# “THE WHOLE FURSHLUGGINER OPERATION”: THE JEWISH COMIC BOOK INDUSTRY, 1933-1954

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**ABSTRACT**

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Over the course of the twentieth century, the comic book industry evolved from an amateur operation into a major institution of American popular culture. Comic books, once considered mere cultural ephemera or quite simply "junk," became a major commodity business.

The comic book industry emerged out of the pulp magazine industry. According to industry circulation data, new comic book releases increased from 22 in 1939 to 1125 titles by the end of 1945. Comic book scholars have yet to adequately explain the roots of this historical phenomenon, particularly its distinctly Jewish composition. Between the years of 1933 and 1954, the comic book industry operated as a successful distinct Jewish industry.

The comic book industry emerged from the pulp magazine trade. Economic necessity, more than any other factor, attracted Jewish writers and artists to the nascent industry. Jewish publishers adopted many of the same business practices they inherited from the pulps. As second-generation Jews, these young men shared similar experiences growing up in New York City. Other creative industries actively practiced anti-Semitic hiring procedures. Many Jewish artists came to comic book work with very little professional experience in cartooning and scripting. The comic book industry allowed one to learn on the job. The cultural world comic books emerged out of was crucially important to the industry's development. Comic strips, pulps, movies, and science fiction all inspired Jewish writers and artists.

An exploration of the comic book industry's working environment reveals how Jewish comic book writers, artists, editors, and publishers simultaneously created a space for

themselves as Jews while developing successful comic book titles and characters. While many of them created an environment suitable to workplace camaraderie and collaboration, there were several areas of conflict. An investigation of these areas of conflict show how Jews responded to workplace disagreements, management exploitation, and battles over artistic credit. In particular, the practice of ghosting art remains a particularly contentious issue. Jewish writers and artists in the comic book industry did not form or join a labor union in order to protect their rights and interests. A consideration of this development shows that they stood in stark contrast to other industries with a large Jewish workforce.

Finally, the examination of World War II through the comic book industry's internal development provides a variety of different ways to unearth how the Jewish writers, artists, editors, and publishers shed their amateur roots and became a professionalized industry. This professional turn brought increased sales and increasingly mature content for an older readership. Many Jewish writers and artists feared being drafted into the military. However, those that were drafted came away from their experiences with a sense of pride and accomplishment. They could not foresee that their industry was coming under attack. Many comic book historians place the roots for the comic book industry's cultural downfall in the 1950s. However, primary sources from the 1940s reveal that social critics and parents were already concerned about mature comic book content in the 1940s. Comic book publishers were slow to respond or outright ignored complaints from social critics and concerned parents.

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To Katie, with all my love

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## INTRODUCTION

*"The topic of Jews, comics, and superheroes is simultaneously specific and amorphous. It's a topic that, when looked at directly, almost disappears. One has to look at it from the corner of one's eye to catch a glimpse of something that, by its nature, evades detection."*[1]

*"We are people of the Book; we are storytellers essentially and anyone who's exposed to Jewish culture…walks away for the rest of his life with an instinct for telling stories."*[2]

The comic book industry thrived almost from its onset in the 1930s, becoming a permanent institution of American popular culture by the end of World War II. According to industry circulation data, new comic book releases increased from 22 in 1939 to 1125 titles by the end of 1945.[3] From 1933 to 1954, the comic book industry obtained a crucial niche in American popular culture. Comic book writers and artists found a mainstream audience, especially through the superhero genre. One comic book historian stated these superhero "myths are the closest thing we have to a national religion."[4] The continuing visibility and influence of the superhero genre within American popular culture proves the early comic book industry is still vitally important. While comic book content remains highly visible in American popular culture, the creators of this content remain decidedly invisible and in need of further investigation. Comic book scholars have ably demonstrated the appeal and relevance of comic books to their American audience but have yet to adequately explain the roots of this seeming phenomenon, particularly its distinctly Jewish composition. The experiences and careers of

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[1] Danny Fingeroth, *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007), 155.
[2] Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008), xiv.
[3] Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 22.
[4] Fingeroth, *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero*, 23.

Jewish comic book writers, artists, and publishers remains largely fragmentary and in need of further academic attention.

*Background of the Problem*

The comic book industry offers a closer perspective for how a particular segment of American Jews defined themselves in a thriving secular popular culture. Jewish influence over the comic book industry was rarely recognized by most outside observers at the moment of its peak. It was not until recent times that scholars even acknowledged an overt Jewish presence in comic books.[5] Comic book creators have always been subjects worthy of historical inquiry. However, comic book historians have not used them as the central focus of many critical works. For scholars, the role of the comic book creator has habitually come second to the product itself. In part this is intentional on the part of the industry as a whole. Traditionally, comic book creators of the 1930s and 1940s left readers with an impression of anonymity, hiding behind various pen names and flamboyant personas. The promotion of the comic book company and its stable of characters and titles was more important and what is still immediately evident in a typical reader's initial exposure to comic books. Creators have also tended to be characterized, especially by nostalgic older fans, as romanticized author figures.[6] This was a holdover practice from early twentieth century pulp magazines. Fans built passionate letter columns devoted to popular writers and artists such as Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. This helped to facilitate an

[5] Eddie Portnoy and Paul Buhle, "Comic Strips/Comic Books," in *Jews and American Popular Culture Music, Theater, Popular Art, and Literature*, ed. Paul Buhle (Westport: Praeger Perspectives, 2007), 2: 313.
[6] Brad Ricca, "The Historians of the Creators," in *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, ed. Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 2017), 76-77.

atmosphere where the writer or artist was seen as a mythical fictional hero on par with the characters they created rather than a properly placed historical subject.

To make things even more problematic for the comic book scholar, while some early comic book publishers did acknowledge their workforce in tangible ways, most did not. Because of a variety of factors, most notably anonymous production methods via shops and ghost artists as well as the complicated ownerships of many of the characters, readers and critics were always only given partial information on who exactly was making what.[7] Early comic book publishers either consciously changed or blatantly avoided creator bylines, increasing the shroud of mystery surrounding comic book creators and their artistic community.[8] Thus, it is extremely difficult for comic book historians to reconcile fact from fiction when reconstructing the history of the industry.

*Historiography*

Previously, academics tended to concentrate and privilege research on the content and aesthetics of comic books. These scholars noted educators used comic books in the classroom as early as the 1940s as an instructional aid. Historians also have well documented the use of comic book illustration in military manuals and pamphlets during World War II.[9] In the 1940s and 1950s, comic book publishers marketed several titles to educators in the hope of receiving positive press and avoiding connections to juvenile delinquency.

[7] See Chapter 4 for a detailed overview of the ghost artist system.
[8] Ricca, "The Historians of the Creators," 76-77.
[9] Carol L. Tilley, "Educating with Comics," in *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, ed. Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 2017), 33.

Starting in the 1950s, many of the early chroniclers of the comic book industry were insiders or fans.[10] There was no distinct scholarly methodology. Professional academic inquiry of comic book creator's careers and as distinct historical subjects was an extremely difficult undertaking. Several scholarly works in the 1960s treated comic book content seriously with an objective viewpoint. Intellectuals such as Jules Feiffer, Umberto Eco, and Warren Susman positively connected comic book characters such as Batman and Superman to the evolution of American popular culture and defined them as examples of modern American mythology and an important commodity business.[11] In the 1965 book, *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, Feiffer argued that the transition from stock heroes, detectives, and soldiers to fully-fledged superheroes transformed the comic book industry into a place of unparalleled imagination and creativity.[12] Social critics and by extension, American popular culture, could no longer ignore the artistic contributions of the comic book industry. Furthermore, Feiffer and novelist Mordecai Richler began to explore the connections between Jews and the comic book industry. In an essay published in 1967, Richler stated:

> "Superman, The Flash, The Human Torch, even Captain Marvel, were our golems ….There is no doubt, for instance, that The Green Lantern has its origins in Hassidic mythology. Will Eisner's The Spirit…is given to cabalistic superstitions and speaking in parables."[13]

These two writers introduced the idea that Jewish ethnic identity was an essential element of the comic book industry. In addition, Feiffer and Richler suggested comic books possessed clear

[10] Ricca, "The Historians of the Creators," 76.
[11] See Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," in *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 107-124 and Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).
[12] Jules Feiffer, *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (New York: Dial Press, 1965; Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2003, 8-9. Citation refers to the Fantagraphics Books edition.
[13] Mordecai Richler, "The Great Comic Book Heroes," *Encounter* (May 1967): 52.

Jewish subtexts and cultural roots.[14] However, these arguments achieved little attention among scholars who were more interested in validating the field of comic book studies.

In academia around this same time, popular culture historian Ray Browne analyzed how people consumed and viewed comic books, legitimizing them in the eyes of many popular culture historians. Browne's emphasis on comic books came at a time when any research on subjects related to popular culture was looked at with skepticism by many other academic disciplines. Comic book professionals also looked to academics to legitimize their industry. For example, Marvel Comics editor Stan Lee attended several academic discussions of comic books and was an in-demand guest lecturer on university campuses in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1972, Michael Uslan taught the first accredited college course on comic books at Indiana University. The course encouraged and taught many academics how to conceive of comic books as an important segment of American popular culture. Most importantly, comic book studies received a great deal of positive press and increased academic attention.[15] However, academics focused a majority of this attention on the characters of comic book titles and particular stories, not on the creators.[16]

In 1970 and 1972, comic book writer Jim Steranko published a two volume set titled *The Steranko History of Comics*. While primarily dealing with stories and characters, Steranko

[14] Beth Davies-Stofka and David McConeghy, "Myths, Archetypes, and Religions," in *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, ed. Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 2017), 174.
[15] See Charles Hatfield, "Comics Studies, the Anti-Discipline," *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, ed. Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 2017), 11-27 and Carrye Kay Syma and Robert G. Weiner, "Introduction," in *Graphic Novels and Comics in the Classroom: Essays on the Educational Power of Sequential Art*, ed. Carrye Kay Syma and Robert G. Weiner (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2013), 4.
[16] See Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), Les Daniels, *Batman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), Glenn Yeffeth, ed., *The Man From Krypton: A Closer Look at Superman* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2006), and Paul Levitz, *The Golden Age of DC Comics: 1935-1956* (New York: Taschen, 2013).

devoted a significant portion of his history to short biographies of creators. These biographies hinted at the Jewish backgrounds of much of the comic book industry. However, Steranko consciously chose not to write a history of the comic book industry geared for academics. For example, Steranko chose not to include citations for any of his evidence or sources. He also clearly marketed the book to comic book fans.[17] Jerry Bails, another life-long comic book fan turned historian, began a four volume set titled *Who's Who of American Comic Books* in 1973. Bails attempted to identify comic book creators from the Golden Age and give them proper artistic credit for their work. Bails's approach professionalized comic book studies to a certain degree. He interviewed comic book industry figures with elaborately designed questionnaires and started a large comic book collection on microfilm for further academic research.[18] In the mid-1990s, Bails decided to put *Who's Who of American Comic Books* on the Internet. Academics interested in the lives and careers of comic book creators could use the site as a useful research tool.

Like many of the earliest academic practitioners seen above, many scholarly works of the past forty years focus on the merits of particular characters and stories, often emphasizing the unique literary qualities inherent in the comic book genre. These approaches often frame comic books against those critics who would consider them "junk." In the twenty first century, comic book scholars still feel their chosen subject material needs special justification in contrast to safer, more traditional historical topics.[19] For instance, Batman historian Will Brooker reassured

[17] Ricca, "The Historians of the Creators," 78-79.
[18] Jerry G. Bails, "'The Who's Who of American Comic Books' surveys and other materials," Special Collections, Michigan State University, n.p.
[19] See Thierry Groensteen, "Why are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?" Anne Magnussen and Hans-Christian Christiansen, eds., *Comics & Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000): 29-42.

his readers that serious comic book research "can be done, that such work is academically valid."[20] As a rule, this remains the predominant scholarly model in comic book studies.

Published in 1990, M. Thomas Inge's *Comics as Culture* was one of the most influential texts in the field. Inge believed comic books were so widely consumed in American popular culture that they clearly deserved critical attention.[21] Inge expanded his argument and demonstrated that comic books were reflections of larger American social and cultural trends. Inge discussed the specific genre of superheroes and their emergence from the heroes of old folklore and mythology, which he claimed was a persistent and perhaps essential component of American popular culture. However, Inge largely relegated Jews to the background of his narrative.

Cultural historian William Savage Jr. and others emphasized communication between comic book creators and their reading audience. If one looks close enough, Savage argued in *Comic Books and America, 1945-1954*, the intent and message of the artists and writers of a comic book are contained in the narrative. Under Savage's methodology, "comic books, like other products of mass culture," comprised meaning for their readers in uncertain historical moments.[22] Savage connected various comic book stories of the 1950s to the atomic bomb, Communism, and the Korean War. This approach also privileged comic book content as the primary topic under consideration, however. Savage's work sidestepped the wide spectrum of contradictions in the comic book industry. He did not give comic book creators proper agency for their work or acknowledge the role of shared ethnicity in their work and professional

[20] Will Brooker, *Batman: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 14.
[21] M. Thomas Inge, *Comics as Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), xi.
[22] William W. Savage Jr., *Comic Books and America, 1945-1954* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), ix.

environment. Yet, Savage and Inge demonstrated that scholars in American Studies, mass media, and historical disciplines began in the 1990s to treat comic book subjects with vital and relevant academic arguments.

Several of these later works further engaged with how comic book characters, stories, and industry trends reflected and commented upon American popular culture and history. Brooker's *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* was one of the first books that tackled a single comic book character's historical development. Brooker's project was an "investigation…of the disparate texts which have borne the signifier 'Batman' over sixty years, in an attempt to reconstruct their context."[23] And in an overview of comic book history, cultural historian Bradford Wright's *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* argued comic books clearly intertwined with American youth culture and reflected cultural trends throughout the 1940s to 1990s. Once again, comic book content was more important to Brooker and Wright than the creators' careers in the industry. However, Wright specifically cautioned against analyzing comic books for irrefutable meaning. Wright stated that there are intellectual pitfalls in analyzing a medium such as comic books. In his book, *Comic Book Nation*, Wright argued there is an intellectual temptation to read more into comic books than was actually present in the text.[24] Different reading audiences interpreted comic book content in different ways. Nevertheless, Wright still used the comic books themselves as his primary focus. I do not question the academic validity or utility of these approaches to history. Echoing Wright's main critique of comic book studies as useful only to a certain extent, I stress the creators of these

[23] Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural* Icon, 3.
[24] Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture* (Baltimore, ME: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xviii.

characters and comic books receive comparatively little attention under this scholarly approach. Furthermore, their Jewish ethnicity remains largely invisible using these academic inquiries.

As many of the interview subjects documented in the following chapters, comic book writers and artists initially did not think they were a distinctly Jewish industry or contributing anything meaningful to American popular culture. Nevertheless, the past decade has seen a slight emphasis on academic works that highlight the presence and essential contributions of Jews to a variety of popular media, including comic books.[25] Comic books were one of the few mass mediums along with television and film in which Jews could not only carve out a career, but also largely define the industry according to distinct cultural sensibilities and production techniques.

In the years right after Feiffer and Richler's moment in the late 1960s, scholarship specifically on the connections between Jews and comic books did not adequately address their historical impact or importance to the industry's evolution. It is only in the past twenty years that scholars have renewed their attention towards the connection between Jews and the comic book industry. Foreshadowing this increased attention, Michael Chabon's novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* was one of the first published works that properly placed Jews at the forefront of the comic book industry's formation and development.[26] Although a fictional work, Chabon portrayed the lives of these Jewish writers and artists. Simcha Weinstein covered

[25] Academics collaborated with comic book professionals on several autobiographies and biographies of comic book professionals. See Bob Kane and Tom Andrae, *Batman & Me: An Autobiography* (New York: Eclipse Books, 1989), Stan Lee and George Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), Mark Evanier, *Kirby: King of Comics* (New York: Abrams, 2008), Bill Schelly, *Man of Rock: A Biography of Joe Kubert* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2008), and Steven Brower, *From Shadow to Light: The Life and Art of Mort Meskin* (Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2010).

[26] See Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay: A Novel* (New York: Picador USA, 2001).

a great deal of Jewish writers and artists in his 2006 book *Up, Up, and Oy Vey!: How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero*. However, Weinstein did not really engage in the comic book careers of these Jews nor did he discuss them as a part of a collective industry. Weinstein was more interested in how their superhero creations personified "a theme or themes that figure prominently in the Jewish tradition."[27] Weinstein largely sidestepped the broader Jewish community of writers and artists in his account.

Some of most recent works on the connections between the comic book industry and Jews focused on biographical treatments of comic book creators. Brad Ricca's *Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—The Creators of Superman*, and Gerard Jones's *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* are two of the most visible works dealing with Jewish comic book creators. Both authors wrote narrative histories and were primarily focused on select individuals.[28] Moreover, Ricca and Jones's writing styles were geared towards a general readership; they imparted dramatic agency to their historical subjects in order to craft a compelling story. However, Ricca and Jones established there was an undeniable Jewish presence at the very forefront of the comic book industry's development. My work explores these individuals further. I attempt to frame their actions as a history of second generation Jews coming together to form an industry in a time of economic uncertainty.

Other books like Blake Bell and Michael J. Vassalo's *The Secret History of Marvel Comics* concentrated only on one particular publisher and did not offer an expansive perspective of

[27] Simcha Weinstein, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey!: How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero* (Baltimore, ME: Leviathan Press, 2006), 17.
[28] See Brad Ricca, *Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—The Creators of Superman* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin Press, 2013) and Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

Jewish ethnic identity in the industry. Moreover, Bell and Vassalo's argument was not to claim Jewishness in the comic book industry. They only sought to "correct the half-baked tales and legends that have spread across the internet and into books that deal with the origins of Marvel Comics."[29] Unlike Bell and Vassalo, I move beyond discussions of a single comic book publisher. I want to discuss the comic book industry as a single, distinct institution.

Arie Kaplan was one of the few writers to take on the connection between Jews and comic books explicitly. According to Kaplan, "early Jewish cartoonists, street kids with no formal artistic training, wrote and drew comic books to feed their families."[30] As Kaplan attested, most scholars acknowledged there was a Jewish presence but they did not know how to interpret its larger importance to the formation and development of the comic book industry. Kaplan himself did not really engage with larger questions of interpretation. He only went so far to claim, "the story of Jews' involvement in comic books is a reflection of Jews' changing status in American society."[31] Kaplan's interviews with several Jewish comic book writers and artists gave real insight into their lives and careers. However, Kaplan did not demonstrate that comic book writers, artists, editors, and publishers comprised a distinct Jewish industry.

In *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero Industry*, comic book writer and historian Danny Fingeroth argued that Judaism and American superheroes shared many parallels and continuities. Fingeroth saw Jewish experiences and lessons reflected through the lens of the superhero. He declared, "there *is* a sense of 'Jewish identity' that has

[29] Blake Bell and Michael J. Vassallo, *The Secret History of Marvel Comics* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2013), 9.
[30] Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books*, xiv.
[31] Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books*, xiv.

become part and parcel of American culture."[32] Fingeroth's work remains especially valuable to scholars interested in the parallels between Jews and superhero archetypes and themes. However, *Disguised as Clark Kent* largely omitted the working experiences of Jewish comic book writers, artists, editors, and publishers. I argue that the historical literature must shift towards creators and their labor experiences and less on the story content.

The scholarship on American Jewish labor, business, and media history, while valuable from a foundational standpoint, cannot sufficiently explain the significance of the Jewish comic book industry on its own. This is primarily because these scholars rarely discuss and sometimes even completely omit the Jewish comic book industry. For much of the twentieth century, John R. Commons and what he termed the "Wisconsin School" dominated labor history scholarship. Many of these early works focused on major labor unions such as the International Workers of the World or the American Federation of Labor. Labor historians emphasized these formal institutions until the 1960s.[33]

The Civil Rights Movement alongside later pioneering labor scholarship done by E.P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman shifted focus away from institutional histories to other kinds of labor history.[34] During this time, much of the scholarship shifted to a bottom-up perspective. Labor historians paid more attention to workers and their personal experiences in and out of the workplace environment. The 1980s ushered in a third historiographical trend. Labor historians took the bottom-up perspective of the 1960s and further diversified their methodologies and

[32] Fingeroth, *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero* 151.
[33] See David Brody, "On Creating a New Synthesis of American Labor History," in *Perspectives on American Labor History: The Problems of Synthesis*, ed. J. Carroll Moody and Alice Kessler-Harris (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1989).
[34] See Herbert G. Gutman, *Power & Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987).

theoretical frameworks. Labor historians such as Joan Scott, Ava Baron, Leon Fink, Alice Kessler-Harris, and David Brody published new works on regional studies, gender, revisionist biographies, and international comparative studies. These newer labor historians were interested in a labor synthesis. They wanted to combine the old institutional histories with some of the newer approaches to labor history into a new scholarly model.[35] Since this last historiographical shift, labor historians continued to publish works that challenged institutional labor history.

During this period of attempted synthesis, Daniel Soyer's *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939* and Tony Michel's *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* both featured Jewish working-class institutions. Soyer argued that the "*landsmanshaftn*, associations of immigrants from the same hometown, became the most popular form of organization among Eastern European Jewish immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."[36] In contrast, Michels traced the development of twentieth century Jewish socialism and political radicalism in the United States. Michels showed that Jewish radicals not only fought for worker rights but formed a community based on a shared ethnic nationalism.[37] While Soyer and Michels obviously omitted the comic book industry, their discussion of shared communities provides a useful methodology for the comic book industry. Much like Soyer's landsmanshaftn and Michels's radical left, Jewish comic book writers, artists, editors, and publishers all hailed from the same generation and shared similar experiences growing up together in the same New York City boroughs.

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[35] See Priscilla Murola and A.B. Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short, Illustrated History of Labor in the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2001).
[36] Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1.
[37] See Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Several recent American labor history books specifically focus on twentieth century Jewish labor organizations and issues. In particular, historian Daniel Katz revealed that garment workers and other Jewish working-class industries belonged to labor organizations that believed in social unionism. He defined social unionism as the "radical vision of social organization, a prescription for the political role of unions as well as an organizing strategy. Above all, it was an expression of union culture that intersected with a larger movement for social change."[38] The Jewish comic book industry did not have a strong union ethos but still believed in the possibility of social change. Some comic book writers and artists backed Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal principles. Some even boldly discussed progressive politics in the workplace. However, this did not translate into union activity or worker solidarity with other Jewish industries. In fact, writers and artists in the comic book industry did not follow the radical Socialism of other laborers during this time. The comic book industry actually embraced modern forms of capitalism and commercialization.

Historian Rebecca Kobrin's 2012 collection of essays *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, emphasized Jewish entrepreneurial success as being central to the history of American capitalism. Kobrin's theoretical focus on Jewish businesses adds to my analysis of the Jewish comic book industry of the 1930s and 1940s. As demonstrated above, academics widely chose to ignore Jewish contributions to the comic book industry. Kobrin argued "American economic historians and sociologists have long focused on the ways in which specific individuals engineered innovations in American business, and this volume will allow those

[38] Daniel Katz, *All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 4.

interested in American business to see how Jews, as one exemplary ethnic and religious group, adapted, took advantage of, and expanded particular niches in the American economy."[39] I adapt Kobrin's statement to demonstrate how Jews formed the comic book industry. Jewish comic book writers and artists took advantage of a cultural niche at a specific moment in time and created an enduring industry. Jewish comic book writers and artists like other Jewish workers examined in Kobrin's collection "participated in new areas of economic distribution and production."[40] My study of the Jewish comic book industry begins to fill a gap in our collective knowledge of Jewish and American capitalism.

Certain segments of modern American Jewish labor historiography focused on the interplay between the Jewish left and popular culture and media. For instance, labor historian Brian Dolber argued the radical Jewish left of the 1930s used the media and popular culture in order to spread their political ideology. In the process, Dolber argued, radical political messages gradually became compatible with American capitalism and an emerging consumer society. This fostered a "new framework for U.S. politics, expressed and experienced through mass culture."[41] However persuasive, Dolber emphasized the traditional working-class Jewish subjects: the garment trades, radical working-class unions, and Yiddish press. Dolber ably demonstrated that Jews used new mediums such as TV and radio. However, he does not show that during this time, the Jewish comic book industry created an entirely original medium of cultural expression. In

[39] Rebecca Kobrin, "Introduction: The Chosen People in the Chosen Land," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 2-3.
[40] Historians Phyllis Dillon and Andrew Godley used the Jewish garment industry as a primary example. See Phyllis Dillon and Andrew Godley, "The Evolution of the Jewish Garment Industry, 1940-1940," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 35-61.
[41] Brian Dolber, *Media and Culture in the U.S. Jewish Labor Movement: Sweating for Democracy in the Interwar Era* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 6.

addition, the comic book industry did not advocate for unions as Dolber suggested of other Jewish industries in New York City.

Cultural historians Michael Kammen and Michael Denning wrote extensively on the significant role of the print media in nineteenth century and twentieth century American popular culture. Kammen claimed newspapers and magazines "became sources of entertainment as well as basic information at the turn of the century."[42] Visual imagery became more important in reporting the news and attracting new readers. Newspaper circulation had a significant loyal readership among different ethnic communities including Jews. My research contributes to Kammen's methodology. Comic books were also major sources of entertainment and information. I propose that the formation and consolidation of the comic book industry by Jews in the 1930s was one crucial step towards making sense of the world around them. Nearly every American demographic read comic books in the 1930s and 1940s. In this way, comic books and their Jewish writers were an ideal means of making sense of one's world.

According to Denning, working-class Jews were active participants in American popular culture of the 1930s and 1940s. Jewish laborers from a wide variety of different industries, including the Disney animation studios, advocated for strikes and produced radical political content for popular consumption. The comic book industry is completely absent from Denning's analysis. In fact, the inclusion of the comic book industry directly challenge Denning's assertion of a "'proletarianization' of American culture, the increased influence on and participation of

[42] Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999), 82.

working-class Americans in the world of culture and the arts" during this historical era.[43] Although primarily working-class, Jewish writers and artists did not actively participate in the political and cultural wars of the 1930s and 1940s described in Denning's work. While mostly shunning labor unions, Jewish writers and artists did readily identify with American popular culture. Historian Andrew Heinze argued many Jews fashioned new identities for themselves through their active participation in acts of consumption.[44] Adapting Heinze's methodology, I argue that the Jewish comic book industry were active participants by appealing and marketing themselves to young, American readers.

Surveys of American Jewish media history do not even mention the comic book industry. Analysis of the comic book industry are largely absent from discussions of American Jewish labor and media.[45] For example, Arthur Hertzberg's *The Jews in America* devoted attention to other entertainment mediums that featured Jews, especially film, sports, and comedy. In addition, Eli Lederhendler's *American Jewry: A New History* completely omits the comic book industry from discussion. Jewish dominated industries are certainly not neglected by other scholars such as Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*.[46] Historian Lary May argued "that the motion picture industry provides an ideal focal point for fathoming the birth of a new urban culture."[47] May defined this new urban culture by its accessibility to the middle

[43] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), xvii.
[44] See Andrew Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Mass Consumption and the Search for American Identity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990).
[45] See Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), and Jonathan D. Sarna ed., *The American Jewish Experience* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986).
[46] See Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988).
[47] Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), xi.

class. Jewish comic book writers and artists, influenced by New York City's vibrant urban culture, also constructed an industry suitable for mass consumption. The stories and characters they created were not intended for a highbrow cultural elite. By and large, scholars have not completed similar analyses of the comic book industry and its role in perpetuating entertainment for the masses of the 1920s and 1930s.

Cultural historian Paul Buhle went the furthest to bridge the historical gaps between Jews, the comic book industry and other forms of American popular culture. In *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture*, Buhle argued comic books were an essential element of Jewish contributions to American popular culture. He further demonstrated the Jewish comic book industry of the 1930s and 1940s contributed to a historical moment where "Jews happened to be in the right place at the right time, and kept on being there, whether they personally identified with Jewishness or not."[48] In the second volume of his series *Jews and American Popular Culture*, Buhle expands his discussion of the comic book industry. In previous years, Buhle theorized that "the vision of a great democratizing assimilation" amongst Jewish intellectuals of the 1930s through the 1950s made Jewish contributions to American popular culture seemingly invisible.[49] He claimed that modern day scholars are now far more intellectually adept at discussing and recovering these Jewish contributions to American popular culture. Buhle's series included a chapter devoted to the origins of Jewish comic books. Instead of comic book content analysis, Buhle and comic strip historian Eddie Portnoy began to critically

[48] Paul Buhle, *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture* (New York, NY: Verso, 2004), 2.
[49] Paul Buhle, "Introduction," in *Jews and American Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Buhle (Westport: Praeger Perspectives, 2007), xi.

approach the career experiences of Jewish creators. Yet, much of their analysis focused on the connections between cultural tropes such as Jewish humor and Yiddishisms and comic books. In addition, the chapter devoted more analytical content to Jewish comic strip artists. They concluded "nowhere but Hollywood…was the Jewish role so influential in a major form of popular art."[50] Their emphasis on Jewish creative talent was a promising foundation for scholars. However, they stop short of characterizing the writers and artists as a distinctly Jewish industry.

My research instead relies in part upon Buhle's assertion that the formation of a Jewish comic book industry came from a "surge of energy moved toward creation in the scattered but intense global world of *Yiddishkayt*, a common Jewish life and culture outside the frameworks of religion or the state."[51] Like Buhle, I see traditional Jewish culture and society changing at a rapid pace during this historical period. Jews in the comic book industry recognized these changes and capitalized upon them to create a distinct modern Jewish identity that was not dependent on the experiences of their immigrant parents. Cultural historian Stephen Whitfield argued the resulting cultural "tension between the parochial and the national, the particular and universal would be resolved in favor of satisfying mass taste."[52] This modern identity embraced certain traditional elements of Jewish communities and culture while simultaneously incorporating the influences of a secular American popular culture.

[50] Portnoy and Buhle, "Comic Strips/Comic Books," 313.
[51] Paul Buhle, "Introduction," in *Jews and American Comics: An Illustrated History of an American Art Form*, ed. Paul Buhle (New York: The New Press, 2008), 9.
[52] Stephen J. Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 1.

*Statement of the Problem*

In this dissertation, I argue writers, artists, and publishers who faced discrimination in other creative fields in New York City started and expanded the comic book industry that has been largely unrecognized as a Jewish industry by many historians. Unlike many other professional examples during this time, the comic book industry did not discriminate against Jews looking for work. I argue Jews who worked during this period regarded comic books as a legitimate way out of economic poverty and a step towards greater social mobility. This led many of them to critically approach what storytelling techniques and motifs stimulated the American imagination, and how to most effectively market their comic books to secular, young readers in stories that had universal appeal.

This dissertation also seeks to illuminate the relative importance of Jewish comic book industry professionals to critical academic inquiry and examine the formative period of the comic book industry. Between the years of 1933 and 1954, now popularly known as the "Golden Age" of comic books, Jewish comic book professionals established the visual grammar, conventions, and rules of the emerging medium and introduced a pantheon of classic, enduring characters. The superhero genre proved to be one of their most lasting and enduring contributions. Comic book publishers, especially within the superhero genre, allowed Jewish creative talent to capitalize on their raw artistic talents and make money in an industry that readily accepted them. They then created enduring icons that resonated with a mass, young audience while unintentionally forming a distinct Jewish industry.

An exploration of the continuing influence of comic books reveals how industry writers, artists, and even publishers defied the examples posed by other working-class Jews during this

historical period. The comic book industry never unionized as did other working-class Jewish industries. And yet many of them sympathized with the heated, violent labor struggles fought by unions. For example, many of the most iconic superheroes created by Jews, including Superman, initially fought anti-union villains and espoused ideology consistent with the New Deal. Some of Superman's earliest adventures saw him deliberately trapping the owner of a dangerous mining company in a hazardous mine to convince him to improve safety standards and pay his workers a better salary. In another story, he systematically destroys a company that has been selling worthless stock to naïve citizens.[53] Comic book writers and artists clearly sympathized with labor movements privately but they did not join any of the various unions fighting for worker rights.

Finally, the exploration of the vast diversity of Jewish voices in the comic book industry exposed the evolution of the industry from one of inexperienced novices to seasoned professionals. Initially, these men did not have codified professional standards and very little oversight. Several of them learned to draw comic books on their own with no formal schooling. Job stability was nonexistent. In fact, many artists found their chosen line of work embarrassing and sought to move on to more respectable artistic careers in illustration and advertising. By the end of the 1940s, comic book publishing houses had clearly defined standards for their writers and artists. Comic book writers and artists created an industry that became a stable institution and a testament to their artistic craft. It is in this labor environment that Jews created and ultimately sustained an industry that remains an integral segment of American popular culture.

[53] See Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, *Superman Archives* Vol. 1 (New York, NY: DC Comics, 1989).

The emerging popularity of the comic book industry established a clear Jewish influence on American popular culture. This influence, with the foundation laid by Jewish comic book publishers in the 1930s and 1940s, was at its height with the implementation of the Comics Code of 1954. Young Jewish men from the same generation came together out of sheer economic necessity, connected by their similar backgrounds, upbringings, and aptitudes for illustrative work. Their resulting collaboration shaped a distinctly Jewish creative industry that remained intact until the juvenile delinquency fears of the 1950s.

*Significance of the Study*

My research into the Jewish comic book industry of 1933 to 1954 makes significant contributions to the areas of American popular culture, American Jewish labor history and the history of comic book professionals. Unlike many other professions dominated by Jews, comic book professionals defied easy categorization. The comic book industry largely functioned outside the oversight of most traditional American business models and their subsequent requirements, restrictions, and regulations.[54] Some artists proudly publicized their Jewishness while others tried to actively suppress their ethnic roots. Still others publicly denied their Jewish backgrounds while subtly introducing Jewish religious and cultural concepts into their written and artistic work.

In these formative years for the industry, a select few writers and artists embraced political radicalism alongside other working-class Jews. They fought for union integration and advocated worker rights. On the other hand, many writers and artists did not challenge the

[54] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book*, xiv-xv.

status quo and actually embraced closer ties with conservative editorial and upper management figures. This dissertation explores the working environment and career choices made by Jews that in the comic book industry.

In the end, many Jewish comic book professionals did not even consider their ethnic identity to be that important to their work. It was not remarkable to them. Their job was to craft stories that appealed to young American readers. Their shared Jewish heritage was not an active topic of discussion. They only wanted to practice their craft in a new artistic medium they grew to appreciate over time. In many ways, to talk about American Jews, especially during the years of 1933 to 1954, is to discuss the significance of Jews adjusting to a changing society and culture. Comic book historian Weinstein perpetuated this idea, claiming young Jewish artists and writers embraced "living with the times."[55] While an important point, I argue that the community of Jewish writers and artists only adapted in order to more successfully market their comic books.

Most traditional comic book scholarship claimed Jews were able to fashion a working environment in which their ethnicity did not matter. They were free to concentrate on their work unencumbered by the discrimination faced by other Jewish workers. Comic book historian Danny Fingeroth argued Jewishness within the comic book industry was essentially moot. While true to a certain extent, I stress Jews in the comic book industry also forged strong informal social relationships that heavily relied on their shared ethnic and cultural roots. They used these Jewish associations to sustain and expand their professional opportunities. My work demonstrates how the comic book industry became implicitly Jewish through these shared interactions.

[55] Weinstein, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey!: How Jewish History Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero*, 16.

