A Rejection of Order: The Development of the Newspaper Comic Strip in America, 1830-1920

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A REJECTION OF ORDER, THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEWSPAPER COMIC STRIP IN AMERICA, 1830-1920

by

Elsa A. Nystrom

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Finally, I would not have been able to complete this work without the cooperation and constant nagging of my husband Chuck and my children, with special thanks to Justin who led me through the computer maze.
VITA

The author, Elsa Ann Hohenstein Nystrom, is the daughter of Ernest Hohenstein and Regina (Holechko) Hohenstein. She was born June 25, 1936 in Chicago, Illinois.

Her elementary education was obtained at St. William School, Chicago, Illinois. Her secondary education was completed in 1954 at Notre Dame High School, Chicago, Illinois. In the same year, she married Charles H. Nystrom in Chicago, Illinois.

In June, 1961, she received the associate in Arts degree with High Honors from Chicago City Junior College, Wilbur Wright Branch. In June, 1977 she received the Bachelor of Arts Degree with Highest Distinction from Judson College, Elgin, Illinois, also receiving a scholarship award.

In September, 1977, Mrs. Nystrom was granted an assistantship in history at Loyola University of Chicago, enabling her to complete the Master of Arts Degree in January, 1980. While attending Loyola, she was elected to the Chi-Mu Chaper of Phi Alpha Theta, in 1978. Her assistantship was extended to allow her to complete her studies for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1981, and she received a Schmitt Doctoral Fellowship for 1981-82.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................... ii

VITA ............................................................................... iii

Chapter

I. Introduction .................................................................. 1
II. America Demands to be Amused ....................... 10
III. Preparing a Medium For the Masses ............... 51
IV. The First Generation Family
    And Their Friends ............................................... 107
V. The Comics, An Endangered Species ............ 159
VI. The Syndicates Take Charge ......................... 192
VII. Comic Strips Triumphant ............................... 228
VIII. Epilogue ............................................................. 286

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................... 297
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1986, more than 22,000 people of all ages, responded to the Chicago Tribune's comic survey.\(^1\) Printed on the front page of the Sunday Comic section, the survey attempted to measure the popularity of the Tribune's comics. Readers were asked to place all the comics in three categories; read regularly, occasionally or never. They were also asked to name their three longtime favorites, three favorite new comics, and three they hated the most. Survey respondents were grouped by sex and divided into three age brackets, 18-34, 35-55 and over 55.

At the present time, the Tribune prints a total of thirty-eight daily and Sunday comics, including the survey's most popular, Charles Schultz' Peanuts, and the most hated, Doonesbury, which has been a source of controversy since its debut in 1970.

The survey's findings were based on the tabulation of 2,000 randomly selected ballots and its results are an indication of the public's longterm involvement with the comics. Peanuts, which originated in 1950, has had amazing staying power. It was the reader's first choice in 1983, and is still number one. It was followed by For Better or Worse (3rd in 1983), Hagar the Horrible (5th in 1983), Beetle Bailey (2nd in 1983), and Blondie (7th in 1983) and still very popular in its 57th year. As might be expected, the readers' preferences varied somewhat according to age and sex, but the most

\(^1\)This was more than three times the response to its last survey, held in 1983.
interesting aspect of the survey for an historian, is the reader attachment to long-running strips such as *Gasoline Alley* (1918), *Little Orphan Annie* (1924), *Blondie* (1930) and *Barney Google* (1919).\(^2\)

Surveys like the Tribune's are serious business. They are carefully studied by trained market analysts because the newspaper management knows that more than 100 million Americans read the Sunday comics every week in one of the 1,700 papers published in the United States. Only the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and USA Today have rejected the use of comic strips and the comics are the most widely read printed material published in America today. Modern newspaper editors are extremely sensitive to the importance of the comics as a circulation builder and are very aware of their readers' loyalty to their comic favorites.

A number of survey respondents also included thoughtfully critical, analytical and nostalgic letters with their ballots. Harry Rohde and Mark Rosenfelder (18-34 age group) wrote the following about a new favorite...

*Calvin and Hobbes* is the best thing since Peanuts, wildly imaginative, wonderfully sarcastic and drawn with a craft worthy of the comic strip art form. It's a difficult decision whether to save Calvin for last, like dessert, or to pounce on it at once...

Concerning their dislikes they wrote...

*Barney Google, Moon Mullins, The Phantom, Dick Tracy and Gasoline Alley* seem to be retained mainly for nostalgia's sake... *Broomhilda* has been drowning in mediocrity for

\(^{2}\)Chicago Tribune, Sunday 4 January 1987, Tempo, p.3.
years...*Sherman on the Mount* is an insult to Christians. Its so cloyingly sweet, it makes us thirsty.\(^3\)

Another reader, Bernice Jackle of Chicago, provides a thoughtful commentary on the continuity of comics.

I am a great-grandmother and have read the comics for more years than I care to remember--first as a child in a frugal house that purchased only a Sunday paper, always the *Trib*, of course, and then as a young wife and mother of four. There are many happy memories recalling Sunday afternoons--all five of us, Mom, Nancy, Judy, Bill, Dan and Chris the dog lying on our tummies reading those "neat" colored cartoon strips--part of our family tradition. Now that our children are grown, married and far away I read and enjoy them alone. It's the first feature I turn to after my husband has finished the Jumble and Crossword. I would hope the tradition continues with our children, for so much can be gained--lessons learned, laughter and mirth and the challenge of good humor and devious puns. Of course times change and we do too, but I would hope that the little beings with the balloons of fun and joy will continue.\(^4\)

Many powerful and famous Americans have admitted their continued interest in the comics. The list includes a number of presidents from Woodrow Wilson to Ronald Reagan, as well as industrialists like Henry Ford. However the real key to the durability and significance of the comics is the long-term loyalty of millions of daily readers.

American involvement with the comics goes back almost a century to the heyday of the *Yellow Kid* and the *Katzenjammers*. During this period, Americans have not only read the comics, they have spent millions of

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\(^3\) Ibid.  
\(^4\) Ibid.
dollars on comic-related merchandise from toys to t-shirts. In addition, they have enjoyed songs, musicals and motion pictures based on comic strip characters. At least two comic strip characters, *Pogo* and *Snoopy*, have been mentioned as possible presidential candidates.

Historians can use this valuable and enduring popular art form to further their understanding of American society and culture. The purpose of this study is to determine, through a look at its nineteenth century roots, the reasons for America's enduring fascination with the newspaper comic strips. At the same time, I want to define the conflict between the genteel middle-class and working class cultures that shaped the development of American mass entertainment in the progressive era.

Americans have long appreciated a certain amount of graphic and visual humor, but the newspaper comic strip is unique in that it became almost an instant commercial success from its first appearance in major urban centers. By looking at nineteenth century arts, entertainment, communication systems and culture, one sees a pattern of cultural preconditioning that shows how American society was prepared for the advent of the newspaper comic. The gradual inclusion of humor and graphics in newspapers and magazines after the Civil War whetted the appetites of American readers for more and better comics. This conditioning process can also be found when the parallel development of other mass entertainments in the same period are investigated. The comics were an important part of a
larger movement that initiated the development of a mass entertainment system in America.5

To completely understand this conditioning, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the development of graphic arts as a business. It is also important to examine how artists in nineteenth century America were trained.6 Finally it is impossible to place the comics in their context without an overview of the newspaper business which provided the medium for the comics.

Because the comics are a unique blend of entrepreneurship and artistry, made possible by modern technology and communication systems, their formative period is especially important as a source for insights into the values of American society and culture. The comics were possibly the most responsive to their audience and the least conformist of the mass entertainments. Even after they became big business, they retained a large measure of their rowdy and irreverent nature, a working class rather than middle class heritage. Their development also serves as a model both for the durability of the Protestant work ethic and as a Horatio Alger-like

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glorification of "pluck and luck" combined with self-improvement and business success.

In the same way, an analysis of the comic strips and their creators in the first two decades, provides an interesting model that shows how mass culture was a powerful expression of democratic society in early modern America. The comics retained the individualistic native humor of the frontier, along with a celebration of childhood and freedom that was a counter to more conservative messages of other entertainments like the movies. Despite considerable pressure, the comics have continued to remain sensitive to the needs and interests of mass society.

Yet for all their importance, Comic strips have been largely ignored by scholars. Recently, a number of books on individual comics have been published. The two best general works remain Jerry Robinson's *An Illustrated History of Comic Strip Art* and Coulton Waugh's *The Comics*. They are particularly interesting because both were written by men who had long careers as cartoonists and thus provide some professional insights and analysis of the comics scene. In addition, a number of other books about the comics have been written by both American and European authors, although the comics have yet to be placed in their proper historical perspective. The continued success of well-written magazines such as

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Cartoonist Profiles, Comics Journal and Nemo, which provide biographical sketches of cartoonists along with reprints and analysis of both old and new comic strips, prove a lively and continuing interest in comic strips and cartoonists. In addition, there are now two museums devoted to the preservation and study of comic strips, books, biographical material and assorted memorabilia. European scholars were the first to appreciate the importance of the comic strip and there are several European societies devoted to the study of comics, including the well-known Bande Desinee and SOCERLID. Unfortunately, American historians have shown little comparable interest in the comics.

Popular interest has sparked several controversies regarding the comic strips. Arguments continue over which strip was first, its date of publication and even about the proper definition of a comic strip. While intrinsically interesting, these problems have little effect on the overall study of the comics. Actually, it is almost impossible to pin down the date the first newspaper comic was printed, because comic strips appeared in many places at approximately the same time. Some strips survived, others have been lost and forgotten.

Flint, 1942). Unfortunately, the research in some of these volumes is superficial and many contain contradictory information.

8 The Museum of Comic Art, in Port Chester, New York, and The San Francisco Academy of Comic Art, San Francisco, California.
The issues are further confused by the definition of a comic strip. Some authorities disqualify panel strips (a comic having only one large square or oblong box), while others insist that comic strips should have both text and pictures.

For the purpose of this study, my definition requires a newspaper comic strip to have a general theme, regular publication in a newspaper or magazine, and a format of either one large frame or a series of boxes or panels, running either horizontally or vertically across a newspaper page. Text, whether located in speech balloons or elsewhere in the box, should not be more important than the pictures.

A strip may feature a continuing cast of characters or a particular location. Each strip may be complete in itself or part of a series. In addition, the strip must have a verbal or visual message of humorous or dramatic content. A study of American comics reveals that most comics also take a definite moral stance, either positive or negative. In other words, comic strips are a popular art form, appearing on a regular basis, either daily or weekly, which provide a graphic commentary of interest to the newspaper's mass audience.

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9 Although comic strips are popular today throughout the world, the term "comic strip" is used mainly in English-speaking countries in referring to comics published in newspapers. The French use a more literal term, "bande desinee" (drawn strip). The Germans call them "bilder-geschichte" (picture story), while the Italian term is "fumetto" (puff of smoke) referring perhaps to their ephemeral quality or more likely the speech balloon. Note that the word "comic" is used only by English-speakers, possibly to proclaim their function as popular entertainment.

10 A cartoon has been defined for centuries merely as a drawing. The modern cartoon has a more narrow definition. It differs from a comic strip in that it is a humorous sketch that usually has one idea and is more topical and dated, tied to a particular news event, for example or directed at a specific political figure.
I am interested in tying together the many forces and conditions—human, geographic, economic, sociological and technological—that combined in the development of the comic strip between 1830 and 1920. The comics became a successful American fixture as a result not only of cultural conflict but also from the actions of a complex series of historical forces. At the same time, I will analyze how and why they were immediately accepted by the American public. This examination thus includes a close look at their style, content and creators. The comic strip industry is particularly worthy of study because it developed in what later became known as the typical American style, a combination of artistry, technology, marketing, cultural trends and big business.

The evolution of this fascinating art form was a gradual process that resulted in the production of a uniquely American comic graphic directed at a mass audience. Whether this product was a positive force or a worthless and possibly negative ephermera, it reveals many of the underlying values hopes and dreams of its ordinary readers.
CHAPTER II

AMERICA DEMANDS TO BE AMUSED

Despite depressions, wars and cultural conflicts, comic strips have remained the most popular form of mass entertainment in America for almost one hundred years. They are found not only in the comic section of almost every daily and Sunday newspaper, but on clothing, bulletin boards and television. Comic strip characters like Garfield then "fat cat" tout the virtues of the Embassy Suites Hotels while Snoopy the beagle sells everything from breakfast cereals to golf bags. ¹ The comics have become an integral part of American life in the eighties. Even Metropolitan Life, the dignified dowager of the insurance business startled its competitors by committing the bulk of a $25 million advertising budget into a campaign based on the Peanuts comic strip. ² As Bob Weinstein, Metropolitan's assistant vice president of marketing explained...

"We did a lot of focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Every time we showed a Peanuts ad to people they responded, nine out of ten times, positively." ³

¹ In the first year that the national chain used fickle feline Garfield to advertise its hotels, calls to their hotels rose 150%. Embassy Suites then increased its 1987 ad budget $4 million, to $10 million a year. Embassy's Judy Heinrich called Garfield the ideal pitchman, "He cares most about the things we offer: eating and sleeping and being pampered." The use of popular comic strip characters is part of a growing trend, says Jeanne Gibbons of the Graphic Artists Guild. "Advertisers get an adorable, instantly recognizable character who is perceived as a celebrity without all the hassle of a celebrity." Jeanette Willis, USA Today (12 October 1987), p. 4B. In other words, comic strip personalities are controllable and won't step out of character in a way that might damage product appeal.

² Metropolitan inserted an expensive full-page color advertisement in Life Magazine, featuring Snoopy the beagle. Life Magazine, Fall 1987, 119. Linus's security blanket and Charlie Brown's harried everyman personality also have great appeal.

³ Northwest Herald, 7 August 1985, Section b, 10.
How did comics become so important to Americans? There is no simple answer to this question but it is obvious that comic strips were one result of a number of forces at work in America during the nineteenth century. The most important of these were the changes in both middle and working class society brought by industrial expansion and the coming together of an American culture. These changes, in turn, triggered other responses that eventually resulted in a recognition of the need for mass-produced entertainment generated outside the home.

Although change was in the air as early as the 1830's, the pace of expansion and urbanization increased rapidly after the Civil War. The divisive struggle that racked the United States between 1861 and 1865 destroyed more than bodies, hopes and dreams. It helped break down customs and standards that had been set in place over a hundred years, yet at the same time, stimulated the spread of an urban "machine culture". For good or ill, it accelerated the pace of industrial expansion and social change. America was on its way to becoming a complex interdependent urban society; one that would demand mass entertainments.

Yet long before the Civil War, as early as 1820, there were signs that an American culture had begun to develop, at least in the cities and towns. It is possible, after reading the newspapers and magazines of the time, to see that most, regardless of class accepted certain general values as distinctly and

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The most important of these values were patriotism, chauvinism, a loudly voiced belief in God, the acceptance of a rudimentary and diluted Calvinistic moral code, a desire to reform society, a belief in the possibility of individual success (aggressive individualism) and the establishment of separate social roles for men and women. Although many of these values originated in the middle-class, they were generally accepted by most Americans, regardless of their social status. At the same time, after 1840, there was an increasing acceptance of British Victorian standards by the new American bourgeoisie.

Patriotism was a virtue promoted most sincerely throughout the United States in ante-bellum America. The exploits of the founding fathers had been glorified and many young men longed to prove themselves on the field of battle as their grandfathers had. George Washington, in particular, was commemorated in numerous works of literature and art as the father of a new land no longer in thrall to the mother country. The Fourth of July, America's birth-date, was then the most important national holiday, celebrated with extensive oratory, parades and fireworks.

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5. Thomas C. Cochran states..."Despite regional variations and the growing influence of the frontier and the older West, the traditional American values had by 1850 a recognizable degree of national uniformity. Not only de Tocqueville and Grund but also the ascerbic Mrs. Trollope, who stayed longer in the South than in the North, spoke of Americans as one people...Although specific values and norms differed, particularly from South to North, there were surprisingly large uniformities in activities and attitudes towards life. White citizens in all regions believed in the unique greatness of America, in some version of democracy, in racism, utilitarianism, activity rather than contemplation, material success under capitalism, and Evangelical Protestant Religion. Thomas C. Cochran, A Challenge to American Values (New York: Oxford U.P., 1985), 43.


7. The dark side of this patriotic fervor was a fascination with militarism, bloodshed and violence and the glorification of war. Violence has always been an integral part of the comics, albeit in a fantasy world.
Most Americans believed that success was available for those who worked hard because God would surely favor them. There was, as a result, a great interest in education and self-improvement, but almost always for practical or useful purposes. This belief in the availability of success was accompanied by an aggressive expansiveness. There seemed no limits to the potential of both individual and nation.  

Americans often proclaimed outwardly that everything in their country was the best; the air, the scenery, the democratic political structure, ... yet many secretly harbored feelings of cultural inferiority. For example, there was considerable interest in, and imitation of European paintings and a corresponding rejection of native work. British novelists were very much in demand. American architects re-created both European and classical building forms without producing any native designs except for the log cabin. In addition, a growing demand for instructional books of manners and etiquette seemed to indicate a feeling that Americans were lacking in social graces. Yet they continued their chauvinistic boosterism and even "the sun shone more brightly on Americans, God's chosen people." 

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8 "In a world that seemed to have jumped the old restraining ruts—where a Cornelius Vanderbilt could ride the new transportation systems to a fortune and a skillful Yankee carpenter such as Thomas Rogers could become one of the nation's leading locomotive manufacturers—the dream of success was hardly to be escaped. It rose in close correlation with economic growth gathering strength in the 1830's and 1840's and turning into a flood after the middle of the century." Daniel T. Rogers, The Work Ethic in Industrial America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Also see John Higham, From Boundlessness to Consolidation, The Transformation of American Culture from 1848-1860 (Ann Arbor: William Clements Library, 1967), particularly page 26, and "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890's" from Writing American History, Essays on Modern Scholarship (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1970).


10 Bode, Anatomy of American Popular Culture, X-XI.
Religious activities were very important to Americans, regardless of the sincerity of their belief in God. Most attended church regularly and had an optimistic belief in the progress of mankind. Middle-class churchmen still were very influential while middle-class reformers of both sexes supported humanitarian and social reforms such as abolition, temperance and women's rights. The American Bible Society labored mightily to place a Bible in every home and the American Tract Society distributed millions of religious leaflets and bound volumes of pious works. ¹¹

In addition, middle-class Americans wholeheartedly accepted Victorian ideals of modesty, propriety and social behavior. In Victorian society, gender roles were strictly defined. This was the age of the manly, heroic male and the pious virtuous woman. Joined in holy wedlock, their family was made complete with the addition of a sweetly angelic child. The sentimental fiction of the period often portrayed an idealized family as the source of all happiness. ¹²

A review of the basic values held by ante-bellum Americans is important because they provided the cultural base for American society before the Civil War. It is likely that only the WASP members of the middle-class, a relatively small minority, subscribed to all of these beliefs.

¹¹ Ibid., pp.XIII,XIV.
¹² As the Rev. J.N.Danforth put it in The Token of Friendship, (1844) "Home is the palace of the husband and the father. He is the monarch of that little empire wearing a crown that is the gift of heaven." quoted in Bode, 272. Bode further states that in engravings of the time, the wife's wide eyes dwell submissively on him (the husband) and he looks nobly up to heaven or out in the distance. In ante-bellum period literature, no wife dominates her husband if he shows any manliness at all. Only when he shows weakness, does the wife assert herself...In real life, ante-bellum women were probably little different from modern women in ability but were constantly relegated by society to an inferior position, legally, economically and socially. These positions were reinforced by the literature of the time.
The majority of Americans lived in the unsettled frontier or had recently emigrated from Europe. However, this minority was very significant particularly in the North where the bourgeoisie controlled the institutions of culture and industry.\textsuperscript{13}

After the Civil War, there were a number of changes and additions to the original cultural patterns. The base culture remained in evidence, but many Americans began to re-evaluate some of their traditional beliefs and time honored customs. Although the submissive wife was still the ideal in both the literary world and polite society, more middle-class women sought independence and self respect in the work force. This trend was reinforced by the large number of working-class women, both native born and immigrant, who worked out of necessity.\textsuperscript{14}

Male-female relationships underwent a subtle change during the post war period in the sense that gender roles became even more sharply defined. Pioneer men and women had worked together on the farm and in home industries because cooperation was necessary for survival. With survival no longer in doubt, men took the role of breadwinner while women were assigned to the role of mother and homebody, if this was

\textsuperscript{13} See Rodgers,\textit{The Work Ethic}, 15, 16.

economically feasible. This new importance of "true womanhood" was further reinforced by Victorian Convention.\textsuperscript{15} Despite the problems this stereotype caused, many middle-class women who could afford to stay home began to believe in the importance of this role. They soon considered certain aspects of family life their special sphere. Spending money to equip the home with the latest in furniture and accessories and selecting fashionable clothing for their children became major concerns. Society encouraged women to become absorbed in such activities. Even the new women's colleges such as Vassar and Mount Holyoke promoted these values to some extent.\textsuperscript{16} At the same time, there was increasing pressure on the male to succeed in the business world, which was much farther away from home as the middle-class moved to the suburbs.\textsuperscript{17} This new "suburban America" was increasingly run by women whose husbands were absent for long hours at work during the week.

Changing social rules in the post-war years, also caused a major reversal in parental attitudes regarding children. The Puritan belief that

\textsuperscript{15} A "true woman" was one who fulfilled her role as wife and mother, while "unwomany women" remained single and pursued a career. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," \textit{American Quarterly}, 18 (Summer 1966). Social conventions did not reckon the fact that Civil War carnage had left thousands of women widows or spinsters.

\textsuperscript{16} These colleges were founded to provide women with a course of studies equal to those of the finest men's schools. However, as more women attended college, courses were changed and added and college administrators, often men, promoted college as a "finishing school" for marriage or inserted "practical courses" in homemaking as a preparation for the future. See M. Carey Thomas, "The Future of Women's Higher Education," in Mount Holyoke College, \textit{The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary} (South Hadley, Mass: 1913).

\textsuperscript{17} Even though America was still more rural than urban, suburbs as we know them today began to spring up outside the perimeter of the larger cities even before the Civil War. See Henry C. Binford, \textit{The First Suburbs: Residential Communities on the Boston Periphery, 1815 - 1860} (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1985). Binford shows that suburbs existed on the urban fringe long before the transportation revolution. Businessmen eventually traveled to work on the new commuter railroads and electric trains.
children were sinful creatures who needed firm discipline was gradually replaced by the feeling that children should be nourished, loved, and indulged, at least among wealthier families where children did not have to work. Thus many children had considerable license as early as the 1830's when Alexis de Tocqueville and Mrs. Frances Trollope commented on the democratic and willful behavior of American children. Forty years later, childish manners had not improved. Many books and sketches of the time relate as humorous vignettes, pranks that would be considered outrageous by today's standards. This problem was not helped in the middle-class home by the absence of the father at work and the mother's insistence on a public style of restrictive dress and behavior for children that encouraged private rebellion. Another side-effect of these changing roles, was the development of an industry devoted to youth-related products which

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19. See Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (New York: Random House, Modern Library edition, 1981) on the influence of democracy on the family, 477-483. See also, Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (New York:Vintage Books,1949) reprint of 1832 edition,213. "I have conversed with many American ladies on the total want of discipline and subjection which I observed universally among children of all ages, and I never found any who did not both acknowledge and deplore the truth of the remark."

included books, toys and elaborate clothing, that were purchased mainly by women.

The general attitude towards work had not altered during the post-war period, despite the other changes in society. Most Americans still believed in the theory that hard work would bring financial success. Yet it seemed that great rewards came to an increasingly smaller number, a chosen few. In actual fact, the gulf between the ultra-rich and poor did increase at this time, despite the growth of industry and the GNP. Many socio-economic groups, including farmers, workers, immigrants and blacks, found themselves blocked from climbing the ladder to prosperity and influence. Because of restrictive Victorian conventions, genteel middle-class women, despite their secure social status, felt trapped by the failure of the Women's Rights movement to gain the vote and more equal rights. Since the established social order denied most of them careers in the public sphere, they increasingly directed their interest and energies towards their homes and families.

