

Alberta's Forgotten Censor: The Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications & the 'Citizen Action' Campaign Against Comic Books and 'Salacious' Literature (1954-1976)

Amie Wright

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Aug 2021

© Amie Wright, 2021

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**

**School of Graduate Studies**

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Amie Wright

Entitled: Alberta's Forgotten Censor: The Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications & the 'Citizen Action' Campaign Against Comic Books and 'Salacious' Literature (1954-1976)

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts (History)**

compiles with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair

Dr. Andrew Ivaska

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner

Dr. Matthew Penney

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner

Dr. Elena Razlogova

\_\_\_\_\_ Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Erica Lehrer

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Gavin Taylor, Chair of History Department

August , 2021 \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

## Abstract

Alberta's Forgotten Censor: The Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications & the 'Citizen Action' Campaign Against Comic Books and 'Salacious' Literature (1954-1976)

Amie Wright

The postwar transnational public health crisis afflicting children was not just polio. Across North America parents, educators, librarians, and doctors met to discuss the public health 'emergency' - of comic book reading. Initial restrictions in Canada under the 'Fulton Bill' (1949), followed by Senate hearings in Canada (1952) and in the United States (1954) argued that comic book reading contributed to illiteracy and juvenile delinquency. Previous scholarship has focused on the US Senate hearings and the subsequent introduction of the industry self-censoring 'Comics Code' as the fever pitch in this 'moral panic.' However, such analysis overlooks what happened *after* 1954 - specifically the continued work of 'citizen action' committees in the US and Canada to continue this campaign against comics - often behind the scenes and under the guise of 'good reading' initiatives. In Alberta this took the form of the newly created Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications. Operational from 1954-1976, this 'watchdog' organization worked with government, law enforcement, and local news agents to monitor and restrict the sale, distribution, and consumption of comic books and other 'objectionable' literature in the province. Based on previously unpublished primary sources from the Provincial Archives of Alberta, this paper discusses how the Alberta Board leveraged the comics 'moral panic' to (1) create widespread extragovernmental censorship restricting 20-25% of publications from reaching the newsstand including, notably, *Playboy* [1962] and *Rolling Stone* [1969], and (2) engage in transnational gatekeeping dialogues about 'optimal' child education and the role of the community to police these 'good reading' standards.

## Acknowledgements

“None of us lives in a vacuum - none of us is untouched by the everyday events around us...”  
*‘Stan’s Soapbox’ Captain America v. 1 no. 127 July 1970*

Nothing happens in a vacuum and one page of acknowledgements is not enough to recognize everyone who helped me, and this research get to this point. And, for many of the acknowledgements, words cannot capture the depth of feeling and true gratitude.

A special thanks to Lynn Farrugia from the Edmonton Public School Board, and the staff of the Provincial Archives, who first sparked this work. While hosting a trip to the Archives for students, Lynn saw a copy of “What’s Wrong With Comic Books?” in the Archives gift shop and, sharing my interest in comics, purchased a copy of the reprinted pamphlet (plus a commemorative shirt) for me. Upon reading the pamphlet and after further researching, I found out that one of the archivists, Michael Gourlie - a longtime comic book fan - had stumbled across the pamphlet while creating an archival finding aid to better organize this unprocessed collection. On a whim, Michael received approval to get some copies reprinted (plus tee shirts) as a community outreach endeavor for the Edmonton Comic Expo. With the eye-catching title, the shirts and pamphlets were a success and have remained a gift shop staple to this day.

To the Concordia History Department, my committee, and fellow cohort - thank you. You believed in this research before it had shape and helped me continue to find my way.

To my companions in the Hush Up and Write sessions, you gave me energy and encouragement during gray days and when it was most needed. I am ever grateful.

To my family - born and chosen - thank you. None of this work would have happened without you, your support, reassurance, love - and all those cups of coffee.

To the past, present, and future comics library workers, educators, archivists, creators, publishers, supporters, historians, and fans - this is for you.

**Table of Contents**

List of Figures	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: ‘Citizen Action’ and the Postwar Campaigns Against Comics (1945-1956)	31
Chapter 2: ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ (1956-1962)	48
Chapter 3: ‘The Choice is Yours’ (1962-1976)	64
Conclusion: ‘Unflattening’ the Postwar Comics Debate and Its Impact (1976-Present)	77
Bibliography	93
Appendix: ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ (1956) Full 14 pg booklet	101

## List of Figures

Figure 1: “Police wield obscure law in comics raid,” <i>Calgary Herald</i> (September 27, 1987)	2
Figure 2: “Blame Comic Book as Boys 11, 13 Charged with Murder,” <i>Toronto Daily Star</i> (November 23, 1948)	4
Figure 3: “Board Views Objectionable Publications In Effort to Clean Up Alberta News Stands”	6
Figure 4: Board Archival Materials – including Frederic Wertham’s “What Parents Don’t Know About Comics” (1953)	10
Figure 5: <i>The Death of Captain Marvel</i> (1982) by Jim Starlin	26
Figure 6: Public Aid Urged in Comic Book 'Battle,'” <i>Calgary Herald</i> (March 9, 1955)	31
Figure 7: “Help Kill Polio,” March of Dimes, <i>Edmonton Journal</i> (January 28, 1950)	34
Figure 8: "What About the Comics?" <i>Macleans</i> (December 1948)	38
Figure 9: <i>Peace River Block News</i> (January 27, 1949, pg 8)	40
Figure 10: Front Cover, 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956)	48
Figure 11: 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956, pg 3-4)	51
Figure 12: 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956, pg 7)	53
Figure 13: 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956, pg 9-10)	54
Figure 14: ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ (1956 pg 11-12)	55
Figure 15: ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ (1956 pg 13-14)	56
Figure 16: 'The Choice is Yours' (1962)	64
Figure 17: Yardley Jones, Political Cartoon in <i>Edmonton Journal</i> (September 28, 1962)	67
Figure 18: Will Eisner, “Comic Books in the Library,” <i>School Library Journal</i> (1974)	79
Figure 19: 'Reluctant Readers' book display (2019)	87
Figure 20: BRANCH: Board of Censors (formerly Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications, 1979)	91

## Introduction

On September 22, 1987, in Calgary, Alberta something happened that had not occurred in Canada in more than thirty years - someone was charged under Section 163, 1b of the Criminal Code of Canada under the Obscenity clause for ‘possession of crime comics.’<sup>1</sup> Spotlighted several days later in a front page article of the weekend edition of *The Calgary Herald* (Figure 1) lawyer and historian Janice Dickin McGinnis believed the arrest would be a ‘surprise’ to most as this ‘obscure’ provision to the Criminal Code, “...has had so little impact on the Canadian legal world that the news of Ott’s arrest will introduce it to most lawyers - even criminal lawyers - for the first time.”<sup>2</sup> The legal history of ‘crime comics’ in Canada starts in 1948. Spurred on by concerned local constituents in Kamloops (BC) that these comic books functioned as ‘how-to’ manuals for juvenile delinquency, Member of Parliament E. Davie Fulton introduced a private member’s bill to amend the law to include ‘crime comics’ under ‘obscene materials.’ A little over a year later, and amid a North America-wide “successful public scare campaign initiated largely by Dr. Frederic Wertham, a New York psychiatrist”, ‘crime comics’ was added to the Canadian Criminal Code in December 1949.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> At the time Ott was charged, ‘crime comics’ and ‘obscene materials’ fell under Section 159 of the Criminal Code; in early 1950s, ‘crime comics’ and ‘obscene materials’ fell under Section 150 – and by the 2010s, as additional sections were added to the Criminal Code, ‘crime comics’ and ‘obscene materials’ fell under Section 163. For more on the legal history of ‘crime comics’ and ‘obscenity’ see Simon Fodden, “Crime Comics and the Remnants of a Moral Panic,” *Slaw: Canada’s Online Legal Magazine*, December 7, 2013, Accessed August 1, 2021, <https://www.slaw.ca/2013/12/07/crime-comics-and-the-remnants-of-a-moral-panic/>; Janice Dickson McGinnis, “Bogeymen and the Law: Crime Comics and Pornography,” *Ottawa Law Review / Revue de droit d’Ottawa*, 20, no. 1 (1988): 3-23; and Government of Canada, Archived Criminal Code Section 163 Obscene Materials, Justice Laws Website, Accessed August 4, 2021, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-163-20181213.html#wb-cont>

<sup>2</sup> Janice Dickin McGinnis, “Police wield obscure law in comics raid,” *Calgary Herald* (September 27, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Dickin McGinnis, “Police wield obscure law.”



comics content deemed ‘obscene’ and/or problematic. ‘Crime comics’ would become synonymous with ‘comic books’ in the minds and eyes of anti-comic crusaders. With this widened newsstand ‘policing’ of reading materials, even titles like *Dick Tracy*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Superman* would come under scrutiny as ‘crime comics.’ Yet, despite this fever pitch and the addition of ‘crime comics’ to the Criminal Code, Dickin McGinnis remarks that, “I have only been able to track down seven cases argued under this section before Canadian courts.”<sup>6</sup> One arrest occurred in Alberta in 1951, three seizures in Manitoba and Ontario in the mid 1950s, and three newsstand raids in Quebec in the same period. Nothing after the mid-1950s - until Darren Ott’s case in 1987. In concluding the article, Dickin McGinnis asks: “*if crime comics [comic books] were virtually unaffected by prosecutors, what made them disappear?*”<sup>7</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

In April and June 1954, the US Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency held three hearings on comic books - broadcast live on television. Testifying as an expert witness on the first day of hearings, April 21, 1954, Frederic Wertham referred to the reading of comics by children as an urgent public health matter, noting, “the real question is this - are comic books good or are they not good? If you want to raise a generation that is half stormtrooper and half cannon fodder with a dash of illiteracy, then comic books are good. In fact, they are perfect...”<sup>8</sup> Wertham, author of *The Seduction of the Innocent: The Influence of Comic Books on Today’s Youth* (1954), cited examples where comics had ‘directly’ contributed to violent behavior such as the 1948 ‘Murder in Dawson Creek’ in which two boys aged 11 and 13 playing ‘highwaymen’ took potshots at passing motorists, fatally striking one - their perceived inspiration? Comic

---

<sup>6</sup> Dickin McGinnis, “Police wield obscure law.”

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Frederic Wertham, US Senate Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency (April 21, 1954).

books. The Dawson Creek incident was widely reported across Canada at the time (Figure 2) and helped to intensify momentum behind the ‘Fulton Bill’ addition to the Canadian Criminal Code in 1949 making it a crime to possess, print, publish, or sell a ‘crime comic.’<sup>9</sup> This incident received renewed attention in 1954 throughout North America both due to its attention-grabbing



Figure 2: "Blame Comic Book as Boys 11, 13 Charged with Murder" Toronto Daily Star (November 23, 1948)

mention in the US Senate Hearings and due to the popularity of Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* - Chapter 11 is entitled, 'The Murder in Dawson Creek.'

On day three of the US Senate's comic book hearings on June 4, 1954, special invited guest, the Honorable E. Davie Fulton addressed the committee. Fulton expressed frustration that, even with the Criminal Code addition in 1949 plus Senate Hearings in Canada on 'Salacious

<sup>9</sup> "Blame Comic Book as Boys 11, 13 Charged with Murder." *Toronto Daily Star* (Nov 23, 1948, Front Page Second Edition). The 'murder' is the 'Dawson Creek Incident' in which two boys playing 'highwaymen' took potshots at cars on the Alaska Highway (Dawson Creek is Mile 0 of the Highway) - striking and killing local farmer James Watson. Though Fulton had been agitating for government action on 'crime comics' at least since April 1948, this incident in Nov 1948 gave Fulton, Wertham, and other anti-comic crusaders 'proof of concept' that, in their belief, 'crime comics' cause juvenile delinquency.

Literature’ in 1952, current legislation and action on comics was not enough. He relayed how in April 1954 a violent incident following the pattern of Dawson Creek had occurred - this time with young people in Nova Scotia led astray by the same perceived instigator - ‘crime comics.’<sup>10</sup> Fulton echoed Wertham’s urgent plea for action, noting that in Canada government and community groups were looking at complementary mechanisms for enforcement - including a “campaign” by the Canadian Home and School Federation to sustain vigilance, awareness, and action amongst parents and educators about the “emergency of crime comics.”<sup>11</sup>

Scholarship often still pivots to the US Senate Hearings (1954) and Wertham’s bombastic testimony as the apex for comics censorship - underreporting the censorship and continued work post 1954 of ‘citizen action’ committees to continue the comics fight. Further, there is almost no mention that the Canadian Home and School Federation mounted its own ‘campaign’ to raise awareness about, in Fulton’s words, the “emergency of crime comics.” In Alberta, this took the form of the government-initiated citizen run ‘Board on Objectionable Publications’ (Figure 3 below)<sup>12</sup>, which functioned (in their own words) (1) *to control, as far as possible, the sale of objectionable comics, tabloids and magazines in the Province and (2) to foster a public awareness of the danger inherent in permitting young people to read unwholesome material.*

Zealously operating from 1954 to 1976, the Alberta Board on Objectionable Publication’s “*effective action to prevent [comics and magazine] sale and distribution in the Province*” included two public outreach pamphlets: (1) The widely successful ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ printed in 1956 with a print run of 40,000+ copies distributed across Canada and the

---

<sup>10</sup> E. Davie Fulton, US Senate Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency (June 4, 1954). NOTE: both Wertham and Fulton considered all/most comic books at the time under the umbrella of ‘crime comics.’

<sup>11</sup> Fulton, US Senate Hearings (June 4, 1954)

<sup>12</sup> Undated – newspaper clipping found amongst Board items from 1959-1961. Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications sous-fonds (GR0065.001SF). Unprocessed. Special Collections, The Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton. On right in the photo (with glasses) is Bruce Peel (*Peel’s Prairie Provinces*).

United States and (2) The more modestly successful 'The Choice is Yours' produced in 1962 with a print run of 10,000 copies. Composed of prominent 'citizen' members from around the Province, the Board met six times/year, maintaining an ongoing list of 100-200+ publications deemed 'objectionable' and unfit for sale and distribution in the province. The Board's unique 'working arrangement' with distributors and law enforcement to 'clean up the newsstands' was so successful that up to 20-25% of periodicals found 'objectionable' were removed from Alberta newsstands (including *Playboy* [1962] and *Rolling Stone* [1969]).



Figure 3: "Board Views 'Objectionable Publications' In Effort to Clean Up Alberta News Stands"

Tucked in along the creased folders of the Board's meeting minutes and receipts for travel, are correspondence from Hugh Hefner and *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner. Hefner adopted a conversational tone on *Playboy's* 'objectionable' status - remarking that, "modern

literature is undergoing such a dramatic evolution at the present time, guideposts for exactly what is right and proper are not as easy to find as might otherwise be the case.”<sup>13</sup> He concludes the letter by thanking the Board for reconsidering their decision and approving subsequent issues of *Playboy* for Alberta’s newsstands.<sup>14</sup> Jann Wenner’s letter, however, espoused a more exasperated tone asserting to Board Chair at time, Aleta Vikse, “do you really feel that *Rolling Stone* is in any way comparable to *Dude* or *Confidential* or *Escape* or *Midnight*? Do you know what *Rolling Stone* is? Do you have any intelligence?”<sup>15</sup> This correspondence plus the sheer numbers of titles deemed ‘objectionable’ and thereby unfit for Alberta’s newsstands indicate the Board’s considerable impact on restricting publications - in Alberta and with precedent setting impact elsewhere in North America.

Parallel to the Board’s actions to restrict sales on the newsstands, was its charge “to foster a public awareness of the danger inherent in permitting young people to read unwholesome material.” This action the Board achieved through a mix of widespread public outreach - including mass mails out of more than 8000+ copies of ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ to the Alberta Federation of Home and School Associations, as well as provincial public libraries - as well as direct work with students themselves to instill the importance of ‘good reading.’ This commitment to ‘good reading’ was a core part of the Board’s objectives and reinforced by its membership - at every juncture in the Board’s twenty-year history, one to two of its members, including Board Chair, Anna P. Maure (1954-1960) and Aleta Vikse (1969-1971), were librarians. Under Maure’s tenure, and with the assistance of founding Board member John S. Dutton, Chief Librarian of the City of Lethbridge, the Board partnered with Grade 10 students

---

<sup>13</sup> Hugh M. Hefner to Donald V. Steele, December 21, 1962. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>14</sup> Hefner to Steele, December 21, 1962. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>15</sup> Jann Wenner to Aleta Vikse, Chairman, January 27, 1970. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

at St. Basil's School in Edmonton to come up with a student-created 'Code' on Good Reading. The one-page typewritten document includes a rubric for gauging 'superior', 'beneficial', 'good', and 'rejectable' literature and begins with the following: "good literature builds up the morality of teenagers so that they will be better citizens and better fit to run the government of tomorrow. Culture can be developed spiritually, socially, artistically, and scientifically by good readings."<sup>16</sup> It is also worth remarking on the original draft title for 'What's Wrong with Comics?' was 'Good Reading.'<sup>17</sup>

Though many prominent Albertans in libraries, public education, and civil service like John Dutton, Louise Riley, Aleta Vikse, and Bruce Peel served on or worked with the Alberta Board on Objectionable Publications, the knowledge of this involvement - and of the board itself as this study will discuss - appears in no biographies, library or local histories, or educational documents consulted for this study.<sup>18</sup> The entire unprocessed collection at the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton that make up the history of the Board were only released in 1979 due to a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) request from a law librarian at the University of Waterloo following up on a legal case from the mid-1960s that

---

<sup>16</sup> "CODE drawn up by a committee of Grade 10 students attending St. Basil's School, Edmonton, Alberta" (undated memo - found within papers and folders from 1954-1956). Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>17</sup> Hamley Press Ltd. to Province of Alberta, Dept. of Economic Affairs, Invoice no. 4234 - Preparation of Booklet for Advisory Board 'Good Reading' (November 30, 1955). Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>18</sup> John Dutton was the former Assistant Chief Librarian of the City of Calgary and the longtime Chief Librarian of the City of Lethbridge; the central auditorium in the old Calgary Central Library was named after him. Louise Riley was a noted and longtime children's librarian at the Calgary Public Library, as well as an author and a regular radio host for 'Children's Story Hour' throughout the 1940s on Calgary Radio. The Louise Riley branch of the Calgary Public Library is named after her. Longtime Associate Director of the Edmonton Public Library from the mid-1950s-1970s and responsible for staff instruction, Aleta Vikse also served as the Chair for Alberta Board on Objectionable Publications from 1969-1971; it was under Vikse's tenure that *Rolling Stone* was banned. Bruce Peel is the arguably the most famous and influential librarian in Western Canada and amongst the most prominent Western Canadian historians. He helped found the Library School at the University of Alberta (where he served as Chief Librarian for decades) and served as a former President of the Canadian Library Association. He is also the founder and creator of *Peel's Prairie Provinces*, one of the first comprehensive historical compilations of Western Canadian prairie history. The Special Collections department at the University of Alberta library is named after him.

involved the Board. This thesis, to the best of my knowledge and working in close partnership with the Alberta Provincial Archive, is the first work of its kind to discuss the Alberta Board.

Six banker boxes of unprocessed materials make up the collection of the Board's archival memory: typewritten board minutes, handwritten notes, copies of purchase orders, newspaper clippings, color coded index cards used for title evaluation, and extensive correspondence.

Amongst the letters in the Board's archive are messages from government officials including E. Davie Fulton and the General Governor of Canada, exchanges with faculties of education and librarianship, notes from Chiefs of Police, as well as ongoing correspondence from similar 'citizen action' committees in the United States, especially branches of the National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL) based in Chicago and founded by Bishop John Francis Noll.<sup>19</sup> Amongst the folders is also an exhaustive amount of literature and research on: obscenity law in Canada and the United States; newspaper clippings either involving or mentioning the Board, often from the *Edmonton Journal* or *Calgary Herald* (two of the major provincial newspapers); detailed notes on best practices for publicity and marketing campaigns; as well as an abundance of source works that the Board used for inspiration and information.

These materials include a copy of Frederic Wertham's 1953 article, "What Parents don't know about Comic Books" originally published in *Ladies Home Journal* and reprinted as a supplemental pamphlet<sup>20</sup> (Figure 4 below). Wertham's influential and widely reprinted article opens with the following flourish directed at the 'unaware' parent: "the parent who shrugs and says his children read only 'good' comics usually hasn't read these books himself. Here is the

---

<sup>19</sup> David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (New York: Picador [Farrar, Straus and Giroux], 2008) 75-80 describes the founding and development of the NODL; 'Citizen action' or 'civic action' is a phrase used by several groups active at the time including the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books (Cincinnati, Ohio) and the Citizens' Committee for Better Juvenile Literature (Chicago, Illinois).

<sup>20</sup> Frederic Wertham, "What Parents Don't Know About Comics," *Ladies Home Journal* (Nov 1953), 50-53, 214-220. Found amongst Board items from 1954-1956. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

startling truth about the 90,000,000 comic books American children read each month” - and Wertham then recounts, over eleven pages, and in lurid detail, how ‘crime comics’ serve as ‘how to’ manuals for juvenile delinquency.<sup>21</sup>

Also nestled in the board meeting minutes is a common repeating footnote to many

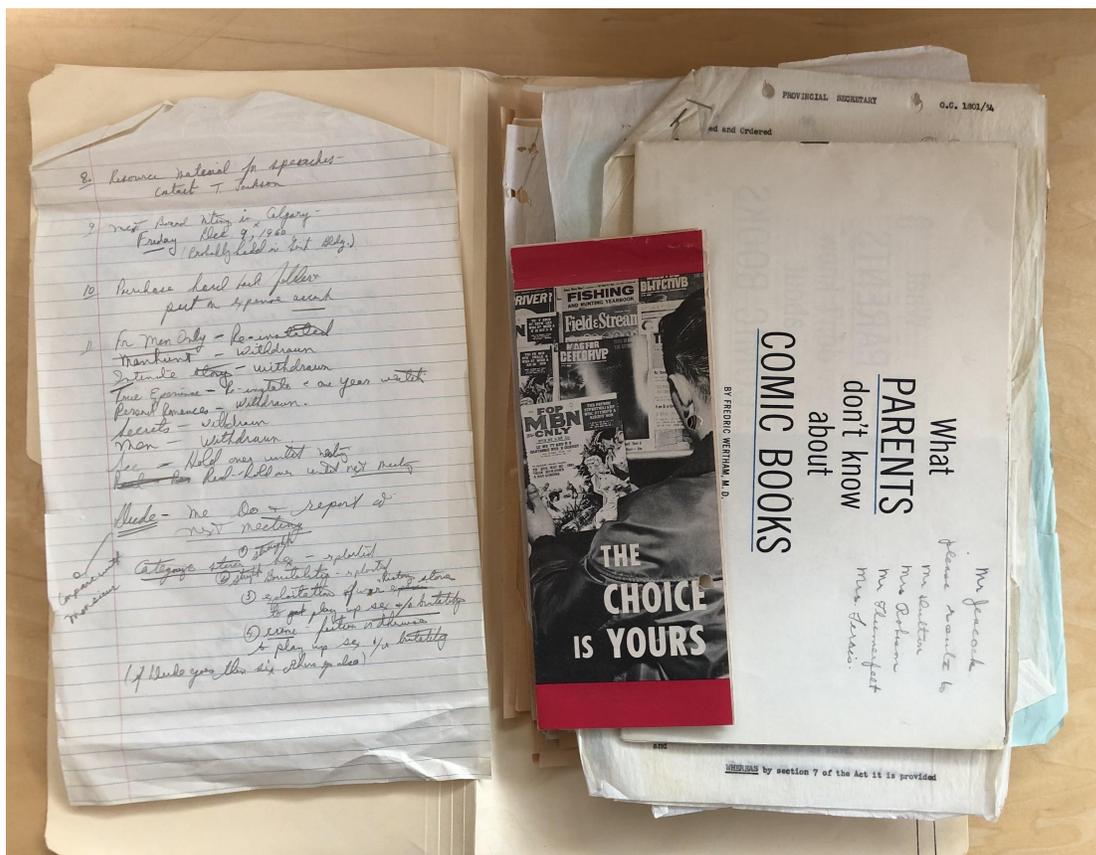


Figure 4: Board Archival Materials including Frederic Wertham's "What Parents Don't Know About Comics" (1953); photo courtesy of author

conversations involving members exasperated and frustrated that critics do not understand that they are, “not a censorship board - just an advisory board.” Yet the carefully repeated actions of twenty years to restrict newsstand sales and gatekeep standards around ‘good reading’ tell a different story. This paper will discuss how, capitalizing on the comics ‘moral panic’ and evoking inflammatory language of a public health crisis ‘afflicting’ children, the Board’s actions

<sup>21</sup> Wertham, “What Parents Don't Know About Comics,” 50.

to restrict access and sales on the newsstands of Alberta well into the 1970s were censorship. Further, this study will explore how the Board actively engaged as a ‘double censor’ - simultaneously ‘cleaning up’ the newsstands while also participating in transnational dialogues about ‘optimal’ child education and the role of the community to act as a gatekeeper to actively police these ‘good reading’ standards. Finally, this paper concludes with reflection on historical memory and ‘hard histories’ and asks - how is a prominent board like this forgotten? How does a gap exist in the legal history of ‘obscenity’ between the 1950s and Ott’s 1987 arrest?

In comics these gaps are called ‘gutters’ - the space between panels. How an artist and writer use this space can be arbitrary - or very purposeful. Many artists will reflect on tight deadlines and minimal creative control in page layout put forth by a publisher; yet, sometimes the choices are meaningful creating a panel layout in which everything - including the space between panels - is, as Art Spiegelman’s masterfully puts in *Meta Maus*, “deeply layered information.”<sup>22</sup> As this study unfolds, I want to pay attention to the gaps, omissions, and gutters. One gap worth noting is the Board’s high profile and impactful actions in 1969-1971, including banning *Rolling Stone* and maintaining active correspondence with the RCMP and area police departments, contrasted with the Board’s status in 1972 - existing in bureaucratic limbo. Though not officially disbanded until 1976, the province began discussions to terminate the Board in 1971/1972 - right around the same time that newly elected Progressive Conservative government and Premier Peter Lougheed also halted the Alberta Eugenics Board and Sexual Sterilization Act<sup>23</sup>. In place from 1928-1972, the Alberta Sexual Sterilization Act was the longest running such act in Canada and something hard to reconcile with reform minded Lougheed’s plans for a

---

<sup>22</sup> Art Spiegelman. *MetaMaus*, New York: Pantheon Books, 207.

<sup>23</sup> Claudia Malacrida, *A Special Hell: Institutional Life in Alberta’s Eugenic Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015) 200-214.

new Alberta publicly focused on arts, culture, and industry.<sup>24</sup> I would argue that an Alberta focused on arts and culture is also hard to reconcile with a ‘watchdog’ committee so consciously monitoring newsstand sales and policing children’s reading.

### Historiography

Much of the prevailing scholarship on the comics ‘moral panic’ focuses on a perceived decline in the hysteria post 1954. Jean-Paul Gabilliet in *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* calls it ‘the calming of passions’ in which, “...even if Dr. Wertham continued his crusade, he did so increasingly alone.”<sup>25</sup> In Canadian histories, the campaign against comics gets two pages in Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman’s comprehensive, *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children’s Illustrated Books and Publishing*<sup>26</sup>. They describe it as a demonstration “...in which the Canadian government assumed the role of controlling the infiltration of American mass culture by restricting access to literature that would threaten ‘normal’ Canadian citizens.”<sup>27</sup> This viewpoint with the Canadian government as the active agents in ‘control’ of restricting comics builds off comic scholar Bart Beaty’s influential article, “*High Treason: Canadian nationalism and the regulation of American crime books.*” Beaty

---

<sup>24</sup> Fil Fraser, *Alberta's Camelot: Culture and the Arts in the Lougheed Years* (Edmonton and Vancouver: Lone Pine Publishing, 2003). Fraser notes Lougheed extensive investment in the Arts & Culture - particularly Lougheed’s allocation of \$75 million in 1980 (using the province’s gains from oil and gas) towards Provincial Arts Councils and festival seed money; this trajectory eventually cultivated in the Edmonton Fringe Festival (the second largest globally), the Edmonton and Calgary Folk Festivals, as well as the creation of the Alberta Heritage Fund.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010) 237.