Unlike other Jewish industries with a high concentration of Jewish employers and workers), the emergence of the comic book industry is a relatively recent historical phenomenon of the twentieth century.[56] It did not rely on any Jewish cultural precedents established in Europe.[57] The comic book medium was an entirely American invention. Arie Kaplan characterized the comic book as "cheap and disposable…innocent, clean fun, as American as apple pie, baseball, or jazz." Comic books were one of the rare industries that actually commercially succeeded during the worst stretches of the Great Depression. Historian Beth Wenger revealed most Jewish job seekers during this historical period "encountered a shrinking pool of jobs and opportunities and a sharp rise in employment discrimination and university quotas."[58] Indeed, the Jewish comic book industry stands as a unique historical case study that tells us how a particular ethnic group in one industry negotiated the tremendous social and cultural upheavals of the mid-twentieth century in America.

*Methodology*

Today, the distinctions between secular and Jewish comic book content and creators is well defined. There are now several comic books and graphic novels that deal with modern

[56] Several historian demonstrated that the Jewish garment, scrap, and liquor industries all had roots in the nineteenth century. See Andrew S. Dolkart, "From Rag Trade to Riches: Abraham E. Lefcourt and the Development of New York's Garment District," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism,* ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick: Rutgers: University Press, 2012), Jonathan Z.S. Pollack, "Success from Scrap and Secondhand Goods: Jewish Businessmen in the Midwest 1890-1930," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism,* ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick: Rutgers: University Press, 2012), and Marni Davis, "Despised Merchandise: American Jewish Liquor Entrepreneurs and Their Critics, in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism,* ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick: Rutgers: University Press, 2012).

[57] Kaplan, xiv.

[58] Beth S. Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 2.

Jewish experience written and drawn by Jews.[59] However, scholars are less clear about the Jewish role in the formative years of the industry. They struggle with a unifying definition of Jewishness in the comic book industry, as it remains a disputed term for an amorphous group constantly negotiating and re-negotiating its relationship between the years 1933 and 1954. Philosopher Harry Brod comes closest to an agreed upon scholarly standard. He argues "it's not enough to pick any random tangential detail and blow it up out of proportion to make a claim that a story is Jewish."[60] Scholars must look at both the ethnicity of the authors and whether an artistic work displays any references to Jewishness in the work itself. While useful to certain intellectual approaches, Brod limits his theory by dismissing the creators themselves. This approach privileges the creative work and ignores the working environment, and more importantly, the professional experiences of writers, artists, and publishers as they built a Jewish industry.

I rely on a small but diverse collection of primary sources in this dissertation. Although many scholars of comic book history rely on the books and characters themselves, my project is mainly dependent upon interviews, memoirs, and in some examples business correspondence. There was very little attempt to systemically organize and catalogue the experiences of comic book professionals. In 1974, Marvel Comics editor Stan Lee wrote back to a curious fan "we are afraid that we have no formal archives."[61] Some publishers preserved a small amount of historical materials and records but many did not or lost their records through natural disasters

[59] Art Spiegelman, Neil Gaiman, Trina Robbins, Miriam Katin, Chris Claremont, Paul Kupperberg, and Paul Levitz are several notable Jewish comic book writers and artists. *See Kaplan, From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books*, 176-205.
[60] Harry Brod, *Superman is Jewish? How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the American Way* (New York: Free Press, 2012), xxiii.
[61] Stan Lee, "Fan Correspondence," 18 December 1974, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.

and the passage of time. For many years, as with other genres of popular literature such as science fiction, materials valuable to comic book history were often considered unworthy of scholarly attention and were not added to research library collections.

Much of what does exist comes from secondhand testimony, stories, and biased accounts such as autobiographies and industry backed histories. Many previously published interviews in journals and fan periodicals, and publishers illustrate how writers, artists, and editors used their industry to display, define, and contest their working environment and relationships. In these invaluable sources, the individual can document both the profound and mundane moments that shaped the Jewish comic book industry. It should be noted that these fan magazines conducted a majority of these interviews several years later. Many of the interviewed writers and artists were retired or near the end of their artistic career. Though these interviews were self-reported—and the interviewee largely decided what to include and exclude to the interviewer—the preservation of certain memories and insights can represent what the individual experienced at the time and connect to larger historical trends within the comic book industry. All of these interviews take place after the 1950s except where noted. In addition, I emphasize primary sources that deal with the superhero genre within the comic book industry. Other genres were just as important between 1933 and 1954, especially romance, westerns, true crime, and horror. However, many of these genres were rarely discussed in my primary sources. The range of activities explored in this dissertation range from trivial, such as shop talk or silly pranks, to more complex settings, like the legal battles waged by the Kirby estate against Marvel Comics.

I emphasize a diversity of Jewish voices wherever possible in order to capture the complexities of the comic book industry. I also privilege several Jews who exerted a large amount

of influence on the direction and formative moments of the comic book industry, especially Will Eisner and Stan Lee. These voices are valuable to historians not only because they are collected in historical archives, but because they show how an individual's personal correspondence, beliefs, and work can reveal larger trends in the industry's top most institutions and structures.

My dissertation is not an aesthetic or content based history of comic books. I largely leave analyses of narrative and artistic content to other scholars. There are already a wide variety of theoretical works on the aesthetics and unique qualities of the comic book genre. Several of these works show how to "read" a comic book, understand panel layouts, and the balance / interplay between textual and visual elements.[62] I am concerned with comic books as a cultural representation but more importantly as a distinctly Jewish working-class industry. Certainly, the two are inextricably tied together when scholars discuss the medium, but I believe that the people who wrote, drew, edited, and distributed the books were central to the industry's rise and evolution. To be clear, I am principally concerned with how Jews understood and defined themselves amongst themselves and to their readers.

The way that readers, social critics, and young Americans in general received and processed the comic book industry's message from predominantly young Jewish creators is far more varied and the subject for another study. For instance, scholar Mila Bongco investigated the relationship between readers and producers of comic books.[63] Finally, primary sources from

[62] See Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Kitchen Sink Press, 1993), Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (Tamarac: Poorhouse Press, 1996), Geoff Klock, *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (New York: Continuum, 2002), and David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

[63] See Mila Bongco, *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books* (New York: Garland Publications, 2000).

New York City are overrepresented because most comic book publishing houses were established there.

*Chapter Outline*

In this dissertation, each chapter explores a specific component of the Jewish comic book industry. The first chapter gives an overview of the origins of the industry and argues economic decisions, as much as any other factor, attracted young Jewish men to the comic book industry. Comic books developed as an outgrowth of the pulp magazine trade. Many of the initial Jewish comic book publishers came from the pulp magazine trade. These young Jewish men shared similar upbringings and experiences growing up in the boroughs of New York City. The consolidation of the Jewish comic book industry is in part a result of these shared environmental circumstances. Jewish creative talent entered the comic book industry primarily out of economic necessity for their families. Other creative industries actively discouraged Jewish employment. In contrast, some Jewish writers and artists benefitted from nepotism in the comic book industry due to their shared family and ethnic ties. Finally, many artists came to comic book work with very little professional experience in cartooning and scripting. The comic book industry allowed one to learn on the job without fear of reprisal.

The second chapter explores the various cultural factors that motivated young Jewish writers and artists to pursue comic book work. I argue that the cultural universe comic books emerged out of was vitally important to the industry's evolution. Many Jewish comic book professionals had early childhood interests in illustrative work. American popular culture glamorized the life of a cartoonist. Comic books flourished at the same time as movies and radio,

pointing to the larger interest of young Americans in new forms of cultural consumption. This chapter also demonstrates many aspiring Jewish writers and artists believed a career in the comic book field provided a personal sense of artistic fulfillment. Science fiction not only interested Jewish teenagers but laid the foundation for comic book fan communities. The economic success of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's Superman character promoted the comic book industry as an exciting place of openness, economic prosperity, creativity and new ideas. The reality was far more complicated once one became entrenched as a writer or artist.

The third chapter reveals how writers, artists, editors, and publishers used the comic book industry to simultaneously create a space for themselves as Jews and develop successful comic book titles. I explore Jewish identity within the industry as it evolved into an American cultural institution. Jewish comic book professionals formed strong social relationships in the workplace. For many, social outings, pranks, and artistic collaborations all facilitated a strong sense of camaraderie and belonging. As a result, the comic book industry became quite insular. At other times, workplace tensions boiled over, thereby threatening the tight social fabric of the comic book community. This chapter also investigates the importance of the editor as a middleman between creative talent and upper management. It also shows that there were several Jewish social relationships that crossed management lines.

The fourth chapter explores how Jews interacted dealt with workplace conflict, management exploitation, and battles over credit. The chapter also demonstrates that Jewish writers and artists in the comic book industry did not have formal unions protecting their interests. Despite a few attempts, Jews in the comic book industry did not have a strong union tradition. Finally, this chapter explores the relationships between the creators and upper

management. Many comic book publishers and editors portrayed the industry as one of upward economic mobility and close collaboration. However, the evidence presented in this chapter shows that comic book writers and artists worked in an industry that was prone to professionally abusing them. I use the Jack Kirby v. Marvel Comics lawsuit in order to highlight specific workplace abuses and grievances.

The fifth chapter examines the impact of World War II upon the Jewish comic book community. Comic book scholarship already demonstrates how Jews used patriotic rhetoric and star-spangled superheroes to promote the war effort while selling their titles.[64] In addition, many scholars reveal Jews used the war to advocate for a white, American identity in their stories. Several historians of World War II established comic books were "actively used in the war effort to influence hearts and minds on the Home Front and in the military."[65] Through their comic book work, Jews could fashion a patriotic image of themselves. As a result, Jewish-created superheroes were of an entirely American foundation. However, what is less clear in the existing historiography is that Jews used the comic book boom during WWII to become genuine professionals in their chosen career. Professional standards became increasingly widespread as the American cultural spotlight shone on the industry. Jewish writers, artists, and publishers linked the increased visibility of their industry with greater social awareness from the larger mainstream culture. Several writers and editors made a conscious effort to legitimize their industry to prospective artists and outside observers. Their efforts reveal that they were quite aware that the outside world viewed their chosen line of work with skepticism and even moral

[64] Mike Benton, *The Comic Book in America: An Illustrated History* (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Company, 1993), 32.
[65] Jane Chapman, Anna Hoyles, Andrew Kerr, and Adam Sherif, *Comics and the World Wars: A Cultural Record* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 10.

derision. Many scholars of comic book history placed concerns about comic book content and juvenile delinquency as a product of the 1950s and as a result of the cultural impact of the Cold War.[66] This chapter shows that the roots for this period of history actually originated at the height of the comic book boom of the 1940s. As seen in several letters and commentary in this chapter, social critics were already concerned about comic book content and young readers. Thus, the comic book industry's very success at promoting their titles to a more mature readership led to their downfall in the 1950s.

*Conclusion*

All the while, the Jewish men behind these tales remained largely invisible to outside observers. Yet, comic book historian Danny Fingeroth reminds us they did not really think much of their shared ethnic background in the moment. "The fact that these men were predominantly Jewish must have made it possible for them to not have to deal with it. It wasn't remarkable to them."[67] Even so, these Jewish men knew the comic book industry was not just a potential career choice among many, it was necessary in a New York City job market largely closed off to artistically inclined Jewish men. Even after 1950s censorship and self-regulation, these formative experiences, relationships, and values remained an important part of the industry's early history and success story. The experiences, anecdotes, and memories in the following chapters are essential in order to understand the birth and development of the comic book industry. In many

[66] See David Hajdu, *The Ten Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How It Changed America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008) and Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998).
[67] Fingeroth, 21.

respects, the comic book industry is an ideal arena for exploring Jewish ethnicity and ripe for further exploration. Collaborations between writers, artists, editors, and even publishers served to mark their industry as places of informal Jewish associations. The comic book publishing houses did not merely instruct Jews how to run a profitable publishing business catering to young, impressionable readers but encouraged them to collaborate as a distinct Jewish industry.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### Origins, Jewish Families, New York City, and Economic Necessity

"*Batman was a steady thing. I always felt secure that at least I'd always have some kind of check coming in. That's what I felt. I don't have any regrets about it.*"[68]

"*There's a common belief that there was a reason why most of the young cartoonists who started in the 1930s were Jewish. And the reason is very simple. It was a medium that had no status; it was wide open to anybody, the opportunities in that medium did not discriminate. The Jewish kids flocked to the medium because it was there and available.*"[69]

During the 1910s and 1920s, New York City attracted many Jewish immigrants. New York offered many advantages to Jewish families that other international cities did not possess. There was widespread anti-Semitism and job discrimination but Jews did not have to live in fear of their lives. Historian Deborah Dash Moore argued, "Jews could live freely as Jews…their presence helped constitute much of what was distinctive about New York as an American city."[70] Moore's contention showed that Jews were able to live in New York as a distinctive ethnic group with their own culture. Moreover, this gave Jews the necessary space to express themselves as an essential element of the city's urban culture. Similarly, American Jewish historians Annie Polland and Daniel Soyer argued by the 1930s, "the association of Jews with New York culture was so pervasive that for many Americans the two were nearly synonymous."[71] Unlike the European cities they escaped from, Jewish immigrants did not face religious pogroms or forced expulsion. Historian Jeffrey Gurock stated "New York's multiethnic diversity, shaped in vital dimensions by

[68] Sheldon Moldoff, "My Years With Batman," Interview by Bill Schelly, *Alter Ego: the Comic Book Artist Collection* (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2001), 134.
[69] Will Eisner, "Will Eisner Interview," Interview by Jon Cooke, In Thomas Andrae, ed., *Creators of the Superheroes* (Neshannock, PA: Hermes Press, 2011), 170.
[70] Deborah Dash Moore et al., *Jewish New York, the Remarkable Story of a City and a People* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 11-12.
[71] Annie Polland and Daniel Soyer, *Emerging Metropolis: New York Jews in the Age of Immigration, 1840-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 242.

its large Jewish population, shimmered as a showplace of American democratic distinctiveness, especially vis-à-vis Europe."[72] New York City offered political commitments to social welfare and democracy. Jews quickly adopted these principles. Many Jews embraced a Jewish urbanism characterized by "a progressive and prosperous multiethnic twentieth century American city."[73] As Moore demonstrated, these commitments were not solely political. Jewish urbanism extended towards the centers of cultural production including "literature and publishing, theater, music, and visual arts."[74] The creation and evolution of the Jewish comic book industry was an often overlooked part of this urban environment.

The progressive platform of Jewish families was often challenged by the realities of street life. The chaos that engulfed Jewish neighborhoods made them ripe for thievery and mischief. One Jewish observer remarked that the neighborhoods were a "dense swirl of people milling about, the constant noise. It was like an Arab bazaar and a European shtetl combined."[75] During the 1920s and 1930s, many Jewish youth knew of and participated in the youth gang wars that engulfed the city. Many of these Jewish street toughs would later become mobsters and bootleggers for the Jewish mobs, including Frank Costello's organization.[76] As seen below, their experiences on the streets made Jewish youths even more determined to find steady jobs and make money.

[72] Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), xi.
[73] Moore et al., *Jewish New York, the Remarkable Story of a City and a People*, 12.
[74] Moore et al., *Jewish New York, the Remarkable Story of a City and a People,* 12.
[75] Myrna Katz Frommer and Harvey Frommer, *Growing Up Jewish in America: An Oral History* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 96.
[76] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book*, 43-44.

In 1933, Wildenberg and Gaines published *Funnies on Parade* and *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics*. These two releases contained previously published material and advertisements for company sponsors. In the early 1930s, Wildenberg and Gaines demonstrated that there was a growing market for these pamphlets. *Funnies on Parade* had an initial print of 10,000 and because of high demand had a second print run of 100,000. *Famous Funnies* had a print run just over 250,000.[77] However, Wildenberg and Gaines did not know how to evolve their ideas alongside their initial success. Even more problematic, newsstands did not know how to market these pamphlets, now called comic books. The syndicates that physically published the books received delayed information that there was a market for their material.[78] These factors showed that the nascent comic book industry needed even more marketing innovation and creative energy behind their products.

In 1935, Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, a retired military major, decided to publish original comic book material. Wheeler-Nicholson had the potential to expand his comic book company but made a series of increasingly bad business decisions. He "was inclined to overreach himself, erecting business ventures on bad checks and seducing investors with assets he didn't yet have."[79] Harry Donenfeld, one of the most visible pulp magazine publishers, offered a potential solution to Wheeler Nicholson.[80] Donenfeld and his business partner Jack Liebowitz bought out Wheeler-Nicholson's business interests in the comic book company. The two partners transformed the previously amateur outfit into an efficient publishing operation. Historian

[77] Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books,* 9.
[78] Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books,* 10.
[79] Jones, 101.
[80] Donenfeld was also Wheeler-Nicholson's distributor. See Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, 5.

Bradford Wright stated, "Liebowitz managed business affairs in their New York office, while editor Vincent Sullivan supervised the work of freelance writers and artists." In turn, Donenfeld strengthened the company's business connections in order to increase their declining distribution network. Though they did not have a strong stable of titles or characters, the company that eventually became DC Comics now competed on the newsstands with other comic books and magazines.

As Donenfeld's acquisition of Wheeler-Nicholson's comic book assets demonstrated, many Jewish comic book publishers started out as pulp magazine purveyors. These publishers inherited many of the cutthroat business practices practiced in the pulp trades. Comic book historian Gerard Jones revealed Jewish pulp magazine publishers routinely "glad-handed the tobacco dealers, the book jobbers, the local racketeers, whoever moved sleazy magazines."[81] In some cases, economic patronage went even further. For example, publisher Harry Donenfeld "bragged of his friendships with gangsters" in the late 1930s and early 1940s to colleagues and friends.[82] Publishers such as Donenfeld clearly admired gangsters and tried to emulate their lifestyle. Donenfeld dropped "the loud jackets of the cheap drummer in favor of dark expensive suits."[83] The close ties with the mob demonstrated that the pulp magazine trade was a lowbrow industry.

Befitting their often seedy reputation, pulp magazine publishers engaged in several illegal business practices. In one of the most common examples, a publisher bought out their competition and set up shell companies in order to save on labor costs. The business practice of

[81] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book*, 105.
[82] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book*, 44.
[83] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book*, 47.

shell companies allowed unscrupulous pulp magazine publishers to publish their titles under multiple companies. When a company inevitably went into bankruptcy, the publisher avoided paying his creative talent and simply shifted the assets to a solvent company.[84] For instance, Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman's comic book line "once best known as Timely Comics, was published under dozens of different nearly anonymous company names, from Atlas to Zenith, visible only in the small print of the copyright notices."[85] In addition, pulp magazine publishers treated their creative talent badly. One pulp magazine editor stated of writers "if he has what it takes and can stand rebuffs, well and good; if he hasn't, it's just too bad."[86] Pulp magazine publishers became successful because of these underhanded schemes. Comic book historians Blake Bell and Michael Vassallo revealed, "Martin Goodman followed the same strategy that he used with the pulps: minimum expenditures on content and printing in the service of chasing a maximum return."[87] The major comic book publishing houses gradually emerged out of this particular style of business management.

Comic book scholars should seek closer connections between Jewish comic book professionals and second-generation American Jewish history. Such an attempt would help scholars understand why a single generation of Jews gravitated towards illustration and cartooning work. In addition, young Jews' early experiences in New York City informed much of their work in comic books. This suggests that Jewish adaptation to the city and American popular culture were conducive to magazine and book publishing.

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[84] Bell and Vassallo, *The Secret History of Marvel Comics*, 15-22.
[85] Sean Howe, *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012), 3.
[86] Harold Brainerd Hersey, *Pulpwood Editor: The Fabulous World of the Thriller Magazines Revealed by a Veteran Editor and Publisher (*Westport: Greenwood Press, 1937), 136.
[87] Bell and Vassallo, *The Secret History of Marvel Comics*, 67.

One way to understand how the comic book industry eventually coalesced is through early childhood experiences. Those who entered the comic book industry had vivid memories of simultaneous economic poverty and youthful mischief, which seems to suggest that these experiences were central to their later creative careers and managerial philosophies in comic book publishing. In fact, according to historian Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, many New York City Jews, "saw themselves as fellow strugglers: hardworking, near-poor, oppressed by discrimination, managing only by pressing family members into service."[88] Those Jews who entered the comic book industry during the 1930s clearly shared these social pressures agreed and adopted a working-class mindset. Their collective memories demonstrated that many Jewish comic book writers and artists were predominately working-class.

But even more importantly, the comic book industry was one of the few paths out of economic poverty for young Jewish men with little hopes for higher education. Life on the streets taught young Jewish boys "how to hawk wares, how to buy low and sell high, how to lie with guts and not back down, how to know when to take care of your buddy and when to stick it to him."[89] In some cases, parents actively encouraged their sons to further their artistic ambitions. But in many others, there was simply no choice.

*Family Influence*

During the 1920s and 1930s, Jewish parents exerted a tremendous amount of influence upon their children. Their immigrant backgrounds largely shaped their parenting styles. DC

[88] Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American* Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 46.
[89] Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book*, 10.

Comics editor Julius Schwartz recalled in his autobiography, "My parents, Joseph and Bertha, were of Jewish descent and emigrated from a small town outside Bucharest in Romania to come to the land of milk and honey—which other people have chosen to call the Bronx."[90] These parents wanted to transcend the familiar cultural and societal patterns of their European upbringing for their American born children. In a sense, these children embodied a better future for their families. Jewish children saw their immigrant parents make sacrifices for them. Jewish parents wanted a better future for their children and a stable career. Children were an important consideration in many American Jewish families of the 1920s and 1930s. Cultural historian Jenna Weissman Joselit stated "children ensured the physical and cultural continuity of the Jewish people…giving meaning and form to the very notion of the Jewish family."[91] Comic book artist Jules Feiffer recalled in his memoir, "much in the manner of immigrant Jewish mothers of her time and circumstance, my mother placed all her hopes and dreams on me."[92] As Feiffer recalled, many Jewish children felt a certain pressure to live up to these expectations. Comic book artist Bill Bossert bluntly recalled his father "was contemptuous of people who couldn't find work."[93] In a 2000 interview, DC Comics artist Sheldon Mayer's daughter stated her father's "family was quite poor when he was growing up, so at first they thought his drawing pictures everywhere was just a waste of time."[94] Jewish parents expected their children to help the family financially whenever necessary. More often than not, this meant finding a steady job to

[90] Julius Schwartz and Brian M. Thomsen. *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics* (New York, NY: Harper Entertainment, 2000), 2.
[91] Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880*-1950, 56.
[92] Jules Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir* (New York, NY: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2010), 1.
[93] Bill Bossert, "I Was Contemptuous, Basically, of the Comics," Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 99 (January 2011): 38.
[94] Merrily Mayer Harris, "Sugar's Daddy," Interview by Bill Alger, *Comic Book Artist*, April 13th, 2017, http://www.twomorrows.com/comicbookartist/articles/11merrily.html.

supplement the family income. DC Comics publisher Harry Donenfeld's family encouraged him to take on subcontracted work from time to time. Donenfeld's brothers spoke in later years of having to cut bolts of cloth on the kitchen table by kerosene lamps. In another example, Marvel Comics editor Stan Lee recalled in 1977, "My father was a dress-cutter…so I was always looking to help out."[95] Jewish parents wielded a great degree of influence over their children. The memories of these Jewish comic book figures suggested that their generation felt a certain obligation to live up to these expectations.

For some Jewish families, finding jobs was a relatively simple process by knowing the right people. In some family situations, a well-connected family could provide their son with career connections into the comic book industry such as Bob Kane.[96] Belonging to an established union or professional association was even better for one's future career prospects. Batman and Superman comic book artist Alvin Schwartz knew this reality all too well as a young boy growing up in the 1920s. In a 2010 interview, he stated, "That was one of those power unions that ran the theatre business. If you (or your father) had that kind of position, you could have any job you wanted."[97] Other fortunate Jews such as Batman artist Bob Kane had influential parents who could guide their comic book careers. Schwartz stated of Kane "I mean, was he stupid? Was he backwards? I hate to say it but it's true. He had a smart father, in a business sense, who was his lawyer."[98] Regardless of the circumstances, knowing the right people was a tremendous benefit in the job search. Schwartz showed that Jews with professional connections such as Kane did not

[95] Stan Lee, FOOM Interview, March 1, 1977, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming, n.p.
[96] Kane and Andrae, *Batman & Me: An Autobiography*, 5.
[97] Alvin Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 98, (December 2010): 36.
[98] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 36.

have to be particularly adept at job hunting. Furthermore, Schwartz's suggestion that Kane was not particularly smart demonstrated one did not even have to possess the best qualifications for the job.

Some Jewish parents encouraged their sons to pursue their early interests in cartooning and make it a career. In a 1998 interview, DC Comics artist Irwin Hasen disclosed, "I was always drawing. I was drawing in the backs, on the empty pages, of books. So my mother, God bless her soul, took me across the street and enrolled me in a course of drawing."[99] In a 2004 interview, DC Comics artist Jerry Robinson remembered newspapers "had big comics sections and I looked forward to seeing them on Sundays, both the humor and adventure strips. Some of my favorites were Hal Foster's *Tarzan*, Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*, *Bringing Up Father*, and *Mutt and Jeff*. I read them all. As a kid, when I went away to camp, my parents would send me some of the reprint books."[100] He further added "they tell me I was drawing pictures in kindergarten; while everyone was doing lessons, I was on the floor drawing pictures" and "at nine or ten, I'd be sitting on the floor drawing portraits of my family while they sat around talking."[101] It is clear that certain Jewish parents recognized the particular merits of an artist's life and actively encouraged their children to pursue their own artistic ambitions.

DC Comics artist Joe Kubert indicated parental support could also come in unconditional terms. He professed, "My family came from the other side. They were immigrants. The idea of anybody making a living doing these crazy little drawings was probably the furthest thing

[99] Irwin Hasen, "So I Took The Subway And There Was Shelly Mayer…," Interview by Roy Thomas, *The Alter Ego Collection* Vol. 1 (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2006), 48.
[100] Jerry Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 39 (August 2004): 4.
[101] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 4.

removed from their minds. But my parents were extremely understanding, and it's a result of that that I'm in this business to this day."[102] For young Jewish artists such as Kubert, drawing became a lifelong passion worth pursuing in a professional capacity, cultivated from early childhood experiences and tacitly encouraged and supported by their parents. Kubert's statement also suggested that his parents' immigrant background made them unaware their son could pursue alternative careers such as illustration. Even if they could not understand the appeal of comic books, Kubert's parents did not want their child to follow the old ways and instead wanted him instead to carve out a new career path for himself.

*Industry Nepotism*

As previously demonstrated, family connections mattered in the comic book industry of the 1930s. Several comic book publishers hired their own family members in key positions. Many of these Jewish men brought these nepotistic arrangements from their time in the pulp magazine industry. Stan Lee's hiring at Marvel Comics is one of the most noteworthy examples of a nepotistic arrangement. Marvel Comics editor Joe Simon recalled of Lee, "I thought he was a pesky but nice kid. I used to take him out all over. I didn't guess what he would become—who could?"[103] Lee managed to ingratiate himself with many Marvel writers and artists. However, other staff members treated family hires with suspicion in the office. At Marvel Comics, writers particularly scrutinized publisher Martin Goodman's family. Marvel Comics artist Dave Gantz recalled of Goodman's cousin, Robbie Solomon, "It wasn't that Robbie was a bad guy. It's just

[102] Joe Kubert, "Joe Kubert," Interview by Jim Salicrup, *Comics Interview: The Complete Collection* Vol. 1 (Clayton, GA: CO2 Comics, 2010), 403.
[103] Joe Simon, "Simon Says!" Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 76 (March 2008): 10.

that he was always watching us, and that rubbed some people the wrong way. I don't even think he wanted to do that job. But he was related to Goodman, so he was going to have a job."[104] These nepotistic arrangements forged close familial bonds between Jews. Those who benefitted from these close relationships were inextricably tied to their publishers. Gantz's recollection also showed that there was a certain degree of wariness and jealousy in the workspace. Those without have any family connections did not receive the best jobs.

Many editors adopted a paternal relationship with their new writers and artists. Lee stated in a later interview Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman "was a father figure to me-most successful man I've ever known."[105] Familial type relationships were a common feature of workplace dynamics. While at Quality Comics, Feiffer stated, "I enjoyed an active and bantering relationship with my boss and the others in the studio, but I was closest to Abe, with whom I had developed a big brother-kid brother relationship."[106] In another example of familial bonding in the Eisner & Iger studio, artist Bill Bossert stated that his editor "provided the impetus and the creative work…He watched over us like a mother with her chicks."[107] Lee's family connection to Martin Goodman showed in some cases the editors were relatives of their younger hires.[108] In other situations, comic book publishers treated reliable Jewish artists as extended family and gave them preferential treatment. While at Marvel Comics, Jewish comic book artist Ken Bald revealed Goodman "treated me as a member of the family. He made me the art director."[109]

[104] Dave Gantz, "A Long Glance at Dave Gantz," Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 13 (March 2002): 14.
[105] Stan Lee, "Outline for Autobiography" (unpublished book manuscript, July 30, 1978), n.p.
[106] Feiffer, *Backing into Forward: A Memoir*, 53.
[107] Bossert, "I Was Contemptuous, Basically, of the Comics," 38.
[108] Stan Lee was the nephew of Martin Goodman. Lee's cousin was married to Goodman.
[109] Ken Bald, "I Did Better On *Bulletman* Than I Did On *Millie The Model*," Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 55 (December 2005): 6

Comic book publishers such as Goodman wanted their employees to feel like an integral part of an extended family. These closer bonds made it harder for indebted writers and artists to challenge their publisher over workplace abuses and grievances.

*Economic Necessity*

Not every Jewish teenager with drawing talent could readily enter the comic book industry. Aspiring Jewish cartoonists encountered resistant parents fearful of the Great Depression's economic impact. Though he eventually became a comic book artist, Bossert divulged, "The thing about it was that my father didn't want me to be in art at all. He said, 'Don't do it. I'll have to support you your whole life. I don't want that.'"[110] DC Comics artist and editor Carmine Infantino's parents were even more resolute, maintaining a pessimistic opinion that "all artists lived in attics and starved to death in a world tough and hard."[111] Though not Jewish, Infantino's parents' characterization of an artist's career represented the mindset of many immigrant families. Infantino also described some of the economic difficulties confronting working class families in New York City. He stated:

> "Those were Depression years, and it was kind of tough in those days. You could get eggs and potatoes for 15¢ and each of us would have a quarter from our parents to go to school…so one day we would share my eggs and potatoes, and we'd buy a comic book with his money, and then the next day we'd do the reverse."[112]

[110] Bossert, "I Was Contemptuous, Basically, of the Comics," 37.
[111] Carmine Infantino and J. David Spurlock, *The Amazing World of Carmine Infantino: An Autobiography* (Lebanon, NJ: Vanguard Productions, 2001), 16.
[112] Carmine Infantino, "The Carmine Infantino Interview," *TCJ Archive*, accessed April 6 2017, http://www.tcj.com/the-carmine-infantino-interview/.

The need for supplementary income forced Jewish parents to make hard choices. For instance, Lee took on odd jobs including delivering sandwiches to downtown office workers and working as an usher at the Rivioli Theater on Broadway.[113] This generation of Jewish parents looked at a full-time position as a writer or an artist in the comic book industry with skepticism. Their children needed to take advantage of any job opportunity, no matter how mundane or personally unfulfilling.

The Great Depression's societal and economic impact could immediately halt artistic careers. Hawkman and Sgt. Rock artist Joe Kubert claimed, "I was incredibly fortunate. A couple of guys I knew, in Brooklyn, with similar family backgrounds, could draw as well as me, maybe better, but their parents wanted them in the family business."[114] Many Jewish parents did not want their sons to enter an artistic career with seemingly no professional development opportunities or guaranteed economic security.

In an uncertain social and economic milieu, Jewish teenagers needed stable jobs in order to support their families and transition into adulthood. Jews were primarily concerned with making a living, and many later interviews with writers and artists of the time indicate that cartoonists saw comic books as a way of making money. For example, Quality Comics artist Gill Fox revealed why he pursued work in the comic book industry. He admitted "it was survival. I come from the depths of the Depression. I knew the way it was going I'd be driving a truck." He added, "I had to make a positive decision, and it seemed that cartooning would be a way out."[115] In another similar example, Quality Comics artist Lou Fine's son revealed, "My dad started out

[113] Lee, "Autobiography outline," n.d., Stan Lee Papers.
[114] Joe Kubert, "Joe Kubert," 404.
[115] Gill Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 12 (January 2002): 5.

poor. He was the kind of person who got the job done because no one else could do it…He had no time to complain." Fox and Fine were two of many Jews who chose to participate actively in the burgeoning comic book industry of the 1930s. I argue Jews made their decision to pursue cartooning and illustration work and then attempted to make a career out of it because of economic necessity. For many aspiring Jewish writers and artists, the comic book industry was one of the few legitimate options available to them in order to avoid continual poverty.

Some Jews explored their own professional interests but with their own expectation that they would eventually find alternative, better paying work. For instance, Marvel Comics editor Stan Lee always thought that his involvement in the comic book industry was a temporary situation. While certainly enjoying pulps and adventure magazines as a youth, Lee was far more interested in other media such as radio, advertising, and novels. He figured "I'd give up working in comics as soon as I hit it big in one of these other areas."[116] Similarly, Fox stated, "I really wanted to get a syndicated strip and to break into Johnstone and Cushing [an advertising service]."[117] For Lee and Fox, comic strips and books were a temporary path to improved career prospects.

In addition, Lee saw how the Depression affected his family directly. In his autobiography, Lee observed his father and the "demoralizing effect that his unemployment had on his spirit, making him feel that he just wasn't needed, gave me a feeling I've never been able to shake. It's a feeling that the most important thing to do for a man is to have work to do, to be busy, to be

[116] Stan Lee, "Interview with Stan Lee," Interview by Kathleen Quinn and Peter McGowan, *Celebrate Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1976): 10.
[117] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 7.

needed."[118] Before Marvel Comics hired him to write comic books, Lee bounced from job to job. He recalled, "one was writing obituaries for people who were still alive. But writing in the past tense about living people soon got to be very depressing."[119] Lee, and others like him, looked at the burgeoning comic book industry with an eye towards career opportunity and stability that eluded their parents.

Bossert stated his early interest in comic art stemmed primarily from a survival instinct in an intensely competitive job market. He disclosed, "I couldn't get a job, and I was a graduate of Pratt Institute. So that was a blow that was really very, very tough for me to accept then, and I didn't want to accept it. But I was glad to have an excuse to say, 'Well, it's the Depression, nobody can get work.'' The troubles of their parents in finding work also made a tremendous impact upon Jewish writers and artists. Bossert revealed "But then the other thing about the Depression, which was quite interesting to me, is that my father, who was a professor, he had a safe job. And they reduced his wages some during the Depression."[120] In another example, Hasen recalled "when you really want to do something, you do it" which ideally summed up the attitudes of many young Jewish artists looking for work.[121] Hasen revealed that some Jews had the necessary will and stubbornness to become artists. Jews such as Hasen and Bossert did not want to struggle alongside their parents. Jewish comic book writers and artists wanted something more stable and professionally fulfilling.

[118] Stan Lee and George Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 5-6.
[119] Stan Lee, "Conversation with Stan Lee," *Oui Magazine* (March 1977): 116.
[120] Bossert, "I Was Contemptuous, Basically, of the Comics," 38.
[121] Hasen, "So I Took The Subway And There Was Shelly Mayer…,"48.