Immigrants from many nations poured into the United States in increasing numbers after the Civil War, lured by dreams of riches and freedom and the letters of their relatives already in the promised land. Most of these later immigrants were poor. Uneducated and unskilled, they looked for a better life. Instead many found misery in the squalid tenements

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22 Between 1840 and 1880, approximately 9 million immigrated to America. Between 1880 and 1900, another 9 million came. New York City, had a population of which eighty percent were foreign born or of foreign parentage. Ibid., 105-106.
of cities such as New York, Boston and Chicago. Recent immigrants flocked to these cities between 1880 and 1920. After 1875, they were joined by growing numbers of Southern blacks looking for opportunity and advancement in the North. This rapid rise in urban population caused an acute housing shortage and resulted in the formation of large urban ghettos.

Even before the Civil War, many upper class urban residents viewed with alarm the increasing numbers of the "dangerous classes", mainly homeless children and young men who lived off the streets. Serious plans were made for their control, education and reform, as early as 1853 when the Children's Aid Society was founded in New York City. The Society voiced its fears regarding the threat these uneducated, uncontrolled and potentially rebellious masses posed to the established society in its first annual report (1854).

They will vote--they will have the same rights as we ourselves, though they have grown up ignorant of moral principle, as any savage or Indian. They will perhaps be embittered the wealth and luxuries they never share. Then let society beware, when the vicious reckless multitude of New York boys, swarming now in every foul alley and low street, come to know their power and use it.

23 There is an enormous amount of relatively new material on all facets of the immigrant experience in America. Alan M. Kraut, The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921 (Arlington Hts. IL: Harlan Davidson,1982) contains an excellent bibliographic essay on this literature.

24 Urban population increase was greatest during the decade 1880-1890, particularly in the Northeast. The population of New York City rose from 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 and Chicago from 500,000 to 1,000,000. Philadelphia reached 1,000,000 and Brooklyn, Boston, Baltimore and St. Louis were all over 500,000. By 1880, there were fifty million Americans, 22.7% of them lived in cities over 8,000. In 1900, there were seventy-six million, and 32.9% lived in cities. For more information see Blake McKelvey, The Urbanization of America, 1860 to 1915 (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers U.P.: 1969) and Schlesinger's classic, The Rise of the City 1878-1898,(New York:Macmillan,1932).
Yet having whetted its appetite during the Civil War, industry continued to increase its production of raw materials, durable goods and luxury items. Immigrants provided a never-ending source of cheap labor for its factories, mines and mills. They also bought the new cheap, factory-made clothing and durable goods. Yet although the immigrants were necessary for American financial success, they were often rejected by the native born. Both immigrants and the urban poor were viewed as carriers of crime, disease and revolution by more successful Americans. Middle and upper class fears increased as urbanization and public transportation allowed the classes to mingle at work and play in the shops and public places of the city. Children's Aid Society founder, Charles Loring Brace wrote in 1880,

"Like the rats, they were too quick and cunning to be often caught in their petty plunderings so they gnawed away at the foundations of society undisturbed."25

Increasing familiarity with the environment of the urban poor reinforced the middle-class belief that they must be controlled and Americanized. One form of control would, of course, be in the development of entertainments that allowed these urban masses to let off steam.26 This

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5 In 1860, there were 140,000 industries of all types, in 1880, 250,000 and in 1900, more than 500,000. In each of these twenty year periods, the number of people employed in industry doubled. Overall industrial production had its greatest increase between 1880 and 1900. See Historical Statistics, 220-255.


26 Clergymen who preached the social gospel also recognized the plight of the urban poor and their need for recreation. Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladding, and others worked both to alleviate urban poverty and promote wholesome amusements for the urban poor. See Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1912), 441-442.
problem became critical when the United States Census Bureau announced in 1890, that the frontier was closed. It was no longer possible to believe that these undesirables could be shipped off into the vast unpopulated heartland of America. The "safety valve" theory was no longer operable if ever it had been. However, even the more-privileged classes felt the rapidly multiplying restrictions of a society increasingly rule-bound and confining. The more far-sighted regretted the destruction of national resources and the destruction of the free wilderness in the name of progress. They too would find a need for manufactured amusements. 27

The expansion of the cities, rapid growth in urban population, and increased commerce and production created huge problems in logistics. It was obvious to a widely distributed group of middle-class leaders and professionals, (grouped together by historians as the progressives,) that reform and organization was needed if America was to develop to its highest potential. 28 This group was also concerned about providing some space and recreational facilities where the masses could let off steam and perhaps be educated as well. The progressives felt that newspapers and magazines could be a positive force for good in American society, providing a model for the education of the masses in patriotism, morality and culture. However, strangely enough, as society itself became more organized and

27 For different insights on a variety of mass entertainments see John Higham's "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890's", in Writing American History, Lewis Erenberg's Steppin' Out, John F. Kasson's Amusing the Million, Lary May's Screening Out the Past and Albert F. McLean's American Vaudeville as Ritual.

regulated, newspapers became more daring and outspoken. The penny press, directed at the lower classes, acted as a mass forum for the people of the city. By the end of the century, the mass press had taken over the function of social arbiter which had traditionally belonged to the genteel elites.29

The possibility of an urban crisis forced both the traditional established upper-middle class leaders and "nouveau riche" business tycoons to re-evaluate their attitudes towards leisure time for the masses. They realized that although most Americans were still committed to hard work by the Protestant ethic basic to their culture, many people were also eager to be entertained in their leisure hours. Middle-class Americans felt that the traditional social club of the poor, the saloon, was an evil influence yet they were reluctant to allow the masses entry into genteel amusements. Obviously some new forms of entertainment were needed. Thus although the popular mass amusements of the nineties had existed for some time, they were used in a different way. Class barriers were lifted as the new-style entertainments provided something for everyone, regardless of wealth, social position or sex. The genteel middle-class feared these new amusements because they were heterosexual, rather than male-oriented and

29Emily Rosenberg credits the "purveyors of mass culture" with replacing the missionaries and philanthropists as leaders in world-wide cultural expansion. She feels that the American yellow press influenced the major European papers as well since the London Daily Mail even hired one of Hearst's editors to Americanize it. As she points out, "America's mass culture was democratic in that it appealed to a broad social spectrum, but oligarchic in that it was carefully contrived and narrowly controlled. Appealing to the masses it could appear revolutionary yet by its ritualistic, escapist and standardized nature, it could also prove profoundly conservative." See Emily Rosenberg, Spreading the American Dream, American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 25-36.
they allowed the youth of both sexes to mingle unchaperoned in public places. 30

Aspiring entrepreneurs of all classes enthusiastically noted this growing demand for public amusement as a possible source of future income. At the same time, the progressives reluctantly decided mass entertainments were necessary for social control and might be a useful tool for mass education. Thus an increased demand for entertainment stimulated the development of new ideas in all social classes for completely different reasons. Encouraged by the demands a mass new audience, actors, musicians, writers and artists began to make their own rules. They broke away from the traditional ante-bellum format of the melodrama and the minstrel show. By the end of the century, several new forms of family entertainment, including motion pictures, vaudeville, amusement parks and of course the comics, had become part of the American scene. 31

There are several major issues that need to be clarified in order to more completely understand the development of the new amusements. Of primary importance for this study, is to see how comic humor become an integral part of the newspaper. It is also necessary to determine how

30 Jane Addams, The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets (New York: Macmillan, 1909) summed up the negative feelings of the genteel reformers who deplored the effects of cheap amusements on poor urban youth.

recreation and leisure become an accepted option for all Americans. Finally, it is necessary to understand how and why native American humor became a major industry as well as an integral part of American culture. The first problem is relatively easy to answer. The rapid expansion of the newspaper industry provided a perfect vehicle for the wide distribution of humorous material. Interest in newspapers and magazines was stimulated by a democratic society and an improvement and expansion of the educational system. In addition, compulsory education requirements were extended in many states. By 1890, almost sixty percent of white Americans of both sexes and one third of the black population attended school on a regular basis. However relatively few Americans attended high school or college at this time. In the cities, immigrant children were exposed to a school system dedicated to Americanize them and turn them into good citizens and workers. Despite overcrowding and poor facilities, a disciplined compulsory education had produced a semi-literate public that began to regard the printed page as a source of entertainment. Their thirst for inexpensive reading material was largely met by the new popular magazines, illustrated weeklies and the penny press. 32

Leisure time became a reality for increasing numbers of Americans after the Civil War. The beginning of labor reform had also caused a gradual reduction in the average number of hours spent each week in the

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32 Michael Schudson, Discovering the News, A Social History of American Newspapers (New York: Basic Books,1978) traces the development of the popular press from the 1830's. However, the penny press does not become a national force until the development of syndication, high-speed presses and rapid distribution systems.
workplace. No longer did a majority of urban workers labor relentlessly from dawn to dusk.33

The work habits of nineteenth-century Americans have been the subject of much recent study. Labor historians such as Herbert Gutman have shown that although workers in pre-industrial society often labored from dawn to dusk, they had a more casual relationship with their employer.34 The "boss" was often a member of the family or at least a close personal acquaintance. Even the early factories tended to be small, and the machinery simple and easy to use. Although there were no formal days off, workers often had lengthy lunch and dinner breaks. Absence was not considered a cause for dismissal and employees had considerable freedom. It was not unknown for large numbers of workers to take time off to go fishing. Entertainment often centered around the workplace and involved fellow workers. Lunches were lengthy and might include the consumption of large amounts of alcohol. At the same time, if a job needed to be completed, the boss could usually count on his workers to stay until it was finished. People probably worked as hard or harder than they do today but at their own pace. In the pre-industrial workplace, workers were not alienated or schooled by the machine. The need to escape workday pressures was not yet present because the workplace was less stressful and less structured.

33 Farmers continued to work long hours but they were able to set their own pace and were sometimes more in control of their lives. However, they also received some benefit from the new technology, but they often used the saved time to work harder. Those who adopted the new machines could farm more land, and have a greater yield with fewer laborers, but the machines were expensive. Many of the poorer or less successful farmers went into debt or sold out. The trend to consolidation began early in agriculture. See Peter C. Marzio, editor, A Nation of Nations (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 148.

Industrialization was to change both the employer-employee relationship and the pace of the workplace drastically. When costly machinery first replaced hand labor, the welfare of the machine became more important than that of the worker. Factories grew in size and the "boss" was no longer in daily contact with the workers. Factory "hands" were forced relentlessly to conform to the discipline of the machines which were often kept running non-stop to increase profits. In the new factory, workers had little freedom or energy for anything but work.

Gradually the pendulum began to swing the other way. The slow growth of labor unions and their fight for industrial reform and reduction of hours had some effect. The working poor also benefited to some extent from the beginnings of government regulation. Most now had some free time during the day for leisure, small though it might seem by today's standards. Certainly, the idea of a period when one could relax after a hard day's work existed in the nineteenth century despite the lingering influence of the "Protestant work ethic". Many middle-class managers even suspected that now workers were more interested in their recreation period than in enobling work itself. They also feared that a mass of idle workers might be a potential threat to society. However, after work, laborers and factory hands could visit a tavern and drink with their friends. They might also look at a newspaper or one of the new weekly tabloids such as Harper's Weekly or Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly. If they lived in the city, they could walk in the park or attend a minstrel or vaudeville show, or even visit an amusement park.

Middle-class families did not flock to the mass amusements at first because they did most of their entertaining at home. Their homes and
grounds were spacious and they had plenty of room for family gatherings as well as outdoor activities. The homes of the poor were usually small and crowded so they had accustomed to finding entertainment outside their living space.

The Protestant emphasis on the desirability of work and personal industry gradually evolved into an economic system that maximized efficiency and speed of production. Thus success of the American industrial system provided an increased amount of leisure time for the worker along with enormous profits for investors and developers. One unlooked for result was that America now had a leisure class of idle rich, not unlike the despised European aristocracy. Another, that the labor of the common worker was also less demanding. At the same time, the "Founding Fathers" insistence on the separation of church and state inadvertently helped to produce a secular and materialistic society. These factors combined to negate white Anglo-Saxon influence, eliminate moral authority and develop what can be described as the "fun lifestyle". Today, entertainment and leisure, rather than thought of as being evil or shameful, has become a necessity for all classes. The expansive modern entertainment industry provides an escape from the pressures of modern society. In the 1880's and 90's, the new-style mass newspapers were among the first to provide readily accessible entertainment for the masses. They were inexpensive and emphasized exciting features and stories as well as the tremendously popular new comic strips.

While the emergence of newspapers as a vehicle for comic entertainment and the changing attitude towards leisure is fairly easy to trace, determining the development of an American sense of humor and
the public recognition of the recreational benefits of laughter is a more complex matter. How did American popular newspapers and magazines noted for their serious, moralistic tone before the Civil war, gradually become involved with a comic industry worth millions of dollars? Furthermore, how did Americans begin to develop and appreciate their own individual sense of humor?

When the need for mass entertainment was finally perceived as a major issue, the pursuit of play quickly developed into a serious business. Recreation itself became a science directed by experts and specialists set the boundaries for play. Recreational play could not be mere idleness nor could it be entirely unstructured or spontaneous. The same society that approved a work ethic produced a play ethic almost as structured and rigid. Because middle America still feared a loss of control, there was considerable concern directed at any amusement that was spontaneous and liberating. Thus the path to the development of an American sense of humor was slow and difficult.35

There were relatively few American humorists of note during the period preceding the Civil War. Certainly, most people may have appreciated a good joke in private, but the bulk of the literature produced at this time was serious, mainly religious or political in content. The few humorous graphics that were produced had either a political theme or reached only a small genteel urban audience. This scarcity of illustrated humor was also due to high production and distribution costs; the technology for rapid and relatively inexpensive photogravure had not yet

arrived. It was not until advances in communication conquered distance, time and isolation, that a national sense of humor gradually emerged. By 1890, American culture had developed to the point where a mass urban audience was ready to appreciate humor on a country-wide, rather than a regional basis.

The political cartoon, the first form of graphic humor acceptable to Americans, has been popular from the colonial period to the present. It can be very funny but the humor is often negative, bitter and degrading. In addition, political humor is always topical and of the moment, lacking the continuity necessary for long term involvement. Directed at a particular audience, it aims to inform, change or polarize opinion; to move people, or shock them into action at a particular time. Political cartoons, at first printed on handbills, flyers or tearsheets, later became part of the newspaper itself. They were printed in a paper that was directed at the American male because he made all the necessary political decisions.

After the Civil War, an influx of new non-political cartoons tried to relate to other segments of society as well, in different ways. Post war graphic humor gradually became more visual than verbal and used illustrations rather than text to make its point. The new-style cartoons often evoked feelings of superiority, power or admiration, a gentle nostalgia for the past or an identification with the weak and helpless as well as the more traditional ridicule and satire. They also poked fun at or criticized the

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36 The first American political cartoon may well have been the segmented serpent drawn by Benjamin Franklin to illustrate the need for a united war effort. It was first printed in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 9 May 1754. It was a popular success and was reprinted in many other newspapers. See Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism, A History, 1690-1960, Third Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 54, reproduced on page 96.
institutions of the past and business tycoons of the present. The new style also featured characters who were familiar to the readers, including rustics or provincials, immigrants and members of minority groups, children and animals and even members of the middle class.  

The new graphic humor soon enjoyed a rapidly expanding national audience. However, certain areas of the United States which had a particularly large or powerful religious or ethnic population, were still able to influence the national culture. For example, the original German-language humor magazine *Puck* was initially successful because it contained fresh appealing material of particular interest to the large German community in St. Louis, Missouri, where it was first published. However, much of its humor also came from the broad mainstream of American culture provided by the general consolidation of urban culture in the late nineteenth century. *Puck* quickly gained popularity among non-Germans because its innovative graphics on general topics needed no translation. However, the Germans were also one of the most successfully assimilated and influential of the immigrant groups. German high culture was admired by the elites just as German immigrants became stock comic characters in mass amusements like vaudeville and comic strips. Consequently, the publication of an English-language version of *Puck* was a great success.

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37 For example, a sampling of the cartoons in the humor magazine *Puck* during 1885, includes many that satirize family life and immigrants, and others that are critical of business practices. The middle-class humor magazine *Life*, during the same period printed graphics featuring Palmer Cox' *Brownies*, some domestic and animal comics, and an hilarious cartoon by Kemble titled "New Years Day with the Puritans, New England Merrymaking in Olden Times". *Life*, Jan. 1885, pg. 11. This cleverly drawn double-page graphic portrayed a houseful of grim-visaged Pilgrims "enjoying themselves" on New Year's Day.
Conversely, areas with a strongly religious population have forced at least temporary changes in its comic population. We are all familiar with vestigious eighteenth and nineteenth century "Blue Laws" that prohibit entertainment on the Sabbath. What is not so well known is that early in the twentieth century, comics were dropped for a brief period in a number of cities due to pressure from churches, educators and parents. More recently, the large Mormon population of Salt Lake City, Utah rejected a comic strip in which an important character was seen smoking. At the same time, local interest groups often provide support for comic strips that do not have national appeal.

Because comic strips are an inseparable blend of art and humor, it is impossible to understand why this particular comic medium has proved so durable without surveying American attitudes towards both art and humor. Surprisingly, however, despite the fact that comics have been an important part of our culture for almost 100 years they have been largely ignored by scholars. The problem inherent in academic appreciation of the comics we have inherited a number of negative attitudes towards mass humor, recreation and leisure. In The Roots of American Culture, Constance Rourke suggested that the founding fathers, particularly Washington, Adams and Jefferson, were opposed to the fine arts because they regarded art as a luxury, a concept that was common in the age of kings and privilege.

38 See Martin Sheridan, Comics and Their Creators, 20-21.
39 For example, the feminist comic strip, Sylvia drawn by Nicole Hollander, is not nationally syndicated but does well in urban markets such as Toronto, Chicago and San Francisco.
Nevertheless, Washington and Jefferson saw some benefit in art if it were used to educate or uplift the population or had some other useful purpose. However, the emphasis in eighteenth and early nineteenth century America was on science and industry, the useful rather than the artistic.\textsuperscript{41} Benjamin Franklin, the most famous and influential American of his day argued that

All things have their season, and with young countries as with young men, you must curb their fancy to strengthen their judgment....To America, one schoolmaster is worth a dozen poets, and the invention of a machine or the improvement of an implement is of more importance than a masterpiece of Raphael....Nothing is good or beautiful but in the measure that it is useful: yet all things have utility under particular circumstances. Thus poetry, painting, music (and the stage as their embodiment) are all necessary and proper gratifications of a refined state of society, but objectionable at an earlier period, since their cultivation would make a taste for their enjoyment precede its means.\textsuperscript{42}

Most of America's founders had received at least the rudiments of a classical education, and were familiar with the literature of the Enlightenment. Two great philosophical theorists of this period, Pascal and Montaigne, had strong views on the nature and value of entertainment. It is likely that educated Americans of the revolutionary and early federal period were familiar with their work.

Pascal's views were similar to the Protestant(Puritan) values that became an important part of American culture. Influenced by traditional Judaeo-Christian beliefs, and the classical Greek heritage of Western culture, Pascal felt that man must constantly fight

\textsuperscript{41} John Adams argued that because arts were luxuries, there was no place for them in a democracy where the people were poor, had to work for a living and had no taste. Ibid,4.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.,2.
against his base nature and avoid recreational diversions that might keep him from salvation. He was an optimist who felt that salvation was possible, yet an ascetic who believed it would require discipline and the avoidance of self-indulgence and pleasure. Calvinist theology built on similar values, but added a belief in predestination that allotted salvation to only a few "elect". Pascal's ideas were later taken up by religious and secular reformers who wanted social and cultural change.

During the Enlightenment, the general attitude of the educated towards the masses was negative. Most felt they were heirs to sin and damnation, good only for the most brutal type of hard labor. This was reinforced by the contemptuous attitude of the upper classes toward the poor. Although the United States was considered a land of opportunity for the poverty-stricken, these eighteenth-century values lingered in the established areas of the North-east and South. While modern society has rejected most of these beliefs, they surface occasionally, particularly in attitudes regarding work and play, and self-denial vs. self-indulgence.

Montaigne's view of man and the nature of entertainment is modern in comparison, similar to Freud's vision of man as basically "discontent". Montaigne believed life was a struggle that produced feelings of fear, stress and anxiety. He felt that diversions were necessary to provide a needed "escape" from these pressures. His was a more pessimistic view of society. He thought man's basic nature and desires could not be changed, so he must make the best of a difficult situation. Although the average American would probably agree with Montaigne today, and his ideas do provide a raison d'être for the entertainment industry, they were not part of the base culture of the United States. The root of American
culture extends from New England Puritans who held Calvinistic beliefs, similar to those of Pascal.43

An understanding of these attitudes now somewhat diluted, provides a reason for the general contempt with which many intellectuals hold almost all forms of mass entertainment. Their doubts concerning the ability of the masses to absorb the finer things of life were reflected by the founders of country. Even though the comic strips can legitimately be considered part of folk culture, usually respected by scholars, they are seldom appreciated by the elites. Yet the inter-relationship of comic and cartoon art with the very fabric of American society and culture gives it some credibility as the unsophisticated expression of our society and culture.44

Even Marxism, the champion of the proletariat, rejected mass entertainments, although for different reasons. Classical Marxism held that...

the mass media of communication were artificial and exploitative in contradiction to genuine folk culture, and were used by the ruling classes to control the masses...through distorting the truth, through diverting energies from revolutionary activity to passive satisfaction with the status quo, through hiding from the masses the realities of their enslavement and at the same time forcing the masses to identify with bourgeois values rather than proletarian values.45

43 The argument for Pascal's and Montaigne's influence regarding mass entertainment is found in Harold Mendelsohn, Mass Entertainment (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1966), particularly Chapter 1, 20-22.
44 As Gilbert Seldes stated, "Of all the lively arts, the Comic Strip is the most despised, and with the exception of the movies, the most popular." The Seven Lively Arts (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1952), 193.
45 The Marxian doctrine of "false consciousness".
This theory completely ignores the fact that a considerable amount of mass entertainment in the United States is produced by members of the working or lower-middle class for their own consumption.

Psychoanalytic theory also provides an argument against popular entertainment. It relates to an individual's sub-conscious fear that in "letting himself go" he will surrender to self-indulgence rooted in libidinous fantasy. 46 Thus if entertainment is too compelling an individual may find himself out-of-control. Even if entertainment is necessary for the human psyche, it can still be regarded with mixed feelings of fear and desire. The lower classes seem to be little concerned with these fears and have embraced mass entertainment enthusiastically through the centuries. 47

Patrons of high culture feel that mass entertainment reduces culture to its lowest level, and turns people away from high culture. 48 Historically high culture has always been enjoyed by a very small percentage of society, yet access to high culture has measurably increased in the nineteenth and twentieth century despite the ready availability of mass entertainments. This seems to negate the argument of Hannah Arendt who wrote...

Mass society wants not culture but entertainment and the wares offered by the entertainment industry are indeed consumed by society just as are any other consumer goods. The products needed for

46 Harold Mendelsohn, Mass Entertainment, p.32.
47 In the 1890's and even later, the upper-middle class seemed instinctively aware of the dangers, and were constantly trying to control mass entertainment. See Kasson, Amusing the Million, Richard Edwards, Popular Amusements and Rollin Lynde Hart, People at Play (Boston:Houghton Mifflin,1909).
entertainment serve the life process of society, even though they may not be as necessary for this life as bread and meat. 49

She has given mass entertainment the same value as a hamburger, mindlessly consumed with no intrinsic value in itself. Yet an appreciation of mass entertainment can lead to an appreciation of high culture. Generally speaking, most Americans, regardless of their social class or education level enjoy some type of mass entertainment. The basic human need to escape pain and suffering which has existed from the beginning of civilization, has encouraged the development of many kinds of entertainment through the centuries. Yet only in the past hundred years has it been possible, at least in the United States, for a majority of people to have access to a variety of entertainments at all times. This seems a positive rather than a negative result of modern technology.

Mass entertainment is especially satisfactory because of its potential for repetition and continuity. In his study, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud noted that a compulsion to reproduce emotional experiences is an innate biological function of the human being. 50 If Freud's argument is valid, comic strips are an especially desirable form of mass entertainment because they can be recalled at will. In addition, they appear at the same time every day. Thus a person can look forward with pleasurable anticipation to a daily entertainment ritual celebrated with a newspaper (or television set). The continuity of mass entertainments like the comic strips and television programs is also important in reproducing a similar emotional response. If Freud's argument is combined with the belief that man is constantly

50 Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle (London: Hogarth, 1922).
searching for "happiness" beyond his reach, it does much to explain the constant demand for mass entertainment.