<sup>26</sup> Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman. *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children's Illustrated Books and Publishing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 52-53; 364 Index entry for ‘comics: campaigns against. Edwards and Saltman’s monograph include over one hundred and fifty oral histories conducted for their study with former children’s librarians, publishers, and creators. Edwards is in the History Department at Douglas College and Saltman is a Professor in the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia, as well as the Chair of the Master of Arts in Children's Literature at UBC - the first specialization in children’s literature of its kind in Canada.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards and Saltman. *Picturing Canada*, 52-53.

stipulates that the comics fight can best be understood in context with the 1951 Massey Report advocating for investment in the growth of ‘Canadian culture’ and viewed through the lens of Canadian nationalism and a “paternalistic conception of Canadian readers as children who require the moral guidance of the state...”<sup>28</sup> Beaty’s article, published in 1997, is one of the most centrally cited points for discussion of the history of comics censorship in Canada<sup>29</sup> - though Beaty’s article originally appeared in a journal of literary criticism.

When scholarship pivots like this to the US Senate Hearings (1954) and Wertham’s testimony as the perceived central agents in comics censorship, it tends to underreport and overlook the work of ‘citizen action’ committees in the mid-1940s-1950s to agitate both behind the scenes - actively corresponding with Dr. Wertham, and, in Canada, E. Davie Fulton - and publicly, with members testifying during Senate Hearings in Canada and the United States. Some scholarly exceptions that do specifically focus on the work of these ‘citizen action’ committees are: in the United States, Evan Ash’s work on The Cincinnati Committee for the Evaluation of Comics, and, from 1955, John E. Twomey’s work on the Citizens’ Committee for Better Juvenile Literature in Chicago; in Canada, Joseph Tilley’s work on British Columbia Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and its leader, Eleanor Gray, to bolster Fulton’s advocacy, as well as Alastair Glegg’s work on the life and times of Eleanor Gray.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Bart Beaty, “High Treason: Canadian nationalism and the regulation of American crime books,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 62 (1997), 87. The ‘Massey Report’ issued in 1951 by the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences recommended federal funding and cultural investment in the development and nurturing of ‘Canadian culture’ i.e., the Report is the nascent beginning of Canadian Content (‘CanCon’) in mass media. The Massey Report is remembered for its role in establishing the Canada Council for Arts and the National Library of Canada. The Canadian Museum of History calls the report, “a catalyst in the Canadian government’s increased involvement in developing and promoting Canadian culture.”

<sup>29</sup> Beaty’s article is the central citation for discussion of the comics history in Canada in Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*, 344 note 15; in Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman, *Picturing Canada*, 244 note 14; and Joseph Tilley, “Pulp Fictional Folk Devils? The Fulton Bill and the Campaign to Censor ‘Crime and Horror Comics’ in Cold War Canada, 1945-1955,” (Masters thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2015),

<sup>30</sup> Evan Ash, “Objectionable: The Cincinnati Committee for the Evaluation of Comics and the American Anti-Comics Movement, 1940–1956,” (Masters thesis. Miami University, 2019); Alastair Glegg, “ ‘The Child’s Education to

Two of these works are unpublished Masters theses, and all these works are situated within the postwar / cold war period terminating at 1955/56. As far as the research for this study has entailed, no previous work has considered a widespread transnational framework for these ‘citizen action’ committees nor focused on the efforts of these committees past the mid-1950s; finally, no previous work consulted for this study considers the existence of such groups in Canada beyond the above noted work about the British Columbia PTA.<sup>31</sup> In Canadian scholarship, there is almost no mention about Fulton’s testimony in the US Senate Hearings in 1954 that the Canadian Home and School Federation was mounting its own ‘campaign’ to raise awareness about the “emergency of crime comics.”

An added challenge in compiling a historiography on the comics debate is how often comics are ‘ahistoricized’ - a practice juxtaposed to contextualizing as ‘historical documents’ other popular works of fiction, film, music, or fashion. Of the three hundred and twelve pages of discussion about popular culture, Jerome de Groot, in his seminal work on history in popular culture, *Consuming History*, spends four pages on ‘graphic novels’ - noting “fictional ‘sequential art’ - graphic novels or comics - have traditionally eschewed history, being more concerned with fantasy...or the present...”<sup>32</sup>. A notable statement given that the cover image gracing the second edition of de Groot’s *Consuming History* is a still image from the superhero film, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011). Though possibly a choice of an overzealous editor trying to

---

Violence’: Mrs. Eleanor Gray and the Canadian Crusade to Ban Crime Comics” *Education Matters* (4, no. 1, 2016): 26-36; Tilley, “Pulp Fictional Folk Devils?”; John E. Twomey, “The Citizens’ Committee and Comic-Book Control: A Study of Extragovernmental Restraint,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 20, no. 4 Obscenity and the Arts (1955).

<sup>31</sup> Other studies in the history of childhood have noted a scholarly tendency to read within national lines dialogues and discussions that were, in their origins, *transnational* as in Kristine Alexander’s study, “Canadian Girls, Imperial Girls, Global Girls: Race, Nation, and Transnationalism in the interwar Girl Guide Movement” in Karen Dubinsky, Adele Perry, and Henry Yu, eds. *Within and Without the Nation: Canadian History as Transnational History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015): 276-292.

<sup>32</sup> Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (New York, Routledge, 2016), 270.

capitalize on the Marvel films' success, it is notable that de Groot does not mention Captain America - the comics or the cinematic universe - nor the exceptional popularity of comics readership amongst military servicemen in World War II. Of the 189 magazines greenlit for purchase and distribution to US troops in summer 1944, fifty of the titles were comic books – including Captain America.<sup>33</sup>

This tendency to 'ahistoricize' comics is further reflected in the scarcity of dedicated monographs. Bradford Wright's *Comic Book Nation* (2003), John Bell's *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe* (2006), David Hajdu's *The Ten Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (2008), and Gabillet's *Of Comics and Men* (2010), are still of the few comprehensive works to situate comics *within* the historical record focusing on primary source points such as consumption, popularity, reception, audience, and stakeholder engagement.<sup>34</sup> Bell's *Invaders from the North* is one of the only to focus specifically on Canadian comics. Though much of Bell's attention is to modern Canadian comic artists like *Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane, or indie successes Seth (*Clyde Fans*) and Chester Brown (*Louis Riel*), the text offers several illuminating insights into little known parts of Canadian history including the existence of homegrown WWII era Canadian comics aka the 'Canadian Whites' (created as a result of the War Measures Act which restricted, amongst other things, the importation of American comic books)<sup>35</sup> or that 10 year old future Prime Minister Brian Mulroney

---

<sup>33</sup> Sidney Shalett, "189 Magazines Put on New Army List: War Department Acts on Survey of Soldier Preferences Made Under Taft Amendment," *The New York Times* (July 20, 1944).

<sup>34</sup> Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (2nd ed.) (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); John Bell, *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006); Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*; Gabillet, *Of Comics and Men*.

<sup>35</sup> Bell, *Invaders from the North*, 43-86 discusses the 'Canadian Whites' with a special spotlight on 'Johnny Canuck' and the search for Canadian Superheroes. For more on the 'Canadian Whites', see also *Lost Heroes*, Directed by Will Pascoe (Toronto, ON: Middle Child Films Inc. / Winnipeg, MB: Farpoint Films, 2014). The *Lost Heroes* documentary premiered in early 2014 on CBC; it was also screened at Emerald City Comic Con in Seattle in March 2014 and at the Toronto Comics Arts Festival (TCAF) in May 2014. This documentary is one of the few current

won a public-speaking contest in his hometown of Baie Comeau, Quebec orating on the dangers of ‘crime comics.’<sup>36</sup>

These exceptions aside, the scarcity of ‘history’ in comics history can be attributed in part to much comics scholarship still being situated in its origins growing out of communication and literary studies and criticism. Many academics in comics studies, and dedicated departments of comics studies at present are still situated in faculties of English, Communication, Literature, and Media. Many discussions still utilize a lens of art and media, and literary ‘close readings.’

However, there has been substantial growth in the study of comics in Education, Librarianship, and History. This thesis builds on the work and owes a great deal to the discoveries and insights of library scholars Carol Tilley and Lucia Cedeira-Serantes, as well as educator and comics creator, Nick Sousanis. Sousanis’s theory of ‘unflattening’ is a call to action to consider comics in the broadest sense - not assigning any dichotomous labels such as ‘low brow’ or ‘highbrow’ (or the good/bad reading dialectic). Instead, Sousanis urges comics readers, scholars, and educators to ‘unflatten’ comics - i.e., to see them as multi-dimensional multi-faceted channels for communication.<sup>37</sup> Another way to frame this is through art history and the discourse of ‘multivalence’ - multiple layers of meaning and memory - oftentimes juxtaposed, conflicting, and yet co-existing. The call to ‘unflatten’ I would argue is critical in (re)constructing any complicated history. Like Sousanis, Cedeira Serantes adds a caution around viewing comics - and comics readers or comics history - through a narrow professional gaze; in her research, Cedeira Serantes has tracked how these assumptions have collaborated at times in perpetuating stereotypes about

---

historical inquiries to focus specifically on the ‘Canadian Whites’; however, in Oct 2021 the ‘Canadian Whites’ and the history of Canadian comics will be the subject of a two-day conference, ‘80 Years and Beyond: A Virtual Symposium on Canadian Comics’ presented by Society for the Promotion of Canadian Comics. This conference is billed as “the first dedicated conference on Canadian comics, including cartoons, graphic novels, and web comics.”

<sup>36</sup> Bell, *Invaders from the North*, 94-95 discusses Brian Mulroney’s public-speaking victory.

<sup>37</sup> Nick Sousanis, *Unflattening*. Boston: Harvard University Press (2015).

readership and normalizing gatekeeping professional practices in libraries and archives.<sup>38</sup> Finally, beyond extensively researching the history of comics in education and libraries from the 1930s-1950s, Carol Tilley is the researcher who proved something that had been speculated at since the mid-1950s - that the ‘basis’ for Dr. Frederic Wertham’s scientific research into comics and juvenile delinquency was falsified.<sup>39</sup>

Growth in comics historiography may be occurring but, I would argue, part of the most significant hurdle in achieving this growth is due in large part to the massively successful and extraordinarily underreported comics campaign and, by extension, the campaign about ‘salacious materials’ and ‘bad reading,’ that persisted well in the 1970s. This lingering moral stigma impacts comics still. There is not only academic scarcity on this topic, but also scarcity in historical memory. Few remember or discuss comics' widespread popularity in the 1950s - amongst kids *and* adults, or that comics have been used as vital teaching tools in classrooms since the 1950s.<sup>40</sup> Even while the comics campaign raged, many supporters and champions existed. The goal of this study is to not only discuss the Alberta Board as a case study of a ‘citizen action’ committee at the time, but also serve to better ‘unflatten’ discourse around the comics campaigns - and censorship - in postwar Canada, and how this reflects larger currents of social and cultural regulation.

---

<sup>38</sup> Lucia Cedeira Serantes, “Misfits, Loners, Immature Students, and Reluctant Readers: Librarianship in the Construction of Teen Readers of Comics” in Anthony Bernier (ed.) *Transforming young adult services: A Reader for our age* (pp.115-135). New York: Neal-Schuman (2013).

<sup>39</sup> Carol Tilley, “Educating with Comics,” In Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan, eds. *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies* (New York: Routledge (2017): 3-11); Carol Tilley, “Seducing the Innocent: Fredric Wertham and the Falsifications that Helped Condemn Comics.” *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* (47, no. 4 November-December 2012): 383-413.

<sup>40</sup> “Teaching with the Funnies,” *The Palestine Post* (April 7, 1950). This article, reporting on the new course taught by US sociologist Professor Harvey W. Zorbaugh at New York University, emphasized the instructional potential of comic books, describing them as, “an important medium of mass communication.”

## Methodology: Concepts & Terms

The following case study of the Alberta Board considers how the Board, as a citizen action committee, functioned as a ‘double censor’ for the province engaging in suppressive newsstand restrictions and community gatekeeping around ‘good reading.’ In conducting this survey, I have built on definitions and concepts from legal history, Canadian history, cultural studies, comic studies, and library history. This study will use / define the following terms and analytic tools: ‘citizen action’ committee; ‘community standard(s)’ and ‘obscenity’; ‘gatekeeping’; ‘censorship’ and ‘vocational awe’; and ‘moral panic’ as an analytical tool for inquiry. This study also considers how language and perceptions of ‘comics’ have evolved over the past seventy years - and how lingering stigmas still tend to impact ‘comics’ versus perceptions of ‘graphic novels.’

**‘Citizen action’** or ‘civic action’ committees was a phrase used by several groups active in the mid-1950s including the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books (Cincinnati, Ohio) and the Citizens’ Committee for Better Juvenile Literature (Chicago, Illinois). For the purposes of this study, I will be defining ‘citizen action’ committees - including the Alberta Board, as well as counterparts in the United States - as groups of private non-comics industry affiliated citizens (working in a volunteer capacity)<sup>41</sup> striving for ‘objective’ evaluation of materials and committed to upholding what they perceive to be as ‘community standards’ in doing so. This definition

---

<sup>41</sup> Though the Alberta Board (like other ‘citizen action’ committees) received remuneration from the Province for travel expenses and a small honorarium for each meeting, they were never paid by government or law enforcement or the comics industry as full-time employment. In addition, I will be using ‘citizen action’ committees to refer to the National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL); though affiliated with the Catholic Church and with active roles of clergy in the administration, the NODL was primarily composed of volunteer citizens working on assessment of materials with clergy and church guidance - like other community and women’s associations at the time working in a larger umbrella of a religious organization (such as the YMCA or YWCA).

builds off the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books (Cincinnati, Ohio) description of their work included in the findings of the 1955 US Judiciary Interim Report on Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency:

*“The work of the committee on evaluation of comic books in Cincinnati, Ohio is an example of what can be accomplished by citizen action in dealing with the problem of comic books. The Cincinnati committee has been a nonprofit group and is not subsidized by the comic book industry. It is composed of public-spirited citizens who have sought to be objective.”<sup>42</sup>*

**‘Community Standard(s)’ and ‘Obscenity’:** Determining ‘obscenity’ in the Canadian Criminal Code demands a ‘community standards’ test - i.e., does this film, book, image, etc. offend enough community members to be considered ‘obscene’?<sup>43</sup> However, this is in relative terms impossible to determine on personal basis, or, as Dickin McGinnis posits: “a clear definition of community standards is not within the realm of human capacity. As we all know, one man’s obscenity is another man’s verb.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, a necessity in the operations of these ‘citizen action’ committees and their evaluation work were for the group to both see a need for a community ‘monitor’ of standards - and for the group to see themselves as the ‘objective’ body of individuals who could serve as this ‘community standard.’

**‘Gatekeeping’:** Implicit in this self-appointed role as ‘community standard’ are ideas of gatekeeping - determining what (or whom) is/are ‘acceptable’ for citizenry, in what contexts and in what amounts. A heavy assumption of moral and social authority on the part of the group is built into this framework - and it was one heavily utilized by librarians, teachers, and other

---

<sup>42</sup> “Correspondence from the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books, Cincinnati, Ohio” as included in the United States. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. “Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency: A Part of the Investigation of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States. Interim Report.” 1955-56. Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number 77-90720 (March 14, 1955). 84th Congress 1st Session Report No. 62.

<sup>43</sup> Dickin McGinnis, “Police wield obscure law.”

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

cultural ‘gatekeepers’ in postwar and Cold War Canada. To define ‘gatekeeping’ for this study, I will build off of ideas in Franca Iacovetta’s *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*, and assess how the Alberta Board - like other ‘citizen action’ committees - employed gatekeeping regulatory language to ‘uplift’ the physical and moral health of citizenry while also working to ‘contain’ (regulate) certain behaviors - especially, children’s leisure time.<sup>45</sup> For many ‘citizen action’ committees of this era this translated to initiatives designed to encourage ‘good’ reading - while containing ‘bad.’ In a 1955 study for *Law and Contemporary Problems* John E. Twomey reported that an important arm of The Citizens’ Committee ‘comic-book control’ was *Operation Good Reading* - aided by a strong partnership with the Chicago Public Library and including recommended reading lists, Children’s Story Hour, and the ‘Vacation Jamboree’ summer reading program.<sup>46</sup>

**‘Censorship’:** The American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom considers three areas of censorship: (1) *bans* (when an item has been removed from the shelves i.e., ‘banned’); (2) *challenges* (when an item has been challenged for suitability/age range or reading level, but no decision has been made about whether it stays on the shelf); and (3) *gatekeeping*.

‘Gatekeeping’ in libraries and schools often includes restricting access on the shelves, through availability and/or use of coded language around ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reading or ‘suitability’ for certain age ranges, groups, or communities. Even at present, gatekeeping - and the decision

---

<sup>45</sup> Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006) 50.

<sup>46</sup> John E. Twomey, “The Citizens’ Committee and Comic-Book Control: A Study of Extragovernmental Restraint,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 20, no. 4 Obscenity and the Arts (1955): 626.

makers behind those practices - is amongst the most common yet least studied or tracked form of censorship in libraries.<sup>47</sup>

**‘Vocational Awe’:** Fobazi Ettarh has coined the lens ‘vocational awe’ to describe the “set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique.”<sup>48</sup> Though Ettarh’s study is rooted in current Library & Information Science (LIS) practice especially professional conduct that maximizes martyrdom and diminishes expressions of professional burnout even in challenging environments, I think there is great value in extending this framework to the library history, historical memory, and how we perceive librarians, and the library and archive as an institution.

Just as history stumbles over how to reconcile the life and times of the ‘Famous Five’ and their fight for women’s suffrage while also actively supporting eugenics, I would argue there is a similar professional reticence to describe library gatekeeping as ‘censorship.’ In spite of the American Library Association, the governing body and ‘community standard’ for librarianship, defining ‘gatekeeping’ under the umbrella of ‘censorship’, scholars such as Jennifer Elaine Steele, building off of Kurt Lewin’s ‘gatekeeping theory,’ have demonstrated how extensive and

---

<sup>47</sup> American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF). Banned & Challenged Books. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/> Accessed July 10, 2021; Jennifer Elaine Steele, “Censorship of Library Collections: An Analysis Using Gatekeeping Theory,” *Collection Management* (43, no. 4, 2018): 229-248. Steele’s paper builds on Kurt Lewin’s ‘gatekeeping theory’ to investigate, “...the decision-makers as well as the different pressures and constraints that are at issue in decisions regarding challenges and censorship attempts that occur regarding library collections. Knowing who the decision-makers, or gatekeepers, are in the decision-making process, whether it is library boards, library directors, or public officials, is crucial to the understanding of censorship in public libraries. Without a clear understanding of the function of gates and gatekeepers in the decision-making process, libraries may allow unintended censorship of ideas and information to persist.”

<sup>48</sup> Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves," *In The Library With The Lead Pipe* (January 10, 2018. <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/>)

normalized gatekeeping practices historically have been - and continue to be.<sup>49</sup> For example, in describing the development of children's librarianship in the late nineteenth century and the growth of specialized children's reading rooms, Edwards and Saltman in their comprehensive text on the history of children's illustrated books in Canada relay how:

*"children's librarians saw themselves as conduits and gatekeepers standing between children's publishers and child readers. As agents of social control, librarians could prevent the moral harm that they believed would result from reading series fiction, 'potboilers in juvenile literature,' 'written-to-order information book[s],' and 'atrocious picture book[s] modeled after the comic supplement[s]' with 'hideous daubs of color and caricature of line.' Instead, by carefully guiding reading choices, and rigorously excluding unworthy literature from their collections, librarians could transform the lives of children beyond the walls of their libraries by providing access to the best literature, which in turn would influence 'the ideals, the tastes, the occupations, the amusements, the language, the manners, the home standards, [and] the choice of careers' of their young patrons."*<sup>50</sup>

Though language around 'uplift' ("carefully guiding") and 'containment' ("rigorously excluding"), as well as beliefs about child health, reading, and 'moral harm' appear in this passage, Edwards and Saltman do not situate these behaviors within greater gatekeeping frameworks nor label these behaviors 'censorship.' Instead, this seems to reflect a normalized attitude of 'vocational awe' towards library gatekeeping - that it was done for the 'good' of the community' and that the librarian was suited to act as 'community standard' on these decisions.

---

<sup>49</sup> Geo Takach, *Will the Real Alberta Please Stand Up?* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2010), 99. Takach describes Albertan Emily Murphy's and other members of the 'Famous Five' involvement in eugenics with the following passage: "while compulsory sterilization by the state is viewed today as a monstrosity with Nazi overtones, it was favored widely earlier in the last century by a wide array of political, medical and public interests as a way of ensuring only those with desirable genetic backgrounds should have children. Voices like the National Council of Women, the Canadian Medical Association and at least three of Alberta's Famous Five (Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, and Irene Parlby) supported it."; The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest, largest library professional organization in the world. The 'American' in ALA refers to North America and, even when active, the Canadian Library Association (CLA) functioned under the ALA in many capacities - including, importantly, professional accreditation for library school programs. This accreditation is for all library Masters programs including Archives, school librarianship, public librarianship, and academic library positions; Steele, "Censorship of Library Collections."

<sup>50</sup> Edwards and Saltman, *Picturing Canada*, 41.

**‘Moral Panic’** as Analytic Tool: The postwar comics crisis is often called a ‘moral panic’ in popular and scholarly discussions. However, ‘moral panic’ is both a useful analytic tool for social and cultural investigation - and one subject to great academic scrutiny and debate. Much discussion tends to crystallize on the scale of the ‘problem’ (or perceived problem) and the scale of the response / reaction. In oft cited criticism of Stuart Hall et al’s 1978 landmark study on mugging in the UK and the suppressive response of police to often violently quell this ‘threat’, some detractors question Hall’s portrayal of the reaction as a ‘moral panic.’<sup>51</sup> What I would argue this criticism misses is the focus that Hall (et al), building off of Stanley Cohen’s foundational work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, brings to reactions and consequences, including potential long lasting repercussions in legal or social policy as a result.<sup>52</sup> As noted above, the Alberta Board, while originally convened to address the ‘comics problem’, saw their powers expand to include **adult** periodicals (though their mandate - officially - was focused on children) - eventually censoring 20-25% of newsstand publications in the province of Alberta for almost twenty years.

Further, on a national level ‘crime comics’ persisted as a prosecutable offence in the Canadian Criminal Code until 2018. While not all studies of the ‘comics crisis’ are in historical agreement over whether or not this constituted a ‘moral panic’<sup>53</sup>, I will build off of Hall’s work

---

<sup>51</sup> P. A. J. Waddington, "Mugging as a Moral Panic: A Question of Proportion," *The British Journal of Sociology* 37, no. 2 (June 1986): 246. P.A.J. Waddington’s very vociferous rebuttal states, “conceptually, the notion of a ‘moral panic’ lacks any criteria of proportionality without which it is impossible to determine whether concern about *any* crime problem is justified or not.”

<sup>52</sup> Stuart Hall et al. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978; Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. London: Routledge Classics, 2011 [1972].

<sup>53</sup> Tilley, "Pulp Fictional Folk Devils?", 9-10. Tilley, building on Bill Thompson and Andy Williams, *The Myth of Moral Panics: Sex, Snuff, and Satan* (2014), argues that in historical analysis a ‘moral enterprise’ model better illuminates social anxieties at the time. In this framework and utilizing Howard Becker’s concept of ‘moral enterprise’, Tilley argues that policy makers and critics at the time like Fulton, and vocal PTA force Eleanor Gray, acted as ‘moral entrepreneurs.’

as well as William S. Bush and David S. Tanenhaus's concluding arguments in *Ages of Anxieties: Historical and Transnational Perspectives on Juvenile Justice* and use 'moral panic' as an analysis tool (not as an analysis in and of itself).<sup>54</sup> In this way, 'moral panic' becomes an important investigative lens centered on the "more serious and long-lasting repercussions" - especially those repercussions with impact on "legal and social policy."<sup>55</sup>

In addition, using 'moral panic' as an analysis tool, I believe spotlights the 'panic' part of the equation - and the inflammatory and urgent language used by Wertham, Fulton, and notable others in this fight to incite and stoke fear. Critic and columnist John Mason Brown, for example, infamously referred to comic books as "the marijuana of the nursery" in a radio broadcast in 1948.<sup>56</sup> Leveraging such strident language about comics during a larger public health crisis afflicting children - polio - speaks to the attention and urgency that these critics felt this 'threat' deserved. Within a greater constellation of postwar fears, dawning Cold War threats of communism, and nuclear proliferation, comics were considered a public health threat for children alongside polio. In April 1952, a UN conference on press, radio, and cinema for children called for a world ban on 'sex and crime comics' concluding that such comics are "turning the youth and adolescents of today into young ruffians and potential criminals"; instead the conveners urged world-wide action to replace such 'bad' material with "clean, healthy adventure stories and educational reading."<sup>57</sup> In a historical analysis, focusing on the 'panic' aspect is important as it establishes the 'comics crisis' within the larger anxiety that was postwar

---

<sup>54</sup> William S. Bush and David S. Tanenhaus, "Conclusion: Whose Children? A Comparative Anatomy of Moral Panics," In *Ages of Anxiety: Historical and Transnational Perspectives in Juvenile Justice* (New York: NYU Press, 2018) 159-178.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> As reported in "The Press: Code for the Comics," *Time Magazine* (July 12, 1948).

<sup>57</sup> Horace Castell, "UN Group Urges World Ban on Sex and Crime Comics," *The Globe and Mail* (April 18, 1952). The conference was convened by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and comprised of "scientists, educationists, and legal experts."

and then Cold War Canada and the United States. Also, an analysis on the ‘panic’ attempts to recreate and track how these fears traveled in transnational ways throughout North America – and internationally. Though much of the attention may have been on *American* comics, the panic, reactions, and dialogues were overlapping and not drawn on firm national lines – instead these discussions often influenced each other as this study of the Alberta Board demonstrates.

**‘Comics’:** There is much discussion in comics studies, education, publishing, and libraries over what to call this partnership of words and text. One of the most heated debates is over the use of the term ‘comics’ versus ‘graphic novels’ - and where that demarcation is. This paper will focus on the perceived impacts of comic book reading on child health and community standards in the 1930s-1970s - a time in which formal and informal censorship of ‘crime comics’ was widespread in Canada and the United States. After its addition into the obscenity clause of the Canadian Criminal Code in 1949, ‘crime comics’ was used indiscriminately as an umbrella label for any comic books, strips, and panels deemed ‘objectionable’ (‘obscene’) in this period. As defined in the Criminal Code an ‘obscene publication’ is “any publication a dominant characteristic of which is the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of the following subjects, namely, crime, horror, cruelty and violence, shall be deemed to be obscene.”<sup>58</sup> Over the 1940s and 1950s, this included: *Crime Does Not Pay* (perceived glorification of crimes and criminals), *Superman* (perceived glorification of vigilantism), *Wonder Woman* (sexual innuendo, perceived warped gender roles plus scantily clad outfits), and even romance comics (for its ‘salacious’ content like extramarital sex).<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> For more on ‘crime comics’ and ‘obscene materials’ see Fodden, “Crime Comics”; Dickson McGinnis, “Bogeymen and the Law”; and Government of Canada, Archived Criminal Code Section 163 Obscene Materials.

<sup>59</sup> Dickson McGinnis, “Bogeymen and the Law,” 3-5.

When Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* - considered to be the first 'graphic novel' - came out in 1978 to great success, the comics industry (finally) got a refresh and the 'graphic novel' was born.<sup>60</sup> Though often conceptualized in professional literature as "book-length comic books that are meant to be read as one story," the term 'graphic novel' can better be understood as a market invention offering new avenues to comics publishing - which still felt a lingering moral taint of disrepute as cheap, potentially harmful, entertainment for children.<sup>61</sup> Notable works like Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Chester Brown's *Louis Riel*, and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, were all originally published and read in serial form (not as a single story) over several years but only received widespread recognition when rebranded and repackaged as single volume 'graphic novels' for mass market audiences. The success of such 'serious' titles also created an arbitrary delineation for many that a difference existed between 'graphic novels' and 'comic books'; yet even Marvel was publishing 'graphic novels' as early as 1982 with the publication of *The Death of Captain Marvel: The Graphic Novel* (Figure 5).<sup>62</sup>

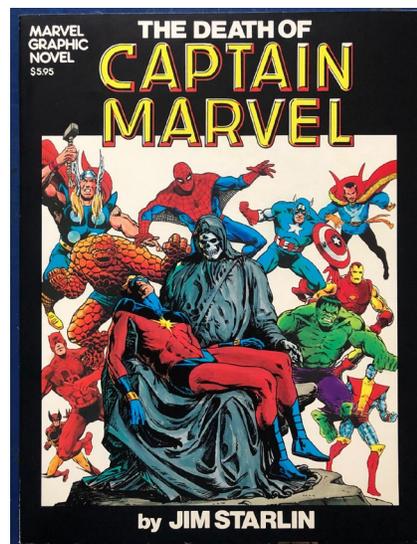


Figure 5: *The Death of Captain Marvel: The Graphic Novel* (1982) by Jim Starlin

<sup>60</sup> Hilary Chute, *Why Comics?: From Underground to Everywhere* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 15-17. As discussed in the opening chapter of *Why Comics?* Although discussions of the term 'graphic novel' had percolated since the 1960s, the trade paperback of Eisner's *A Contract with God* was the first book to have 'graphic novel' on its cover.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen Weiner, *The rise of the graphic novel: faster than a speeding bullet* (New York: NBM, 2003), xi. Weiner's influential text was published for library professionals and is one of the most cited in its active advocacy for comic books in libraries and schools. Weiner includes substantial oral histories from individuals like Eisner and acknowledges the 'moral stigma' of comics past, while petitioning for its future potential. I would argue Weiner, like many professionals of the period and since, very consciously uses 'graphic novels' as a persuasive tool to begin a conversation from a place of open mindedness - and not the still prevalent perceptions around 'comics.'