Fine's career path also confirmed this perspective. Elliot Fine, Lou's son, remarked in a later interview "my father was not into fantasy. He was a serious guy who'd had difficulties in his life, especially his childhood, to overcome." He added, "My dad started out poor. He was the kind of person who got the job done because no one else could do it…he had no time to complain."[122] This statement confirmed economic and social circumstances as much as any other factor played a crucial role in steering Jewish boys towards a career in the comic book industry.

School was a safe haven for many Jewish children. Parents could be reasonably assured that the school would protect their children from the influence of street gangs. But a public education also had major stresses. A typical classroom had forty or fifty students, many with severely underqualified teachers. Several Jewish artists recognized these obstacles in later interviews about their childhoods. For instance, Kirby remarked of his schooling "I didn't go there for long. I didn't like places with rules."[123] Some fortunate Jewish children rose through school to become lawyers and doctors, but more often than not, shortages of time and money made those possibilities unlikely to working-class Jewish boys such as Liebowitz or Kirby.

Many Jewish families faced with anti-Semitism and an inadequate school system turned to the federal government for reassurance. Feiffer stated, "I believed. In movies, in comics, in radio, in the New York Yankees…I believed in FDR and the New Deal." Feiffer and other Jewish New Deal proponents believed in concepts such as the perfectibility of man, rationalism, and essential goodness in humanity.[124] Roosevelt's New Deal and progressive political platform offered hope to many Jewish writers and artists. Some Jewish writers even participated in New

[122] Elliot Fine et al., "…And A Fine Family," Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 17 (September 2002): 23.
[123] Kirby, "Jack Kirby Interview."
[124] Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir*, 15.

Deal programs before entering the comic book industry. Schwartz stated, "I was involved when [President Franklin] Roosevelt started a project on a literary project that he had going [probably the WPA Writers Project]."[125] Jewish writers and artists believed in the progressive programs of Roosevelt.

*Street Life*

Many of the Jewish kids who grew up to become pioneers in the comic book field had early childhoods marked by grinding poverty.[126] DC Comics publisher Jack Liebowitz also came out of this social environment. His rough upbringing informed his later relationships. DC Comics editor Julius Schwartz recalled, "Jack couldn't stand other people easily. He had a hard childhood on the Lower East Side. He was mostly a class thinker. He thought of himself as upper class, and the other people as merely beings."[127] Liebowitz may have thought of himself as upper class but his identification with street gangs marked him as lower class in the eyes of American society.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Jews actively participated in street gangs. Their parents knew very little about this world. The older generation primarily stuck to their own ethnic neighborhoods and places of business. Feiffer characterized the gangs and social environment akin to the Wild West.[128] He revealed, "now and then there were block wars. Their kids invaded our block (or vice versa) and everyone threw stones, resulting occasionally in some kid getting a

[125] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 40.
[126] Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon, *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book (*Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2003), 3-4.
[127] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 43.
[128] Feiffer stated, "But walking down those stairs and out the door into the sunlight is a little like walking down a lone Western street through the swinging doors of a saloon. Gunfighters everywhere—they know they can take me. I know they can take me." Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir*, 5.

hole in the head."[129] Kane recalled similar experiences growing up in the Bronx. He noted, "each neighborhood club would wear sweatshirts emblazoned with an emblem that identified you with your gang." Kane's statement revealed that street gangs were organized and extremely territorial. Walking the neighborhood streets made one quickly aware of the various factions.

A typical restless Jewish boy turned to the city streets for leisure and social interaction. For Jews such as Feiffer and Liebowitz, the streets were where kids congregated and engaged with the larger Gentile world. Street gangs formed their own perspectives of how to succeed in an increasingly complex, modern society. Material wealth came from youth gangs. Marvel Comics artist Jack Kirby stated, "Some of my friends became gangsters. You became a gangster depending on how fast you wanted a suit."[130] According to Kane's recollections, many times gangs would model themselves after the exploits of their favorite movie and radio stars.[131] Feiffer and Kane both describe relatively harmless youth skirmishes. However, oftentimes, Jewish street gangs could be extremely violent and racist. Alvin Schwartz stated, "So many things were racist in those days, all over the place. The Jewish kids fighting the Italian kids, the Italian kids fighting the Irish, and this is the civilized northeast and northwest Bronx at Grand Concourse, PS 28."[132] Youth street gangs provided Jews with a possible future if they could not find a career.

But, the street gang culture was useful in certain respects. They taught Jewish boys the stark realities of American business and social life. Furthermore, street gangs taught an existence that would become crucial to a new American lifestyle.[133] Careening between his gang, school

[129] Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir*, 15.
[130] Jack Kirby, "Jack Kirby Interview," Interview by Gary Groth, *TCJ Archive*, accessed November 6 2017, http://www.tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/.
[131] Kane and Andrae, *Batman & Me: An Autobiography*, 1.
[132] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 36.
[133] See David Nasaw, *Children of the City* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

and work, Harry and others of his generation promoted themselves despite not being particularly skilled at anything. Many people found Harry to be funny and a likeable personality. He displayed a knack for making money through a clever deal, cryptic errand, or as a hawker for a clothing store. Harry was turning himself into a new sort of salesman, one ideally suited to an American economy turning towards a consumerist ethos. In short, Harry Donenfeld was a salesman who sold himself to anyone who took the time to listen.

Anti-Semitism was a constant presence in the lives of many Jewish boys of the 1930s. For example, Will Eisner recounted a tale of how bullies taunted his brother for his Jewish-sounding first name. Eisner tried to defend his brother only to be beaten up himself. After the incident was over, Eisner remembered telling his brother "From now on your name is Pete."[134] Eisner's commentary revealed Jewish identity and name changing became an important strategy to reduce teasing, bullying, and violence. Other comic book industry figures that came of age during this period recalled severe acts of discrimination and felt compelled to change their names to avoid anti-Semitic stigmas and stereotypes. Kirby stated:

> There was violence because first of all, there were ethnic differences and names. If you were small, they called you a runt, and you had to do something about that even if there were five other guys. There were a lot of ethnic slurs, there had to be, and I think in that respect that through the fighting, through the adversity, we began to know each other. I had never seen an Irishman. I'd never seen an Italian. My family had never seen an Italian.[135]

[134] Will Eisner, *Will Eisner: Portrait of a Sequential Artist*, directed by Andrew D. Cooke (2010; New York, NY: Montilla Pictures, 2010), DVD.
[135] Kirby, "Jack Kirby Interview."

Recognition that an overtly Jewish name could provoke violence were foremost on the minds of young Jewish writers, artists, and editors. Kirby also showed that many young Jews were quite aware of the different ethnic neighborhoods and their own shared ethnic background.

Some Jews did not even realize their artistic skills could be used to make money. Before entering the comic book industry, Hasen recalled "during the day I would hawk, sell, drawings of prizefighters down in New York. That was my first job—boxing cartoonist…It was like public relations for the fights."[136] The comic book industry seemed like a savior to many Jews looking for artistic work. Fox recalled, "Word was beginning to come in about a strange publication called comic books. One guy told me you could get paid $5 a page, and that was great money."[137] Fox went into the offices of a publisher to corroborate his friend's story and ask for a job. After a successful interview, he remembered, "My nose started bleeding, no kidding—right there standing in front of his desk—I was so excited about what had happened! My father was a milkman and he got $35 a week, and I had a $20 job already."[138] Although the pay was relatively modest by the standards of the time, it was evident that Fox and others were excited to be actively involved in a profession that promised a living wage.

Marvel Comics artist Joe Simon declared "at 24 years old, I was just trying to make a living. I was a product of the times. The times were very bad, it was the Depression and I was just happy to make a living. We all were. All of us were like homeless people, happy for anything we got. People say, 'Well, the Shusters and the Siegels, and the Simons and the Kirbys were stupid. They

[136] Hasen, "So I Took The Subway And There Was Shelly Mayer…,"48.
[137] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 7.
[138] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 7. 35 dollars per week would equate to $595.78 in 2017 dollars. "US Inflation Calculator," *US Inflation*, accessed February 9, 2018, http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/

gave away everything.' But we never even thought about it that way."[139] Simon's statement strongly suggests the importance of a steady job to one's sense of self-worth. In another example, DC Comics artist Sheldon Moldoff fondly remembered, "At that time, I'm still living with my parents—and a week later I got a letter from National, and it's to my *mother*! She read it and she said to me, 'Sheldon, look at this beautiful letter I got!' And it was typed and signed by Jack Liebowitz and M.C. Gaines, and they said they liked me, and they would like me to stay in comic books, and that my future was in comic books, and that they would match any offer the NEA gave."[140] Moldoff and his mother clearly took great pride in being sought after by comic book publishers.

Jewish artists and writers affected by the Great Depression revealed that many of them came to the comic book industry out of economic necessity. The above statements demonstrate the influence of families in this dynamic. Jews such as Fine and Simon must have felt tremendous pressure to support their families regardless of their personal, professional, and artistic goals. Economic uncertainty was critical to the institutional and professional evolution of the comic book industry. A career, even in the lowly comic book sector, was all that stood in between making a respectable economic livelihood and poverty. Simon and Moldoff's above anecdotes revealed this aspect.

Many Jewish writers, artists, editors, and publishers entered the comic book industry because other professional fields, including more visibly prestigious fields of commercial illustration, denied entry to them. Jews were not readily accepted into these areas. Anti-

[139] Simon, "Simon Says!" 7.
[140] Sheldon Moldoff, "A Moon…A Bat…A Hawk," Interview by Roy Thomas, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 7.

Semitism, both overt and subtle, played a major role in many newspaper offices and advertising firms. MAD artist Al Jaffee declared, "When I got out of high school, I was casting about, and I figured I can't get a job anywhere during the Depression—very difficult—and there was also a certain amount of anti-Semitism. The ad agencies tended to be lily white."[141] In direct contrast, the comic book industry did not have the same issues with discrimination. Many of the established publishers were already Jewish. In addition, the magazine industry, and by extension comic books, were seen as a low artistic form of expression.

*Art Education and Professional Development*

Jewish comic book professionals had very little professional training and development. Batman ghost artist Sheldon Moldoff was fortunate to receive some art education. He recalled "the only art classes I took were right before the war. The WPA, coming during the Depression, had free art classes at the YHMA on 92nd street in New York City, and I went there for Life Drawing." Many Jewish artists did not even go to art school or receive formal instruction in comic book art production techniques. In order to be exposed to cartooning and illustration, some Jews took advantage of geography. DC Comics artist Irwin Hasen stated, "I grew up on the West Side of Manhattan. We moved from Brooklyn to 110th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. And across the street was the National Academy of Design."[142] Other Jews sought out and visited "museums

[141] Al Jaffee, "Cartoonist Al Jaffee, the Original Mad Man," Interview by Michael Mechanic, Mother Jones, accessed November 9 2017, https://www.motherjones.com/media/2010/09/interview-al-jaffee-mad-life-snappy-answers/. For more on Anti-Semitism during this period see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[142] Hasen, "So I Took The Subway And There Was Shelly Mayer…," 48.

like the Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art."[143] These fortunate few were in the minority.

Most Jews struggled to find professional outlets to develop their artistic talent. For example, Green Lantern creator Mart Nodell revealed his parents did not even know of his artistic aspirations as a young child. Batman artist Dick Sprang was similarly unfortunate. He learned how to draw by "studying on my own, in addition to high school art classes with a very good teacher who emphasized the fundamentals of drawing."[144] Even then, a typical art class was mostly impersonal and did not involve much hands-on instruction. Gill Fox recalled a "course took about a year. If you bought the course, you paid about $7-8. If you took instruction from him, which meant every week, you'd send stuff to him and he'd correct it and send it back for an additional $20. I had to take the cheaper way, but I swore to myself that I would religiously follow it, and it worked."[145] These Jewish men learned their craft through initiative, self-training, and rigorous discipline.

More often than not however, one simply learned on the job.[146] Comic book artist Allen Bellman specified "Well I didn't think about it as a 'career.' I liked to do it, and in all honesty I didn't think I was too good. I developed when I began working."[147] In another example, DC Comics artist Jerry Robinson recalled, "In the beginning, they were fairly tight. They *had* to be, because I had absolutely no experience at all. I was working day and night, really sweating it out, to learn the techniques and so forth. I could copy anything I saw, but I didn't think that was *really*

[143] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 8.
[144] Sprang, "Dick Sprang Rides Again," 4.
[145] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 5.
[146] Nodell, "Marty Created 'The Green Lantern,'" 20.
[147] Bellman, "A Timely Talk With Allen Bellman."

being an artist. I think *that* was the thing that Bob was first impressed with. I could look at strips and immediately imitate the style."[148]

Learning on the job allowed Jewish artists to make mistakes, cultivate their own distinctive drawing styles, and work alongside their peers. Stan Lee fondly recalled "working for Simon and Kirby was an education for me. I admired their talents and their professionalism, so it was like working for two idols."[149] Moreover, Stan Goldberg revealed repetition was extremely important to a young artist's development. He said "When I started drawing he said to me, 'You won't be any good until you do your first 10,000 pages.' And I was thinking I could barely get through one."[150] Fawcett Comics artist Jack Binder echoed Goldberg when he stated the comic book industry taught him the importance of "Two complete saleable pages a day. 'Look, see, think, do is my motto.' My advice to anyone learning art is to learn mechanical drawing, pattern of line development, and design. Then, from there on, if they have any artistic talent, let it express itself."[151] Other artists such as Dick Sprang learned important professional standards. He remarked "I learned the value of meeting a deadline. You grew up fast in that atmosphere. That was better training than could be found in the majority of art schools of the day."[152] On the job training emphasized the importance of the work as well as introducing young, often naïve, artists to the rigorous demands and expectations of the job.

As mentioned earlier, comic strips were particularly useful to inexperienced comic book artists. Joe Kubert disclosed "We found out very quickly that the one we could follow the most

[148] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 5.
[149] Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 29.
[150] Goldberg, "The Goldberg Variations," 9.
[151] Binder and Binder, "Journey to the Rock of Eternity," 6.
[152] Sprang, 4.

work was Caniff. His style called for heavy blacks and quick line work, and it seemed to adapt itself and get finished more quickly for all of us."[153] Kubert's revelation indicated even if one did not possess a unique style, one could ape or even blatantly copy previously published work.

Despite this, some Jews managed to balance their comic book work with higher education. For instance, Jerry Robinson stated "I started assisting Bob while I was going to Columbia, working mostly at night on the art and going to classes in the daytime. I was already down to skin and bones, but this was a very exciting time for me. I was interested in writing, and comics was a medium that combined writing and drawing. I had no idea that this would ultimately be my profession. I just thought it'd be a great way to earn my way through college."[154] Robinson's recollection makes it abundantly clear that college was an important priority for middle-class Jews. It did not dawn on Robinson at the time that comic book work would become his professional calling. Nevertheless, by assisting Bob Kane while attending college Robinson both answered the desperate need for more artists in the industry and used the comic book industry as a place of discipleship and training.

Furthermore, Robinson's close partnership with Kane is representative of early Jewish collaboration and relationships in the comic book industry. For example, Kane's coterie of ghost artists on Batman reveal that he had many personal acquaintances at his disposal. Artist Sheldon Moldoff stated, "Someone told Bob about me, and he called me, and I went over to see him in the Bronx—we both lived in the Bronx—and I started working for him. I met Bill Finger there,

[153] Joe Kubert, "'Draw For Comic Books! Learn and Earn in Your Spare Time—At Home!!'" Interview by Roy Thomas, *Alter Ego: The Comic Book Artist Collection* (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2001), 60.
[154] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 5.

and we were gung-ho."[155] Forming relationships in the industry was extremely important, especially in the early days of the comic book industry. Knowing someone who was trustworthy and could reliably produce artwork or type out a script on deadline was extremely valuable.

The randomness and chaos surrounding the early New York City comic book industry was apparent to everyone involved. One day, Jerry Robinson was playing tennis in the city and stated, "I was looking for a player, when I felt a tap on my shoulder. A guy said, 'Who did those drawings?' I thought I was being arrested or something. I turned around and admitted, 'I did.' The guy said, 'They're very good. I'm Bob Kane and I just started a new comic feature called 'Batman.'"[156] Robinson's sketch of his initial meeting with Kane demonstrated comic book professionals were always looking to recruit more creative talent.

Dick Sprang's story of his entrance into the comic book industry is illustrative of many Jewish artists. Unless one was working on one of the major titles, most artists were virtually interchangeable. There was not much of a gap separating the unemployed from the employed in the comic book industry of the 1930s and 1940s. In an interview Sprang recounted:

> "I called my friend Marvin up, and he had a summer job coloring for Timely. Marvin told me that he was going out of the country and said, 'I didn't tell anybody at Timely that I'm not coming back on Monday, so why don't you go up there and sit in my seat? They'll need somebody up there. So I did. At that time, the coloring department was run by publisher Martin Goodman's brother Artie. So Artie Goodman walked into the coloring room, saw me, pointed a finger at me, and asked, 'Who the hell are you?' I said, 'I'm taking Marvin's place.' That's how I got the job."[157]

[155] Moldoff, "A Moon…A Bat…A Hawk," 5.
[156] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 4-5.
[157] Goldberg, "The Goldberg Variations," 5.

Comic book publishers did not have strict job parameters. A seemingly inexperienced and opportunistic young artist like Sprang could obtain a job if he showed up every day and worked hard. In another example, Allen Bellman's educational opportunities were like many young, aspiring Jewish cartoonists. He revealed "my training was mostly experience. I learned so much on the job. My best friend Sam Burlockoff and I went to Pratt Institute at night on and off. It was in a bad neighborhood in Brooklyn and I didn't like going at night."[158] In many cases, comic book publishing houses did not require professional schooling as a job prerequisite and sometimes did not even request portfolios of prospective hires. Comic book artist Marvin Levy remembered "The great thing was that, after school, you could go down to the publishers, knock on doors, and maybe get an editor to look at your work and give you a critique. Then you went home, fixed it up or did it over, or added something, and then came back another day. That was great."[159] Comic book publishers did not yet have a system for accepting work. Levy's anecdote showed that comic book publishers were not picky about artist submissions.

Professional standards simply did not exist in the earliest days of the comic book industry. It was up to the individual writer or artist if one wanted to further their professional knowledge. Julius Schwartz stated "Carmine realized that he wasn't *really educated* in the sense of formal schooling…he was aware of his shortcomings and always tried to better himself."[160] In any case, anyone readily displaying artistic talent could conceivably get work from publishers eager to get more and more magazines on the newsstands.

[158] Bellman, "A Timely Talk with Allen Bellman."
[159] Levy, "I Think I Always Knew I Wanted To Be A Cartoonist," 13.
[160] Schwartz is referring to Carmine Infantino. Schwartz and Thomsen, 104.

As Bellman's reminiscence shows, a fortunate few Jewish artists received some professional artistic training, usually after graduating high school. Even still, the training primarily consisted of commercial art techniques. Commercial art was the ideal field in which to work during this period. As stated above, the field held considerably more prestige and professional legitimacy than comic book art. Sub-Mariner creator Bill Everett stated "Before I got into comics, I'd been in advertising and publishing work. I got into advertising right after I got into the art field."[161] The various art schools in New York City mainly catered to this dynamic.

However, competition in the commercial art world was quite competitive and often inaccessible to Jews. Comic book artist Bill Bossert confirmed "I took my samples everywhere and of course, the only ones in my class that got jobs were hired by big advertising agencies. They only took the top of the class, the guys that were really superb illustrators."[162] Mart Nodell recalled that he and many of his contemporaries thought "a really good artist can go right into advertising agencies and do commercial art."[163] There was little conception that one could do something artistic beyond providing illustrations for advertising firms. Even if Jews were interested in comic strips and cartoons, DC Comics artist Sheldon Moldoff revealed, "When I started drawing, I wanted to go to Disney, I wanted to be a cartoonist. I loved the cartoony side of comics, the bigfoot, the funny stuff, but there was no market for it."[164] There were very few options for artists in the cartooning and illustration fields. Moreover, these options did not favor free artistic expression.

[161] Everett, "Everett on Everett," 5.
[162] Bossert, "I Was Contemptuous, Basically, of the Comics," 38.
[163] Nodell, "Marty Created 'The Green Lantern,'" 20.
[164] Sheldon Moldoff, "Maybe I Was Just Loyal," Interview by Shel Dorf, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 59 (June 2006): 17.

Some Jewish artists lamented the lack of professional training in their chosen industry. DC Comics artist Gil Kane remarked in an interview, "Most cartoonists are emotionally drawn into the field. They are attracted to it because it fills their needs and because it's a proper means of expression for them…unfortunately, most artists tend to be betrayed by their facility. They get easy acceptance from editors, and as a result they never feel the need to press harder or to examine what they do."[165] To be sure, there were some later efforts to actively train aspiring comic book artists and writers. Stan Lee remarked "we used men who had some experience drawing comics and some experience, just as illustrators and we showed them how to draw comics."[166] Comic book publishing houses clearly needed better incoming artists. One proposed solution was to teach comic book illustration from capable in house staff.

One of the most notable attempts was Joe Kubert and Norman Maurer's "Comic Book Illustrators Instruction Course" produced in comic book format in 1954. The book promised several advantages and benefits for an aspiring artist. "You can learn by practicing as little as 15 minutes a day - - in your own home!" The book goes on to boast "Talent is not necessary! The desire to draw is important!!"[167] The book tried to entice anyone on the fence about comic book work by stating "Comic book artists are among the highest-paid craftsmen in the United States. Many of them earn in excess of $10-15,000 a year and some make as much as $5000 a week."[168] If one doubted the professional credibility of Kubert and Maurer, the book claimed they would teach "things that we've learned during the 30 years we've been in the comic book business."[169]

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[165] Gil Kane, "A/E Interview: Gil Kane," Interview by John Benson, *Alter Ego: The Best of the Legendary Comics Fanzine* (Seattle, WA: Hamster Press, 1997): 157.
[166] Stan Lee, Panel Discussion, New York City, January 20, 1971, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming, n.p.
[167] Kubert, "'Draw For Comic Books! Learn and Earn in Your Spare Time—At Home!!'" 60.
[168] Kubert, "'Draw For Comic Books! Learn and Earn in Your Spare Time—At Home!!'" 64.
[169] Kubert, "'Draw For Comic Books! Learn and Earn in Your Spare Time—At Home!!'" 60.

In actuality, Kubert and Maurer's intention for the project was far more modest than the book's grandiose claims. Kubert recalled "Norm and I were thinking, 'Gee whiz, maybe there's something more we could be doing with this.' I don't say we did this out of the goodness of our hearts; but we felt it would be a good deal for people who would be interested. Plus the fact that it would be something on the side for us."[170] Rather than a purely instructional tool for artistic and literary development in the comic book field, the "Comic Book Illustrators Instruction Course" was primarily meant to give Kubert and Maurer more work and serve as a glorified advertisement for the comic book industry. Kubert said "I have to tell you that the stuff sold really well. It wasn't outrageous; we didn't sell a million copies, but we sold a couple of thousand."[171] However, no Jewish artist of any consequence actually utilized the book to enter the comic book industry.

*Conclusion*

This chapter demonstrated those who entered the comic book industry had vivid strong memories of economic poverty. This suggests that economic necessity more than any other factor prompted Jews to seek out the comic book industry. In fact, the comic book industry was one of the few paths available to young Jewish men with barred from other career choices. Jewish parents were a major influence on their children. Jewish children saw their immigrant parents make sacrifices for them. Jewish parents also played a central role in their child's developing artistic interests. Some actively encouraged their sons to further their artistic talent.

[170] Kubert, "'Draw For Comic Books! Learn and Earn in Your Spare Time—At Home!!'" 60.
[171] Kubert, "'Draw For Comic Books! Learn and Earn in Your Spare Time—At Home!!'" 63.

But in many other cases, there was simply little choice. Young Jewish men just entering adulthood needed money and a stable career. Jewish youth gangs provided an alternative from the family. But many Jewish men recognized that a gang was not a substitute for a stable career. Most Jewish writers and artists cultivated their craft on New York City's streets while a fortunate few possessed family connections into the comic book industry. In the mid-1930s, the comic book industry still struggled to make its niche in American popular culture. However, the openness of the industry provided a significant opportunity for young, Jewish males who came to identify with the comic book medium. Social critics may have found comic books lowbrow but the Jewish writers and artists who entered the industry found them absolutely fascinating.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### The Influence of American Popular Culture on Jewish Writers and Artists

*"I came out of school one day, and there was this pulp magazine. It was a rainy day, and it was floating toward the sewer in the gutter. So I pick up this pulp magazine, and it's Wonder Stories, and it's got a rocket-ship on the cover, and I'd never seen a rocket-ship. I said, "What the heck is this?" I took it home and hid it under the pillow so nobody should know I was reading it."*[172]

The previous chapter demonstrated Jews entered the comic book industry because of economic necessity. And yet, Jewish comic book writers and artists did not join the comic book industry without secondary reasons. In this chapter, I argue these young Jewish men fondly remembered their early childhood exposure to illustration, including comic strips and pulp magazines and informed their later pursuance of comic book work. Most of the early comic book publishers came from a pulp magazine background.[173] Jewish teenagers avidly read pulp magazines, and as comic book historian Bradford Wright revealed, "pulps catered to more offbeat tastes."[174] Pulp magazines promised cheap thrills and were not intended for the intellectual elite. A typical pulp magazine cost "ten to fifteen cents, readers could purchase one of as many as two hundred fifty pulp titles available at newsstands each month."[175] Movies and early science fiction stories also fascinated the young Jewish men that created the comic book industry. In a 1984 interview, Will Eisner stated Jewish writers and artists formed "a kind of artistic ghetto in which people with authentic, if offbeat talents" gravitated towards the comic

[172] Kirby, "Jack Kirby."
[173] See Chapter One for information on the pulp magazine industry's business practices.
[174] Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture*, 2.
[175] Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture*, 2.

book industry.[176] Most importantly, newspaper comic strips, especially the weekly Sunday insert, made an essential lasting impression on young Jews.

I also argue that some Jews admired and appreciated the artist's life despite its relatively low status in the American cultural hierarchy. They wanted to participate in this emerging segment of American popular culture. Cultural historian Jenna Weissman Joselit argued during this period of time, "Jewishness itself was redefined. Less a matter of faith or a regimen of distinctive ritual practices than an emotional predisposition or sensibility, it made few demands on its adherents."[177] As Joselit showed, Jewish comic book writers and artists did not feel bound by their parent's conception of Jewishness. Instead, they concentrated on American popular culture. I argue many Jewish writers and artists' initial interest in comic books came from a passionate fascination with American popular culture.

*Comic Strips*

Comic strips were an important segment of American popular culture in the 1930s. Accounts from Jewish comic book writers and artists confirmed the cultural influence of comic strips. In the early twentieth century, comic strips had a tremendous visibility in American popular culture. Several Jewish comic book professionals retained fond memories of the Sunday comic strip insert. Captain America co-creator Joe Simon recalled that he and his siblings "sprawled on…the living room…devouring each cartoon strip. Sunday evenings we went back to

[176] Will Eisner, "Will Eisner: Reminiscences and Hortations," interview by Gary Groth, *Comics Journal* 89 (March 1984), 77.
[177] Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880*-1950 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 6.

the funnies again under the light fixtures on the side walls."[178] Several Jewish creators noted that their favorite comic strips and artists inspired them as youths and spurred their growing interest in art and sequential narratives. According to stories passed down through the years, Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman "even as a toddler, he would cut up papers and paste them together, converting them into little homemade booklets. All through childhood he ate, slept, breathed and dreamed publications. He read every periodical he could get his hands on. No other hobbies distracted him."[179] Fox stated "I started copying the newspaper comics when I was twelve. I was totally fascinated by them."[180] Quality Comics artist Lou Fine did not have any hobbies, "he drew all the time… He just wanted to draw. "[181] For these Jewish youngsters, comic books was one of the most important pastimes in their lives. Artist and playwright Jules Feiffer declared "Comics: I ate them, I breathed them, I thought about them day and night. I learned to read only so that I could read comics. Nothing else was worth the effort."[182] In this single statement, Feiffer captures the overall sentiment of this particular generation of Jewish boys brought up on comic books and strips.

In another example, Batman co-creator Bob Kane entered drawing contests in order to win original art work from one of his comic strip idols, Ad Carter. He professed "I was a superb copycat and entered any contest that had to do with drawing…I was ecstatic at acquiring my first piece of professional comic art."[183] Successful comic strip artists provided celebrities and role

[178] Joe Simon and Jim Simon, *The Comic Book Makers* (Lebanon, NJ: Vanguard Productions, 2003), 16.
[179] Stan Lee, "How to Draw the Marvel Way" (unpublished book manuscript, 1990), n.p, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.
[180] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 6.
[181] Elliot Fine et al., "…And A Fine Family," 19.
[182] Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir*, 2.
[183] Kane and Andrae, *Batman & Me: An Autobiography*, 4.

models for impressionable Jewish boys with artistic aptitudes. DC Comics artist Dick Sprang observed, "Concerning comics, I was mainly influenced by Alex Raymond. In those years when we had full-page Sunday supplements with Terry and the Pirates, Prince Valiant, and Flash Gordon, some of us who wanted to become comic book illustrators studied those men, envied them highly, copied them, and decided we would never copy as well as those men did their work."[184] Many Jews looked forward to the Sunday comic insert. In a later unpublished book manuscript Stan Lee explained the aesthetic appeal of the 1920s and 1930s comic strip:

> "The biggest difference between strips and books, for example, is the sheer size of a strip compared to a comic book. Growing up, my comic strips were printed large and had four detailed panels, letting the creators fill each panel with information and keep the story moving. The continuing stories, though, had to be structured, though, so you were left wanting more, especially between Friday's installment and the one coming on Monday. Since not everyone read the Saturday paper, it was considered a throw away strip, while back then, the color Sunday strips tended to tell entirely different stories."[185]

Lee's statement suggests many Jewish boys found these comic strips extremely entertaining from a purely visual perspective and worthy of their attention. Like Lee, these boys understood and appreciated the aesthetic nuances of the Sunday comic strip.

Comic strips were extremely important to aspiring Jewish artists. These young teenagers did not have any other creative outlets or frequently display promising athletic ability. For example, Quality Comics artist Lou Fine was stricken with polio as a young child and was crippled in his left leg. He could not participate in sports or other youth activities so he turned to drawing

[184] Terry and the Pirates started in 1934 for the Chicago Tribune New York News Syndicate, Prince Valiant started in 1937 for the King Features Syndicate, and Flash Gordon started in 1934 for the King Features Syndicate. Dick Sprang, "Dick Sprang Rides Again," Interview by Ike Wilson, *Alter Ego* vol. 3, no. 19 (December 2002): 5.
[185] Stan Lee, "Stan Lee's Complete How to Write Comics" (unpublished manuscript, undated), n.p., Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.

to pass his time.[186] For Fine and others, reading, writing, and drawing comic books was all they had to fall back on.

Already successful comic strip artists made an enormous lasting impression in New York City's Jewish neighborhoods. Batman ghost artist Lewis Schwartz recalled one particularly flashy comic strip artist "had an apartment on Central Park South, and he started throwing dollar bills on the street. [Billy] DeBeck was making gobs of money in those days."[187] In another story of artist idolatry, Irwin Hasen "waited for the receptionist to turn her head and I walked into the city room. There was my hero sitting at his desk. He allowed me to come down there a few times…We became friends."[188] Schwartz and Hasen's recollections demonstrated Jewish teenagers admired the lifestyles of comic strip artists. Jules Feiffer reasoned "Then what was your way out? A fantasy of fame and fortune as a cartoonist! So went my exit strategy."[189] Furthermore, thriving comic strip artists demonstrated that drawing could be a legitimate, respectable career path. Being good at cartooning and illustration could also help with wooing women. Carrie Nodell, wife of Mart, stated "He showed me a wire rack at a candy store. In those days, comics were sold in candy stores. And he said, 'I just did that.'—and it was *All-American* #16, the first time Green Lantern appeared in a comic book...And I sort of looked at him quizzically…and we started to date."[190] Becoming a successful comic book artist affirmed Nodell's

[186] Fine et al., "…And A Fine Family," 23.
[187] Lewis Sayre Schwartz, Interview by Jon B. Cooke, "Batman, Dr. Strangelove, And Everything In Between," *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 51, August 2005: 9. Billy DeBeck was a famous cartoonist most known for the comic strip *Barney Google*.
[188] The hero in Hasen's anecdote is cartoonist Willard Mullin. He worked for the *New York World Telegram* from 1930 to 1935. Hasen, "So I Took The Subway And There Was Shelly Mayer…," 48.
[189] Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir*, 3.
[190] Mart Nodell and Carrie Nodell, "Marty Created 'The Green Lantern,'" Interview by Shel Dorf, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 102 (June 2011): 16.

sense of masculinity. This example revealed Jewish comic book artists such as Nodell defined their masculinity through breadwinning.

Batman ghost artist Lewis Schwartz offered another reason for the celebrity of comic strip artists. According to Schwartz, a successful comic strip's "popularity…had to do with focus. There was no television. A good chunk of your entertainment came off of that comic page…the truth is everybody followed those daily strips." Schwartz concluded his belief by declaring comic strip artists "fantastic storytellers."[191] In addition, Jewish artists frequently copied popular comic strips, acquiring their aesthetic styles and sensibilities. DC Comics editor Carmine Infantino asserted in a nascent field, aping another's work was extremely advantageous to one's career. "As a kid, I started drawing Dick Tracy's head, Orphan Annie's face, from the comic strips. I really enjoyed it. My father thought I was tracing; he couldn't believe I had drawn these things. Harold Gray and Chester Gould were major early influences on me. That's what started me towards comics."[192] Mimicking a successful comic strip artist's style such as Gould, Milton Caniff or Alex Raymond got one noticed by magazine publishers and editors eager for reliable contributors. Gould wrote and drew the widely read detective comic strip Dick Tracy. Caniff was a master cartoonist, respected by a wide variety of artists. Raymond was well-known for his science fiction comic strip Flash Gordon that was adapted into film serials and novels. Writer Bill Finger concurred about artistic influences: "My idea was to have Batman be a combination of Douglas Fairbanks, The Shadow, and Doc Savage as well. . . My first script was a take-off of a Shadow story. . . … . . I patterned my style of writing Batman after The Shadow. . . . I always liked that

[191] Hasen, "So I Took The Subway And There Was Shelly Mayer…," 48.
[192] Infantino and Spurlock, *The Amazing World of Carmine Infantino: An Autobiography*, 15.

dramatic point of view. It was completely Pulp style."[193] Furthermore, copying an artist's particular style prepared one for a career in comic book art. Irwin Hasen stated "Caniff was one of my idols. He was a great transference to comic books because he kept it simple and he knew how to tell a story."[194] The comic book industry did not have established professional standards or visual guidelines. Almost by necessity, emerging Jewish comic book artists such as Hasen looked towards successful comic strips for examples to emulate, copy, and expand in their own work.