Despite the beneficial effects of mass entertainment, there has been an ongoing conflict between the elites and the masses regarding the viability of mass amusements. This was especially true after the Protestant reformation. New Protestant governments wanted to eliminate many popular celebrations because they were related to Catholic religious observance and contained vestiges of pre-Christian revelry. The Calvinist Puritans who settled in Massachusetts Bay subscribed to this belief especially in regard to public entertainments. Most Puritans would have agreed that...

Seeing the chief end of all religion is to redeem men from the spirit and vain conversation of this world, and to lead into inward communion with God, before whom if we fear always we are accounted happy, therefore, all the vain customs and habits thereof, both in word and deed, are to be rejected and forsaken by those who come to this fear;...as also the unprofitable plays, frivolous recreations, sportings, and gamings, which...divert the mind from the witness of God in the heart. 51

Despite a gradual reduction in the intensity of their religious beliefs, the Massachusetts Bay colonists remained concerned about the potential for sin in secular humor and entertainments. 52 In 1712, they passed "An Act

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52 This attitude sprang more from a concern that preoccupation with earthly pleasures might divert them from their chief goal in life, the glorification of God. However, many modern interpreters of Puritanism might have agreed with H. L. Mencken, the alienated social critic and intellectual who defined Puritanism as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." Mencken saw the Puritans as the direct ancestors of 20th century reformers who wanted the censorship of books and movies, promoted prohibition and desired a rigid and inhibited lifestyle. See Richard Schlatter, "The Puritan Strain", in John...
Against Intemperance, Immorality, and Profaneness, and for Reformation of Manners".\(^{53}\) The advance of secularism in Massachusetts was inherent in the need for this and many other laws directed against entertainment that made up the "Blue Laws" passed during the colonial period. Ongoing concern with the regulation of recreational activities does not mean that the Puritans never laughed, but rather that certain parts of their culture were sacred and had to be protected from the lowering and humiliating effects of laughter.\(^{54}\)

The corruption of the original meaning of the "Blue Laws" and increased importance of form rather than substance allowed a pervasive negative attitude towards mass entertainments to continue among the Puritans' heirs. Popular attitudes towards entertainment and humor in general were less rigid in the South and on the frontier, but these areas would not have as much immediate influence on the development of a national culture. The isolation and lack of urban centers on the frontier and in the ante-bellum South, kept them out of the main stream for a while.

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\(^{53}\) See W. Howland Kenney, ed., *Laughter in the Wilderness, Early American Humor to 1783* (Kent, OH: Kent State U.P., 1976), 8-9. The law stated...And whereas evil communication, wicked, profane, filthy and obscene songs, composures, writings or prints do corrupt the mind, and are incentives to all manner of impieties and debaucheries, more especially when digested, composed, or uttered in imitation or mockery of devotion or religious exercises...whosoever shall be convicted of writing, printing, publishing of any filthy, obscene or profane song, pamphlet, libel or mock sermon, in imitation or in mimicking of preaching or any other part of divine worship...shall be punished by fine...not exceeding twenty pounds, or by standing on the pillory once or oftene, with an inscription of his crime in capital letters affixed over his head.

Despite many cultural barriers to the development of mass entertainment, it was grudgingly accepted as a necessary evil. Our next step is to examine the nature of humor itself in order to fully understand how the distinctly American comic strip developed. Many authorities on humor have often stated that there are no new jokes. A study of the graffiti from Greek and Roman times reveals that the basic ideas for jokes have changed little over thousands of years. If this is true, how can comic strips be considered distinctly American? Despite the fact that the basic elements of humor are rarely new, each culture has a particular approach that makes its humor unique. The comics have retained their distinct personality partly due to their method of publication and distribution and partly from the input of their talented creators and vast audience.

To appreciate the comic it is important to determine as best we can, the essence of humor, that is, how and why we laugh. One of the most popular explanations of humor comes from the great political thinker, Thomas Hobbes, who wrote,

Sudden glory is the passion which maketh those grimaces called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men...  

55 See Robert Kempt, comp. The American Joe Miller, 1865. Many comic strip themes come straight from Joe Miller's Joke Book, first published in the seventeenth century. Some of the jokes found in this book date from Greek and Roman times.  

56 Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan.
According to Hobbes, the primary elements of humor are surprise and superiority. Henri Bergson further developed Hobbes' thesis, stating that humor resulted from the rigid or mechanistic action of humans in opposition of society.\textsuperscript{57} Bergson felt that laughter could be used as a means of social control. Judicious use of ridicule would force people to become aware of their eccentricities and conform to social rules. This type of humor is conservative and can be used as a powerful weapon by a group when directed at isolated and powerless individuals.

Freud developed Hobbes' thesis in a different way, using psychoanalysis. He felt that humor was a socially acceptable form of aggression that provided a way of releasing tension and anxiety.\textsuperscript{58} Humor could also gratify hidden and inhibited wishes. Freud also believed that all human tension was caused by feelings of anxiety about sex, excretion and aggression. For this reason, he felt that these three elements were the basis for all humor. Since Victorian convention forbade jokes about sex and excretion in polite society, most public or published comic humor was based on aggression during this period. The varied racial and ethnic backgrounds of the American population also utilized the therapeutic aggression of the ethnic joke. These jokes allowed the majority an opportunity to affirm its superiority, while acting as a safety valve that reduced harmful aggression. On the other hand, an ethnic joke told by a member of a minority about his own group could disarm a hostile audience. This type of joke sent a message

\textsuperscript{58}See Freud,\textit{Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious}(1905). It was acceptable to tell a nasty joke about your mother-in-law, but not to hit her with a club.
that the minority group knew its weaknesses, understood them, and was even proud of them. 59

Aggressive humor is easily translated into a comic cartoon and there are thousands of examples of violence in cartoons and comic strips of all types. In addition, because artists are trained observers of humanity, they are able to capture unorthodox or peculiar movements, forms, appearances, features or character traits, thus accentuating one's failings for the amusement of others. The caricature is a variation of the cartoon which utilizes these peculiarities. However, caricature works only if its subject is a celebrity of some kind. The caricaturist is often able to gain considerable power over his victim by an exaggeration of his features so grotesque, that it is humiliating and even degrading. 60 Caricatures of famous or notorious people have sometimes appeared within established comic strips.

The work of cartoonists, caricaturists and humorists takes as many forms as there are theories directed at explaining what causes laughter in human beings. Although there is no consensus, most modern theorists agree that the Freudian theory of aggression has some validity, because all types of humor contain some elements of aggression. Although most acts of violence are punished in real life, a certain amount of aggression is allowed under controlled circumstances. It is considered acceptable in childish entertainment, such as the mock cruelty of clowns, the playful and illusory

59 This method was used by several comic strip cartoonists, particularly McManus, Opper and Hershfield.
violence of slapstick comedy, and real violence of professional sports like football and boxing.  

Bergson's thesis that laughter or humor can be used to control deviance is in direct opposition to Freudian theory that laughter is critical of society and attacks established values. However both theories use aggressive laughter as the key, and people will laugh both at conformists and non-conformists depending on the circumstances.

Even Jesus used aggressive humor in the New Testament. He always directed laughter against the improper behavior of individuals and against established authority. The Man who provided the basis for Calvinist sobriety enjoyed eating and drinking and was often accused of associating with unsavory people of the lower classes, sinners and prostitutes.

Several successful twentieth century humorists had their own definitions of aggressive humor. Al Capp said several times that "the essence of humor is man's inhumanity to man", while Will Rogers wrote "Everything is funny as long as it is happening to someone else."  

The settlement of the North American Continent offered many opportunities for aggressive humor. The colonists often vented their feelings of hostility and inferiority by telling credulous European visitors tall tales about the wilderness. As a result, the European idea of what America was really like fluctuated between belief in a paradise flowing with

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61 Our taste for violent and aggressive entertainments has moderated somewhat since medieval times when people enjoyed public executions and bear-baiting. See Boston, An Anatomy of Laughter, 53


milk and honey to a cruel and violent jungle inhabited by fierce monsters and crude peasants. Most of the settlers deliberately did little to clear up this issue.

The proliferation of these tales resulted in the development of several popular regional stereotypes. The first of these stereotypes was the Yankee. This term originally referred to all colonists but by the time of the Revolutionary War specifically defined a resident of New England or a Down Easter. The Yankee was portrayed as gawky, awkward and shrewd, simple yet witty, and an ingenious practical joker.® Yankees were materialistic and interested in profitable business deals, yet anti-authoritarian and egalitarian. Benjamin Franklin, the quintessential American, was himself a superior version of the Yankee stereotype. During this period, many Americans, resentful of the superior attitudes of European visitors, rejected their European intellectual heritage and encouraged the Yankee myth. They preferred a society where learning and literature would be based on the events of ordinary life that the common man could understand.® While the Yankee remained as a regional stereotype, after the Revolutionary War, he was joined by Brother Jonathan. Jonathan was a generic term for all Americans which retained the characteristics of the Yankee, with a distinctly rustic flavor. Jonathan was definitely rural and an often object of fun in ill-fitting linsey woolseys, but despite his bucolic appearance he was a source of wry, understated humor.

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® See Mark Lipper, "Comic Caricatures in Early American Newspapers as Indicators of the National Character" (Ph.D. Diss. Carbondale: Southern Illinois U., 1972), 51.
and homely witticisms, known as *Jonathanisms*. The heroic frontiersman was another comic type of the wilderness. He was a rugged individualist who could outfight any creature, man or beast, in superhuman style. Everything about the frontier hero was larger than life and somehow uniquely American. The mythic frontiersman was a direct descendent of the gods and heroes of Greek mythology and Celtic legend. In America, these heroes were somehow closer to reality and came from many different parts of the country. Perhaps the wilderness shaped the American sense of humor just as much as Turner felt it shaped the American character. Max Eastman wrote that

Native humor became the core of a new popular culture acknowledged to be American. Newspaper caricatures evolved into folk heroes. Because America was too young as a nation to have serious mythic heroes, her demi-gods were born in laughter. They were consciously preposterous...cockalorum demi-gods.

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68 “Like Proteus, he assumed different forms. For James Fenimore Cooper he was Leatherstocking: for Owen Wister, the Virginian: on the Movie screen; Gary Cooper or Tom Mix; on television, Wyatt Earp; in the dime novel, Buffalo Bill; under the circus tent, Wild Bill Hicock; as a social rebel, Jesse James; as a woman, Annie Oakley; in oral tradition Davy Crockett or Mike Fink; in the North, Paul Bunyan; in the Southwest, Pecos Bill; on the Great Plains, Febold Feboldson; for the Indian, Geronimo; for the black, Deadwood Dick, For the Mexican, Joaquin Murieta.” See Robert V. Hine, *The American West, An Interpretive History* (Boston: Little Brown, 1984), 284-299.


70 Max Eastman, ”Humor and America” *Scribners*, July 1936, 10-12.
Certainly nineteenth century Europe had nothing that compared to *Paul Bunyan*, *Pecos Bill* or *Davy Crockett*. An American minister summed up the themes of nineteenth century American humor as follows...

First, there is the shock between business and piety. Secondly the shock of contrast between the Aboriginal and the Yankee. Lastly, the shock of contrast between the bigness of American nature and smallness of European nature, or, as for the matter of that, Human nature outside America.  

All of these root topics branched out and provided opportunities for the venting of feelings of fear and hostility. Although similar topics were used in other countries and times, American humor had something extra, a national habit of choosing sides and viewing things as right or wrong which gave much of our humor a pronounced moral bias. A democratic mindset combined with rampant individualism was also responsible for a marked sense of irreverence and ridicule. The anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism of the colonial and revolutionary period is still reflected in modern political cartoons and comic strips.

Early in the nineteenth century, there was a distinct sectional difference in the type of humor produced in America. In the northeast, a varied group of writers developed and polished the literary format of the humorous essay. This format was familiar to the residents of New England since the days of Benjamin Franklin and similar in style to the almanac, travel journal and anecdote. Their essays were published mainly in

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newspapers and the urban humor magazines that appeared sporadically between 1830 and 1870. In the south and southwest, humorous writing often took the form of the tall tale or myth. The frontier humor of this area is recognized today as the "real" American humor. It is the anti-intellectual, earthy, crude and folksy humor of the wilderness, more amoral and sensuous than *Down East* humor. After the Civil War, writers like Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Bret Harte and others developed a synthesis of frontier and *Yankee* humor in their books, poems and newspaper columns that were read by millions of Americans.  

Both northeast and southwest humorists worked in a set format which usually featured a central character who acted as both comedian and critic. A number of comic writers toured the lecture circuit assuming the characters of their literary creations, speaking and writing in dialect, and sometimes even included an artist to illustrate their programs. Northern humor whether the product of New York *Knickerbocker* or *Down East Yankee* had a more subdued and pessimistic tone than the boisterous expansive tales of the frontier. In New England, the Puritan heritage of ethical humanism was used to define the plight of man in a world where

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74 According to David E.E. Sloane, *The Literary Humor of the Urban Northeast, 1830-1890* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U.P., 1983), illustrators were an important part of American humor, even before the Civil War. He suggests that several of the early essayist Joseph C. Neal's best stories may have been written to accompany F.O.C. Darley's illustrations (Darley was the premier graphic artist of ante-bellum America. He also notes that Thomas Nast offered to illustrate Mark Twain's humorous lectures on stage as a joint business venture. Nast had already illustrated several of Mortimer Thomson's (Doesticks) stories and drew the character of Petroleum V. Naseby for "Swingin Round the Cirkle". Preface,.1.
political, social, economic and moral values were constantly changing. The cultural diversity of the northeast provided a wide variety of viewpoints but several primary themes were shared by all. These included the boasts of an expansionist democratic society, the love-hate relationship with technology and modernization, a contempt for big business, the yokel vs. the city slicker and American politics. Many of the northeastern humorists were professional newspapermen familiar with the urban scene who used it as a format for an active and idealistic social conscience. Some of the more famous writers of this school and their central characters were: Seba Smith's *Major Jack Downing*, T.C. Haliburton's *Sam Slick*, B.P. Shillaber's *Mrs. Partington*, Frances Witcher's *Widow Bedott* and James Russell Lowell's darkly satirical *Birdofredum Sawin*. All these characters were a variation of the Jonathan stereotype, which now included a Mrs. Jonathan. Seba Smith, a shrewd observer of the American scene, used an authentic rustic dialect and chose a name for his character that seemed familiar to Easterners. Even his hometown, Downingsville, seemed natural and true to form. As a result, *Jack Downing* was the most realistic of the Yankee characters. Shillaber's rustic *Mrs. Partington* used malaprops, a comic misinterpretation of events combined with misuse of the language to create comic effects. Frances M. Witcher, a talented New Yorker, wrote sketches of society that were "very

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75 Ibid., 3,43.
77 See Benjamin P. Shillaber, "Experiences During Many Years", *New England Magazine*, October 1893, 153.
much like the society in all growing villages. Mrs. Witcher caricatured the women of genteel society at their teas, feasts, donation parties and sewing circles. She portrayed them as talkative, uneducated, uncultured, pretentious and often malicious. The Yankee and Frontier humorists shared a comic style that featured the use of neologisms, faulty literary allusions, phonetic spelling and grammatical atrocities. The Easterners were more prone to understatement, while the Southerners and Westerners used exaggeration and hyperbole.

Although he was born in Missouri and often used western themes, Samuel P. Clemens, writing as Mark Twain, straddled both sections. Coming out of the midwest, he brought together a synthesis of Puritan values and traditional (Jeffersonian) democracy which he tried to integrate with the changing values of the modern world. Twain found much bitter and pessimistic humor in the clash between traditional ideals and modern technology.

The early Frontier humorists provided a more natural and earthy view of society. Their humor was in some ways more cynical and yet more optimistic than that of the northeast. Frontier tales were directed at man's struggle with nature rather than with the machine. While Frontier heroes usually triumphed over the wilderness or outwitted the fellow humans, they also had less regard for tradition and conventional manners

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78 See Godey's Magazine, XXXVIII, January 1849, 309. Her work gave such an appearance of truth that she was attacked several times by people who felt that they had been caricatured in her articles. Her husband, an Episcopal priest, was forced to leave his parish in Elmira, New York, because the town felt it was the model for Mrs. Witcher's satire, in "Letters from Timberville".

79 See Kenneth Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1959).
or morals. Interestingly there are few female partners for the frontier heroes. Women rarely appear in frontier humor except as the object of male gallantry. Most Easterners wholeheartedly accepted this romantic portrait of the frontier because they wanted to believe that it really existed.

Perhaps the most outstanding work in this area between 1830 and 1860 can be found in the writings of Johnson Jones Hooper's *Simon Suggs* and George Washington Harris' *Sut Lovingood*. Suggs, a shifty confidence man, and *Lovingood* a diabolical prankster, would both inspire numerous comic strip characters. This genre also includes a number of early tales about larger-than-life heroes of the American Frontier such as Davy Crockett and Mike Fink. Their lives assumed legendary proportions when edited by the creative minds of the national press.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the *Brother Jonathan* stereotype had lost much of its vitality. In the post-war years, humorists looked for fresh material. At this time, blacks began to appear in humorous newspaper anecdotes, almost always as ugly and unflattering stereotypes. Black subjects were included as part of the national humor even before the Civil War due to the popularity of minstrel show characters such as *Zip Coon, Dan Tucker* and *Jim Crow*. However the first black character to appear nationally on a regular basis was *Uncle Remus*. Joel Chandler Harris' anecdotes were first

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80. This may be because the frontier was a fierce masculine place that required heroes that were strong, daring and courageous fighters. These traits would have been considered shocking in a woman at that time.

81. The *Katzenjammer Kids* and *Mutt and Jeff* are two of the earliest examples.


published by the *Atlanta Constitution* in 1879. A parallel development was that of immigrant humor. Ethnic types such as Hoffenstein, Yawcob Strause, Spoopendyke, Hans Breitman, Erratic Enrique, Miles O'Reilley, Gilhooley, and Dennis Muldoon appeared in newspaper anecdotes and were a part of vaudeville and the theater in the post-war years.\(^8\) The humorous comments of the Irishman, *Mr. Dooley*, whose column was published in the *Chicago Tribune* were by far the most popular.\(^9\)

A synthesis of northeastern, frontier and ethnic humor, the basis of the new national humor first appeared in the newspapers and ephemeral cheap journals of the after the Civil War. By the 1880's it was a part of vaudeville and the respectable humor magazines *Puck* and *Judge*. By 1905 it had achieved a national audience due to the great popularity in the comic strip.

The cultural significance of the comic strip has long been denied despite the pioneering work of literary historians such as Constance Rourke who realized that humor was an integral part of the national character.\(^10\) For the first time, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the pursuit of amusement and laughter during leisure time became an important activity for millions of Americans. It would reach its fullest potential in the vital urban climate of the 1890's that produced the newspaper comic strip.

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84 Lipper, op. cit.,164-5.

85 See Bernard Duffy and Kenny J. Williams, eds., *Chicago's Public Wits, A Chapter in the American Comic Spirit* (Baton Rouge,: Louisiana State U.P.,1983) They discuss Chicago humorists from the 1830's to the present.

CHAPTER III

PREPARING A MEDIUM FOR THE MASSES

Today, modern Americans have their choice of many inexpensive mass-produced entertainments, both public and private. However, easy access to cheap popular amusements is of relatively recent origin. Between 1890 and 1900, several major forms of mass entertainment, including the comic strip, vaudeville and the amusement park, were established as a successful and popular part of American society. They set the standard for the new family-oriented amusements which have since become a major part of the American scene.

Although my main focus is on the newspaper comic strip, some mention should be made of the importance of vaudeville and amusement parks. Since all three forms of entertainment were born in the same decade, it is not surprising that they share a number of similarities as well as a number of topics and themes. All three were developed by entrepreneurs who came out of the working or middle class. They were directed at heterosexual family groups, and placed equal emphasis on a product of good quality, "clean" family fun and reasonable profit.¹ They also met, in most

respects, the growing middle-class demand for wholesome, Christian entertainment.

Vaudeville variety shows, newspaper comic strips and amusement parks flourished for a number of years, because they provided the new style entertainment demanded by young people and family groups. Eventually, they were joined by motion pictures, radio and television, also family-oriented to a certain extent. Not surprisingly, changes in American society and culture between 1890 and the 1980's have greatly influenced our attitude towards mass entertainment. Popular attitudes towards all of these entertainments have changed considerably over the years, and those amusements that were best able to adjust have endured the longest. For example, vaudeville has almost entirely disappeared because its static format could not compete with motion pictures. Radio no longer provides a showcase for comedy and drama, but has been reduced to providing only music and news. The growth of the motion picture industry is threatened by the high cost of production and the development of the video cassette recorder.

The survival of the newspaper comic strip in very close to its original format proves its importance as a cultural artifact of American society. Comic strips have lasted for almost one hundred years mainly because they deal with topics that are an integral part of American life. In addition, the design of the comic strip gives it the ability to evolve or develop without changing its basic personality and theme. Because of this special ability, comics provide a wealth of information for a student of American culture.

Arbor, Mi.: UMI Research Press, 1981). Also cited earlier, were Kasson's *Amusing the Million*, and McLean's *Vaudeville as Ritual*.
Comic strips did not "just happen". The birth and continued growth of newspaper comics resulted from a complex combination of developments in both the communication industry and the arts. The early magazines and later the illustrated newspapers provided a training ground for artists and cartoonists. At the same time the newspaper industry developed both technology and distribution systems that could serve a mass market. Finally, the growth of the advertising business provided newspapers with the revenue to make newspaper expansion a profitable reality.

American graphic art and the training of native born artists were closely tied to social, political and cultural trends as well as industrial expansion and technological advances. Not until the United States had emerged as a industrial and political force would the demand for illustrated newspapers and magazines reach its peak.

Neither a profitable market nor technological expertise was available for the development of a national newspaper or periodical before 1800. There was also little demand for humorous illustrations at this time. The new nation was poor, under-populated and without the financial or technical capabilities to produce many periodicals, with or without (comic) illustrations. The relatively few magazines of the Federal period usually imitated the literary and artistic styles of English, French, Austrian and German artists. This was not surprising since most of the skilled artists and craftsmen were recent European immigrants. These early periodicals were sold mainly in cities and bought by people who appreciated European culture. A number of subscribers were themselves recent immigrants from foreign shores. Enterprising graphic artists also published independently produced broadsides or tearsheets on humorous or political topics which
they sold to the public. Although these broadsides were not outstandingly original or polished works of art, they were directed at and bought by the general public. This would seem to indicate some popular interest in graphic arts as early as the Federal period.

The comic journals published between 1810 and 1840 provided the first training ground for cartoonists in the United States. Verbal humor was already included in almanacs and other periodicals published during the early years of the American republic. However, magazines devoted entirely to humor had difficult time. They were expensive to produce, difficult to distribute and hard to sell. Difficulty in developing an audience usually wiped out the operating capital of these small publications before they could build up a following. Many were literally one-man operations, with editor, writer, artist and owner, one and the same, and outside contributors were rarely paid for their work. In addition, they had to compete with less expensive newspapers and almanacs which had their share of humorous anecdotes.

The 1840's and 50's brought a new crop of comic journals that were equally unsuccessful. The standard criticism for the failure of these ventures was the complaint that they were merely a pale imitation of the British humor magazine *Punch.* Despite the fact that these criticisms have some merit, I think that most of the failures occurred for another reason. There was yet no unifying national culture that could produce or appreciate

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2 For example, as early as 1847, the failure of the humor journal *Judy* was blamed on its imitation of *Punch.* "Gossip of Month", *The Democratic Review*, XX, April 1847, 371. In 1865, the demise of the humor magazine, *Mrs. Grundy,* was attributed to an imitation of *Punch,* by the *Round Table.* "The Last American Punch", *The Round Table*, II 23 September 1865, 41.
humor on any but the smallest scale. Before the Civil War, American culture was as much regional as national. The East, South and the West identified with regional concerns and traditions, as much if not more than with national issues. There was also an intense sectional rivalry, not to mention feelings of hostility and suspicion that existed between the city and the country (frontier).

