boston Herald*, December 11, 1949, Denys Wortman Papers, 1887-1980, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

³¹³ Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 300.

and subject matter, it seems much closer to the work of American Impressionist John Twachtman's later work, especially that from the last years of his life spent summering in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Wortman's later work as a cartoonist, in contrast, hewed much closer to the Ashcan school in subject matter and style. After the War, Wortman realized that, while Ashcan School paintings and sketches were lessening in popularity due to increasing appetites for Modernism among American art buyers, there was still a market for the sort of radicalism that Arthur B. Davies and John Sloan embodied with their drawings for *The Masses*, now redirected in support of a somewhat cagey liberalism. Wortman took over *Metropolitan Movies* from Gene Carr in 1926. When the stock market crashed a few years later, Wortman found a way to use his neo-Ashcan impulses in a commercial manner. Until he retired the strip in 1954, Wortman advocated for the poor, showing men and women on picket lines, people out of work and looking for work, and exploring, generally, how the other half lived. Forgotten in the last half-century, Wortman's work has recently begun to be re-evaluated as an artist and as a social advocate with exhibits and books.³¹⁴

Outliers: Crowley and Powers

T. E. Powers had been hired by Pulitzer in 1894, and moved to the *Journal* when editor Arthur Brisbane was poached by Hearst. He was primarily

³¹⁴ This renewed interest in Wortman as a cartoonist can be seen in the 2010 exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York, "Denys Wortman Rediscovered: Drawings for the World-Telegram and Sun," as well as Drawn and Quarterly's publishing of the collection *Denys Wortman's New York: Portrait of the City in the 30s and 40s* in the same year.

remembered as an editorial cartoonist, but had works on the comics pages as well. He was a favorite cartoonist of Teddy Roosevelt and Calvin Coolidge.³¹⁵

While he seems to have been a member of the Kit Kat Club,³¹⁶ there is no evidence that points to any closer relationship to Kuhn or any other of his social circle.

Herbert Crowley was another cartoonist who exhibited in the Armory Show. Very little is known about Crowley, as a cartoonist or as an artist. His strip, *The Wigglemuch*, ran in the *New York Herald* from March through June of 1910. Crowley was an English artist, born near London in 1873. He studied singing in Paris but could not find the nerve to perform publicly. He later turned to art. In 1924, he married Alice Lewisohn, best known for co-founding the Neighborhood Theater with her sister, Irene, and for involvement with the Henry Street Settlement. His drawings were strange and surreal, and represented a deeply moral symbolism. His strip, on the other hand, was a fanciful piece about a strange creature, the eponymous Wigglemuch, wondering around fantastical kingdoms.³¹⁷ There seems to have been no connection between Crowley and any of the other cartoonists involved in the Armory Show. The involvement of Powers

³¹⁵ "Thomas E. Powers, Long a Cartoonist," *New York Times*, August 15, 1939, sec. Obituaries; "Thomas E. Powers, Cartoonist, Dies," *The Sun* (1837-1990), August 15, 1939.

³¹⁶ Kit Kat Club, "Kit Kat Club Program for the 3rd Annual Artists' Masque Ball, 1909."

³¹⁷ "A Pioneer in a New Form of Art," *Current Literature* (1888-1912), April 1911; Jim Cullen, *Popular Culture in American History* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 45; "Being as Funny As You Can," *Cartoons Magazine*, April 1915; "Alice Lewisohn a London Bride," *New York Times*, December 16, 1924; "First of Macdowell Club Shows-- News of the Art World," *The Sun*, October 25, 1914.

and Crowley suggested two important things: first, that cartoonists' participation in the Armory Show may not have been purely a matter of social capital, and second, that there were other cartoonists who definitely had artistic aspirations beyond the comics pages.

Promoting the Armory Show

As the organizer of press and promotion of the exhibition, Walt Kuhn worked very hard to make the show reach as wide an audience as possible. In a letter to Edwin Goewey, of the *Kansas City Post*, he wrote, "I could furnish you a fine selection of photos, and in fact a story if you require it, which would make a very attractive Sunday page. We are doing this according to American methods and have already spent a good deal of money on advertising."³¹⁸ Goewey himself had been a cartoonist as well as the former art editor of *Judge* and, later, sports editor of *Leslie's Weekly* before moving in 1910 to Kansas City for a position as drama editor.³¹⁹ Kuhn's position as the chief promoter of the Armory Show gave him an opportunity to leverage his social capital within the world of newspapermen in promotion of art.

Kuhn's "American methods" of promotion for the event focused primarily on marketing to a mass audience that went beyond the typical art world. Wood Gaylor later recalled that "Walt wanted to make sure that this thing was an intensely popular sort of show and his instructions to us when we were

³¹⁸ Walt Kuhn, "Letter from Walt Kuhn to Ed Goewey" January 31, 1913, Walt Kuhn, Kuhn family papers, and Armory Show records, 1859-1978, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

³¹⁹ "Reflections," *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 16, 1910; special thanks to Allan Holtz for helping me track this citation down.

distributing posters was to put them in every gin mill on Second, Third, and Ninth Avenues and to cover not only the part of the town that would normally be interested but to get into the parts of town that would not ordinarily think in terms of art exhibitions.”³²⁰ Kuhn wanted to reach a mass audience, not simply those who might go to an art show. He even looked into the price of an electric sign in Times Square. He also wanted to reach an audience beyond the confines of New York and wrote editors and newspapermen around the country as well as sending out posters to museums, libraries, and colleges all around the country.³²¹

The Armory Show was, in a way that no other art event before it had been, a product not just of high culture but of mass culture. Alfred Steiglitz, the next year, described it as “a sensational success, possibly primarily a success of sensation.”³²² Others were perhaps less forgiving. Theodore Roosevelt, in an article for *The Outlook*, talked of “the power to make folly lucrative which the late P.T. Barnum showed with his faked mermaid. There are thousands of people who will pay small sums to look at a faked mermaid; and now and then one of this kind with enough money will buy a Cubist picture, or a picture of a misshapen nude woman, repellant from every standpoint.”³²³

This comparison to Barnum, while it may have been made to imply a trickster or bunko man, was actually quite accurate. In *The Arts of Deception*,

³²⁰ Gaylor, “Reminiscences of Wood Gaylor.”

³²¹ Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 67.

³²² Green, *New York 1913*, 174.

³²³ Kenyon Cox, ed., *Documents of the 1913 Armory Show: The Electrifying Moment of Modern Art's American Debut* (Tucson: Hol Art Books, 2009), 50.

historian James W. Cook described Barnum's tricksterism in a somewhat more nuanced way than Roosevelt's outright dismissal of making "folly lucrative." In Cook's analysis, Barnum was not simply duping his audience but giving them a controlled means by which to explore a new epistemological uncertainty by inviting them to debate the veracity of his claims. Barnum's audience was not simply paying to be fooled, but rather paying to take part in a game of discernment, where coming to a consensus of "truth" around an item was key. In this analysis, Barnum's exhibits "held out the promise of truth, but they also helped socialize their audiences to a brave new world in which the very boundaries of truth were becoming more and more puzzling."³²⁴ Art historian Michael Leja has argued that, due to the tradition born of Barnum, "Discrepancies between a thing and its label initiated a particular response mechanism in many New Yorkers in 1913—a humbug alert—that precluded aesthetic appreciation and led automatically to doubts about truthfulness."³²⁵

Kuhn, however, seems to have trusted that the power of the new art, especially those of the cubists and other high Modernists, would be perceptible to some members of the general public. So he invited the whole public to see them and let them decide for themselves if the new art was really a new form of art, or just nonsense. In playing Barnum in this way, he ensured the lasting place of the Armory Show in American memory, for those who did not like the show were still

³²⁴ James Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 28.