*Pulp Magazines*

Though pulp magazines had existed in some format since the late nineteenth century, magazine publishers largely defined the format in the 1920s. The term pulp generally referred to any popular literature magazine printed on cheaply produced paper for mass consumption.[195] Pulp magazine publishers recognized the American public's appetite for thrilling stories at an affordable price point. Hugo Gernsback, a Jewish immigrant from Luxembourg, was one of the most visible publishers of this era. He published *Amazing Stories* in 1926. Other Jewish publishers such as Martin Goodman and Harry Donenfeld soon followed Gernsback's lead. Pulp magazines were a relatively amateur operation. Gill Fox stated, "in those days you didn't have a writer and an artist. The same man did both jobs."[196] Throughout the 1920s, pulp magazines increased in popularity and visibility. Their colorful, titillating covers stood out to newsstand

[193] Kane and Andrae, *Batman & Me: An Autobiography*, 25.
[194] Hasen, 48.
[195] I am coopting the definition from Kaplan. Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books*, 4-5.
[196] Gill Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 8.

patrons. Pulp magazines were an important segment of the American magazine industry in the early twentieth century. Many of the early pulp magazine publishers were Jewish. In Jewish neighborhoods, boys and girls knew "the pulp magazines by sight."[197] Pulp magazine publishers catered to young readers. For the most part, they did not take risks. One pulp magazine editor remarked, "If there is one trait that the pulpwood reader has it is his predilection for sameness."[198] Detective stories, science fiction, westerns, and tales of doomed romance were all important genres. In addition, some of the earliest prototypes for superheroes became extremely popular in the pulps; among these were the Shadow, the Phantom, and Doc Savage. The same editor concluded, "It will continue on its merry, prosperous way, supplementing all the other entertainment industries, supplying the demand of those who insist upon infallible heroes and yearning feminine arms."[199]

Pulp magazines deeply influenced the comic book writers and artists. Many of the major comic book publishers graduated from earlier pulp backgrounds. The pulps of the time combined serialized writing with often lurid cover art. Pulps satisfied an urge for exaggeration: Athletes were stronger, heroes were nobler, and women more luscious—with a dollop of sex to spice things up. These pages contained images of crooked cops, clever criminals, sinister spies, and dangerous femme fatales. Jewish teenagers, attracted by the explicit art and mature subject matter, read these magazines avidly.

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[197] Hersey, *Pulpwood Editor: The Fabulous World of the Thriller Magazines Revealed by a Veteran Editor and Publisher*, vii.
[198] Hersey, *Pulpwood Editor: The Fabulous World of the Thriller Magazines Revealed by a Veteran Editor and Publisher*, 2.
[199] Hersey, *Pulpwood Editor: The Fabulous World of the Thriller Magazines Revealed by a Veteran Editor and Publisher*, 11.

*Movies and Radio*

Early Jewish comic book writers and artists were inspired by what they saw on the screen and listened to while home. In fact, some Jewish comic book writers entertained childhood dreams of starring in blockbuster films. Stan Lee originally claimed "I wanted to be an actor. I was with the WPA Federal Theater—me and Orson Welles…you couldn't make any money in the theater in those days. Acting was just something to keep people off the streets. I had a whole family to support—my mother and father."[200] Lee's comment suggests that some Jews viewed comic books as a second career option. Moreover, Lee implied that acting was not a realistic money making venture for him. On the other hand, writing comic books were a distinct possibility for men like Lee who grew up dreaming about becoming a film celebrity.

Batman co-creator Bill Finger was perhaps the most indebted to film in his many stories featuring the Caped Crusader. Jerry Robinson declared Finger's scripts were "very cinematic. He wrote full scripts with the scene, location, mood, and dialogue, and even suggested angle shots. He was a visual writer."[201] Robinson also described how Finger "was a cinematic writer. He knew what could be done visually. He'd write things that would work."[202] Comic books were extremely experimental at this early stage of its history. Writers and artists, such as Finger, were inventing the language and visual conventions of the genre from the bottom up. Finger emphasized to his co-workers the importance of film to the practice of comic book art. Robinson revealed, "Bill was my cultural mentor. He took me to see the great foreign films, and introduced me to art noir: all

[200] Lee, "Conversation with Stan Lee," 116.
[201] Jerry Robinson, "Jerry Robinson Interview," Interview by Thomas Andrae, in *Creators of the Superheroes* (Neshannock, PA: Hermes Press, 2011), 102.
[202] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 8.

the great German expressionists and Italian films."[203] Men such as Finger were cultural ambassadors to their comic book co-workers. In an industry still defining itself, these introductions to other mediums were important to artistic growth and development.

Stan Lee directly connected the influence of movies and radio to the craft of comic book production in a 1947 *Reader's Digest* article. He wrote:

> "Comic strip writing is very comparable to radio writing, or to writing for the stage. The radio writer must describe sound effects in his script, and the playwright must give staging directions in his play. Well, the comic strip writer also gives directions for his staging and sound effects in his script, but HIS directions are given in writing to the artist, rather than to a director. He must tell the artist what to draw, and then must write the dialogue and captions."[204]

Lee's suggestion that comic books should be likened to movies and radio gave them a greater cultural respectability. Comic books were works of art on par with a movie script or radio teleplay. Lee's article portrayed the comic book industry as less childish and suitable for a wider, more discerning reading audience. In a later discussion Lee stated "it probably won't surprise you to learn that comic book art and the art of motion pictures have a lot in common." Lee continued, "He must train himself to think like a camera. Every time he composes a panel he's faced with choices similar to those of a movie cameraman. Should he draw a long-shot or a close-up? Should his characters be viewed from the reader's eye-level, or from above, or below? What should be seen in the panel, and what would be better omitted?"[205] Lee's discussion of visuals placed the comic book artist as an auteur. A comic book artist was not simply drawing simplistic, funny pictures for children. He was the primary director of a visual narrative.

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[203] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 8.
[204] Stan Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" *Writer's Digest*, November, 1947, n.p.
[205] Stan Lee, "How to Become A Comic Book Artist" (unpublished manuscript, undated), Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming, n.p.

Movies and their visual techniques became an important influence on comic book production. Dick Sprang observed, "Movies were a great influence simply because they had movement…a comic artist works in a *static* medium. What I tried to do was get into my work a dramatic highlight, such as you would identify in a film action sequence, in other words to isolate peak action in what moviemakers call the 'frozen frame,' the equivalent of a comic book panel."[206] Sprang used the example of Batman's cape to demonstrate how it functions like a movie action sequence. In his own words, it was a "powerful instrument to show speed and action, the way it folds and billows."[207] In other words, Sprang's description shows comic books took the visual conventions of movies to their logical conclusion.

Like movies, comic books were characterized by vivid detail and colorful characters. However, unlike movies, budgetary constraints were not an issue. Special effects in comic books solely depended on the creative team's imagination. For a large period of time, comic books were the only mass market medium in which one could see a fully realized action set-piece with the only limit being the creators' imagination. Will Eisner heavily used distinct movie camera angles in his most successful comic book *The Spirit* (1939). Depicting a city rife with crime reminiscent of the movies of that era, Eisner also employed tongue-in-cheek humor and deep shadows along with a gritty view of the criminal world. Eisner stated "when people talked about the cinematic quality of *The Spirit* that was because I realized when I was doing *The Spirit* that movies were creating a visual language and I had to use the same language. Because when you

[206] Sprang, "Dick Sprang Rides Again," 6.
[207] Sprang, "Dick Sprang Rides Again," 6.

are writing to an audience that is speaking Swahili, you'd better write in Swahili."[208] *The Spirit* showed that movies and comic books were close relatives and relied on many of the same visual techniques and language.

The character of Batman is illustrative of movie and radio's influence on Jewish comic book writers and artists. Kane stated "the first year of Batman was heavily influenced by horror films, and emulated a Dracula look. I also loved mystery movies and serials; The Shadow on radio was a big influence. . . . I was particularly fascinated with the mysterious Shadow, whose ominous voice cut through the air waves, 'Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men . . . . ' And he would end his prologue with that ominous basso laugh which sent chills down my spine."[209] Other Jewish artists were just as influenced by movies and radio programs. Comic book artist Marvin Levy claimed "I think I always knew I wanted to be a cartoonist….most of my inspiration came from the movies or from listening to the radio, the adventure serials at the time, or from the comic books of that period."[210] Kane and Levy did not become interested in entering the movie business. Instead, they used the visual and auditory language of movies and radio as a direct influence for their later comic book work.

*Science Fiction*

Prior to the 1930s and 1940s, most Jews could not share their interest in comic art, adventure stories, and pulp magazines amongst their peers in formally organized fan

[208] Will Eisner, "Film, Theater, and Family Matters," Interview by Charles Brownstein, in *Eisner/Miller* (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Books, 2005), 88.
[209] Kane and Andrae, *Batman & Me: An Autobiography*, 24.
[210] Marvin Levy, "I Think I Always Knew I Wanted To Be A Cartoonist," Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 75 (January 2008): 13.

communities. Even in New York City, there were very few opportunities to form like-minded fan communities. However, the emerging popularity of the science fiction genre and resulting advent of science fiction fan clubs allowed American teenagers to come together and form communities based around their common interests. Many of the magazines that published science fiction stories also featured articles describing the latest advances in rocketry, science, and radio technology. These articles appealed to Jews already exposed to scientific progress and engineering advances. Julius Schwartz and Mort Weisinger, both future major figures in the comic book industry, were at the forefront of science fiction fan clubs as young Jewish teenagers. Schwartz, Weisinger, and others valued science fiction stories because they expanded the possibilities of technologies for human benefit. Future Batman artist Dick Sprang's love for drawing the Caped Crusader's elaborate gadgets and iconic utility belt came in large part from this shared cultural background. He remembered "I really got a bang out of it. My father was a mechanical and electrical engineer, so I grew up with huge machines he was redesigning."[211] Much like many science fiction writers of the time, Sprang simply selected and exaggerated technologies in his Batman stories to dramatic and artistic effect. Science fiction not only predicted technological innovation and evolution but also offered possible positive futures for human development.

In particular, one science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, stood apart for its strong editorial control and ability to communicate the latest science fiction concepts to a young Jewish working class reading public. Editor Hugo Gernsback was one of the earliest advocates for science fiction narratives. In 1929, Gernsback created the term "science fiction" to describe

[211] Sprang, "Dick Sprang Rides Again," 8.

stories that combined “charming romance interwoven with scientific fact and prophetic vision." He used *Amazing Stories* as an editorial platform to define the genre’s core elements. According to Gernsback, science fiction blended traditional adventure storytelling narratives with scientific facts and visions of the future. Gernsback steadfastly believed the nascent genre provided the foundation of a solid scientific education over time while introducing inspiring intellectual ideas to scientists and inventors.

The new science fiction literary genre captivated many future comic book industry Jews. Fawcett Comics writer Otto Binder remarked he was interested in “everything but comics! Science-fiction, detective, and science books mostly” as a youth.[212] A young, devoted readership quickly formed around early science fiction writers such as Phillip Nowlan and Isaac Asimov. These authors moved away from darker themes popularized in many pulps of the time and instead celebrated human achievement and exploration. To be sure, science fiction appealed to a broad swath of Americans exhausted from the twin horrors of mass industry and world war. Science fiction aficionados began to view the pursuit of novelty as an act of social duty and individual heroism.[213] The emergence of the science fiction genre pointed to an American popular culture that lacked something to aspire to or idealize.

Science fiction's promise of a better world captured the imaginations of many Jewish readers. In fact, science fiction writer Frederik Pohl revealed “most of the science-fiction fans and writers I grew up with were Jews.”[214] Many of these readers aspired to become science

[212] Otto Binder and Jack Binder, “Journey to the Rock of Eternity,” Interview by Bob Cosgrove, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 16 (July 2002): 5.
[213] Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction (*New York: Routledge, 2000), 51-52.
[214] Frederik Pohl, in Robert Silverberg and Grania Davis, eds., *The Avram Davidson Treasury: A Tribute* Collection (Tor Books: NY, 1998), 205.

fiction writers themselves and communicated with each other through the letter columns in *Amazing Stories* and other science fiction magazines. Letter columns provided an active forum for substantial comic book discussions amongst Jewish fandom separated by neighborhood and class divisions. DC Comics editor Julius Schwartz attributed his professional longevity to his early fondness for fan magazines.

In 1934, Gernsback even launched the Science Fiction League, one of the first major organizations devoted to the genre. "And—you know, [pulp editor Hugo] Gernsback encouraged the fans to start local clubs—we had one in Queens called The Queens Science Fiction League."[215] The Scienceers, one of the first science fiction fan clubs, published the first fanzine geared towards science fiction criticism. Future comic book editors Schwartz and Mort Weisinger were among its founding members and most prominent contributors to the magazine. In those days, Schwartz and Weisinger were inseparable. "We became fast friends and would often meet halfway at a public library and talk and talk about the science fiction stories we read and who our favorite creators were. From time to time we used to play challenge games, trying to stump each other with questions about science fiction. We considered ourselves two of the foremost experts on science fiction in 1931."[216] Schwartz and Weisinger were even bold enough to go "up to the editorial offices of the various science-fiction magazines," where they would get "the 'hot news' on forthcoming issues. We were always in awe of the editors. To us, they were the closest things to gods on Earth."[217] Schwartz and Weisinger clearly admired the work done by science fiction

[215] Julius Schwartz, "Three Easy Pieces Starring Julius Schwartz," Interview by Will Murray, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 38, July 2004: 23.
[216] Schwartz and Thomsen, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics*, 10-11.
[217] Schwartz and Thomsen, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics*, 17.

publishing houses. The above comment also showed that there was something elusive and unique to being a science fiction editor.

Schwartz and Weisinger used their elevated position in the fan community to build lasting professional connections that would serve them well in their later editorial careers. From the outset, Weisinger realized the importance of fan magazines to the cultivation of a community of like-minded individuals united by their love of science fiction. At first, it was extremely difficult to organize gatherings of science fiction fans. Schwartz declared "if you had three people in a city who could get together and form a club, they would get a charter. The only ones who attended these meetings were fans."[218] Schwartz soon discovered that if he could recruit professionals to these gatherings then more fans would come. He revealed "I got the idea of bringing professionals around. Now, professionals had never met any of the fans, so they were just as thrilled to meet the fans as the fans were to meet them."[219] Schwartz and Weisinger took science fiction authors out to dinner in order to gain favor with them.[220] Schwartz's idea to introduce science fiction writers and illustrators to these events was crucial to sustaining fan interest and creating distinct, devoted sci-fi communities. In another letter, Schwartz implored science fiction author Jack Darrow to attend a convention. He wrote "You might miss the first day of the Convention? For God's sake - - NO! That's going to be the BIG day of the affair – <u>everything's</u> going to happen then and <u>everyone's</u> going to be there then!"[221] Schwartz's implied

[218] Schwartz, "Three Easy Pieces Starring Julius Schwartz," 23.
[219] Schwartz, "Three Easy Pieces Starring Julius Schwartz," 23.
[220] Julius Schwartz to Jack Darrow, 12 December 1932, Accessed April 15th, 2018, https://www.blackgate.com/2017/04/08/julius-schwartz-on-a-merritt-amazing-stories-and-the-first-worldcon/.
[221] Schwartz to Darrow, 12 June 1939, Accessed April 15th, 2018, https://www.blackgate.com/2017/04/08/julius-schwartz-on-a-merritt-amazing-stories-and-the-first-worldcon/.

urgency at Darrow's arrival suggested that his personal reputation as a pillar of the science fiction fan community was on the line.

Schwartz's efforts reveal that community was essential to maintaining and expanding science fiction's appeal among young readers. A science fiction fan could now point to other like-minded individuals that appreciated the genre just as much as they did. Communication between science fiction writers brought together like-minded peers from different neighborhoods. Schwartz remarked at length of Weisinger's methods:

> When a writer writes a story he lives out of town, and he mails it to *Amazing Stories*. If it's rejected, it has to go all the way back to California. So he sends it to *Wonder Stories*. Then it goes back and forth, because they send it blind. They don't know what the editor wants. Now we talk to the editors, and he can find out if they want an interplanetary story of about six thousand words, or if they want this or that. Then we can relay this information to the writers. And of course we can become their agents and collect the usual fee of 10%.[222]

Schwartz's description of Weisinger's agent duties reveals two important facets of the early science fiction community. First, Weisinger realized the importance of fan magazines to the cultivation of a community of like-minded individuals united by their love of comic books. As an editor always looking for the next big thing, Weisinger combed through these connections to find new talent. Editors exploited their personal relationships and financially benefited as personal agents for their own writers and artists. Second, being closely involved with science fiction artists and writers was economically advantageous to Schwartz and Weisinger. In another example, Schwartz recalled:

> "We knew the editors quite well from asking them for information on this and that and were almost on a friendly basis with them. We knew the science-fiction field, as limited as it was in those days, and we decided to contact a number of authors we corresponded with, suggesting that they send their stories directly to us, thus

[222] John Peel, "Julius Schwartz," *Comics Feature* 30 July 1984, 34.

> saving them the long time of waiting on editors' desks and the back-and-forth postage as their manuscripts made the editorial rounds. We would act as their agents, get quick editorial decisions and checks, keeping ten percent of whatever we got them as our fee."[223]

When he became editor of the Superman family of comic books in 1941, Weisinger combed through these same relationships and personal contacts to find new talent for DC Comics. He compared this situation to "our days in science-fiction where we did have esprit de corps…teamwork."[224] Schwartz and Weisinger were tapping into a decidedly Jewish group of fans and professionals. During the late 1930s, Jerry Siegel, a young Jewish boy from Cleveland and co-creator of Superman, was one of the most notable fans to emerge out of the science fiction letter columns translating his enthusiasm for science fiction into a professional writing career in the comic book industry.

Siegel spent his youth reading the cheaply produced science fiction fanzines. Like others from a Jewish working class background, Siegel loved comic strips and pulp magazines and wanted to make his future in the twin worlds of writing and art.[225] Unlike other socially adjusted teenagers, Siegel was an awkward introvert with a frail physical appearance. Batman artist Jerry Robinson reminisced "he was short, wore very thick glasses" and "very shy, not very successful with women…"[226] He published several of his early character ideas in fan magazines such as *Science Fiction*. Siegel developed his storytelling sensibility through close interactions with early networks of fandom. These early publishing efforts drew the attention of Jewish editors looking

[223] Julius Schwartz and Thomsen, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics*, 19-20.
[224] Bill Finger, Otto Binder, Gardner Fox, and Mort Weisinger, "Ghost Riders in the Sky," Interview by Jerry Bails, *Alter Ego* Vol. 3 No. 20 (January 2003): 21.
[225] Jerry Siegel, "Jerry Siegel Interview," Interview by Thomas Andrae, in *Creators of the Superheroes* (Neshannock, PA: Hermes Press, 2011), 23-24.
[226] Robinson, "Jerry Robinson Interview," 101.

for material to fill out the pages of their magazines. While in high school, Siegel met his longtime partner, Joe Shuster. They bonded over their mutual love for science fiction stories. Siegel declared "we were both great science fiction fans…when Joe and I met, it was like the right chemicals coming together. I loved his artwork…I thought he had a flair—though he was a beginner—I thought he had the flair of a Frank R. Paul, who was one of the best science fiction illustrators in the field."[227] Siegel parlayed his enthusiasm for science fiction storytelling motifs and a strong work ethic into the comic book industry.

*Reading and Writing Interests*

Others, such as Sub-Mariner creator Bill Everett, read and appreciated the popular comic strips but did not treat them with the same devoted reverence as other aspiring cartoonists. Everett admitted "I couldn't emulate them because I never could copy—I couldn't do anything well in those days."[228] Instead, he drew inspiration from earlier adventure writers such as Jack London. Everett also drew influence from a wide diversity of sources, everything from humor strips to nautical adventure tales of the time. In Everett's case he did not even initially pursue comic book work. He stated "I wasn't actually interested in it at all; I was talked into it…And I suppose maybe I had dreamed about being a daily comic strip artist, but had never done anything serious about it."[229] Everett's example showed that it took a variety of different societal and cultural circumstances to become interested in producing comic book art.

[227] Siegel, "Jerry Siegel Interview," 24.
[228] Bill Everett, "Everett on Everett," Interview by Roy Thomas, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 46 (March 2005): 6.
[229] Everett, "Everett on Everett," 5.

Still others entered the industry through sheer curiosity. Marvel Comics artist Jack Kirby ruminated that it was "Probably something in my psychic make-up! I decided to do comics because I liked comics. I developed a deep interest in them at a rather early age and ventured to answer an ad which publicized a cartoon correspondence course. I was probably twelve or thirteen at the time. What makes me stay up all night? Probably because I want to make a living!"[230] Stan Lee remarked in an interview "I didn't even know they published comics. I was fresh out of high school, and I wanted to get into the publishing business, if I could."[231] Some such as Allen Bellman gravitated towards comic books because of formative experiences with drawing and cartooning. Bellman recalled his interest in drawing came from an experience "in the bakery store. Everything was put in brown paper bags. At some point I started drawing on the bags. I suppose this was the start of printing on paper and plastic bags that we know today…I always wanted to tell a story in pictures. Airplanes intrigued me tremendously. As I got older, I started trying to draw my own comic strips. They were very crude."[232] Simply having an early interest in drawing or reading could lead one towards a career in comic books. Julius Schwartz stated "I was a library kid. It was my home away from home."[233] Stan Lee stated "I had always been fairly good at writing. The *New York Herald Tribune* used to run an essay contest for high school kids and I won it three weeks in a row."[234] He also "read so much as a kid. I was just as influenced by Shakespeare as I was by comic strips and I used to love Victor Hugo, Dickens, Mark

[230] Jack Kirby, "Jack Kirby Interview," Interview by Steve Sherman, *The Jack Kirby Collector*, vol. 1, no. 8 (January 1996): 20.
[231] Stan Lee, "IGN FilmForce Interview (Part 1 of 5)," Interview by Kenneth Plume, June 26, 2000, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.
[232] Allen Bellman, "Allen Bellman: the Interview," Interview by Michael J. Vassallo, Accessed April 7th, 2017, http://timely-atlas-comics.blogspot.com/2012/03/allen-bellman-interview.html.
[233] Schwartz and Thomsen, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics*, 3.
[234] Lee, "Conversation with Stan Lee," 116.

Twain, Conan Doyle, Edgar Rice Burroughs. When I ate lunch I read the label on the ketchup bottle. I just wasn't happy unless I was reading."[235] In another example, Bill Finger was characterized as "a man who never grew up."[236] For these young Jewish men, reading was a lifelong passion. A career in the comic book field was just a natural extension of their early childhood interests.

The above statements suggest interests in writing and reading encouraged later interest in comic books. They demonstrate the different ways that Jewish teenagers experienced and perceived American popular culture. Jerry Robinson remembered "I had always drawn as a kid, but not seriously. I assumed I'd be in some profession, but the only thing I actively wanted to be was a writer and a journalist. The art, professionally, came quite accidentally."[237] Robinson detailed his early experiences further. He stated "I was a writer for my school newspaper, and I liked to write short stories. I was influenced by Guy DeMaupassant, Mark Twain, O. Henry…all the great short story writers."[238] This early brush with creative writing intrigued Robinson to the extent that he eventually pursued comic books while in college. Other Jewish writers simply loved the craft of stories. Jewish writer Al Schutzer said "I was always interested in writing. It was something that I was good at, I could make a living at, and I had other options. I could have always got into engineering or God knows what else. But writing was always an old interest. It was always there."[239]

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[235] Stan Lee, "Is Stan Lee Vulnerable to Kryptonite?" Interview by Ken Kesey, *The Irish Republican*, January 23, 1975, n.p.
[236] Fred Finger, "Interview with Fred Finger," Interview by Dwight Jon Zimmerman, *Alter Ego: The Comic Book Artist Collection* (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2001), 144.
[237] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 3.
[238] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 4.
[239] Al Schutzer, Interview by Jim Amash, "The Last Remaining Guy on the Ship," Alter Ego, vol. 3, no. 71, August 2007: 45.

As seen above, the comic book industry rewarded curious bystanders interested in the new medium. These men did not even initially conceive that drawing comic books could become a professional career choice. In fact, Bossert flatly declared "I hated the whole idea of comic books. It was so pitiful: slam bang and guts, guts, blood all over, and a lot of stuff going on. But I turned out to be quite good at it."[240] Marvel Comics artist Stan Goldberg revealed "there was so much work to be had because of all the publishers in the field."[241] At this point of time, the comic book industry was not an exclusive field. Hiring procedures were quite relaxed as long as you could draw and write on a tight schedule.

An ad placed in the New York Times dated October 31st, 1941 sought comic book magazine inkers. According to the ad's job description the only requirements were one had to be familiar with the "technique of adventure comic magazines; suggest see Captain America Magazine for style before answering."[242] The promised payments were similarly inclusive, seeking both freelance and salaried workers. Organization is also implicit in this particular want ad. Comic book publishers may not have cared deeply about payment methods. An aspiring comic book artist needed to have the ability to reproduce a favored art style or mimic a popular artist's aesthetic sensibility. Certain titles and characters needed artists suited to the demands of the job. In this particular want ad, comic book publishers clearly sought adventure comic book artists. Furthermore, this ad foreshadowed the professionalization of the industry. The passage "see Captain America Magazine for style before answering," demonstrated a Marvel Comics developed art style and formula for their Captain America character. The ad's appearance

[240] Bossert, "I Was Contemptuous, Basically, of the Comics," 38.
[241] Stan Goldberg, Interview by Jim Amash, "The Goldberg Variations." *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 18, October 2002: 6.
[242] "Want-Ad." *New York Times*, October 31, 1941.

indicated there was a growing group of job applicants specifically interested in comic book work and would apply for the job without hesitation.

*Conclusion*

An examination of the various push and pull factors provides a cultural framework for the Jewish comic book industry. While some similarities are evident in other Jewish dominated industries, a wide variety of different factors and circumstances affected the career arcs of Jewish writers and artists. Foremost among these, the comic book industry allowed many Jews on the periphery to exploit their early childhood interests into a lifelong, lasting career. Fawcett Comics artist Jack Binder stated "our instance of in the so called "Golden Age" of comics was a period of time similar to the early movies. No one knew what they were doing. We had to just take the bull by the horns and make this thing go! There were no guidelines set for us to go by. Fortunately, because of the thrill of just doing it and being involved in it, the comics worked."[243] Interest in comic strips, pulp magazines, movies, and radio demonstrates the growing influence and organization of Jewish artists. Though small in number, Jewish artists and writers actively pursued the comic book industry. Any Jew with a demonstrated aptitude in cartooning or illustration could conceivably find steady work in comic books. The comic book industry stood apart in that it did not offer much in the way of professional standards or development programs.

As a result, the comic book industry focused on the most basic goals of any nascent business venture: expansion. The comic book industry consistently demonstrated the need for more capable writers and artists, adding to the growing influence of the comic book in twentieth

[243] Binder, "Journey to the Rock of Eternity," 5.

century American popular culture. The earlier example of science fiction proved that a devotion to a particular art form "generally take [s] dedication and fanaticism" but allowed for the possibility that like-minded peers could come together and share their interests.[244] What was less clear was how all of the incoming talent would coalesce into a distinct Jewish comic book community. Ultimately, these early years offered comic book professionals a blueprint for how it would be accomplished. Soon, two young Jews from Cleveland, Ohio, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, would convince National Allied Comics editor Vincent Sullivan to publish a character they dubbed "Superman." The comic book industry had a popular concept and resulting formula it could replicate and expand upon in the coming years.

[244] Lee, "Panel Discussion," Lee Papers, n.p.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### Jewish Social Interactions and the Workplace Environment in the Comic Book Industry

*"They said Martin Goodman would walk through the offices and say, 'See that guy over there? He's a Harvard graduate and I got him working for me for 35 bucks a week.'"*[245]

*"Someone told me that another guy made a nasty remark about me being Jewish and this other guy got up and fought with the guy who made the remark. They wrecked the day room! I didn't know what was going on because I was just sitting there doing my work."*[246]

During the 1930s and 1940s Jews became entrenched in the comic book industry. Interviews from this historical era reveals an emphasis by comic book professionals on creating a collaborative work environment. Jewish comic book writers and artists did not need to worry about the anti-Semitism rampant in other American industries while doing their work. This suggested that the comic book industry was attractive because it offered a relatively safe professional haven for many Jews. This was not the only attraction. Older writers and artists provided a professionally nurturing environment for younger creative talent. This friendly atmosphere fostered a sense of shared belonging and pride. In many ways, Jewish comic book writers and artists formed their own ethnic and social communities that was not dependent on formal mutual aid institutions such as the landsmanshaftn. By the late 1930s, landsmanshaftn membership declined because "the depression itself took its toll…the institution of such government programs as unemployment insurance and social security promised to diminish the value of mutual aid in the future."[247] In later interviews, Jewish comic book writers and artists did not speak about their memories of the Lower East Side, a place imbued with powerful

[245] Goldberg, "The Goldberg Variations," 23.
[246] Gantz, "A Long Glance at Dave Gantz," 21.
[247] Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939*, 201.

meaning for New York Jews of the twentieth century.[248] Instead, Jewish comic book writers and artists created and sustained their own social groups through the workplace environment.

Comic book histories, often do not tell what it was like to work in the industry during the 1930s and 1940s. Historian Tony Michels revealed this was a larger problem in the American Jewish labor historiography. He wrote "historians…mostly ignore the many Jews who never made it into the middle class or somehow fell from it. For that matter, rarely do historians write about what…Jews actually did for a living."[249] My evidence reveals that Jewish writers and artists worked in an industry that initially had little expectations for their creative talent. One could advance quickly up the chain of command if they possessed a little writing or drawing ability. There was a great degree of collaboration even in the sweatshop working conditions favored by many comic book publishers. Writers, artists, and even editors looked out for each other. Over time, the editor became one of the most important positions in the comic book industry. The position acted as a conduit between creative talent and publishers.

The relationships amongst writers, artists, editors, and publishers in the workplace resulted in both expected and unforeseen consequences. There were clear boundaries between creative talent, editors, and publishers. Nevertheless, these boundaries were not fixed and oftentimes crossed without penalty. Because of a lack of professional consistency and standards amongst leading comic book publishers in the 1930s, young Jewish writers and artists held more authority to make their own decisions and create innovative characters and stories. By the 1940s,

[248] David Kaufman, Constructions of Memory: The Synagogues of the Lower East Side," in *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections*, ed. Hasia R. Diner, Jeffrey Shandler, and Beth Wenger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 113.
[249] Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*, 19.

writers and artists faced clearer restrictions on the scripts and styles of art they could produce. Publishers began to exert greater control over their editors to police content. Initially, some editors sympathized and even sided with their creative talent. Other editors sided with the publishers out of fear of losing their jobs.

However, everyone in the industry fought for greater acceptance from social critics. While expanding the industry, Jewish comic book publishers actively fought against cultural stereotypes and produced promotional literature. This Jewish working environment was largely unrecognizable to many comic book professionals in the moment. It is only now with hindsight that Jewish comic book professionals realized what they created in the 1930s.

*Age Gaps*

Many of the Jews who entered the comic book industry did so because of their predecessors. Meeting their artistic idols for the first time unnerved many Jewish writers and artists. Stan Lee remarked "it was hard to believe that I'd actually be working with these men, men whose names on a printed comic book page represented all the glamor and excitement I could envision."[250] Jules Feiffer stated his artistic idol was "in his office. Sixteen and a half and scared shitless. I couldn't believe my nerve. Will Eisner."[251] Feiffer recalled that his admiration extended to his early artistic output. He revealed "my goal, at this, my first attempt at writing professionally, was to become a perfect imitation of my mentor."[252] Idolatry was common across the industry. Many young Jewish comic book writers and artists exaggerated their predecessors'

[250] Lee, "How to Draw the Marvel Way" (unpublished book manuscript, 1990), Stan Lee Papers, n.p.
[251] Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir*, 48.
[252] Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir*, 67.

stature in the industry. Promotion was quick for many young comic book professionals who decided to stick with the industry. Feiffer's quote intimated that many Jews were inspired to enter the comic book industry because they admired their predecessor's work. Many of them were young and impressionable teenagers who grew up on pulp magazines and comic strips.

Feiffer and Lee's statements contain awe over these initial experiences. Young Jewish writers and artists were thrilled to finally be in an industry that accepted them. Lee went on to state of his naiveté "I didn't care. I had become a published author. I was a pro!"[253] But they also did not know how to act professionally around their idols who were now their peers in the workplace. Lee revealed his early nervousness when he stated "Joe was tall and slim with a deep, booming voice and an ever-present cigar. He had a twinkle in his eye which gave me the feeling that he was always chuckling over some private little joke of his own."[254]

The age gap between younger and older comic book professionals was readily apparent in daily office interactions. Marvel Comics artist Stan Goldberg reminisced of Stan Lee:

> "Stan was a real character. I'd go into his office and he'd be sitting on a cabinet, six feet in the air, and playing his recorder. And I'd have to wait until he finished playing his song. When he wanted to describe something to me, he'd act it out. I was 19 or 20 and trying to hold back a laugh because he was very serious."[255]

These young incoming staff members did not have to wait long for a promotion. Stan Lee remembered "My first jobs there were to sweep the place, proofread, and write stories. Within a few weeks, though, I became the editor, because the guy I worked for left and I was the only other guy there. I was 17 years old."[256] Lee's statement revealed that advancement in the comic

[253] Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 26.
[254] In this quotation Lee is referring to Editor Joe Simon. Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 26.
[255] Goldberg is referring to Stan Lee. Goldberg, "The Goldberg Variations," 6.
[256] Stan Lee, "Conversation with Stan Lee," 116.

book industry was fast as long as you demonstrated initiative and reliability. The differing age gaps did not lead to resentment or misunderstandings. Instead, the above evidence revealed that comic book writers and artists facilitated a workplace environment built around their craft.

*Publisher Mandates and Standards*

Early on, writers and artists were given early creative autonomy in crafting their stories. Comic book publishers did not much care for comic book art or stories. Most early comic books were simply collected reprints of newspaper comic strips and related promotional material. Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman believed "Fans are not interested in quality."[257] However, comic book publishers soon ran out of reprint material and needed new content to fill their titles. By and large, comic book publishers did not hire permanent staff to create new material for their titles. They believed this was too expensive and required extensive knowledge of comic book visual aesthetics. Instead, comic book publishers hired experienced, independent art studios to work on their titles for a small fee such as Funnies Inc., Eisner & Iger, and the Chesler Shop. Many publishers believed comic books were a passing fad that would die out soon enough. Recruiting outside help was far more preferable than investing in a permanent staff and training infrastructure. Stan Lee stated "the companies were owned by people who were not really very literary, who for the most part just stumbled into the comics business from other areas of publishing or from some other industry."[258] Lee's boss, Goodman, was not particularly interested in keeping a close eye on his comic book publishing staff. Lee openly stated of Goodman "He

[257] "Big Business in Pulp Thrillers," *The Literary Digest*, January 23, 1937, 30.
[258] Lee, "Conversation with Stan Lee," 71.

enjoyed being a boss. He took lots of time to play golf, would nap on his office couch almost every afternoon, and…enjoyed playing Scrabble with anyone in the company who had the time."[259] Goodman was far more interested in the other segments of his business portfolio: magazine and pulp publishing. Comic books, he believed, were a passing fad and would soon fade into obscurity.