Besides problems with regional issues and content, another major obstacle to their success was the lack of efficient and cost effective production and distribution methods. The process of delivery and payment was so slow that the average publisher ran out of funds before his magazine could become financially secure. Over a period of fifty years, from 1840 to 1890, American comic journals evolved from small, poorly illustrated pamphlets to large, profusely illustrated magazines. A brief discussion of this transformation is necessary to show how important they were in the development of native born artists.

Before 1840, the editors of many humor magazines often felt that it was their mission to criticize and improve society through the use of satire. They savagely attacked or ridiculed political figures, ethnic groups and urban shortcomings. Many gave their magazines names that indicated their purpose; the Corrector, the Scourge, the Wasp and the Bee. These journals had few illustrations and relied mainly on verbal humor. Their graphics were usually woodcuts or steel engravings, time consuming and expensive to produce. The invention of the lithographic process in 1796 would

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3 Both the illustrated magazines and the later illustrated newspapers employed a number of European artists who made their woodcuts and steel engravings. Peter Marzio, A Nation of Nations, 230.
eventually change the method of illustration in magazines and newspapers, but the process was too costly at this time, for periodicals with a limited budget. Lithographs of political cartoons were sold as separate tear sheets during the Jackson administration at an average price of twenty-five cents. This was more than the cost of most humor magazines. The leading political cartoonists could make more money selling tearsheets or broadsides than they could working for a magazine.⁴

During the ante-bellum period, many humor magazines like the newspapers of the period, were rabid supporters of a particular political party or candidate. This severely limited their circulation among partisans of the other side. In addition, according to John Cusack, the most popular non-political topics in all American humor journals published before 1870, were the mud and clutter of city streets and the ignorance of Irish servants.⁵ The proliferation of these topics seems to indicate an urban and reasonably wealthy audience. Neither topic was likely to please the working-class or people living on the frontier.

The majority of American cartoonists in the ante-bellum period whether native-born or immigrant, tended to be prolific in output but lacking in originality. They borrowed shamelessly from foreign magazines or drew many versions of the same basic illustration. Their figures were usually crudely drawn and poorly conceived and many early cartoons were drawn in a stiff unnatural style lacking in true perspective. The poor quality


of American illustration was probably due to a number of factors including the national emphasis on the useful arts, the lack of art schools, and the low status and pay in this field. Many artists also copied European models because they lacked the self-confidence, talent or training to produce original work and because they were the only models available.

The English humor magazine, *Punch*, founded in 1841, would serve as a model for many American humor magazines. Five years after its debut, *Punch* was widely read by knowledgeable individuals on both sides of the Atlantic. Turning the pages of a volume from 1842, one finds a variety of satirical articles, feature columns, serials, a number of well-drawn humorous illustrations, political cartoons, puns and comic letters. *Punch* was gently critical of genteel British society as well as politics, and occasionally included a few gibes directed at its American cousins, called Jonathanisms. Its moderate non-partisan commentary, (quite different from the rabid partisanship of American periodicals) on varied aspects of English life and society would soon be widely imitated in America. Other European humor magazines such as the Austrian *Kikerike* were also imported and probably had some influence on American style as well.

Several comic weeklies were founded in the next decade that often copied *Punch* shamelessly. A major difference between the American journals and *Punch* was the quality of their illustrations and cartoons. They simply were not as good as those found in the British journal. One of the

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*See *Punch or The London Charivari* Vol. 2, Jan.-June 1842, 1-230.*
better magazines of this type was *Yankee Doodle* which first appeared in New York in 1846.

*Yankee Doodle* was published by a literary society, the Yankee Doodle Club, whose members admired *Punch* and wanted to produce an American version.7 *Yankee Doodle* was at first edited by six young men who would later make their mark on society in different ways. They included Richard Grant White, lawyer and music critic, Evart A. Duyckink, author and scholar, George "Gaslight" Foster, writer, Charles F. Briggs, novelist, Parke Godwing, a disciple of Fourierist socialism and William K. Northall, dentist and writer.8 The cover of their twelve-page journal boasted a drawing of *Mr. Yankee Doodle* himself, dressed as a dandy, with a large head and small body.9 Usually, the most eye-catching and distinctive art in these early magazines was found on their covers and in this, *Yankee Doodle* was no exception.

In its first edition, the magazine stated that its purpose was....

to laugh Politics out of its briberies and bullyings, Religion out of its bigotry and intolerance, Literature out of its leading strings Art out of its twaddling clothes, Society out of its false pretenses and History out of its lies.10

7 The literary society was common during the early days of the republic. These societies were made up of educated young professionals who indulged their literary pretensions by writing poetry and prose for various publications, usually under a pseudonym.


9 Cartoon characters with large heads and small bodies seem to have been a mid-nineteenth century style.

10 *Yankee Doodle*, Vol. 1, 10 October 1846, 1.
Unfortunately, America had few talented graphic artists available to bring "art out of its twaddling clothes", so Yankee Doodle hired a young Englishman, Charles Martin, as staff artist. Martin seems to have drawn most of the cartoons printed in the magazine's first months of publication since they were signed with his trademark, a martin (bird) sitting on a capital "C".¹¹

Most of the humor in Yankee Doodle was political but the magazine was non-partisan, imitating the approach of Punch. It criticized both sides freely, including anti-Polk and anti-Taylor cartoons. Yankee Doodle also printed cartoons featuring the failings of foreign visitors, the Irish, rustics, abolitionists, servants and women. Gibes were usually directed at the weakest and least influential members of society who were unable to defend themselves. These people with their crude manners and foreign ways, were an object of amusement to its upper-middle class editors.

After a brief period of popularity, when as many as ten thousand copies a week were sold, Yankee Doodle gradually declined and eventually failed. The magazine changed hands in July, 1847. The new editor, Cornelius Matthews, a noted wit, hired Felix Octavius Carr Darley, one of the few American artists with a national reputation, as staff artist.¹² Darley was an accomplished illustrator, with a light open style, suited to the engraving techniques of the time, but he was a better artist than humorist. Most of his cartoons are mildly amusing at best.

¹¹ For examples of his work, see Yankee Doodle, 19 December 1846, 127, 10 April 1847 and 13 March 1847.
Who read Yankee Doodle? Judging by the topics covered, Yankee Doodle was directed at an increasingly numerous and powerful upper and upper-middle class. The Unitarian Church and the bumbling activities of the New York Historical Society, upper class concerns during the 1840's, were often criticized. The Irish immigrant, a frequent target of upper-middle-class Protestant scorn, was often present. Women were criticized only when they were involved in "unfeminine activities" (abolition or agitation for women's rights) that were middle class taboos.13

Yankee Doodle probably failed because it was unable to sustain a high level of fresh material without over-reaching the limits of what was acceptable to the middle class. When its novelty was exhausted, its lack of compelling graphics, and a wider range of topics which might have had a broader class crossing appeal, contributed to its demise.

Another of the early humor journals that has some importance for the development of graphic humor was John Donkey, which first appeared on January 1, 1848. Donkey, published in Philadelphia, claimed it would interpret everything through the eyes of stupidity, a novel concept.14 Its chief artist was again F.O.C.Darley.15 He was responsible for the clever cover, which featured an anthropomorphic donkey dressed in fashionable attire.16 John Donkey was mainly concerned with politics and "kicked" both sides. This magazine took an extremely conservative stance and was critical

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13 See Yankee Doodle, 20 March 1847,258. This issue contains a cartoon titled "A Picture of Progress" which shows a dominant woman Mrs. Freeandeasy rejoicing at the election of a women's ticket, while her husband is relegated to holding their crying child.
14 The John Donkey, 1 January 1848,16.
16 The John Donkey, 1 January 1848,1.
of most reform movements. Unlike most of the nineteenth-century humor magazines, *Donkey* was consistently negative and rarely supported any cause.

*John Donkey* was expensive to produce, averaging six illustrations per issue and printed on good quality paper. At its peak, it probably reached a circulation of 15,000 at ten cents a copy and was read in an area extending from Boston to New Orleans and as far west as St. Louis. *Donkey's* middle class orientation limited its appeal, but its audience was growing. It is important to note that this journal carried one page of advertising, a portent of the future. One of the advertisers, "Schenck's Pulmonic Syrup" featured a gruesome illustration of a man's lungs, again a sign of things to come.

The direct cause of *Donkey's* failure was the bankruptcy of its publisher, but it would probably have joined *Yankee Doodle* in limbo anyway. Americans were not yet ready to support this type of commercial venture on a scale that would provide financial success. However, Darley's clever donkey was possibly the first of the anthropomorphic animals that would later be popular in comic strips.

Boston, the literary hub of America in the 1850's, produced another pioneering humor journal in 1851, the *Carpet Bag*, edited by S.W. Wilder and S.B. Shillaber. Shillaber, a noted humorist, was the creator of Mrs. Ruth Partington, a comic rustic figure in the New England tradition. Although

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17 Cusack, "American Weekly Humor Magazine", 131-157. *Mrs. Partington* was a simple, down to earth person who spoke in the Maine or *down east* dialect, commenting on local events and the human condition. Her speech was salted with malapropisms, and somewhat racy slang. Mrs. Partington, speaking out on Amelia Bloomer's new styles..."I don't know why a woman can't be as virtuous in a short as in a long skirt." *Carpet Bag*, 24 May 1851, 5. Shillaber also created a number of other rustic village characters including Mrs. Partington's nephew, Ike, the prototype for the normal mischief-loving boy. See also
the Carpet Bag was a regional magazine that featured Yankee humor, it was more popular in the Midwest than in the Boston area. Perhaps the New England natives were too sensitive to appreciate themselves as the objects of humor. It is more likely that it was read by transplanted Yankees in the midwest.

The Carpet Bag is memorable for our purposes, because it published the early work of young Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and Charles F. Browne (Artemus Ward). These two men would soon become famous as popularizers of frontier humor. Twain and Ward created uncouth but clever characters whose shrewdness and sly wit enabled them to take advantage of "city slickers". Their interpretation of frontier humor would later become an important comic strip theme. The austere atmosphere of Boston in the 1850's was not suited to the survival of a humor magazine, and the Carpet Bag closed forever in March, 1853. However, the Carpet Bag was one of the first periodicals to combine down east and frontier humor, another sign of things to come.

Despite a general increase in the total number of magazines and newspapers, the humor magazine did not flourish in the 1850's. The last, and probably the best illustrated magazine of the decade was Diogenes Hys Lantern, published in New York in 1852. Lantern, another Punch imitation, was edited by John Brougham, and its leading artist was Frank Bellew. Bellew, an English immigrant who had studied in England and France, had

Benjamin P. Shillaber, The Life and Sayings of Mrs. Partington, American Humorists series reprint (Upper Saddle River, N.J.:Gregg Press, 1967). It has been suggested that Mrs. Partington and Ike were adopted by Mark Twain and turned into Tom Sawyer and Aunt Polly. See Walter Blair, Native American Humor (New York: American Book Co.,1937), 150-3. Boyish pranks have remained a popular comic strip theme, from the Katzenjammer Kids to Dennis the Menace.
a sympathetic eye for his adopted country. He spent forty years drawing cartoons for American humor magazines, and created for Lantern, an American symbol that is still very popular, Uncle Sam. Bellew also gained fame for his sensitive drawings of "country folks" adjustment to city life. Lantern was a step forward in the evolution of humor magazines with more and better illustrations. In addition, Lantern carried a page of advertisements, some illustrated by staff artists, also part of a growing trend.

The magazine and newspaper industry as a whole would benefit greatly from new federal legislation passed in the 1850's. The Post Office Act of 1852 made magazine postage the responsibility of the publisher rather than the purchaser, and reduced the rate over fifty percent. Previously the subscriber had to prepay magazine or newspaper postage quarterly at the postoffice where it was delivered, because postage was the responsibility of the purchaser. Publishers were happy to absorb the cost of postage when they found that it increased the amount of subscriptions sold. Most publications were still delivered by mail in the 1850's although the newsstand and the newspaper circulation agency appeared in this decade. Advertising revenues from both magazines and newspapers increased

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18 His son "Chip" Bellew was also a talented cartoonist in the first decade of the comic strips whose promising career was cut short by chronic alcoholism. Father-son partnerships are fairly common in the cartoon world. My research seems to suggest that artistic talent can be inherited to some degree, although environment is also a factor. At least half of the cartoonists I studied had at least one family member who excelled in the arts.


20 In 1851, the government also allowed newspapers to have free delivery within their home county. This standard was maintained for many years despite the protests of the Postmaster General. See Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism, A History, 1690-1960* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 305-6.
dramatically as they were now more readily available to the reader. During this same decade, New York City was established as the publishing capital of the nation. By this time, New York had emerged as the dominant American city. Both transportation center and ocean port, it had a large immigrant population, and many of these newcomers were talented in the graphic arts. In addition, the news gathering service, the New York Associated Press was first developed in New York. Although Philadelphia and Boston remained important publishing centers, the major rivals of New York were the western cities of Chicago and St. Louis, and later Los Angeles and San Francisco. Chicago and St. Louis were too far away to subscribe to New York papers, because of the long delivery period. The invention of the telegraph, and Chicago's emergence as the railroad center of the west also aided its development as a communication center.

While the Civil War years were a watershed for the newspaper industry in America, the humor magazine languished. Most artists were hired by newspapers to follow the military campaigns of the Union and Confederate armies, providing battlefield graphics for the news-hungry public. In 1865, yet another humor magazine appeared on the New York scene. *Mrs. Grundy* is important because its cover was drawn by the young Thomas Nast. This intricate illustration featured Mrs. Grundy facing an audience which included recognizable likenesses of at least seventy-five famous people of the day. The eighteen-year-old German immigrant won the hundred dollar prize given for the best cover design because of his

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21 The first advertising agencies date from the 1840's. They were founded by newspaper advertising salesmen who found they could make more money on their own. See Mott's *American Journalism*, 309.
masterful technique. Mrs. Grundy turned a critical eye to the graft and corruption of the post-war period, but avoided the major political issues and failed after a brief run. Partisanship seemed to sell more copies at this time.

Between 1865 and 1877, there was little improvement in the graphic humor found in comic journals. The best artists and cartoonists worked for serious magazines or the new illustrated newspapers, producing political cartoons illustrations and comic inserts. Some also worked as book illustrators. By the 1870's a career as an artist had gained in respectability and status. The increasing demand for talented illustrators made it a desirable and even financially rewarding profession. If an artist could develop a distinctive and popular style, he might well reach national prominence.

During this same period, a homogeneous national culture had become part of American society. Artists began to produce cartoons in a distinctly "American" style, instead of a pedestrian imitation of European work. The new style was a synthesis of the exaggeration and ridicule of the frontier with traditional middle class urban topics, but frontier topics were dominant. Cartoonists continued to use genteel characters, but they were often cheated or met with violence, while rough or rustic characters mocked or imitated genteel culture. However, the new American humor still retained a strong element of Puritanical moralizing. The illustrated newspapers, which first came to the United States in 1850, were to be the foremost exponents of the new national culture.

The illustrated newspaper, an intriguing combination of magazine and newspaper in tabloid form, became very popular during the Civil War.

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because it provided readers with both news and pictures of the war. The first major illustrated newspaper was started by Henry Carter, an English engraver who came to New York in 1848, where he worked for Phineas T. Barnum, the showman. Carter was an aggressive entrepreneur, eager for success. He soon became the publisher of a number of periodicals including many low cost humor magazines. After changing his name to Frank Leslie in 1855, he began the most famous of his ventures, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. *Leslie's* was a sixteen-page weekly that sold at ten cents a copy and contained many large and striking illustrations. It became very popular during the war because it was able to provide pictures for its news stories, only two weeks after the event took place, unheard of at this time. *Leslie's* was a mix of exciting and sensational items, serious news, serialized fiction and travelogues and it continued publication until 1922. Its main competitor, *Harper's Weekly* (1857-1916), was slightly more serious and dignified. *Harper's* employed many of the best writers available and printed some of Thomas Nast's finest work. As a result, it sold 160,000 copies a week in 1872. Although these newsmagazines spearheaded a number of worthwhile reforms, they were mainly popularizers of the news directed at the mass market. Most importantly, they were profusely illustrated to meet the growing public demand for graphic art. During this period, a number

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23 This was still fairly expensive since the newspapers of the times ranged from 1 to 5 cents a copy.
25 Ibid., 379.
26 By 1880, *Harper's* was approximately 15% illustration.
of other weekly journals sprang up. Some imitated *Harper's* and *Leslie's* while others were directed at special interests groups.

The newspaper field would not have grown and diversified without a continued increase in the demand for reading material in the United States. There are number of factors that stimulated the demand for reading material. First, the Puritan emphasis on literacy coupled with the need for an informed electorate in a democratic society encouraged the development of a nation of readers. The steady advance of government supported public education gradually caused a marked decrease in illiteracy.\(^{27}\) Second, the population had more than doubled between 1830 and 1860 creating a much larger market for news. Third, in a democratic society, there was a much greater interest in public affairs and politics. Fourth, the ante-bellum years were a time of great political and social ferment and the chief source of information on these topics was, of course, the newspaper and magazine. Fifth, today one often forgets the impact of the great improvement in home lighting that occurred at this time. The new oil lamps of the 1830's and 1840's and the urban gaslights of the 1850's and 1860's replaced the candle and fireplace as the source of light in many homes. Sixth, improvements in technology reduced the production cost of the average newspaper and magazine, and advertising revenues also absorbed more of these costs. Finally, although many newspaper publishers seemed unaware of the fact, many more women were reading newspapers and magazines.\(^{28}\) The time

\(^{27}\) In 1840, the rate of illiteracy was 11%, in 1860, it was 9%, among whites over twenty years of age. Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1870, (Washington, D.C.1875),467-502.

\(^{28}\) Arguments for the expansion of the newspaper market at this time are found in Mott, *American Journalism*, 303-4.
when women would wield considerable economic leverage was almost here. Astute editor, Henry J. Raymond, wrote in an early issue of the *New York Times*.

English women seldom read the *(London)* Times. American women read newspapers as much as their liege lords. The paper must accommodate itself to this fact, and hence the American sheet involves a variety of topics and a diversity of contents. 29

The illustrated newspapers also provided both a market and a training ground for many rising young American comic artists. Thomas Nast, Frank Bellew, Henry Stephens and Joseph Keppler all worked at one time for either *Harper’s* or *Leslie’s*. They, in turn, influenced a second generation of artists, including Frederick Opper, Thomas Worth, A.B. Frost, Grant Hamilton, Charles Dana Gibson, Palmer Cox and Eugene Zimmerman.

The premier artist of the period 1865-1875 was Thomas Nast(1840-1901), who drew most of his cartoons for *Harper’s Weekly*. Although Nast produced pleasant scenes of American life, his best work features stark, often grotesque and powerful figures, drawn with an unerring eye for human weakness. It was these graphics that brought him national recognition while still in his twenties. Nast, although born in Germany, was passionately committed to the reform of his adopted land. However, by 1880, American society had turned away from reform. Because the emotional, political, and ideological ferment of the Civil War had left the country morally exhausted.

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29 *New York Daily Times* 14 October 1852, 10. Raymond was a famous war correspondent and editor of the times.
many increasingly accepted or ignored the corruption still present in American society. Nast, still in his prime, found his crusading cartoons out of fashion. He was faced with the choice of changing the focus of his work to topics less disturbing to the public or retiring. The bewildered cartoonist tried to change but his later work lacks the inspired idealism of the earlier drawings.30

Nast's rise and fall was closely related to changes in American society. He was the cartoonist of the hour in 1865, drawing from his heart, the American agony over the Civil War. Nast's style was finely detailed, gloomy and sentimental. It was at home in the dark and crowded parlors of Victorian America. The rabidly anti-Catholic Nast was also popular with nativists who appreciated his cartoons with an anti-Irish theme.

During the seventies, Nast remained loyal to his wartime hero Ulysses S. Grant, continuing as his champion during Grant's two scandal-ridden terms as President. Nast, along with reform governor Samuel J. Tilden, was personally responsible for destroying the corrupt Tweed ring in New York.31 Working in a lighter vein, he also developed two figures that have remained enormously popular, Santa Claus and the Republican elephant. Nast remained a political cartoonist and magazine illustrator, rarely branching out into the production of humorous work. Even his political cartoons were usually satirical or moralistic rather than comic.


31 Boss Tweed was the head of a powerful and corrupt political machine in New York City.
After 1880, his cartoons were less powerful and seemed an indication that the artist himself had lost faith in progress and reform.32

The tremendous popularity and influence of Nast's reformist cartoons after the Civil War shows the power that can be wielded by a cartoonist who is emotionally and culturally in tune with the mood of the nation. Conversely, Nast quickly fell from favor when he was unable to adapt to the less idealistic mood of the Gilded Age.

Thomas Nast cannot be omitted from out of a history of comic strips. His work was a major influence for cartoonists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He was a towering giant in the field of political cartoonists, yet his import for the development of the comic strip is more as a popularizer of the graphic arts in general. He was also an inspiration and model for a great number of American youths who aspired to a similar career in the graphic arts.

Another influential "cartoon king" of the seventies and eighties, Joseph Keppler, produced cartoons that were closely related to the comic strip. Keppler, an Austrian who received his artistic training at the prestigious Academe der Bildenken Kunste in Vienna, emigrated to the United States in 1867 to be near his father, a political refugee.

Before coming to America, Keppler worked as a staff artist on the Viennese humor magazine Kikerike(Rooster).33 He combined a mildly

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32 His decline may have been accelerated by the loss of his money in the stock market. Nast received a political appointment from an admiring President Theodore Roosevelt and died in South America.

33 After art school, the romantic and impulsive Keppler joined a touring theatrical troupe. He was also a successful actor in the United States, and used his knowledge of classical drama in his work as a cartoonist.
crusading spirit, inherited perhaps from his father, with considerable artistic ability. He also had a burning desire to publish his own humor magazine. Keppler's first attempts, Die Vehme (The Tribunal or the Star Chamber) and (the first) Puck, both written in German, and published in St. Louis, enjoyed brief success. Die Vehme, which lasted almost a year, (Aug. 28, 1896 to Aug. 10, 1870), was the first American humor magazine to use the lithographic process. Puck was similar in content to Die Vehme, and most important for the development of comic graphics, its cartoons were better than its text. Although Puck also failed in its first year, it brought Keppler to the attention of Frank Leslie, who wrote, offering him a position in New York. Keppler's authentic talent soon brought him fame in New York and gave him the opportunity to meet other rising young comic artists. After the failure of his first magazines, Keppler worked for four years producing woodcuts for Leslie's Illustrated News, all the while longing to publish his own magazine.34 In 1877, he quit Leslie's, and with Adolph Schwarzmann, a coworker, re-created Puck in New York.35 Initially a German-language publication, Puck soon aroused the interest of the American community as well. Keppler's fresh new style, combined the exaggeration of caricature with

34 For a detailed discussion of Keppler and Puck, see Richard Marschall, "A History of the Comic Strip, Part One, Puck Magazine and the ascendance of the Cartoon" Comics Journal, September 1980, 132-139 and "The Stage is Set, The History of the Comic strip, Part Two, The Decline and Death of Puck Magazine", Comics Journal, October 1980, 84-87. Keppler's first efforts did not fail because of his location. St. Louis was then the third largest city in the United States, and an important publishing center, considered along with Chicago as a potential commercial and cultural rival of New York, with a large German community. There was a ready audience for Keppler's work in St. Louis, but he lacked the experience and financial backing to produce a successful magazine at first. Keppler was also an early advocate of the more creative but expensive lithographic process. His illustrations were noted from the beginning for their delicacy of detail.

35 Schwarzmann worked on the production side and undoubtedly brought capital into the venture.
beauty of line, in a scene involving movement and excitement. He had been trained in the German school of cartoon art, which had developed a synthesis of the English style, based on allegory, and the French school, which featured exaggeration. Before Keppler left Europe, John Tenniel was the most famous cartoonist in England, Wilhelm Busch, creator of Max and Moritz, was very popular in Germany, and Daumier was the master of the French school. Keppler drew from all three, yet made his style distinctly American. He was a trained artist, an idealist with a sense of humor and his cartoons were funny. Instead of the sardonic grimace provided by Nast and other cartoonists of the day, there was genuine amusement. In addition, his illustrations were enhanced from the start by the superior reproductive qualities of the lithographic process.