³²⁵ Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2006), 226.

entitled to their opinion. In fact, when the exhibition traveled to Chicago, he and Fredrick James Gregg, who served as the exhibition's public relations director in Chicago, published the pamphlet, *For and Against: Views on the International Exhibition Held in New York and Chicago*, that primarily consisted of articles from newspapers and magazines arguing both "for and against" the exhibit. Five thousand copies were printed and sold at the door.³²⁶ Kuhn was ushering in a new age of modernity by using the same techniques that had worked at Barnum's museum fifty years earlier. In doing so, he gave a mass audience an entrée into the new art that it might otherwise not have had.

And audience reaction was definitely split. The Cubists attracted the most negative attention, and Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, received the most written attention, described as "a lot of disused golf clubs and bags," a "dynamited suit of Japanese armor," or most popular, "an explosion in a shingle factory." The American art at the show, by comparison, was praised for its relative sanity compared to the European "freak canvasses."³²⁷ On the other hand, by the end of the Show's three-city tour of New York, Chicago, and Boston, 174 works were sold, only 51 of which were by Americans, despite the Americans' making up the majority of the exhibit.³²⁸

³²⁶ Cox, *Documents of the 1913 Armory Show*, 167.

³²⁷ Gail Stavitsky et al., *The New Spirit: American Art in the Armory Show, 1913* (Montclair, N.J.: Montclair Art Museum, 2013), 29–30; Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 110.

³²⁸ Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, 97.

Cartoonists React to the Armory Show

Several cartoonists weighed in with their own takes on the exhibit, as well.

The *New York Evening Sun*, on March 20, 1913, published a cartoon by J.P.

Griswold, *Seeing New York With a Cubist: The Rude Descending a Staircase*

(*Rush Hour on the Subway*). A clear pastiche on Duchamp's *Nude*, the cartoon

depicted a throng of highly-abstracted commuters pushing their way down a

stairway into the subway. This was perhaps one of the best-known cartoonist's

responses to the Armory Show and, indeed, Milton Brown even borrows the title

for a chapter on negative and humorous responses to the exhibit. It has generally

been read as an unfriendly appraisal of the Cubist works.

Viewing these cartoons as merely an expression of the public discomfort with, or confusion at, modern art overlooks the similarities of their projects,

however. Cartoonists were developing a visual language at the same time that

depicted movement over time through the use of abstracted, iconic images,

sometimes depicting things that could not be drawn, from language to pain to

wind.³²⁹ Just as likely, such a cartoon may not be so much a rejection of Cubism

but a winking nod to the similarity of these projects, as well as a playful way to

begin to utilize some of the tools and techniques the cubists used in a manner

palatable to a wide audience.

³²⁹ As this chapter sits at the intersection of art history and comics history, it is worth noting here that I do not mean "iconic" in the art-historical way, here, but rather, as explained in Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1994), 24–59: as a manner in which cartooning produces highly-abstracted figures that, in their abstraction, allow for identification from the reader. .

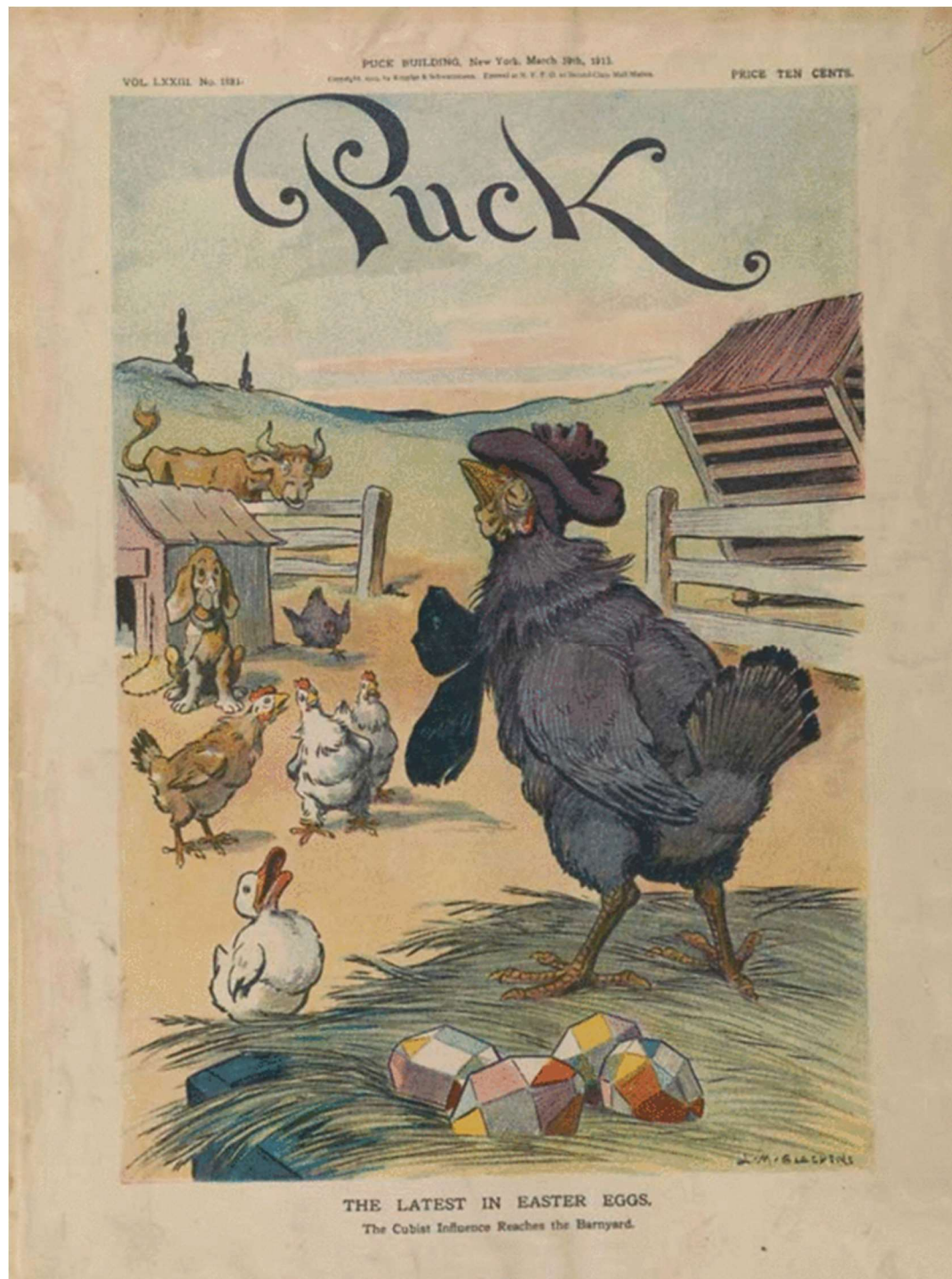


Figure 6: Louis Glackens, "The Latest in Easter Eggs: The Cubist Influence Reaches the Barnyard," *Puck*, March 1913

For another example, it is instructive to analyze Louis Glackens's March 19, 1913, cover for Puck, *The Latest in Easter Eggs: The Cubist Influence Reaches the Barnyard*. (See figure 6.) In this cartoon, a haughty-looking rooster in a beret stands next to some multicolored, polygonal eggs, as other residents of the barnyard, chickens, a duck, a cow, and a dog, look on in horror or confusion. The ridiculousness of a rooster laying cubist eggs is obvious and fairly comical, and the rooster's face reflects an amusing pompousness. It is deeply reductive, however, to read this cartoon as a simple mocking of the artists of the Armory Show, or an outright rejection of Modernism or abstraction.