<sup>62</sup> Tom DeFalco and Laura Gilbert, ed., *Marvel Chronicle A Year by Year History* (London, United Kingdom: Dorling Kindersley, 2008), 207.

Much of the following research study focuses on ‘gatekeeping’ as a form of censorship, and the terminology in and around comics has functioned as its own gatekeeping. While debate still persists around arbitrary definitions, many (if not most) comic scholars, educators, and librarians, are either in favor of working to reunite ‘comics’ and ‘graphic novels’ and use them together or - as I will do in this study unless quoting a direct source - refer to this international and expansive medium known by so many names (sequential art, bande dessinée, manga, graphic novel, political cartooning, comic strips, etc.) simply as ‘comics’ and/or ‘comic books.’

### Methodology: Approach

As this study is built on a large body of unprocessed and previously unpublished primary sources, that address a large body of media-based criticism, the methodological approach for this study will build off Natalie’s Zemon Davis’s work in *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* and *The Return of Martin Guerre*. In *Slaves on Screen*, Natalie Zemon Davis notes that the idea of a ‘passive spectator’ has disappeared from film theory and argues it should disappear from historical criticism of films as well.<sup>63</sup> Building on this argument, I contend that the ‘passive consumer’ or ‘passive reader’ should similarly evaporate. This is not to say that each reader or consumer has the same, similar, or coinciding takeaways from each work, but rather that each reader and consumer brings their own backgrounds and layered meanings and memories to their readings - and, as such, the measures of what is ‘objectionable’ and determining what meets ‘community standards’ becomes ever more complicated and arbitrary.

Finally, Zemon Davis’s research and analysis in *The Return of Martin Guerre* is a vital historical caution to carefully avoid simplistic motivations or conjunctures with historical

---

<sup>63</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2000), 15.

subjects. Instead, Zemon Davis endeavors to create compelling plausible scenarios from primary source material readings complemented with deep historical knowledge of the time<sup>64</sup> - an approach I will be following for this assessment of the primary sources that make up the Board's archival memory. With strong personalities and individual characters, many of which are only 'knowable' through these ephemera, Zemon Davis's work is both encouragements to allow these voices to be heard - and a caution to give them 'gaps' to demonstrate individual agency and historical context. Whenever possible I will include direct quotes from Board correspondence and meeting minutes to allow the Board members to be heard in their own words. Similarly, I will avoid summarizing or paraphrasing when the ability exists to include direct quotes from community members at the time - such as letters of support for the Board's actions, or in the form of rebuttals often in newspaper editorials and letters to the editor at the time.

Using these insights alongside Nick Sousanis's call to 'unflatten' comics scholarship, as well as Cedeira Serantes and Carol Tilley's work to re-examine ideas of gatekeeping, censorship, and historical analysis of librarianship as we 'know it', this study will comprise four sections:

**Chapter 1** will discuss postwar anxieties - in Canada and the United States - and how these fears helped aid the growth and empowerment of 'citizen action' committees. This chapter will also discuss the greater historical landscape of postwar Canada - and Alberta - at the time, particularly massive fears and frustration over unchecked polio outbreaks and emerging ideas of citizen rights and freedoms amid government 'temperance' movements. Finally, this chapter will also describe the 'origins story' for how the Alberta Board came to be - emerging at a time in late 1954 in which, popular scholarship and history contends, comics censorship was ceasing.

---

<sup>64</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1983).

**Chapter 2** will focus on the Board's activities in 1956-1962 beginning with the 1956 publication of 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' Much of the focus of the Board in this period was on public outreach campaigns around 'good reading' and creating strong transnational dialogues with other 'citizen action' committees like the NODL as well as teacher, library, women, religious, and parent associations in Canada and the United States.

**Chapter 3** will focus on the Board's activities in 1962-1976, specifically the Board's second public outreach pamphlet, 'The Choice is Yours,' published in 1962 as well as the shift in the Board's attention towards adult magazines in this period - and the public outcry this increasingly created about newsstand 'censorship.' This Chapter will also discuss the final years of the Board from 1971-1976 and the changing political climate in Alberta after Peter Lougheed's ascent to power in 1971.

**Conclusion** section of this study will focus on censorship, comic books, and historical memory and will include reflections on 'vocational awe' and gatekeeping in librarianship. In addition, the conclusion will discuss the possible long-lasting repercussions on professional practice as well as address the impact on Canadian legal history and the precedent that a Board like this could have set for 'obscenity' law and 'community standards.' This committee - and others like it - normalized the 'gatekeeping paradox' of Cold War Canada that Iacovetta so well describes.<sup>65</sup> On the one hand publicly stating that they want to empower citizens to make the 'right' choices and then, privately, working to restrict and constrain their rights to do so. This section will also attempt to address the 'why?' and 'how?' this work has been forgotten.

This study will examine two recurring themes of the comics / objectionable materials fight from 1954-1976: the perceived and continued belief that reading material leads

---

<sup>65</sup> Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 50.

to/contributes to juvenile crime and/or illiteracy; and that these threats must be ‘contained’ through both legal means and informal censorship. Throughout this case study, I will also examine how the Board functioned in the larger constellation of ‘gatekeeping’ networks in Western Canada and transnationally. Also how did the board’s actions reflect emerging provincial identity politics - and how did their termination reflect a ‘new’ Alberta under Lougheed? How did the board’s ongoing affiliation with similar American ‘censorship’ groups like NODL reinforce and normalize gatekeeping throughout North America? How might the historical actions of educational ‘monitors’ contextualize modern perceptions around youth reading? Though comics are amongst the most popular and most lauded titles for children and adults, they are also still amongst the most banned and challenged in schools and libraries.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF). Banned & Challenged Books. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/> Accessed July 10, 2021.

## Chapter 1: 'Citizen Action' and the Postwar Campaigns Against Comics (1945-1956)



Figure 6: "Public Aid Urged in Comic Book 'Battle,'" *The Calgary Herald* (March 9, 1955)

When it was founded on December 29, 1954, by Order-in-Council (O.C.) 1801/54 through Section 3 of the Cultural Development Act, the Alberta Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications (Figure 6) joined a larger constellation of 'citizen action' committees throughout North America already tackling the comic book 'battle' and other concerns of child health. The comics-focused groups included US counterparts active from the 1940s including the National Office for Decent Literature (NODL); the Citizens' Committee for Better Juvenile Literature in Chicago, Illinois; and the Committee for the Evaluation of Comics in Cincinnati, Ohio; in Canada, the Board built on precedent established by the Crime Comics Committee of the British Columbia Parent-Teacher Association (led by strident anti-comics activist, Eleanor Gray) which had exerted considerable influence to get the 'Fulton Bill' added to the Criminal

Code in 1949.<sup>67</sup> Acting in parallel and often complementary ways in this period were diligent initiatives by Community Associations and Women's Institutes to engage publicly with advocacy for child and community health - such as the Mothers' March to fight polio,<sup>68</sup> the Catholic Women's League (CWL) many resolutions on 'salacious literature'<sup>69</sup> and, since the 1920s, long standing work on part of librarians to codify 'good reading' and integrate this into an emerging sense of Canadian citizenship.<sup>70</sup>

'Crime comics', however, were not the first 'moral panic' to strike Canada in the 20th century. Though the term 'moral panic' was only coined and popularized by Stanley Cohen to discuss the 'panic' of mod rockers afflicting the UK in the 1960s<sup>71</sup>, the term has since been applied liberally to describe both current concerns - and to describe historical ones. In the 1920s widespread fears spread throughout Canada and the United States about - flappers. As described in a CBC documentary, the 'flapper' with their flaunting of traditional feminine clothing like restrictive corsets and waistlines, and their eschewing of traditional feminine norms sticking to gendered spaces "...became a symbol of everything that could go wrong in society — a threat to

---

<sup>67</sup> Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague, 75-80* discusses the founding and operations of the NODL; Ash, "Objectionable: The Cincinnati Committee"; Glegg, " 'The Child's Education to Violence': Mrs. Eleanor Gray"; J. Tilley, "Pulp Fictional Folk Devils?"; Twomey, "The Citizens' Committee."

<sup>68</sup> David M. Oshinsky, *Polio : An American Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 88-89. Held as an annual one night fundraising event, the March of Dimes 'Mothers' March' involved volunteers, assuming a 'maternal' role for their communities, going door to door to raise funds to fight polio.

<sup>69</sup> The Catholic Women's League (CWL) is a transnational Catholic lay organization originally founded in England in 1907 with branches throughout the former British Commonwealth; the first Canadian branch opened in Edmonton, Alberta in 1912 with other city branches to follow. In 1920 the unified Catholic Women's League of Canada was founded. The CWL from its inception functioned as a lay advocacy and lobby group.

<https://cwl.ca/resolutions-by-year/> Accessed July 13, 2021. The CWL passed more than 10 Resolutions on 'Salacious Literature' and 'crime comics' in 1932-1960.

<sup>70</sup> Edwards and Saltman, *Picturing Canada*, 40-42 and 53-55. "In 1920, Lillian Smith had argued that 'the great need in the education of Canadian boys and girls today is for books which will give them a knowledge of the traditions and history which produced the great men of Canadian history.' " (p. 53). Lillian Smith was the first 'trained librarian' for children's services (i.e., the first library professional with their graduate degree in librarianship) in the British Empire. In 1912, Lillian Smith established the Toronto Public Library's Boys and Girls Division - the first large scale child focused library department in Canada.

<sup>71</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils*.

the notions of tradition, motherhood and even Canada itself.”<sup>72</sup> Historian Jane Nicholas further notes in the documentary how so much attention was paid to the policing of young women’s bodies and how this concern over the physical cascaded into concerns over moral character - and how these ‘loose women’ might threaten the future of Canada - especially a the future of a white, ‘traditional’, heteronormative Canada.<sup>73</sup>

Other previous ‘moral panics’ of the 19th century and 20th century have included the Penny Dreadfuls and fears over the Illustrated Police News. Moral panics often materialize at the intersections of new and emerging media, social and political change, and, very often, are centered on concerns of ‘the family’ and child health. W.H. Auden’s Pulitzer Prize-winning poem, ‘The Age of Anxiety’ (1948) well captures the tenor of ubiquitous worries in the post war period and aptly names them. I would argue it is impossible to talk about the comic ‘moral panic’ and situate the often-extreme events association with the comics campaign - such as the surprisingly numerous public book burnings of comics - without briefly situating it alongside the ‘true’ public health crisis affecting children across North America in the late 1940s-50s - polio. An epidemic is a loss of control; censorship and restriction are attempts to reassert it.

Called the ‘crippler’ (as seen in Figure 7 below) for its prevalent and debilitating impact on the legs and mobility, polio was a public threat for multiple reasons: it targeted children, it was unknown exactly how it spread, and it “appeared almost impervious to medical advances, and indeed seemed almost to thrive with improvements in hygiene.”<sup>74</sup> While advancements in

---

<sup>72</sup> Nahlah Ayed, "The Flapper and the Modern Girl," *CBC Ideas* (February 4, 2020. Accessed July 20, 2021 <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/how-the-modern-flapper-gal-of-the-1920s-spurred-moral-panic-in-canada-1.5450536>

<sup>73</sup> Ayed, “The Flapper.”

<sup>74</sup> “Help Kill Polio,” Canadian March of Dimes, *The Edmonton Journal* Jan 28, 1950 (from *Voice of a City: The Edmonton Journal’s First Century 1903 to 2003*. Edmonton: Edmonton Journal Group Inc., 2003, p. 206); “Alberta’s baby boomers face an insidious killer: Despite Advances in Medicine and Hygiene, polio ravages the Province, until a vaccine is found which eradicates the virus almost overnight,” in *Alberta in the 20th Century: A Journalistic*



disposal - the scientific and popularly reported. Given fears that polio might be spreading through touch and materials, public libraries at the time even scrupulously quarantined and cleaned library items in attempts to contain the threat.<sup>78</sup>

The spring and summer of 1948 was also when the ‘comics debate’ started percolating in large measure.<sup>79</sup> Earlier in 1948, Frederic Wertham and partnering psychiatrists staged a symposium of the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy on the dangers of comics - one colleague, Gerson Legman, quite outrageously stating that, “the Superman formula is essentially lynching” and accusing Superman of encouraging vigilantism verging on Nazism.<sup>80</sup> Understandably these claims found an audience amongst concerned parents and educators especially after the ‘Dawson Creek Incident’ and versions of the following headline blazed across Canadian newspapers: “Blame Comic Book as Boys 11, 13 Charged with Murder.”<sup>81</sup>

One of the most vigilant critics at the time was British Columbia Parent-Teacher Federation (Association) ‘Crime Comics Committee’ leader, Eleanor Gray. Gray had been following literature on the ‘dangers’ of crime comics since the late 1930s, and along with colleagues produced in 1945 a *Survey of Undesirable News Stand Literature in Victoria British Columbia*. Described by researcher Alastair Glegg as ‘extensive’ - the survey subdivided objectionable magazines into six categories: Crime, Detective and Mystery, Confessions,

---

<sup>78</sup> Oshinsky, *Polio : An American Story*, 29.

<sup>79</sup> Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, 71-91. Criticism had been bubbling for decades especially within the Catholic Church but the late 1940s is when widespread, networked pushback begins to increase.

<sup>80</sup> As referenced in Sidney Katz, “What About the Comics? Are comics good or bad for your children? Don’t give a snap verdict - even the experts are unable to agree,” *Macleans* (Dec 1, 1948)

<https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1948/12/01/what-about-the-comics> Accessed July 18, 2021. Legman’s claim seems especially exaggerated for impact as, in 1946, the Superman radio telepathy hosted a 16 part radio series, *Superman and ‘The Clan of the Fiery Cross’* about Superman fighting the KKK - and based on the true story of investigative journalist Stetson Kennedy’s efforts to expose the KKK, including his book, *The Klan Unmasked*. Episodes of Superman and ‘The Clan of the Fiery Cross’ via Archive.Org:

[https://archive.org/details/Superman\\_page09/460610\\_1308\\_Clan\\_Of\\_The\\_Fiery\\_Cross\\_Pt\\_01.mp3](https://archive.org/details/Superman_page09/460610_1308_Clan_Of_The_Fiery_Cross_Pt_01.mp3). See also

<sup>81</sup> “Blame Comic Books,” *Toronto Daily Star* (Nov 23, 1948)

White Slavery, Love Leaflets, and Health (because of depictions of nudism). In addition to these magazines, there are also at least 125 different comics which were considered undesirable by researchers.”<sup>82</sup> In 1949 Gray authored a special guest column for the March Alberta edition of the Home and School Federation, and in April presented as part of the British Columbia Parent Teacher Association.<sup>83</sup> Gray, like the Alberta Board, was well aware of American ‘citizen active’ counterparts and heavily utilized talking points from the NODL and the Cincinnati Committee for the Evaluation of Comics.<sup>84</sup> The ‘citizen action’ of the British Columbia Parent Teacher Association under Eleanor Gray’s tenure would ultimately attract the attention of Canadian lawmakers - including E. Davie Fulton.

In a follow up article for the *Ottawa Law Review* in 1988, Janice Dickin McGinnis further investigates the legal history of ‘crime comics’ arguing that, “no matter what we may think of Wertham’s notions today, we must realize that these arguments spoke directly to some need among a large group of adults at the time.”<sup>85</sup> Among those adults were Canadian politicians E. Davie Fulton and the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker. In examining the private papers of both politicians, Dickin McGinnis found reference to ‘crime comics’ in Diefenbaker’s papers from 1946 and was able to determine that Fulton had been “recruited for the cause sometime around April 1948 by constituents from his Kamloops riding who were responding to a general write-in campaign [against comics] initiated by the British Columbia Parent Teacher Association.”<sup>86</sup> This connection between the two would continue; after mutual aid with ‘crime

---

<sup>82</sup> Glegg, “The Child’s Education to Violence,” 27.

<sup>83</sup> Tilley, “Pulp Fictional Devils?,” 11-12, 18.

<sup>84</sup> Tilley, “Pulp Fictional Devils?,” 15.

<sup>85</sup> Dickin McGinnis, “Bogeymen and the Law,” 8.

<sup>86</sup> Dickin McGinnis, “Bogeyman and the Law,” 8-10.

comics' Diefenbaker appointed Fulton, 'Minister of Justice' in 1957 during his tenure as Prime Minister of Canada.<sup>87</sup>

Also, perhaps surprising, this was not the only significant Canadian political relationship initiated through mutual concern over 'crime comics.' Brian Mulroney, who had delivered a rousing public address as a 10-year-old on the dangers of 'crime comics,' would later look to Fulton's tutelage as his political mentor. The fight against 'crime comics' in Canada would become, in large measure, synonymous with political conservatism. In the 1948/1949 period, "the anti-crime comic campaign was clearly perceived as a good bandwagon to be on."<sup>88</sup>

Yet, it is vital to stress that even as the comics debate intensified and advocates like Gray voiced 'urgent' concerns over the comics threat, many in Canada resisted springing to snap judgements about the 'dangers' of comic books. Appearing in December 1948 (Figure 8 below), and just several weeks after the 'Dawson Creek Incident' in late November 1948, Sidney Katz's featured article for *Maclean's* magazine, "What About the Comics? Are comics good or bad for your children?" cautioned its readers, "don't give a snap verdict - even the experts are unable to agree."<sup>89</sup> Katz's twelve page investigative report featured interviews and research from a range of experts and sources - including Wertham (anti-comics and of the belief that children must be protected from the potential 'harm' at all costs) contrasted with those of Dr. Benjamin Spock (who, while not exactly pro-comics, did believe in child empowerment around reading choices, parental involvement in reading selection, and that a child reading 'simple comics' was a necessary and needed developmental step).<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Dickin McGinnis, "Bogeyman and the Law", 14.

<sup>89</sup> Katz, "What About the Comics?"

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



Figure 8: "What About the Comics?" Macleans (December 1948)

Katz also featured quotes from criminal justice practitioners like Judge H. S. Mott of the Toronto Family Court and Edwin Lucas, executive director of the Society for the Prevention of Crime New York, who remarked that professional "...experience tells them that comic books alone cannot make a criminal out of a child nor can they even be the most important cause of juvenile delinquency."<sup>91</sup> In concluding Katz relays that, "much of the desk-thumping, pro and con, over comic books may become slightly dated when a new code of minimum editorial standards, accepted by the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers, becomes fully operative...in the meantime, the debate over comic books goes on. Like any debate worth taking seriously, the most certain thing about this one is that it has more than one side."<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. The Code Katz refers to is the self-censoring industry code (later the 'Comics Code Authority') a version of which had been proposed in the late 1940s.

A notable omission to Katz's article is any reference to the 'Dawson Creek Incident.' Though acting as 'Patient Zero' in Wertham and Fulton's urgent pleas for comics action, the 'murder' in Dawson Creek - while widely reported - was not universally discussed as a 'murder.' *Peace River Block News* - the historical newspaper serving Dawson Creek - first reported the case as: "Two Juveniles Charged with Death of J. Watson" on Thursday November 25, 1948; then "Juveniles in Fatal Shooting Nov. 12, Sentenced" on Thursday December 2, 1948.<sup>93</sup> Though the paper does include a subtitle on December 2nd remarking, "Comments of Crown Counsel and Presiding Judge - Reading of 'Comic Books' Held Responsible for Crime Committed by Two Boys", it is notable how the headlines differ from those reported nationally - specifically the *Toronto Daily Star* headline on November 23rd blaming 'comic books' for 'murder.'<sup>94</sup>

Instead, the local paper adopted more extensive reporting, including large sections from the proceedings.<sup>95</sup> This included testimony of Crown Prosecutor Mr. A.W. McClellan and the Child Welfare officer, who both pointed to comics' influence, as well as the Presiding Judge. The Judge, while supporting his colleagues' findings, further added that the following also needed to be considered: (1) the 'poor' conditions at home with one boy coming from a large, struggling family and the other from a single parent home; (2) the existing evening curfew that the boys were not following; (3) and the curious circumstances that lead to the case in the first place - a Dawson Creek resident had irresponsibly left their vehicle unlocked on the side of the

---

<sup>93</sup> "Two Juveniles Charged with Death of J. Watson," *Peace River Block News* (November 25, 1948); "Juveniles in Fatal Shooting Nov. 12, Sentenced," *Peace River Block News* (November 25, 1948). *Peace River Block News* was issued every Thursday.

<sup>94</sup> "Juveniles in Fatal Shooting Sentenced," *Peace River Block News* (Nov 25, 1948).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Alaska Highway with a loaded rifle lying across its back seat, which the boys took.<sup>96</sup> Overall, Dawson Creek residents did not jump to snap judgements.

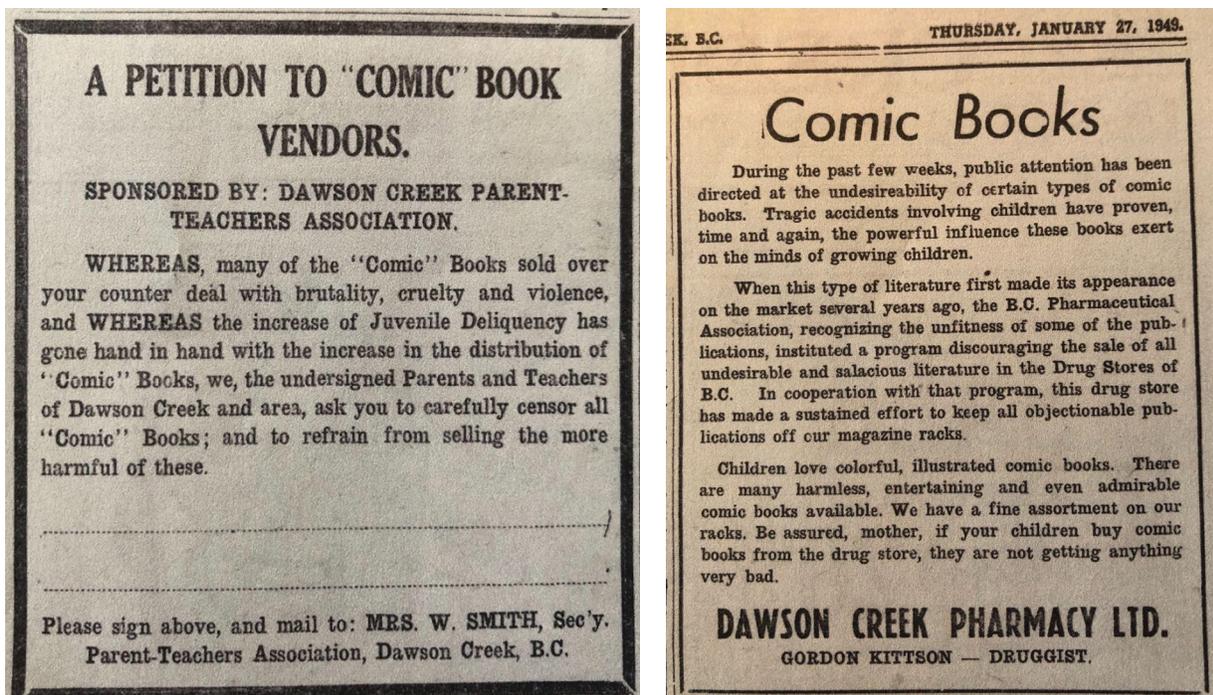


Figure 9: *Peace River Block News* (January 27, 1949, p.8)

Debate did percolate though, notably on January 27, 1949, when the Dawson Creek Parent-Teachers Association and the Dawson Creek Pharmacy took out competing ads - on the same page (Figure 9 above).<sup>97</sup> Adopting a strident tone and soliciting public support, the PTA attacked the comics for sale at the drugstore as an ongoing threat due to the “brutality, cruelty, and violence” that went “hand in hand” between increases in comic sales and increases to juvenile delinquency. The drug store, by contrast, adopted a more pragmatic tone, first describing how it was already ‘censoring’ its materials following standards developed by the British Columbia Pharmaceutical Association “recognizing the unfitness of some of the publications” for newsstands and noting that they had been part of a sustained effort to keep

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> *Peace River Block News* (January 27, 1949), 8.

‘objectionable publications’ off their sale racks. The ad closed with an invitation directed at local mothers, urging, “children love colorful, illustrated comic books.... we have a fine assortment on our racks. Be assured, mother, if your children buy comic books from the drug store, they are not getting anything very bad.”<sup>98</sup>

This debate in Dawson Creek between the vendors and educational gatekeepers would foreshadow additional battles in the years to come as ‘crime comics’ were soon added to the Criminal Code in late 1949, and, later, the Canadian Senate debated “Salacious Literature’ in 1952-52. Chief amongst these debates were competing beliefs about child health, morality, and the role of ‘community standards’ in policing this. I would argue it’s impossible to discuss how and why ‘citizen action’ committees approached the comics debate without returning to the larger impact of polio on the population.

Before it was finally tempered by mass vaccinations in 1955, polio was Canada’s most serious epidemic since the 1918 influenza pandemic; between 1949-1954, around 11,000 people in Canada were left paralyzed.<sup>99</sup> In the United States’ single worst year, 1952, nearly 60,000 children were infected.<sup>100</sup> In both countries, the years 1952-54 saw the most serious case counts. Returning to Iacovetta’s work on Cold War gatekeeping, it is noteworthy how often language of public health paralleled language of reform and assimilationist programs at the time to ‘uplift’ the good and ‘contain’ the bad.<sup>101</sup> This same language is present throughout the comics debate and the Board’s correspondence. Amongst the Board’s papers is a letter from a Lecturer in Education at the University of Alberta thanking the Board for their work, noting that “this

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Canadian Public Health Association, “The Story of Polio,” <https://www.cpha.ca/story-polio>

<sup>100</sup> Lepore, “Episode 6: Cell Strain.”

<sup>101</sup> Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 50.

problem of the comic book is a *plague* [emphasis mine] in my home province also.”<sup>102</sup> An article from *Chatelaine* in the late 1940s asks, “Are the Comics really a menace? Canadian Mothers report on this lively issue” remarking on the difficulty of parents properly monitoring their children’s reading due to widespread comic ‘swapping’ that occurred amongst kids.<sup>103</sup> Wertham’s article in *Ladies Home Journal* capitalized on these fears of contagion and infection. In discussing the ‘swapping’ of comics Wertham states, “many children read the same comic book repeatedly. Then it is traded or passed on to be read and reread by many different children.”<sup>104</sup> The 1952-53 Senate Hearings in Canada also mention this ‘risk’ and transmission with comic book swapping. Though the tie between swapping comics and catching polio is not explicitly noted, but it is important to contextualize these sentiments at the time they occurred – a time in which the public libraries were sanitizing books and surfaces, fearing polio. The message of concern over swapping seems to be that, through comics, a potential existed for children’s bodies - and minds – to be infected.

Until 1954/55, the comics debate raged – as polio numbers increased. I would argue that a large part of this fear had to do with the uncontrollable and the unknown. Like polio, the ‘comics’ threat was random, pervasive - and it was popular. How popular? Though debate exists over numbers in Canada, comics scholar and professor of library studies, Dr. Carol Tilley offers a baseline which contradicts much of how we perceive comics readership historically (as a marginal activity) and how we perceive children’s postwar leisure time describing how

*“if you were to go back to 1950 and look at comics readership you would have been, I think, astounded at what that readership looked like. Virtually every elementary aged young person in the country [United States] reading comics regularly. The rates were something like 90-95% for boys and for girls. Comics had infiltrated into every aspect of*

<sup>102</sup> L. Doris Baker to Mrs. Maure, Chairman, April 18, 1956. Alberta Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>103</sup> Mary Jukes, “Are the Comics really a menace? Canadian Mothers report on this lively issue,” *Chatelaine*, 22, no. 5, May 1949.