The mechanics of the lithographic process deserves a brief mention. This process was time-consuming and expensive. The artists drew their cartoons directly on a flat smooth surface of porous soapstone imported from Germany. They used both pen and brush, working with an ink that was a thick, greasy emulsion. The cartoon was then sprayed with a solution of gum arabic and nitric acid which etched the stone everywhere except where it had been covered by the ink. The stone was then rinsed and the drawing remained in relief on the stone, which was used as the printer's plate. A separate stone was necessary for each individual color used. In addition, a different stone was needed for each drawing. By 1879, Keppler had improved the use of chromolithography so that he was able to produce both cover and center-spread cartoons in color.

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36 Marschall, op cit., 136.
The German-language *Puck* was almost an instant hit. Certainly it was helped by the exposure and experience Keppler had gained as one of Frank Leslie's star cartoonists. In fact, its great success prompted the publication of an English-language edition. Keppler was encouraged to expand by rising playwright, Sydney Rosenfeld, who recognized the potential of *Puck* for the American market. Rosenfeld was named editor of the English-language *Puck* which debuted March 14, 1877. Initially he planned to use the cartoons from the German edition with a different English text.

Rosenfeld hired the young and talented Henry Cuyler Bunner as assistant editor for the new journal, an excellent choice. The youthful Bunner, just twenty-two, was descended from a prominent New England family fallen on hard times. 37 He had a talent for directing *Puck* towards the important and popular social issues of the day. Bunner also excelled as a writer and drafted *Puck*’s editorials. He soon replaced Rosenfeld (who left after an argument) as editor in chief. However, even with fresh, topical material and lively cartoons, the American *Puck* was largely carried by its German relative until Keppler perfected the use of color plates. By 1879, *Puck* covers displayed as many as five colors, giving it a distinct advantage on a news-stand inhabited by drab monochromatic cover designs. It is impossible to measure exactly the impact of the colored cartoons but it was substantial. Color was as intrinsic to the initial success of the humor journal as color printing was to the first comic supplements. The American public

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was first attracted by the novelty of *Puck*’s colored illustrations but if novelty was all *Puck* had to offer, it would quickly have failed. However, people who picked the journal up because of its attractive cover soon realized that it had much more to offer. The same would later be true in regard to newspaper comic strips.

Guided by the idealistic yet pragmatic Keppler, *Puck* took an interest in both social and political topics which concerned a variety of Americans. In a series of humorous sketches published in 1878-79, Keppler criticized in turn; the Mormons, Henry Ward Beecher and the Catholic Church. *Puck* was also critical of mass immigration and certain immigrant groups especially the Chinese and Irish. The journal alternately supported and ridiculed American reformers and did not hesitate to mock the "wizard of Menlo Park", Thomas Edison, for unscrupulous business practices. *Puck* was opposed to the middle-class led temperance movement (as were most German-Americans) but supported middle-class opposition to the organization of labor.

Because a wide section of the public was interested in at least some of *Puck*’s material, Keppler's magazine was able to gain a large following that crossed class barriers. It also avoided attaching itself to one political party. The broad base of Keppler's humor was closely related to the variety of comics that would be carried by the Sunday supplements in the 1890's. Although *Puck* published a number of political cartoons, it also pointed out the funny side of many social issues and included some humorous graphics that were completely lacking in social significance.

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38 Particularly bitter anti-Edison cartoons ran in *Puck* on 5 May 1880, 4 August 1880 and 17 November 1880.
The election of 1880 consolidated Puck’s position as the premier interpreter of the American scene. The campaign inspired one of Keppler’s most popular cartoons, "Forbidding the Banns", a humorous indictment of Garfield's participation in the Credit Mobilier scandal. This cartoon ran as a color centerfold on August 11, 1880. In 1884, Puck dropped its impartial stance and supported Grover Cleveland for President. The campaign of '84 was one of the dirtiest ever, and the tarnished reputation of Republican candidate James Blaine provided much material for Puck’s cartoonists.39 Cleveland later acknowledged the importance of the journal to his successful campaign and its circulation increased 10,000 copies a week. In 1885, growing pains brought about the construction of the landmark Puck building in lower Manhattan. The building prominently featured two large statues (six and ten feet high) depicting Keppler’s trademark, the Shakespearean cupid Puck. Both held a banner with the motto "What fools these mortals be!"40

Who were Puck’s readers in the eighties? By the end of the decade, it claimed a weekly circulation of 100,000 copies. Judging by the amount and variety of advertising it carried, Puck’s audience was rapidly gaining in income and social status. Before 1880, the primary advertisers were German-American variety theaters, a yeast company, a tailor specializing in $3.00 suits and Palmo sun shades. By the end of the decade, Puck’s clients

39 Someone suggested a portrait of Blaine as a tattooed man. Puck ran a cartoon of Blaine clad only in undershorts, his body tattooed with his political sins. It was probably Puck’s most effective cartoon, and was gleefully distributed out by the Democrats.

40 The Puck building was designed by architect Albert Wagner in 1885 and built at 295 Lafayette Street in the Soho district of New York City. Dingy and abandoned, it was rehabilitated by architect Peter Gee, and restored to its original appearance in 1983. From an advertisement that ran in the New York Times, 5 May 1985.
included four steamship lines, piano manufacturers, diamond merchants and photographers. The magazine's readers had increased in affluence and improved their position in society.

Continued financial success brought other talented artists to Puck, including Eugene Zimmerman and Bernard Gillam. "Zim" became famous for exaggerated panels featuring Negroes and Jews, while Gillam drew forceful political cartoons. 41 Except for the campaign of 1884, which produced the Republican humor magazine Judge, Puck remained a relatively non-partisan champion of social and political reform. The magazine gradually declined in importance during the nineties due to the death of Keppler and the untimely death of Bunner at the age of forty.

Puck's innovative experimentation was an important milestone in the development of the comic strip. It was the first to recognize the importance of color, combined with good quality illustrations. It was also one of the first to provide cartoons on cross-cultural topics. It developed and employed many outstanding cartoonists, capable of creating work that could stand on its own merits. The talents of its staff made them important social and political arbiters during the eighties and early nineties, worthy heirs of Thomas Nast but with a lighter, more catholic view of society. Finally, Puck and its fellow humor journals of the eighties, helped create an audience that appreciated and demanded graphic humor.

The Judge, a major rival of Puck, was the result of a major rupture among Puck's employees. Its first editor, J.A. Wales, a staff artist, left to

41 Keppler employed a large staff of talented artists, including Carl von Stur and Friedrich Graetz, old friends from Vienna, James A. Wales and young Frederick Burr Opper.
produce a magazine that was at first only a poor copy of Puck. The Judge did not challenge Puck until a change in ownership along with funding from the Republican Party campaign chest gave it new life. Both format and staff of Judge ("The" was dropped) were changed and the weekly enjoyed brisk sales to Republican partisans. At this point, Judge began to favor cartoon graphics over text. Although Puck's illustrations were the reason for the journal's initial success, it also featured well written verbal humor. Judge was the first humor magazine to concentrate on visual humor. It employed many young artists who later gained fame as political or comic strip cartoonists during the Republican years of William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. Many of Judge's later cartoons also appeared in excellent color. Judge started as a magazine directed at the lower-middle class, and it never tried to reform society. Neither did it publish sophisticated literary humor in imitation of Puck and Life. Judge strove for broad popular appeal in its portrait of the humorous side of American society and did not, with the exception of its political cartoons, try to influence American opinion.

The last major humor journal that preceded the birth of the newspaper comic strip was Life. Started in 1883 by John Ames Mitchell as a magazine that would publish the finest literary and artistic work, Life

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42 James Albert Wales, 1852-86, was the first prominent native American cartoonist. He drew interesting color cartoons and comic panels for both Puck and Judge, but his career was cut short by his untimely death. See Ann Gould ed. Masters of Caricature, intro. and commentary by William Feaver (New York: Knopf, 1981), 98 and Cusack, "Nineteenth Century Humor Magazines.", 369.

43 Among the better-known artists were T.S. Sullivant, who could draw ethnics or animals with great comic originality, R.F. Outcault, creator of the Yellow Kid and Buster Brown, George Herriman, long before Krazy Kat, James Montgomery Flagg, creator of Nervy Nat, and C.W. Kahles, creator of the early comic strip Hairbreadth Harry.
aspired to a position as the arbiter of genteel society. It differed from *Puck* and *Judge* in that many of its writers came from the relatively small group of college-educated Americans. These young men came from a higher social class than most members of the press. They had served their apprenticeship on college newspapers more sophisticated but more sheltered than the highly competitive commercial market. Because of their social status, they were more aware of the flaws and weaknesses of the elites and were able to use this information in their cartoons. After searching for the right combination of graphics and text, *Life* became very successful mainly due to the appealing work of Charles Dana Gibson. The magazine began by specializing in gentle spoofs of aristocratic society as portrayed by W.H. Hyde and W.W. McVickar, both college men. They would soon be surpassed by young Gibson, who excelled at portraying the best of the Gilded Age.

Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944) was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts into a respectable Yankee family with little money but much interest in art and education. The Gibsons were an outstandingly handsome and close-knit. Gibson loved drawing and was determined to make art his career. He went to New York against the wishes of his father who wanted him to find some "decent" work. After a year's study at the Art Student's League, he had met with dozens of rejections and was ready to go home in defeat. Fortunately for *Life*, John Ames Mitchell saw promise in Gibson's

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work and bought one of his drawings for $4.00. This was the beginning of a close friendship that brought fame and fortune to both.

Under the tutelage of Mitchell, Gibson soon became a regular contributor to Life. Keppler noticed his talent and attempted to hire him but he remained loyal to Mitchell even though Puck offered more money. Gibson at first drew popular cartoons on many topics, but he did not become famous until he created his portrait of the ideal American girl-woman, the Gibson Girl. Tall and graceful, chastely beautiful, cool and remote yet capable of warmth and love, she touched the hearts of both men and women. Both sexes recognized her as an idealized representation of American womanhood at its finest, a fusion of the past and present. The Gibson Girl and her male counterpart (a look at Gibson family portraits shows that they bear a striking resemblance to his much-loved parents) provided a national model for the nineties. They evoked a way of life that Americans wanted to believe in and quickly tried to imitate. Yet Gibson was aware of the corruption in his world, and sometimes indicted its faults. He saw the cruelty and pretension present in upper-class American society that existed along with its glamour. But the overall mood created by Gibson was one of beauty, genteel humor, wistful longing, and resignation. His characters accepted their world as it was and did not try to escape or change.

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45 The "family type" has remained true through the fourth generation. Town and Country magazine recently featured an fashion photo-essay in which Gibson's grandson and great-granddaughters were posed alongside life-size reproductions of original Gibson drawings. The resemblance was striking. See "Those Glorious Gibson Girls", Michael Ballentine, Town and Country, May 1983, 194-200, 263.
Gibson's work is important for several reasons. He was one of the first to develop graphic characters with continuity. His characters had the elusive modern quality of "personality" or a sense of special or unique selfhood. It is difficult to determine just exactly why the need for personal individuality became so important at this time. Certainly, America was well on its way to becoming a nation of crowded cities. It was increasingly difficult to retain one's personal identity and sense of place. Thus Americans were urged by a number of philosophers, doctors and social scientists to concern themselves with their own individuality and self-hood, rather than continue the more conformist development of character along traditional moral lines. Warren Susman wrote concerning the perception of personality at this time,

> From the beginning, the adjectives most frequently associated with personality suggest a very different concept from that of character: fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing, masterful, creative, dominant, forceful.

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46 Gibson's work is hard to place in the cartoon world. Only rarely does he deal in caricature; his work contains considerable humor, but it is not comic. There are no boxes or speech balloons yet his work has a story-line and sometimes even a message. It also has the strong identification factor of comic strip character.

47 The accepted definition for personality, then and now was "the personal or individual quality that makes one person be different or act differently from another." Clarence L. Barnhart, ed. The Thorndike Barnhart Pocket Dictionary (New York:Doubleday,1951), 284.

48 See Raymond Williams, Keywords and Vocabulary of Culture and Society (New York:Oxford University Press,1976),194-97. Williams notes that personality is a modern term that was widely used in the early years of the twentieth century.

These adjectives infer something so attractive that it is easy to see why millions of Americans would copy the Gibson image in order to grasp some of the magic for themselves. Their attempt to add something of the Gibson style to their own nondescript selves, was at the same time a totem and a cry for recognition. Unfortunately, Gibson, himself, became the captive of his creation. Although he had an outstanding and versatile talent both as political cartoonist and serious painter, popular demand forced him to draw Gibsons for the rest of his commercial life.

The Gibson image took the country by storm. His idealized but human characters became role models for millions of Americans of all classes. However only the upper and middle class believed that the Gibsons had been created in their own image. Gibson's sketches set the fashion

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50 Gibson was probably the first to develop graphics with a broad popular national appeal. There was even a Gibson Girl wallpaper for the bachelor apartment. Americans would identify with many other cartoon characters through the years including the more recent Snoopy, Garfield and Mickey Mouse.

51 Another artist who created characters so popular that they took over his career was Palmer Cox (1840-1924), born in Granby, Province of Quebec, Canada. Cox, a talented cartoonist and book illustrator, created a group of little people called Brownies for St. Nicholas Magazine in the 1880's. The Brownies became so popular with children and parents alike that Cox was forced to spend all his time drawing them. Perhaps the Brownies captured him, because Cox, who never married, left New York to live in Brownie Castle in his native Granby. He estimated that he drew over ten million Brownies for his demanding public, writing 13 books and many magazine articles. The Brownies, though not drawn in panel or strip form, were closely related to the comic strip. Several newspaper strips, including the Ting-a-Lings and the Teenie Weenies were strongly influenced by Cox. See Maurice Horn, ed., The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons (New York:Chelsea House, 1980), 174-5.

52 Amazingly enough the image still retains vitality as evinced by an ad in the New York Times, which ran 5 May 1983. Along with a picture, the ad included the following copy. "The legend is living history, in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. Langhorne Gibson and their two daughters. In a portfolio of lavish color portraits, Town & Country introduces you to the elegant descendants of the original Gibson blood line, photographed alongside the famous drawings by the man who started it all, Charles Dana Gibson...when your eye moves from bloodline to hemline, you will see how easily and gracefully the classic Gibson Girl fashions are right at home in your current active wardrobe."
trends for many years. Women imitated the upswept hairstyle, shirtwaist dress and graceful carriage of the Gibson Girl, while men removed beards, mustaches and sideburns to maintain the style of the clean-shaven, well-tailored, square-shouldered Gibson Man. Gibson's work also appeared in albums and as framed pictures displayed in thousands of homes. His influence was so great that it inspired dozens of imitations in other magazines and in advertisements. None had the character and vitality of the originals. The Gibson Girl and her family are closely related to the best comic strips because they have in common, strong identification and personal involvement with the reader.

Although the humor magazines provided an important training ground for cartoonists, and whetted the public appetite for graphic humor, the newspaper would develop the medium that allowed it to reach a mass audience. Newspapers had the initial advantage of lower cost which automatically made them accessible to more people. Newspapers were also the first to develop mass marketing and distribution methods. The relatively low cost of newspaper production made it possible for a person of modest means to start a newspaper and hundreds of newspapers, large and small were an accepted part of the American scene. Despite increased costs of publication, newspapers remain important to our culture today. During the nineteenth century, a battle for dominance raged between the "serious" newspaper that printed political and other news in a genteel, moral masculine style and the "sensational" newspaper that printed anything that would sell newspapers. By the 1890's, the conflict had produced a "hybrid" newspaper that was a combination of serious and sensational news, sold
huge numbers on a daily basis and was constantly seeking to increase its circulation and profits. Despite the influence and popularity of the humor magazines in eighties, the most significant and lasting form of graphic humor, the comic strip, would emerge as part of this newspaper hybrid. The daily newspaper of the nineties was ideal for the publication of cartoons and comic strips because it had a large-size format, huge circulation, ready availability, low cost and a readership that cut across class lines. However the modern newspaper like the humor magazine, developed slowly and was shaped by conditions unique to American society.

Newspapers in Colonial America, like the early magazines, were fairly expensive and directed at a small audience. The first newspaper published continuously in America was printed in Boston, April 24, 1704. The Boston News-Letter, a weekly, continued until the Revolutionary War. From this insignificant beginning (only 300 copies of the Newsletter were printed each week), total weekly newspaper circulation had risen to 76,438 copies by 1789. These statistics, however inaccurate, give some idea of the increasing demand for information in the young nation.

Rapid expansion of the newspaper business was difficult at first, because the colonists simply did not have the capital or material necessary for large scale production. The British were determined to restrict colonial


55 There were exceptions. Benjamin Franklin had done so well as a printer and newspaper publisher that at the age of forty-two, he sold his business. The money it provided
industry and restricted the importing of paper and printing machinery. Vitally necessary movable type was also produced mainly in Europe. The success and growth of these early papers, despite the hostile environment, shows that the interest was there. After the Revolutionary War, newspapers multiplied at a faster rate, aided by the new Bill of Rights, which made the American Press the least restricted of any in the world. Unfortunately, this freedom would also cause a proliferation of abuses. Continued publication of vicious slanders directed at public figures like Washington and Jefferson were the rule in many newspapers. The victim's only recourse was to sue or personally attack the offending editor. However most Americans seemed to agree with Thomas Jefferson when he wrote..."Were it left for me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government I should not hesitate to prefer the latter." 56 Despite the misuse and exploitation of this freedom, and ultra-conservative attempts at censorship, the press has retained freedom of expression. This freedom allows political cartoonists and even the comic strips of Gary Trudeau and Burke Breathead to shock or offend certain segments of the populace with their ideas of truth.

An example of American ingenuity can be found in the response to the problems of newspaper expansion and distribution at a time when travel was difficult. Because it was impossible to deliver newspapers over any distance, Americans responded by starting a large number of small

newspapers which served a particular area. Readers could choose from a
great variety of newspapers: political, sensational, religious, foreign
language or mercantile (papers that carried mostly advertising) in weekly,
bi-weekly or daily issues. The size of these papers was much smaller than
the papers of today with fewer (6 to 8) pages. Because paper was expensive,
publishers used a minuscule type face in narrow columns that crowded
across the page. These newspapers were always profitable because of high
overhead and small circulation, and thus were either a printer's sideline or
subsidized by a special interest group. Advertising and illustrations were
also limited due to limited space.

The entertainment function of the newspaper was present even
during Colonial times, though on a much smaller scale. A shortage of news
often left gaps in the papers that were filled by humorous anecdotes. In
addition, several early papers stressed their ability to entertain the reader. Benjamin Franklin was one of the first to provide a model for the
humorous rustic philosopher when he wrote a series of letters proportedly
coming from Widow Silence Dogood. Unfortunately the dominant societal
forces of Puritanism and the work ethic made the pseudonym a necessity.

57 Only the largest papers had a circulation of 4,000 copies at an average price of six
cents.

58 The New England Courant, 11 February 1723,1, stated that it was "designed purely
for the entertainment and merriment of the Reader". The New England Weekly Journal, 20
March 1721, 1, mentioned "some regular schemes for the Entertainment of the ingenious reader
and Encouragement of Wit and Politeness. The Massachusetts Centinel, 11 March 1784, said
that "whatever space was not occupied by political intelligence would be devoted to amuse
the pensive and sad, and make them merry that are mad."
Despite the demand for humor, many contributors feared public censure if they were found spending valuable time *scribbling*.59

Cultural and social traditions also influenced newspaper development. Although the strict observance of Sunday as a day of rest and prayer, was not followed in all areas, the basic standard remained. Puritan moral and spiritual values were accepted as an important part of their cultural heritage by white middle-class Americans. These values restricted the development of the newspaper at first. For example, the religious observance of Sunday which was almost as important socially as spiritually in 1830, demanded that Sunday newspapers be forbidden. The Biblical tradition that the male was the head of the house and dominant in the political and business world determined that newspapers be read and written by men, for men.60 Consequently, many early newspapers contained only *serious* news, sermons, legal notices, and a list of advertisements.

Despite the moral force of the opposition, some newspaper editors felt that a Sunday paper was a good idea. As early as 1796, Philip Edwards attempted to publish a Sunday paper in Baltimore. It lasted for one issue.61 Edwards was well aware of the religious bias against reading the news on Sunday, and he carefully included spiritual messages along with the news. He argued that many would-be readers were too busy during the week to read a newspaper. Edwards felt that a journal published on the Sabbath

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59 See Mark Lipper, "Comic Caricatures in Early American Newspapers as Indicators of the National Character." (Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1972), 23.
60 Of course, there were exceptions. American women were noted and often criticized for their independence and interest in public affairs.
61 Lee, The Daily Newspaper in America, 76.
would provide both spiritual enrichment and information that might otherwise be missed. Despite his logical argument, the paper met with a solid wall of resistance.

A rebirth of religious fervor in the 1820's further delayed the appearance of the Sunday paper which inadvertently became part of bitter fight for influence and control between organized religion and the secular world. At this time, the ministry still offered a career with some potential for power and influence. Since colonial times, the ministry had been the chosen career for many brilliant and able young men. Although the Protestant Churches still attracted men of talent in the ante-bellum years, they gradually lost out to the seductive lure of financial success in the business world. As the pulpit declined in prestige and influence, the press began to fill the void as a source of information and instruction.

At first, the protests and boycotts led by Protestant clergy against the Sunday paper kept most publishers from publishing on the sabbath. However the success of the Sunday edition was insured by the arrival in the 1840's of large numbers of Catholic immigrants who had no Puritan bias against Sunday entertainment. As a result, by the 1890's, the Sunday newspaper had become the largest and most desired edition and included many special features not found on any other day. One of these was, of course, the color comic supplement.

In 1830, the ordinary citizen who lived in a rural area often could not afford to prepay the subscription fee (from $5 TO $10 a year) which insured

63 Lee, The Daily Newspaper in America, has a good section on the arguments for and against the Sunday paper. 379.
the delivery of a newspaper or magazine. Thus most of the early periodicals were directed at the upper classes who could support them. The first attempt to provide a variety of reading material for the common man was the establishment of the penny press. The cheap urban dailies which first appeared in the 1830's in the larger cities on the east coast, were the forerunners of the popular mass press of the 1890's.64

The first attempts to publish cheap papers in New York and Boston, had failed despite the success of the penny paper in England.65 These failures did not deter Benjamin H. Day, printer and journalist, from publishing the first issue of the *New York Sun* in 1833. He was not motivated by a commitment to bring knowledge to the masses but instead hoped to develop a profitable sideline for his printing business. The *Sun* was approximately the size of a sheet of typing paper, four pages long and featured a modest title headline and three columns across of small but neatly set type.66 The paper was sold on the street by newsboys for a penny. The *Sun* took a new approach, emphasizing human interest stories and police reports rather than political or commercial news. These sensational stories, coupled with its low price, made the *Sun* almost an overnight success. After four months, the *Sun* had a circulation of over 5,000 copies a day, more than any other daily of the time. Rather than printing news that was political, moral or educational, the *Sun* pioneered a more modern

64 Schiller, *Objectivity and the News*, details the struggle for dominance between the elite and the workingman's press, in chapters 1 and 2.

65 The English *Penny Magazine*, a penny weekly, published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, had a circulation of 160,000 in the 1830's when 2,000 was considered large in the United States. Mott, *American Journalism*, 220.

66 *New York Sun*, Vol. 1., 3 September 1833, 1. The actual typeset size measured 7.5 by 10 inches.
concept of printing anything that was interesting and newsworthy, regardless of its social significance.  

Day was also innovative in his approach to marketing. He tried the *English style* of newspaper distribution, selling his papers to newsboys for 67 cents per hundred. The newsboys collected 6 cents per week from their regular subscribers and sold the rest to casual customers. It was much easier to pay a penny a day or 6 cents a week for the Sun than to spend at least $5. for a prepaid subscription.