Alvin Schwartz remarked "we all had our own ideas" in the early days of the comic book industry.[260] Initially, many writers worked alone on their scripts. Fawcett Comics writer Otto Binder stated, "Well, as you know, a writer works alone. I'm a morning writer. I'd get going at 9 o'clock and work until I was groggy, which usually came around 2:00 in the afternoon. The rest of the day I'd take off to recover.[261] During much of the mid-1930s, comic book production was a lonely endeavor. Unlike other creative industries, comic book publishers did not have many shared production facilities. If not working alone, writers and artists informally gathered at someone's apartment or did their work in the publisher's office. Writers and artists did their work on their own schedules. This began to change by the late 1930s when comic book publishers realized they could retain more reliable talent and pay them cheaper rates if they were exclusively signed to the company. For example, Lee stated "in the fall of '39, Martin Goodman decided to form his own art staff rather than rely entirely upon Funnies Inc. He hired Joe Simon as a free-lance editor/art director and Joe was to create new comic book titles for him" at Marvel Comics.[262] In this new arrangement, Marvel writers and artists did not have as much creative

[259] Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 25.
[260] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 40.
[261] Binder, "Journey to the Rock of Eternity," 5.
[262] Lee, "How to Draw the Marvel Way," n.p.

autonomy. Marvel writers and artists became even more dependent shared workspaces. Artists and writers were aware of these publishing mandates. Marvel Comics artist Gil Kane asserted:

> "The only trouble with the field is that it's done on a factory basis—and it wasn't when comics first started out. While there was a factory, a need for production, there weren't any restrictions imposed on the artists and writers. So while the stuff was primitive, it was very fresh, and it had tremendous charm. And now the factory regimentation has become total."[263]

Working on the most popular characters was even more restrictive. Otto Binder affirmed "Well, working with the editors was pretty well established from the beginning…very few stories are a prime, pristine product of the writer. Although I did have quite a bit of freedom in the early days…but the more established characters…are almost always the editor's…"[264] By the early 1940s, comic book characters such as Superman, Captain Marvel, and Captain America were extremely important to a publisher's financial bottom line. They made every effort to regulate story content through stringent editorial oversight in order to appeal to a mass audience and avoid upsetting social critics.

Comic book publishers established several ground rules that reinforced their positions of authority in the workplace by empowering their editors. Goodman cultivated a working environment where he was "the ultimate boss," and had final say over what comics Marvel published. If Goodman did not approve a comic book, it was not published. Occasionally, Goodman would request changes to artwork or a story; Lee was responsible for ensuring that the artist executed Goodman's changes."[265] Writers and artists did not question Goodman's orders.

[263] Kane, "A/E Interview: Gil Kane," 166.
[264] Binder, "Ghost Writers in the Sky," 13.
[265] Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript, July 28, 2011, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming, n.p.

They could be fired on the spot. In one particularly representative example, Goodman fired the entire staff while he was on vacation. He left Lee to announce the decision. Gil Kane recalled "Stan used to tell me that Goodman would order him to fire everybody, and then Goodman himself would take off down to Florida and play golf while Stan was telling everyone they were fired. He said he never relished that."[266]

Goodman's poor treatment of his editor and staff was not atypical for the time. Other comic book publishers viewed their personnel with similar amounts of contempt. In an interview about his career, artist Arnold Drake spoke about his time at DC / National. Drake did not care for Superman editor Mort Weisinger. He recalled, "Oh, yes, his attitude was very clear to me: 'The only way I can stand tall is to kick somebody in the nuts, and that makes me a big man.' I decided I didn't need that.[267] DC Comics artist Alvin Schwartz confirmed Drake's opinion of the editor. He remarked "Mort had a lot of people working to build his reputation."[268]

Other notable comic book figures of the 1930s and 1940s displayed strange personalities that made them endearing to writers and artists. Marvel Comics artist Gene Colan highlighted Stan Lee's idiosyncrasies in an interview: "Oh he was very young. Stan always looked like a kid…He was sitting there wearing one of those beanie caps with the propeller spinning…{*laughs*] Oh it was one of the most ridiculous things I ever saw! [*laughs*] This is the editor of Timely Comics?"[269] Lee, himself, admitted, "I've never denied it. I am the corniest guy that ever

[266] Gil Kane, "Stan Was the Prince"—Gil Kane on Timely Comics," Interview by Roy Thomas, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Winter 1999/2000): 36.
[267] Arnold Drake, "My Greatest Adventures," Interview by Marc Svensson, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3., no. 17 (September 2002): 7.
[268] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 42.
[269] Gene Colan, "So You Want a Job, Eh?" Interview by Roy Thomas, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 6 (Autumn 2000): 7.

lived."[270] Comic book artist Al Plastino remarked that his publisher Harry Chesler "always had a cigar in his mouth, never lit, while he'd hum in the back of his office…he wanted to keep everyone happy, so he served the artists juice."[271] On the other hand, a publisher's unusual personality could make him an imposing and unapproachable figure to their subordinates. For example, Harry Donenfeld "was a showman; he often did bizarre things, simply for the effect. He had pet alligators, little ones, in his office, and would feed them raw hamburger. He also served them minnows, but he would chop their heads off first, so the minnows wouldn't suffer when the alligators ate them."[272] These memories showed that the comic book industry attracted all different sorts of personalities. In addition, Donenfeld's eccentric behavior suggested that he was not above scaring his employees in order to reinforce his workplace authority. In another example, Gill Fox stated his publisher "was likable. He'd come in wearing a hat on the back on his head with a watch chain in his vest. He reminded me of a fight promoter, and he smoked a cigar."[273] Comic book industry figures got away with certain eccentric habits and social foibles if they got books out on time and ran their staff efficiently.

Some editors brought their personal economic anxieties in service to the publisher. Julius Schwartz recounted "the big brass had a box seat at Yankee Stadium, and if they weren't going to attend a game, the editors would go…So I said, 'Well, let's take a cab, Mort." And Mort says, 'No, no, no, no. Let's take the subway. We'll get there faster.' He didn't want to spend the

[270] Stan Lee, "Stan Lee Comic Meister Extraordinaire," Interview by Sean Piccoli, *Washington Times* (October 25, 1991).
[271] Al Plastino, "My Attitude Was, They're Not Bosses, They're Editors," Interview by Jim Kealy, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 59 (June 2006): 27
[272] Binder, "Journey to the Rock of Eternity," 5.
[273] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 8.

money on a cab."[274] Schwartz continued: "he says, 'We'll buy our peanuts on the outside.' I said, [*exasperated*] 'Mort, we'll buy our goddamn peanuts on the inside.' He says, 'Are you crazy? Peanuts on the inside cost a quarter. On the outside they only cost a dime.'"[275] Schwartz's story of Weisinger's penny-pinching revealed two aspects of the comic book industry. First, many of the individuals who became comic book editors came from families who struggled economically during the 1920s and 1930s. Second, for Weisinger and his generation, saving money by any means necessary was an inherited anxiety from a childhood lived in constant poverty.

*The Role of the Editor*

An editor had to maintain healthy, professional relationships with his creative talent while simultaneously carrying out the dictates of a demanding, intimidating publisher solely concerned for his company's financial bottom line. An editor was given a tremendous amount of professional power in order to his job. At times, this could become attractive to aggressive editors. Stan Lee stated "I had this great feeling of power, that I was keeping three secretaries busy with three stories, and I knew that occasionally people were watching – and I was so proud…I got a kick out of playing to the crowd."[276] Being in a position of authority was extremely attractive to men such as Lee. And yet, an editor's job relied more on active collaboration with his creative talent than it did on strict oversight. This could be an extremely difficult balancing act for many comic book editors unaccustomed to the responsibilities of the job.

[274] Schwartz, "Three Easy Pieces Starring Julius Schwartz," 14.
[275] Schwartz, "Three Easy Pieces Starring Julius Schwartz," 14.
[276] Lee, FOOM Interview, Lee Papers.

Artist Stan Goldberg spoke of the difficulties Stan Lee faced as editor at Marvel / Timely Comics. He stated "Stan did everything. He was the editor and art director. We had people up there who were pros. There were no prima donnas there. We all knew what we had to do." Goldberg continued, "Martin left it all up to Stan. Stan would have to get okays from Goodman, but that was about it. Goodman was more hands-on with the sweat magazines and the other publications…He was a very strange guy."[277]

To be sure, the editor was a direct extension of the publisher. Whatever the publisher wanted done in the workplace was left up to the editor to implement and execute completely. As the earlier Kane and Goldberg anecdotes illustrate, this was irrespective of the editor's feelings or the relationships he had cultivated with his artistic talent and staff. An Executive Doodle Book authored by Stan Lee, while produced as a joke, lends some truth to how many editors viewed their employees. In the book Lee wrote:

"A is for ADVERTISING
Which so blithely succeeds
In making Joe Public
Buy more than he needs

B is for BUDGET
Sing ye its praises
It gives you a reason
Not to grant raises
…
H is for HUCKSTER
Sometimes brazen and brash
He never stops pitching
But he brings in the cash"
…
S is your SECRETARY
Be she fright or a jerk
You will never dismiss her

[277] Goldberg, "The Goldberg Variations," 9.

For she does all your work[278]

In the end, an editor had to prioritize his career and family over his office relationships. Stan Lee remarked "my prime concern was to please the publisher, the work I did, so that I would have a steady job." Also, Goldberg's statement strongly suggests at least some of the writers and artists knew of and sympathized with the tremendous professional burdens confronted by the editor.

However, not all of the interactions between an editor and his creative talent were inherently adversarial in nature. Arnold Drake's time working for DC Comics editor Mort Weisinger was quite different. Belying his cheap image, Weisinger could be generous when the mood struck him. Drake stated, "Mort called me in one day, and said, "I don't have any assignments for you," and I said "Mort, I need a check." Mort said, "Repair this, see what you can do with it, it's a first effort." I think I changed two balloons on the last page. That was my entire contribution. Mort wanted to give me a check. So that's how he did it.[279] Weisinger demonstrated that editors and publishers could be generous to their employees from time to time. Similarly, Batman artist Sheldon Moldoff stated editors and comic book publishers "always treated me wonderful. I never asked for any favors. I never went to them and said, 'I need more work,' or anything like that; I respected them. I'm grateful to them."[280] These examples of professional generosity and courtesy challenge the widely held assumption that editors and upper management were always pitted against their creative talent.

In fact, some comic book publishers preferred healthy lines of communication. EC Comics publisher William Gaines stated, "Feldstein and I did almost all the writing for three or four years.

[278] Stan Lee, "My Own Executive Doodle Book," 1962, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.
[279] Drake, "My Greatest Adventure," 7.
[280] Moldoff, "A Moon…A Bat…A Hawk," 8.

And we worked as follows: we'd come in every day and we would sit down…until we got a story we were happy with."[281] Some comic book editors clearly chose collaboration over disarray. DC Comics editor Mort Weisinger stated, "And it also became impossible for any one writer to write 'em." Each writer has to be alerted to what the other writers are doing so as not to repeat. Because, God knows, we *did* repeat despite our various diligences."[282] Getting the books out on time was paramount to Weisinger and other DC Comics editors. The editor needed to coordinate with all of his writers and have open lines of communication.

As stated earlier, the comic book industry tried to foster a familial sense of belonging. Stan Goldberg revealed "we played cards during our lunch hour, and the card games were great… I remember Stan coming in one time and he said, half kiddingly, half seriously, 'I want you guys to eat your lunch at lunchtime, not before. I don't mind you playing cards, but eat while you're playing cards.' He didn't really berate us, because our work always got done."[283] In fact, editors and artists often preferred the same social circles. Quality Comics artist Gill Fox reflected, "When guys like that work at the same place you do, they make you want to get better so you can keep up with them."[284] In another instance, Fawcett Comics writer Otto Binder remembered "dealing with the artists of that time, and the writers—it was like a big plant with a lot of camaraderie and a lot of fun and a lot of bounce and vitality."[285] Artist Ken Bald added of his time at Fawcett "I'd double-date with Jack and his wife and we'd go visit [main 'Captain Marvel' artist] C.C. Beck, and

[281] William M. Gaines, *Comic Book Confidential*, directed by Ron Mann (1988; Chicago IL: Home Vision Entertainment, 2002), DVD.
[282] Weisinger, "Ghost Riders in the Sky," 11.
[283] Moldoff, "A Moon…A Bat…A Hawk," 8.
[284] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 9.
[285] Otto Binder, "The Fabulous 40's – The First Full Decade of Comic Books," Interview by John Benson, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 60 (July 2006): 70.

sometimes Otto came with us."[286] Overall, Bald spoke of his time at Fawcett fondly. He stated "It was fun. We were all young, and then the older guys came in and played with us."[287]

Sometimes, the editors and creative staff would collaborate on office pranks in order to take advantage of the publisher's attention lapses. Fawcett Comics writer Otto Binder disclosed "we had the editorial section on one floor and the art department on the other. So Chesler would go out on a call or something, and the boys could tell when Chesler left, and they knew I was upstairs, so they'd start raising hell downstairs. The moment I went downstairs to find out if they were working or not, some of the guys upstairs would take off. We had one heck of a time keeping that staff working. [*chuckles*][288] Moreover, creative talent looked out for each other. DC Comics artist Sheldon Mayer's daughter stated her father told "me of instances where he got blamed for doing things that he knew better than to do. But that the person who had done them was afraid of being fired, and felt that my dad, being so young (he was only 18 when he started there) would only get yelled at, and (with the help of the culprit) could talk his way out of it." Mayer relented because the unnamed associate later covered for him.[289] Writers and artists bonded over the shared pressures of a tight deadline. Bill Everett reminisced "As I recall, it was a 64-page book, and we did turn it out something, like between Wednesday and Thursday and the following Monday…There were quite a few of us that got together and went to my apartment and did the whole thing. We just stayed there the entire weekend…Nobody left except to go out

[286] Bald, "I Did Better On *Bulletman* Than I Did On *Millie The Model*," 6. Bald is referring to Fawcett editors Jack and Otto Binder.
[287] Bald, "I Did Better On *Bulletman* Than I Did On *Millie The Model*," 7.
[288] Otto Binder, "A Real-Life Marvel Family," Interview by Richard Kyle, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 55 (December 2005): 66.
[289] Mayer Harris, "Sugar's Daddy."

and get food or more liquor and come back and work…It was a pretty wild weekend!"[290] For many Jewish writers and artists, work and social bonding occurred simultaneously.

*Social Relationships*

Camaraderie outside the workplace could be just as strong. To be sure, some writers and artists preferred relative solitude while at work. For instance, DC Comics editor and writer Julius Schwartz stated "He and John Broome were probably the only writers that I socialized with outside of the office."[291] But more often than not, work often gave way to spirited discussions of comic book aesthetics. Otto Binder recalled "we had regular "bull sessions" in those days. We could talk for hours about comics. In fact, we met for weekends for six years, just talking shop. Even though the meetings were social, the conversations always centered around work. We lived it!"[292] Dave Gantz recalled "we had a clique…we made all the rounds of the nightclubs on 52nd Street. We went to all the jazz clubs."[293] Several comic book publishers allowed opportunities for organized social interactions outside of work. Artist Nat Champlin revealed "I was a part of the Binder ball team, and I wasn't a bad pitcher! We would play anyone who would come along—but mostly the Fawcett comic staff."[294] Friendships between artists were particularly strong. Stan Goldberg recalled "The three of us would go out to lunch. When we crossed the street, I'd say, 'Okay, Frank. You stand on this side of Jack and I'll stand on the other. If a car hits us, they

[290] Everett, "Everett on Everett," 11.
[291] Schwartz and Thomsen, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics*, 95.
[292] Binder, "A Real-Life Marvel Family," 66.
[293] Gantz, "A Long Glance at Dave Gantz," 22.
[294] Nat Champlin, "The Jack Binder Shop Days: An Interview with Nat Champlin," Interview by P.C. Hamerlinck, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 40.

won't get Jack!' We had a lot of fun."[295] Even comic book publishers ran in some of the same social circles. Al Schutzer recalled that EC Comics publisher Bill Gaines was quite friendly with all of his employees. He stated "well, Bill Gaines was a diamond in the rough—bright, very down to earth, nothing phony about him…Bill Gaines used to have the use of his father's 30-foot cabin cruiser, and the four of us used to go out on it quite often in Jamaica Bay…It was a good period in our lives."[296] These comic book industry figures saw no boundaries between creative talent and upper management. Instead, there was an emphasis on social bonds regardless of one's position in the industry. These statements demonstrated that associations of work and social community were closely intertwined. The shared Jewish backgrounds, neighborhoods, and interests of the writers and artists made these social relationships possible.

*Working Environments*

Exploring the working environment of Jewish comic book professionals provides a glimpse into the comic book's purposeful construction of shared cultural, social, and working bonds. As seen above, the comic book industry fostered closer, friendly interactions amongst writers, artists, and editors. The comic book industry taught young Jewish males how to interact in an office environment built around the fast, efficient production. Female presence in the office was relegated to secretarial positions. Female writers and artists were a rare occurrence. Quality Comics artist Toni Blum and EC / Marvel Comics artist Marie Severin were the most notable female artists that contributed comic book work in the 1930s and 1940s. Pleasing the editor and

[295] Goldberg, "The Goldberg Variations," 18.
[296] Schutzer, "The Last Remaining Guy on the Ship," 46.

publisher was the foremost concern. Nevertheless, comic book offices, or "bullpens," encouraged a family aesthetic. Many Jews came from the same neighborhoods and social fraternities.

Within this social dynamic, comic book publishing houses gradually adopted more stringent work policies and standardized artistic styles. Publishing houses quickly recognized those that assimilated to these new policies. Stan Lee remarked in a 1947 article "for once you're 'in,' there are many assignments which can come your way."[297] It seems that a willingness to work hard, produce scripts and art on a timely basis, and a demonstrated ease in artistic social circles were the essential elements to succeed in the comic book industry.

During the 1930s and 1940s, there was limited office space available to comic book professionals. Marvel Comics artist Stan Goldberg stated "we were in the Empire State Building, and Magazine Management had their own separate bullpen and editorial offices…Our bullpen was on the 14th floor. The comics offices were much smaller than the magazine department."[298] Stan Lee confirmed Goldberg's recollection that "Timely's offices were first located in the McGraw-Hill Building at 330 West 42nd Street, New York City."[299] Goldberg's account revealed that the magazine arm of the publishing house was still far more important than comic books. Comic books were only a small segment of a larger print media business.

In an interview, Joe Simon disclosed formal office space, if it existed at all, was at a premium. He stated "they were very small. There was a waiting room with maybe two chairs, and then there was a window with a girl behind it. She was the receptionist, and if you turned in

[297] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[298] Goldberg, "The Goldberg Variations," 7.
[299] Lee, "How to Draw the Marvel Way," Lee Papers, n.p. Marvel Comics went by Timely Comics from 1939 to 1951.

a circle, you did a whole circuit of the whole waiting room; a very small area."[300] In particular, Marvel Comics was notorious for their haphazard office environment. Even by the 1950s, Stan Goldberg stated "Stan was the only one getting a salary, and there wasn't much of a staff the whole time Marvel was creating the super-heroes. Stan had a tiny, narrow room, and there was one desk in the front and his desk was at the end of the room, near the window." Referring to the lack of formal office space, Goldberg stated, "I did most of the coloring at home, but I made corrections at that front desk."[301] Marvel Comics writer Joe Simon revealed that most of the office comforts belonged solely to publisher Martin Goodman. Simon stated Goodman had "the biggest office, and had all the luxuries of the publisher."[302] These statements revealed that workspaces were extremely small and functional. The publishers did not think much about worker comfort except for perhaps themselves.

In yet another workspace description, artist Gill Fox stated that Quality Comics "had practically no staff. Busy Arnold had his office and his secretary had an outer office." In addition to no formal working space, Fox stated he and other editors "worked in a great big room where the artists came in and laid their art out on big flat tables. The only art done in there was lettering and correcting."[303] In fact, as far as most readers could tell, "comic books were written by machines."[304] Fox's memory revealed that publishers believed only a few individuals needed to produce comic book content for their companies. Extra staff would be unnecessarily extravagant and harm the bottom line.

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[300] Simon, "Simon Says!" 8
[301] Goldberg, "The Goldberg Variations," 18.
[302] Simon, "Simon Says!" 8.
[303] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 16.
[304] Michael Vance, *Forbidden Adventures: The History of the American Comics Group* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 53.

Always looking to save on what they deemed unnecessary expenditures, comic book publishers resisted upgrading the work space for their employees. Simon observed:

> "Liebowitz had been most strongly in favor of moving; he thought it was good for the industry. I don't think that Harry Donenfeld liked the idea; he thought it'd be too expensive. I used to call Liebowitz 'the Jewish Neville Chamberlain.'" So the first morning after the move I got in very early. Sitting at my machine, I hear Harry Donenfeld come down the hall shouting, '280,000-a-year rent and I can't even take a shit! They locked the executive bathroom on me!!' Harry was no "Neville" Liebowitz. Anyway those expensive new quarters made them a bit more professional. It was a separation from their early beginnings. Back then they never felt totally professional. It was like they were doing something sneaky."[305]

Donenfeld was representative of many publishers who felt that the cramped work space they offered their employees was more than adequate. Nevertheless, Liebowitz's intervention proved that at least someone in the company valued upgraded, professional work areas. Liebowitz recognized that a new office for employees gave an added sense of legitimacy to their line of work and a positive image to the outside world.

*Workplace Interactions*

Oftentimes, publishers and editors emphasized the values of teamwork and collaboration to their writers and artists. Superman editor Mort Weisinger claimed "this is very reminiscent of our days in science-fiction where we did have esprit de corps. I think what Jerry just said about how we get out the comic involves the same thing – teamwork."[306] In Weisinger's view, editorial and creative talent happily co-existed alongside each other. However, this was far from the truth. Weisinger's statement came from a 1964 comic book panel held in New York City. Weisinger's

[305] Drake, "My Greatest Adventure," 5.
[306] Weisinger "Ghost Riders in the Sky," 10.

later message of solidarity was not shared by many 1930s and 1940s comic book writers and artists. Alvin Schwartz declared "Mort liked to be among people, especially when he was able to influence them. People were interesting to Mort to the extent that he could make them feel he was wonderful…Mort was blind to a lot of features in himself. He was an ungainly man…He overate, he was clumsy…he must have had a hard time as a kid."[307] Weisinger's reputation as a demanding, unkind editor preceded him. For instance, Schwartz recalled a serious physical altercation took place between Weisinger and another DC Comics writer. Schwartz stated:

> "I walked in the middle of it, you might say, and there was a big fuss around the window behind Jack Schiff… Well, I happened to come in at a time when there was a whole crowd trying to pull Don off Mort and Mort was pushing against the windows. The windows were covered with a kind of steel mesh. Mort wouldn't have gone through anyway. We were way up on the, what, 11th or 12th floor, I don't remember. But there was a lot of screaming and squalling, and it was a very funny scene."[308]

Schwartz concluded his story by suggesting that some of the other physical altercations took place because of political posturing amongst the editors and creative talent. He stated "Weisinger, as you know, was a battle-ax, but I don't think he could lift a flea."[309] In another example of professional discord, Quality Comics artist Gill Fox did not speak highly of his relationship with comic book publisher Jerry Iger. Fox remarked "I was athletic and Iger was a little guy. There was something that I didn't like in one of his packaged art jobs that came in, so I said to him on the telephone, 'Don't do this anymore.' And he said he'd punch me in the nose!

[307] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 43.
[308] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 48.
[309] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 48.

This was long-distance, and I thought this guy was crazy! He wouldn't have said that to me in person. Arnold and I got a big laugh out of that. Iger was not liked by too many people."[310]

On a more to day to day basis, writers found that editors such as Weisinger could prove extremely difficult to deal with on a professional level. Schwartz remembered "there would be differences on plotting, on ideas, even politics. Mort would come to me with his complaints about Schiff. You know, the writers and artists, they would talk about each other. There wasn't a loyalty in-house, or anything like that for those things. I think Mort was well aware that people didn't like him."[311] Tensions between comic book publishers and their creative talent frequently ran high at the work place.

And yet other comic book professionals held more favorable opinions towards their editors. For example, Weisinger was difficult to many writers and artists but maintained cordial relations with others. Batman artist Dick Sprang asserted in an interview "I've heard several DC artists did not get along with him. I got along with him splendidly. He was one of the most gracious men I ever met." Sprang believed that Weisinger's treatment of writers and artists depended on whether he liked you on a personal level. Sprang disclosed "If he liked you, he really let you know it. If he disliked you and your work, you also knew it—I've heard. He was a big, imposing man, aggressive for sure; a fast-spoken individual who had come up in publishing the hard way….Mort wanted things done the way he liked them, and the stuff I did he happened to like, so all went well with me."[312] Weisinger was not unlike other editors who wanted very

[310] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 16.
[311] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 42.
[312] Dick Sprang, "Dick Sprang Rides Again," 11.

specific stories and art from their creative talent. As the 1940s wore on, this style of editor became more prominent in the comic book industry.

*Conclusion*

The comic book industry quickly provided an environment suitable for work and social community. First, working in the comic book industry allowed Jews to meet their peers and share their love of craft. Because of its insular nature, the comic book industry treated creative talent like family. Social interactions inside and outside the workplace demonstrated the close relationships. However, editors sometimes challenged complete harmony in the workplace. This shows that the professional lines between editor and creative talent were not always clear. Secondly, the next generation of Jewish writers and artists slowly began to take over leadership roles in the office environment, which simultaneously introduced new and more organized attitudes towards comic book work and artistic standards. The editor's expanded powers and responsibilities made this possible. Third, the growing visibility and popularity of the comic book industry was in part a result of the tremendous work ethic of Jewish writers and artists. For these young men, pushing to meet editorial deadlines was a means to an end and became a source of pride. An efficient writer or fast artist produced more content for the publisher. Editors gave more efficient writers and artists more opportunities for work. Finally, several comic book professionals sought to put their industry in a more positive light. Their promotional work on behalf of the industry showed that these Jewish men were comfortable with their career choice and saw real artistic merit in their work.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### Workplace Grievances, Contract Disputes, Lawsuits, in the Comic Book Industry

*"What in 'ell has come over you? Making cracks about 'B' features and 'being one of the boys' and 'factory jobs.' As far as this office is concerned, we consider all features important. If you don't think I can handle this feature to your satisfaction than perhaps you'd better forget it."*[313]

In the formative years of the comic book industry, artists and writers encountered numerous obstacles on a wide range of issues including contract disputes, union representation, radical politics, and ghosting. In the past, publishers such as Martin Goodman "resorted to the simplest expedient. He contacted an art service named Funnies Incorporated, owned and managed by Lloyd Jacquet, and hired Jacquet's shop to produce original comicstrips for the titles Martin intended to publish."[314] Now Goodman and other comic book publishers hired their own staffs. This exacerbated the assembly line nature of the work. Other publishers followed Goodman's lead. At Quality Comics, Will Eisner remembered "we made comic book features pretty much the way Ford made cars…I would write and design the characters, somebody else would ink, somebody else would letter."[315] In a 1979 interview, Eisner recalled that his role as the head of the art studio made him "very rich before I was twenty-two."[316] Eisner's statement demonstrated that success created gaps in wealth among creative talent. This shift in business philosophy posed a threat to a carefully crafted image of worker solidarity and collaboration. While topics like contracts and union representation largely belong to major American labor movements, the nascent comic book industry was also greatly affected by these issues. Historian

[313] Jerry Iger to Will Eisner, 4 April 1942, Will Eisner Papers, Ohio State University.
[314] Lee, "How to Draw the Marvel Way," Lee Papers, n.p.
[315] Will Eisner, "Interview," Interview by Jim Steranko, *The Steranko History of Comics*, vol. 2 (Reading: Supergraphics, 1972), 112.
[316] Will Eisner, "Will Eisner Interview," Interview by Cat Yronwode, *Comics Journal*, no. 46 (May 1979): 34.

Deborah Dash Moore revealed by the end of the 1930s many Jews "supported the New Deal's social welfare provisions and they championed the rights of labor to unionize to negotiate from strength to secure a decent livelihood."[317] Jewish comic book writers and artists encountered this political climate while trying to find and maintain steady work in an industry marked by constant turnover and tight, unrelenting deadlines. The resolution of these issues heavily favored publisher interests.

The evidence in this chapter clearly demonstrates comic book publishers routinely took advantage of their creative talent, especially in contracts. Yet, writers and artists did not move towards the creation of a labor union. Jewish comic book writers and artists did not lack in opportunities to affiliate with a particular union. Historian Jeffrey Gurock noted "the city, particularly Manhattan, also provided a prime venue for Jews to speak out publicly" and advocate for worker rights.[318] Jewish workers still remembered the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire tragedy that claimed the lives of one hundred forty six workers, many of them young Jewish women. Historian Paula Hyman argued "the fire captured the imagination of the immigrant Jewish community…labor activists and social reformers took charge of bringing the lessons of the fire to the larger civic community."[319] Historian Tony Michels revealed there was a, "new image of Jews—the Jew as a radical—that took shape in the 1890s. It was a stereotype that would gain wide currency…and remain with Jews (often to their detriment) into the 1960s."[320] New York

[317] Deborah Dash Moore, "Introduction," in *American Jewish Identity Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 6.
[318] Gurock, *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010*, 76.
[319] Paula E. Hyman, "Beyond Place and Ethnicity: The Uses of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire," in *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections*, ed. Hasia Diner, Jeffrey Shandler, and Beth S. Wenger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 71-72.
[320] Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2.

City facilitated Jewish political radicalism. According to Michels, the city provided "a laboratory of political and cultural innovation."[321] By the 1940s, historian Cheryl Lynn Greenberg noted American Jews were more public than ever before in condemning bigotry and instances of labor injustice.[322] However, comic book writers and artists, by and large, did not advocate for better worker protections or payment. Instead, they successfully worked alongside editors and publishers they no longer respected or trusted. Their creations became the sole intellectual property of comic book publishing houses. As the comic book industry became more successful, the carefully crafted image of solidarity and familial belonging became a pretense. The interests of creative talent diverged sharply from editors and publishers.

*The Creative Talent and Publisher Perspectives on Comic Book Work*

During the 1930s and 1940s, comic book publishing houses eagerly hired anyone who displayed artistic talent. More artists were needed because comic book publishing houses ran out of old material to publish in their titles. In order to keep the industry viable, entirely new content was needed from prospective writers and artists. Quality Comics editor Gill Fox stated, "the books were mostly reprints but that began to change when I got there. We were in the process of changing to all new material."[323] The comic book industry promoted themselves as an attractive professional opportunity. In a 1947 article, Stan Lee wrote, "The pay is good. A competent writer can write about 10 pages a day for $6 to $9 per page, depending upon the strip

[321] Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*, 5.
[322] Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*, 74.
[323] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 16.

he is writing and the quality of his material."[324] Lee also noted later in the article "so, this comic field certainly bears a pretty close scrutiny from any writer who's interested in receiving meaty checks, and in receiving them often."[325] In order to emphasize the seemingly easy work opportunities, Lee and other comic book editors stressed "the good guys were good guys, the bad guys were bad guys, the stories had happy endings, and that was the end of it."[326] Many of Lee's claims were simply not true or were grossly exaggerated.

In a later industry panel, Lee admitted the comic book industry was not a path to easy money. He stated "Sometimes publishing comic magazines is like producing Wrigleys Spearmint Gum…You don't make much off any single slice but if you just turn out enough you make money. Some publishers lose money on the publishing and make it back on the distribution or whatever. It is not what I would call a tremendously healthy field, very rarely has been except for certain periods."[327] DC Comics artist Jerry Robinson revealed that his comic book work did not pay more than other work opportunities available to him. He stated "I'd ink and letter a page for $3, if I'm not mistaken. I know that by the end of the week, I didn't end up with any more money than when I was selling ice cream. Before long, I was able to get a raise, which brought me up to a magnificent $50 a week."[328] In a 2011 published interview, Bill Bossert stated comic book work "was like a factory. We were off Third Avenue in New York City. We'd get there in the morning, and work there all day long, knocking off in the evening, and we'd be there half a day on Saturday.

[324] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[325] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[326] Lee, FOOM Interview, March 1, 1977, Lee Papers, n.p.
[327] Lee, Panel Discussion, New York City January 20, 1971, Lee Papers, n.p.
[328] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 5.

It was an old time sweatshop."[329] In this way, the comic book industry was not unlike any typical working class industry in the city.

Comic book publishers wanted prospective writers and artists to believe the work was plentiful, easy, and paid well. New content demands made the old system of hiring professional art services outdated. By the early 1940s, these hired bullpens could not keep up with the demand for new material. Publishers initially were at a loss trying to respond to the increased demand. For example, Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman admitted in a later interview that he was flabbergasted at booming sales, especially among young adults.[330] With these incentives, publishers and editors sought to hire their own creative talent.

*Payment and Contracts*

As a result, the influx of new writers and artists and the growing visibility of the comic book industry led to concerns among publishers about how to pay their workers and keep them busy producing story content. Prior experiences in the pulp magazine industry informed their response. Comic book publishers used the exploitative hiring practices they learned while selling pulp magazines in the 1920s and 1930s. A profit driven motivation emerged in various business practices and contracts designed to completely exploit naive writers and artists. For example, Stan Lee revealed "Some editors would only give work to married freelancers, figuring that they had at least one other mouth to feed and therefore would have added incentive to actually deliver the assignment on time."[331] These dishonest business procedures greatly influenced the

[329] Bossert, "I Was Contemptuous, Basically, of the Comics," 38.
[330] Dave Burgin, "Even Professors Read Them," Jan 6th 1966 *News Chronicle*.
[331] Lee, "Stan Lee's Complete How to Write Comics" (unpublished manuscript, undated), Lee Papers, n.p.

course of a typical young Jewish artist's career. For instance, Jerry Siegel's struggle to retain creative ownership over the Superman character caused him great anxiety and soured him on the comic book industry. Jerry Robinson described, "the traumatic experiences that [Siegel] went through because of the Superman court battles were too much for him. He'd walk by a movie theatre playing a Superman serial or see Superman comics at a newsstand and get physically ill."[332]

Comic book publishers structured contracts to benefit themselves. Some publishers were notorious for counting every dollar spent. Quality Comics publisher Busy Arnold wrote to Will Eisner "I am enclosing check covering the cost of material used in the December issue of MILITARY COMICS. Your statement showed a total of $695.41, but this figured the five pages of Miss America at $85. You corrected this to a $75 price which was at the rate of $15 per page. So the correct amount for the material which you supplied for the December issue of MILITARY COMICS was $685.41."[333] Publishers also used contract language to get out from financially disastrous agreements. A letter dated December 26th, 1941 is representative of the immense power the purchaser had over the supplier. Arnold wrote to Jerry Iger "The total combined loss on HIT COMICS and NATIONAL COMICS for the June 1941 to the November 1941 issues (six issues of each magazine) was $10,704.87. During this period, we were operating under our agreement dated January 13, 1941."[334] Arnold continued, "Starting with the December issues of HIT COMICS and NATIONAL COMICS, we worked under the terms of a second agreement dated July 21, 1941. The loss on the December issue of HIT COMICS was $1,261.99 and the loss on the December issue

[332] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 18.
[333] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 12 September 12 1941, Will Eisner Papers, Ohio State University.
[334] Busy Arnold to Jerry Iger, 26 December 1941, Eisner Papers

of NATIONAL COMICS was $1,506.51 – a total of $2,768.50."[335] The above quotes showed that Arnold closely kept track of a particular title's profitability. More importantly, the above passages revealed the publisher had direct control over the hired suppliers.