<sup>104</sup> Wertham, “What Parents Don’t Know,” 53.

*their lives.*”<sup>105</sup>

This widespread popularity of comic books is virtually eradicated in historical memory. For this thesis it is important to reconstruct ideas of the threats and fears in the postwar period, especially given comic books’ prevalence and popularity, to better understand and conceptualize the reactions and responses to the comics debate. Reactions which sometimes took the form of very public displays, such as the October 1948 “monster bonfire” lit by students at Our Lady of Mercy Separate School at Coniston and led by educator Rev. J. L. Fortin; after feeding 200 comic books to the flames, “the children vowed not to purchase or read crime stories.”<sup>106</sup>

Another very public display was August 1949 resolution by The Ontario Federation of Women Teachers Association, “pledging to unremittingly endeavor to have the publication in circulation of such [comic] books prohibited by law.”<sup>107</sup> Passing the resolution after their two day conference the teachers further added that, “these so-called comics serve no useful purpose, provide no desirable entertainment and present an economic waste. Their circulation among children contributes to juvenile delinquency and the lowering of moral standards and taste.”<sup>108</sup>

Reading the above bylines provides historical context for the fear and the urgency felt by some; it also starts to provide a greater context for why – whether urged on by political aspirations, vocal constituents, or his own concerns – Fulton declared an “emergency of crime comics” in the 1954 US Senate Hearings.<sup>109</sup> This also better contextualizes the letdown that

---

<sup>105</sup> Carol Tilley, “Carol Tilley: Comic Book Crusader,” interview by University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, July 23, 2013, 3:42-4:22, <https://youtu.be/cktZutUTok>

<sup>106</sup> “Children burn two hundred Crime Comics,” *The Globe and Mail* (October 27, 1949).

<sup>107</sup> “Women Teachers open new attack on Crime Comics,” *The Globe and Mail* (August 25, 1949).

<sup>108</sup> “Women Teachers,” *The Globe and Mail* (Aug 25, 1949).

<sup>109</sup> Dickin McGinnis, “Bogeyman and the Law,” 9, 14-15 discusses Fulton’s possible motivations and belief in the cause. ‘Crime comics’ was a very politically profitable platform for Social Conservatives in the late 1940s and a way for the Freshman MP Fulton to achieve a second term in 1949; however, Dickin McGinnis also remarks that, in examining Fulton’s private papers and the sheer amount of literature he collected, there does seem to be a

some vocal ‘crime comics’ critics may have felt post-1954 – specifically that the urgency had not diminished, even if public support for ‘crime comics’ legislation or restriction had. In researching Eleanor Gray’s private papers, Glegg notes Gray’s disappointment with the Comics Code introduction in 1954 and her desire to continue the comic campaign – one that was not successful.<sup>110</sup> In 1955, Gray left the comics ‘battle.’ However, in Alberta, the comic book ‘battle’ was only beginning in 1955.

\*\*\*\*\*

Iacovetta calls it the ‘gatekeeping paradox.’ A state in which “the Gatekeepers envisioned the ideal citizen as a thinking person, and they warned against the dangers of a complacent citizenry, yet many of them subscribed to the Cold War consensus of the day, which discouraged political criticism.”<sup>111</sup> This paradox perfectly allowed for ‘community standards’ to develop – solidifying and institutionalizing the right of ‘experts’ to judge quality, control, and make judgments for the ‘good’ of communities. Returning to Ettarh’s ideas of ‘vocational awe’ I would argue that this tendency to see library actions as “inherently good and sacred” created an especially empowered environment for the Board with their library connections and membership to see their actions as benefiting the ‘greater good’ of their communities.<sup>112</sup> Or, in the words of John Dutton during a Board meeting in 1955, “we are carrying out the will of the people.”<sup>113</sup>

For the Board and other citizen action groups the introduction of the Comics Code Authority – the industry self-censoring initiative that came out of the US Senate Hearings – was not enough. They may have publicly stated their beliefs in a citizen’s right to choose – but their

---

personal commitment to the issue as well: “it seems clear, however, that Fulton’s efforts sprang from a sincere belief that crime comics committed harm.” (Dickin McGinnis, 9).

<sup>110</sup> Glegg, “The Child’s Education to Violence.”

<sup>111</sup> Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 50.

<sup>112</sup> Ettarh, “Vocational Awe and Librarianship”

<sup>113</sup> John Dutton in Board Meeting Minutes June 23, 1955. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

suppressive actions told a different story. Though discussions continued to circulate in the early 1950s that built on Dr. Spock's ideas about children's right to choose and evaluate their own reading materials<sup>114</sup>, much of the movement in librarianship and education at that period was toward the development of 'recommended reading lists' to 'guide' children towards better reading – such as 'Operation Good Reading' at the Chicago Public Library.<sup>115</sup>

When the Alberta Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications launched in late 1954, they were not without their critics – those who did not see a 'need' for such oversight and guidance. An editorial appearing in the *Calgary Herald* on June 13, 1955 entitled, "Lulling Parents Back Into Apathy" criticized the role of the Board, arguing that parents should have the right to choose children's reading materials - stating "...in spite of Mrs. Fisher's [board member] statement that 'we don't wish to censor, but we want to see the people censor themselves as far as their reading is concerned', the people are not to be given that opportunity. The committee, with the same penchant for secrecy which seems to afflict all officialdom in this province, has already censored its own material."<sup>116</sup> The 'secrecy' and frustration the editorial alludes to is answered in another editorial on the same page, expressing frustration at the province's paradoxical commitment to health, wellness, and modernity. The editorial notes, "the Province made millions from oil development" and yet Alberta has highest school debt in Canada, and "out of date" temperance liquor laws with no provincial transparency or clarity about how these

---

<sup>114</sup> An example is 6<sup>th</sup> Grade teacher, Robert Conway's article for *Parents' Magazine* (26, 3 March 1951) entitled "Children Rate the Comics: Children can be good critics. Here's what a group of sixth graders thinks about comics. You'll find their opinions worthwhile and refreshing." Conway's article was based on his own classroom practice.

<sup>115</sup> Twomey, "The Citizens' Committee" 626.

<sup>116</sup> "Lulling Parents Back into Apathy," *Calgary Herald* (June 13, 1955).

policies might be altered or amended.<sup>117</sup> The article concludes with frustration that Social Credit Party claims to be ‘Good Business’ and ‘sound business’ yet seems anything but.<sup>118</sup>

However, despite such criticisms, many ‘concerned Albertans’ and like-minded colleagues elsewhere continued to join ‘citizen action’ movements post-1955, including many still focused on the ‘comics threat’ or on encouraging ‘good reading.’ An additional residual effect of the polio crisis may also have been the way it both motivated and normalized ‘citizen action’ amongst women’s groups. As historian Oshinsky describes the annual Mothers’ March,

*“the portrait of mothers marching against polio became one of the most indelible images of postwar America. For an hour each year, on a January evening, these women formed the largest charitable army the country had ever known, serving as models for the later marches by others against nuclear testing and environmental pollution. What could be more natural than a mass movement based on the maternal protection of the young?”*<sup>119</sup>

‘Naturalizing’ this maternal involvement in ‘citizen action’ created an ideal environment for the Alberta Board on Objectionable Publications to launch – especially with strong library connection. As Edwards and Saltman note many librarians, especially, “children’s librarians saw themselves as conduits and gatekeepers.”<sup>120</sup> With this assumed professional role, and “as agents of social control, librarians could prevent the moral harm that they believed would result from reading [‘objectionable’ literature].”<sup>121</sup> Returning to Figure 6 and the Board’s publicity visits throughout early 1955, this is exactly the message and intended takeaway from the article – the caption of which reads, “The Good and the Bad Side of Children’s Habits are shown above” juxtaposing ‘good’ such as reading books from the children’s department at the Calgary Public Library with ‘bad’ such as reading ‘objectionable materials.’ Seen in this lens, the Board

---

<sup>117</sup> “The Report,” *Calgary Herald* (June 13, 1955).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Oshinsky, *Polio*, 89.

<sup>120</sup> Edwards and Saltman, *Picturing Canada*, 41.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

continued to build on thoughts from individuals like Wertham that children needed to be led to ‘good’ reading, and that reading only existed in a dialectic good/bad. Viewed through this ‘flattened’ perspective, the Board was singularly focused on restricting (‘containing’) bad materials and promoting (‘uplifting’) the good – after all, 1956’s ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ was originally entitled, a Guide to ‘Good Reading.’ These ideas around restriction, the perceived need for the Board to serve as ‘community standard’, and the continued rebuttal that these efforts were not censorship would shape the Board in the years 1956-1962.

## Chapter 2: 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956-1962)

*"The 'comic' book problem is of world-wide concern. It has assumed such serious proportions that many governments, including those of Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the United Nations, have appointed committees to study this matter. In response to a growing outcry from parents, educators, religious leaders, and others, the Government of the Province of Alberta issued an Order in Council in 1954 which states:*

*...it is deemed advisable and in the public interest to establish a Board to be known as the ADVISORY BOARD ON OBJECTIONABLE PUBLICATIONS to study and investigate the question of crime and other objectionable comics and salacious magazines and to recommend effective action to prevent their sale and distribution in the province."<sup>122</sup>*

Alberta 1956. Images of valiant ships, fearless adventurers, tenacious scientists, and canonical figures like Huckleberry

Finn, all rendered in soft, inviting

pastels sprout from the mind of a curious young reader sprawled on the floor holding an apple, scanning an open text. Then, quite suddenly and cutting across these peaceful images, appears a darkened cloud with ominous figures wielding guns and groping scantily clad women - the

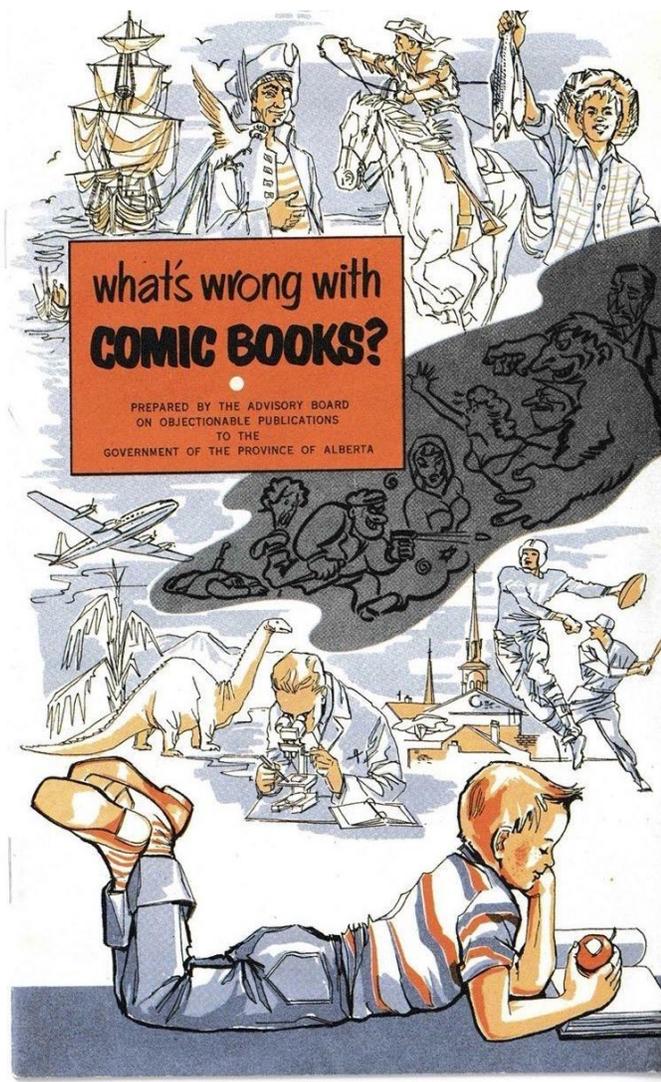


Figure 10: Front Cover, 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' 1956

<sup>122</sup> 'Why an Advisory Board?' in 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' 1956, pg 1. Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications sous-fonds (GR1968.0310 Box 33 Item 751), and (GR1992.0197), "What's Wrong with Comic Books?" Unprocessed. Special Collections, The Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton.

beckoning cloud of impending comic book violence. Stamped over the left-hand corner of this darkened cloud is a bright alertive orange box entitled: ***“What’s Wrong with Comic Books?”***: *“Prepared by the Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications to the Government of the Province of Alberta”* (Figure 10 above).

Released in Spring 1956, the fourteen-page pamphlet represented the Alberta Board’s first public outreach endeavor - directly targeting parents, teachers, libraries, and young readers themselves to educate about the eminent ‘danger’ of comic book reading. Included fully in the Appendix of this study, ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ was designed and printed in three eye-catching colours by local Edmonton printer, Hamley Press Ltd. Authorized by the Alberta Department of Economic Affairs with an initial print run of 25,000 copies, that was within one month increased to 40,000 copies, the pamphlet has six sections:

1. Two pages of introductory text first asking: **“Why an Advisory Board?”**, followed by one page directed to parents, **“Do You Know What Your Child is Reading?”** and featuring quotes from the Canadian Senate Hearings on Salacious and Indecent Literature, Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent*, and the Massey Report - all pointing to the urgent importance of ‘safeguarding’ the physical *and* mental well-being of children<sup>123</sup>
2. A four-page section entitled **“ ‘Comics’ are No Laughing Matter!”** and listing six major objections to comics - each supported by “selected opinions of recognized authorities”<sup>124</sup>:
  1. *Some ‘Comics’ Glorify Crime and Criminals: They Encourage the Commission of Crime and Contempt for Lawful Authority*
  2. *Some ‘Comics’ Present a Distorted Unhealthy and Immoral Concept of Sex and Marriage*
  3. *Some ‘Comics’ Foster Prejudice Against Class, Race, Creed, and Nationality*
  4. *Some ‘Comics’ Portray Violent Death, Grotesque, Fantastic and Unnatural Creatures with Repulsive Realism*
  5. *Most ‘Comics’ are Inartistic*
  6. *All ‘Comics’ are Detrimental to Good Reading Skills*

---

<sup>123</sup> What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ 1956, pg 1-2. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>124</sup> “ ‘Comics’ are No Laughing Matter!” in ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ 1956, pg 3-6. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

3. A one page “**Rating Scale**” rubric for parents to gauge, “how do the ‘comics’ in your home rate by these standards?” asking questions such as: “does the ‘comic’ glorify crime and criminals?” (Yes/No); “does it overemphasize sex?” (Yes/No)<sup>125</sup>
4. A two-page guide to “**Inexpensive Books**” noting “don’t leave a vacuum in your child’s reading. Limiting ‘comics’ should not deprive your child of reading material. You can substitute inexpensive good books for bad ‘comics’ “<sup>126</sup>
5. A three page ‘prescription’ entitled, “**Rx for ‘Comics’: Guiding Your Child to Good Reading**” and authored by Louise Riley, Chairman of the Alberta Library Board<sup>127</sup>
6. A one-page list of resources “**For Your Further Information**” including three selections from Frederic Wertham, a guide to ‘Acceptable Comics’ from the National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL), and ‘An Evaluation of Comic Books’ from the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books (Cincinnati, Ohio)<sup>128</sup>

A declarative sign off on the final page in all capital letters urges the pamphlet reader, “DO NOT FORGET THAT YOUR OPINION CARRIES WEIGHT” - reassuring them that “your retailer will feature worthwhile publications if you create the demand.”<sup>129</sup> ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ worked to establish Board as “socially accredited experts” – a needed component and ingredient for any panic.<sup>130</sup> Utilizing language in the first few pages about this “world-wide concern” also reflects ideas of ‘community standards’ and, in this instance, the Board’s belief that they were the right group of individuals to serve as these ‘experts’ advising on “the comic book problem” - and recommending action to fight this threat. The fourteen-page three colour pamphlet rendered in, ironically, comic-like illustrations (as in Figure 11 below) detailed the Board's objections to comic books and, crucially, introduced reading ‘standards’ and a list of

---

<sup>125</sup> “Rating Scale” in ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ 1956, pg 7. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>126</sup> “Inexpensive Books” in ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ 1956, pg 8. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>127</sup> “Rx for ‘Comics’: Guiding Your Child to Good Reading” in ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ 1956, pg 10-12. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>128</sup> “For Your Further Information” in ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ 1956, pg 13. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>129</sup> ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ 1956, pg 14. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>130</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils*, 1.

quality titles to uplift children and promote 'good reading.' 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?'

was the Board's version of 'Operation Good Reading.'

**"Comics" are No Laughing Matter!**

Busy parents only glance at comics because they have so little time or inclination to study them. The Advisory Board has made a careful and exhaustive study of both "comics" and expert opinion on them. As a result this pamphlet has been compiled by the Advisory Board for the guidance of parents and others concerned. The Board also urges parents to take time to appraise the comics their children read.

The Board's major objections to comics are listed below. Following each objection are selected opinions of recognized authorities.

**1** SOME "COMICS" GLORIFY CRIME AND CRIMINALS: THEY ENCOURAGE THE COMMISSION OF CRIME AND CONTEMPT FOR LAWFUL AUTHORITY.

Is the police official often less clever and resourceful than the criminal? Is he often outwitted even though the criminal is ultimately punished? Is the police officer the hero or is the villain really the hero? Whom will the children regard as their hero—the police officer or the villain?



*In my many years of Police experience, I have found no comedy in crime—only tragedy and broken homes. Children should be taught to respect the laws, and the law enforcement agencies, that they may not gain the erroneous impression, as they so often do from crime comics, that it is clever to evade the law and ridicule and hamper the efforts of law enforcement officers.*

— M. F. E. Anthony, Chief Constable, City of Edmonton, Assistant Commissioner, R.C.M. Police (retired) (former Director of Criminal Investigation R.C.M.P.)

**2** SOME "COMICS" PRESENT A DISTORTED, UNHEALTHY AND IMMORAL CONCEPT OF SEX AND MARRIAGE.

Will a detrimental impression of sex or marriage remain with your children?

*... if we break down the regard that we have for the sanctity of the human body and the fundamental relations between man and woman, we are destroying our civilization.*



*"A Guide is pure in thought and in mind and in deed." With so much literature denoting thought, speech and action of an impure and immoral nature available, it is very difficult to instill into Guides the proper conception of this law of purity.*

— Mrs. D. E. S. Wishart, Former Chief Commissioner of Canadian Girl Guides. (The Senate of Canada. Proceedings of the Special Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature.)

*The most subtle and pervading effect of crime comics on children can be summarized in a single phrase: Moral disarmament.*

— Wertham. *Seduction of the Innocent.*

*Crime "comics" are a contributing factor leading to juvenile delinquency.*

— Report of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics.

*The availability of salacious literature and presentation of any type which glorify crime make a mockery of democratic living and respect for order.*

— J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the F.B.I., U.S. Government.

Figure 11: 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956, pg 3-4)

As such, the pamphlet does not debate on the comics issue or any sense that not everyone considered this a "world-wide problem" – even though Fulton, during his testimony in the US Senate hearings, had allowed that not everyone in Canada was in agreement with him about the dangers of 'crime comics' and their 'link' to juvenile delinquency.<sup>131</sup> Instead all bumps of the debate were 'flattened' in the Board's first booklet and the evidence was portrayed as the result of an exhaustive survey by the Board consulting many sources and presenting it as a quick guide

<sup>131</sup> Hajdu, *Ten-Cent Plague*, 153.

for ‘busy’ parents, built on authoritative research. To further reiterate this, each of the Board’s six objections against comics on pages 3-6 of the pamphlet<sup>132</sup>, include one to three eye-catching and noteworthy sound bites of expert testimony from Canadian and American notables such as:

**#1 Some ‘Comics’ Glorify Crime and Criminals: They Encourage the Commission of Crime and Contempt for Lawful Authority**

*“Crime ‘comics’ are a contributing factor leading to juvenile delinquency”* (Report of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics)

**#2 Some ‘Comics’ Present a Distorted Unhealthy and Immoral Concept of Sex and Marriage**

*“The most subtle and pervading effect of crime comics on children can be summarized in a single phrase: moral disarmament”* (Frederic Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*)

**#3 Some ‘Comics’ Foster Prejudice Against Class, Race, Creed, and Nationality**

*“ ‘Comics’ which depict...race hatred impair the ethical development of children”* (Report of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics)

**#4 Some ‘Comics’ Portray Violent Death, Grotesque, Fantastic and Unnatural Creatures with Repulsive Realism**

*“One wonders what place they [comics portraying fear and horror] have in the life of a child other than to fill him with unnatural fears and forebodings”* (Mrs. C. W. Mellish, Children’s Reading Committee, The Canadian Home and School and Parent Federation)

**#5 Most ‘Comics’ are Inartistic**

*“Most comics could not be called artistic by any stretch of the imagination. They are cheap tawdry commercial reproductions that haven’t anything to do with art. The pictorial content seems to me most damaging to growing children, especially those with sensitive artistic notions”* (H. G. Glyde, Head of Fine Arts, University of Alberta)

**#6 All ‘Comics’ are Detrimental to Good Reading Skills**

*“No informed thought is given to the fact that far from instilling into children and adolescents a taste for books, the habit of reading ‘comics’ exclusively tends to destroy this taste. That is the most serious aspect of the matter. A people who thrives on comics will never progress beyond the digest stage and a nation of digest readers will never be a cultured nation.”* (The Senate of Canada, Proceedings of the Special Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature, 1952-53)

---

<sup>132</sup> ‘What’s Wrong with Comics?’ 1956, pg 3-6. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.



Starting on page 8 (righthand side Figure 12), the tone of the booklet shifts from ‘containment’ of comics to ‘uplift’ in identifying ‘Inexpensive Good Books.’ This focus on ‘uplift’ is continued through a three-page section entitled, “**Rx for ‘Comics’: Guiding Your Child to Good Reading**” (Figure 13). Including best practices from librarianship and education in the 1950s (and present day) such as making time to read together as a family and creating a ‘library’ at home with well stocked bookshelves, this section strikes a helpful and positive tone.

FAMOUS DOG STORIES, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
*Evans*. Derry: Airedale of the Frontier  
*Evans*. Derry's Partner  
*Kjelgaard*. Big Red  
*Kjelgaard*. Irish Red  
*Kjelgaard*. Snow Dog  
*Knight*. Lassie Come Home  
*Lathrop*. Juneau, The Sleigh Dog

YOUNG READERS' BOOKSHELF, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.29  
 Young Readers' Baseball Stories  
 Young Readers' Basketball Stories  
 Young Readers' Football Stories

THRUSHWOOD BOOKS, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
*Seaton*. The Biography of a Grizzly  
*Tarkington*. Penrod

BIG LEAGUE BASEBALL LIBRARY, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
*DiMaggio*. Lucky to be a Yankee  
*Young*. Roy Campanella

FAMOUS SPORTS STORIES, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
*Emery*. High, Inside!  
*McCormick*. Flying Tackle

TRIPLE TITLE SERIES, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
 Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys  
 Fun, Fun, Fun

FOR YOUNGER READERS

LITTLE GOLDEN LIBRARY BOOKS, 39c  
 Animals of Farmer Jones  
 Brave Cowboy Bill  
 Christmas in the Country  
 Gingerbread Man  
 Golden Goose  
 Hansel and Gretel  
 The Musicians of Bremen  
 Little Red Hen  
 Little Red Riding Hood  
 Madeline  
 Nursery Tales  
 Puss in Boots  
 Scuffy, the Tugboat  
 Singing Games  
 Thumbelina  
 Topsy Turvey Circus  
 Twelve Dancing Princesses  
 Year in the City  
 Year on the Farm

PUFFIN PICTURE BOOKS, Montreal. *Penguin Books (Canada) Ltd.*, 50c and 60c  
*Courtney*. A Book of Trains  
*Hardy and Megoran*.  
 A Book of Ships  
*Stroud*. Airliners

Additional titles may be obtained from: Children's Books for \$1.25 or Less—  
 Association for Childhood Education, 1200 15th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

# Rx

FOR "COMICS"

## Guiding Your Child to Good Reading

**TREASURE TO SHARE**

Everyone loves a good story. Reading has been the chief delight of generations of children. If it is losing its appeal for them, may it not be partly because we adults, amid all the distractions of the modern world, have ourselves forgotten the magic to be found in books?

We must enlarge our own knowledge and renew our own sense of wonder in books before we can transmit this enthusiasm to a child. We cannot teach him to value books unless he sees them around the home on shelves and tables, and unless he observes that they are important to us and that we get pleasure from them.

**READING . . . A FAMILY ADVENTURE**

If parents repeat nursery rhymes to babies, if they share picture books, tell stories and read to older children, they will not only be giving pleasure to the children, but they will be giving them the opportunity to grow unconsciously in imagination and in mental capacity.

It is important that families make time to read together. There are books that appeal to all ages. Alice in Wonderland, The Jungle Books, The Wind in the Willows, Charlette's Web and many others have no age limit. Fairy tales and hero stories are as full of wisdom for adults as for children.



Figure 13: 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956, pg 9-10)

‘**Rx for Comics**’ also includes resources and recommendations for parents to steer young readers in the direction of ‘good reading’ and describes the active role a librarian can play in this process (Figure 14 below). Louise Riley, Chairman of the Alberta Library Board, authored this

section and, despite the generally uplifting tone, Riley does add a stern caution advising parental vigilance because, “when a child has learned to read, he is naturally eager to practice this new skill. He will read whatever is available. Unfortunately, it is often the tawdry and unworthy book that is at hand.” The takeaway is that while parents should encourage young readers, children should waste no time on unworthy books. As a practical conclusion to this section, ‘**Rx for Comics**’ recommends two buying guides for ‘good children’s books’ available at the public library or Cultural Activities Branch (Dept of Economic Affairs):

- (1) Books for Boys and Girls edited by Jean Thomson of the Toronto Public Library
- (2) Junior Bookshelf “compiled especially for the children of Alberta by Grace McDonald and Dorothy Rogers, Children’s Librarians of the Public Libraries of Edmonton and Calgary”

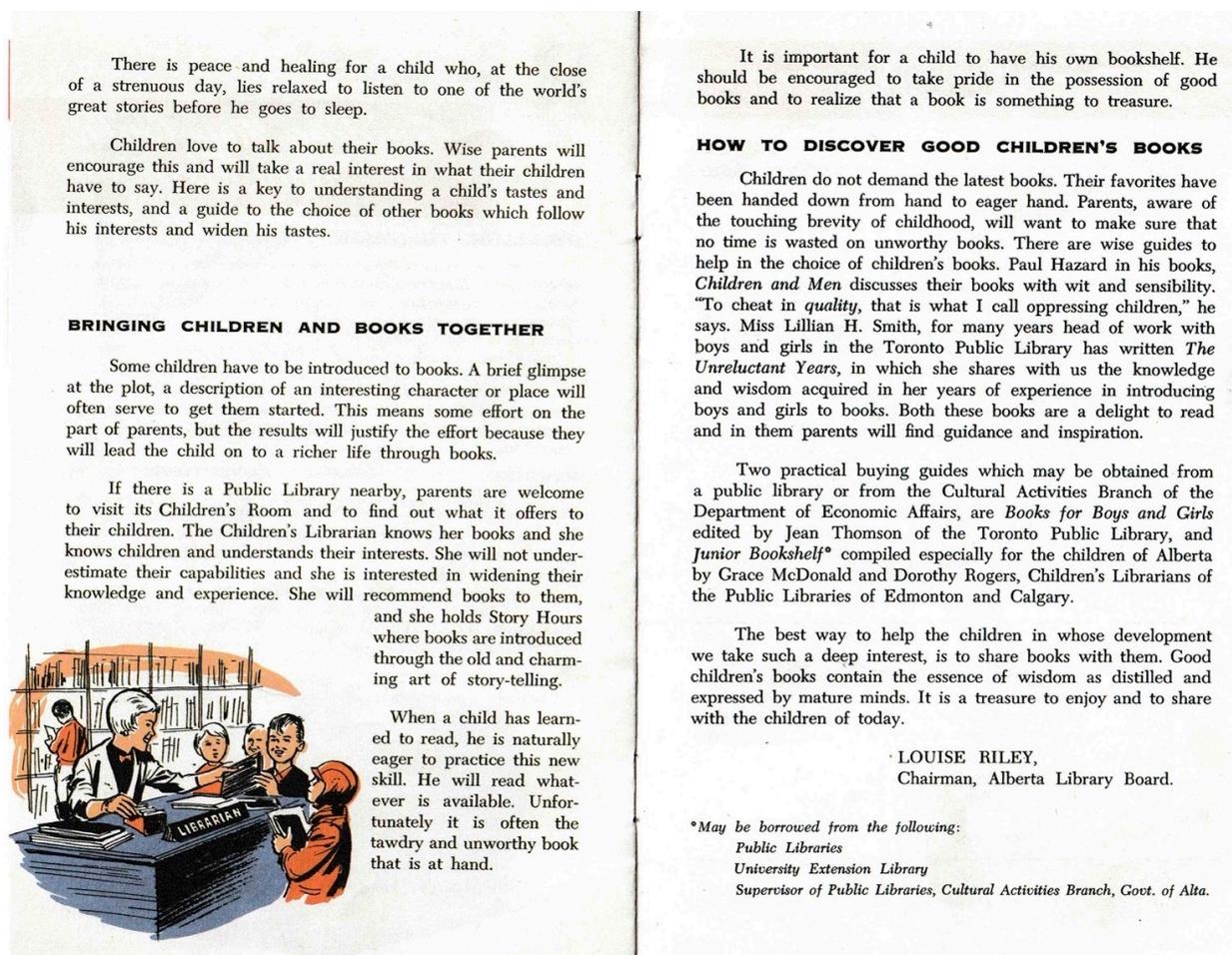


Figure 14: 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956, pg 11-12)

The Louise Riley branch of the Calgary Public Library opened in 1959; named after Loise Riley, the branch's namesake is remembered as, "a beloved children's librarian and author" well known for her storytime sessions and her widespread encouragement of children's reading.