By 1834, the Sun, having installed new and faster equipment, was printing 15,000 copies a day. In 1835, it boasted that its circulation was now..."far surpassing that of any other daily paper in the Union, and with one, perhaps two, exceptions in London, in the whole world." The Sun was also increasingly profitable, with so many advertisements, that they often took up 3/4 of the paper. However, despite his success, Day sold out to his brother-in-law, Moses Y. Beach, in a fit of anxiety over the failure of other

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67 And if it would sell newspapers. In one 1833 issue, the Sun devoted two lines to the removal of the Secretary of the Treasury, three to the catching of a big shark, and a quarter of a column to feeding an anaconda in the American Museum. Its main story featured the exploits of Miss Susan Allen, who bought a cigar on Broadway and was arrested after smoking it while dancing in the street. See Helen MacGill Hughes, *News and the Human Interest Story* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1940), 8.

68 As the Sun's circulation increased, Day organized groups of newsboys for each district, and paid them $2. each per week for selling 125 papers a day. The boys could also buy additional papers at 9 cents a dozen. When opportunistic men saw that boys could earn as much as $5. a week selling papers, they organized delivery routes and hired boys to deliver the papers. By 1836, the rights to these delivery routes were valued at $600. a year. Both the Sun and its main rival, the Herald, insisted on cash payment for newspapers, which helped keep them profitable. This system was copied by other urban papers. See Lee, *The Daily Newspaper*, 261.

69 *The New York Sun*, 30 June 1835, 1.
cheap papers in the panic of 1837. The Beach family successfully continued the *Sun* until it was bought by Charles A. Dana in 1868. Under Dana's guidance, it continued to turn a profit and gained respectability.

Naturally, the *Sun*'s success encouraged many others to publish cheap papers. In New York City alone, 34 dailies were started between 1833-37, although 19 failed within a year. The *Sun*'s only major rival in New York was the *Herald*, begun on May 6, 1835, by James Gordon Bennett. Bennett, a Scots immigrant, was to become one of the most important figures in the history of American journalism. Tall and impressive-looking, except for a sinister squint, he rose from poverty to wealth and power. Although born a Catholic and educated for the priesthood, Bennett rejected his faith, becoming an iconoclastic apostate noted for his black humor. Bennett's keen intelligence and grasp of economics was coupled with a sarcastic and blasphemous wit. He also had an inflated ego and a burning desire to make himself and his newspaper important.

Bennett used the *Herald* as an extension of his personality. The paper was irreverent toward religion and delighted in scandal and sex, yet it had an efficient news-gathering service, excellent editorials and good managers. Bennett was determined to break down what he felt was the ridiculous prudery of the times such as the popular convention which insisted that

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70 Day later regretted his sale of the *Sun* and bought a literary journal. He lived to see the *Sun* prosper after the Civil War. Day's family was also associated with the newspaper and literary world. His son invented the *benday process* used in engraving, while his grandson, Clarence Day, was a playwright and author.

71 See the *Union List of Newspapers*. The most interesting of these were *Man*, a daily labor paper, and *The Ladies Morning Star*, an attempt to produce a more genteel version of the sensational penny paper.

72 Napoleon was his hero. For more information, see Piers Brendon, *The Life and Death of the Press Barons*, (New York: Athenaeum, 1973), Chapter 2.
polite society refer to legs as *limbs*, shirts as *linen* and trousers as *unmentionables*. Bennett wanted news reported in the words of real life. He also believed in both the power of the newspaper and its place as the voice of the people. The *Herald* prospered, close behind the *Sun* in total circulation, despite a movement to boycott the paper, started by the *respectable people* of New York.\(^73\) To counteract the effects of this boycott, Bennett worked to make his newspaper both interesting and attractive. Besides better and more current news, he added commercial and financial reports, illustrations, as well as maps and cartoons, sports features, church news and society gossip. Thus by 1860, the *Herald* claimed a circulation of 77,000 as opposed to the *Sun's* 60,000.\(^74\) It boasted 8 pages, 5 of news and miscellaneous items, and 3 of advertising.

During the Civil War, Bennett was the first major publisher to fully utilize the steamboat, railroad and telegraph to facilitate rapid newsgathering. He kept an army of reporters in the field at a cost of over $500,000. Thus, although many respectable people kept the *Herald* hidden from view, they read it for the latest war news. Bennett's paper, like the man himself, was never loved; it was successful although many hated and feared its power. Bennett died an embittered and lonely man whose sole interest in life was the continued growth of his newspaper monster.\(^75\)

The *Herald* was inherited by his only son, James Gordon Bennett II. Young Bennett was a spoiled, wilful, drunken, degenerate who had been

\(^{73}\) See Mott, *American Journalism*, 236.


\(^{75}\) Uncharacteristically, Bennett made his confession and died in the faith he had so cruelly lampooned, perhaps as insurance for the next world.
given every luxury. Brought up like a royal prince, he treated everyone beneath him with contempt. Because of his volatile and demanding personality, the newsroom under his rule was hell, yet journalists clamored to work for him. Despite his stated desire to kill the Herald, the younger Bennett was a good newspaperman who knew how to capture the public interest. His paper continued to prosper until the 1890's when it was successfully challenged by the new yellow journals of Pulitzer and Hearst.76

The penny press, an important barometer of social change, was also crucial to the development of the comic strip because it was directed at the working class, the poor and the half-educated as well as the lower-middle class. There is some disagreement among scholars concerning the readership of the penny press. Michael Schudson argues that the main readership of the penny press came from the new, upwardly mobile lower-middle and middle classes, as distinguished from the older established traditional genteel culture.77 This is in opposition to the argument of Dan Schiller who sees the penny press as a mainstream version of the more radical labor press. With the decline of the labor press, after the Panic of 1837, the penny papers became the main voice for the egalitarian republican views of the skilled artisans.78

However, observers at the time felt differently. Family Magazine stated in 1834...

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76 Having wasted a fortune, Bennett II died in 1918. His paper was sold to Frank Munsey in 1920. The proceeds ironically went to found a home for indigent journalists.

77 Shudson, Discovering the News, 51-56. Schudson sees the penny press as part of the change in the economy from an agricultural society controlled by idealistic but elitist landowners to a more democratic free market capitalism.

78 See Dan Schiller, Objectivity and the News. Chapter 2, particularly 71-75.
The penny papers reach the very depths of the social state and move the mighty waters that lie undisturbed and stagnant below the reach of our daily mammoth sheets.\textsuperscript{79}

This genteel critic realized the potential power of the mass audience, as yet untapped by the mainstream press. The statement itself acknowledges that these papers were reaching the people at the bottom of society. Despite the arguments of Shudson and Schiller, and the difficulty of determining readership, the large numbers of papers sold, in relation to urban population, proves that many were bought by the less advantaged classes. Publishers like Day and Bennett were keenly interested in the profit level. They wanted to maximize the sale of their papers and they directed them at the working class which greatly outnumbered the elites.

Because of its mass orientation, the penny press was often sensational and lacking in polish. These papers placed too much emphasis on sex and crime and printed irresponsible and misleading advertisements. Yet at the same time, the penny papers loudly proclaimed a desire to keep the common people informed. They stressed their eagerness to expose abuses, support reform and remain free of class or party dominance.\textsuperscript{80} They also helped change the newspaper's orientation from providing information to providing information and entertainment, with the emphasis on entertainment. This was very important for development of the comic strip. Even the news story was expected to be amusing while the deliberately sensational human interest story became an important part of the paper.

\textsuperscript{79}Family Magazine, 17 May 1834 p.40.
\textsuperscript{80}As the masthead of the Sun proclaimed, "The Sun shines for all". See Mott, American Journalism, 242-3.
During the ante-bellum years, the political and mercantile papers continued to dominate the market even though the penny papers had higher individual circulation. However, the gradual change in the popular concept of news helped break the dominance of the political papers. The independent non-partisan journalist eventually became highly prized and the improved profitability of newspapers allowed them to exist without partisan support.

Several other developments in the newspaper field that later affected the comic strip are worth mentioning. First the total number of newspapers in the United States tripled between 1870 and 1890.\(^{81}\) There was also a huge increase in the number of foreign-language papers. Although French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian and Jewish immigrants had their own newspapers, the German papers predominated. In 1860, there were almost 300 German-language newspapers published in the United States.

Another important change was the gradual acceptance of the Sunday edition. After several false starts, James Gordon Bennett finally succeeded in developing a Sunday edition for the *Herald* in 1841. At the same time, French and German papers in New Orleans, a predominantly Catholic city, started Sunday editions. Other papers gingerly followed, encouraged by the influx of Catholic immigrants without towards the restriction of Sunday activities. The demand for Civil War news increased the demand for

\(^{81}\) In 1870, the total number of newspapers was about 4,500. By 1890, this number had increased to over 12,000. This includes dailies and weeklies. To compare these numbers with other countries, in 1870, the United States had three times as many papers as the United Kingdom and one third of the world's newspaper. See Mott, *American Journalism*, 404.
Sunday editions of daily papers, and in some cases, the Sunday issue sold more copies than the daily one.

The Sunday edition was also a significant part of a trend towards the feminization of the newspaper. The important role played by women during the war and increased agitation for women's rights caused many papers to provide more news and advertising for women. Formerly they had been confined to religious or women's publications. The rise of the department store and the increase in mail-order catalog purchases also found more ads directed at women. Many newspapers even added a weekly Women's Page, and began to hire women as reporters and feature writers.

Finally, after the Civil War, political cartoons began to appear in newspapers. The first to use political cartoons on a regular basis was Bennett's New York Evening Telegram, which was founded in 1867. However, other papers had randomly used them as early as the 1830's, particularly during political campaigns.

In the 1880's the time was ripe for the development of mass newspapers with huge circulations published by men who would wield enormous power and have tremendous influence. Joseph Pulitzer, the first of the new-style press barons, noted and used the new developments in the newspaper industry to develop a mass market for his paper. Pulitzer and his bitter rival, William Randolph Hearst, dominated the newspaper scene by the turn of the century. Their competition for a major share of the market helped establish the comic supplement as perhaps the most important part of the Sunday paper. Both were bitterly denounced by politicians and businessmen as power-mad egomaniacs who manipulated and corrupted the masses. Certainly they were ruthless in their quest for power, and
believed they could change the course of history. Yet, they were also independent and unrestrained critics of social ills with the means to resist bribes. Their great financial success also brought changes and improvements in both content and style of the newspaper.

Joseph Pulitzer, the founder of the New York World, came to the United States in 1864 as a penniless recruit for the Union Army. His Austrian-Jewish parents were wealthy, and the German-speaking Pulitzer had been well-educated in Hungary. His father's death caused the break-up of his family, and the penniless young man decided on a military career. However, he was sickly and had such poor eyesight that only the Union Army would accept him. After brief military service, Pulitzer moved to St. Louis where he worked at a series of odd jobs in the German community. He was eventually hired as a reporter by the Westlichte Poste. Pulitzer was able to master English in four months and his restless energy and incisive mind brought him rapid success as a reporter. However, his scarecrow appearance, ragged clothes, big nose and German accent made him the constant butt of jokes in the newspaper office. After a brief period as newspaper editor and state representative, Pulitzer bought the Westlichte Poste, built it into a successful paper and sold it after a year. He then returned to Europe to seek a cure for his terrible headaches. 82

In 1878, Pulitzer returned to the newspaper business, buying the bankrupt St.Louis Post for $2,500. He made it into one of the most powerful newspapers in the midwest, by getting the most out of the talented people

82 Pulitzer suffered from intense headaches all of his life and eventually went blind. Both may have been caused by a brain tumor. See Brendon, The Press Barons. Chap. 6.
he hired. In 1883, he moved to New York City. There he bought the New York World from Jay Gould for $346,000, much more than it was worth at the time. Pulitzer was able to increase the World's daily circulation from 15,000 to 150,000 in just two years by utilizing the techniques of the penny press and hiring the best available talent. However, his surprisingly quick success angered and frightened influential people on both sides of the Atlantic. British historian W.E.H. Lecky complained...

that it was unthinkable that unknown men merely by virtue of owning newspapers, should assume the language of the accredited representatives of the nation and rebuke, patronize and insult its elected leaders.

The Democratic Mayor of New York felt that Pulitzer had underhandedly gained as much power with less restraint than the traditional political boss.

...Sitting in his editorial sanctum like a brooding Buddha, he does not hesitate to claim omniscience and to endow himself with omnipotence. The political boss was responsible to his party; the newspaper boss is responsible only to his own pocket. He is as dangerous as he is despotic.

84 Brendon, The Press Barons, 94.
85 W.R. Reynolds, "Joseph Pulitzer" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1950), 212.
Despite the large amount of sensational material in the World, it was not just a cheap daily. Pulitzer's talented editors and reporters were paid well and worked hard. The World's features were well written, its news current and its editorials thoughtful. Pulitzer developed a separate sports department to provide readers with the latest news on increasingly popular sporting events such as horse racing, prize fighting, international yacht racing and baseball. 86

Pulitzer was one of the first publishers to hire a number of women staff members. This quickly became a necessity when women moved into the business world in growing numbers after 1880, working in retail stores and offices. Women became more visible in the world and a women's viewpoint became an important part of the newspaper. By the 1890's, several hundred women worked for newspapers. A few had became star reporters while others filled positions as specialists in women's news, producing recipes, articles, and human interest stories for the new Women's Pages.

The best known of Pulitzer's female reporters was Elizabeth Cochran, who wrote under the pen name, Nelly Bly. Cochran was hired by the World as a "stunt reporter". 87 Her job was to develop tricks that would gain both publicity and readers for the World such as getting herself committed to an insane asylum. Her most famous was an attempt to beat the record of Jules Verne's Phileas Fogg in the book, Around the World in Eighty Days.

87 A stunt reporter assumed a disguise or forged credentials to gain admission to a hospital, asylum or jail. He or she then used the experiences gained to write a sensational expose of the institution.
Cochran's well publicized trip took seventy-two days, six hours, eleven minutes and fourteen seconds.\textsuperscript{88}

Pulitzer's *World* ran crusades against monopolies, white slave traffic, and corrupt politicians. It was also active in providing charity for less fortunate readers, distributing free ice and coal, and providing summer trips and Christmas dinners for the poor. In addition, the paper had a staff of thirty-five doctors who gave medical aid to the needy.\textsuperscript{89}

The *World* pioneered in providing a newspaper with large numbers of illustrations, despite the fact that the almost-blind Pulitzer did not care for pictures. In 1885, the *World* began to carry political cartoons, and by 1890, they were a regular feature in both daily and Sunday editions. In the mid-90's, color comics and color pictures were added.

Pulitzer was the first to develop the full potential of the Sunday edition. In 1884, Sunday editions were little different from daily editions except for an extra insert of miscellaneous features. Under Pulitzer, the Sunday *World* became a twenty-page paper, packed with interesting light reading and illustrations. People liked the new edition *World*, and its circulation had climbed to 200,000 by 1885 and reached 250,000 in 1887. In 1889, the Sunday *World* contained forty-eight pages. Even though its price was increased to five cents, readers bought it in large numbers. Other papers such as the *Boston Globe* and *Herald*, and the *Sun* and *Herald* in New York, quickly copied the *World*’s expanded Sunday edition. The competition to

\textsuperscript{88}Mott, *American Journalism*, 437.

\textsuperscript{89}*New York World Souvenir Supplement*, 10 December 1890.
produce the biggest and best Sunday edition made it the perfect vehicle to carry the new colored comics and the *World* first ran them in 1889.

Evidence of the growing prestige power and wealth of the press is found in the number of splendid palaces built by major urban papers between 1870-1890. Many newspapers built unusual and expensive buildings at this time. Not to be outdone, the *World* constructed a $2,500,000 building on New York's Park Row in 1890 as a symbol of its success. It was not to hold center stage alone for long. 90

In the 1890's, the newspaper world was jarred from its complacency by the *yellow* journals of William Randolph Hearst. Hearst, the spoiled only son of a wealthy silver miner who had led a sheltered and indulged childhood seemed an unlikely candidate for success in the ruthless newspaper world. 91 Young Hearst was expelled from Harvard but not before he developed an interest in the newspaper business and became an enthusiastic admirer of Pulitzer. 92 Hearst Sr. had recently purchased a California newspaper for political reasons and the young man begged his father to let him manage the *San Francisco Examiner*. He wanted to make it a newspaper in the *World*'s image of the "new journalism" as it was called. After five years, the new format and style changes he had initiated made the *Examiner* a huge success, and Hearst felt he was ready to challenge the competition in New York City. After his father's death in 1891, Hearst's

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92 He was the very successful business manager of the *Harvard Lampoon*.
doting mother gave him $7,500,000 from the sale of mining stock. With money in hand, he went to New York in 1895 determined to buy a newspaper. The *Morning Journal*, formerly owned by Albert Pulitzer, Joseph's brother, was losing money and its owner readily agreed to Hearst's offer of $180,000 cash.93

The *Journal* (*Morning* was dropped) was quickly converted to the *World's* format, and its circulation began to rise. Hearst spared no expense, hiring the best journalists available whatever the cost, the same policy he had followed in San Francisco. Like the *World*, the *Journal* emphasized sensational news, had many pictures and a variety of features yet sold for only one cent. Pulitzer also reduced the *World's* price to a penny in order to compete with Hearst, making up the difference by increasing advertising rates. The publicity gained from this competition raised the circulation of both but hurt the profits of the established paper.

After Hearst's second year in New York, his *Herald* actually moved ahead of the *World* in circulation. Despite the efforts of moral reformers to shut them down because they glorified sex and violence, both continued to prosper and compete for readers. The *Herald* gained in respect as well as readers when it prevented a crooked gas franchise deal and aided several other reforms. Hearst and Pulitzer both wanted to make their papers the dominant force in New York and their keenest competition was over the Sunday edition. Money was never a problem for Hearst, so he promptly hired away the entire staff of Pulitzer's *Sunday World*. Hurt and angry, Pulitzer fought back, making them a higher offer which Hearst again

93 Mott, *American Journalism*, 520.
topped. The bidding was was especially vicious when it concerned the cartoonists who drew the very popular new comic strips. Richard F. Outcault, whose Yellow Kid was the hit of the 90's and the inspiration for the term yellow journalism was a prime example. Outcault originally worked for Pulitzer, but was hired away by Hearst. Because he did not have a long-term contract, he could accept the offer of the highest bidder. Outcault was also a shrewd businessman who capitalized on his comic strip character's popularity in vaudeville, on the stage and by merchandising it as an advertising symbol.

By 1900, the Comic Supplement had become the jewel of the Sunday paper. Although color comics had been printed intermittently by other newspapers the World was the first to publish eight pages of comics with four in full color. When the comic section proved almost an instant hit, Hearst countered with his own section. In a further effort to outdo Pulitzer, he bought new color presses with a high output in 1896. He then produced an eight page color section, the American Humorist, which was rapidly copied by every paper that could afford it and some that could not. As Hearst modestly announced...

A Morning Glory ablaze with light,
I'm here a bewitching, bewildering sprite,
Fresh as the posies that come with the vernal,
Discreet? Why of course, but not too coy,
Dainty but daring, a thing of joy,
The latest advance of the Sunday Journal.94

94 New York Journal, 4 October 1896, 1.
The medium that has made the Sunday comics a staple for almost 100 years had finally arrived.

A discussion of the newspaper's development as a vehicle for the comic strips would be incomplete without a brief mention of advertising growth in the nineteenth century. Advertisements have always been closely related to the comics and important as popularizers of certain comic characters. Before the Civil War, many editors considered illustrated advertisements a distraction from serious news. By 1880, when competition among manufacturers of similar home-oriented products had become more intense, they developed brand names to make a product stand out. Distinctive trade marks were also added. Illustrated ads were a then necessity to attract the readers to a specific brand and instill confidence in the product. Artists were encouraged to clever symbols or pictures that would help the public recognize and remember a particular item.

The best use of this type of advertisement during this period was in the marketing of *Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound*. One of the products most heavily advertised in the newspapers of the eighties was the patent medicine. Fortunes could be made in this field if the product sold well and was trusted. The Pinkham family successfully marketed their home remedy through the skillful use of the motherly, confidence-inspiring portrait of Lydia Pinkham.

The Pinkham men were restless Yankee entrepreneurs reduced to poverty by the panic of 1873. They regained a measure of success by marketing an herbal medicine developed by Lydia Pinkham, the family matriarch. Their product sales increased when they began large-scale newspaper advertising but their first ads were all text and featured
sensational testimonials. However, Daniel Pinkham wanted to connect his product with respectable New England womanhood, and he had a brilliant idea. Why not use a portrait of his mother, who was at this time sixty years old, as the company symbol. The calm, motherly and obviously respectable face of Lydia Pinkham soon graced their labels and the new ads was an immediate success. Business doubled in a year. At a time when women's faces were not often found in newspapers, Lydia's portrait was eye-catching. (Some editors used her picture as a substitute for Queen Victoria or for other famous women because it was so readily available.) Lydia Pinkham's phenomenal success as a trademark was noticed and emulated by hundreds of other businesses. In fact, the earliest trademarks were usually portraits of people associated with the product like Lydia Pinkham and the bearded Smith Brothers of cough drop fame. When comic strip characters gained national prominence, they were and still are in demand for this type of advertisement.

The new advertising agencies that sprang up to specialize in the production of advertisements developed at least three distinct types of ads that are still in use today. They are the elegant or sophisticated ad, the

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95 Her motherly face appeared above a message addressed to "the Ladies of the World", which promised to cure ovarian troubles, inflammations, ulcerations, falling and displacements, spinal weakness, tumors in the uterus, faintness, headaches, sleepiness, depression, and ease change of life. Since the compound was 18% alcohol, it probably did relax tension. An anonymous poet composed the following verse...Then we'll sing of Lydia Pinkham and her love for the human race, How she sold her vegetable compound And the papers published her face." This doggerel became the basis for a favorite rowdy song. See George Juergens, *Joseph Pulitzer and the New York World* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1966) 115, footnote 94.

96 For more on the Pinkhams, see Donald Dale Jackson, "Lydia Pinkham", *Smithsonian*, 15 (July, 1984). See also Sarah Stage, *Female Complaints* (New York: Norton, 1979). The Pinkhams spent $150,000 annually in advertising, out of sales totaling $2,500,000 in 1881.
humorous ad, and the testimonial ad. For example, Sapolio soap was famous for its "clean town", Pear's soap used humorous scenes involving shrunken woolens and "Phoebe Snow" a Gibson Girl type advertised the Lackawanna Railroad. Many famous cartoonists designed ads for manufacturers but since most were unsigned, it is often difficult to identify the artist. E.W. Kemble, well-known for his warm and sensitive portraits of black culture, created the black Gold Dust Twins for a soap company. Charles Dana Gibson himself glorified Colorado as a vacation spot for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad in the 1890's. The use of a celebrity or personality to advertise a product is still important in commercial advertising.

Thus the new-style advertising that appealed to women was due not so much to the women's rights movement but to the rise of the department store and female purchasing power. Most of the new products that were advertised were for use in the home and generally were bought by women. Newspaper advertising for the mass market also had a leveling effect similar to that of the comic strips. The products advertised were always said to be of the finest quality. If clothing was advertised, allusions were often made to exclusive foreign, usually French, styles, even if the items were cheaply priced. Mass production made elaborately styled dress clothes available for the same price as work clothing. This enabled the laborer,
factory worker or clerk on their day off to dress in the same style as the upper classes. It was sometimes difficult to discern the difference between a lady's maid and her mistress at first glance much to the annoyance of the wealthy. Mass production and mass advertising provided working-class and lower middle-class Americans with an opportunity to copy the life-styles of more privileged Americans. The mass press and their newspaper comics strips would provide these same groups with an outlet for their feelings as well as entertainment, and one that would successfully resist the domination of the elites.
CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST GENERATION FAMILY AND THEIR FRIENDS

Newspaper comic strips were the product of decades of artistic trial and error as well the result of commercial experimentation and technological advances. Their popularity was assured when they met the need of a growing urban audience made up of working and lower middle class readers. Many of their readers were first generation or foreign born citizens who had difficulty in fitting in or gaining status. The majority of the first generation comics focused on the adventures of characters who were involved in a constant struggle against the rules of social order already in place. Their heroes were outsiders who proved that they could survive and even thrive in this new urban environment. The Yellow Kid, the first comic strip to reach star status was also the start of this genre. This strip had a stunning effect on the residents of New York. The Kid was a character, but not of good character. Strange and individualistic in appearance, and unmistakably a child of the slums, he quickly captured the imagination of the New York World's readers. The Yellow Kid and his companions of the comic supplement, celebrated city life and culture during a period of

1 In England, the comic strip did not evolve in the mass newspaper. Instead, British comics appeared in separate penny-weekly comic papers, from the early 1880's. Unlike the mixed readership of the mass journals, research seems to indicate that the comic penny-weeklies were read mainly by the lower-middle class. The most popular of the weeklies featured Aly Sloper, a cockney of proletarian origin, who had become a "gent". Sloper, who became a cult figure among the middle class, was an artful rogue rather than openly anarchic, reactionary or a naive innocent. See Peter Bailey, "Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday: Comic Art in the 1880's" History Workshop, a Journal of Socialist-Feminist Historians, 16( Autumn 1983): 4-31.