The cartoonist, Louis Glackens, was the brother of the Ashcan School's William Glackens, who exhibited in the Armory Show. William and Edith Glackens were lifelong friends of both Walt Kuhn and his wife Vera,³³⁰ and Glackens, who had attended the first full meeting of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors along with Kuhn and others, was an integral part of the planning of the Armory Show. William Glackens is largely remembered for Impressionist paintings influenced by late Renoir, and was certainly not a proponent or booster of Cubism or abstraction.

The motif of the cartoon presents an opportunity for an interesting counter-reading to the simplistic interpretation of this cartoon as a reflection of public reaction against cubism, one that allows us to see the cartoon's jibe as much more personal and more sympathetic. The leitmotif of birds in a barnyard

³³⁰ Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter*, 42.

setting seems could be found in many of Walt Kuhn's cartoons. Many examples of Kuhn's cartoon work involve birds, barnyards, or both. Usually these birds and barnyards were used to contrast and gently mock urban pretensions, fads, and foibles. This is certainly not a genre of cartoon that was limited to Kuhn, but it did represent a common thread running through most of his cartoon work. Kuhn was quite adept at drawing birds, anthropomorphizing them in a trademark style that skated along the line between naturalistic and bigfoot cartooning. It seems likely that this *Puck* cover, while it played to a public still unsure what to make of cubism, was also a winking jab at Kuhn who in addition to being a central organizer of the Armory Show was also a former fellow *Puck* cartoonist and family friend.

Glackens's barnyard cartoon also lacks some of the viciousness of his comics attacking the comic supplements. Glackens was capable of being very biting in his humor, and frequently was quite harsh with his anti-supplement cartoons in *Puck*. (Refer back to figures 4 and 5.) By comparison, this drawing seems rather gentle in its humor. The winking nod to Kuhn as a cartoonist, the lack of the pointed arguments about morality that Glackens employed when he genuinely disapproved of something, the family connections: all point to a reading that is more of a light lampoon than a caustic barb.³³¹

³³¹ I must point out that, at the time of this writing, I have not found any detailed descriptions of the editorial policies and practices toward artists at *Puck*. I must acknowledge that it is possible that Glackens was merely told by an editor to produce a "cubist chicken" gag. But it is just as likely that their practices followed the practices that editors would follow when dealing with cartoonists, weather

Art Historian Sarah Burns has made a similar argument, pointing out that many cartoonists, in their treatment of the Armory Show, “promoted the notion that viewing modern art was like being in a funhouse at the amusement park—a place of tricks and illusion stocked with mazes, distorting mirrors, and undulating floors all calculated to unbalance and disorder perception . . . a carnival that invited audiences to enjoy avant-garde art on their own terms.”³³² In other words, a number of cartoonists, even while seeming to mock the Armory Show, were engaging with the Show and the modern art within it with the same idea of inspiring mass participation and engagement, and using the methods of mass culture, that Kuhn himself had championed. The public was interested in democratization of the ultramodern.

Comics and Fine Art Circa 1913

If some of the cartoonists may have sensed the similarity of these projects, of Modernism and the comic strip, there are also some hints, however small and anecdotal, that some of the Moderns may have been similarly influenced by comics. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Gertrude Stein, writing in the voice of her lover, recalled calling on Picasso in 1907. Picasso and Fernande Olivier were in the middle of one of their many fights. As they left, Stein paused at the door. “Oh I forgot to give you these, said Gertude Stein handing Picasso a

staff or freelance, later in the twentieth century: that is to say, that while sometimes topics might be suggested, the actual content of the gag was left to the cartoonist. I am reading this cover with the assumption that this is the case.

³³² Sarah Burns, “Cubist Comedy and Futurist Follies: The Visual Culture of the Armory Show,” in *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*, ed. Marilyn S. Kushner and Kimberly Orcutt (GILES, 2013), 346.

package of newspapers, they will console you. He opened them up, they were the Katzenjammer kids. Oh oui, oh oui, he said, his face full of satisfaction, merci thanks Gertrude, and we left.”³³³ Stein apparently gave Picasso Sunday supplements on a regular basis, and he read them regularly.³³⁴

The idea that Picasso was familiar with American comics, and with Dirks’s work, in particular, is appealing. Journalist Jonathan Jones pointed to the famous story of Picasso’s portrait of Gertrude Stein, painted between 1905 and 1906. She sat for hours, 80 or 90 sessions, but neither party was pleased with the result. Finally, Picasso simply painted over her face. “I can’t see you any more when I look,” Picasso said. After a trip to Italy, he returned to the painting, he went back to the painting with a renewed vigor, painting Stein in her absence. And both were pleased with the result. Jones argued that it was, as much as African masks and other influences, “As much as anything . . . the distorted, vibrant, violent, grotesque, fantastically modern graphic world of American newspaper comics that helped Picasso break out of every convention of continuity in art, that helped him paint a portrait that is a cartoon, but with gravitas.”³³⁵

Some years later, when American journalist Matthew Josephson fell in with the Dadaists in 1921, they were fascinated with all things American, from film, to magazine and newspaper advertisements, to dime novels. The Dadaists

³³³ Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 23.

³³⁴ Ibid., 25–26.

³³⁵ Jonathan Jones, “Comic Strips and Cubism,” *The Guardian*, April 13, 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/apr/13/books.guardianreview1>.

viewed them as transmitters of “folklore.” Among the things Josephson had brought with him was a collection of clippings of George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat*. Showing them to the Dadaists, they proclaimed them “pure American Dada humor.”³³⁶ In all of these cases, it is hard to pin down exactly how much influence American cartoonists may have had over Modernist European artists, it is clear that they were familiar, and in some cases quite fond of them. The split between high and low culture, and the cultural primacy of Europe as a hotbed of Modernity as opposed to America as a cultural backwater: these assumptions that underwrite many narratives of the Armory Show, and of this cultural moment generally, are definitely challenged by such stories.

The comic supplements were influencing the youngest American artists of the time. As the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported in 1913, the Chicago Art Institute School found that they were one of the most common influences among their new applicants. One instructor explained: “You see, we question each applicant at the Institute and keep careful statistics. These prove that the comic supplement brings us more pupils than anything else.” He went on to explain that a preponderance of their incoming applicants had been first inspired to attempt a career in art by the comic supplements, “In the last century the average American had no use for art as a career goal for his son . . . but now he has heard about the fabulous prices paid for pictures and the large incomes made by a fortunate few artists.” Children inspired by the art in the comics were encouraged by parents

³³⁶ Matthew Josephson, *Life among the Surrealists* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 124.

who had heard of the expanding market for commercial art, much to the chagrin of this particular instructor, who seemed to have viewed the whole thing distasteful and wrongheaded.³³⁷

Michele Bogart has argued that “Fine art and commercial art have never coexisted happily, but their differences have never been fixed . . .”³³⁸ Bogart describes the ascendance of print mass media, advertising, and other forms of commercial illustration as creating a brief Golden Age of American illustration between roughly 1880 and 1930, a period when illustrators were much more a part of the art world than they were before or after. As early as the 1910s, however, “Enthusiasm faded . . . many observers perceived the forces of commerce to be adversely affecting the intents and practices of artists and to be encroaching inappropriately into realms of experience once deemed private. The standing of illustration . . . was diminished”³³⁹

³³⁷ Harriet Monroe, “Comics a Factor in Art Education,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 27, 1913.