\*\*\*\*\*

'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' wraps up with a "**For Your Further Information**" section (Figure 15). Scanning this section, the strong transnational influence of other American 'citizen action' committees is apparent. 'An Evaluation of Comic Books' from the Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books (Cincinnati) is included as well as the 'Acceptable Comics' list from NODL (Chicago) plus three readings from Wertham. No Canadian resources are included.

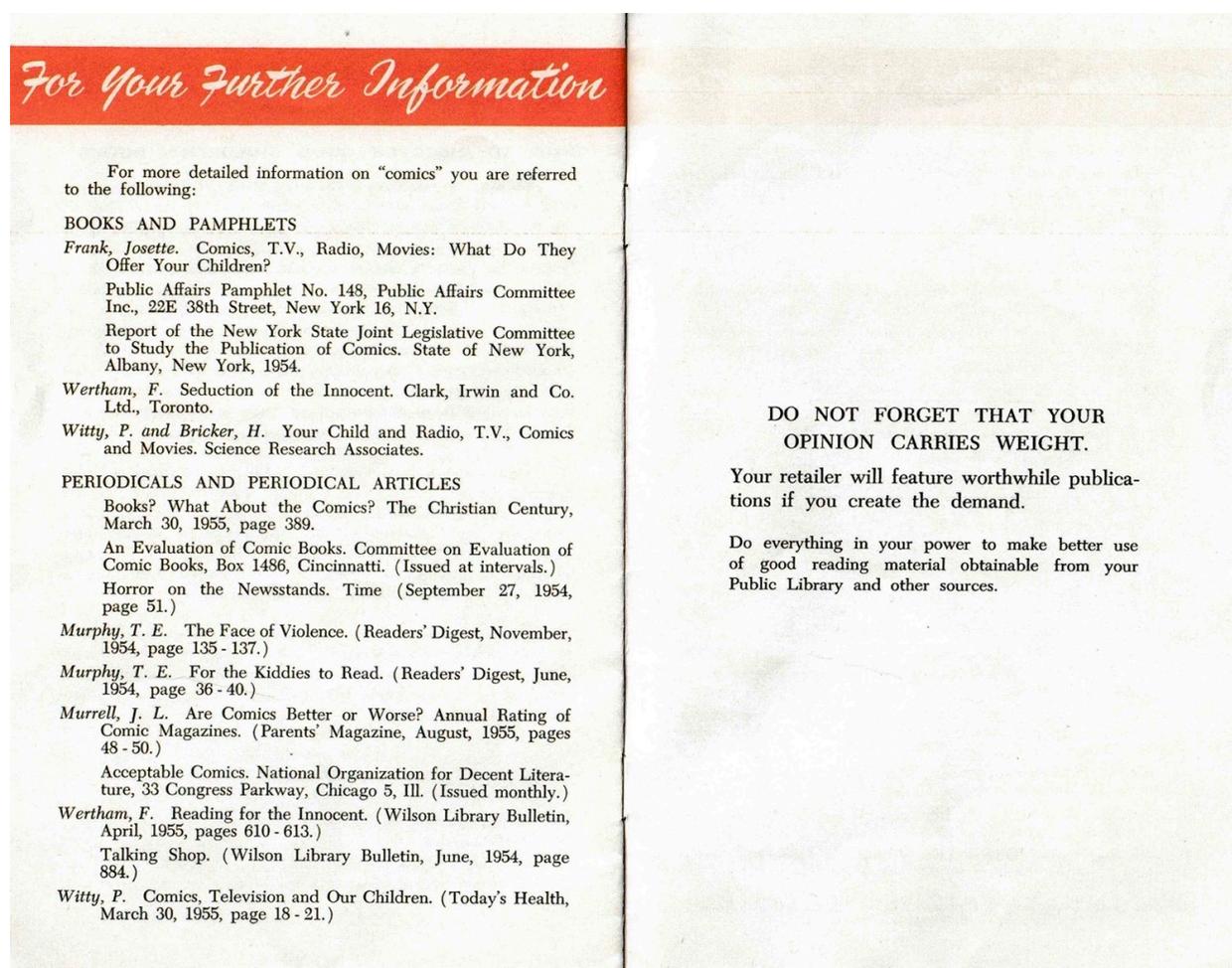


Figure 15: 'What's Wrong with Comic Books?' (1956 pg 13-14)

With the final pamphlet sign off and a call to action to “do everything in your power to make better use of good reading material obtainable from your Public Library and other sources” (righthand side of Figure 15) the Board persuasively appeals to popular ideas of public health, child wellness, and ‘citizenship’ in Cold War Canada. Reading initiatives, developing a sense of community, and regulating certain values also appear in Kristine Alexander’s “Canadian Girls, Imperial Girls, Global Girls: Race, Nation and Transnationalism in the Interwar Girl Guide Movement.”<sup>134</sup> Alexander describes how Guiding-led recommended readings and transnational correspondence with ‘sister guides’ were underpinned by a mission of ‘Canadianization’ and ‘ideals of British citizenship.’<sup>135</sup>

Ideas around reading and citizenship are also described in Iacovetta’s *Gatekeepers* Chapter on ‘Shaping the Democratic Family.’<sup>136</sup> Iacovetta includes a story from *Macleans* in 1950 in which a Polish family from Warsaw ‘talks back’ to Canadians relaying some positives from their experiences so far (such as the culmination of their suburban dreams with the purchase of a house and car) and some negatives (including their frustration with Canadian child raising and attitudes around idleness). However, there was consensus on comic books - “the Zarambas said they let their children ‘do most things’ but, interestingly, drew the line at comic books because they ‘breed lazy reading’.” Iacovetta adds, “the child experts and lobbyists would have been delighted.”<sup>137</sup> This point is further echoed in Board’s sixth objection to comic books (All ‘Comics’ are Detrimental to Good Reading Skills) and the corresponding expert testimony that they include from the 1952-1952 Canadian Senate Committee on Salacious and Indecent

---

<sup>134</sup> Alexander, “Canadian Girls, Imperial Girls,” 283-284.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 191.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

Literature that, “a people who thrive on comics will never progress beyond the digest stage and a nation of digest readers will never be a cultured nation.”<sup>138</sup>

Between 1956-1957 more than 40,000 copies of ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ were sent out by the Alberta Board and the Alberta Department of Economic Affairs to Alberta organizations; libraries and schools in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Quebec; American counterparts in the National office of Decent Literature and Cincinnati Committee, as well as 100 copies of the pamphlet that were sent for distribution to conference attendees at the 1956 Annual Conference of the Canadian Library Association (CLA) in Niagara Falls, ON.

The Board kept detailed records of the total distribution of ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ and what is notable is the large number of heavily connected, transnational women’s organizations, religious groups and youth fellowships who were the eager recipients of the fourteen-page pamphlet. These groups include the still-prominent Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, and the YMCA / YWCA, as well as advocacy groups well affiliated and influential at time like the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.)<sup>139</sup>, the Alberta Women’s Institute (AWI)<sup>140</sup>, the Catholic Women’s League (CWL), and the Farm Women’s Union of Alberta (FWUA)<sup>141</sup>. The AWI historically has been one of the most influential women’s organizations in Western

---

<sup>138</sup> ‘What’s Wrong with Comics?’ 1956, pg 6. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>139</sup> IODE was incorporated as a Canadian women's organization by a special act of the Parliament of Canada in 1917. Their byline is “IODE...women dedicated to a better Canada” and their focus is Children, Education and Community Services, Accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.iode.ca/>.

<sup>140</sup> Alberta Women’s Institute (AWI), “About AWI,” Accessed July 13, 2021. <http://awi.athabascau.ca/About/> In 1955, ‘crime comics’ and ‘objectionable literature’ also served as one of the keynote presentations at the AWI’s 50th anniversary Education Program, ‘Progress to Peace’ on May 31, 1955.

<sup>141</sup> “The Farm Women’s Union of Alberta was organized in 1949, a re-organization of United Farm Women of Alberta. The aim of the FWUA was a prosperous agriculture community with a focus on improved educational, health and welfare services for the farm family” Accessed July 13, 2021 <https://southpeacearchives.org/finding-aids/farm-womens-union-of-alberta-canuck-local-105-fonds/>.

Canada, with strong reach nationally. Its motto is, “For Home and Country” and prominent members have included ‘Famous Five’ members Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy.<sup>142</sup> In addition, the FWUA and AWI, though Alberta organizations, were affiliated with the transnational Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) based in the UK and with current membership of nine million across eighty countries.<sup>143</sup>

Building on two items of correspondence in the Board files<sup>144</sup>, the following table tracks the distribution and allocation of ½ (~15,000) of the total 30,000 copies of ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ distributed in the province of Alberta in April/May 1956 to community groups:

Council on Child and Family Welfare, Calgary	300
Government Publicity Bureau (Mr. E. Bryant)	500
Edmonton Members of the Advisory Board and Office	2000
Public Libraries	3400
• Edmonton Public Library (1000)	
• Medicine Hat Public Library (200)	
• Lethbridge Public Library (400)	
• Calgary Public Library (1000)	
• Rural Libraries in Alberta (500) 750?	
I.O.D.E. Headquarters, Calgary	2000
Alberta Federation of Home and School Associations	5000
Farm Women’s Union	800
Women’s Institute	200
Girl Guide Association (Alberta)	200
Boy Scout (Alberta)	300
Junior Hospital League	100
Edmonton Community Leagues	55
Catholic Women’s League	140
Edmonton Ministerial Association	175
Catholic Diocese of Edmonton	100
YWCA (Edmonton)	25
YMCA (Edmonton)	25

<sup>142</sup> AWI, “About AWI.”

<sup>143</sup> The ACWW was founded in 1929 following the International Council of Women and has held Consultative Status with the United Nations since 1947, Accessed July 13, 2021, <http://www.acww.org.uk/>

<sup>144</sup> Figures in this table are aggregated from information utilizing two letters in the Board collection: (1) Anna P. Maure, Chairman to Mrs. D. Teviotdale, President, Women’s University Club (May 4, 1956) and (2) Anna P. Maure, Chairman to Mr. R. R. Moore, Deputy Director of Economic Affairs, Government of Alberta (undated - found in same stack as 1956 letter to Mrs. D. Teviotdale). Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

Based on correspondence in the Board files, the massive mailout of ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ was well received and involved the Board networking with numerous levels of community, educational, and transnational stakeholders. In writing to the President of the Women’s University Club, Anna Maure, Board Chairman in 1956, asked for “your assistance in helping to outlaw objectionable publications...promoting interest in good reading seems to me a most valuable project. It will promote good education and promote good citizenship in Alberta.”<sup>145</sup> The Board also received a thank you from the NODL for passing along “What's Wrong with Comic Books?” and a few extra lines of correspondence that passed along “congratulations on your success with the distributors in Alberta who are withdrawing publications at your request.”<sup>146</sup>

But perhaps the most tremendous mark of success of ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ arrived in the form of a letter mailed shortly after booklet’s publication in April 1956, written by the Honourable E. Davie Fulton who remarked<sup>147</sup>

*“Since the Criminal Code now provides penalties, I would like to see the pattern established that any of those who persist in selling publications which offend under the Code will be prosecuted. I believe that obvious signs of determination on the part of law enforcement agencies at the provincial and local level will do a very great deal towards discouraging the production and distribution of this harmful material.*

*“The efforts of organizations such as yours in pointing out so clearly to the public the dangers will be very helpful in creating the demand for effective enforcement. Once again may I express my congratulations and appreciation.”*

*Yours sincerely,  
E. D. Fulton*

As 1956 closed out, debates over the Board’s role and its involvement in ‘effective enforcement’ would become a larger issue publicly that the Board would have to answer to.

---

<sup>145</sup> Anna P. Maure, Chairman to Mrs. D. Teviotdale, President, Women’s University Club (May 4, 1956). Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>146</sup> John S Brennan (NODL) to Anna Maure, April 25, 1956. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>147</sup> E. D. Fulton to Mrs. A. J. Maure, Chairman, April 20, 1956. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

However, privately and publicly, the Board continued to maintain their stance as an ‘advisory board’, noting in Meeting Minutes from March 1957 that, “the Board is autonomous and is not therefore subject to regular government editing. The main point to get across to the people is that we are not a censorship board.”<sup>148</sup> In discussing the Chicago Committee, Twomey describes how the group’s ‘extragovernmental’ powers constituted censorship and suppression. In the Alberta case, though the group considered themselves ‘not subject to regular government editing’ and knowingly occupied an influential place with law enforcement, they did not see themselves as censors – nor acknowledge this paradoxical role.

A News Release on March 7, 1957, from the Alberta Government notes that, “while the first objective of the Board is discouragement of distribution of objectionable materials and crime comics among young people, it is equally interested in encouraging good reading habits among teenagers. Organizations in eight Canadian provinces have sought information on functions and methods of operations of the board, as have several American organizations. Eight hundred and fifty copies of the Board’s booklet, ‘*What’s Wrong with Comic Books*’ have been sold to such groups while some 30,000 copies have been distributed within Alberta.”<sup>149</sup>

Item #9 on the Board Meeting Agenda for November 24, 1958, is, ‘Interview with Mr. Brown, Provincial News.’<sup>150</sup> Board Minutes note that Mr. Bruce Peel will be conducting the interview; page 4 includes the following quotes describing the interview with Mr. Brown which is excerpted here from the Board Meeting Minutes:<sup>151</sup>

- After talking to fellow distributors at an industry meeting earlier that month about *Provincial News* relationship with the Board, Mr. Brown described that he felt such

---

<sup>148</sup> Board Meeting Minutes March 4/5, 1957. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>149</sup> Press News Release, March 7, 1957. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>150</sup> Board Meeting Minutes, Nov 24, 1958. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

conversations “...would help other distributors to realize the co-operation existing and **required** [emphasis mine] between themselves and the Board” (1st paragraph)

- The next paragraph of the Board minutes includes the following sentence, seemingly appearing out of context, but potentially relating to Mr. Brown’s level of concern or anxiety during the interview. The next note in the Board Minutes reads as follow: “Mr. Brown said that **he would not like to become involved with the law** [emphasis mine]. He has no intention of becoming a ‘guinea pig’ although he had been offered publishers’ support if he were ‘in trouble’ for not co-operating with the Board.” (2nd paragraph)
- Yet in the following paragraph, Mr. Brown started to show what could be frustration or fear when he “mentioned that he has experienced **a loss of revenue of \$600.00 a month** [emphasis mine] through the removal of some of these magazines and it may be necessary to decrease his staff. Regardless of this, he would continue to co-operate with the Board.” (3rd paragraph)

Earlier and just before Mr. Brown’s interview, the Board had been joined by the Alberta Deputy Attorney-General who, as described in the Board Meeting Minutes, has “mentioned that the Attorney General would assist in prosecution if the Board ever found it necessary. At this timely moment Mr. Brown of Provincial News, arrived. The Board appreciated the co-incidence.”<sup>152</sup>

In the 1987 *Calgary Herald* article on Darren Ott’s arrest, Dickin McGinnis had speculated about ‘why?’ crime comics disappeared - wondering if, in lieu of actual prosecution from the mid-1950s-1980s, police had “...used threats of prosecution under the [obscenity] section to force individual retailers to remove their stock from the stories' ' noting the impact of this suggestive pressure.<sup>153</sup> Yet what Dickin McGinnis, or seemingly anyone at the time of Ott’s arrest, did not realize is that someone - something - was putting pressure on the retailers and vendors and it was not the police - it was the Alberta Board on Objectionable Publications.

---

<sup>152</sup> Board Meeting Minutes, Nov 24, 1958, pg. 4.

<sup>153</sup> Dickin McGinnis, “Police wield obscure law.” For example, after the 1987 raid on Ott’s store, other comic shops preemptively pruned their shelves of ‘obscene materials’ in fear of similar seizures. Ott’s arrest was effective as an act of prosecution -- and for the threat of prosecution to others.

There was consciousness to what the Board was doing, as evidenced by the Board Minutes in 1958; publicly using language of comics ‘fear’ - while privately acknowledging that the comics threat has passed, yet still leveraging it for increased powers of ‘effective enforcement.’ Even in early 1955, before the publication of ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’, there was discussion that comic sales *were* down. In *The Calgary Herald* article from March 9, 1955 (Figure 6), “wholesalers agreed the sale of comic books has dropped since the public has become aware of the objectionable nature of some publications.”<sup>154</sup> Yet, despite the reduction in ‘salacious’ quality of images (due to the Comics Code) and the acknowledged drop in sales, the Board’s message remained one of urgency and vigilance.

In the years, 1956-1962 the Alberta Board not only successfully lobbied for increased discussions of ‘good reading’ on a provincial and national level, but also leveraged the still-present ‘fear’ of comics to successfully institutionalize and operationalize newsstand censorship in Alberta. However, the Board’s self-appointed role to gauge ‘community standards’ was not without critics.<sup>155</sup> This push and pull between the Board’s public statements that they were ‘advisory’ only and ‘not a censor’ contradicted private actions to restrict sales and titles making it to newsstands. In the 1960s-70s, this type of criticism over the Board’s place would only intensify in Alberta - as similar discussions over ‘censorship’ and civil liberties percolated throughout North America.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> “Public’s Aid is Urged,” *Calgary Herald* (Mar 9, 1955).

<sup>155</sup> As in “Lulling Parents Back into Apathy,” *Calgary Herald* (Jun 13, 1955).

<sup>156</sup> In May 1955, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released a white paper entitled, “ ‘Censorship of Comic Books’: A Statement in Opposition on Civil Liberties Grounds.”

### Chapter 3: 'The Choice is Yours' (1962-1976)

#### *"The Choice Is Yours..."*

*Do you set an example to your children for reading good books using public library facilities and purchasing and making available in the home interesting and well written books for your children?*

*Do you assist your children and selecting reading material do you advise them and give guidance to them in their selection of library books?*

*Do you place reasonable and enforceable restrictions on your child's reading of comic books and magazines?*

*Do you know what your child reads in his or her spare time both inside the home and away from the home?*

*If every parent could answer yes to the above questions, there would be no necessity for the creation or continuance of The Advisory Board on objectionable Publications what it all comes down to is - the choice is yours."<sup>157</sup>*

Though entitled, 'The Choice is Yours', the Board's second pamphlet (Figure 17), published in 1962, would come to symbolize the continued push and pull over individual citizen rights and

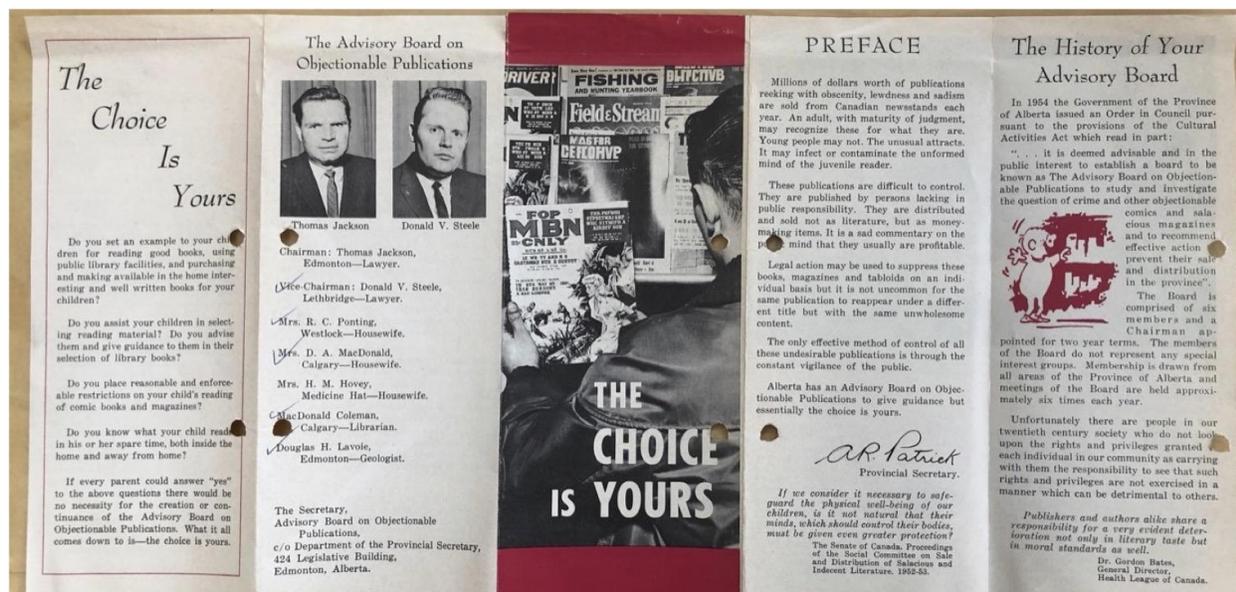


Figure 16: 'The Choice is Yours' (1962)

<sup>157</sup> 'The Choice is Yours' 1962. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

freedoms - and the Board role as 'community standard.' The years 1962-1976 were marked by three pivotal moments for the Board: the publication of their 1962 pamphlet, 'The Choice is Yours'; increased scrutiny on the part of the Board towards other 'salacious' literature - particularly magazines that they feared could fall into the hands of children and therefore should be contained, such as *Playboy* [1962] and *Rolling Stone* [1969]; and the intensified public scrutiny over the Board's decisions and operations. The Board's actions were now increasingly publicly seen as 'censorship' - not 'containment'; these perceptions seem to foreshadow the impending official demise of the Board in 1976, and its de facto end of operations in 1971.

In correspondence from March 1962, the Board noted that they were still shipping out copies of '*What's Wrong with Comic Books?*' but promised that a new pamphlet was on its way. In the Board's files are several versions in the years 1961-1962 of a mock-up for what this follow up pamphlet might be. After several revisions, including one entitled, 'Lewd Literature', the Board's second pamphlet for public outreach was released in May 1962 (Figure 16 above). Featuring photos of Board Chair at the time, Thomas Jackson (Edmonton - lawyer), and Vice Chair, Donald V. Steele (Lethbridge - lawyer) the left-hand side of the pamphlet addresses parents directly asking parents to rate their own awareness – and concluding that, "*if every parent could answer yes to the above questions, there would be no necessity for the creation or continuance of The Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications what it all comes down to is - the choice is yours.*"<sup>158</sup> The Board here continues their platform as 'community standard' – voicing the possible options for citizens, but then, in the next instance, chiding the parents almost in a paternalistic way that they 'need' the oversight, care, and attention the Board can bring.

---

<sup>158</sup> 'The Choice is Yours' 1962. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

Following these opening questions, ‘The Choice is Yours’ then includes a Preface written by Alberta Provincial Secretary A.R. Patrick:

*Millions of dollars’ worth of publications reeking with **obscenity, lewdness and sadism** [emphasis mine] are sold from Canadian newsstands each year. An adult, with maturity of judgment, may recognize these for what they are. Young people may not. The unusual attracts. **It may infect or contaminate the uninformed mine of the juvenile reader** [emphasis mine].*

*These publications are difficult to control. They are published by persons lacking in public responsibility. They are distributed and sold not as literature, but as money making items. It is a sad commentary on the public mind that they usually are profitable.*

*Legal action may be used to suppress these books, magazines, and tabloids on an individual basis, but it is not uncommon for the same publication to reappear under a different title but with the same unwholesome content.*

*The only effective method of control of all these undesirable publications is through the **constant vigilance of the public** [emphasis mine].*

*Alberta has an Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications to give guidance but essentially the choice is yours.*

In both the Preface and introductory questions, the Board continues to utilize the language of public health carried over the comics ‘moral panic’ with such phrases as “infect” and “contaminate” young minds. This continues to perpetuate ideas from the 1940s-50s that young minds *need* to be guided and protected, and, if parents were not prepared to do so, then someone had to protect the public ‘good’ and fight this battle against “obscenity, lewdness and sadism.” The pamphlet strikes a tone of fear with its mention of the need for “constant vigilance of the public” and the perception that salacious materials, unless constant surveillance is kept, will ‘reappear’ under the cloak of new, nefarious titles.

This push and pull between the acknowledgement of individual rights and yet the perceived need for a group like the Alberta Board to serve as ‘community standards’ reflects the paradoxical gatekeeping mentality in Cold War Canada.<sup>159</sup> This juxtaposition would colour the Board’s tenure in the years 1962-1976, years in which the Board experienced waning public support as they migrated their central attention away from comic books and ‘uplifting’ children to intensified newsstand scrutiny - which, for the first time, started to significantly impact the access to reading materials of adults in the province and brought an uncomfortable scrutiny to

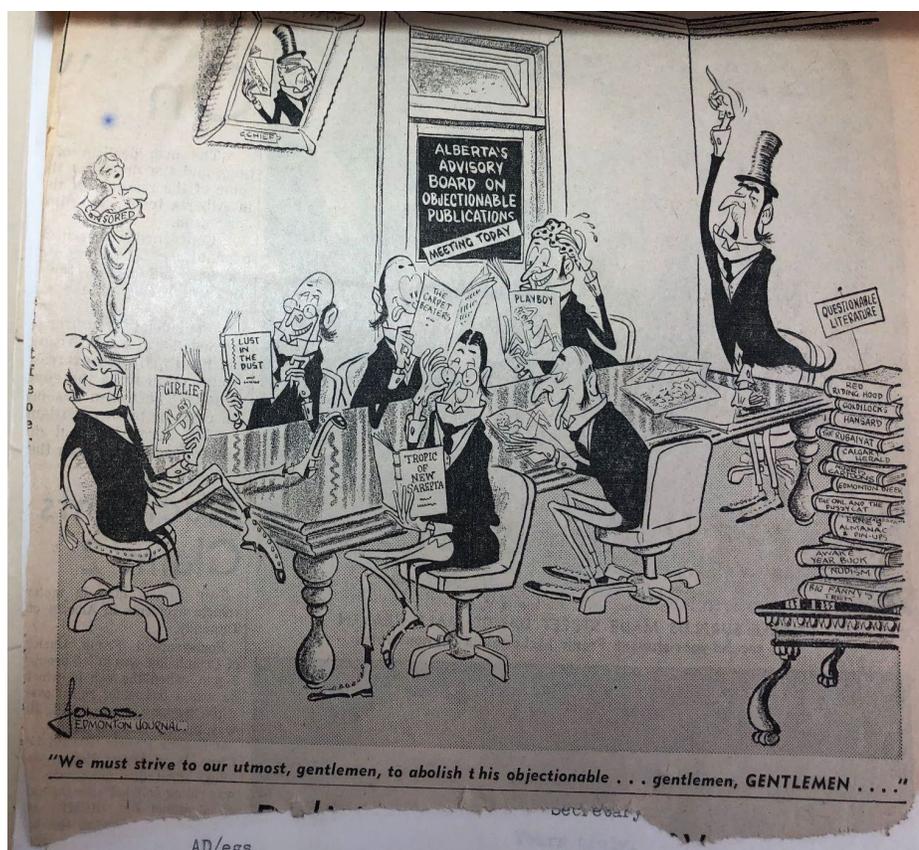


Figure 17: Yardley Jones, *Edmonton Journal* September 28, 1962.

the Board’s actions as evidenced in an internal memo written by outgoing Chair Thomas Jackson in 1962.<sup>160</sup> Jackson wrote that he believed the best use of the Board is as a “watchdog committee”

<sup>159</sup> Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers*, 50.