107
confusion and conflict between rural and urban values and ideals.\(^2\) This is the main reason why it gained such enormous though short-lived popularity that most comic strip histories list it inaccurately as the first comic strip.

In his essay, "Personality and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture", Warren L. Susman discussed the gradual replacement in the American vocabulary of the nineteenth century word "character" with the twentieth-century word "personality".\(^3\) He felt that self-conscious individuality, and the development of the modern "cult of personality" could be traced in the emerging modern mass entertainments of the early twentieth century.\(^4\) The development of a "cult of personality is undoubtedly another key component in the success of the early comics. These strips exuded personality and individualism, yet were also capable of subordinating their individuality as part of a complex family of comics.

\(^2\) The majority of strips in the major eastern cities, New York, Boston, etc., featured urban or foreign settings, while papers in the rest of the country sometimes included a strip with a rural background during the first decade. By 1920, small town and country life was more visible in the comics.

\(^3\) Susman defines character as a group of traits concerned with with social significance and moral quality to be developed by the use of self control. Words used along with character, according to Susman, include: "citizenship, duty, democracy, honor reputation, manners, integrity and manhood". Conversely, he defines personality as "the quality of being Somebody". Words he finds associated with personality in the first decades of the twentieth century include: "fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing, masterful, dominant and forceful". Most of these words would not fit with the nineteenth century definition of character. Susman, Culture as History, 271-285.

\(^4\) Using the motion picture industry as an example, Susman notes the creation of the movie star. After 1910, screen players were marketed and billed as personalities, images and objects. This led to the development of fan magazines, the celebration of personality and the emergence of a new profession, that of celebrity. There was a relaxation of the correlation between achievement and fame as well. The star personality had already been developed in the comic strip. Susman, 283.
Comics also have other important attributes that provide criteria for either long term acceptance or brief appearance before the mass audience. For the purpose of this study, I have divided newspaper comic strips into two major categories, topical and elemental, according to their main theme. Topical comic strips appeal to the particular needs of society at a given time. The popularity of these strips is not unlike the short-lived but extreme obsession a modern audience sometimes develops with media stars of other disciplines. Topical comics usually have a brief period of intense popularity, then quickly fade and disappear.

A study of the main characters of most successful comic strips usually shows that they have "socially prismatic" personalities that enable them to appeal to all levels of society. William R. Taylor has defined a "socially prismatic personality" as one found in a character that would "have comic significance to those approaching it from different social perspectives." This means that adult and child readers might receive an entirely different message from the same comic strip. Taylor goes on to note that the use of children and animals in the American funnies allowed a wide range of comic responses. This is indeed true, but many times both children and

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5 William R. Taylor, "Toward the Launching of a Commercial Culture: New York City, 1860-1939.", paper prepared for the Social Science Research Council, March 16-19, 1984, 51-2. Taylor goes on to note that the early comic strips were entirely preoccupied with leisure. Although not entirely true, the early strips did stress recreational activities in the city, and as Taylor states, presented a picture of an urban entertainment culture, rather than the more conventional view of the city as a workplace. Unfortunately Taylor refers to the Yellow Kid as a toddler which is inaccurate. Despite the fact that he is dressed in a childish nightgown, the Kid is a streetwise urchin of nine or ten. He also often appears in the slums, not just "on the town", although with comic license, the Kid and his working-class friends sometimes appear in fashionable neighborhoods.

6 Ibid., 51. Taylor notes that a child might view the Yellow Kid or Buster Brown's pranks with appreciation, while a parent might use them as an example of bad behavior.
animals were used in an adult manner. Their childish or non-human freedom gave them the power to act in a counter-productive or anarchic manner not appropriate for adults. For example, the modern fat cat, Garfield enjoys such freedom and often fulfills adult fantasies. It is impossible to dismiss the importance of the animals present in the comics both as primary and secondary characters. In the nineteenth century, as man became less closely associated with animals in a natural state, the replication of animals in toys and cartoons increased, as did the development of zoos and animal sanctuaries.\(^7\)

Successful topical strips, such as the Yellow Kid, usually enjoyed tremendous popularity for a time, not only due to the prismatic appeal of their characters but also because their main theme was of intense current interest to a wide segment of society. In the case of The Yellow Kid, the theme was urban life. This strip inspired many imitations and a number of related products as well as popular songs and stage plays, yet quickly faded into oblivion when the national interest in city life waned.\(^8\) Some few strips began as topical, but due to the creativity and adaptability of their authors, adjusted to social change and retained their immediacy.

Unlike the topical strips, elemental strips have, along with prismatic personalities, themes that touch the longstanding basic values and

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\(^7\)John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, "Why Look at Animals", 20. In the twentieth century, animals ceased be used for transportation and energy and instead functioned as both curiosity entertainment, as well as domesticated pets.

\(^8\)An example of media-crossing is the following play developed from the Yellow Kid comic strip; Frank Dumont,*The Yellow Kid Who Lives in Hogan's Alley*(New York: The Dramatic Publishing Co., 1897). The play featured all the main characters of the comic strip and many of the cruel pranks. For example, steps were greased with stolen butter to make people fall, and a doctor was tricked into beating a crippled woman with a baby.
traditional beliefs held by a majority of Americans. As a result, many elemental strips have retained their popularity for decades. Another reason for the lasting popularity of both elemental and topical strips may be that while some are keenly responsive to current events or interests, others retain and actually preserve a cross-section of American beliefs and values.

The newspaper comics of the first generation naturally included both topical and elemental strips. Some of the earliest topical comic strips were directed at the lower classes. Their blocks and panels were filled with slum kids and other urchins, laborers and housewives, policemen, bums, social climbers and immigrants as well as angelic children and cute animals. A groundswell of middle-class criticism which crested between 1908 and 1912, resulted in the introduction of more genteel topics to the comic section. However, rowdy and violent strips like the Katzenjammer Kids were also retained not only because they sold newspapers, but because of their elemental appeal. Strips that featured cruel pranks and practical jokes and the more socially acceptable dream strip were probably the most important topical strips of the first decade. In addition, a temporary interest in the life of the urban poor aided the brief but amazing popularity of The Yellow Kid.

The two most consistently recurring elemental themes in newspaper strips have been rebellion against authority, and sympathy for the underdog. There has always been at least one anarchic strip in each comic

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9 Rebellion against authority has been closely related to humor and the grotesque for centuries. For example, the carnival of the middle ages and the early modern period gloried in earthy humor and the abnormal and in so doing signified the "symbolic destruction of authority and official culture and the assertion of popular renewal. See Mikhail Bahktin, Rabelais and His World, translated by Helenelswolsky(Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1984).
section, a constant from the Katzenjammer Kids to Garfield the Fat Cat. There have also been a number of innocents and fools (in both the medieval and modern sense) or poor souls and losers, depending on one's viewpoint, from Happy Hooligan to Charlie Brown in Peanuts. Other elemental themes developed by the end of this period included nostalgia for the past, found in numerous strips with a rural setting like Maud the Mule and portraits of family life, from the dialect of The Katzies to the Victorian respectability of Buster Brown. Because many of the early comic strips were directed at the working class, it is not surprising that a number of the most popular early strips were critical of middle-class values and manners. Criticism of the establishment, social, cultural and economic then quickly became an important elemental theme.

Hundreds of comic strips were produced between 1895 through 1915. It was a time of intense competition and creativity in the comic field. Editors and cartoonists both desperately sought a successful comic formula that would bring fame and fortune to the artist and increase newspaper circulation. If a new strip did not quickly gain popular acceptance, it was usually dropped. Thus many well done and innovative strips appeared only briefly and had a minimal impact on society, because the impatient artist or editor wanted the huge success of The Yellow Kid.

Because of the ephemeral nature of the comics, it is probably impossible and certainly unnecessary to enumerate every strip ever printed. Instead, for the purpose of this study, I have chosen for discussion and

10 Although the Katzenjammer Kids may have started as a topical strip to capture German immigrant readers, the fiendish anarchy of the Kids made it a perrenial favorite long after its original theme was forgotten.
analysis, some of the most popular and creative examples of both topical and elemental strips produced between 1895 and 1920. Statistics on readership were not kept during this period therefore I have selected as examples strips that were widely syndicated and imitated. Most of the featured strips were used in commercial advertising, regularly crossed over into other entertainment forms and provided their creators with substantial income. All of the elemental strips selected also enjoyed long-lasting runs in the comic section. I have also included a few strips that did not make much of an impact on the national comic scene in hopes of determining why they failed. A thoughtful analysis of these comic strips combined with a brief biography of their creators provides considerable insight as why they were both successful and durable.

Most comic strip histories erroneously cite Richard Felton Outcault's *The Yellow Kid*, as the first comic strip ever published. Although not the first strip to appear in a newspaper, it was the first to enjoy a notable, individual success.\(^{11}\) It also had the credentials to definitely identify it as a comic strip. *The Yellow Kid* featured a leading character with a distinctive personality, drawn in a recognizable comic strip format, and published on a regular basis with some continuity of characters.

*The Yellow Kid* may seem a odd choice for a comic strip today, but there are several reasons why it enjoyed such success in 1895. The most obvious are, of course, that it was something new and different, and that it was printed in brilliant color when most newsprint was still black and

\(^{11}\) The first may have been *The Ting-A-Lings*, created by Charles Saalberg for the *Chicago Inter Ocean* in 1892. However, the *Ting-a-Ling’s* which appeared in the Youth Supplement of the *Inter-Ocean* did not run every week, and did not achieve any great success.
white. Yet other colorful strips debuted at this time with only minimal interest. Obviously, there were more important reasons for the *Yellow Kid*'s success. Mott feels that public interest in the settlement house movement of the eighties and nineties caused a related interest and curiosity in city slums and their inhabitants. This promoted the rise of a school of fiction which depicted tenement life, and slum children in particular.\(^\text{12}\) *Hogan's Alley*, the location as well as one of the original titles of *The Yellow Kid*, might have been an attempt to capitalize on this trend, as it depicted the activities of slum children in a humorous but sometimes cruel and demeaning way (to modern eyes).\(^\text{13}\) Richard F. Outcault, the creator of the *Yellow Kid*, was during 1892, a reporter-artist for the *New York World*, working the Oak Street Police Court and its surrounding slums. The *Yellow Kid* may also have been influenced by the racial and immigrant themes of many hit vaudeville acts of the period including Lew Dockstader's black minstrels, and the German dialect comedy of Weber and Fields and others.

Mickey Hogan, the *Yellow Kid*, began as a centrally placed but not outstanding character in a large single panel cartoon. Outcault filled the panel with childish figures engaged in a number of activities that was faintly reminiscent of a Breughel painting. The *Yellow Kid* gradually became Outcault's main character during the chromatic metamorphosis of his

\(^{12}\)Mott, *History of American Magazines*, Vol. IV, 198. Stephen Crane's *Maggie of the Streets*, is an example of a more serious view of the slums, which dates from this period while Horatio Alger published *Adrift in the City*, in 1895, and *Frank and Fearless*, in 1897.

\(^{13}\)Robinson, *Illustrated History*, 12. The slum kids also appeared at other locations such as Riley's pond, Coney Island, Casey's Alley, and Shantytown during their developmental period. The presence of Irish names and locations is an attempt to appeal to the Irish-American audience and those who considered them a cause for amusement or scorn. *The Yellow Kid*, however, unlike *Happy Hooligan* and *Jiggs* is not drawn as a stereotypical Irishman.
mysterious shirt or nightgown from blue (May 5,1895) to green with a blue apron (July 7,1895) to pink (Aug. 18,1895) to white (Nov. 11,1895) to red with black dots (Dec. 10,1895) finally emerging in yellow, Jan. 5,1896.14

The popular story concerning the reason behind the choice of yellow for the Kid’s nightgown seems too good to be true, although it is mentioned by Waugh, Robinson, and other comic strip experts. Jerry Robinson notes that Charles Saalberg, an artist-cartoonist himself, then comics editor for the World, arbitrarily selected the Kid’s nightgown as the test area for a new yellow ink. Its brilliant eye-catching success made the Yellow Kid the strip’s lead character.15

The Yellow Kid enjoyed enormous popularity during its relatively brief run, less than five years. It spawned almost as many commercial products as Charles Schultz' Peanuts in the nineteen seventies and eighties. In addition to buttons, cracker tins, playing cards, cigarette packs, toys, Broadway plays and songs. It also inadvertently added the term "yellow journalism" to our vocabulary.16

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14 New York World, 5 May 1895, 7 July 1895, 18 August 1875, 11 November 1895, 10 December 1895, 5 January 1896. All these strips naturally appeared in the Sunday Supplement.
15 Robinson, Illustrated History, 12,13.
16 The great popularity of the Yellow Kid made it a prime subject in the great newspaper wars of the 1890's...a time when artists were wooed and recruited like star athletes today. Stephen Becker in Comic Art in America gives the following account,"Hearst had bribed Outcault away from Pulitzer earlier in the year (1896); Pulitzer had brought him back. Hearst upped the ante again, and Pulitzer had washed his hands of Outcault; not, however, of the Yellow Kid to which he still had a legal right. He hired George Luks, who later became a master American easel painter, to continue the Kid. Hearst at one point, pirated Pulitzer's entire Sunday Supplement staff away from the World. The sight of two Yellow Kids appearing in the rival papers simultaneously brought the phrase yellow journalism into the American vocabulary. The term referred to the unscrupulous practices of the sensational press. Robinson, Illustrated History, 13.
for the Yellow Kid was carried one step further in Joe Kerr's fortnightly comic magazine, Yellow Kid of 1897. The first six issues of this magazine included a quotation from Max Nordau's Degeneracy, a sensational book of the nineties. The book was basically a defense of degeneracy and regarded slum life as amusing. Nordau, a popular German doctor-philosopher described the Kid as follows:

The Yellow Kid is the exact and ultimate expression of degeneracy in the Type of Gamin. Notice the bald head (on a boy), the two teeth, the abnormal head and abnormal feet, the formless shirt of yellow--color of decay--covering a multitude of other abnormalities. Every street gamin possesses the same characteristics in a less exaggerated degree, and that is why the Yellow Kid cannot exist (persist?) while degeneracy exists and degenerates. 17

Depending on a reader's interpretation, the Yellow Kid could be viewed as a mongoloid degenerate; again, somehow related to the increased interest in freaks or abnormalities of nature apparent at this time. Dime museums, not a museum in the modern sense but similar to the circus sideshow, were very popular and often included as part of a vaudeville show. Outcault, himself, said that the Yellow Kid with his protruding ears and snaggle-teeth, was a composite of a number of street urchins he had observed as a reporter. He regarded the Yellow Kid he drew as a cheerful, happy-go-lucky fellow. 18 On the other hand, the vaguely oriental features of the Kid may have been influenced by Charles Saalberg. The Ting-A-Ling's

17 Mott, American Journalism, 197.
18 "Richard Felton Outcault Scrapbook, 1895-96", Cornell University Microfilm
featured a group of oriental children, and Saalberg was working for Pulitzer when the *Yellow Kid* came out. We will never know for sure.¹⁹

Unlike most first-generation cartoonists, Richard Felton Outcault was born into a middle-class family during the Civil War year of 1863. He grew up in Lancaster, Ohio and graduated from McMicken University in Cincinnati with a degree in the fine arts.²⁰ His work was noticed by Thomas Edison, who hired him as an illustrator for his magazine, *Electrical World*. The twenty-six year-old Outcault was later sent to Paris by Edison with his company exhibit at the Paris Exposition in 1889. Upon his return to the United States, Outcault's work was published regularly in the humor magazines, *Judge* and *Life* and he became one of the better known graphic artists of the time. Outcault was particularly good at humorous drawings and political cartoons. A mature artist who drew with a sharp, clear line, he had an unsophisticated approach to humor that was in tune with mainstream America. His realistically drawn characters from the slums found their humor in pranks and violence, in cruelty to minorities and in mocking the amusements of the middle class.²¹ Yet surprisingly, Outcault also was noted for his humorous yet sympathetic portraits of black Americans, that were free of the stereotypical characteristics so common in

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¹⁹ Outcault's papers were destroyed in a fire and his family had little interest in his work as a cartoonist. George Luks who drew the alternative *Yellow Kid* provided him with distinctly oriental features.

²⁰ The great majority of cartoonists had raw talent but little formal education or artistic training, and came from lower-middle, working class or immigrant backgrounds. Nothing is known about Outcault's ethnic background except that the original spelling was Outcault. Personal letter from Frances Charman, former curator of the *Buster Brown* Museum to Elsa Nystrom, dated 12 July 1984.

²¹ An interesting panel titled "A Secret Society Initiation in Hogan's Alley" spoofs the secret societies so popular among the upwardly mobile at the time, including the Moose, the Masons and Shriners, and the Knights of Columbus. *New York World*, 15 September 1896.
comic strips and political cartoons of the time. Although blacks were often
treated badly in the *Yellow Kid*, Outcault was the first to create a strip that
featured a black as a principal character\(^{22}\).

The *Yellow Kid*'s intense popularity was relatively short lived, lasting
about four years. The fascination with slums and degeneracy had declined by
1900 and public outcry regarding violence in the comics found the editors
looking for more suitable topics. Both Outcault and George Luks, who drew
the rival *Yellow Kid*, dropped their strips to go on to new projects. It is
ironic that the comic strip most often mentioned as the first of its kind
would probably have flopped if it had not been in the right place at the right
time. The *Yellow Kid* did not touch any of the basic themes necessary for
lasting success. He was neither a hapless underdog, sufficiently anarchic or
sweet and nostalgic. The humor found in this strip was brash, crude, rough
and violent. Its large, crowded, colorful panels were filled with youthful
characters from the slums whose antics encouraged laughter at the lowest
level.

Roy Rosenzweig stated that in the post-Civil War period, the reckless
and boisterous behavior of working-class males represented an implicit
rejection of, the discipline, order hierarchy and sobriety of the workday and

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\(^{22}\) In *The Yellow Kid's Great Fight*, the Kid knocked down a little black boy and
dislocated both his jaws. A goat then butted the boy and pulled the wool(hair) out of his
head. *New York Journal*, 20 December 1896. This casual attitude towards violence in the
sensational press, started many crusades against violence in the newspapers. The *Christian
Science Monitor*, to combat what it considered the negative influence of the *Yellow Kid*,
dropped its comic strips in 1898, and later developed its own wholesome strips.
workplace and provided a vision of a less structured, less demanding, less constrained world.\(^{23}\)

According to Rosenzweig, violence served as a vehicle for expressing the hostility the working class felt towards its social betters and the bosses whose rules ordered the workplace and even to some extent their leisure time. Overt violence was often directed at other ethnic groups or minorities perceived of as beneath them in the pecking order. Covert hostility was found in their mockery of middle class values. In early strips like the *Yellow Kid*, *The Katzenjammers*, *Happy Hooligan*, and *Lady Bountiful*, there is a continuance of this feeling. In the first three strips, the hero is a member of the underclass who often turns out to be smarter, or better and in his own way more successful than his social superiors. In *Lady Bountiful*, the middle-class heroine is often humiliated or ridiculed. Yet the uncontrolled spontaneity, rough vitality and violence of the early strips would not long endure before they, as well as the yellow journals that spawned them, became more respectable. Despite the trappings of respectability imposed by syndication, many of the comic strips remained inherently rebellious and anarchic. They were usually able to resist censorship and total capitulation to genteel values due to their popularity with the mass audience.

In a *Yellow Kid* drawing that ran in the *New York Journal*, October 25, 1896, Outcault himself summed up the Kid's appeal at the time. Coming from the horn of a phonograph in the panel is the following statement,

\[^{23}\text{Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will(Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), 77.}\]
Why is the Sunday Journal's colored supplement the greatest thing on earth? Say!!! Dat's too easy. It's a rainbow of color, a dream of beauty, a wild bust of laughter and regular hot stuff.

Certainly in their initial contact with comic strips, the people were caught by the brash novelty of the Yellow Kid, but it was soon apparent that comic strips were providing something important and necessary for Americans. The newspaper comics brought more than mere entertainment, they would provide companionship, release, remembrance and reinforcement of values and ritual to American life, first on a weekly and soon daily basis. The comics came as a bonus, along with the daily newspaper. Readers did not have to pay an extra fee for this entertainment, and they were free to enjoy their favorite comics. From the first, comics appeared in a family that had many different personalities. Thus readers might favor comics that were brash and violent and characters that thumbed their nose at established order or they might prefer those that had gently humorous storyline. If they belonged to a particular ethnic group, they might follow a strip that featured the Katzenjammer Kids (not so different from the original German Max und Moritz) Yanitor Yens Yenson or Bringing Up Father. It was easy for a reader to ignore comics they did not enjoy. The regular appearance of the comics was reassuring, particularly after continued storylines were added. Favorite comics soon became valued friends. The ability of comic strip characters to transcend reality in performing impossible feats brought vicarious satisfaction, identification and even a sense of belonging to the isolated and lonely. The comics provided wish fulfillment as they punched or tripped their victims. Finally, the early strips provided a subjective and personal view of society for each reader, as they still do today.
Many historians have considered the reasons for the appearance, and almost immediate acceptance of a variety of mass entertainments after 1880. Vaudeville, amusement parks, organized sports and motion pictures quickly became an important part of the American scene at this time. In "The Quest for Subcommunities and the Rise of American Sport", Benjamin G. Rader suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century spectator sports began to provide an identity and common cause for many Americans who lived together in urban neighborhoods and small towns yet were divided by barriers of class, race, ethnicity and religion. Comic strip readers of both sexes, women were largely excluded from the sports community at this time, could feel the same sense of belonging when they read the comic section. It is obvious that they identified with certain comic characters because from the beginning, they eagerly bought related products. For example, a whole generation of little boys suffered in the Little Lord Fauntleroy clothes their mothers had admired on the comic strip character, Buster Brown.

The great newspaper barons of the '90's quickly realized that the "funny papers" were a commodity that the public craved. In fact one of the fascinating sidelights associated with the development of newspaper strips was the battle for dominance in the comic field waged by Pulitzer and Hearst. Both quickly realized that comic strips sold newspapers and each wanted to have the best artists and most popular comics in their Sunday editions. In fact, the publicity surrounding this battle, was undoubtedly

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indirectly responsible for the rapid proliferation and popularity of the "Sunday Funnies" nationwide as smaller papers quickly imitated the giants.

Battle was joined in 1895, when the Californian, Hearst, moved into the New York market with the purchase of the unsuccessful *New York Morning Journal*. To ensure the success of the *Journal*, the wealthy and determined Hearst began a series of raids on Joseph Pulitzer's New York World and gradually lured away many of Pulitzer's best people, by offering a higher salary. He was well aware of the current drawing power of the *Yellow Kid*, the World's star attraction and decided to add Outcault to his staff. On October 18, 1896, he published the following statement on the first page of his brand-new comic supplement, the *American Humorist*.

NEW YORK JOURNAL'S COMIC WEEKLY – EIGHT FULL PAGES OF COLOR THAT MAKE THE KALEIDOSCOPE PALE WITH ENVY...Bunco steerers may tempt your fancy with a "color supplement" that is black and tan--four pages of weak, wishy-washy color and four pages of desolate waste of black.