³³⁸ Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art*, 6.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

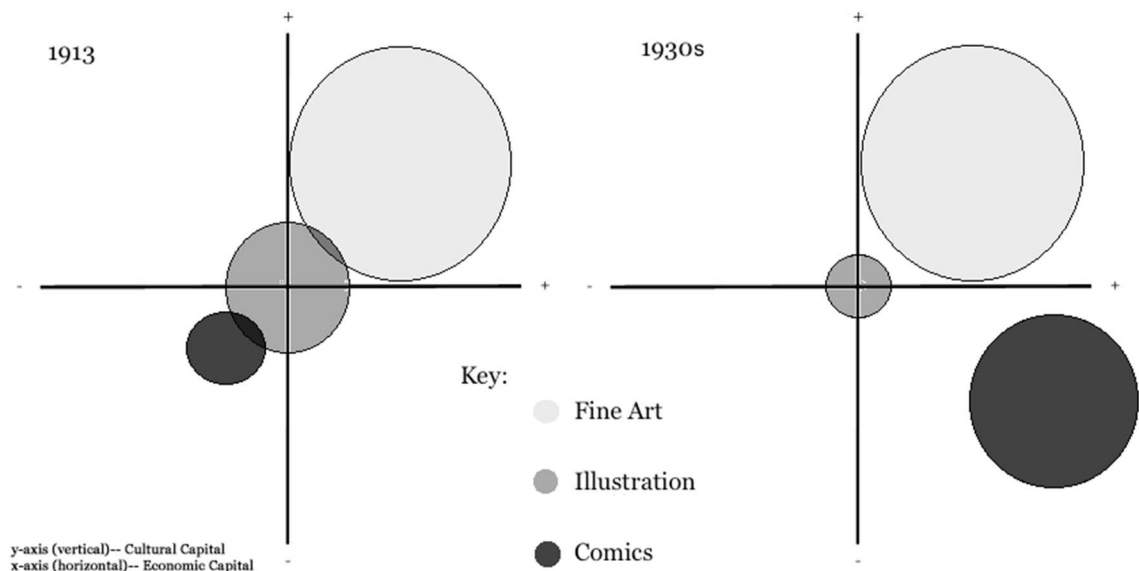


Figure 7: “Art Worlds” of Comics, Illustration, and Fine Art, 1913 vs. 1930s

Bart Beaty, drawing on Howard Becker’s notion of “art worlds,” proposes the notion of an “art world” of fine art, and a “comics world,” and talks about them as mutually antagonistic.³⁴⁰ At this particular moment in history, it is possible to complicate this vision somewhat, to imagine three separate “art worlds”: the world of art, the world of illustration, and the world of comics. (See figure 7.) In 1913, these fields were firmly established in terms of cultural capital: the world of fine art had more cultural capital than the world of illustration, which, in turn, had more cultural capital than the world of comics. But at the same time, each of these worlds was contiguous and overlapped, and agents within one field could easily exert social capital in ways that would allow them to participate in the adjacent world. Fine artists found commercial illustration work,

³⁴⁰ Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art*. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012), 37.

commercial illustrators were not cut off from either comics or fine art, and cartoonists were able to find commercial illustration work. But the distance between cartoonists and fine artists grew greater over time, and a leap from comics into fine art was quickly becoming untenable. In terms of economic capital, different transitions were occurring and becoming almost inverse to the cultural capital of each “art world.” The American art market was not particularly strong. Between 1880 and 1915, the illustration market was still quite strong but in the next decades would rapidly decline. Newspaper comics as an economic market, however, was increasing, and would continue to do so in the next several decades.

Cartoonists and pictorial reporters, working for the low-class Yellow Press, were especially at risk of a drop in status. While illustrators for middle-class magazines were organizing the Society of Illustrators and painting posters for the War effort to counter claims of “commercialism,” cartoonists were actually embracing the art of Europe with an eye to gaining respectability. Simultaneously, they were forming organizations like the Kit Kat and Penguin Clubs, that allowed them to build social capital while they both worked on their craft and, in the case of the Penguin Club, exhibited more modernists. Some, like Kuhn, turned away from cartooning around 1913. Others, like Mager and Dirks, continued lifelong interests in both painting and cartoon work. And in the case of Wortman, a career on the comics page allowed him the opportunity to produce the type of socially-conscious art that fell out of favor as American art collectors

fell into the thrall of Modernism and abstraction. At the same time, this period from around 1905 to 1915 was a period of profound experimentation in comics. Cartoonists were producing some incredible work, some of which dealt very directly with the sources of Modernity.

In the end, the mutual antagonism between the comics world and the art world that Bart Beaty discusses in *Comics Versus Art* had already begun to take shape, and would quickly deepen not long after 1913. Rudolph Dirks's son John, continued *The Captain and the Kids* after his father stopped, while also working as a sculptor. But cartoonists who tried to engage with the art world were quickly becoming less common. By the time Martin Sherridan was conducting the interviews that would make up *Comics and Their Creators*, few of the younger artists discuss painting or any other art, and many even take as a point of pride stories about getting kicked out of art school. This antagonism had not yet fully calcified by 1913: there were still cartoonists who were able to exercise social capital for a small foothold in the art world. But this was already changing. Artists like George Luks and Walt Kuhn, both of whom were professional cartoonists before succeeding as artists, were basically unheard of in the years after 1913.

CONCLUSION

In his memoir *King News*, Moses Koenigsberg, the head of Heart's King Features Syndicate described what he called the "major thesis" of Newspaper Feature Service, Inc., the short-lived predecessor organization to King Features: "*Habit-forming [is] the core of newspaper supremacy*" he wrote, "[t]he vitality of the newspaper being bound up in the mental habits of the reader, Newspaper Feature Service frankly addressed itself to multiplying and intensifying those addictions."³⁴¹ Koenigsberg, in just a few lines, summed up the chief appeal of the comics to newspaper editors and publishers. This is what they discovered in the late 1890s when they realized that unique recurring characters would draw more sales than a mere imitation of the humor weeklies. And it was the same logic that drove the rise of the so-called "continuity" strips in the 1920s and into the 1930s—strips that utilized serial narrative to provide daily thrills, adventure, and mystery. When sociologist Leo Bogart conducted interviews with working-class adult New Yorkers about their comic reading, it is primarily strips of this type

³⁴¹ Moses Koenigsberg, *King News, an Autobiography* (Philadelphia; New York: F.A. Stokes Company, 1941), 378.

that they recalled discussing: strips like Prince Valliant, Dick Tracy, and Mickey Finn.³⁴²

As comic scholar Jared Gardner has pointed out, serial continuity in comic strips was not actually something new. As early as 1897, the *New York Journal* ran a series, not really comics strips but a series of illustrated columns, that sent the Yellow Kid on a European Grand Tour. The “Kid” would report back, in his typical mangled dialect of meeting the queen in England, gambling in Monte Carlo, or visiting the Louvre in Paris.³⁴³ Hearst repeated this conceit in 1904 with Happy Hooligan, although this time the visits took place on the pages of the Sunday supplement. Gardner likewise pointed to Winsor McCay’s 1906-1914 run of *Little Nemo in Slumberland* as a particularly compelling early serial narrative: “This was not a series or a conventionally serialized narrative with a logical terminus . . . There was, in fact, no reason it need ever end nor any economic incentive for the series’ publishers . . . to want it to do so.”³⁴⁴

Gardner also points to the early example of Lyonel Feininger, who later would become one of the first faculty members of the *Staatliches Bauhaus*, and his all-too-brief run of the strip *The Kin-der-Kids* which ran in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1906 and told the story of a group of grotesque children who set out to

³⁴² Leo Bogart, “Adult Talk About Newspaper Comics,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (July 1955): 28.