Comic book sales were not a matter of public record but publishers well knew whether or not a title was a money-making product. Generosity was not in a publisher's best interest. Arnold stated "I had a letter from your ex-partner making me a counter offer and he must think that I am Santa Claus or something."[336] In another letter Arnold concludes, "So for the period from June 1941 to February 1942 we will lose a total of nearly $20,000.00 on HIT COMICS and NATIONAL COMICS. You must realize we cannot operate any longer under the terms of our agreement dated July 21, 1941 and this letter is to officially cancel all past deals on HIT COMICS and NATIONAL COMICS effective with the April issues of each magazine."[337] Arnold was quick to end the contract despite his prior business dealings with Iger. In this regard, Arnold was quite forthright with Iger. He stated "If we are going to buy any material from you in the future for these magazines, it must be on an entirely new setup."[338] In fact, Arnold maintained that he could pick and choose from Iger material best suited to a title's sustainability in a competitive marketplace. He specified, "I must add the best available material which I can buy independently to each book and kill several of your features which apparently do not sell comic magazines."[339] Arnold clearly believed assigning titles was up to him and not Iger.

[335] Arnold to Iger, 26 December 1941, Eisner Papers.
[336] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 6 January 1941, Eisner Papers.
[337] Arnold to Iger, 26 December 1941, Eisner Papers.
[338] Arnold to Iger, 26 December 1941, Eisner Papers.
[339] Arnold to Iger, 26 December 1941, Eisner Papers.

As the above threat suggested, Arnold did not have to solely purchase content from Iger. He could supplement Iger's contributions with material from other suppliers. The letter also demonstrated comic book publishers were not naïve entrepreneurs. They were fully aware of the intricacies of the publishing industry. Comic book publishers, like Arnold's Quality Comics, had little patience for suppliers who tried to take advantage of them. He concluded his letter to Iger:

> "In closing may I take a crack at the statement in your letter of December 4th where you say, 'Maybe I'm a fool, but I've turned down considerable businesses so that I may better serve you in your books. What do I get in return?' Are you trying to be funny or do you think I am a bit simple? You never turned down any business because of me and grabbed off all the accounts you could get from such magazines as Pocket Comics, Champ Comics and Speed Comics. And aren't you the same Jerry Iger who started Great Comics and Choice Comics with Fred Fiore even though you were supposed to be concentrating on producing extra good work for E.M. Arnold and Thurman Scott? Don't make me laugh, Jerry…[340]

Also noteworthy in this statement, Arnold severely downplayed Iger's contention that he discovered Will Eisner and was responsible for his success. He wrote "And please don't tell me again that you personally developed every top notcher in this business, including Bill Eisner. He was largely responsible for the success of Eisner & Iger as you well know."[341] The personal relationship between Arnold and Iger was clearly contentious despite ostensibly being in business together. In another letter, Arnold made his displeasure for Iger clear. He wrote:

> "In your letter you refer to your desire to keep your staff contented and make certain that the caliber of the art work and stories remain on a high plane. I am certainly most anxious for this to be done but your letter implies that in the past I have been entirely satisfied with your efforts which certainly is not the case. Also, I want to be sure that your key men such as Crandall, Williams, and Bryant are entirely satisfied and expect to stay with you and handle my lead features.

[340] Arnold to Iger, 26 December 1941, Eisner Papers.
[341] Arnold to Iger, 26 December 1941, Eisner Papers.

> Otherwise, there is no advantage in signing any new contract with you if I cannot be sure of you retaining your best artists."[342]

In this passage, Arnold used the threat of a contract renewal to motivate Iger to hire better artists and produce timely content he could publish in his books. Arnold also demonstrated that he had little patience for Iger's work. Arnold did not treat Iger as an equal partner in their business arrangement.

*The Case of Jack Kirby vs. Marvel Comics*

In some cases, written contracts were not required in order to work for a publishing house. This had several significant consequences for both the creators and companies involved. In a later 2011 court case between Marvel Comics and artist Jack Kirby, the court stated "First, the fact that there was no written contract does not, as a matter of law, mean there was no contractual relationship. 'We agree that, if you draw a picture, I will pay you' creates a contract, whether the agreement is reduced to writing or not."[343] Under this arrangement, a publishing house held total control over the entire creative process. The court went on to state "A hiring party's ability to supervise and edit an artist's work does not need to be based on terms set out in a written contract."[344] Working without a written contract could be detrimental to one's future earnings. In the same Kirby and Marvel lawsuit, the court affirmed "The parties do not dispute that Kirby provided his own tools, worked his own hours, paid his own taxes and benefits, and used his own art supplies…in this Circuit, the 'expense' requirement is satisfied 'where a hiring

[342] Arnold to Iger, 6 January 1941, Eisner Papers.
[343] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming, n.p.
[344] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.

party simply pays an independent contractor a sum certain for his or her work."[345] The above quote clearly states that Marvel's only obligation to Kirby was to pay him the agreed upon sum for his work. Kirby had no legal control over the characters he conceived, designed, and helped introduce in the pages of Marvel comic books.

In contrast, the Kirby Heirs argued they bored the risk of his work's profitability because Marvel was not legally obligated to purchase all the work that Kirby submitted "and on occasion rejected Kirby's work, or asked him to revise it." In other words, Kirby was in a work-for-hire contract but retained no agency over what Marvel did with his finished work. In addition, they also asserted that Kirby "was not paid any 'turn down fee' or any extra amount if he was required to revise a drawing, and contend that this, too, shows that he bore the risk that his work would not be acceptable to Marvel."[346] Kirby's heirs believed that Kirby produced work whether or not Marvel decided to publish it. He had no written guarantee that unpublished work would be paid for by Marvel Comics. Kirby's heirs argued "that Kirby did not have a contractual relationship with Marvel (by which they mean there was no written contract setting forth the terms of their arrangement), so therefore Marvel lacked the legal right to Kirby's work."[347] Kirby's heirs clearly believed that the lack of a written contract equaled no rights to characters, concepts, or stories. Nevertheless, the court case was decided in Marvel's favor.

Two key arguments shifted the court towards Marvel's side. First, Marvel persuaded the court that "Kirby took on none of the risks of the success of the many comic books he helped produce. His contribution to the enterprise was plainly critical, but Marvel, not he, bore the risk

[345] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[346] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[347] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.

of its failure. Therefore, the expense factor favors Marvel's work-for-hire claim as well."[348] Because Kirby was considered a work-for-hire, Marvel could claim direct copyright over the characters, concepts, and ideas produced by Kirby. Furthermore, the court determined Marvel retained direct copyright because the publishing house:

> "bore that risk, because it hired the team of artists who were tasked with creating the comic book (*i.e.* the writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, etc.), bore the cost of printing the comic book, and paid the artists a flat fee, before publication and irrespective of whether the comic book made a profit."[349]

The court's opinion on this aspect was explicit when it was stated "the assignment did not state that Kirby actually owned any copyright in the works, on the contrary, the assignment contained an acknowledgement that Kirby had created the works 'as an employee for hire' of the owners of Marvel, the Goodmans."[350] Second, the court made an important distinction over exactly what was being argued in court. In the beginning of their judgment, they revealed:

> "this case is not about whether Jack Kirby or Stan Lee is the 'real' creator of Marvel characters, or whether Kirby (or other freelance artists who created culturally iconic comic book characters for Marvel or other publishers) were treated 'fairly' by companies that grew rich off the fruit of their labor. It is about whether Kirby's work qualifies as work-for-hire under the Copyright Act of 1909, as interpreted by the courts…if it does, then Marvel owns the copyright in the Kirby works, whether that is 'fair' or not. If it does not, then the Kirby heirs have a statutory right to take back these copyrights, no matter the impact on a recent corporate acquisition or on earnings from blockbuster movies made and yet to be made."[351]

Under the confines of this narrow legal viewpoint, Kirby's heirs held little recourse. In the 1960s, Kirby himself admitted in effect "that all his work on the MATERIALS, and all his work which created or related to the RIGHTS, was done as an employee of the Goodmans."[352] The court

[348] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[349] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[350] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[351] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[352] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.

concluded "In this case, Kirby received only a fixed sum; he was not eligible to collect royalties. His heirs' argument that he bore the risk of the project is, therefore, even less persuasive."[353]

In the 2011 lawsuit, Kirby and other artists who worked for Marvel Comics did not have any creative ownership of their artistic output. The court noted "Kirby assigned whatever right, title, and interest (including copyrights) he 'may' have, but the agreement contained no representation that Kirby in fact had any right, title, or interest to convey."[354] Like most comic book publishing houses, Marvel used their editors to maintain complete control over their creative talent. The court transcript revealed Marvel editor Stan Lee "was responsible for the 'creative editorial aspects' of the comic books published by Timely Comics—which eventually became Marvel…as editor, Lee developed the ideas and stories for all of Marvel's comic books." Thus, under the work-for-hire arrangement, characters and story content were credited to the editor and became the sole property of Marvel Comics.

The court transcript goes on to state "all of Marvel's artists and writers reported to Lee. Lee assigned artists to work on comic books, edited or changed their work, set deadlines for the submission of work, and even gave artists direction and guidance about the stories they were assigned to draw."[355] Marvel's argument and claim to their artist's work relied on the power of the editor. In a work-for-hire system, the court claimed, "an essential element of the employer-employee relationship[] is the right of the employer to direct and supervise the manner in which the [artist] performs his work.'"[356] The work-for-hire arrangement of Kirby's Marvel work was

[353] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[354] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[355] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[356] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.

because "the hiring party 'took the initiative in engaging [the artist]' and had 'the power to accept, reject, or modify her work,' then the work is a work for hire." To this end, Marvel designed a creative method that reinforced editorial oversight in what became known as the Marvel Method. The defining attributes of the Marvel Method were enumerated by the court in the following dialogue:

> "Obviously, the Marvel Method gave an artist greater opportunity for input into the process of creating the characters and the stories. However, even under the Marvel Method, artists did not work 'on spec;' they only began to draw 'pages' when they received an assignment and plot synopsis from Lee. Furthermore, the artists were always constrained by Lee's plot outlines, and Lee retained the right to edit or alter their work, or to reject pages altogether and not publish them if he did not like them."[357]

It is readily apparent from this above statement that Marvel believed Lee retained complete control over story content. All creative output came down from the editor. Marvel claimed that Kirby and their other creative talent took their orders directly from Lee. Lee confirmed "In the old days, the editor was akin to God, he giveth work and he taketh it away." [358] Editors were in a similar position of power in other publishing houses. Under the Marvel Method, artists and writers lost much of their creative agency and legal rights. Marvel Comics safeguarded themselves from challenges to the status quo. They did not feel compelled to reward their creative talent with royalties or a share in the profits of a successful character or story. Stan Lee confirmed that no writers or artists received royalties in his 2002 autobiography. He stated "And, unlike other forms of writing, there were no royalty payments at the end of the road. No

[357] *Marvel v. Kirby Heirs Memorandum Opinion and Order Transcript*, July 28, 2011.
[358] Lee, "Stan Lee's Complete How to Write Comics," Lee Papers, n.p.

residuals. No copyright ownership. You wrote your pages, got your check, and that was it."[359]

In the same 2011 lawsuit, Marvel claimed:

> "(1) Any and all MATERIALS, including any and all ideas, names, characters, symbols, designs, likenesses, visual representations, stories, episodes, literary property, etc., which have been in whole or in part acquired, published, merchandised, advertised, and/or licensed in any form, field, or media by the Goodmans, their affiliates, and/or their predecessors or successors in interest…"[360]
>
> (2) Any and all RIGHTS, including any copyrights, trademarks, statutory rights, common law rights, goodwill, and any other rights whatsoever relating to the Materials in any and all media and/or fields including any and all rights to renewal or extension of copyright, to recover for past infringement and to make application or institute suit therefor."[361]

These claims were not understood by Kirby or his heirs. The materials listed here demonstrated Martin Goodman maintained complete control over his publishing company's intellectual property.

*Other Contract Grievances*

Kirby's legal situation was not unique in the comic book industry. Many writers and artists were happy to work without proper written contracts during the 1940s and 1950s. In the moment, the opportunity for steady work overrode was paramount to most writers and artists. MAD artist Al Jaffee constantly expressed "his financial reality or his shtetl fears of once again finding himself poor and starving."[362] Publishing houses often distracted writers and artists with lavish gifts and vacations. EC Comics publisher William Gaines "was famous for treating writers

[359] Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 27.
[360] Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 27.
[361] Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 27.
[362] Al Jaffee, *Al Jaffee's MAD Life* (New York, NYL It Books, 2010), 165.

and artists to luxurious annual trips to faraway destinations. But there was a catch. In order to qualify for the trip, the artists and writers had to have contributed a minimum of eighteen pages to *MAD*."[363] Other companies offered paltry raises and claimed they were doing right by their creative talent. DC Comics artist Arnold Drake explained: "What Liebowitz did was say, "You all got a $2 raise." In those days, a $2 raise was 15 to 20%, but when you base it on what the figure was…! That was a Liebowitz tactic, and the other part of the tactic was to stall. Liebowitz's thing was that there were a lot of problems involving copyright and ownership. One of the things we'd said to him was that we wanted to discuss reprint rights, and his worry was problems involving protecting their copyrights while still sharing with the talent.[364] Drake's recollections show that DC Comics actively tried to hide just how little they were paying their writers and artists. In Drake's anecdote, Liebowitz actually claimed that the complicated nature of contracts and written copyrights were to blame for some of their policies towards their employees.

Marvel Comics also believed they did right by their employees. Editor Stan Lee fondly remembered that "I used to put out extra books we didn't even need, just to keep guys working."[365] When all else failed, comic book publishing houses outright lied to and ignored their writers and artists. DC Comics editor Julius Schwartz stated editor Mort Weisinger "more than occasionally chose to stretch the truth…I felt badly misled."[366] Quality Comics artist Gill Fox revealed "I figured to do the same thing and I wrote them a letter. They never bothered to answer it. They had wind for who I was."[367] Paying creative talent on time was a sensitive issue

[363] Mary-Lou Wiseman, *Al Jaffee's MAD Life*, 187.
[364] Drake, "My Greatest Adventures," 19
[365] Lee, "FOOM Interview," Lee Papers.
[366] Schwartz and Thomsen. *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics*, 34.
[367] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 7.

for many publishing houses. For instance, artist Bob Powell wrote to Will Eisner "I hate to be mercenary, but as yet I haven't received the check for last week's MM 23 A.. Realizing that you're probably up to your ears in last minute details, I can understand how you could forget about it."[368] Powell clearly believed that Eisner would eventually pay him in full.

Like Kirby's situation, contract disputes did not end well for most writers and artists. Arnold Drake recalled that many writers were naïve and did not have the legal or professional tools to address contract disputes. DC Comics writer Bill Finger was one of the best known examples of an exploited comic book writer and suffered for it. Drake stated of Finger:

> "They screwed him worst of all. Probably more so than even Siegel and Shuster. It was one of my great regrets that I didn't get closer to him. He indicated a number of times that he'd like to get closer. I was frightened, because Bill was not a very stable guy, and I think probably compared him to myself and said "I'm two steps from there myself." I think that scared me off a little bit.[369]

Bill Finger did not receive any credit for his role in the creation of the Batman character. Instead, Bob Kane negotiated a contract that signed away sole ownership of the character to DC Comics in exchange for, among other benefits, a mandatory byline on all published Batman comic books. Finger's situation scared many writers and artists. Artist Alvin Schwartz stated Finger "was a good writer for the kinds of things he did, but he was limited. Bill couldn't do anything that required knowledge or any education. Bill had no education. He went through high school."[370] Contract disputes actively discouraged healthy professional dialogue amongst comic book industry peers. They did not want to end up financially in ruin like Bill Finger. Finger himself was personally humiliated by his experiences in the comic book industry. His son Fred Finger remarked in an

[368] S. Robert Powell to Will Eisner, undated, Eisner Papers.
[369] Drake, "My Greatest Adventure," 7.
[370] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 49

interview, "I think it made him have even less self-esteem than he already had, basically, because he could never get any further."[371] In some cases, creative talent that engaged in public battles with management were shunned by their peers. Superman writer Jerry Siegel was one such figure. DC Comics writer George Kashdan remembered "The other writers despised him. The word was, 'Don't say anything around Jerry that you don't want repeated to Harry Donenfeld or Mort Weisinger."[372] Siegel was bitter towards DC Comics about his contract for the Superman character. Kashdan revealed that Siegel took his frustrations out on other DC Comics writers and artists in order to curry favor with the editors and publisher. However, most writers and artists were content to simply do what they were told to do by editors and publishers.

Some artists had grossly incorrect assumptions about working relationships that complicated and severely limited their work opportunities. Quality Comics artist Gill Fox remarked "I thought that, if you freelanced for one person, that was all you were allowed to do. I don't know where I got this idea.[373] Horror stories were widely circulated by writers and artists. Fox stated "Once I ran into a woman with a couple of kids, and she was crying and told me he had about 20 or 40 pages of hers and never paid her! I felt so sorry for that woman."[374] Some editors at least vocally professed support for their creative talent. For example, Stan Lee told artist Dave Gantz "'I don't have to worry about you. You've probably got other freelance work.'" Gantz later confirmed "Which was true. Stan worried about the guys he had to let go."[375]

[371] Finger, "Interview with Fred Finger," 145.
[372] George Kashdan, "Sales Don't Tell You Everything!" Interview by Jim Amash, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 94, (June 2010): 44.
[373] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 7.
[374] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 8.
[375] Gantz, "A Long Glance at Dave Gantz," 24.

However, Lee's concern was rare for a typical editor. Many other editors freely hired and fired creative talent.

Some writers did not question management about their contracts because they were having immediate success with characters and concepts. In an interview, Batman artist Sheldon Moldoff stated "A lot of people have asked me, 'Should Bill Finger's name be up there [on "Batman"]? The only thing I can say is, at that time, we were all excited that we were *working*, you know? Bill Finger was a frustrated writer. There were not too many markets. Then, all of a sudden, here's Batman, and his friend Bob needs as many scripts as he can provide. As soon as he finishes one, he's got another one to do. All of a sudden we're making money!"[376] As Finger's situation suggests, one did not ask too many questions of management with the lure of immediate professional success and wealth.

Other writers and artists did not question management because they did not care for their work. The comic book industry was still trying to carve out a niche in American popular culture. Parents looked at the industry with a skeptical eye. Many writers and artists were embarrassed to display their affiliation with the comic book industry. DC Comics artist Sheldon Moldoff explained, "there were *two* reasons they didn't sign their names. Many writers who were writing pulp magazines at the same time would sign anonymous names. The comic books were not looked at as a great field, you know. They took a lot of abuse. A lot of parents didn't want their kids reading comics because they were a 'bad influence.' A lot of teachers were against comic books."[377] There was little need to question contract abuses if the work itself was not deemed

[376] Moldoff, "A Moon…A Bat…A Hawk," 5.
[377] Moldoff, "Maybe I Was Just Loyal," 18.

valuable. Most original comic book content was immediately destroyed after publication. Jerry Robinson revealed "They'd let you have it. They didn't care; they were destroying it…After the art went to the engraver, unless some editor wanted a page back for some other purpose, after they shot the negatives, they destroyed the art."[378] The comic book industry's negative reputation clearly helped the economic position of the publishers at the expense of the writers and artists. If creative talent worked in such a lowly regarded field, publishers felt they did not have to pay them well.

*Artistic Credit and Ghosting*

Finally, ghosting was one of the most problematic issues facing the comic book industry of the 1940s and 1950s. Ghosting referred to artists who produced uncredited work for another artist. In many cases, there could be multiple ghost artists working for a single individual. Perhaps the most instructive of these cases is Bob Kane and the numerous ghosts that worked under him while producing Batman stories for DC Comics. In a later interview, Jerry Robinson outlined the typical duties for a ghost artist. He stated "I started with Bob Kane 'way back in 1939. I was his first assistant. When he and Bill Finger created Batman, I was working on the pages and covers. I was inking, lettering, doing the logos, and things like that. I had just gotten out of school and we were both living in the Bronx."[379] Artistic credit was not a simple process. Writers, artists, and editors all had a voice in a particular character's development.

[378] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 6.
[379] Sheldon Moldoff, "My Years With Batman," Interview by Bill Schelly, *Alter Ego: the Comic Book Artist Collection* (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2001), 133.

Ghosting prompted concern over story treatments. Robinson revealed "it perhaps was up to the writer's request and the editors' approval, or the editors' sole prerogative. If my treatment of a particular villain in former stories was liked better, at the time, than that of anyone else who had recently worked with the character—there was several of us ghosting that strip—the editors would send stories about that particular character to me."[380] Character creation was also dependent on the needs of the story. Batman artist Dick Sprang remembered that "In individual stories that didn't employ a standard serial villain, such as The Joker or The Penguin or Two-Face, but that would introduce as a one-shot a prominent villain of distinctive aspect, I would create him. Many stories went this route."[381] Kane was the nominal artist credited for Batman stories but he certainly had many different artists that contributed their ideas to the title from month to month.

Batman ghost artist Sheldon Moldoff stated of Kane "he didn't pay great. But it was steady work, it was security. I knew that we had to do a minimum of 350 to 360 pages a year. Also, I was doing other work at the same time for [editors] Jack Schiff and Murray Boltinoff at DC. They didn't know I was working on 'Batman' for Bob."[382] Moldoff added "So I was busy. Between the two, I never had a dull year, which is the compensation I got for being Bob's ghost, for keeping myself anonymous."[383] Ghost artists such as Moldoff did not work for the publishing house. They got paid by the artist they ghosted for. He revealed "I was never working in the offices. I always worked for Bob personally."[384] As a result, numerous professional and personal abuses could

[380] Sprang, "Dick Sprang Rides Again," 9.
[381] Sprang, "Dick Sprang Rides Again," 8.
[382] Moldoff, "Maybe I Was Just Loyal," 16.
[383] Moldoff, "Maybe I Was Just Loyal," 16.
[384] Moldoff, "My Years With Batman," 133.

take place under this arrangement. After all, Moldoff stated "when you're a ghost, you do it, and you don't say anything."[385] Ghost artists had very little creative and professional agency. They were expected to do their assigned work on a timely fashion and with no complaint.

Publishing houses knew about these tacit arrangements between artists. However, they did not move to stop the practice. In fact, in some cases, they even encouraged it when a popular intellectual property was involved. By himself, Kane could certainly not keep up with the demand for more Batman stories as the character's popularity increased among young readers. However, he went out of his way to maintain the illusion that anything involving the Batman character had his direct artistic participation. Moldoff added of Kane "In his mind, you were just an extension of his thoughts or his fingers…he was not about to give anybody credit for anything."[386]

Kane made no mention of the fact he used ghost artists until late in his life. Batman ghost artist Lewis Sayre Schwartz recalled:

> "I remember in 1992 or '93, the last time I spoke to him, he'd finally got a publisher for *Batman & Me*, and I said, 'Bob, sign a copy and send it to me.' Then dead silence. I said, 'Don't you want to send me a copy?' He said, 'Well, I'll send you a copy, but…you're not in the book.' I said, 'Look, Bob—I only worked for you for seven years, so it's perfectly understandable you could forget seven years. Besides that, I had another career and it doesn't matter to me. But I wonder who else you forgot in the book.'"[387]

Kane felt that his reputation as professional comic book artist was at stake. He did not want to publicly acknowledge his use of ghost artists on *Batman*. Jerry Robinson believed "Bob felt that any credit that went to either Bill or myself would detract from him, which it wouldn't have."[388]

[385] Moldoff, "My Years With Batman," 133.
[386] Moldoff, "My Years With Batman," 134.
[387] Sayre Schwartz, "Batman, Dr. Strangelove, And Everything In Between," 5.
[388] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 8.

Batman's immense popularity may have had an impact on Kane's reasoning. In addition, the comic book industry's pattern of exploitation and unfair contracts informed Kane's beliefs. Those with money held creative ownership of popular characters like Batman. Kane was plainly concerned those past abuses would end up undermining his favorable economic position.

Publically being the sole artistic force behind Batman gave Kane a tremendous amount of fame and prestige. However, there was a social price to pay. Many of Kane's ghost artists lost all respect for the man. Schwartz stated "Kane gave so damn little credit to Bill Finger over the years, and only reneged and confessed that he should have done more for Bill not long before he [Kane] died."[389] Robinson bluntly stated in an interview "I can't forgive him for: not recognizing Bill" Finger.[390] Moldoff remarked "I would have liked to have had my name up there. I would have liked him to give me a mention or credit. That would have been nice. But Bob wasn't that type of person. You live with it, that's all."[391] If Kane had any reservations about his use of ghost artists he did not display it publicly. Bill Finger's son, Fred, did not hold Kane in high regard: "Mr. Kane sat back and collected a lot of money for his name going on everything."[392] Kane's actions clearly alienated his ghost artists and damaged his personal and professional reputation.

In later years, comic book scholars debated Kane's overall artistic contribution to the Batman character and his villains. Schwartz remarked "I go back to the business with Jerry Robinson and Bob Kane about the origin of The Joker…Of a certainty, Jerry lettered it—it looks like his work—and maybe he even inked it. But the drawing was pure Kane. Kane drew arms

[389] Sayre Schwartz, "Batman, Dr. Strangelove, And Everything In Between," 4.
[390] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 8.
[391] Moldoff, "My Years With Batman," 134.
[392] Finger, "Interview with Fred Finger," 144.

coming out of the hip half the time, and there it was. But that doesn't diminish the fact that Jerry, being a very bright guy, could have contributed or solidified the whole idea of The Joker."[393] As the years went by, Bob Kane's use of ghost artists on Batman comic books proved creative ownership became an increasingly stressful and contentious issue for many writers and artists.

Proper artistic credit was hard to come by even when there were no ghost artists on a particular title. In an interview, Gill Fox stated his editor Busy Arnold:

> "never gave me credit, but I could tell what he thought of me by the assignments he gave me. When he called me to help out on *The Spirit*, I knew he thought a lot of my writing. In fact, he came in one day and said, 'Eisner's got a lot to do right now. He's just finished a set of *Spirit* dailies. Can you write five weeks of an Ebony sequence?'…Eisner liked it so much that he wrote three more weeks of that sequence after I'd finished."[394]

Reliable, efficient artists were clearly valued by busy editors such as Arnold. However, they were in service to building up the prestige of the company and select individuals. Stan Lee disclosed: "It is a business in which the creator…owns nothing of his creation. The publisher owns it."[395] Many of the writers and artists in the comic book industry worked in relative anonymity. For instance, Bill Finger felt throughout his career as a writer on *Batman* that "he wasn't getting the most recognition" for his contributions to the character's mythology.[396] Stan Lee stated during the 1940s "the identity of the artists involved became submerged into the need to get this work out. And the characters that were created, like Superman and Batman, became the dominant product. Gradually, the skills of the artists became the trading coin, so to speak."[397] Even more notable artists such as Will Eisner faced difficulties in receiving proper credit for their artistic

[393] Sayre Schwartz, "Batman, Dr. Strangelove, And Everything In Between," 4.
[394] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 16.
[395] Lee, "Panel Discussion," Lee Papers, n.p.
[396] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 43.
[397] Lee, "Panel Discussion," Lee Papers, n.p.

output. Eisner wrote to a newspaper editor "Incidentally, I notice that the authorship, 'Will Eisner' is not mentioned after the opening. I'd deem it a great favor if you would include the 'by'-line after the Spirit, since the plots are all identical with those in the section."[398] Receiving proper artistic credit was extremely difficult, even for well-known and respected figures such as Eisner.

*Radical Politics and the Failure of Unions in the Comic Book Industry*

Writers and artists who felt sufficiently aggrieved by their circumstances did not have many options. There were a few failed attempts at a proper union uniting both writers and artists.[399] Some comic book creative talent had labor backgrounds. DC Comics artist Alvin Schwartz remembered "I was involved when [President Franklin] Roosevelt started a project on a literary project that he had going [probably the WPA Writers Project]."[400] Other associations with labor movements were even more overt. Gill Fox declared "Look, I had my own foot in the Union Movement. I was an organizer for it at Crucible Steel. I helped organize Crucible Steel. I was involved in the Steelworkers Union. This was all volunteer stuff. I was quite active politically, and on top of that, I was a Trotskyite, as you know."[401] Fox added: "We were getting $17.50 a week, which was standard. We were trying for more money and better conditions..."[402] In another example, Arnold Drake revealed "In general, our feeling was that we were being terribly exploited. The artists were, too, but not as much as the writers were. We felt we should ask the front office to deal with us as a group, rather than as individuals. The problem there was that

[398] Will Eisner to Enid Hager, 29 November 1941, Eisner Papers.
[399] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 7.
[400] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 40.
[401] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 40.
[402] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 7.

one writer was being played off against another, back and forth."[403] In addition, the very nature of the comic book market made it difficult to organize creative talent into a formal union recognized by the publishing houses. Julius Schwartz remarked, "The magazine business wasn't just rough on writers. Competition was tough on the newsstands as well, causing the death of many a title."[404] Competition and job volatility made work opportunities an extremely important commodity. One was likely to stick with a publishing house that offered steady work and ignore milder work grievances if a title became economically successful.

Comic book publishers were especially aware of the potential for strikes from the example of the animation studios. In 1937, Gill Fox recalled that he and a work colleague "were two of the four guys who helped lead a strike at Fleischer's."[405] Fleischer animation studio executives resorted to bullying their creative talent during attempts at labor solidarity. Fox further reminisced, "During the strike, a group of three guys charged the picket line because we were too close to the entrance. They deliberately charged our line because they wanted to bring charges against anybody who got violent. Dave Fleischer was one of those three guys…This was a deliberate attempt to demoralize us."[406] In response to the Fleischer strikes, comic book publishers hampered calls for unionization through quick actions in order to shut organizing efforts down. Publishing heads communicated with each other to prevent unionization drives. In one example, DC Comics co-owner Jack Liebowitz "instantly called his golf-buddy, Martin Goodman, the boss at Marvel, and warned him that some writers were trying to start a union."[407]

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[403] Drake, "My Greatest Adventure," 21.
[404] Schwartz and Thomsen, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics*, 29
[405] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 6.
[406] Along with his brother Max, Dave Fleischer ran the animation studio. Fleischer Studios was notable for producing cartoons featuring Betty Boop, Bimbo, Popeye the Sailor, and Superman. Fox, "Gill Fox Quality Control," 6.
[407] Drake, "My Greatest Adventure," 22.

Bullying from upper management was not the only obstacle in achieving labor solidarity. Comic book creative talent was dispersed alongside different ideological and political lines. Fox revealed, "I am very conservative in my politics, and Lou was very liberal. I had so much respect and love for Lou. He was a wonderful human being, so I didn't get too deep into political discussion with him, because Lou could get heated up.[408] At DC Comics, artist Alvin Schwartz stated of a work colleague: "I was a Trotskyite, he was a Stalinist. We would argue about many of the major differences that each stood for…Most of the editors were Democrats…The radical element was not very strong at DC."[409] Union organizers found it hard to organize these disparate elements into a cohesive, united front. In the end, comic book writers and artists did not formally affiliate with any labor union.

Many comic book artists did not view themselves as a part of the leftist labor movement. They considered themselves purely artists and actively made that distinction. DC Comics artist Arnold Drake spoke to this difficulty in an interview. He specified, "the artists felt, 'I'm an artist, not a laborer. And you guys are talking about labor issues.'"[410] Comic book artists plainly revealed that they thought of themselves as different. The concept of worker solidarity with other labor unions was antithetical to an artists' self-perception. Comic book writer and artist's antipathy towards labor unions suggested they were unique from other similar creative industries. For example, the Disney animation studio belonged to the Screen Actor's Guild and

[408] Fox, "Gill Fox Quality Control," 23
[409] Schwartz, "I've Always Been a Writer," 39.
[410] Drake, "My Greatest Adventure," 20.

even conducted a 1941 cartoonist's strike.[411] The comic book never organized as a distinct union nor strike alongside other Jewish labor unions.

*Conclusion*

While many individuals promoted the comic book industry as a place of easy money, upward mobility, and plentiful work opportunities, most Jewish comic book writers and artists encountered an industry rife with contract disputes, grievances, and management abuses. The Kirby lawsuit reveals many of the legal obstacles faced by creative talent. Intellectual property laws made characters and stories extremely difficult to protect from larger publisher interests. In addition, the use of ghost artists frayed personal and professional relationships amongst comic book peers and made it extremely difficult to reconcile over the years. To be sure, most writers and artists were united in creating story content for their publishers but many of them remained divided in presenting a united front against upper management. Vastly different political and labor views alongside active management resistance made it difficult to organize comic industry professionals into a united front. Most comic book scholars discuss these years by largely eliding the major disputes between creative talent and publishers. But a closer examination of this historical period demonstrated that the comic book industry were engaged with labor issues from the very beginning and in ways not traditionally associated with many labor movements populated by Jews of the twentieth century. This was because of their absence from many of the formal labor struggles of the 1930s.

[411] Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, 405-413.

**CHAPTER FIVE:**

**World War II, the Comic Book Boom, Professionalization, and Warning Signs**

*"For instance, in the February issue of HIT COMICS, there was a man in The Red Bee who wore a checked suit. In about half the panels, it was a plain suit and we had to put in the check marks. In several panels of the same feature you had the balloons going to the wrong men and these all had to be corrected."*[412]

*"Please try and improve the art work on the second installment of Manhunter. It wasn't anywhere near as good as I thought it would be. And try to get the man who handles this to do a real job on the first six pages of Espionage. Incidentally, I am enclosing tear sheets from issue No. 1 of SMASH COMICS so he can copy your old style. Have him make both Manhunter and Espionage in nine panels with plenty of big figures on each page."*[413]

Several comic book historians have ably demonstrated that the comic book industry relied on patriotic imagery and messages during World War II in order to sell their titles.[414] Many comic book publishers were caught unaware by war's positive boom on comic books. Arie Kaplan noted during World War II that American Jewish comic book professionals produced "comics that…reflected both an American—and particularly a Jewish—attitude with Nazis…their creating characters that could beat the Nazis made perfect sense for somebody who felt a direct threat from them."[415] They have argued that American Jewish comic book writers and artists included superheroes in the wartime narrative as a natural means of empowerment. This argument is perhaps best exemplified by *Captain America Comics* #1 (1941). Writer Joe Simon and artist Jack Kirby did not personally fight Nazis but their patriotic creation Captain America confidently

[412] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 22 October 1941, Eisner Papers.
[413] Arnold to Eisner, 28 November 1941, Eisner Papers.
[414] See Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, Chris Murray, "*Pop*aganda: Superhero Comics and Propaganda in World War II," in Anne Magnussen and Hans-Christian Christiansen, ed., Comics *& Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000): 141-156, and Laurence Maslon and Michael Kantor, *Capes, Cowls, and the Creation of Comic Book Culture* (New York: Crown Archetype, 2013).
[415] Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books,* 57.

punched Adolf Hitler on the cover of his first comic book. Similarly, many other American Jewish comic book professionals combined patriotic sentiment with super heroics as well.

Scholars have also noted that there was a more practical reason that comic book publishing houses promoted the war effort. The war created a large demand for alternative leisure entertainment. Comic book industry data revealed "overall circulation tripled from 1940 to 1945."[416] One of the reasons for this large increase came from an unorthodox source. Many young American GIs gravitated towards this emerging medium.