<sup>160</sup> Jackson resignation (1962). Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

and he does not believe the committee should be educating the public about ‘good reading’ as enough other groups do that. He acknowledged the Board’s adverse publicity as of late, writing “the press, quite understandably, is vitally concerned with any apparent encroachment upon freedom of expression and thus much editorial comment is adverse.”<sup>161</sup> Though Jackson does not include explicit mention of the decision to ban *Playboy* in 1962, this Board action was well reported - and mocked - in local newspapers such as this political cartoon from the *Edmonton Journal* (Figure 17 above) which was included amongst the newspaper clippings in the Board’s files for Oct/Nov 1962.<sup>162</sup>

Seen in Figure 17, the Board is depicted as a group of upstanding ‘gentlemen’ complete with fine attire – viewing ‘obscene’ materials and seeming to delight in the images, while the Board Chair attempts to bring the group to order proclaiming, “We must strive to our utmost, gentlemen, to abolish this objectionable...gentlemen, GENTLEMEN...”<sup>163</sup> The gentleman in the center of the frame wiping his brow (presumably from salaciously provoked sweat) is reading a copy of *Playboy*. Seen in the left-hand side of the image is Greco-Roman style bust of a woman - with a banner across her naked chest reading, ‘censorship.’ The political cartoon exposes the inherent humorous nature of the Board’s evaluation process in which ‘upstanding’ citizens sat around a table examining in detail – together - salacious literature and then discussing whether this was ‘objectionable.’

This public image of how the Board is perceived seems forefront in Jackson’s resignation letter as he concluded the correspondence by stating, “I think that you will agree it is far more desirable that the Board err in its judgment of a title in favor of the title than that the Board

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Yardley Jones, *Edmonton Journal* (September 28, 1962). Found in Board folder of items (correspondence, meeting minutes, and newspaper clippings) from 1962. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>163</sup> Jones. *Edmonton Journal* (1962). Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

acquire a reputation of being severe, or harsh, or prudish.”<sup>164</sup> Finally, he cautions, “above all, I would recommend that the Board do not lose sight of the principle which it has already established - namely, that it is concerned with limiting the availability of objectionable written material to children and adolescents.”<sup>165</sup> This concern about losing sight had been a concern with the ‘crime comics’ addition to the obscenity clause since 1948/1949 when first introduced. In 1949, British Columbia Attorney-General Gordon S. Wismer, though supportive of limiting the availability of ‘crime comics’, worried that changing the Criminal Code and expanding the definition of ‘obscene’ materials in Canada could create the “possibility of a censorship board” – a prospect that he deemed “a very dangerous precedent.”<sup>166</sup>

A ‘forgotten’ newsstand censor in a province like Alberta may seem surprising yet this ‘Maverick’ province has always been a land of contradictions. Aritha Van Herk fittingly describes Alberta’s politics and provincial culture as, “unstable, eccentric, susceptible to unpredictable fluctuations in opinion and moment...sometimes called pluralism, sometimes called grassroots, sometimes called populism, and sometimes called downright mean and ornery.”<sup>167</sup> While Alberta had a film censor, a liquor control board (‘mixed’ drinking between men and women was not commonplace until the late 1960s), a significant eugenics and institutionalization program, and a long-standing conservative leadership under Social Credit Premier Ernest Manning (1943-1968), it also had strong historic beliefs around perceived censorship, including freedom of the press and what was purchased and printed for the newsstands. In mid-1938, the *Edmonton Journal* received special recognition from the Pulitzer

---

<sup>164</sup> Jackson resignation (1962). Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> “Censorship seen in banning comics,” *The Edmonton Journal* (November 19, 1949).

<sup>167</sup> Aritha Van Herk, *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* (Toronto: Viking [Penguin Publishing Group], 2001), 349.

Prize Committee for “its editorial leadership against the Accurate News and Information Act, in defense of the freedom of the press.”<sup>168</sup> Earlier that year, in March 1938, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled Alberta’s ‘Accurate News and Information Act’ unconstitutional.<sup>169</sup> Under the so-called ‘Press Act’, Alberta newspapers were beholden to Alberta Premier William ‘Bible Bill’ Aberhart – so known for his strong ‘Christian’ beliefs - and the ruling Social Credit Board party. Under the Press Act, the Premier and members of the Ruling Party could compel “...papers to publish any ‘correction’ or ‘amplification’ issued by the chair of the Social Credit Board.”<sup>170</sup> It also includes broad powers enabling the Premier and his party to force papers to reveal private information of sources, as well veto power to cease and suspend any newspapers found to be ‘noncompliant.’<sup>171</sup>

By 1967 scrutiny over the Board's role continued to intensify. *The Calgary Herald* on November 1, 1967, carried the following byline by writer, Bill Musselwhite: “Nobody Will Claim Censor’s Role - But Books Get Banned.”<sup>172</sup> Musselwhite’s article described how the Board's actions were, in their words, ‘not censorship’ and they continued to describe their official role as ‘an advisor’ - yet Musselwhite noted that there was ‘no appeal’ process for the public to counter these decisions<sup>173</sup>. In an included rebuttal quote to this criticism, Board representative Mr. Shapiro explained that an appeal was ‘not necessary’ because it was the

---

<sup>168</sup> The Pulitzer Prizes, ‘Edmonton Journal’ <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/edmonton-journal> When the Edmonton Journal and other Alberta papers won in 1938, it was the first time the award had been given outside of the United States.

<sup>169</sup> Paula Simons, "Eighty years ago, the Edmonton Journal won a Pulitzer Prize. Let's remember why." *Edmonton Journal*, May 2, 2018. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/paula-simons-eighty-years-ago-the-edmonton-journal-won-a-pulitzer-prize-lets-remember-why/>

<sup>170</sup> Simons, “Eighty years ago.”

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. Under the Press Act, *Edmonton Journal* columnist Don C. Brown was briefly arrested and incarcerated by the RCMP for his refusal to print a retraction. Upon his release, Aberhart, “cautioned [Brown that] his government would not hesitate to take action against any newspaper that published what he deemed ‘false information.’ “

<sup>172</sup> Bill Musselwhite, “Nobody Will Claim Censor’s Role,” *Calgary Herald* (November 1, 1967).

<sup>173</sup> Musselwhite, “Nobody Will Claim,” (Nov 1, 1967).

distributors, not the Board, who were withdrawing the materials.<sup>174</sup> Yet, returning to the 1958 incident with the Provincial News, the ‘choice’ distributors and vendors felt they had was minimal, and they worked under the threat of criminal prosecution.

This coercive force and special ‘working partnership’ with law enforcement was most evident during the tenure of last active Board Chair, Aleta Vikse (1969-1971). Remembered in Todd Babiak’s *Just Getting Started: Edmonton Public Library’s First 100 Years, 1913-2013*, as a mentor and leader in the public library system who had “...done a marvelous job of creating a sense [of community] among the librarians,”<sup>175</sup> Vikse was a remarkably efficient, industrious, and thorough Board Chair. During her run as Board Chair, her practice was to send out a typewritten memo each time a title was added to the ‘objectionable’ materials list ensuring that local and provincial police departments were alerted. In files for 1969 alone there are dozens, if not hundreds, of neatly typewritten memos sent to Chiefs of Police in Alberta’s major cities, the RCMP, and the Attorney General’s Office. Often these memos appeared courtesy of Vikse’s day job with stationary from the ‘Edmonton Public Library.’

Vikse also took a strident stance on the Board’s role and wielded significant administrative vigor in assuring that board’s ‘community standards’ were implemented province wide. Involved with the Board since its planning stages in 1954/1955, Vikse was the Assistant Director at the Edmonton Public Library for almost twenty years. Vikse features prominently in the Babiak’s history of the Edmonton Public Library remembered almost as an erasable elder aunt. In a section entitled, “Sex” Babiak writes that R-rated books in ‘those days’ (the 1960s/1970s) were under lock and key but notes that that the librarians were still willing to assist

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Todd Babiak, *Just Getting Started: Edmonton Public Library’s First 100 Years, 1913-2013* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2013) 157.

patrons to assess this ‘scandalous’ content, arguing that it was all part and parcel of Library Director Coburn and Assistant Director Vikse’s commitment to create a culture of popular reading materials at the library to revitalize library use and patron engagement.<sup>176</sup> Babiak does not call this type of behavior ‘gatekeeping’ or restrictive - instead there is a tone of paternalism (or maternalism) ‘advising’ patrons on the ‘right’ type of material and keeping ‘certain’ materials under lock and key. Nowhere in this chapter on book selection and public outreach is there a mention of the Alberta Board on Objectionable Materials or Vikse’s prominent role. In the 358 pages of history covering 100 years of Edmonton Public Library history, there is no mention of the Board, nor the active role librarians like Vikse - and the institution - played in the Board’s administration. This includes the Edmonton Public Library assistance to facilitate the ‘good reading’ initiatives, public outreach, and distribution of 1000 copies of ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ in 1956.

In early 1970, Vikse submitted to the Alberta Government the following, very concise, two paragraph-long Annual Report on the Board’s activity for the year 1969:

*“The Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications was established in 1954. Its function has been to control, as far as possible, the sale of objectionable comics, tabloids, and magazines in the Province and to foster a public awareness of the danger inherent in permitting young people to read unwholesome material. The Board has a working arrangement with wholesale distributors of magazines, comic books and tabloids whereby the distributors accept recommendations made by the Board and voluntarily refrain from distributing titles which the Board has deemed ‘objectionable.’*

*In 1969, the Board [sic] held five meetings at which 53 publications were reviewed. 25 or 46% of those reviewed were held to be objectionable. The list of publications withdrawn from circulation now contains 226 titles.<sup>177</sup>*

---

<sup>176</sup> Babiak, *Just Getting Started*.

<sup>177</sup> Annual Report (1969), submitted by Aleta Vikse, Chairman. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

In the Annual Report, there is no mention of the move to ban *Rolling Stone* that year or the public pushback around the Board's actions. Instead, there is continued language of 'containment' (control) through restrictions and prohibiting sales, and 'uplift' by promoting 'good reading' and working to problematize 'bad' reading.

Librarians are often called the 'defenders of intellectual freedom' and valorized as vanguards of reading and advocacy, yet during the Board's active years, 1954 to 1973, one or two of the principal members at all times were prominent librarians wielding considerable provincial and national influence. A less commonly told narrative, I would argue, is that of librarians as gatekeepers and arbitrators of not only 'good' vs. 'bad' reading but also other 'community standards' as well.

When Congressman John Lewis accepted the National Book Award in 2016, an emotional Lewis remarked how "unbelievable" receiving an award like this was given that, "...I grew up in rural Alabama very very poor...very few books in our home and I remember in 1956 when I was 16 years old some of my brothers and sisters and cousins going down to the public library trying to get library card..we were told the libraries were for whites only..."<sup>178</sup> In December 2016, the Fairfax County library in Virginia sent Congressman Lewis a library card congratulating him on the award and apologizing for the treatment he had experienced in libraries growing up.<sup>179</sup> Over the hundred years as the public library has grown and become institutionalized in North America, it has been both a bastion of education - the so-called, "university of the people" - and a contested site of gatekeeping. Vocational awe, I would argue,

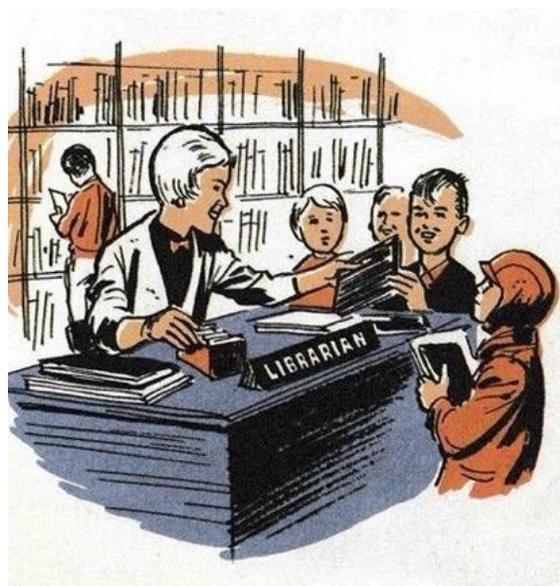
---

<sup>178</sup> John Lewis, "Civil Rights Icon, John Lewis Wins National Book Award!" *YouTube* video, 2:09 (November 16, 2016, [https://youtu.be/bYx\\_hqzdChs](https://youtu.be/bYx_hqzdChs) Accessed July 10, 2021).

<sup>179</sup> School Library Journal, "A New Library Card for Rep. John Lewis | Picture of the Week," *School Library Journal* (Dec 8, 2016 <https://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/?detailStory=a-new-library-card-for-rep-john-lewis-picture-of-the-week> Accessed July 10, 2021)

has kept actions like this suppressed, or couched in ‘maternalistic’ language of the era. Yet, the careful, precise, and diligently reproduced actions over twenty years to restrict availability, to mandate ‘quality’, and to ensure the cooperation of law enforcement agencies to work in tandem on these ‘objectionable’ lists certainly casts a different shadow and complicates commonly held beliefs around the library’s role - and that of the librarian - in the communities they serve.

Babiak describes the public library as “the Google of the 1940s,” – answering a range of community questions on topics from ‘recreation for war workers’ to ‘problems of a country school teacher’ to ‘juvenile



delinquency and its prevention.’<sup>180</sup> Inherent in answering these reference questions from the public is an assumed social trust – that these questions will be treated with dignity, privacy, and information to answer them delivered in an unbiased fashion. Yet, one of the crucial takeaways from Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction is that, as much as we may wish it to be so, education and its intuitions are not neutral spaces; these exchanges of information and cultural capital are part of larger (and often neglected aspects of) sociologies of power.<sup>181</sup> Considered through this lens, the comic image in the Board’s 1956 pamphlet ‘What’s Wrong with Comic

<sup>180</sup> Babiak, *Just Getting Started*, 115-116. The above topics are actual reference queries from the 1940s at the Edmonton Public Library central reference department.

<sup>181</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction,” In J. Karabel and A.H. Halsey (eds.), *Power and Ideology in Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977): 487-488.

Books' (close up image from Figure 14 – as seen above) of a smiling librarian ready to suggest book titles to children and their parents takes on more complicated nuance.

Nonetheless, the Board continued to maintain that their powers were 'advisory' only - a stance that increasingly brought frustration from vendors and distributors. In a July 22, 1970 letter to Alberta Secretary Hon. A. Halowach (with Board Chair Aleta Vikse cc:ed), Provincial News Sales Manager S. A. Senuk explained that they had noticed titles deemed 'objectionable' being distributed in the Province even after informing the Board of this several weeks ago - and receiving no reply from the Board.<sup>182</sup> Senuk tersely concludes the letter with the following: "I dread the thought that after adhering to the Advisory Board's decisions since 1954, that this body of people are ineffectual and a waste of the taxpayer's money. If this is true, the Board has literally cost this firm a small fortune over the last sixteen years."<sup>183</sup>

In 1971-1973 there were few correspondences or actions of note during this period except a Provincial memo from 1972 discussing the Board's future and wondering if there was a need for such a group. In 1971 newly elected Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed enacted several social and legal changes to modernize Alberta including finally halting the Sexual Sterilization Act and updating Alberta's 'archaic' liquor laws.<sup>184</sup> After debating for several years the Board's future, the committee was officially disbanded on November 2, 1976, by Order in Council (O.C.) 1194/76. Often hard and complicated histories are not reported, under reported, or addressed in a comparative way that acts to diminish the weight of what occurred. When discussing how Alberta's Sexual Sterilization Act was both the longest running in Canada and the first of its kind

---

<sup>182</sup> S. A. Senuk, Provincial News Sales Manager, to Hon. A. Halowach, Provincial Secretary (cc:ed Miss A. Vikse) July 22, 1970. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections. Presumably Senuk is pointing to titles being distributed by other rival vendors as Provincial News, historically, had cooperated with the Board's 'suggestions' for removal.

<sup>183</sup> Senuk to Halowach, July 22, 1970. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>184</sup> David G. Wood, *The Lougheed Legacy* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1985), 91-92.

in the British Empire, Geo Takach notes, “unlike BC, which destroyed all records of its estimated several hundred eugenics cases, Alberta saved about one fifth of its paperwork on its more than 2,800 cases.”<sup>185</sup> The takeaway is puzzling - is the impression that, as many cases as Alberta engaged in, at least they saved some of the files...?

In Alberta, however, other forms of media censorship persisted. In 1981, the Alberta Film Censor caused quite a controversy when they instructed Edmonton Police to seize the film *Caligula* on obscenity charges, halting - at the last minute - several scheduled screenings in the province. At a trial later that month media headlines were rife with discussion about how ‘historically accurate’ the salacious details (orgies) and violence (dismemberment) in the film were as well as extensive discussion of the rights of citizenry to view this.<sup>186</sup> Ultimately, the court ruling proclaimed *Caligula* to be “revolting but not obscene.”<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Takach, *Will the Real Alberta Please Stand Up?*, 100.

<sup>186</sup> Fred Haeseker, “Professors defend Caligula on its historical accuracy,” *Calgary Herald* (Oct 29, 1981). University of Alberta historian, Dr. Christopher Simpson remarked, “the film gives an accurate representation of historical documents” – noting that such outrageous to modern sensibilities routine acts of violence – like beheadings as a common pre or post dinnertime activity – were very common during Caligula’s reign.

<sup>187</sup> Fred Haeseker, “Court’s ruling: Caligula revolting but not obscene,” *Calgary Herald* (December 11, 1981).

## **Conclusion: ‘Unflattening’ the Postwar Comics Debate and Its Impact (1976-Present)**

We tend to shy away from complicated and hard histories. They can be difficult to tell, reconciling conflicted stories with the still prominent ‘single narrative’ approach to teaching history, especially in K-12 and with many schools' continued reliance on singular textbooks. In public history, this can be further exacerbated by lack of complexity in museum exhibits, movies, popular historical nonfiction (or fiction), and historical podcasts -- all things that impact our foundational understandings of history.

It is hard for many - especially if this has not been built into their K-12 foundational education and/or lived experiences - to hold complicated pictures of prominent historical figures in their head, reconciling that someone like Emily Murphy could be a feminist, a suffragist - *and* a believer that these rights were not for all people. Yet this lack of complicated historical analysis also works to suppress more comprehensive examinations of the long-lasting repercussions of moral panics and exclusionary policies - and see these actions for what they are/were. I would argue that in the example of the Alberta Board and with the lens of ‘vocational awe’ it may be cloudy for some to see this gatekeeping and law enforcement-bolstered ‘advising’ of newsstand distribution for what it was - coercion and censorship. In *Gatekeepers*, Iacovetta expertly demonstrates how pervasive this type of gatekeeping was in Cold War Canada; further, there are significant other examples from Canadian history such as the enlistment fight for Black Canadians during World War I - exclusionary and racist policies that were cloaked under a bureaucratic blanket of provincial versus federal control.<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Melissa N. Shaw, “‘Most Anxious to Serve Their King and Country’: Black Canadians’ Fight to Enlist in WWI and Emerging Race Consciousness in Ontario, 1914-1919,” *Histoire sociale / Social History* (49, no. 100, 2016), 543-580. Technically, enlistment was open to all, but the federal government determined that enlistment would be provincially administered - which allowed massive discrimination for Black Canadians who attempted to enlist. Historian Melissa Shaw, in describing this juxtaposition builds on ideas from David Theo Goldberg’s *The Racial*

While gatekeeping *is* a form of censorship, it is one of the hardest to spot and one of the most professionally normalized behaviors, hiding in plain sight like the coded significance, ‘politeness’, and tolerance in historicist racial states.<sup>189</sup> In Jenny Robb’s, “The Librarians and Archivists” chapter in *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, Robb describes that, “in addition to the general prejudice against collecting comics, there were practical problems. Comics were fragile and difficult to preserve. They created unique challenges to the established system for cataloging, which was designed for more traditional media.”<sup>190</sup> Though Robb’s statement is accurate in that many librarians and archivists may have *said* that comics are/were difficult to preserve, this statement overlooks the one hundred plus years of collecting those libraries have managed for other fragile, difficult to preserve items such as newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals. World War I issue newspapers were remarkably thin due to wartime paper rationing and notoriously difficult to preserve, yet these items survived. Instead, I would argue, the ‘preservation’ point is yet another gatekeeping stance in which perceived community ‘value’ has been attributed to certain items, and certain historical memories – and not to others.

Indeed, it was not until the introduction of ‘graphic novels’ in the late 1970s that many archives and libraries began building comics collections in earnest. For decades comic artists like Will Eisner - and others - strived to establish ‘comics’ as a reputable and valid art form. Eisner’s advocacy included his decades-long collaboration with the US military on informational comic

---

State of ‘historicist’ racist states (Canada) vs. ‘naturalist’ racist states (United States), adding that the ambiguity, tolerance, coded significance and politeness can function as “veils for continued racial invocation” and the lack of clear racial discrimination and demarcation can be harder to pinpoint.

<sup>189</sup> Steele, “Censorship of Library Collections.”

<sup>190</sup> Jenny Robb, “The Librarians and Archivists,” In Matthew Smith and Randy Duncan, eds. *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*. New York: Routledge (2017): 71-72.

strip manuals for soldiers as well as extensive outreach to libraries.<sup>191</sup> In October 1974, Will Eisner created the following illustration for *School Library Journal* (Figure 18)<sup>192</sup>, the popular trade magazine for school and public librarians. In 1978, Eisner's *A Contract with God* was published - considered to be the first 'graphic novel'<sup>193</sup>. Binding collected comic stories together as a 'novel' served multiple purposes including appealing to a narrative driven consumer market and allowing for easier shelving of comics in libraries, schools, and stores.

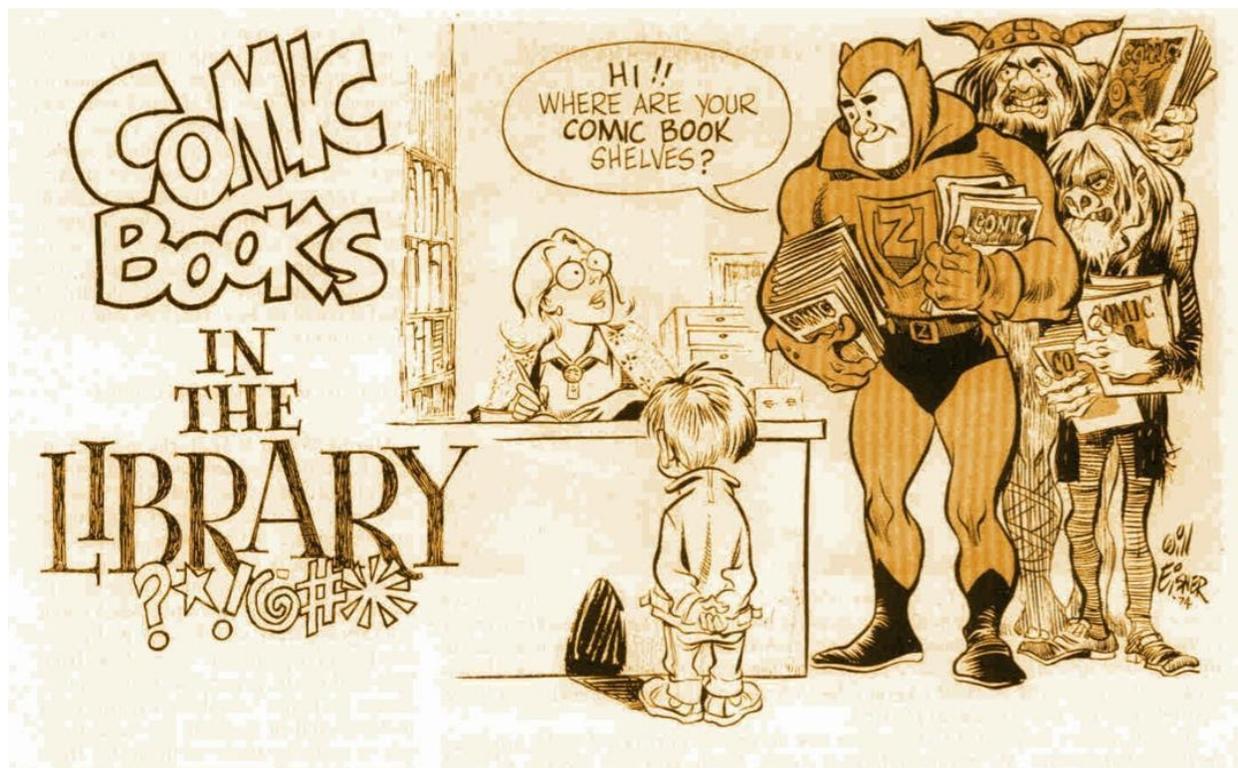


Figure 18: Will Eisner, 'Comic Books in the Library' *School Library Journal* October 1974

Though the collecting of comics would *start* in the late 1970s, the movement to fully embrace comics in libraries was slow. In 1990 comics scholar and academic librarian at the University of Michigan Randall W. Scott wrote the first resource on this speciality, *Comics*

<sup>191</sup> Eisner and US Military co-created P.S. Magazine - the informational comic style magazine for soldier readiness and preparedness. "PS Magazine: Informing Army Readiness | TB 43-PS-Series." P.S. Magazine. Last modified June 9, 2021. <https://www.psmagazine.army.mil/About-PS/PS-History/>

<sup>192</sup> Will Eisner, "Comic Books in the Library, *School Library Journal* (October 1974)

<sup>193</sup> Chute, *Why Comics?*, 15-17.

*Librarianship: A Handbook*. In his introduction, Scott projected that in “ten years” there would be comics librarians and support in all sectors of librarianship.<sup>194</sup> With this in mind, Scott hoped, “...this book will recruit a generation of comics librarians.”<sup>195</sup> Official recognition and professional support across all sectors of librarianship would take twenty eight additional years. In June 2018, the American Library Association (ALA) officially recognized the designation ‘comics librarianship’ with the approval of the Graphic Novels and Comics Round Table.<sup>196</sup>

In her 2013 work, “Misfits, Loners, Immature Students, and Reluctant Readers: Librarianship in the Construction of Teen Readers of Comics”, Lucia Cedeira Serantes notes the lingering ‘moral stigma’ that seems to persist around youth reading of comic books.<sup>197</sup> This attitude is particularly reflected in *how* the medium is discussed by library professionals. Cedeira Serantes argues that “for the general public, and many librarians, the graphic novel embodies the evolution of the sequential art from childish entertainment to serious literary form.”<sup>198</sup> This statement seems to substantiate the idea, at least for many professionals, that there exists a difference between ‘comics’ and ‘graphic novels’ and that there is a hierarchy of value - with ‘graphic novels’ being part of ‘good reading.’ This professional ‘gatekeeping’ often manifests in building recommended reading lists and collection development budgets; the story, Cedeira

---

<sup>194</sup> Randall W. Scott, *Comics Librarianship: A Handbook*. Jefferson (North Carolina): McFarland Publishing, 1990.

<sup>195</sup> Scott, *Comics Librarianship*.

<sup>196</sup> American Library Association, "Graphic Novel and Comics Member Initiative Group becomes Round Table," ALA Member News, June 26, 2018, Accessed Aug 4, 2021, <https://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2018/06/graphic-novel-and-comics-member-initiative-group-becomes-round-table>. Prior to the official membership status of this group, librarians and library workers had few professional networking, recognition, or advocacy platforms. Similar to the addition of the ‘Graphic Reviews’ to the American Historical Association (AHA) along with an increase in AHA conference presentations focused on comics, this kind of professional recognition can be key for frontline professionals (especially K-12 teachers and school/public librarians) to advocate for resources including collection development and professional development time and funds (i.e., conference attendance).

<sup>197</sup> Lucia Cedeira Serantes, “Misfits, Loners, Immature Students, and Reluctant Readers: Librarianship in The Construction of Teen Readers of Comics” in Anthony Bernier (ed.) *Transforming Young Adult Services: A Reader for Our Age* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2013), 115-135.

<sup>198</sup> Cedeira Serantes, “Misfits, Loners, Immature Students”, 130.