³⁴³ Bill Blackbeard, *R.F. Outcault’s the Yellow Kid: A Centennial Celebration of the Kid Who Started the Comics* (Northampton, Mass.: Kitchen Sink Press, 1995), 137–145.

³⁴⁴ Jared Gardner, *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 40.

sail around the world in a bathtub.³⁴⁵ In fact, looking at Peter Maresca's fascinating collection *Forgotten Fantasy*, which collects many short-lived children's fantasy strips from 1900-1915, one finds many examples of these dreamlike fantasy strips that possess elements of serial storytelling, including *The Explorigator* by Harry Grant Dart (1908), *The Exciting Adventures of Bill and Budd in the Good Airship Flying Fish* by William L. Wells (1909-1910), and even *Whisk* by Walt Kuhn (1909-1910).³⁴⁶ These fantasy strips were short-lived, and their narrative structure were often reminiscent of a half-remembered dream, but it is clear that rather than simply drawing gag strips, some cartoonists in the first decade of the twentieth century were already trying to encourage readers to return week after week using narrative continuity as a tool.

In November of 1907, the *San Francisco Chronicle* premiered a new strip on the sports page featuring a Mr. A. Mutt, who put down a bet at the horse track, and invited readers to come back the next day to see how Mr. Mutt did. Readers did come back, and the strip took off. It was not an original concept. Almost the exact same idea had been first attempted in the *Chicago American's* *A. Piker Clerk*, the brainchild of Moses Koenigsberg. William Randolph Hearst himself quickly pulled the plug on *A. Piker Clerk* because he considered the strip immoral. But *A. Mutt* gained popularity, and eventually the horse racing angle was abandoned, Mutt was given a companion in his various get-rich-quick

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ See Peter Maresca, ed., *Forgotten Fantasy: Sunday Comics, 1900-1915: Visions from Lyonel Feininger, Winsor McCay and Many More* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Sunday Press Books, 2011).

schemes, and the strip was retitled *Mutt and Jeff*.³⁴⁷ Mutt and Jeff was neither the first strip, nor the first daily comic, but it was the one that others emulated. In the years between 1908 and 1914, black and white daily comic strips became more and more common, as did comics pages in daily papers.

With the rising popularity of melodramatic short films in the first decade of the twentieth century, melodrama was an obvious target for satire. Two strips, C.W. Kahles's *Hairbreadth Harry*, introduced in 1906, and Harry Hershfield's *Desperate Desmond*, which began in 1910, took melodramatic conventions and mined them for laughs. These strips drew from literary and theatrical melodrama and early melodramatic film serials like *The Perils of Pauline* to create a familiar context for their gags: familiar, stereotyped characters, sensational scenes of action and the threat of violence, and cliffhanger continuity. While they used these elements in order to spoof the genre, their stories were constructed in the same highly-engaging manner, something that likely kept readers engaged as much as the humor of the strips.³⁴⁸

Finally, in 1917, *Chicago Tribune* cartoonist Sidney Smith introduced *The Gumps*, the strip that is widely considered to have begun the fashion for continuity strips. In its first year, the strip was a rather gentle domestic comedy

³⁴⁷ Coulton Waugh, *The Comics* (Jackson [u.a.]: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 25–31.

³⁴⁸ For more on these melodrama parody strips, see Josh Lambert, “‘Wait for the Next Pictures’: Intertextuality and Cliffhanger Continuity in Early Cinema and Comic Strips,” *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 2 (2008): 3–20;; for more on early serial melodrama in film, see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity : Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 189–220.

about a distinctly average middle class family.³⁴⁹ Like *Mutt and Jeff's* Mutt, the bloviating, chinless Andy Gump was always looking for the easiest path to monetary gain, but he does so not out of personal avarice like Mutt but out of a desire to better his and his family's station. His long-suffering wife Min, obviously the smarter one in the marriage, was always gently pushing Andy to the right path.³⁵⁰ Their son, Chester, was essentially a non-entity, and usually off-panel. Their maid, Tilda, was a gruff, older, working class woman who was always deflating Andy's pretensions.³⁵¹ The characters were set up as lovable but imperfect. Andy's avarice and lack of common sense was canceled out by his good heart. Min clearly saw Andy's inherent goodness, too. Later in the year, Smith introduced Andy's wealthy and enigmatic Uncle Bim. Bim's mysterious past, his wealth, Andy's greed, and the machinations of others who came into contact with the members of the family provided a seemingly endless string of storylines for Smith to pursue.

The strip shifted, by 1921, toward a more melodramatic serial narrative, with twists and turns, mysteries, and cliffhangers.³⁵² *The Gumps* often lacked the spectacle of violence that some other melodramas of the time relied upon, but it

³⁴⁹ Gardner, *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling*, 47.

³⁵⁰ David Welky, *Everything Was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 71.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁵² Jared Gardner, "A History of the Narrative Comic Strip," in *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, ed. Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2015), 246.

had many other elements: nontraditional, episodic storytelling, moments of heightened emotionalism and sentiment, and moral polarization of the main characters, even if they do not exactly conform to the sorts of stock characters that inhabited the melodrama parody strips. The strip was a new take on the melodramatic formula, however, and people loved it. In 1922, the *Tribune* signed a new contract with Smith for a hundred thousand dollars a year for ten years. This million-dollar contract still did not make him the highest-paid cartoonist of the day, Bud Fisher, the cartoonist behind *Mutt and Jeff*, made more, but the million-dollar commitment generated a good deal of publicity.³⁵³

In the years following the premier of *The Gumps*, many newspapers launched similar strips, that took advantage of serial continuity, cliffhangers, mysteries, and pathos. Perhaps no paper was more successful than the one in which *The Gumps* ran, the *Chicago Tribune*. In the next couple decades, the *Tribune* premiered many successful continuity strips that would last for years: *Gasoline Alley* in 1918, *Little Orphan Annie* by Harold Gray, Sidney Smith's former assistant, in 1924, *Dick Tracy* in 1931, and *Terry and the Pirates* in 1934.³⁵⁴ By the 1930s, the continuity strips dominated the newspaper comics marketplace, and the gag strips that remained were largely older legacy strips like *The Captain and the Kids*.

³⁵³ Robert C Harvey, *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 61.

³⁵⁴ Gardner, "A History of the Narrative Comic Strip," 245.