Historians have said less about the comic book industry's internal development during the war despite profiling several other industries in which there was a sizable Jewish presence, especially the American film industry. For example, film historian Lary May revealed the Hollywood film industry became a reflection of "a return to a more intolerant and monolithic national culture, spurred by World War II."[417] This chapter argues that Jewish comic book writers and artists became true industry professionals during the 1940s. This transformation was because of the increased cultural spotlight on the comic book industry. Comic book publishers could not afford to employ creative talent that did not tap into the patriotic fervor of the times. To this end, the industry became more sophisticated. Comic book titles now featured elaborate covers designed to older readers. Artists strived for visual continuity between panels and pages. Entire teams of writers proofread scripts to catch careless grammatical errors. To be sure, this push towards professionalization was not entirely self-imposed. Newspaper editors that adapted popular comic book characters such as the Spirit exerted a large degree of influence.

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[416] Les Daniels, *DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World's Favorite Comic Book Heroes* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1995), 64.
[417] Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

In addition, many comic book writers, artists, and editors feared the draft. Many of them were sympathetic and supportive of the war effort. However, they did not necessarily want to participate in the conflict. Editors also did not want the military to draft their creative talent. Comic book publishers released titles on a tight deadline. Losing an irreplaceable artist could set back the publishing schedule and negatively affect the bottom line. In some cases, comic book publishers went to extraordinary lengths to protect their writers and artists from the draft. However, the military did draft several Jewish writers and artists. Many Jewish comic book writers and artists felt out of place in the armed forces. Historian Deborah Dash Moore showed that they were like many other Jews, exposure to military life "produced a kind of culture shock."[418] For the most part, these men did not receive combat experience. Instead, the military used their illustration skills to produce teaching manuals for new recruits. Several Jewish writers and artists who participated in these projects displayed pride over their military work. They felt they were using their artistic talents for something nobler than a comic book.

Finally, social critics took special notice of mature comic book content. Concerned parents intensely scrutinized superhero, horror, true crime, and adventure titles. This chapter argues the very successes made by the comic book industry during World War II eventually led to their downfall. Most comic book historians place the roots for this downfall in the 1950s. This chapter demonstrates violent, mature comic book content already deeply disturbed social critics and parents in the 1940s. As seen below, the comic book industry were aware of these

[418] Deborah Dash Moore, "When Jews Were GIs," in *American Jewish Identity Politics*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 29. See Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006).

complaints. However, they did not do much to address the criticisms when their business was booming and the nation was preoccupied with war.

*Appealing to Young Readers*

By the early 1940s, leading comic book industry publishers needed to foster closer bonds between young readers and the creators of their most successful titles and characters. They needed to do so if they hoped to expand sales of comic books and introduce them to wider, mass audience of readers. Before the 1940s, the comic magazine publishing outfit was cloaked in mystery.[419] Cultivating fan clubs and answering reader mail was one important way to increase the visibility of creative talent and, by extension, the industry as a whole. Comic book publishers wanted to reward young readers who wrote to them with signed art from the creative talent. For example, Quality Comics editor Busy Arnold wrote to editor Henry Martin of a young fan's interest in Will Eisner's Spirit character. Arnold wrote "We had a letter from a youngster in New Jersey saying that he and a group of his friends had formed a club…Am sending a request for an Ebony drawing along to Eisner."[420] In another letter Arnold wrote "I think it would be a good idea for you to draw a couple of small original drawings for these kids and autograph both of them."[421]

These fan requests were not taken lightly. Comic book publishers were keenly aware of their public image and relationship to their readers. Some publishers used fan mail to organize their publishing endeavors. In a letter to Will Eisner, Busy Arnold wrote "as you know, we get quite a flow of letters here from kids expressing admiration for Blackhawk; asking permission to

[419] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[420] Harriet B. Wetrich to Henry Martin, 31 October 1941, Eisner Papers.
[421] Arnold to Eisner, 21 January 1942, Eisner Papers.

form Blackhawk clubs; suggesting a Blackhawk Quarterly, etc. To me this indicates Blackhawk is 'ringing the bell' and should have a quarterly next spring."[422] Favorable reader response to a particular character could lead to the expansion of a title or spinning the character off into his own book. Characters or titles that did not resonate with young readers were quickly canceled by the publisher. Newspaper publishers could exert tremendous pressure to change comic strip content. Publisher Bill Hawkes wrote to editor Henry Martin, "The people who have been making the Sunday Spirit told a very intriguing but complicated story in one reading. I think the daily Spirit is hard to follow from one day to another because of the complicated plots."[423] In another letter about Eisner's comic strips, newspaper secretary Harriet Wetrich claimed "the New Orleans editor at the Times-Picayune thinks the continuity to date is too heavy, but Mr. Lounsbury promised him future episodes would be lighter."[424] Appealing to young readers were always the foremost concern for all involved. Arnold warned Eisner that a recent story idea would fail because younger readers

> "will not think this sequence is so 'hot' and I imagine that readers will find these strips pretty confusing. You built up the case of Ebony and the silver locket and then you dropped it too suddenly. The girl who is injured in the airplane crash is placed in the car and then the second girl with the gun appears behind Ebony and The Spirit. Since the injured girl is in the front seat entirely covered by a coat, most readers will assume the girl with the gun is the one picked up by The Spirit and Ebony. The action is pretty confusing and would have been much clearer if you had showed the figure in the overcoat as being a girl."[425]

[422] Arnold to Eisner, 12 September 1941, Eisner Papers.
[423] Bill Hawkes to Henry Martin, 28 October 1941, Eisner Papers.
[424] Wetrich to Martin, 31 October 1941, Eisner Papers.
[425] Arnold to Eisner, 26 January 1942, Eisner Papers.

Eisner was asked to provide promotional material to promote *The Spirit* time and time again. In one letter, newspaper secretary Harriet Welch asked Eisner to provide biographical information of interest to readers. She wrote:

> "The Star Journal apparently would like to get some additional pictures which stress some of your spare-time interests such as fishing, quail-hunting, tennis, reading at home, etc. This is a pretty large order, but we thought perhaps you might have something along this line on hand which we could retrograph and service. If we could develop a rounded-out series of pictures, we could service them to other SPIRIT customers for some excellent promotion."[426]

Arnold commissioned elaborate advertisements in magazines and newspapers for The Spirit in order to increase reader awareness of the title. One such advertisement claimed, "Proven Popularity! 'The Spirit' daily strip by popular demand of newspapers using over 3 million Comic Books each week in which 'The Spirit' has the title role."[427] Promotion of the title and the creator went hand in hand in the example of *The Spirit*. Eisner and Quality Comics relied heavily on newspaper promotion. For example, an Eisner letter dated October 17th, 1941 thanked Charles Fisher and the Philadelphia Record for a recent interview.[428]

Other sales tactics deliberately manipulated readers in order to increase sales. Comic book publishers, with the tacit support of editors and writers, published titles with cover dates well in advance of their publication date. Stan Lee claimed this practice was extremely beneficial to increasing sales of a particular title. He stated "The accepted theory is that a reader always wants to feel he's getting the very latest issue of a magazine. Thus, if the magazine's cover date is sometime in the future, the gullible reader will feel he's getting some sort of advance copy, or

[426] Harriet B. Wetrich to Will Eisner, 3 November 1941, Eisner Papers.
[427] Advertisement for *The Spirit*, undated, Eisner Papers.
[428] Charles Fisher to Will Eisner, 17 October 1941, Eisner Papers.

at the very least, the most up-to-date copy."[429] Another tactic was recognizing that readers responded to memorable cover art. Mort Weisinger believed that titles under his editorship needed attractive covers that appealed to children. In a 2002 published interview, Arnold Drake stated "I remember him lecturing Jack Miller saying, 'Every time we put gold or cash or diamonds, on the cover, the cover sells. The kids are crazy about gold, cash, or jewels.' That was another theory. Of course, he was defining his own obsessions, not the kids'.[430] In this regard, creative talent, editors, and publishers collaborated with each other to the benefit of the comic book industry as a whole. Drake revealed that editors and publishers desperately courted young readers, sometimes even projecting their own expectations and desires on their audience.

*Professionalization of the Industry*

For much of the 1930s, the comic book industry remained a largely amateur operation. DC Comics artist Sheldon Moldoff revealed, "In those days, you penciled and inked everything. The mass production of comics didn't come until a little later, when they decided that some fellas are better at penciling, some fellas are better at inking."[431] By the early 1940s, the comic book industry emphasized a commitment to higher work standards, production techniques, and efficiency. However, comic book publishing houses stressed these commitments only because they saw a growing audience and resulting cultural spotlight on comic books. As seen earlier, the nascent comic book industry did not have traditions or standards in place to guide writers and artists in their work. However, the growing visibility of the industry necessitated that standards

[429] Lee, "How to Draw the Marvel Way," n.p.
[430] Drake, "My Greatest Adventure," 7-8.
[431] Moldoff, "Maybe I Was Just Loyal," 17.

be put in place to safeguard and regulate future story and artistic content. In the 1947 article "There's Money in Comics," Stan Lee began to articulate some of the changes and innovations of the comic book industry. Lee saw that editors and writers were beginning to see the merits of a particular story structures for comic books. He wrote that comic book stories must have an "Interesting Beginning, Smooth Continuity, Good Dialogue, Suspense Throughout, Satisfactory Ending."[432] He advised prospective writers that comic book publishing houses were not all the same. By the late 1940s, publishers began to specialize in distinct storytelling genres and artistic styles. Lee advised young writers to "decide which comic magazine you want to write *before you do any writing*. The various magazines in the field have editorial differences which are almost amazing."[433] Lee also wrote of the new roles undertaken by the editor. He stated "The editor of comics is more of a coordinator. He not only considers the merits of a script, but also who is going to draw it and whether it is written in a manner that will suit the artist's style of drawing."[434] While Lee admitted that "There are some artists who write their *own* scripts…they are in the minority."[435] Lee's article revealed that stories, characters, and even art were by 1947 closely controlled by the editor in a supervisory format. Prospective comic book professionals were wise to heed Lee's dictum that "the writers who concentrate on such details are the ones who attain top recognition and top rates in the phenomenal comics field."[436] Writers no longer had complete control over the direction of a story or title. Lee concluded "Should your synopses click, you'll get an order for a 'Georgie' story from the editor. He will tell you how many panels to write per

[432] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[433] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[434] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[435] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[436] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.

page, how many pages in length to make the story, and any other relevant information."[437] Such an approach would lead to professional success and harmony between the writer and editor. In the following years, In the following years, Lee came to loosely adopt this early editorial vision, calling it the Marvel Method.

Some of the earlier marketing techniques carried over from the 1930s, especially an attractive cover page. Quality Comics editor Busy Arnold revealed in a letter "If the fourth issue moves ahead as it should with an extra attractive cover, it will be a good sign."[438] Many comic book editors demonstrated a concerted effort to instill an air of professionalism in their writers and artists. Arnold remarked in a letter "The issue of MILITARY COMICS which Julian delivered here yesterday was handled in a very sloppy manner. So for the fifteenth time will you please get your gang to go over things more closely so that we don't have so much work on this end of the line."[439] Arnold's tone is straightforward and at times unflinchingly direct. In perhaps Arnold's most personal critique he wrote "The ears which your boys put on page one and 33 are very sloppy and you should have new ears made for these pages. Also, you should have whoever puts them on do a better job than they have done in the past. Not only are the ears always dirty and partly torn, but whoever draws the originals looks like they had the palsy. They have to be retouched here by Tony and this work could be eliminated if your office didn't do such a careless job."[440]

[437] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[438] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 12 September 12 1941, Eisner Papers.
[439] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 17 September 1941, Eisner Papers.
[440] Arnold to Eisner, September 17, 1941, Will Eisner Papers.

Only a month later, Arnold's critiques become even more specific and reveal the urgency of the editorial demands. He states "Will you please get after Sam, your lettering man, and instruct him to make his commas properly in both the weekly comic book and the daily Spirit strips? He uses a straight line with on loop for a comma and this is very bad. Have him use regular commas in the future."[441] At the end of the letter, Arnold demonstrates in pen an example of a proper comma. In another letter Arnold wrote "The last couple of issues of both Hit and National have been full of errors and it has taken Ed several days to correct them. I think the big reason for this is that Jerry throws each book together in a few days and doesn't allow enough time on them to do a good job."[442] These passages make clear that the old amateur production methods for comic books were no longer be tolerated by established publishing houses. Artists and writers needed to be more dedicated to their craft and careful of making errors or they were in danger of losing their jobs. These editorial concerns represented a concerted effort to correct written and artistic sloppiness.

Even during World War II, young American readers were quick to recognize discrepancies in artistic work between monthly issues. As the head of several writers and artists, one of Will Eisner's job responsibilities was to keep track of reader feedback month to month. In a note to artist Lou Fine, Eisner declared, "Make his costume always the same. In the past you have changed this from month to month and this is rather confusing to readers. Have The Ray always use the peaked blade on his headpiece and make this like it was on the enclosed tear sheet."[443] This letter demonstrates that Eisner wanted his artists to follow specific artistic guidelines. The

[441] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 31 October 1941, Eisner Papers.
[442] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, n.d., Eisner Papers.
[443] N.d. correspondence between Will Eisner and Lou Fine, Eisner Papers.

enclosed tear sheet also shows Eisner had an established template he wanted his artists to follow when drawing certain characters.

During World War II, the comic book industry clearly showed that consistency and repetition was of paramount importance. Those that adapted well to these mandates were given more work. For example, Busy Arnold stated "please have Chuck Cudeira do the next MILITARY cover and also make up a full page of promotion for MILITARY COMICS."[444] In some cases, there could be an overreliance on useful individuals such as Cudeira. Arnold wrote, "I'm NOT TOO WORRIED ABOUT a substitute for Chuck. I'm almost certain he won't go to the Army for at least 3 months. In that time he can turn out at least 4 or even 5 Blackhawks."[445] Those who were slow to adapt were criticized by Arnold. In another letter, Arnold wrote "It certainly took Strauss an awful long time to do the 14-page feature for UNCLE SAM QUARTERLY No. 2 and Ed and Julian are going to lose plenty of money on him unless he can speed up considerably."[446]

Consistency and repetition were also a crucial element in the story themes of the period. Comic book publishers rarely deviated from wartime stories. Above all, they believed in pro-war messages to their young readers. In a later interview, Stan Lee remarked, "We simply gave the public what they wanted – or so we thought. As for our audience, we all assumed that our readers belonged to the bubble-gum brigade…basically our readers ranged from toddlers to kids the age of thirteen or fourteen- or so we thought."[447] Arnold shared Lee's sentiments when he wrote "In UNCLE SAM QUARTERLY No. 3, I think that you should eliminate the four pages of

[444] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 6 November 6 1941, Eisner Papers.
[445] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 19 January 19 1942, Eisner Papers.
[446] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 28 November 28 1941, Eisner Papers.
[447] Lee, "Is Stan Lee Vulnerable to Kryptonite?"

illustrated poetry since this doesn't 'ring the bell' with kids."[448] Lee revealed that success with a certain message bred conformity among comic book publishers. He believed that "the minute you become successful you can't be too radical."[449] Corroborating Lee's beliefs of this publishing period, comic books sought to "keep making fools of the Nazis and continue to play up" heroic war figures and deeds.[450]

Editors heavily discouraged attempts to produce other kinds of stories. Busy Arnold wrote to Will Eisner "I think that the October 19 issue of The Spirit was absolutely one of the worst you have done to date and I don't think you should run any stories in this groove. This particular episode was altogether too heavy and profound. It is on the philosophical side and will not interest most readers. I think you should make The Spirit more along the usual lines with a good interesting story and plenty of sustained rapid fire action."[451] Eisner himself warned writers under his oversight to steer clear of overly complex plots and characters. In a letter to writer David Berg he wrote "Please keep away from the Eisner type of sadistic humor. One black sheep in the family is bad enough."[452] He continued, "I am convinced you are trying to say too much in a five page story. I am very anxious for you to really try hard on this next job because we may make MILITARY COMICS a monthly again in the autumn and I think that Death Patrol is a very worthwhile feature deserving of a better fate than you have been handing out to it."[453] Under

[448] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 12 December 1941, Eisner Papers.
[449] Stan Lee, "Jenette Kahn, Stan Lee, and Harvey Kurtzman Discuss Comics," Chicago Comic-Con Panel, August 1976, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming, n.p.
[450] Will Eisner to David Berg, 31 March 1942, Eisner Papers.
[451] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 3 October 1941, Eisner Papers.
[452] Eisner to Berg, 31 March 1942, Will Eisner Papers.
[453] Eisner to Berg, 31 March 1942, Will Eisner Papers.

this politically charged climate, Nazis were almost always the enemies of a particular story, often playing the role of sinister saboteurs or tempters of impressionable, naïve American youths.

Other Jewish comic book professionals realized a reliance on war propaganda could backfire on them. Even while emphasizing war comics, Busy Arnold stated, '"Practically all of the plots were about war and dictators. Every comic book in the country is playing up this angle and it is going to lose its appeal very shortly. So try and vary your plots and only have one or two in each magazine relating to the war or dictators."[454] Arnold and other publishing houses knew about their competition. Joe Simon revealed ""Everybody knew it…It was no secret. It was all over the industry. All the companies checked out the newsstands, on each other's business and everything else."[455] In some cases, newspaper publishers were unhappy over the slant of wartime content and demanded changes. A Nazi depiction of flag burning angered publisher B.M. McKelway. This particular publisher abhorred any visual depiction of flag burning, even if the depiction was anti-Nazi. He declared, "This desecration of flag violates local flag law and probably many states please caution comic people against repetition."[456] Another publisher believed that Quality Comics published too many war stories and warned against further saturation. Newspaper editor Phillip Star remarked in a letter to fellow editor Henry Martin: "I've told Mr. Arnold many times, The Star believes the place for the war news is in the news columns; and the comics pages are no place for either."[457] Nevertheless, the events of the war were prime fodder for comic book content and characters.

[454] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 22 October 1941, Eisner Papers.
[455] Simon, "Simon Says!" 8.
[456] B.M. McKelway to Henry Martin, 21 January 1942, Eisner Papers.
[457] Phillip H. Star to Henry Martin, 21 January 21, 1942, Eisner Papers.

Editors clearly believed that their American readers were not interested in more complex themes. Arnold and other editors made wartime themes a priority. The editorial demand for more and more war-centric comic book content facilitated a certain degree of anxiety among writers and artists. In a letter to his business partner Jerry Iger, Will Eisner wrote "Believe me, Jerry, it is very important to me to have MILITARY COMICS the best published book I could turn out. For I am not selling pages - - I make my money as, if, and when, the public buys the magazine. So if I am a little cranky about that, please understand."[458] Eisner's words demonstrate his apparent uneasiness. The connection between money and livelihood shows that Eisner was on tenuous ground with his publisher. Nevertheless, Eisner reasserts his personal confidence in Iger by the end of the letter when he states "Re. your last paragraph – I DO think you can handle this feature to my satisfaction and I have no intention of forgetting it."[459]

Editors were under immense pressure to put out titles that resonated with young readers. Even as the war fueled comic book economic boom, profitability was still a sensitive issue for many publishing houses. DC Comics publisher Irwin Donenfeld revealed, "Long-term, for sure, because the magazines were selling very well, and then we got into the war, and everything they put out sold. I mean 100%. Of course, in those days, you know what the tax rate was? 90%! So, during the war years, if you made a hundred thousand dollars, Uncle Sam got 90,000, and you got ten."[460] Expenses were carefully recorded by editors. Even the smallest oversights were scrutinized in order to save money. Busy Arnold wrote to Will Eisner "However, there was no

[458] Will Eisner to Jerry Iger, 6 April 1942, Eisner Papers.
[459] Eisner to Iger, 6 April 1942, Will Eisner Papers.
[460] Irwin Donenfeld, "There's a Lot of Myth Out There!" Interview by Mark Evanier, Robert Beerbohm, and Julius Schwartz, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 26 (July 2003): 9.

Diary of a Draftee in this issue so I deducted the $15 charge for this." At Marvel Comics, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby felt tremendous pressure to continue their success with the Captain America title. Simon was able to shrewdly negotiate a royalties deal with Marvel because of their dependency on the character. Simon stated in an interview "It was my idea to work out a percentage deal on *Captain America*. Timely's chief accountant was Maurice Coyne, a guy who promoted that for me; he didn't like them very much…It was his idea that we arrange some kind of a 25% royalty rate for me. I gave Kirby part of it, but it was hardly anything. Maurice took me aside one day and told me they were putting all the office expenses, all the salaries and everything, on *Captain America*."[461] Simon's superiors, including Marvel publishing head Martin Goodman, instructed him to lie about the title's success. In the same interview, Simon stated "Martin used to call me in and say, 'If anyone asks you how it's selling, you cry a little bit.'"[462] Goodman did not want other publishing houses to receive information about their finances.

Throughout the war years, comic book writers and artists continued to hide their Jewish background by changing their names on story credits to Americanized versions. In some cases, they did so in order to promote the idea that their publishing house had more writers and artists than in actuality. "Martin decided it shouldn't look as if Timely could only afford one writer, so I adopted additional pen names."[463] In some cases, an alias could be used in a political context. For example, artist Jack Kirby "I was saying what was on my mind. And I was extremely

[461] Simon, "Simon Says!" 8.
[462] Simon, "Simon Says!" 8.
[463] Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 27.

patriotic."[464] Kirby's statement suggested that Anglicized names sounded more American to these Jewish writers and artists.

Even with the comic book industry's growing acceptance, professional legitimacy was still a primary motivator for changing one's name. Artist Marvin Levy stressed that "'Lev' was a Jewish name, but it just sounded short and direct. Also, when I first signed my work, I was in school, and I somehow had the feeling I didn't want my name as seen in the comic book be the one that was in high school and my teachers."[465] This was not a sudden or abrupt shift either. Levy revealed that "I didn't sign it as 'Levy.'" Some of it was signed, I remember, as 'Marv Lev,' and a few years later, I signed it 'Lev.'" In one instance of changing his name, Levy recalled "at the time, I thought 'Lev' was just a little bit more arty-sounding than 'Levy.'"[466] Levy said his name changing had nothing to do with his Jewish background. He wanted a name that stood out on a comic book cover, something readers would easily remember.

Loftier artistic ambitions were certainly a great motivator for change, regardless of one's Jewishness. Jewish artists that changed their names did not necessarily change them out of shame for their ethnicity but rather for greater artistic recognition. For instance, Stan Lee stated in an interview, "I somehow felt it would not be seemly to take my name, which was certain to win a Pulitzer, and sign it to mere, humble comic strips. Thus, I was caught up in the fantasy of using a pen name, something suitable for the strips, while saving my real name for the saga that would make me immortal."[467] This comment illustrates that during the war years some name

[464] Jack Kirby, *Comic Book Confidential*, directed by Ron Mann (1988; Chicago IL: Home Vision Entertainment, 2002), DVD.
[465] Levy, "I Think I Always Knew I Wanted To Be A Cartoonist," 28-29.
[466] Levy, "I Think I Always Knew I Wanted To Be A Cartoonist," 28.
[467] Lee and Mair, *Excelsior: The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, 26.

changes were simply for personal reasons rather than trying to hide one's ethnic roots. Writers and artists like Lee changed their name for more respectable professional opportunities and artistic legitimacy. The historical impact of name changing in the comic book industry remains inconclusive. Levy stated, "Of course, a lot of Jewish names were changed, and I don't know whether that did more for some of the people."[468] It is clear that Jewish comic book writers and artists readily changed their names. They did not do so because of anti-Semitism or shame, rather, they changed their names to increase their professional prestige. However, American Jewish historian Kirsten Fermaglich argued many Jews changed their names in order to gain agency over antisemitism and maintain their middle-class status.[469] Using this argument, Levy's name changing demonstrated he was trying to project a middle class status through his work. Furthermore, Levy's name changing allowed him to "pursue economic success more effectively."[470] Unlike some other Jews, Levy and Lee changed their names to project a middle-class status.

*The Comic Book Industry and the Draft*

Anxiety in the workplace also extended to potentially being drafted by the United States military. For instance, Eisner's military duties directly conflicted with his work responsibilities. Busy Arnold noticed as much when he wrote "In looking over recent issues of 'The Spirit', it appears to me as though Bill Eisner is not doing much of the work himself. It doesn't have the

[468] Levy, "I Think I Always Knew I Wanted To Be A Cartoonist," 28.
[469] Kirsten Fermaglich, ""Too Long, Too Foreign … Too Jewish": Jews, Name Changing, and Family Mobility in New York City, 1917-1942," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 35.
[470] Fermaglich, ""Too Long, Too Foreign … Too Jewish": Jews, Name Changing, and Family Mobility in New York City, 1917-1942," 51.

same punch that his artwork used to have and I think you should check in with Bill and see what's going on."[471] Comic book publishing houses could not afford to lose many men to the military. The field was still relatively insular.

Losing men like Eisner seemed catastrophic in the moment. Writer Bob Powell wrote to Eisner "So the die is cast? You go the first, eh?.. I felt almost sure that you wouldn't be called until later.. The radio commentator just said that all men in class three would be reclassified into sub-divisions A and B..depending on the importance of their jobs in defense."[472] Anxiety over the draft was a very real occurrence for many writers and artists. Powell stated in the same letter "I don't want to get sickly sentimental but as I probably wont get to see you before you go, I'd like you to know that all my best wishes go with you.. I don't know what you think, but believe this..I never had anything against you personally..whatever differences we might have had were because of business reasons."[473] The omnipresent threat of being drafted seemed to unite many Jews in the comic book industry. Powell's heartfelt letter seems to suggest past workplace grievances did not matter as much when confronted with going overseas. Powell ended his letter on a rueful, almost melancholy note. He declared "You're a pretty okay guy, and it's too bad that we'll never be able to be real friends again."[474]

Comic book publishing houses scrambled to come up with contingency plans in case someone of value was drafted into the service. The military drafted Will Eisner in the latter half of 1941.[475] Busy Arnold wrote to Eisner "You are falling behind on the daily strips. Why not

[471] Henry Martin to Busy Arnold, 22 September 1941, Eisner Papers.
[472] S. Robert Powell to Will Eisner, n.d., Eisner Papers.
[473] Powell to Eisner, n.d., Will Eisner Papers.
[474] Powell to Eisner, n.d., Will Eisner Papers.
[475] Michael Schumacher, *Will Eisner: A Dreamer's Life in Comics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 80.

write up the 9th, 10th, and 11th weeks of the daily strips and send these to us as soon as possible. Then you can be doing all 3 weeks of strips while Alden McWilliams is doing the naval story of the weekly Spirit."[476] Arnold and other editors relied increasingly on producing work well in advance so that the quality of the final product would not suffer as much. In another letter, Eisner revealed how this process typically played out for writers and artists pressed into military service. He remarked "at the end of this week, Mar. 26th, I'm moving my studio up to Stamford where I'll continue to produce until I enter the service. As to staff the men I leave behind are very capable having worked with me for a long time…I'm planning out on laying out the skeleton of daily adventures that should stretch far into the Autumn."[477] The letter also illustrates that Jewish comic book professionals were pragmatic about the duration of the war. The letter implicitly alludes to the fact that Eisner knew he would be gone for a great deal of time and that he would have to prepare his work schedule and staff replacements accordingly.

Comic book editors also stressed that writers should use the ever-changing war time narrative to their benefit. Arnold wanted Eisner to "have new up to the minute stories written for the third issue" of a particular title, no doubt wanting to appear relevant to his readers.[478] Furthermore, editors such as Arnold offered concrete suggestions to closely intertwine comic book content and war time events. He stated in a letter, "In view of present war conditions, don't you think it would be best to have the Blackhawks get a new base and operate from the Pacific? Also, have the hero stamps about Americans rather than Britishers. A good subject for the first American Hero Stamp is Captain Kelly who was killed sinking the Japanese battleship

[476] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, n.d., Eisner Papers.
[477] Charles Lounsbury to Will Eisner, 23 March 1942, Eisner Papers.
[478] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 12 December 1941, Eisner Papers.

yesterday."[479] These ideas made World War II the central element in most comic book stories. They brought the realities of the war closer to the domestic, albeit in a sensationalized and politicized format.

When all else failed and they were drafted, comic book professionals turned to their superiors for assistance. Will Eisner's example is particularly illustrative of some of the difficulties Jewish comic book professionals faced while trying to balance their professional and military obligations. In reference to getting drafted, Eisner wrote to Arnold "I want to comply with every request as soon as they ask for it."[480] However, Eisner's letter showed that he was not eager to join in the war effort. He went on to state:

> "I was interviewed by the Board last night and I feel that they looked favorably upon the sheaf of stuff in my dossier. What they want is proof, in the form of an affidavit, from the Syndicate, stating in effect that without me there would be nothing, and that this section is a new innovation and, consequently, in my absence, men in the engraving and printing plants would be without employment. The Syndicate might also state that, inasmuch as a great deal of the feature is in my style of writing, art work, mind and personality and is unique, they feel sure that newspaper editors might refuse to accept substitution and, possibly, cancel present contracts, which they are permitted to do. You might also add that a daily strip is now in preparation for distribution in the Fall, which will give my features an even greater circulation."[481]

This passage clearly demonstrates Eisner wanted Arnold and, by extension, Quality Comics to petition the United States government for abstention from military service. Eisner's letter also suggested a close, intimate connection between valued comic book professionals and their publishing houses as opposed to other more mundane professionals. Eisner further states "It might not be amiss if you, too, in the official capacity of publisher, state that you depend upon

[479] Arnold to Eisner, 12 December 1941, Will Eisner Papers.
[480] Will Eisner to Busy Arnold, 30 July 1941, Eisner Papers.
[481] Eisner to Arnold, 30 July 1941, Will Eisner Papers.

me to guide the policies and edit 'Military', and that my services in that capacity are unique and cannot be duplicated."[482] Eisner believed that his job responsibilities made him indispensable to his employer. His services made him unique to the publishing house and too valuable for military service. Eisner's publisher crafted a carefully worded affidavit that claimed "William E. Eisner personally conceives and creates the entire content of these books each week. That he produces all the ideas therefor and 'lays out' each of the individual 16 pages personally in such form that he may then apportion it to a staff of artists. He then supervises this staff of artists in the execution of his ideas into the final book."[483] Quality Comics clearly valued Eisner's work. But more importantly, this affidavit revealed Eisner made himself professionally indispensable to his publisher.

Other Jewish comic book professionals felt similarly to Eisner but did not feel comfortable seeking out assistance from their employers. Artist Gill Fox emphasized "I was classified 1-A for military service and had to give it up…I didn't want to go."[484] Other publishing houses were split in opinions about the war. Fawcett Comics was one such publishing house. In an interview the Binder brothers reveal their diverse opinions. Otto Binder revealed "in my case, my whole living was practically Fawcett Comics." In contrast, his brother Jack was resigned to military service. He stated "It didn't bother me a bit!" Jack Binder even made moves to dissociate himself from the comic book industry. He revealed "I knew the end of the war was near and I'd made arrangements to go into another line of business."[485] In some cases where the creator was

[482] Eisner to Arnold, 30 July 1941, Will Eisner Papers.
[483] Affidavit by Chuck Lounsbury, n.d., Eisner Papers.
[484] Fox, "Gill Fox: Quality Control," 27.
[485] Binder, "Journey to the Rock of Eternity," 7.

essential to the title's success, Eisner's especially, contingency plans were made in order to continue the title's economic success. However, in many cases the livelihood of a drafted writer or artist was of little consequence to the publishing house.

*Wartime Experiences*

The war transformed Jewish comic book professionals drafted into service in several profound ways. Many army officials believed comic book professionals were well suited to non-combat work. After all, comic book professionals were already in the business of communicating with a young audience, a talent army officials wanted to cultivate in their own ranks. Jews such as Will Eisner and Stan Lee performed illustrative work for military technical manuals. These manuals highlighted significant job responsibilities and outlined many technical aspects of a soldier's duties. Lee stated of his experience "when I was in the Army, I used to watch training films, and I wrote instructional manuals for the troops. I would take very difficult subjects, like how to operate a 16MM rifle camera under combat conditions, for combat photographers. I took that extensive manual and I did it in cartoon form…I wrote it very simplistically."[486]

In another interview Lee showed that he adapted to his new role quickly. He remarked "to find a way to re-do the training manuals so they could train payroll officers faster and get them overseas. I read these manuals. I was first going to do it as a movie, but then I realized that a movie has the greatest initial impact of any form of communication—you see the picture, you hear music, you see motion, it's bigger than life, it *gets* you. But it has a few shortcomings. You

[486] Robert Kanigher and Stan Lee, "Those Who Can, Teach," Interview by Mike Barr, *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 6 (Autumn 2000): 19.

can't carry it with you. You can't study it at your own speed. If you're a little bit slow, and it's going too fast for you, you miss things." Lee's statement suggested that writers and artists drafted into the military believed comic book illustration was an effective means of communication. The military used comic book professionals such as Lee and Eisner to convey vital information to a large, disparate group of incoming military recruits. In particular, Lee used a character named Fiscal Freddy in order to explain mundane military paperwork to new recruits. Lee revealed Freddy "ran through all these dull payment forms, illustrating how to make them out; the upshot of it is that we were able to reduce the training period that was required to process a payroll officer." For his efforts, Lee was discharged with a "Good Conduct Medal." In a nod to Lee's lofty artistic ambitions, the United States military listed his occupation as a "Playwright."[487]

Some Jews believed their non-combat roles were not sufficient and even embarrassing to their sense of self-esteem. Only direct military engagement would give them a sense of fulfillment and personal responsibility.[488] Stan Lee felt "I was a very skinny, pink-cheeked, curly-headed kid. I didn't look like a buck-ass sergeant." Lee did not feel as if he measured up the ideal image of an American soldier. He "always felt a little embarrassed to be a three striper" even around other non-combat personnel. Lee concluded his anecdote "when I'd see a combat soldier approaching, I'd spit a lot and roll up my sleeves."[489] The reality of being drafted and then being not allowed to participate on the front lines must have been discouraging to Jewish comic book professionals such as Lee. However, Lee's experience was ultimately personally rewarding in

[487] "Discharge Form for Stan Lee," 1945, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.
[488] Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed A Generation* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006), 35.
[489] Lee, "Conversation with Stan Lee," 116.

later recollections. For example, Lee remembered "when the Army needed something creative job done, I got the call. Because of this, I drew one of the most famous posters of World War Two…so I drew this poster of a proud, smiling soldier walking into a pro station, and the sign read *V.D.? NOT ME*."[490] The wartime experience was of tremendous benefit to the comic book industry on the whole.

*Defending Comic Books against Critics*

In the article, "There's Money in Comics!" Marvel editor Stan Lee's commentary emphasized that the industry was not run by amateurs. In fact, his use of the phrase "interesting field" strongly suggests that Lee was defending his industry from social critics who deemed comic books as suitable only for impressionable children. Time and time again in the article, Lee demanded that prospective writers and artists should not "WRITE DOWN TO YOUR READERS!!!"[491] Comic books could be accessible to everyone, not just children. In addition, Lee's statements in the article suggested writers and artists could find personal and professional fulfillment in their chosen profession. He stated "No matter what type of writing you specialize in—adventure, detective style, romantic stories, or humorous material, there is some comic magazine which uses the type of story you'd like to write. And, once you've broken into the field, you'll find that your assignments come to you at a fairly steady pace."[492] Lee is clearly concerned about negative stereotypes of the comic book industry. His article served as a promotional and

[490] Lee, "Conversation with Stan Lee," 116.
[491] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[492] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.

recruiting tool for the comic book industry. Unconvinced artists could look to Lee's article for reassurance that the comic book industry was a professional career choice worthy of respect.