Serantes argues, is in what is left *off* these lists and what is *not* purchased - the story is in the gaps and the gutters. Cedeira Serantes contends that these assumptions have collaborated at times in perpetuating stereotypes about comics readership and impacted professional practice in libraries and archives<sup>199</sup>. One current way that this occurs is format - webcomics and digital reading are a new and burgeoning field that is transforming the industry, especially in widening the diversity of creator voices and stories. Yet most libraries choose not to invest in digital comics, despite sizable investments in other electronic reading platforms.

In the teaching of history, a similarly limited view of comics also seems to persist. Texts like Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1992), Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003), Allison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), and Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009) have appeared on high school and university curriculum across Canada and the United States in large number - and in such a prevalent way that I would argue that these texts have come to function as a sort of 'canonical' or 'anthology' comics set. In *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins argues that anthologies can create a 'type' or text as 'spokesperson' for a particular era or topic in such a way that can flatten and simplify our understanding and, historically, can create perceptions that are at odds with actuality - as in Tompkins's cited example of 19th Century American literature.<sup>200</sup> Tompkins notes that most such anthologies include 'canonical' (though not commercially successful) works by Mark Twain while leaving out commercially successful works from female creators like Harriet Beecher Stowe.<sup>201</sup>

Less has been written about issues of 'canonical comics' though history teachers Alicia C. Decker and Mauricio Castrodo observe that curriculum tends to embrace 'canonical' texts like

---

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 200-203.

<sup>201</sup> Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 200-203.

*Maus* while overlooking opportunities for emerging graphic texts.<sup>202</sup> In the teaching of history, though many K-12 instructors use graphic texts in their teaching, and many comics (though generally the ‘canonical’ ones cited above) appear on course text lists, the American Historical Association only added its ‘Graphic Reviews’ section in December 2018.<sup>203</sup>

From March 2013-December 2017 I worked at the New York Public Library on MyLibraryNYC - the largest joint school-library partnership in the world. When first hired I served as the collection development librarian on the initiative, buying and building collections at the public library to be loaned out to schools. With New York City being one of the first early adopters of the new Common Core State Standards in the United States, there was heavy pressure from the municipal government under Mayor Bloomberg for the schools and libraries to diversify and innovate our collections - while also embracing organizational efficiencies - i.e., strategic partnerships.

As part of this role, I purchased more than 100,000 items for use in PreK-12 classrooms across the five boroughs of New York. The Common State Standards for Reading History Text Types for Grades 6-12 call for a spectrum and range of texts including poetry, political cartoons, nonfiction, historical fiction - and graphic novels.<sup>204</sup> Owing to my reading of these standards as

---

<sup>202</sup> Alicia C. Decker and Mauricio Castro, “Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel.” *The History Teacher*. 45, no. 2, February 2012: 169-187. Decker and Castro describe how “Art Spiegelman’s Pulitzer Prize winning *Maus* series is perhaps the most utilized, particularly within classes that focus on the Second World War and the Holocaust. It is not, however, the only available option for historians. There are several lesser-known, but equally compelling texts that explore war, displacement, and genocide in a variety of different contexts. Thus far, very little has been written about these fewer familiar comics.” Though Decker and Castro published this article in 2012, I would argue little has significantly changed over the past ten years with this view.

<sup>203</sup> Trevor Getz, “Graphic History Reviews: Introductory Note,” *The American Historical Review* (123, Issue 5 December 2018): 1596 <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1093/ahr/rhy390>

<sup>204</sup> ‘Graphic Novels’ are amongst the list of required text types in the Common Core State Standards Reading History for Grades 6-12. The Common Core State Standards calls for vigorous, differentiated instruction using a variety of text types and instructional approaches. Common Core State Standards Reading History: Text Types for Grade 6-12 <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/standard-10-range-quality-complexity/rang-of-text-types-for-612/>

well as the benefit of more than twenty hours of professional development workshops spent as interloper amongst NYC educators, I added titles like *MARCH* to our civil rights collection for Grades 6-12. *MARCH* is the best-selling award-winning nonfiction title from American Congressman John Lewis, co-authored by senior staffer, Andrew Aydin, and illustrated by Nate Powell. *MARCH* won the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature in 2016 - the first comic to do so - and in 2014 was added to the NYC Social Studies curriculum. Given these accolades I was unprepared for the pushback I received - and continued to receive.

- *“I can’t teach that”*
- *“Yeah ...we have to teach history in the classroom. That’s not history”*
- *“We can’t teach that - comics you know ...with the Common Core they are restrictive about what we can teach”*

Introduced in the United States in 2012 under massive scrutiny the Common Core State Standards are, at their heart, a call for standardized instructional practice. They are not text-based teaching but rather a renewed call for vigorous instructional practice with a range of formats - including ‘graphic novels.’ I was surprised and unprepared for what I heard from teachers, school librarians - and my fellow public and academic librarians. I experienced firsthand the lingering ‘moral stigma’ that Cedeira Serantes describes - a direct impact, I would argue, from the widespread and historically underreported and suppressive gatekeeping practices of library and education professionals to demarcate ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reading.

I left the New York Public Library in December 2017 for a position at the Edmonton Public Library in Edmonton, Alberta managing a small community branch. I would continue in school-library work as part of my management duties chairing a city-wide School Aged Services Committee. In this capacity I assisted with Summer Reading initiatives between the public library and area schools as well as creating recommended reading lists. At one area Summer Reading meeting I overheard a librarian from a neighboring system mention that, for their

summer reading program, “kids have to read one ‘real book’ for every comic book.” I was shocked - and yet this idea of comic books as ‘othered’ from ‘real books’ persists echoing notions reflected in 1956’s ‘What’s Wrong with Comic Books?’ - especially “#6 *All ‘Comics’ are Detrimental to Good Reading Skills.*”

A lingering moral stigma—real or imagined—seems to endure as year over year comics are amongst the topmost banned and challenged titles for children, and among the most removed from the shelves of school and public libraries.<sup>205</sup> The Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) at the American Library Association (ALA) maintains a list of the Top Ten most challenged and banned titles. Each year for the past ten years, between 1-4 comic titles have made the list each year. The top reasons for a material to be challenged include “unsuited/inappropriate for age group” and “books with ‘diverse’ content” i.e. content by or about people of color, LGBT people and/or people with disabilities. 2021 was the first year that a comic book did not make the list. In previous years Raina Telgemeier’s *Drama* - a comic book for kids about a school theatre group that features queer storylines - made the Top Ten List every year since it was first published in 2012. In 2016, Jillian and Mariko Tamaki’s *This One Summer* became one of the most lauded titles - and one of the most banned due to its queer romance between characters.

This intersection and confluence of ideas and discussions around comic books, morality, education, and youth defamiliarizes assumed perceptions of educators and librarians, and fractures the ‘vocational awe’ that sees these roles (and institutions) as “inherently good and sacred.”<sup>206</sup> Instead of reading advocates and community champions, a more complicated picture emerges -- that of librarians and educators, at times, as active agents in gatekeeping and policing

---

<sup>205</sup> American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom, Banned & Challenged Books. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/> Accessed July 10, 2021.

<sup>206</sup> Ettarh, “Vocational Awe and Librarianship”

of ‘community standards.’ Especially with the active involvement of the Alberta Board with faculties of education and librarianship for more than twenty years, the impact on vocational training and practice - and its rippling impacts - are hard to pinpoint but certainly demand further scrutiny and research.

Similarly, I would argue more investigation is needed in how widespread this tendency was - to leverage the well-accepted criticism and fear of comics into normalizing censorship and the ‘right’ of certain community members to serve as ‘community standard’ and arbitrator on ‘moral’ content for whole constituencies. Given the extensive correspondence of the Board with transnational groups - especially on the issue of newsstand restrictions and their ‘working arrangement’ with distributors - I would speculate that this type of ‘soft’ censorship occurred more often than has been previously reported. The Board, for example, always maintained a public face that it was the vendors and distributors doing the ‘censoring’ - not the Board; yet, as this study has shown, the Board engaged in consistent and widespread coercive behavior with vendors and distributors for twenty years, ranging from the 1958 incident with Provincial News to Aleta Vikse mailing memos to each of the major police departments and the RCMP.

Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent* came out in 1954; in 2013 comics scholar and library school professor Carol Tilley conducted primary source research into Wertham’s papers, recently made public at the Library of Congress.<sup>207</sup> Tilley disproved the ‘factual’ basis for much of Wertham’s evidence, finding that he duplicated and triplicated results to maximize effect and make conclusive broad statements.<sup>208</sup> In doing so, Tilley was able to empirically prove suspicions that had plagued Wertham’s work since the 1950s - suspicions that were even voiced

---

<sup>207</sup> Tilley, “Seducing the Innocent,” 383-413.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

by the US Senate Committee on the Judiciary in their 1955 report on, “Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency.”<sup>209</sup> Despite Carol Tilley’s investigative work to disprove Wertham’s accusations that comics cause juvenile delinquency, the stigma persists and many still assume a causation between comics and violence - or now, video games and violence.<sup>210</sup>

This persistence brings up an important question - why? Why and how could people believe that juvenile crime was an on/off switch - and that something as transactional as playing a video game or reading a comic could flip this switch? Mariah Adin’s book on the Brooklyn ‘Thrill-Kill Gang’ offers a possible explanation.<sup>211</sup> The Thrill-Kill Gang were middle class, mostly Jewish teens from well-to-do Brooklyn homes, yet they engaged in debauchery, crime, and, eventually, a murder. Adin’s speculates that ‘comics’ offered a way to reconcile the irreconcilable - that instead of confronting the postwar anxieties that spiraled into Cold War anxieties and social ills, ‘comics’ offered an easy, tidy, and ‘safe’ way to pin the blame on the issue. In a review of Adin’s work, Christopher J. Moloney notes, “the parallels here between 1950s comic books and 1990s video games are striking. Both forms became folk devils or scapegoats which society conveniently utilized to explain the same problem—serious violent crime committed by young people. Similarly, both comic books and video games provide(d) a neat and simple answer to a complex problem, allowing people to eschew digging deeper to look for the actual, and much more nuanced, causes of this problem.”<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> US Senate Committee on the Judiciary. “Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency,” The 1955 US Senate Justice Report on comics and juvenile delinquency notes Wertham ‘anecdotal evidence’ and a lack of clear delineation from ‘act’ (reading crime comic) and actual crimes committed.

<sup>210</sup> Devan Cole, “Trump, McCarthy cite video games as a driver behind mass shootings” CNN Politics Mon August 5, 2019 <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/05/politics/kevin-mccarthy-mass-shootings-video-games/index.html> Accessed July 10, 2021

<sup>211</sup> Mariah Adin, *The Brooklyn Thrill-Kill Gang and the Great Comic Book Scare of the 1950s* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015).

<sup>212</sup> Christopher J. Moloney, “The Brooklyn Thrill-Kill Gang and the Great Comic Book Scare of the 1950s,” review of *The Brooklyn Thrill-Kill Gang and the Great Comic Book Scare of the 1950s*, by Mariah Adin, *Criminal Law and*

Persisting too is a notion of comics and ‘lower’ reading standards. Despite substantial educational evidence demonstrating success in comic books activating multiple literacies and despite comics use in a spectrum of pedagogy from the teaching of history to the teaching and diagnosis of medicine<sup>213</sup>, ideas of comics as ‘simpler’ texts for ‘reluctant readers’ or as ‘gateways to reading’ are often still perpetuated. As seen in Figure 19, titles such



Figure 19: 'Reluctant Readers' book display (2019), photo courtesy of author

as *If I Go Missing* feature prominently in this section alongside titles like *Deogratias, A Tale of Rwanda* - all appearing on the same 'Reluctant Reader' shelves as Raina Telgemeier's titles for kids including *Smile* and *Guts* and Dav Pilkey's *Captain Underpants*.<sup>214</sup>

---

*Criminal Justice Book Reviews*, January 2016. <https://clcjbooks.rutgers.edu/books/the-brooklyn-thrill-kill-gang-and-the-great-comic-book-scare/>

<sup>213</sup> Meryl Jaffe and Katie Monnin. *Using Content-Area Graphic Texts for Learning: A Guide for Middle-Level Educators*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House (Capstone Publishing), 2013, 3-10. Maupin House is the publishing arm of Capstone Publishing - one of the largest educational publishers for the K-12 market. Jaffe and Monin's text is one of the most used and recommended for educators. Published in 2013 specifically in response to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in the United States, this volume filled (and continues to fill) a gap in this type of professional development resource for teaching; MK Czerwiec, Ian Williams, Susan Merrill Squier, Michael J. Green, Kimberly R. Myers, and Scott T. Smith, *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* (University Park (PA): The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015). Comics in/about medicine falls under the term, "Graphic Medicine" - a phrase originated by Dr. Ian Williams and utilized by a collective group of practitioners to broadly refer to this international field of comics, cartooning, art therapy etc. for the purposes of medical training, diagnosis, symptom management, mental health, memoir, and public health. Graphic Medicine is often nonfiction and informational. The 'origin text' in this movement is MK Czerwiec et al's *Graphic Medicine Manifesto*.

<sup>214</sup> Paragraphie Bookstore (Montreal, Quebec, 2019): Photo taken by author. *If I Go Missing* by Brianna Jonnie, Nahanni Shingoose, and Neal Shannacappo is a comic based on primary sources about Missing Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) and is recommended for upper high school (Grades 10/11 and up) or University. *Deogratias, A Tale of Rwanda* by J.P. Stassen (2006) is a historical fiction comic based on primary sources from and about the Rwandan genocide and is recommended for upper high school (Grades 10/11 and up) and University.

I would argue it is impossible to extricate any discussions of comic books and their current mass media popularity without contextualizing the still lingering stigma around their widespread use in education owing to a deep, complicated, and conflicted history of ‘morality’ boards, gatekeeping, and censorship - particularly in librarianship and education. The Fulton Bill addition to the Criminal Code functioned almost as a ‘letter of marque’<sup>215</sup>, empowering Canadian ‘citizen action’ committees like the Alberta Board (and/or individuals as in the case of one concerned mother who in 1987 called the Calgary Police to report that her son had purchased ‘obscene’ materials from Darren Ott’s comic shop) to act in extragovernmental ways. This allowed singular groups or individuals to function as morality and ‘community standard’ enforcement - determining for a whole province and constituencies of citizens what should be considered ‘objectionable’ and/or ‘obscene.’ Maybe even more remarkable is that in a province so committed to the defense (or the appearance of a defense) of freedom of expression, Alberta had an active newsstand censor for more than twenty years that appears in no social criticism, no commemorative albums, and no 100-year compendiums consulted for this survey.<sup>216</sup>

---

The average recommended reading level for Raina Telgemeier’s and Dav Pilkey’s titles would be Grades 2-6. Recommended reading / grade levels determined with consulting publisher site and aggregating several review sites including *School Library Journal* and classification within library catalogues.

<sup>215</sup> ‘Letter of Marque’ as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary is, “written authority granted to a private person by a government to seize the subjects of a foreign state or their goods” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/letters%20of%20marque>. Though the definition as applied refers to seizures, it also can refer to private citizens acting on behalf of the state to enforce state policies, often through an individual lens.

<sup>216</sup> These include *Alberta in the 20th Century: A Journalistic History of the Province*; Babiak, *Just Getting Started*; Peter Collum ed. *Alberta 100 Years a Home: The people, issues, and events that built a province. From the pages of the Calgary Herald and the Edmonton Journal* (Calgary and Edmonton: Calgary Herald Group and Edmonton Journal Group, 2005); Merrill Distad, *The University of Alberta Library: The First Hundred Years, 1908-2008* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Libraries, 2009); Rod Macleod, *All True Things: A History of the University of Alberta, 1908-2008* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2008); Takach, *Will the Real Alberta Please Stand Up?*; Van Herk, *Mavericks*; and *Voice of a City: The Edmonton Journal’s First Century*.

A pointed example of this gap is in Aritha van Herk's, *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta*, described as an "irreverent but relevant history of Alberta."<sup>217</sup> *Mavericks* was chosen as the inaugural first book for Calgary Public Library's city-wide reading initiative, 'One Book, One Calgary' in 2010 and it serves as the foundation framework for the permanent collection 'Audacious and Adamant: the Story of Maverick Alberta' at the Glenbow Museum and Archives in Calgary, one of the largest museums of Western Canadian art, cultural and social history.<sup>218</sup> In a section on the 1930s, Van Herk describes the 1938 'Accurate News and Information Act' as "downright censorship", yet when discussing other media restrictions, including early film censorship, Van Herk remarks that, "Alberta's censorship was supposedly one of the most liberal in Canada."<sup>219</sup> There is no mention of the Alberta Board on Objectionable Publications nor the longevity of the film censor board in Alberta.

The banning of *Playboy* in 1962, the restriction of *Rolling Stone* in 1969, the abrupt halt to the *Caligula* screening in 1981, and the police raid on Darren Ott's comic shop in 1987, all are examples of 'obscenity' claims brought about in Alberta based on ideas of what constitutes 'community standards.' However, these incidents are rarely discussed in scholarship in intersectional ways that exposes the commonality amongst this widespread gatekeeping, social and cultural regulation, and censorship. This continuation of moral judgement well into the legal history of the 1980s demonstrates long-lasting repercussions sparked by the comics 'moral panic.' This transnational frenzy allowed 'citizen action' committees significant platforms to judge 'community standards' - and, with the Criminal Code parameters for 'obscenity', to have a protracted and considerable impact on legal and social policy in Canada.

---

<sup>217</sup> Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Arts Awards. "Aritha Van Herk 2013." <https://artsawards.ca/artist/aritha-van-herk/> Accessed July 12, 2021.

<sup>218</sup> Van Herk, *Mavericks*.

<sup>219</sup> Van Herk, *Mavericks*, 252 (Accurate News and Information Act), and 337 (early days of film censorship).

Additionally, the Alberta Group was not alone - based on correspondence in the Board of Objectionable Publications archives as well as references in primary sources at the time, similar organizations and/or vocal well-connected community advocates operated during the 1950s-1970s in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, and New Brunswick.<sup>220</sup> Only further research can determine how influential these organizations and individuals were in restricting sales and/or “*foster [ing] a public awareness of the danger inherent in permitting young people to read unwholesome material*” like the Alberta Board.<sup>221</sup> But if these additional organizations - formal or informal - across Canada were even a fraction as successful as Alberta Board, this alters the picture of education, librarianship, legal history and precedent setting in Canada - providing a possible clear line between this kind of gatekeeping and current debates in public spheres with ‘intellectual freedom’, ‘neutrality’ and who serves as the ‘community standard’ in determining where these lines are.<sup>222</sup>

The comic book ‘moral panic’ may have crested in 1954/55 according to popular memory and scholarship of the period, and while the fear may have been - for many - rooted in nationalism and a fear of ‘American’ comic books, the *reaction* to this panic was undeniably Canadian with long-lasting repercussions on Canadian legal and social history. Returning to Janice Dickin McGinnis’s original question: “*if crime comics [comic books] were virtually unaffected by prosecutors, what made them disappear?*”, this study has shown the lingering

---

<sup>220</sup> “Crime Comic Ban pleases Newsdealers, Druggists,” *The Edmonton Journal* (December 6, 1949). A subsection to this article is entitled, “Many Campaigns” and describes how “the legislation [Fulton Bill] climaxes campaigning by numerous groups in Canada. In Edmonton The Home and School Council conducted a campaign and submitted a brief to the Federal Government.”

<sup>221</sup> Annual Report (1969), submitted by Vikse. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

<sup>222</sup> One of the largest current debates in libraries and public spheres involve giving meeting room space/platforms to arguments deemed by some as ‘controversial’ and others as ‘hate speech.’ See CBC Radio As It Happens, “I’m not going to reconsider: Toronto’s Top Librarian Refuses to Bar Speaker Critical of Transgender Rights” Oct 17, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-thursday-edition-1.5324424/i-m-not-going-to-reconsider-toronto-s-top-librarian-refuses-to-bar-speaker-critical-of-transgender-rights-1.5324431>

impact of the empowered, government supported gatekeeping by the Alberta Board on Objectionable Publications to restrict comics (and later, periodical) sales on a provincial level and influence on a transnational level educational policies and popular opinions around reading and 'community standards.' This thesis has also started to illuminate an under-discussed part of Canadian (and American) transnational history - the role and impact of 'citizen action' committees on policing and effecting social and political policies - often long after the initial threat or 'panic' has faded. After all, in Canada it was not until 2018, that Section 163 of the Canadian Criminal Code was finally updated; removed were the words 'crime comic.' No longer in Canada would the sale or distribution of an 'obscene or crime comic' be a criminal offence.

However, from 1948 to 2018, it was.

ALBERTA		92.197 Reference Copy		92.197		RECORDS LISTING INVENTORY		
FILE NUMBER/ REFERENCE	VOLUME NUMBER	TITLE	CONTENT	From	RANGE To	FILE LOCATED IN BOX, SHELF, OR FILE CABINET NUMBER	REMARKS	RECOMMEND RETENTION PERIOD
DEPARTMENT			BRANCH	COMPLETED BY		DATE		
Culture and Multiculturalism			Board of Censors (formerly Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications)	Robert Chow		July 21, 1989		
FILE NUMBER/ REFERENCE	VOLUME NUMBER	TITLE	FILE TOPICS/SUBJECTS, PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS (i.e. INDICES, CONTRACTS, MEMORANDA, LETTERS etc. ORIGINALS OR COPIES)	From	RANGE To	FILE LOCATED IN BOX, SHELF, OR FILE CABINET NUMBER	REMARKS	RECOMMEND RETENTION PERIOD
								DEPT. ARC FINAL
1		Sec's Files - 1959	General correspondence re: Objectionable publications	1/59	12/59	<del>SRA</del> A-1	Similar to IX PRC #79/58, except no alpha index cards	
2		Sec's Corresp. - 1960	General correspondence re: Objectionable publications	1/60	12/60			
3		No title	Copies of expense account forms, Biographies, Newspaper clippings, General correspondence	1960	1961			
4		Advisory Board On Objectionable Publications	General correspondence, Advisory Board meeting minutes	1961	1962			
5		Advisory Board On Objectionable Publications	General correspondence	1963				
6		Advisory Board On Objectionable Publications	Copy of 'Saturday Night', General correspondence, Advisory Board meeting minutes, Reports, Brochures	1957	1961			
7		Speech Material	Copies of speeches	1961				
		Advisory Board On Objectionable Publications	General correspondence re: Title	1962				

Figure 20: BRANCH: Board of Censors (formerly Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications, 1979)

End Note: Amongst the unprocessed collection of materials that make up the Board's correspondence, speeches, meeting minutes, pamphlets, orders-in-council, newspaper clippings, and more, is the following (Figure 20 above). After the Board's dissolution in 1976, the Province of Alberta filed several sections of the Board's materials under, 'BRANCH: Board of Censors

*(formerly Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications).*' The Alberta Board of Objectionable Publications - a group that stridently repudiated the moniker of 'censor' their entire tenure from 1954-1976 - is archived and remembered under 'censorship.'<sup>223</sup>

---

<sup>223</sup> Records Listing Inventory 92 - 197 DEPARTMENT: Culture and Multiculturalism BRANCH: Board of Censors (formerly Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications, 1979) COMPLETED BY: Robert Chow DATE: July 21, 1989. Advisory Board. Unprocessed. Special Collections.

## Bibliography

### Unpublished Primary Sources

Advisory Board on Objectionable Publications sous-fonds (GR0065.001SF). Unprocessed. Special Collections, The Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton.

----- (GR1968.0310 Box 33 Item 751). "What's Wrong with Comic Books?" Unprocessed. Special Collections, The Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton.

----- (GR1992.0197). "What's Wrong with Comic Books?" Unprocessed. Special Collections, The Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton.

### Primary Sources

#### Newspapers and Periodicals

*Better Homes & Gardens*  
*Blairmore Graphic, The*  
*Calgary Herald*  
*Chatelaine*  
*Edmonton Journal, The*  
*Globe and Mail, The*  
*Ladies Home Journal*  
*Macleans Magazine*  
*New York Times, The*  
*Palestine Post, The*  
*Parents' Magazine*  
*Peace River Block News*  
*School Library Journal*  
*TIME Magazine*  
*Toronto Daily Star*

#### Published Primary Sources

*Alberta in the 20th Century: A Journalistic History of the Province - Centennial Limited Edition, 'The Albertans: From Settlement to Super Province 1905-2005.'* Edmonton: CanMedia, 2005.

Babiak, Todd. *Just Getting Started: Edmonton Public Library's First 100 Years, 1913-2013.* Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2013.

Collum, Peter, ed. *Alberta 100 Years a Home: The people, issues, and events that built a province. From the pages of the Calgary Herald and the Edmonton Journal.* Calgary and

Edmonton: Calgary Herald Group and Edmonton Journal Group, 2005.

Distad, Merrill. *The University of Alberta Library: The First Hundred Years, 1908-2008*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Libraries, 2009.

Fraser, Fil. *Alberta's Camelot: Culture and the Arts in the Lougheed Years*. Edmonton and Vancouver: Lone Pine Publishing, 2003.

Macleod, Rod. *All True Things: A History of the University of Alberta, 1908-2008*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2008.

Takach, Geo. *Will the Real Alberta Please Stand Up?* Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2010.

Thompson, Don and Dick Lupoff (eds.) "Introduction" in *The Comic-Book Book*. New Rochelle (NY): Arlington House, 1973: 9-16.

Van Herk, Aritha. *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta*. Toronto: Viking [Penguin Publishing Group], 2001.

*Voice of a City: The Edmonton Journal's First Century 1903 to 2003*. Edmonton: Edmonton Journal Group Inc., 2003.

Wertham, Fredric. *Seduction of the Innocent*. New York: Rinehart, 1954.

Wood, David G. *The Lougheed Legacy*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1985.

### **Digital Resources**

Alberta Women's Institute (AWI). "About AWI." Accessed July 13, 2021.  
<http://awi.athabasca.ca/About/>

Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW). Accessed July 13, 2021.  
<http://www.acww.org.uk/>

Catholic Women's League (CWL). "Resolutions By Year." Accessed July 13, 2021.  
<https://cwl.ca/resolutions-by-year/>

CBC Radio. "Citizens Forum." Moderated by Neil Morrison. CBC Radio. Halifax, NS: Jan 21, 1949. Accessed July 1, 2021.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1791222292/>

Farm Women's Union of Alberta Canuck Local 105, fonds (1951-1977). "Agency History." South Peace Archives. Accessed July 13, 2021.  
<https://southpeacearchives.org/finding-aids/farm-womens-union-of-alberta-canuck-local-105-fonds/>

I.O.D.E. Canada. Accessed July 13, 2021. <https://www.iode.ca/>

Lewis, John. "Civil Rights Icon, John Lewis Wins National Book Award!" YouTube video, 2:09 November 16, 2016. Accessed July 10, 2021.  
[https://youtu.be/bYx\\_hqzdChs](https://youtu.be/bYx_hqzdChs)

National Archives. "Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency." Accessed August 4, 2021.  
<https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/congress-investigates/comic-books-and-juvenile-delinquency>.

Ryerson University. "Crisis of Innocence: Comic Books and Children's Culture, 1940-1954." Accessed August 4, 2021.  
<https://crisisofinnocence.library.ryerson.ca/exhibits/show/a-crisis-of-innocence>.

### **Government Publications**

Canada. Government of Canada. Archived Criminal Code Section 163 Obscene Materials. Justice Laws Website. Accessed August 4, 2021.  
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-163-20181213.html#wb-cont>

Canada. Senate. Proceedings of the Special Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature. Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1952-53.

United States. Senate Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency and Comic Books, 1954.

United States. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. "Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency: A Part of the Investigation of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States. Interim Report." 1955-56. Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number 77-90720 (March 14, 1955). 84<sup>th</sup> Congress 1st Session Report No. 62.

United States. Common Core State Standards Reading History: Text Types for Grade 6-12. Accessed July 10, 2021.  
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/standard-10-range-quality-complexity/range-of-text-types-for-612/>

### **Secondary Sources**

Adin, Mariah. *The Brooklyn Thrill-Kill Gang and the Great Comic Book Scare of the 1950s*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015.

Alexander, Kristine. "Canadian Girls, Imperial Girls, Global Girls: Race, Nation and Transnationalism in the Interwar Girl Guide Movement." In Karen Dubinsky, Adele Perry, and Henry Yu, eds. *Within and Without the Nation: Canadian History as Transnational History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015: 276-292.