By embracing the melodramatic mode in continuity strips, cartoonists fostered strong emotional responses and involvement in their readers. Serial melodrama was the essence of what Koenigsberg described as “habit forming,” but it was also a distinctly stigmatized, “low cultural” mode of narrative. Serial melodrama was a storytelling mode that was associated with a distinctly working-class audience.³⁵⁵ Continuity strips were engaging a mass audience on a daily basis, making the field more profitable for many of its top practitioners. But the type of material that they were appealing to that audience with, a distinctly economic heterogeneous audience, was very low in cultural capital, due to a narrative technique already established as a “low” cultural form.

Newspapers began printing comics in their Sunday editions in order to attract middle class readers, the same middle class readers who may have had a subscription to *Puck* or *Judge*. Attacks on the *World* and *Journal* from their competitors, made this approach no longer make sense. These attacks tied the Yellow Kid, the biggest feature in both papers’ supplements, to the derisive term “yellow journalism.” Yet the editors and publishers had discovered, in their attempts to emulate the comic weeklies, an even more effective draw for readers: regular and semi-regular comic features with recurring characters and jokes. The modern comic section was born out of this discovery.

³⁵⁵ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 245–248.

When the moral panic around the comic supplements arose between 1907 and 1912, it adopted the language of maternalism to challenge the comic strips. The crusaders advocating for the elimination or “improvement” of the comic supplements associated them with a number of interconnected anxieties of the time, and for a few years, they tried to build a movement around making the comics safe for children. As the moral panic died down, there was little downside for the editors and publishers. The moral crusade against the supplements made little difference in sales at the end of the day, and by 1912 there were more newspapers that ran comics than ever before.

Some of the rhetoric of the reformers had not been entirely negative in its effect on newspapers that included comics. Papers like the *Chicago Tribune* that made a show of working to satisfy reformers’ demands, and like the *Atlanta Constitution*, which spent the years of the panic explaining how *their* comic supplement was of a better sort than the others, both came out of the moral panic having spent several years positioning themselves as papers whose comics were of the best sort, claims they would have been unlikely to bother making if not for the crusader’s claims to the contrary.

Moreover, the maternalism of anti-comics crusaders can even be argued to have a net positive effect for newspapers that ran comics. The crusaders couched their language in a system of maternal concern for children, because that was a position from which middle class women without franchise could assert control over the public sphere in a way that was not threatening to male authority, or to

women who opposed the suffrage movement. Because of this, they argued against the comics in terms of their effects on children, and presumed that the young were the primary readership of the comic supplements, even though, as comics historian Robert C. Harvey has pointed out, “Children alone were not the target readers. Never had been.”³⁵⁶ In framing the moral panic about the comic supplements in terms of the protection of children, the anti-comics crusaders of 1907 to 1912 helped cement the notion that the comics *were* for kids, even if adults continued to read them at a remarkable rate. In so doing, they inadvertently and ironically helped create a notion of the comics as something that was for children: something wholesome, clean, and suitable for consumption by a wide audience.

Of course, the commercial success of a mass-produced piece of ephemeral culture, especially one that had been subject to a protracted assault from portions of the press that banked on their own respectability and high tone, was not necessarily welcome news all. To some cartoonists who saw cartooning as a way to pay the bills while pursuing a career in fine art, it likely seemed as if their choice of vocation might be holding them back. It was not coincidental that the cartoonist Walt Kuhn became the painter and Armory Show organizer Walt Kuhn right around the end of the moral panic against the comic supplements. Kuhn

³⁵⁶ Robert C. Harvey, “How Comics Came To Be: Through the Juncture of Word and Image from Magazine Gag Cartoon to Newspaper Strips, Tools for Critical Appreciation plus Rare Seldom Witnessed Historical Facts,” in *A Comics Studies Reader*, ed. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 36.

leveraged the social capital he had built working in newspapers and participating in clubs for illustrators to help him reach a position of importance in the Armory Show, and to make the Show a success. While some cartoonists, notably Rudolph Dirks and Gus Mager, continued to pursue artistic interests while making a living cartooning, drawing comic strips for the newspapers seems to have been increasingly considered mutually exclusive to an interest in fine art. After 1913, there basically were no more cartoonists-cum-artists like Luks and Kuhn.

The rise of the “continuity” strip throughout the 1920s made comics even more profitable still, and had a lot to do with the rituals of reading that helped solidify the importance of comic strips to American culture, even after they fell out of vogue in the latter half of the century, ceding ground to humor strips once again. But they also reinforced the idea of comics as a lowbrow form of entertainment by emulating the narrative mode of melodrama. In each of these moments, we can see the place of comics in the broader field of cultural production becoming a more settled matter. We can see how things began to approach the better-understood midcentury status quo.

In looking at the moments that have been highlighted in this project, one can find more than simply the story of how cartoonists tried to navigate these issues of “respectability” and commercial appeal. These moments all tied into larger narratives of the years during which they took place. Looking at how publishers like Hearst and Pulitzer approached the addition of the comic supplement, insight can be gained into how they approached the business of

publishing more generally. Pulitzer especially found talented editors like Morrill Goddard and allowed them a lot of room to innovate. The success or failure of these innovations was determined very rapidly, and based almost completely on sales. Hearst used a similar approach, although he was able to emulate many of Pulitzer's innovations, and to poach some of his most successful staff. Pulitzer was also a more hands-on publisher, and would sometimes make decisions based on his own tastes and impulses, rather than relying completely on sales. In this way he was able to frequently outsell Pulitzer, despite borrowing frequently from Pulitzer's experiments. The experiment of the comic supplement was one of several controversial innovations in journalism that the "yellow" journals would make that would later become standard among most American newspapers, along with the use of illustrated news, extensive sports and crime coverage, and large, attention grabbing headlines. All of these were born out of the same approach.

The movement to improve the Sunday comic supplements was important not simply because it was illustrative of how readers struggled with questions of the respectability of the comic supplements, but because its advocates saw the movement at its base a struggle over working class leisure and consumption. Patterns of industrialization, urbanization, and unprecedented immigration were radically reshaping the nation at this time. At the same time, organized labor was making strides for the improvement of the conditions of this new urban working class. Aided by wealthy and middle-class progressives, workers began to gain

ground, in the form of shorter work days and Sundays off. But the Progressive impulse had a darker side, as well. One way that this dark side expressed itself in attempts to regulate and standardize the way that the ethnic, urban working class enjoyed these new freedoms. Many reformers felt that, in order for people to escape their current conditions, their use of this newfound leisure should be disciplined, made to more closely resemble the uses to which Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans put their leisure. Moral panics and campaigns against “Impure Literature,” ragtime, vaudeville, amusement parks, comic supplements, and the motion picture all resulted in part from this desire to regulate urban, working-class leisure.

At the same time, the campaign against the comic supplements can be seen as occurring almost at the apex of the maternalist approach to women’s role in the public sphere. This approach was a back door of sorts that allowed women to organize around issues and advocate for change in a way that was uncontroversial to men as well as women who were opposed to women’s suffrage. Beginning with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union’s attacks on the *National Police Gazette* and creation of melodramatic stories with temperance morals, women found a way to influence cultural production, and in so doing influence the public sphere. But they did so by couching their language in maternalism, in the argument that women should have a role in public discourse based on their position as defenders of domestic life. By the period of 1907-1912, women using this rhetoric were advocating not simply for the suppression of the

Police Gazette, a paper that was primarily found in homosocial masculine spaces, but to suppress a major component of some of the best-selling newspapers in the United States. At the same time, they were advocating for the first urban boards of censorship that helped regulate the motion picture industry. While the move to reform the comic supplement was short-lived, the advocacy for censorship of movies continued. The years between 1912 and 1919 also saw a massive swell in the movement for women's suffrage. The anti-comic supplement crusade lost momentum at a time when the maternalist rhetoric of women's organizations fell by the wayside, as increasing numbers of women pivoted toward more active calls for full franchise.