Social critics and receptive parents heavily criticized the comic book industry for producing violent and subversive content in the 1950s. These attacks did not come out of nowhere and actually originated in the 1940s. Prior to the 1950s, the comic book professionals did not heed any warning signs that their industry would come under attack. They produced comic book content more and more for older, mature readers. In one example, newspaper editors called into question a panel that depicted the Spirit punching a cop in the face. A 1941 letter warned Will Eisner "lay off any more of this gruesome stuff before we start getting any more complaints."[493] Concerned parents also closely scrutinized newspaper comic strips. One particularly violent Spirit strip received the complaint: "If that isn't something for a great newspaper to print. I have small children that study the comics and if this comic 'The Spirit' is continued in your newspaper I will cancel my subscription. You must get stuff like that free. You could use less comics or raise your price once more to cover the cost of reasonable comics."[494] Another letter cautioned, "This is both a criticism and a request. Clean up your filthy cartoons…so the kids will have something wholesome to look at. Much pressure can be brought to bear on this sort of thing you know, so let's see some improvement in a week's time."[495] The pressure quoted in the letter writer is not identified. Nevertheless, these complaints demonstrated American readers were already upset with comic book content in the early 1940s.

[493] Busy Arnold to Will Eisner, 15 December 1941, Eisner Papers.
[494] The comic strip in question is not included or described in the letter. A.P. Ankerston to Circulation Manager of the Des Moines Tribune, 5 December 1941, Eisner Papers.
[495] Anonymous to Will Eisner and the Detroit News, 19 December 1941, Eisner Papers.

Quality Comics tried to appease these complaints in their own way. They removed objectionable content while claiming to the public it was done to service the story's cohesiveness. Henry Martin wrote, "we have removed the lines indicating that Dolan contemplated going into hiding. It seems to tie the whole thing together more convincingly, also."[496] This letter correspondence was in reference to a complaint about a negative portrayal of a law enforcement figure. In another example, Quality Comics publisher Chuck Lounsbury stated of an objectionable story "Implication will be same however so if still objectionable will redraw sequence entirely and get in mail by tonight, since strip 19 refers to cop found without clothes. Advise at once."[497] Editors and writers endlessly debated minute details and plot points. For example, Lounsbury wanted immediate changes. He wrote to Eisner "I believe this can readily be changed to be more in conformity with the type of material adaptable to newspaper readership."[498] Lounsbury added, "If you will, therefore, draw a panel two and a half inches wide, substituting the above suggestion, we will paste it up and hurry the engraving along."[499]

DC Comics also became concerned about comic book content. In internal memos, DC Comics editorial instructed their writers and artists to abstain from showing among other things hypodermic needles, coffins, corpses, electric chairs, hangings, stabbings, blood, skeletons, torture, and limb dismemberment.[500] In a sarcastic handwritten comment, the editor wrote "Now go ahead and write a good story – I dare you."[501] Mayer's hint of sarcasm suggested that he and other creative talent employed by DC Comics during the 1940s found these guidelines

[496] Henry Martin to Busy Arnold, 3 September 1941, Eisner Papers.
[497] Will Eisner to Chuck Lounsbury from Will Eisner, undated, Eisner Papers.
[498] In reference to the Spirit striking a cop. Chuck Lounsbury to Will Eisner, 22 September 1941, Eisner Papers.
[499] Lounsbury to Eisner, 22 September 1941, Will Eisner Papers.
[500] "Note to Writers and Artists," n.d., Gardner Fox Papers, University of Oregon, n.p.
[501] The note is signed SM which suggested it came from DC Comics editor Sheldon Mayer.

restrictive and absurd. Furthermore, Mayer's note demonstrated that some writers and artists at DC Comics did not take these guidelines entirely serious.

The comic book industry largely subscribed to the same regulatory procedures done during the wartime comic book boom. In 1941, Busy Arnold responded to reader complaints of gruesome violence "We have changed balloons in some of the strips."[502] Comic book publishing houses regulatory practices had changed little since that time. After all, Bill Gaines remarked in 1988, "they were attacking Superman back in the 30s and 40s because some kid might think he could fly and jump off the roof. They attacked comic books because you couldn't read the print and it was ruining all the kids' eyes. They came up with *more* damn reasons to attack comics over the years that it was really kind of ludicrous for me to look back."[503] During the 1940s, although comic book publishers clearly improved the craftsmanship of their product, they did very little to address complaints about comic book content. Furthermore, Arnold and Gaines both showed that they viewed any complaints with skepticism or outright dismissiveness.

Professional legitimacy was difficult to come by for many comic book writers. In a later interview Stan Lee stated, "I'd be embarrassed to tell people. They'd say, 'What do you do?' I'd say, 'I'm a writer," and I'd try to get away before they asked me what I wrote."[504] In the foreword of his memoir, Jim Simon recalled the embarrassment he sometimes encountered over his father Joe's job occupation:

> "In school, the teacher asked the class what their dads did for a living. When it came time for his turn, the kid said, 'Publishing." That seemed to impress the teacher. 'Comic books,' KC called out. The teacher's eyebrows arched. 'His dad

[502] Henry Martin to Busy Arnold, 3 September 1941, Eisner Papers.
[503] Stan Lee, *Comic Book Confidential*, directed by Ron Mann (1988; Chicago IL: Home Vision Entertainment, 2002), DVD.
[504] Lee, "Stan Lee Comic Meister Extraordinaire."

> makes comic books. Superheroes, cowboys and Indians, even monsters.' The whisperings among the fellow classmates swelled to loud praises against the teacher's protest for calm and order. The kid slouched."

To any typical outside observer, being employed in the comic book industry was simply not respectable.

To be sure, comic book writers and artists tried several times to combat negative stereotypes about their line of work. One of the most visible attempts was Stan Lee's 1947 article in *Reader's Digest*, titled "There's Money in Comics!" Lee explained that comic books were not a passing fad and were an important and growing segment of American popular culture. He declared that the comic book industry had "been publishing comic magazines for more than 10 years. They've been buying scripts for these magazines from free-lance writers for that same length of time and paying good rates for them." Lee goes on to discredit the idea that the comic book industry was a small, niche field in comparison to other forms of print media such as magazines or even newspapers. He continued "there are 92 comic magazines appearing on the stands every single month—and each magazine uses an average of 5 stories. It's a big field, it's a well-paying field, and it's an interesting field. If you haven't tried to crack the comics yet, now's the time to start."[505] Mort Weisinger revealed as much in a later industry panel when he stated "As you all know, "Superman" is not the product of any one man. It would be impossible!...But as the popularity of Superman became a national, an international, phenomenon, it became more and more necessary to expand."[506]

[505] Lee, "There's Money in Comics!" n.p.
[506] Weisinger, "Ghost Riders in the Sky," 9.

*Conclusion*

World War II was a crucial historical period for the comic book industry. Comic book publishers finally made inroads with American popular culture. Their emphasis on patriotic themes and characters appealed to American readers. More importantly, the comic book industry matured into a professional entity during World War II. The days of amateur comic book production were over. Instead, comic book publishers demanded professional output from their writers and artists. Editors took script and art errors more seriously than ever before. In addition, the war took several Jewish writers and artists abroad. Once in Europe, these men struggled to reconcile their work responsibilities back home with their military duties. And yet, several Jewish comic book writers and artists looked back on their wartime experiences with fond memories. While most did not fight on the frontlines, several Jews wrote military manuals and produced promotional material for the war effort. However, once the war ended and veterans returned from their duties abroad, positive morale within the comic book industry gradually turned to shame. Comic books were under attack.

## CONCLUSION:

### The Cultural Backlash of the 1950s

While comic book readership exploded in previous decades, the 1950s ushered in an era of significant readership reductions. The genre, and superheroes themselves, came under attack from conservative social critics. World War II had offered a distinct opportunity for comic book publishing houses to insert the superhero into a pro-war ideology. As previously demonstrated, the visibility of superheroes within American popular culture was unprecedented. Comic book sales had reached a high point of 540 million copies sold during the year of 1946.[507] 540 million copies for the year of 1946 averaged out to 45 million per month. However, the growing influence of superhero comic books upon impressionable youth also invited negative attention and introduced a "ten-year period [that] was probably the most banal, the blandest, the least creative period in comics."[508] Marvel comics editor Stan Lee proclaimed "name any period you want after the war, and comics people would rather forget it.'"[509] A retrospective newspaper article of the 1950s comic book decline stated, "Sales have dropped since the heyday…when there were 30 publishers selling 500 million comics a year."[510] By the end of the 1950s, many of the original Jewish writers, artists, and editors that comprised the industry permanently left. Non-Jewish fans who grew up reading 1930s and 1940s comic books were now in control of the comic book industry.

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[507] Bart Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 116.
[508] Kane, "A/E Interview: Gil Kane," 162.
[509] Stan Lee, *Comic Book Confidential*, directed by Ron Mann (1988; Chicago IL: Home Vision Entertainment, 2002), DVD.
[510] Ron Base, "Heyday of the Comics," *The Detroit News Magazine*, July 30, 1978.

The war hero was no longer as popular. EC Comics publisher William Gaines remarked, "after the war, interest in superheroes began to taper off. People began to forget about fighting, they wanted to read about things closer to home; romance, crime, you know all the elements of the American dream."[511] Social critics, especially Dr. Fredric Wertham, saw superheroes as a sinister ideology that promoted anti-democratic values and shunted the moral and physical development of children. Wertham organized his negative views of comic books in his landmark book, *Seduction of the Innocent*.[512] Comic book characters, especially superheroes, were under attack for contributing heavily to renewed fears of a juvenile delinquency epidemic. Wertham and his supporters contended comic books favorably portrayed youthful violence.

There was also a growing uncertainty among writers and publishers over the future viability of the industry. The comic book publishing houses had known success in the 1940s but had previously struggled to maintain a foothold. Now, times were again uncertain. In a later interview, Marvel Comics writer Joe Simon gave voice to a general sentiment of unease. He stated, "No I didn't. I didn't know how long comics would last. No one did."[513] While other comic book figures such as Stan Lee insisted in hindsight that comic books were a valuable and viable means of entertainment. "Some people viewed comics as a passing fad. Not me. From the beginning, I felt that comics could be a vital part of the publishing field. They had a broad appeal and a great potential for telling stories. I thought that children, in particular, would love the

[511] Gaines, *Comic Book Confidential*.
[512] See Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York, NY: Rinehart Press, 1955).
[513] Simon, "Simon Says!" 11.

colorful fantasies they presented."[514] During the 1950s, many comic book writers and artists were on tenuous professional ground.

Comic book readership slowly declined after the conclusion of WWII. Wartime heroes such as Captain America were no longer profitable characters.[515] No longer could violent comic book characters and stories hide behind patriotic rhetoric. The onset of the Cold War complicated matters. Communism was a more ambiguous threat: superheroes could not galvanize behind the threat of a Soviet attack like they could against the threat of Nazism and Fascism.[516] This ambiguity hampered comic book companies as they tried to retain the gains in readership during the war. An anti-Communist comic book story could not solely rely on patriotic sentiment. Comic book companies would face loyalty tests that hampered other popular cultural mainstays such as the film industry.[517] Charges of impure content shamelessly promoted to impressionable children hampered efforts to prove loyalty on the part of comic book publishers.

In the late 1940s, Fredric Wertham argued that the comic book industry promoted juvenile delinquency to its young, impressionable readers. Wertham's critiques spared no comic book storytelling genre. He was particularly harsh towards superheroes. The "holy trinity" of superheroes - Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman received varying levels of criticism for promoting juvenile delinquency. Wertham made these claims using fantastic language in order to incite parents to worry over their children. In an 1948 article "The Comics…Very Funny!," Wertham made the pseudo-scientific claim that "It is pretty well established that 75 percent of

[514] Lee, "Panel Discussion," Lee Papers, n.p.
[515] Marvel Comics cancelled Captain America comic books in 1954 until his revival in 1964.
[516] Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, 111.
[517] Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 141.

parents are against comic books."[518] Wertham was on a crusade against the comic book industry. He made any claim that would damage the already tenuous position the industry had with parents. He emphasized that comic books are unavoidable and largely obtainable by impressionable youth. Wertham believed that morally objectionable comic books were slipped to naïve children. He believed this was a great example of the uncaring nature of the publishing house.[519] Concerned social critics and reformers used Wertham's rhetoric and accusations and presented a united front. Even before Wertham's accusations, comic strips received complaints from parents. Thus, the comic book industry did not take Wertham seriously. Comic book professionals did not believe Wertham was any different than any of these prior attacks on comic book content.

In particular, Wertham singled out the superheroes Batman and Wonder Woman as subverting the very tenets that built post-WWII American society. Some of the more important values considered by Wertham included an emphasis on the nuclear family, proper gender roles, and a hierarchy of responsibility. According to Wertham, Batman did not keep with the traditional expectations of a nuclear family and was fraught with homoerotic underpinnings. Manliness was an important consideration for many scholarly critics of the era. A man could not perform his duties as a responsible American citizen if he gave in to effeminacy.

The relationship between Batman and Robin was supposed to be analogous to a father and son dichotomy. Batman's creators never intended to support the contention that Robin was more than Batman's trusted ward. Robin's role was to be young and devilish counterpart to the

[518] Fredric Wertham, "The Comics Very Funny!," *The Reader's Digest*, August 1948, 18.
[519] Fredric Wertham, *The Circle of Guilt* (New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc., 1956), 89.

dark and sober Batman. Writers wanted to favorably contrast the similar tragic circumstances that led first to Batman and then later to Robin, fighting crime.[520] However, Wertham saw the father-son dynamic subverted by his homosexual reading of the Batman comic books:

> At home they lead an idyllic life. They are Bruce Wayne and 'Dick' Grayson. Bruce Wayne is described as a 'socialite' and the official relationship is that Dick is Bruce's ward. They live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred. Bruce is sometimes shown in a dressing gown. As they sit by the fireplace the young boy sometimes worries about his partner…it is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together.[521]

Homosexuality in Batman comic books of the 1950s has been a widely debated topic for academia. While Wertham's claims were in retrospect "self-evidently ludicrous," his argument was considered "both relevant and convincing" at the time.[522] Wertham's anecdotal evidence combined patient testimony with confident assertions. In the end, Wertham's charges of homosexuality hurt Batman's reputation.

Wonder Woman did not fit any conceived notion of female domesticity and thus was neglecting her responsibility to American society. Wertham saw Wonder Woman's values as shirking the core fabric of femininity. A young patient of Wertham's recounted: "I buy comic books every week…One of the girls is the best fighter."[523] The notion that a girl could be physically strong and assert her femininity was unheard at the start of the 1950s. Wertham and his followers saw an undercurrent of lesbianism in Wonder Woman's monthly adventures.

Wertham's severe attacks on superheroes such as Wonder Woman and Batman led to the direct involvement of the U.S. federal government. The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile

[520] Bill Finger et al., *Batman Archives* Vol. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 1990), 133.
[521] Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, 190.
[522] Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*, 201.
[523] Wertham, "The Comics Very Funny!," 15.

Delinquency convened in 1954. The committee's charge was to investigate the link between juvenile delinquency and comic books. Once juvenile delinquency was defined, the committee would provide regulatory recommendations. Interviews with comic book writers, artists, and editors were held. However, testimony given by Wertham and social critics of comic books were given first priority by the committee's head, Senator Estes Kefauver (D – TN). The Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency was no different than past inquiries into the film industry. In 1934, several figures in the American government "introduced a resolution to create a committee to investigate Nazi propaganda and activities" in the United States.[524] The newly named House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) repeatedly investigated the film industry for subversive elements. After World War II ended, HUAC shifted their focus to Communist infiltration of the movie studios. These investigations culminated in the blacklisting of several Hollywood writers who had criticized HUAC's investigative methods. This blacklist lasted until the 1960s.

The main difference that distinguished the comic book industry from its earlier cultural peers was in the directness and shocking turns the interviews took. Neither side was willing to make concessions. Wertham championed himself as a moral crusader while the comic book industry presented themselves as victims of an organized witch-hunt. With the two sides dug in, the committee would have to make a difficult decision about the future of comic book content.

Wertham's testimony was starkly critical of the comic book industry's disregard for the problem of juvenile delinquency. Many social critics believed American youth suffered from "the

[524] Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, 351.

destructive and dangerous culture of the streets."[525] These critics condemned popular formats including comic books, fashion, music, and movies for promoting and glamorizing this subversive culture. In short, the American teenager of the 1950s threatened adults. Wertham's opening statement went into great detail about his education and prominent role in American psychiatry. Wertham's stress on credentials and his unverified claim that "to the best of my knowledge our study is the first and only individual large scale study on the subject of comic books in general" portrayed him as a larger than life figure.[526] Wertham's authority was derived from his uncanny ability to make grand statements and assertions. In fact, Wertham's famous study on comic books, *Seduction of the Innocent*, was largely condemned by peer review because of its reliance on unscientific data and conclusions.[527] Nonetheless, Wertham was able to project an authoritative voice on the proceedings which took place.

Wertham's authority was based on rather circumstantial evidence. At one point in his line of questioning, Wertham professed that "I had no idea how one would go about stealing from a locker in Grand Central, but I have comic books which describe that in minute detail and I could go out now and do it."[528] Wertham's strategy was to present shocking claims bolstered by dubious logic. He hoped that the impact of his claims would go straight to the moral attitudes of the committee and concerned parents. Wertham's main contention was that violence and deviant behavior was glamorized by superhero comic books. There was little moral recourse

[525] James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4.
[526] United States, *Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, *U.S. Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), 81.
[527] Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*, 196.
[528] United States, *Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, *U.S. Congress,* 14.

retained in superhero narratives. The main motivation for comic book publishers was to make a profit. Wertham contended that making comic book publishing houses the arbiters of morality and childhood education would be a dangerous trend for the future generations of American society.

One tactic that was used by Wertham to great effect "was to take panels and dialogue out of context in order to illustrate a point."[529] We have already seen this aspect at play in Wertham's interpretation of Batman and Robin as gay partners and Wonder Woman as strong-headed lesbian subversive. However, in testimony given at the hearing, Wertham went a step further. He directly criticized the first superhero icon, Superman, by applying Nazi ideology to the origin of his name. Wertham's implication that Superman was an "Ubermensch" figure proved to be one of the more shocking revelations made by the anti-comic book contingent.[530] Wertham's agenda assumed central prominence. Advocates for the comic book industry were hard pressed to come up with a logical defense of the profession.

Writers, editors, and artists represented and defended the industry. As a whole, the comic book industry presented a relatively united front. While some such as Arnold Drake shared the opinion that "I don't think censorship means anything after about six months. That's about how long those things last," many writers and artists were fearful of government intervention.[531] Comic book writers and artists witnessed the Hollywood blacklist. Artist Dave Gantz recalled "Everybody started getting jittery about things."[532] The comic book industry, while successful in

[529] Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code*, 64.
[530] United States, *Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, *U.S. Congress*, 86.
[531] Drake, "My Greatest Adventure." 4.
[532] Gantz, "A Long Glance at Dave Gantz," 14.

the 1940s, was not a stable profession. Artists were constantly on the lookout for more work. Elliot Fine recalled that his father recognized "The business ran in cycles and he had some tough years. He had one business partnership that wasn't particularly pleasant. He always did advertising, except when he did comic strips. He did stuff for *American Weekly*, so he was doing newspaper and magazine work."[533] Many others were not as fortunate or as savvy as Fine and would struggle to find work if the government directly intervened in their industry.

However, the man that enthralled the Senate committee was Entertaining Comics (EC) publisher and Editor William M. Gaines. Gaines's EC Comics was notorious for putting out violent and sadistic horror comic books. In a later interview, Gaines stated that he and his team of writers and artists "always love to have shock endings."[534] Gaines claimed EC Comics was for mature, sophisticated readers. He maintained "What we were doing really was writing up to our readers. I was aware, having come out of the service, that there was a great readership out there of older adults; not just teenagers, not just children reading funny little animals…there were guys reading them in the barracks. They were now back in civilian life and they were still reading comics."[535] However, throughout the 1950s Gaines admitted, "we did get grosser and grosser, no question about it. But we were doing tongue-in-cheek horror stories. And they were starting to say things like, 'Hey, you know, this is ruining our kids and they're going to become ghouls, vampires, and murderers; which is a lot of nonsense.'"[536]

[533] Fine et al., "…And A Fine Family," 19.
[534] Gaines, *Comic Book Confidential*.
[535] Gaines, *Comic Book Confidential*.
[536] Gaines, *Comic Book Confidential*.

Superheroes were lumped in with Gaines's coterie of hideous zombies and ghouls. The comic book industry would galvanize around Gaines's brave testimony. Gaines, in a spectacularly defiant performance, refuted many of Wertham's most pointed critiques of the comic book industry. He pointed out to the Senators present at the hearing that comic books "had attacked anti-Semitism, racism, drug addiction, and even juvenile delinquency."[537] Unfortunately, Gaines was not able to keep up his verbal barrage against the paranoid culture that Wertham promoted. The defining moment of the hearings came in this exchange of dialogue:

> *Senator Kefauver.* Here is your May 22 issue. This seems to be a man with a bloody ax holding a woman's head up which has been severed from her body. Do you think that is in good taste?
>
> *Mr. Gaines.* Yes, sir; I do, for the cover of a horror comic. A cover in bad taste, for example, might be defined as holding the head a little higher so that the neck could be seen dripping blood from it and moving the body over a little further so that the neck of the body could be seen to be bloody.
>
> *Senator Kefauver.* You have blood coming out of her mouth.
>
> *Mr. Gaines.* A little.
>
> *Senator Kefauver.* Here is blood on the ax. I think most adults are shocked by that.
>
> *The Chairman.* Here is another one I want to show him.

[537] United States, *Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, *U.S. Congress*, 99.

*Senator Kefauver.* This is the July one. It seems to be a man with a woman in a boat and he is choking her to death here with a crowbar. Is that in good taste?

*Mr. Gaines.* I think so.

*Mr. Hannoch.* How could it be worse?[538]

It is quite clear that the senators on the committee chose specific evidentiary materials for Gaines to respond to. A conscious decision was made to show the worst of the worst images and force Gaines into a verbal hole. While the beleaguered publisher performed admirably, the above passage sunk any momentum Gaines had garnered among the committee. Many social critics did not trust the comic book industry to self-regulate their content. Superheroes were no different than Gaines's horror line. Every genre of comic book was under attack. The comic book industry would quickly come up with a solution that would end calls for direct federal regulation but at the expense of freedom of content.

The committee issued its recommendations in 1955. They did not fully endorse Wertham's views. Yet, the cultural and political environment prompted the committee to come to the conclusion that "this country cannot afford the calculated risk involved in feeding its children, through comic books, a concentrated diet of crime, horror, and violence."[539] On October 26th, 1954, the comic book industry took matters into their own hands. They combined resources to form the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA). This organization would

[538] United States, *Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, *U.S. Congress*, 103.

[539] United States, *Interim Report of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, *U.S. Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955), 32.

provide the ultimate oversight on objectionable content within comic books, including superheroes.

The CMAA allowed the comic book industry to continue to operate free of federal government intervention. However, many advertisers abandoned the comic book industry. In an article describing the financial model of many comic book publishing house, Leonard Sloane wrote, "Contrary to the situation at consumer magazines, the bulk of the income from comic magazines…is derived from circulation rather than advertising. Nevertheless, the income derived from advertisers can be substantial."[540] This meant a severe self-censorship on publishing companies who accepted the code's tenets. Comic book publishers did not want to risk losing even more advertisers. The financial demise of Gaines's EC Comics proved the absolute power of the CMAA. A loss of advertising dollars was financially disastrous for many comic book companies that featured primarily objectionable content.

The two major publishers of superheroes, DC and Marvel, had to contend with the decisions that "forbade the presentation of crime in any manner that created sympathy for criminals" and to present respected institutional figures in a positive and respectful manner.[541] Half-hearted regulatory measures would not pass muster with the CMAA. This meant that vigilantes such as Batman would have to work with the police and insane villains such as the Joker would have to be sanitized to fit the CMAA's definition of criminal activity. Furthermore, the CMAA stated that women were to be depicted as pure and "never treated in such a way to

[540] Leonard Sloane, "Advertising: Comics Go Up, Up, and Away," *New York Times*, July 20, 1967, 60.
[541] Michael R. Lavin, *Original Text of the Comics Code Authority* (as Adopted in 1954), 23 April 2007, http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/lml/comics/pages/cca-lang.html.

stimulate the lower and baser emotions."[542] This edict was aimed at strong superheroines such as Wonder Woman. The CMAA believed that comic book figures such as Wonder Woman should "emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage."[543] The CMAA code which now governed superhero comic books was extremely restrictive even by the conservative standards of the 1950s. The comic book industry had been dealt a decisive blow. They would never reach the prolific sales figures or tap into the American mainstream culture as they had by the end of World War.

Some Jewish writers and artists chose to leave the industry entirely. Lou Fine counseled his son to find a different career and not follow in his father's artistic footsteps. Elliot Fine recalled "When I said my father wanted me to be a banker, it wasn't that he had no regard for what he did. He just felt I shouldn't have to lead the freelance life."[544] Some Jewish comic book professionals managed to eke out an existence on the margins of the industry. Artist Gene Colan stated "Well, I couldn't get work in comics, so I figured maybe I could pick up some illustration work. I did whatever I could do! I went to some of the magazine publishers and they were really out of my league. They had big-time illustrators that did full-blown oil paintings, you know?"[545] Older comic book professionals faced the hardest job prospects. Artist Gil Kane remembered "Those times were hard, especially for the older guys, at least ten years older than me. You couldn't even get into advertising. You would end up working for these small service houses, odd

[542] Lavin, *Original Text of the Comics Code Authority* (as Adopted in 1954).
[543] Lavin, *Original Text of the Comics Code Authority* (as Adopted in 1954).
[544] Fine et al., "…And A Fine Family," 21.
[545] Colan, "So You Want a Job, Eh?" 8.

little services, where everything was freelance; and if you were lucky, ultimately maybe later on you'd land a berth at a commercial agency."[546]

Many lost passion for artistic work in the comic book field. Jerry Robinson became tired of his ghosting duties with Bob Kane. He recalled "Basically, I was just tired of doing the same thing, and not being able to sign it, either. In fact, I probably signed Bob's name more than *he* did. [*laughs*] I also began to get other offers, where I could do my own thing. That was the main reason."[547] Some writers and artists blamed other media. Klaus Nordling argued "In those days, TV had a real strong effect…and I left comic books around 1951, I think. And it wasn't so much my leaving as the comic books leaving me. I did all of my work at that time for Quality comic books, and they were losing money fast all of a sudden—starting in the year of '50 to '51, maybe even '49…"Busy" Arnold…kept dropping books, one after another, one after another."[548] Another artist claimed "Comics were going down, but TV was the villain. I think everything was being affected, Hollywood in particular, by television."[549] Other social critics brought up old critiques of the industry to explain its decline. One charged "Comic books are often considered to be at the bottom of the literary and artistic totem pole."[550] This same critic charged that comic book companies declined because they catered "to collectors rather than the general reading public."[551] Others denied that comic book content ever went too far. Stan Lee remarked, "'I think of comics as comic books as fairy tales for older people…We don't sell sex and we don't sell

[546] Kane, "'Stan Was the Prince'"—Gil Kane on Timely Comics," 40.
[547] Robinson, "Building 'Batman' and Other True Legends of the Golden Age," 37.
[548] Klaus Nordling, "The Fabulous 40's – The First Full Decade of Comic Books," *Alter Ego*, vol. 3, no. 60 (July 2006): 72.
[549] Drake, "My Greatest Adventures," 4.
[550] Roger Ebert, "A Comeback for Comic Books," *Chicago Sun-Times*, MidWest Magazine, December 1966, n.p.
[551] Ebert, "A Comeback for Comic Books," n.p.

violence per se. What we are selling is fantasy.'"[552] Regardless of the exact reasons, the comic book industry was once again a non-entity in American popular culture.

Artist Bill Everett tried to stay employed in comic book illustration but proclaimed, "I tried, but I never sold anything spectacular. I wrote a lot of stuff, but my heart wasn't really in it. I could probably paper several rooms with the rejection slips."[553] A 1966 article in the Chicago Sun-Times summed the era up best stating "comic book writers and editors, desperate for plots, turned to the eternal themes of sex and horror, but the 1954 Comics Code rang down the curtain on that ploy, and comicdom entered its Dark Ages."[554] The Jewish comic book industry went into seclusion and cultural obscurity. The industry did not recover until Marvel Comics' reemergence in the mid-1960s with a new line of superheroes geared towards the Atomic Age and scientific breakthroughs.

The Jewish comic book industry, established in the 1930s, made a significant impact upon American popular culture. Writers, artists, and editors created an entirely new industry from cultural roots in pulp magazines, science fiction, and film. Many Jews had transformative experiences while employed in the comic book industry. Some of them found steady work and a satisfying career while many others struggled against strict publisher mandates, abuses, and one-sided contracts. The goal for any comic book writer or artist was to find steady work in a labor environment that readily accepted Jews. But the long term goal of the comic book industry was to create a professional institution respected by American popular culture as a legitimate and worthy medium. The comic book industry did not accomplish this long-term goal as

[552] Base, "Heyday of the Comics."
[553] Everett, "Everett on Everett," 19.
[554] Ebert, "A Comeback for Comic Books," n.p.

suggested by the eventual downfall of the comic book industry during the 1950s by social critics and government hearings.

However, the legacy of the 1930s and 1940s Jewish comic book industry persisted in the memories of its creators and interviews. In 2002, Stan Lee remarked, "We may all be competitors at the different companies, but that doesn't stop us from being friends and fans of each other's work."[555] The comic book industry also recovered from the setbacks of the 1950s. By the 1970s, comic books gained a new legitimacy. In 1974, Albert Landau, an associate of Marvel Comics, remarked, "As you can see, you're dealing with complex three-dimensional personalities. Someday I imagine Stan will be compared to Dostoyevsky."[556] Landau's statement demonstrated that Stan Lee, and by extension the comic book industry, regained its status as an important segment of American popular culture. By 2010, the Obama administration invited Stan Lee and other Jewish comic book figures "to highlight and celebrate the range and depth of Jewish American heritage and contributions to American culture."[557] In recent years, some have acknowledged the Jewish composition of the comic book industry, but that acknowledgment has not been met with intensive scholarly interest. Scholars need to focus more on the Jewish composition of the industry itself and not on the links between Jewishness and comic book content.

An examination of the 1930s and 1940s comic book industry reveals that it was a distinct Jewish industry. The experiences, obstacles, and collaborations described in this dissertation establish that Jews came to the industry out of economic necessity and their fascination with

[555] E-Mail between Tom DeFalco and Stan Lee, 17 February 2002, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.
[556] Albert E. Landau to Joe Barbera, 8 November 8 1974, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.
[557] E-Mail between Mike Kelly and Danielle S. Borin, 14 May 2010, Stan Lee Papers, University of Wyoming.

similar cultural mediums and genres. Family connections and some professional art education helped some Jews enter the industry. However, a vast majority of Jewish creative talent were self-sufficient and learned their craft primarily through on the job training.

Jewish writers, artists, and editors created a familial sense of belonging in the comic book industry. They discussed their craft and shared jokes inside and outside the work place. Jews in the comic book industry formed lasting friendships even across management lines. However, they never lost sight that their industry consistently sought to cheat them of their hard work. Worker abuses, contract grievances, and cheaply designed workspaces were all realities of a career in the comic book field. The Jewish comic book industry's decision not to pursue labor union representation stands as a unique case study of the period and in direct contrast to other Jewish focused industries.

The comic book industry initially struggled even with an influx of young Jewish creative talent. World War II helped the comic book industry attract more readers and establish themselves as a professional, legitimate segment of American popular culture. Jewish writers and artists produced material on a steady schedule even though the military cut into their work force. Jewish writers and artists shifted to more mature and graphically violent story content in the 1940s. They did not realize this shift would lead to the industry's decline in the 1950s despite several warning signs from reader feedback. Nevertheless, the comic book industry of the 1930s and 1940s operated as a successful distinct Jewish industry.

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

Table 1. The Jewish Comic Book Industry

| Name | Life Span | Occupation | Company | Noted Work |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jack Binder | 1902-1986 | Artist / Editor | Fawcett Comics | Led Art Studio |
| Otto Binder | 1911-1974 | Writer | Fawcett Comics | Captain Marvel |
| Gene Colan | 1926-2011 | Artist | DC / Marvel Comics | Daredevil |
| Harry Donenfeld | 1893-1965 | Publisher | DC Comics | Ran DC Comics |
| Arnold Drake | 1924-2007 | Artist | DC / Marvel Comics | Deadman |
| Will Eisner | 1917-2005 | Editor, Writer, Artist | Quality Comics | The Spirit |
| Jules Feiffer | 1929- | Writer / Artist | Quality Comics | Line-wide Artist |
| Al Feldstein | 1925-2014 | Writer / Editor | EC Comics | MAD Magazine |
| Lou Fine | 1914-1971 | Artist | Quality Comics | The Spirit |
| Bill Finger | 1914-1974 | Writer | DC Comics | Batman |
| Gardner Fox | 1911-1986 | Writer | DC Comics | The Flash |
| Gill Fox | 1915-2004 | Editor / Artist | Quality Comics | Line-wide Editor |
| William M. Gaines | 1922-1992 | Publisher | EC Comics | Ran EC Comics |
| Dave Gantz | 1922-2007 | Artist | Marvel Comics | Line-wide Artist |
| Martin Goodman | 1908-1992 | Publisher | Marvel Comics | Ran Marvel Comics |
| Irwin Hasen | 1918-2015 | Artist | DC Comics | Green Lantern |
| Al Jaffee | 1921- | Artist | EC Comics | MAD Magazine |
| Gil Kane | 1926-2000 | Artist | DC / Marvel Comics | Green Lantern |
| Robert “Bob” Kane | 1915-1998 | Artist | DC Comics | Batman |
| Jack Kirby | 1917-1994 | Artist | Marvel Comics | Captain America |
| Joe Kubert | 1926-2012 | Artist | DC Comics | Sgt. Rock |
| Stan Lee | 1922- | Editor / Writer | Marvel Comics | Line-wide Editor |
| Marvin Levy | 1925- | Artist | Freelance / Chesler | Line-wide Artist |
| Jack Liebowitz | 1900-2000 | Publisher | DC Comics | Ran DC Comics |
| Sheldon Mayer | 1917-1991 | Editor / Artist | DC Comics | Line-wide Editor |
| Sheldon Moldoff | 1920-2012 | Artist | DC Comics | Batman |
| Martin Nodell | 1915-2006 | Artist | DC Comics | Green Lantern |
| Jerry Robinson | 1922-2011 | Artist | DC Comics | Batman |
| Lewis S. Schwartz | 1926-2011 | Artist | DC Comics | Batman |
| Alvin Schwartz | 1916-2011 | Writer | DC Comics | Line-wide Writer |
| Julius Schwartz | 1915-2004 | Editor | DC Comics | Line-wide Editor |
| Joe Shuster | 1914-1992 | Artist | DC Comics | Superman |
| Jerry Siegel | 1914-1996 | Writer | DC Comics | Superman |
| Joe Simon | 1913-2011 | Writer | Marvel Comics | Captain America |
| Dick Sprang | 1915-2000 | Artist | DC Comics | Batman |
| Mort Weisinger | 1915-1978 | Editor | DC Comics | Line-wide Editor |

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