- Allen, Erin. "Seduction of the Innocent: Papers of Comic-Book 'Villain' Opened." *Library of Congress: Information Bulletin* (October 2010). Accessed July 10, 2021.  
<https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/1010/wertham.html>.
- American Library Association. "Report Censorship Toolkit." Accessed July 10, 2021.  
<https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/share>.
- American Library Association. "Graphic Novel and Comics Member Initiative Group becomes Round Table." ALA Member News. June 26, 2018. Accessed Aug 4, 2021.  
<https://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2018/06/graphic-novel-and-comics-member-initiative-group-becomes-round-table>
- American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF). Banned & Challenged Books. Accessed July 10, 2021.  
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/>.
- American Psychological Association (APA). "APA Reaffirms Position on Violent Video Games and Violent Behavior Cautions against oversimplification of complex issue" March 3, 2020. Accessed April 22, 2021.  
<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2020/03/violent-video-games-behavior>
- Ash, Evan. "Objectionable: The Cincinnati Committee for the Evaluation of Comics and the American Anti-Comics Movement, 1940–1956." Masters thesis. Miami University, 2019.
- Ayed, Nahlah. "The Flapper and the Modern Girl." CBC Ideas. February 4, 2020. Accessed July 20, 2021.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/how-the-modern-flapper-gal-of-the-1920s-spurred-moral-panic-in-canada-1.5450536>
- Beaty, Bart. "High Treason: Canadian nationalism and the regulation of American crime books." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 62 (1997): 85-107.
- . *Comics versus Art*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.
- Bell, John. *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006.
- Bohan, Chara Haeussler and O.L. Davis, Jr. "Historical Constructions: How Social Studies Student Teachers' Historical Thinking is Reflected in Their Writing of History." *Theory and Research in Social Education*. 26, no. 2, Spring 1998: 173-197.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction." In J. Karabel and A.H. Halsey (eds.) *Power and Ideology in Education*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977: 487-511.

Bush, William S. and David S. Tanenhaus. *Ages of Anxiety: Historical and Transnational Perspectives in Juvenile Justice*. New York: NYU Press, 2018.

Canadian History Museum. 'Report of the Massey Commission.' Last modified June 3, 2017  
Accessed July 10, 2021.  
[www.historymuseum.ca/blog/report-of-the-massey-commission/](http://www.historymuseum.ca/blog/report-of-the-massey-commission/)

Canadian Public Health Association, "The Story of Polio." Accessed August 1, 2021.  
<https://www.cpha.ca/story-polio>

Cedeira Serantes, Lucia. "Misfits, Loners, Immature Students, and Reluctant Readers: Librarianship in the Construction of Teen Readers of Comics" in Anthony Bernier (ed.) *Transforming Young Adult Services: A Reader for Our Age*. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2013: 115-135.

Chute, Hillary L. *Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere*. New York: Harper Collins, 2017.

----- . *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. Belknap Press [Harvard University Press], 2016.

Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. London: Routledge Classics, 2011 [1972].

Czerwiec, MK; Ian Williams; Susan Merrill Squier; Michael J. Green; Kimberly R. Myers; and Scott T. Smith. *Graphic Medicine Manifesto*. University Park (PA): The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015.

Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision*. Toronto: Vintage Canada [Penguin Random House], 2000.

----- . *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Decker, Alicia C., and Mauricio Castro. "Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel." *The History Teacher*. 45, no. 2, February 2012: 169-187.

DeFalco, Tom, and Laura Gilbert, ed. *Marvel Chronicle A Year by Year History*. London, United Kingdom: Dorling Kindersley, 2008.

de Groot, Jerome. *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (2nd ed.) New York: Routledge, 2016.

Dickin McGinnis, Janice. "Police wield obscure law in comic raid." *Calgary Herald*. September

- 27, 1987.
- . "Bogeymen and the Law: Crime Comics and Pornography." *Ottawa Law Review / Revue de droit d'Ottawa*. 20, no. 1, 1988: 3-23.
- Edwards, Gail and Judith Saltman. *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children's Illustrated Books and Publishing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Ettarh, Fobazi. "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves." *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*. January 10, 2018. Accessed July 10, 2021.  
[www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/](http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/)
- Fodden, Simon. "Crime Comics and the Remnants of a Moral Panic." *Slaw: Canada's Online Legal Magazine*. December 7, 2013. Accessed August 1, 2021.  
<https://www.slaw.ca/2013/12/07/crime-comics-and-the-remnants-of-a-moral-panic/>
- Gabilliet, Jean-Paul. *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*. Trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010.
- Getz, Trevor. "Graphic History Reviews: Introductory Note." *The American Historical Review* 123, Issue 5 (December 2018): 1596
- Glegg, Alastair. " 'The Child's Education to Violence': Mrs. Eleanor Gray and the Canadian Crusade to Ban Crime Comics." *Education Matters*. 4, no. 1, 2016: 26-36.
- Goldberg, David Theo. *The Racial State*. London: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Goulding, Anne. "Libraries and Cultural Capital." *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*. 40, no. 4 (December 2008): 235-237.
- Hajdu, David. *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America*. New York: Picador [Farrar, Straus and Giroux], 2008.
- Hall, Stuart M. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978.
- Iacovetta, Franca. *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006.
- Jaffe, Meryl and Katie Monnin. *Using Content-Area Graphic Texts for Learning: A Guide for Middle-Level Educators*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House (Capstone Publishing), 2013.
- Jobb, Patricia H. *Biography of a Librarian: Bruce Braden Peel*. Edmonton: University of Alberta (Faculty of Library Science), 1987.
- Lepore, Jill. "Episode 6: Cell Strain." *The Last Archive*. June 2020. Accessed July 12, 2021.

[www.thelastarchive.com/season-1/episode-6-cell-strain](http://www.thelastarchive.com/season-1/episode-6-cell-strain)

----- . *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. New York: Knopf, 2014.

Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Arts Awards. "Aritha Van Herk 2013." Accessed July 12, 2021.

<https://artsawards.ca/artist/aritha-van-herk/>

*Lost Heroes*. DVD. Directed by Will Pascoe. Toronto, ON: Middle Child Films Inc. / Winnipeg, MB: Farpoint Films, 2014.

Malacrida, Claudia. *A Special Hell: Institutional Life in Alberta's Eugenic Years*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

Oshinsky, David M. *Polio: An American Story*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

P.S. Magazine. "PS Magazine: Informing Army Readiness | TB 43-PS-Series." P.S. Magazine. Accessed June 9, 2021. [www.psmagazine.army.mil/About-PS/PS-History/](http://www.psmagazine.army.mil/About-PS/PS-History/)

Resha, Adrienne. "The Blue Age of Comic Books." *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*, vol. 4 no. 1, 2020, p. 66-81.

Robb, Jenny. "The Librarians and Archivists," In Matthew Smith and Randy Duncan, eds. *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2017: 71-72.

Scott, Randall W., *Comics Librarianship: A Handbook*. Jefferson (North Carolina): McFarland Publishing, 1990.

Shaw, Mellissa N. "'Most Anxious to Serve Their King and Country': Black Canadians' Fight to Enlist in WWI and Emerging Race Consciousness in Ontario, 1914-1919." *Histoire sociale / Social History*. 49, no. 100 (2016): 543-580.

Simons, Paula. "Eighty years ago, the Edmonton Journal won a Pulitzer Prize. Let's remember why." *Edmonton Journal*, May 2, 2018. Accessed July 27, 2021.

<https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/paula-simons-eighty-years-ago-the-edmonton-journal-won-a-pulitzer-prize-lets-remember-why/>

Smith, Mark K. (ed.). "Pierre Bourdieu on education: Habitus, capital, and field. Reproduction in the practice of education." *Infed.org: Education, Community-Building and Change*.

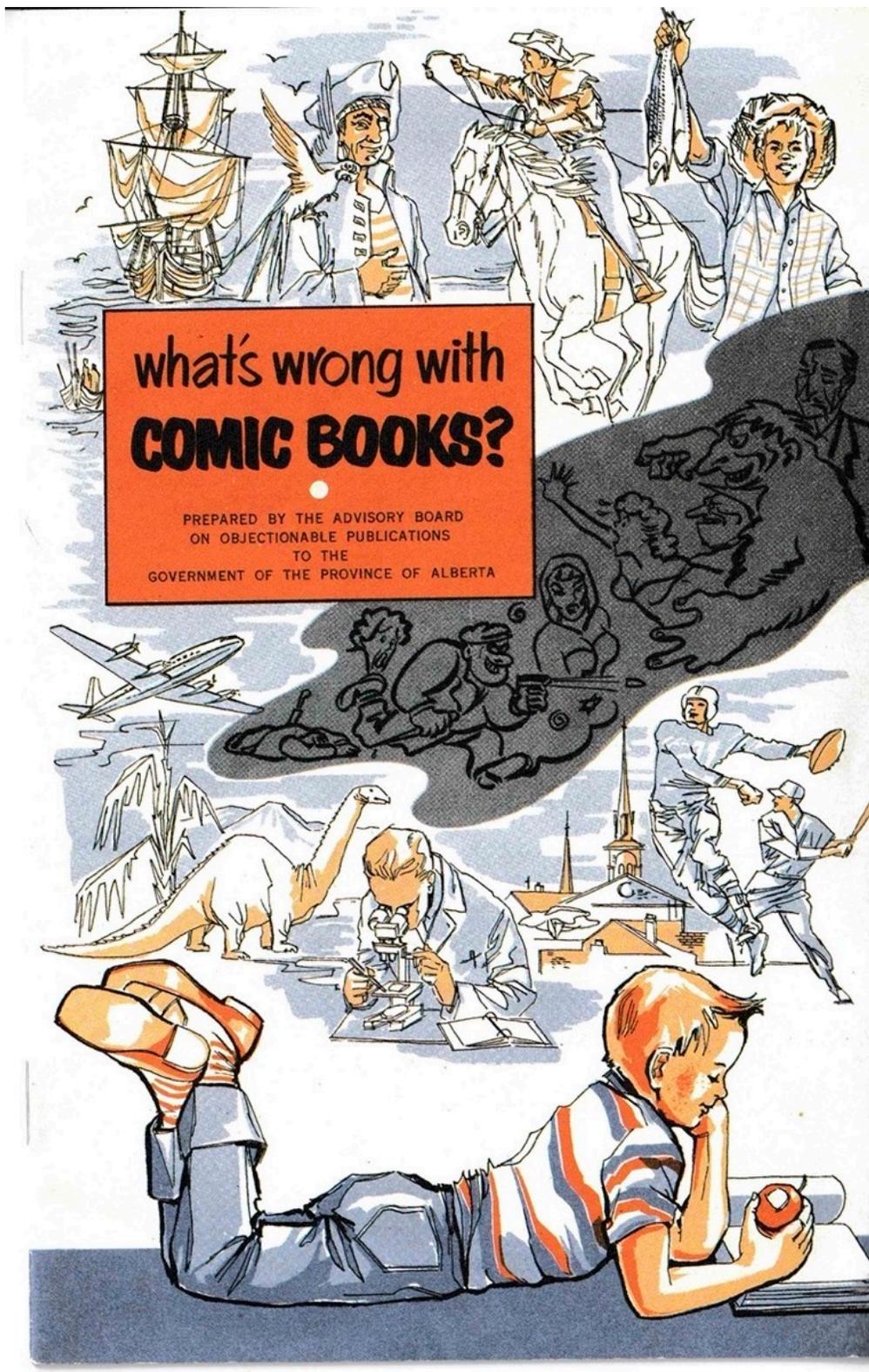
Accessed August 28, 2021. <https://infed.org/mobi/pierre-bourdieu-habitus-capital-and-field-exploring-reproduction-in-the-practice-of-education/>

Smith, Matthew and Randy Duncan, eds. *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*. New York: Routledge (2017).

Society for the Promotion of Canadian Comics. "80 Years and Beyond: A Virtual Symposium on

- Canadian Comics.” Accessed July 27, 2021. <https://www.canadiancomics.org/academic-conference>
- Steele, Jennifer Elaine Steele. “Censorship of Library Collections: An Analysis Using Gatekeeping Theory.” *Collection Management*. 43, no. 4 (2018): 229-248.
- Tilley, Carol. “Educating with Comics.” In Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan, eds. *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*. New York: Routledge (2017): 3-11.
- . “Seducing the Innocent: Fredric Wertham and the Falsifications that Helped Condemn Comics.” *Information & Culture: A Journal of History*. 47, no. 4 (November-December 2012): 383-413.
- Tilley, Joseph. "Pulp Fictional Folk Devils? The Fulton Bill and the Campaign to Censor “Crime and Horror Comics” in Cold War Canada, 1945-1955." Masters thesis. Simon Fraser University, 2015.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Twomey, John E. “The Citizens’ Committee and Comic-Book Control: A Study of Extragovernmental Restraint.” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 20, no. 4 *Obscenity and the Arts* (1955): 621-629.
- Tzanakis, Michael. “Bourdieu’s Social Reproduction Thesis and the Role of Cultural Capital in Educational Attainment: A Critical Review of Key Empirical Studies.” *Educate*. 11, no. 1 (2011): 76-90.
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. “Carol Tilley: Comic Book Crusader.” Interview. July 23, 2013. Accessed July 27, 2021. <https://youtu.be/cktZutUTok>
- Waddington, P. A. J. "Mugging as a Moral Panic: A Question of Proportion." *The British Journal of Sociology*. 37, no. 2 (1986): 245-259.
- Weiner, Stephen. *The rise of the graphic novel: faster than a speeding bullet*. New York: NBM (2003).
- Wright, Bradford W. *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (2nd ed.) Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Appendix



# what's wrong with **COMIC BOOKS?**

PREPARED BY THE ADVISORY BOARD  
ON OBJECTIONABLE PUBLICATIONS  
TO THE  
GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

## Why an Advisory Board?

The "comic" book problem is of world-wide concern. It has assumed such serious proportions that many governments, including those of Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the United Nations, have appointed committees to study this matter. In response to a growing outcry from parents, educators, religious leaders and others, the Government of the Province of Alberta issued an Order in Council in 1954 which states

"... it is deemed advisable and in the public interest to establish a Board to be known as the ADVISORY BOARD ON OBJECTIONABLE PUBLICATIONS to study and investigate the question of crime and other objectionable comics and salacious magazines and to recommend effective action to prevent their sale and distribution in the Province."

### THE ALBERTA ADVISORY BOARD ON OBJECTIONABLE PUBLICATIONS

Mrs. A. J. Maure, Chairman, 9227 117 Street, Edmonton

R. M. Block, 534 Parkview Drive, Medicine Hat

J. E. Dutton, Public Library, Lethbridge

Mrs. L. G. Fisher, 805 1st Avenue West, Calgary

Francis P. O'Hara, 9711 85 Avenue, Edmonton

Mrs. John Srigley, 11208 71 Street, Edmonton

Mrs. W. E. Stiles, Didsbury, Alberta

*If there is any aspect of the "comics" problem that you wish to bring to the attention of the Board, please correspond with the Board member in your vicinity.*

## Do You Know What Your Child is Reading?

*If we consider it necessary to safeguard the physical well-being of our children, is it not natural that their minds, which should control their bodies, must be given even greater protection?*

- The Senate of Canada. Proceedings of the Special Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature. 1952-53.

*Why does our civilization give to the child not its best but its worst, in paper, in language, in art, in ideas?*

- Wertham. *Seduction of the Innocent*. Page 15.

*Today in a mass-produced, mass-organized, group-thinking society, books are above all others the means by which the individual may be nourished and a free society preserved.*

- His Excellency The Right Honourable Vincent Massey, Governor-General of Canada.

## "Comics" are No Laughing Matter!

Busy parents only glance at comics because they have so little time or inclination to study them. The Advisory Board has made a careful and exhaustive study of both "comics" and expert opinion on them. As a result this pamphlet has been compiled by the Advisory Board for the guidance of parents and others concerned. The Board also urges parents to take time to appraise the comics their children read.

The Board's major objections to comics are listed below. Following each objection are selected opinions of recognized authorities.

### 1 SOME "COMICS" GLORIFY CRIME AND CRIMINALS: THEY ENCOURAGE THE COMMISSION OF CRIME AND CONTEMPT FOR LAWFUL AUTHORITY.

Is the police official often less clever and resourceful than the criminal? Is he often outwitted even though the criminal is ultimately punished? Is the police officer the hero or is the villain really the hero? Whom will the children regard as their hero—the police officer or the villain?

*In my many years of Police experience, I have found no comedy in crime—only tragedy and broken homes. Children should be taught to respect the laws, and the law enforcement agencies, that they may not gain the erroneous impression, as they so often do from crime comics, that it is clever to evade the law and ridicule and hamper the efforts of law enforcement officers.*



—M. F. E. Anthony, Chief Constable, City of Edmonton, Assistant Commissioner, R.C.M. Police (retired) (former Director of Criminal Investigation R.C.M.P.)

*Crime "comics" are a contributing factor leading to juvenile delinquency.*

—Report of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics.

*The availability of salacious literature and presentation of any type which glorify crime make a mockery of democratic living and respect for order.*

—J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the F.B.I., U.S. Government.

### 2

### SOME "COMICS" PRESENT A DISTORTED, UNHEALTHY AND IMMORAL CONCEPT OF SEX AND MARRIAGE.

Will a detrimental impression of sex or marriage remain with your children?



*... if we break down the regard that we have for the sanctity of the human body and the fundamental relations between man and woman, we are destroying our civilization.*

—Charlotte Whitton, Mayor of Ottawa, (The Senate of Canada, Proceedings of the Special Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature.)

*"A Guide is pure in thought and in mind and in deed." With so much literature denoting thought, speech and action of an impure and immoral nature available, it is very difficult to instill into Guides the proper conception of this law of purity.*

—Mrs. D. E. S. Wishart, Former Chief Commissioner of Canadian Girl Guides, (The Senate of Canada, Proceedings of the Special Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature.)

*The most subtle and pervading effect of crime comics on children can be summarized in a single phrase: Moral disarmament.*

—Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent.*

**3** SOME "COMICS" FOSTER PREJUDICE AGAINST CLASS, RACE, CREED, AND NATIONALITY.

Is the villain usually a foreigner? Is he a person not of the white race? Is the villain usually from another country? Are pagan beliefs being spread?



*"Comics" which depict . . . race hatred impair the ethical development of children.*

- Report of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics.

**4** SOME "COMICS" PORTRAY VIOLENT DEATH, GROTESQUE, FANTASTIC AND UNNATURAL CREATURES WITH REPULSIVE REALISM.



Do the "comics" your children read promote good mental health? Do they cause tension and fear?

*One wonders what place they [Comics portraying fear and horror] have in the life of a child other than to fill him with unnatural fears and forebodings.*

- Mrs. C. W. Mellish, Children's Reading Committee, The Canadian Home and School and Parent Federation.

**5** MOST "COMICS" ARE INARTISTIC.

Is the paper poor, the printing blurred and the colour gaudy or unpleasing?



*Most comics could not be called artistic by any stretch of the imagination. They are cheap tawdry commercial reproductions that haven't anything to do with art. The pictorial content seems to me most damaging to growing children, especially those with sensitive artistic notions.*

- H. G. Clyde, Edmonton, Alberta, Head of Department of Fine Arts, University of Alberta.

**6** ALL "COMICS" ARE DETRIMENTAL TO GOOD READING SKILLS.

Are lines of type floating in small balloons, training your child to become a slow word-by-word reader? Is the print cramped? Are "comics" enlarging your child's vocabulary? Is there anything "comics" do for your children that a good children's book won't do better?

*No informed thought is given to the fact that far from instilling into children and adolescents a taste for books, the habit of reading "comics" exclusively tends to destroy this taste. That is the most serious aspect of the matter. A people who thrive on comics will never progress beyond the digest stage and a nation of digest readers will never be a cultured nation.*

- The Senate of Canada. Proceedings of the Senate Committee on Sale and Distribution of Salacious and Indecent Literature.





- FAMOUS DOG STORIES, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
*Evans*. Derry: Airedale of the Frontier  
*Evans*. Derry's Partner  
*Kjelgaard*. Big Red  
*Kjelgaard*. Irish Red  
*Kjelgaard*. Snow Dog  
*Knight*. Lassie Come Home  
*Lathrop*. Juneau, The Sleigh Dog  
*O'Brien*. Return of Silver Chief  
*O'Brien*. Silver Chief, Dog of the North  
*O'Brien*. Silver Chief to the Rescue  
*O'Brien*. Spike of Swift River  
*O'Brien*. Valent, Dog of the Timberline  
*Terhune*. Buff, A Collie
- YOUNG READERS' BOOKSHELF, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.29  
 Young Readers' Baseball Stories  
 Young Readers' Basketball Stories  
 Young Readers' Football Stories  
 Young Readers' Indian Stories  
 Young Readers' Pioneer Stories
- THRUSHWOOD BOOKS, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
*Seaton*. The Biography of a Grizzly  
*Tarkington*. Penrod
- BIG LEAGUE BASEBALL LIBRARY, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
*DiMaggio*, Lucky to be a Yankee  
*Young*. Roy Campanella
- FAMOUS SPORTS STORIES, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
*Emery*. High, Inside!  
*McCormick*. Flying Tackle
- TRIPLE TITLE SERIES, Toronto. *McLeod*, \$1.49  
 Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys  
 Fun, Fun, Fun  
 Pirates, Pirates, Pirates  
 Space, Space, Space

## FOR YOUNGER READERS

- LITTLE GOLDEN LIBRARY BOOKS, 39c  
 Animals of Farmer Jones  
 Brave Cowboy Bill  
 Christmas in the Country  
 Gingerbread Man  
 Golden Goose  
 Hansel and Gretel  
 The Musicians of Bremen  
 Little Red Hen  
 Little Red Riding Hood  
 Madeline  
 Nursery Tales  
 Puss in Boots  
 Scuffy, the Tugboat  
 Singing Games  
 Thumbelina  
 Topsy Turvey Circus  
 Twelve Dancing Princesses  
 Year in the City  
 Year on the Farm  
*Bannerman*. The Story of Little Black Sambo. *Clarke Irwin*, 75c  
*Brunhoff*. Story of Babar. *Ambassador*, \$1.50  
*Duvoisin*. Donkey-Donkey. *McLeod*, 75c  
*Johnston*. Jamie and the Dump Truck. *Musson*, \$1.35  
*Lenskie*. Cowboy Small. *Oxford*, \$1.00  
*Potter*. Peter Rabbit. *Saunders*, \$1.00
- PUFFIN PICTURE BOOKS, Montreal. *Penguin Books (Canada) Ltd.*, 50c and 60c  
*Courtney*. A Book of Trains  
*Hardy and Magoran*. A Book of Ships  
*Stroud*. Airliners  
*Veale and "Wren"*. How Planes Fly  
*White*. Sailing Ships

Additional titles may be obtained from: Children's Books for \$1.25 or Less—Association for Childhood Education, 1200 15th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

# R<sub>x</sub> FOR "COMICS"

## Guiding Your Child to Good Reading

## TREASURE TO SHARE

Everyone loves a good story. Reading has been the chief delight of generations of children. If it is losing its appeal for them, may it not be partly because we adults, amid all the distractions of the modern world, have ourselves forgotten the magic to be found in books?

We must enlarge our own knowledge and renew our own sense of wonder in books before we can transmit this enthusiasm to a child. We cannot teach him to value books unless he sees them around the home on shelves and tables, and unless he observes that they are important to us and that we get pleasure from them.

## READING . . . A FAMILY ADVENTURE

If parents repeat nursery rhymes to babies, if they share picture books, tell stories and read to older children, they will not only be giving pleasure to the children, but they will be giving them the opportunity to grow unconsciously in imagination and in mental capacity.

It is important that families make time to read together. There are books that appeal to all ages. Alice in Wonderland, The Jungle Books, The Wind in the Willows, Charlotte's Web and many others have no age limit. Fairy tales and hero stories are as full of wisdom for adults as for children.



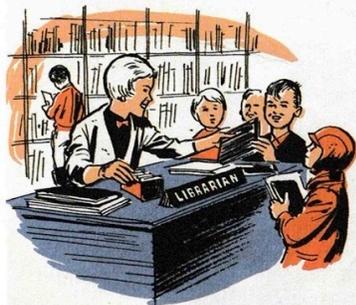
There is peace and healing for a child who, at the close of a strenuous day, lies relaxed to listen to one of the world's great stories before he goes to sleep.

Children love to talk about their books. Wise parents will encourage this and will take a real interest in what their children have to say. Here is a key to understanding a child's tastes and interests, and a guide to the choice of other books which follow his interests and widen his tastes.

#### BRINGING CHILDREN AND BOOKS TOGETHER

Some children have to be introduced to books. A brief glimpse at the plot, a description of an interesting character or place will often serve to get them started. This means some effort on the part of parents, but the results will justify the effort because they will lead the child on to a richer life through books.

If there is a Public Library nearby, parents are welcome to visit its Children's Room and to find out what it offers to their children. The Children's Librarian knows her books and she knows children and understands their interests. She will not underestimate their capabilities and she is interested in widening their knowledge and experience. She will recommend books to them, and she holds Story Hours where books are introduced through the old and charming art of story-telling.



When a child has learned to read, he is naturally eager to practice this new skill. He will read whatever is available. Unfortunately it is often the tawdry and unworthy book that is at hand.

It is important for a child to have his own bookshelf. He should be encouraged to take pride in the possession of good books and to realize that a book is something to treasure.

#### HOW TO DISCOVER GOOD CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Children do not demand the latest books. Their favorites have been handed down from hand to eager hand. Parents, aware of the touching brevity of childhood, will want to make sure that no time is wasted on unworthy books. There are wise guides to help in the choice of children's books. Paul Hazard in his books, *Children and Men* discusses their books with wit and sensibility. "To cheat in *quality*, that is what I call oppressing children," he says. Miss Lillian H. Smith, for many years head of work with boys and girls in the Toronto Public Library has written *The Unreluctant Years*, in which she shares with us the knowledge and wisdom acquired in her years of experience in introducing boys and girls to books. Both these books are a delight to read and in them parents will find guidance and inspiration.

Two practical buying guides which may be obtained from a public library or from the Cultural Activities Branch of the Department of Economic Affairs, are *Books for Boys and Girls* edited by Jean Thomson of the Toronto Public Library, and *Junior Bookshelf*\* compiled especially for the children of Alberta by Grace McDonald and Dorothy Rogers, Children's Librarians of the Public Libraries of Edmonton and Calgary.

The best way to help the children in whose development we take such a deep interest, is to share books with them. Good children's books contain the essence of wisdom as distilled and expressed by mature minds. It is a treasure to enjoy and to share with the children of today.

LOUISE RILEY,  
Chairman, Alberta Library Board.

\*May be borrowed from the following:

Public Libraries  
University Extension Library  
Supervisor of Public Libraries, Cultural Activities Branch, Govt. of Alta.

## For Your Further Information

For more detailed information on "comics" you are referred to the following:

### BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

*Frank, Josette.* Comics, T.V., Radio, Movies: What Do They Offer Your Children?

Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 148, Public Affairs Committee Inc., 22E 38th Street, New York 16, N.Y.

Report of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics. State of New York, Albany, New York, 1954.

*Wertham, F.* Seduction of the Innocent. Clark, Irwin and Co. Ltd., Toronto.

*Witty, P. and Bricker, H.* Your Child and Radio, T.V., Comics and Movies. Science Research Associates.

### PERIODICALS AND PERIODICAL ARTICLES

Books? What About the Comics? *The Christian Century*, March 30, 1955, page 389.

An Evaluation of Comic Books. Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books, Box 1486, Cincinnati. (Issued at intervals.)

Horror on the Newsstands. *Time* (September 27, 1954, page 51.)

*Murphy, T. E.* The Face of Violence. (*Readers' Digest*, November, 1954, page 135 - 137.)

*Murphy, T. E.* For the Kiddies to Read. (*Readers' Digest*, June, 1954, page 36 - 40.)

*Murrell, J. L.* Are Comics Better or Worse? Annual Rating of Comic Magazines. (*Parents' Magazine*, August, 1955, pages 48 - 50.)

Acceptable Comics. National Organization for Decent Literature, 33 Congress Parkway, Chicago 5, Ill. (Issued monthly.)

*Wertham, F.* Reading for the Innocent. (*Wilson Library Bulletin*, April, 1955, pages 610 - 613.)

Talking Shop. (*Wilson Library Bulletin*, June, 1954, page 884.)

*Witty, P.* Comics, Television and Our Children. (*Today's Health*, March 30, 1955, page 18 - 21.)

### DO NOT FORGET THAT YOUR OPINION CARRIES WEIGHT.

Your retailer will feature worthwhile publications if you create the demand.

Do everything in your power to make better use of good reading material obtainable from your Public Library and other sources.