In 1913, many Americans were exposed for the first time to the radical *avant-garde* that had been fomenting in Europe, on display in the Armory Show. One of the major organizers of that show had been a newspaper cartoonist, and a significant handful of cartoonists in his social network were exhibited in the show as well. To historians of comics, this would be significant in and of itself. But it also represents one of the last moments where American cartooning and illustration were still contiguous, and artists could jump from one sphere of production to another. Within the next few decades, the market for illustration in the United States shrank, while cartoonists made ever-larger sums for strip cartooning. By midcentury, illustrators and cartoonists occupied completely separate "art worlds."

The move toward serial continuity was a significant shift that would bring about a new era of popularity for newspaper comic strips. While *The Gumps* was not the first strip to use seriality or melodramatic plot devices, it was the first to achieve major success with the format, and would inspire many in the industry to create adventure and continuity strips. But the impact of *The Gumps* went deeper than that. As broadcast historian Elizabeth McLeod has noted, the radio show *Amos 'n' Andy* actually began life as a proposal to the main actors who would create the show by *Chicago Tribune* promotions manager Benjamin McCanna for the actors to create a radio show based on *The Gumps*.³⁵⁷ While the actors decided to instead create original characters for the show, based on black dialect sketches they had been developing, *Amos 'n' Andy* bears a strong resemblance in format to the *Gumps* newspaper strip. Both used serial continuity and melodramatic plot devices to create an ongoing narrative, heavily peppered with comedy. Other radio programs like *The Goldbergs* would emulate this narrative formula. Later, with the advent of television, both of these radio programs would be brought over to the new medium. In this way, *The Gumps* would become a formative text for the television sitcom, though this role is largely forgotten.

Culture is important. It shapes people's opinions, gives people narratives with which to make sense of the world. It helps to delimit the acceptable and unacceptable in discourse. It is always ideologically infused and relevant to the

³⁵⁷ Elizabeth McLeod, *The Original Amos 'N' Andy: Freeman Gosden, Charles Correll and the 1928-1943 Radio Serial* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009): 25-27.

lived experience of people in a particular time. This project takes these things as a given. Culture is also almost always hierarchical. Certain forms of cultural production tend to be imbued with more or less economic and cultural capital. Many studies of cultural hierarchy, from Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow* to Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*, show an implicit bias toward cultural objects with relatively high cultural capital. Newspaper comics present a particularly good example of something with low cultural capital, to analyze how cultural hierarchy works at the other end of the spectrum.

It might be tempting to dismiss newspaper comic strips as a subject for critical and historical inquiry. They may not seem important enough, and they certainly aren't serious. But such dismissal is actually a reification of comics' place within the cultural hierarchy. Rather than dismiss comics as historically insignificant, one should look at them as what they were: a major subsection of the newspaper industry in the United States for over a hundred years, one that drew more readers than any other section of the paper. *Blondie*, *Little Orphan Annie*, *The Katzenjammer Kids*: comic strips are ingrained into our culture, they are a common social and cultural currency. Even as most people dismiss them as unserious and trivial, they have a major role in the cultural consciousness of the twentieth century. For this reason, it is important that we ask how they came to this position, to be simultaneously near-universal within the culture, massively profitable, but also dismissed as ephemeral, insignificant in a way that is distinct from the rest of the newspaper.

APPENDIX

In this Appendix, I would like to give a few comments on methodology, as well as what brought me to this project. I came to comics as a research topic out of a lifelong love of the medium. I learned to read from comic books—my first comic book was purchased for me the same month as my second birthday. It was *Spidey Super Stories* #55, a book that was a coproduction of Marvel Comics and the Children’s Television Workshop’s *The Electric Company*. Superheroes taught me to read. Later, when I was in elementary school, I would discover *Doonesbury* and *Pogo* at my public library. These led me to begin to systematically read every book of editorial cartoons the library had—and they had a decent collection, dating back to the 1950s or 1960s. It was the political education that these books gave me that led me to my lifelong interest in history.

While working on my Master’s degree at UMass Boston, I wrote a research paper during my master’s research on the disappearance of ethnic characters between 1895 and 1920 from the comics page, which I later presented at the New England American Studies Association. It was then that I realized how understudied the period of comics history between 1900 and 1920 was. When I began to develop my dissertation topic, I knew I wanted to focus on the first twenty-five years of newspaper comics. It was a period when the conventions of the

newspaper comic were really being worked out by artists, a period of much experimentation, and a period that is not sufficiently studied by comics studies scholars. It was also a period when there were a lot more images of urban poverty, and ethnic minorities were more frequently found on the comics page—in both sympathetic and problematic ways. I found the resonance of early newspaper comics and works like Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* compelling.

In the course of my research, I stumbled across two things that particularly caught my attention. One was the surprising number of newspaper cartoonists who participated in the 1913 Armory Show. The other was the moral panic around newspaper comics pages between approximately 1907 and 1912—something mentioned in different histories of comics, but usually only briefly. When I began to look through different databases, I found that, far from being a minor issue at the time, it was actually widely covered in the press. Newspapers that carried a comics supplement, those that did not, progressive magazines, women's magazines, professional magazines for librarians and teachers, and the press organs of many women's organizations all weighed in on the vices of the comic supplement. I still was not sure how to bring these two themes together until I read Bart Beaty's *Comics Vs. Art*, when suddenly I realized that they both reflected questions about the “respectability” of the world of cartooning in a time period that Beaty's brilliant work neglected.

I have tried, as much as possible, in writing this dissertation, to forego most if not all questions of what “came first.” Comics history has an obsessive interest in “firsts” that I feel is distracting from questions of real historiographical import. I think that this stems from it being a field in which many of the top scholars are antiquarians and collectors, rather than trained historians. It is of much less import to me whether the first American “comic book” was 1934’s *Famous Funnies #1*, or a collection of newspaper strips by Couples and Leon or another publisher, or the 1840s translation of Töpffer’s *Les Amours de Mr. Vieux Bois* (published in the U.S. as *The Adventures of Mr. Obadiah Oldbuck*). What is far more interesting is when publishing collections of comics might have become common, or how *Famous Funnies* spawned the market for what contemporary readers now call “floppies.” Likewise, it is not particularly interesting, unless one is especially interested in “firsts,” whether the irregularities in the printing schedule of *Mutt & Jeff* disqualify it from its status of being the first true “daily” comic strip. I am much more interested in the general market trend toward strips that appeared regularly (or as often the case in the first few years, semi-regularly) on weekdays that became increasingly common between 1907 and 1914.

It is thus my intention to generally set aside debates around absolute origins, to use the word “first” only with caution, and to instead focus primarily on the contours of the industry, and of the field. Why I choose to look at newspaper supplements and strips to the exclusion of what came before is because, while newspaper comic strips certainly relied heavily on sequential

storytelling techniques that had come before, when the newspaper comic strip came into being, it did something different—something that had to do with the place of these strips in newspapers, with the extended use of characters over time, and with the syndication of those characters across the country. When these things happened, and the newspaper comic strip created a standard format that was widely circulated across the country, that forever affected the history of comics in America.

Another issue of language that I would like to clarify immediately: the terminology of the field has changed over time. I have tried, in writing this dissertation, to adhere to the terminology that was at use in the time I am writing. This is the most precise way to do things, but it does run the risk of creating some confusion for contemporary readers who may not be familiar with the language of the day. *Puck*, *Judge*, *Life*, and *Truth* were all weekly magazines in the 1890s that featured light verse, short stories, and cartoons. In terms of format, they were fairly typical of magazines of the day. Each had its own political slant and approach to humor, but they were all known collectively as “humor weeklies” or (more importantly, for matters being discussed here) “comic weeklies.”

When Pulitzer’s *New York World* began running a weekly short color supplement that was imitative of these magazines in his Sunday edition, it was known as a “comic supplement.” When Hearst began to publish *The American Humorist*, his own take on that formula, the term was used for that as well. The

term “comic section” had not yet been adopted, and “comic supplement” continues, for Sunday comics at least, into the 1910s. The term “supplement” implies that it was seen as a supplement to the Sunday paper, much like the newsprint magazines published for the same Sunday papers, whereas the adoption of the phrase “comic section” when discussing the Sunday comics implies that it was seen as an integrated part of the newspaper.

For similar reasons, I try to avoid describing the features of those early comic supplements as “comic strips.” This is an anachronistic term, as “strip” only came into usage after the wide adoption of daily comics pages, which were strip-like in format. Instead, I tend to try to describe them as “pages” or “half-pages,” or more generally simply as “cartoons.” Even after the adoption of the “strip” format of daily cartoons, “pages” and “half-pages” seem to have been used when discussing Sunday comics for some time. Relatedly, “daily” would suggest—initially—any comic that appears, even irregularly, in the Monday through Saturday editions, rather than necessarily appearing every day.

This dissertation is, at its heart, an attempt to address a question that by its very nature can only be answered in a partial, fragmented manner. I have tried to look at the question of how artists, editors and publishers, and reading publics have navigated questions of respectability and commercial appeal in the early newspaper comics, trying to better understand the antagonism between comics and fine arts that Bart Beaty explores in *Comics Versus Art*, using Pierre Bourdieu’s model of the field of cultural production as a theoretical basis. In

undertaking this task, I ran up against several inherent problems. First, there is the fact that comics have been, for most of the twentieth century, an undervalued art form. This leads inherently to lacunae in the archival record, especially in the earliest years, which of course is exactly what I chose to tackle.

Moreover, it is inherently problematic to try to reconstruct the field of cultural production in a bygone time period. While we must understand this field as always being historically situated and constructed, we must also be mindful of the fact that when trying to trace social, economic, and cultural capital in the past, our understanding will always be incomplete. These things are always built in part on tacit and implicit knowledge, and on deeply contingent factors some of which will always go undocumented. Even looking at cultural productions that are very well-documented, this is impossible to fully overcome. With a field like early newspaper comics, where historical evidence can be scant, it may seem downright impossible.

Having said that, though, at the end of this project, I still feel that it is an important one, and one from which we can gain important insights. Rather than try to establish a complete model of the cultural field of a particular moment, I have tried to select a few distinct moments in the early history of comic strips that provide us with insights into the formative years of a medium that was so important to the history of twentieth century journalism. Each of these moments points to larger issues dealing with the push and pull of respectability,

commercial success, and social capital that always inform how people make the distinctions that form cultural hierarchy.

While one can easily argue that the low cultural status of newspaper comics was inevitable from their first appearance, due to the newspapers they first appeared in, their embrace of anarchic and lowbrow humor, and the very fact that they combined word and image, something that already had “lower” associations when they appeared, none of these were guarantees that they would be received exactly the way they were. Rather, these things were just part of the contours into which the new art form appeared. Historians generally refrain from counterfactuals, but they can sometimes be instructive to ask: what if the comic supplement had kept its original format, had remained merely a cheaper alternative to the comic weeklies? What if the League for the Improvement of the Children’s Comic Supplement had been more successful in maintaining momentum? Might the comic supplements have been replaced with children’s picture pages? Or was the momentum toward comics in newspapers simply insurmountable by 1912?

While these questions may never be answered with absolute certainty and methodological rigor, the good news in all this is that, while the picture I have been able to reconstruct of the field of comics in this time period is highly fragmentary and desultory, it is likely that in the future, we will be able to far better understand the earliest years of the newspaper comics. The cultural status of comics as a medium has greatly increased in the last twenty years or so. The

field of comics studies is still in its infancy, but exciting studies are being produced every year. With the uptick in the cultural status comes funding and institutional support. The Ohio State University has supported a comics library since 1977. In the years since, this institution has grown from a few classrooms in the Journalism department to a world-class research library and museum. The libraries at Bowling Green State University and the Michigan State University have also made major commitments to comics collections.

The rise in digitization of early twentieth century books, magazines, journals, and newspapers is likewise an exciting trend. The research that I did in writing Chapters Two and Three would have quite frankly been prohibitively time-consuming even fifteen years ago. I believe that part of the reason that the story of the moral panic against the Sunday comic supplement had not been told elsewhere in any depth is simply that the sources needed to truly understand the movement are scattered in progressive and women's magazines, newspapers, trade journals, and minutes of various women's organizations. When the sources are this disparate and the subject is not well-indexed, a small moment like this might not have seemed worth researchers' trouble. The Library of Congress's *Chronicling America* project, Hathitrust, Google Books, and Proquest's historical newspaper and magazine databases have fundamentally changed all this. Now, looking for a topic like this is mostly a matter of figuring out the best search terms. In fact, the hardest part of writing those two chapters was probably the

fact that every time I conducted a follow-up search, there was even more material digitized that related to the topic.

Overall, I feel that there are many reasons to feel optimistic about the future of scholarship about old newspaper comics. It is a deep well, and it is still largely untapped. Comics are a fascinating art form, to be sure, but they are also a great source of insight into their time. As something designed to be consumed and then disposed of, it was crucial that comics stayed current. Often less subject to editorial whims than other sections of the newspaper, comics can be an excellent window into social attitudes of their day. They point to fads and foibles, daily minutia and big topics of the day, and all with both words and pictures, in other words, they often illustrate cultural context in a way many other documents cannot with such immediacy.

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BIOGRAPHY

Ralph D. Suiter III—who much prefers to be called “Tad”—dropped out of the Miami Valley School in Dayton, Ohio, at the age of 16 to go to college. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from Simon’s Rock College in 1999. For five years, he worked as a security guard, delivery driver, office temp, and short-order cook in Ohio, before returning to Massachusetts to begin graduate work. He received a Master of Arts in American Studies from the University of Massachusetts Boston, and then moved down to Virginia to pursue his PhD in History from George Mason University.

His research interests include the history of communications, media, and journalism; comics history; and public history. While attending GMU, he worked at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum and the Arlington Public Library’s Center for Local History, as well as a stint as a graduate assistant at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media. He is the author of “Why ‘Hacking?’” in Daniel J. Cohen and Tom Scheinfeldt’s *Hacking the Academy* (2013) and “Reverse Racism: A Discursive History” in Yuya Kiuchi’s *Race Still Matters* (2016). He is currently an adjunct instructor at North Shore Community College in Danvers, MA.