   But the JOURNAL'S COLOR COMIC WEEKLY!
Ah there's the diff!
EIGHT PAGES OF POLYCHROMATIC EFFULGENCE THAT MAKE THE RAINBOW LOOK LIKE A LEAD PIPE.
That's the sort of color comic weekly the people want: and they shall have it. 25

The modestly successful Outcault found himself in the enviable position of being sought after by the two most powerful newspapermen of the time. Hearst bribed Outcault. Pulitzer bought him back. Hearst increased his bribe and Pulitzer gave up. He hired instead, George Luks, later to become a serious painter, to draw the *Yellow Kid* for the *World*. Luks' *Kid*

was vaguely oriental in features and more gentle, while the original remained its brash and vigorous self. Outcault thumbed his nose in print at the World on November 22, 1896, when this message appeared on the Kid's shirt,

De harp wot wunst troo Hogan's Hall de sole of lafter spread--don't live dere any more a tall--becuse dat joint is dead, but in McFadden's double flat yez kin hear it every day where I am glad dat I lives at ta-ra-rum-boom-de-ay. Keep the change.

Needless to say, these defections and raids resulted in a number of law suits, before the war finally ended.

Although he abandoned the Yellow Kid in 1900, Outcault was not yet finished with the comic strip field. He was one of the few artists to create three completely different comic strips during the first decade and have two of them become smash hits. His next effort, Lil Mose, ran sporadically from 1901 to 1920 in the Journal, but although it was popular, it was not as successful as his other strips. Mose, its hero, was an attractive little black boy who engaged in gentle rather than violent mischief. The laughter he evoked was tender and sympathetic rather than derisive. However, it was ahead of its time and had only a modest success, although it featured Outcault's best work from an artistic standpoint.

Outcault abandoned Mose and replaced him with his final effort, Buster Brown, in 1902. The title character, Buster Brown was a realistically drawn ten year old boy who lived in a middle-class home, He wore the

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26 New York Journal, Sunday Supplement, 22 November 1896. Note the street dialect, the Irish place names and the inclusion of a refrain from a popular song of the period.
elaborate, clean, Little Lord Fauntleroy clothes, fashionable among the middle and upper classes at this time. Buster was handsome and intelligent and appeared at first glance to be the ideal middle-class child, well-behaved and polite, yet he was capable of breaking out in fiendish pranks.

America at the turn of the century was still bound by middle-class customs and standards and Buster Brown and his family seemed to be ideal role models. Yet the outwardly correct Buster was inwardly rebellious and as his vaguely dissatisfied facial expression warned, was made for trouble. The main characters of the strip included Buster Brown, his bulldog Tige and his female counterpart Mary Jane. Each episode a successful prank and ended when Buster was caught and punished by his victims. As a concession to Victorian standards, the last frame provided an aphorism delivered by a pious and repentant Buster.

Buster Brown was a topical strip, with little or no character development. Buster never abandoned practical jokes or changed his attitude Another popular strip of the period, Foxy Grandpa, by Charles

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27 "The obsession in early comics with youth and with boys in particular, stemmed from a trend in literature which had produced Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, the boys of Horatio Alger and in the 20's, Booth Tarkington's Penrod. In the twenties, a new wave of kid strips rose on the tide of successful child characters in silent films." Fuchs, Anatomy of a Medium, 24.

28 A typical aphorism started with the word RESOLVED in large letters and continued for a long paragraph. The aphorisms often mentioned adult concerns and were undoubtedly read more by adults than children. A sample follows. RESOLVED! Herbert Spencer says that life is perfect adjustment to one's environment: that's me. Why my adjustment to my environment is perfectly ridiculous. And Henry Drummond says happiness is perfect harmony with ones correspondences. I'm that. My only trouble is my bad judgment about doing things. Why can we not learn that virtue is its own reward. Reprinted in Los Angeles Herald, 22 September 1928. The same technique was used when Outcault leased Buster Brown for advertising. For example: RESOLVED That if you wish to march along you must be clad in the latest. The better your apparel the swifter will be your progress. Los Angeles Times, 19 March 1911.
"Bunny" Schulze had a similar theme. In this strip an adult (Grandpa) played tricks on his grandsons.

Practical jokes that were often cruel and elaborate, were part of both literature and life at this time. Peck's Bad Boy, a compilation of George W. Peck's newspaper articles, was first published in 1883 and quickly became a best seller. Yet the pranks played by Hennery the bad boy on his father would be considered extremely vulgar and mean by modern standards. In fact, as Wolfgang Fuchs states, in Anatomy of a Medium, comic strips appeared in an era when the practical joke, the prank and the hoax had become a cult...Good examples of the popularity of Schadenfreude in that period are the practical jokes exercised by famous personalities which can be verified historically.30

In the preface to a new edition of Peck's Bad Boy, published in 1958, Thomas Edison and the Prince of Wales were mentioned as great practical jokers. Edison tricked Mark Twain into getting onto an apparatus that caused violent diarrhea and the Prince of Wales served the Kaiser with dog meat in the guise of wild boar.31 With the public example of cruel tricks perpetrated by some of societies' most admired men, it is no wonder that the early comics were filled with malicious children and animals. Peck's Bad

29 George W. Peck, editor and publisher of a newspaper in a small Wisconsin town, satirized provincial midwest society in the style of the Down East or Yankee humorist. His subjects were small town shopkeepers, businessmen, clergy and their wives. Superficially respectable, they were exposed by the pranks of the Bad Boy, Hennery, as being petty, mean or dishonest. The pranks were often vicious and cruel, causing public or private humiliation. Peck seems to be criticizing the narrow formalism and empty respectability of small town America, but I suspect that the thousands of people who bought these books did not see themselves, but rather their neighbors in the stories. Comic strip violence was subtly different. The pranksters and the victims were usually, but not always, members of a lower social group, foreign or even an animal, anthropomorphic or otherwise.

30 Fuchs, Anatomy of a Medium, 34

31Note that Outcault was personally acquainted with Edison.
Boy himself appeared briefly as a comic strip that was drawn by Walt McDougall in 1906.32

Although the middle class still accepted Victorian standards of public behavior in the two decades preceding World War I, they loved Buster Brown. Coulton Waugh states that Buster stood out from the other comics as being American, up to date, and possessed that special quality of the comics, personality, but his appeal was more complex. Although he was a devilish prankster, Buster was not afraid to act and managed to stand out from the common herd. Despite the efforts of his parents to civilize him, he risked punishment to play tricks on his family and friends because he treasured his freedom. Although the last panel of the strip contained Buster's sanctimonious apology, the reader knew that this was a forced recantation; that Buster would try again. Rebellious Buster was both appealing and threatening to the middle class in a society increasingly organized and controlled.

Outcault modeled Buster and Mary Jane after his own children, and Tige, the bulldog, after his own dog which added a note of realism. The strip was so popular that thousands of dogs were named Tige and even more boys answered to the nickname Buster.33 Finally, although Buster overstepped the bounds of proper childish behavior, he was always clean, very well-dressed and polite and took his punishment in a manly way. Thus he was much more acceptable than the vulgar Yellow Kid and the obviously

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32 McDougall, a versatile and talented cartoonist, was involved with several strips taken from best-selling books, including Peck’s Bad Boy and The Wizard of Oz. Although he was an important part of the graphics revolution, he never developed a long-running original comic strip of his own.
33 Waugh, 9.
foreign *Katzenjammer Kids* and others. For example, a *Herald* reader (male) wrote concerning Buster's inherent manliness, sporting spirit and his love for dear old Tige (his dog) in 1903.\(^{34}\) In addition, Outcault came from a genteel middle-class background and was a mature adult when he began drawing Buster Brown. This seems to have kept him from the using the more outrageous and daring style of Dirks. Yet there were critics. In December, 1904, the *New York Topics* column printed the following...

This is the most appropriate time to protest against the brutality of the so-called "comic pictures". Without exception from Buster Brown to his less artistic imitators, the pictures teach such cruelty to children that the Gerry society should arrest them. Every parent is represented as flogging or spanking a child. Every child is doing its utmost to annoy or injure its parents. When the pictures do not libel parents and children, they depict clubbing policemen, swindling panhandlers, cowardly bestialities and shocking accidents that make every Sunday a holy terror in every household. The law prohibits prize-fighting as demoralizing to the community but not the introduction of such beastly pictures into American homes. The New York supplements relettered and sold by the thousand to out of town newspapers are much more dangerous. The refusal of readers to purchase any paper that prints the miscalled comicalities would work a reform in a few weeks and the public arrest and trials of the editors responsible for the outrageous misuse of the press would suitably inaugurate this protest.\(^{35}\)

Although *Buster Brown* was the subject of an extremely popular musical that played in many cities in the United States and in Europe, its creator and eventually the public lost interest in the strip. According to Frances Charman, former curator of the Buster Brown museum, Outcault opened his own advertising agency in Chicago to exploit the commercial

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34 Outcault scrapbook clipping.
35 *New York Times*, 8 December 1904, Town Topics.
potential of the name *Buster Brown* because he was bored with the daily routine of preparing comic strips.\textsuperscript{36} Outcault seems to have been as aggressively opportunistic and as successful marketing his comic characters as commercial trademarks as he was in producing popular comic strips. *Buster Brown* appeared in ads extolling the virtues of various products including shirt collars and musical instruments. The most popular was a line of children's shoes manufactured by the Brown Shoe Company. Buster Brown shoes are still sold today, although few of their purchasers known anything about the original *Buster Brown*.

Just as Outcault had switched papers with the *Yellow Kid* for a better offer, he did the same with *Buster Brown*, setting off another series of law suits. Outcault was the only cartoonist to ever have two double strips (the original and a look-alike copy) running at the same time, yet he never created a long-lasting elemental strip. Outcault seems to have used the comic strip as a springboard to financial success. Once he became wealthy, he had no qualms about leaving the comic strip field. Unlike most successful cartoonists who became almost the captives of their creations, he seems to have had no real commitment to creating comic humor. Outcault himself saw little value in the comic strip seeing it only as a passing fad\textsuperscript{37}.

\textsuperscript{36} The *Buster Brown Museum* was closed some years ago when the company was taken over by the Gerber company. According to Ms. Charman, some artifacts are in the Gerber manufacturing plant, some in their corporate offices and some have been disposed of. Personal letter from Ms. Frances Charman, dated 21 July 1986. Ms. Charman states that Outcault's life remains somewhat of a mystery and that his children knew little about his career, and in fact, were not interested. His children are now dead and his grandchildren never knew him. Personal letter from Frances Charman to Elsa Nystrom dated 3 September 1985.

\textsuperscript{37} In an interview often quoted out of context, Outcault stated..."You have asked if I believe the comic supplement will continue as a big feature of the Sunday papers. I don't believe it will, anymore than one style of theatrical amusement will continue to hold public interest. The old fashioned melodrama, the Shakespearean play and the comic opera have
By 1910, Outcault was both famous and wealthy. The income from merchandising his copyrighted *Buster Brown* character was substantial, larger in fact, than his income from the strip itself. Financially secure, he continued *Buster Brown* almost as a hobby (it was never a daily strip) until 1920, although newspapers continued to run reprints until 1928. He turned over the presidency of the Outcault Advertising Agency to his son and pursued a full time career as a serious artist. Outcault's work was shown in several major exhibits and he was a respected figure in American art until his unexpected illness and death in 1928. 38

The initial success of the *Yellow Kid* brought a rash of imitative strips to the funny pages of many newspapers. However, the more perceptive editors soon realized that strips with fresh and original themes might also draw more readers. Thus in 1896, Rudolph Block, editor of Hearst's *New York Journal*, asked Rudolph Dirks, a nineteen year old, German-born staff artist to develop a comic strip in the style of Wilhelm Busch. This German artist was the creator of *Max and Moritz*, the original boy pranksters. Busch's comic cartoon characters had enjoyed great popularity in Germany for over forty years and were familiar to many Americans, including Hearst himself. Dirks quickly provided Block with a variety of sketches from which

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the editor selected two boys whom he called *Hans* and *Fritz*. Block also picked a name for the strip, the *Katzenjammer Kids*, literally *cats howling* but also German slang for a hangover. Dirks provided his strip with several permanent main characters, all speaking the heavily accented German-American dialect popularized by vaudeville. The strip takes place, strangely enough, on a vaguely African desert island. This exotic locale may have been inspired by then current interest in the opening of the dark continent. Besides the devilish twins, it featured *die Mama, der Captain*, a shipwrecked sailor (unrelated to the twins or their mama), and *der Inspector*, a truant officer who came to investigate the twins' absence from school and became a permanent member of the cast.

In the *Katzenjammer Kids*, Dirks used several new ideas that soon became the accepted standard. He was one of the first cartoonists to regularly employ the panel sequence and was also one of the first to utilize the speech balloon. Many early strips had the words printed either on the top or the bottom of the panel or page.

The first *Katzenjammer Kids* panel appeared in the *New York Journal* on Sunday December 12, 1897. The early Dirks' drawings were crude and rough but although they were not polished, they had vitality and humor. Dirks tended to draw the Kids with stumpy bodies and pop-eyes, while Mama, at first scrawny became fat and homely. Dirks had a good eye for the basic elements of American humor, particularly clever pranks and slapstick dispensed by the aggressively anti-authoritarian *Kids*. The other

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40 A number of early comic strips have segments that take place in Africa, including *Alphonse and Gaston*, *The Kin-Der-Kids*, *Little Nemo*, *Nibsy the Newsboy* and others.
characters in the strip acted as foils for their mischief, yet die Momma stands out. She remained kind, loving, trusting and optimistic even as she administered justly deserved punishment. This is particularly important and reinforces the elemental theme of the Katzies especially if you consider the explanation of Talcott Parsons. According to Parsons, naughty boys play a special role in American culture. Parsons wrote the following,

In addition to the mother's being the object of love and identification, she is to the young boy the principal agent of socially significant discipline....When he revolts against identification with his mother in the name of masculinity, it is not surprising that a boy unconsciously identifies "goodness: with femininity and that being a "bad boy" becomes a positive goal.41

Parsons has inadvertently provided an interesting hypothesis for the behavior and popularity of numerous anarchic child heroes in the comic strip world from the Katzies to Dennis the Menace. Dirks was undoubtedly unaware that he had developed a new strip with a powerful elemental theme, coupled with well defined characters and a lively style. Yet it was for this reason that the Katzies soon enjoyed great popularity. However, there were many complaints about the nature of their pranks. This is not surprising because compared to the Kids, The Yellow Kid and Buster Brown were novices. Their pranks sprang from the fertile imagination of a very creative young man, as opposed to the more mature Outcault; and they were fiendish.42 As Fuchs says, "With the battlecry "society is nix" they declare

42 Some early examples include the following from 1903: the Katzies pelt Momma and the Captain with snowballs containing rocks, they saw the family toboggan part-way through, they send cruel valentines and blame Happy Hooligan. Atlanta Constitution, 5
total war on all representatives of the social order and launch their outrageous plots against authority in any shape...". However, psychologist Arthur Asa Berger sees their continued misbehavior as part of the psychology of Puritanism. According to Berger, "belief in predestination actually spurred people on to greater efforts just as the Kids' knowledge that they would almost surely be caught and punished inspired them to pull off bigger and more absurd pranks." 

The development of the elemental *Katzenjammer Kids* as one of the most popular and certainly the longest-lived comic strip, provides a key to the inherent nonconformity of the comics. Despite periodic campaigns to censor and emasculate the comics, they have successfully resisted the forces of order because of their consistent appeal to basic American needs. In the 1890's, the anarchic behavior of many comic strip characters had great appeal to large numbers of underclass and others who had little control over their lives. I am sure they also appealed to many members of the middle class as well, despite the criticism of educators, women's clubs and church groups, because they were both fearless and unrestrained by convention and possessed incredible determination and energy. The *Katzies* were completely devoid of the prissy niceness and self-denying repentance of *Buster Brown*, yet were not part of the urban ghetto. Of course, being foreign, their outrageous behavior was also more acceptable by the arbiters

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January 1903, 1 February, 1903. Because these strips were created in the same newspaper office during the first decade, cartoonists often collaborated on a strip. They drew double-sized panels signed by both artists.

43 Fuchs, *Anatomy of a Medium*, 34.

of social order. The anarchic behavior of the *Katzies* also seems related to the cultural differences between American and European family life. Many European visitors to nineteenth century America noted the freedom allowed children and attributed it to the side effects of our republican form of government. The *Katzies* never reformed, and it was obvious to the reader that they were plotting new tricks even as they were being punished for their latest adventure. The combination of an ability to totally disregard social convention, and a remembrance of childhood's freedom found in this strip, had a broad cross-cultural appeal. The *Katzenjammer Kids* was the first of the long-lived "elemental" strips and is still syndicated by King Features.

The creator of the *Katzenjammer Kids*, Rudolph Dirks, was the son of a German woodcarver who emigrated to the United States and settled in Chicago. Young Dirks tried carpentry but almost cut his hand off in an industrial accident and decided to become a cartoonist. By the age of

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45 "It is still...amazing to find in a systematic summary of English travelers' opinion in the last part of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth centuries, that the emphasis on equality and democracy had already created the distinctive child-oriented family which astonished the later visitors...A close connection was made by the stranger between the republican form of government and the unlimited liberty which was allowed the younger generation. They were rarely punished at home, and strict discipline was not tolerated in the schools...It was feared that respect for elders or for any other form of authority would soon be eliminated from American life." Seymour Martin Lipset, *First New Nation*, quoted in Arthur Asa Berger, *The Comic-Striped American*, 43-4.

46 Their popularity was so great that despite the hatred of German culture stirred up by American involvement in World War I, the *Katzies* were not banned but became the *Shenanigan Twins* for the duration of the war. Everyone became Irish although they continued to speak in a German dialect. After the war, they returned to their original Germanic identity.

47 According to Claudia Smith, Director of Advertising and Public Relations for King Features, The Katzenjammer Kids are carried today in 50 newspapers, worldwide. Personal conversation with Elsa Nystrom, 4 May 1988.
seventeen, he was selling drawings to *Puck* and *Judge*. Young Dirks moved to New York and was hired by the *Journal*. He had created a popular strip by 1897, at the age of twenty. The next year, Dirks took a year off to fight in the Spanish American War and resumed drawing the strip upon his return. After a number of years filled with the constant pressure of meeting deadlines, Dirks wanted to take time off to tour Europe with his family and pursue a growing interest in serious painting. The *Journal* refused to do without its most popular strip and pressured Dirks to double up his output so that he would be a year ahead. Dirks was unable to meet this quota and frustrated and angry, he packed and sailed anyway, with his contract about to expire. Tired of Hearst's constant demands for new strips, Dirks signed a new contract with Pulitzer's *New York World* on condition that he would not start until his problems with the *Journal* were settled. When news of this contract became public, the *Journal*'s lawyers gained a restraining order forbidding Dirks to work for the *World*. The trial that resulted from Dirks' defection lasted for a year, making front page news. Dirks lost the first decision but appealed and eventually won the right to his creation. The *Journal*, however, retained the title, *Katzenjammer Kids*. As a result, Dirks, the strip's creator, was forced to rename the strip *Hans and

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48 These popular comic journals gave many aspiring young talents their first professional jobs with national exposure.

49 Dirks younger brother, Gustavus "Gus" Dircks(1879-1903) followed his brother to New York and was also hired by Hearst to draw a comic strip, *Bugville Life*. The younger Dirks had already gained fame for his cartoons featuring bugs and small animals in real-life situations, which were published in *Puck*, *Judge* and *Life*. However, shortly after Dirks began drawing *Bugville Life* for the Sunday Supplement in 1903, he took his own life. His nephew John Dirks stated the family belief that Gus was frustrated in his attempt to break into the fine arts. Richard Marschall, "Polychromatic Effulgence, Death at the Drawing Board", *Comics Journal*, 61 January 1981, 91.
Fritz (the names of the Kids) when he began drawing it for the World. The wave of anti-German feeling that swept through America during World War I forced the World to change this title to the non-ethnic Captain and the Kids. However, despite the general ban on all things German, the Katzies retained their ethnicity and their great popularity saved them from destruction.

The Katzenjammer Kids provided Rudolph Dirks with an excellent living. Like Outcault, he quickly became a wealthy man, able to enjoy the good life, which included spending summers in Maine and devoting time to serious art. He founded an artist colony at Ogunquit, Maine in the 1920's. A member of the ash can school of artists, Dirks became noted as a landscape and portrait artist and had exhibitions in many cities. He later became a post impressionist and was noted for his landscapes and marine views.

However, Dirks also thoroughly enjoyed drawing his comic strip and remained personally involved in the creation and continuity of the Katzies until his retirement in 1958, over sixty years.

Ethnic themes were important in the first generation comics and the two most numerous ethnic groups found in the comics were the Germans.

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50 Sheridan, 59-60.

51 The appeal of the Katzies remains strong. The New York Times states, "In an age that regards delinquents as more sinned against than sinning, Dirks' mixed-up kids have never been better understood. Child psychologists and teachers these days deplore their influence, but children love them. New York Times, 22 April 1968, 47.

52 Sheridan, Comics and their Creators, 60, mentioned that Dirks' college-educated children regarded his cartoons as "low art" in the late thirties although his children had artistic ability. However, his son John assisted his father on the Captain after service in World War II, and later took over the strip in 1958, keeping it in the spirit of the original work. Today it is drawn by Hy Eisman and is still syndicated by King Features. In 1968, the Kids appeared in 100 papers, today they are in 50.

and the Irish. The short-lived Yellow Kid, of course, was Irish, and the Katzies, undeniably German. The great popularity of the Katzies encouraged a number of imitations, including the Fineheimer Twins by Harold Knerr. When Dirks lost the right to use the title, Katzenjammer Kids, Knerr was hired to continue the strip for the Hearst papers. The strip was popular enough to support two originals and a number of imitations for many years. The question arises as to who read these strips. Both the Katzenjammer Kids, Bringing Up Father, and Happy Hooligan, appealed to the working class. Their plots were simple and unsophisticated and their heroes were often morally superior to the middle class characters in the comics. In addition, they had a native intelligence despite their lack of manners and naivete, that sometimes allowed them to get the better of upper class characters. We will never know whether they were deliberately drawn to give the working class a sense of worth and a feeling of belonging or were an attempt to show the middle class the virtue of the working poor. Despite the fact the early ethnic characters are often a figure of fun, they are not without a sense of dignity. Whatever their purpose, they were sought after and accepted by millions of Americans and the intrinsic value of their

54 The first significant group of Germans to emigrate to the United States in the 19th century were the idealistic and revolutionary Forty Eighters. These Germans were urban and relatively well educated, and laid the foundation for the appreciation of German high culture and education in America. However, they also had trouble with the language and made typical "greenhorn" mistakes. See Adolph E. Zucker, ed. The Forty-Eighters, Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848 (New York: Columbia U.P., 1950) According to La Vern J. Rippley, The German-Americans (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1976) German-Americans were proud of their culture. Until the rejection of Germanic culture that resulted form World War I propaganda created strong anti-German feeling, they remained bi-lingual and supported German schools as well as German theater groups. This clannish ethnicity undoubtedly provided examples for humorists.
elemental themes remained long after their ethnicity became accepted or unremarkable.

Probably the best and certainly the longest-lived Irish strip is *Bringing Up Father*, created by George McManus in 1912. Going by the date of its debut, *Bringing Up Father*, seems to belong in the second generation, but McManus himself was a first generation cartoonist. His fertile imagination and facile pen were responsible for a number of different comic strips (including an hilarious parody of Winsor McKay's outstanding dream strip *Little Nemo in Slumberland* entitled *Nibsy the Newsboy in Funny Fairyland*). The most popular and longest lived of his strips were based on the humorous aspects of family life. The first to enjoy real success was *The Newlyweds*, which had its debut in the *New York World* of 1904.

During the next few years, McManus tried a number of comic formats without developing a hit. After switching to the Hearst organization in 1912, he eventually worked out the story line of his most famous strip, *Maggie and Jiggs*, from the plot of a play he had seen as a boy. *The Rising Generation* was a comedy based on the adventures of a working-class family that suddenly became wealthy. This is also the story-line of *Bringing Up Father*. *Jiggs* (drawn as a stereotype of an Irish laborer) spends most of his time resisting his wife *Maggie*’s attempts to get them accepted into high society. While not an original theme, it was successful for several reasons. McManus had a fertile sense of humor and drew on his own Irish background to provide a note of authenticity. In addition, he had a genuine and original talent as an artist. His early panels were notable for their open space and clean lines but his later panels were filled with accurate detailed drawings of both clothing and furniture.
Perhaps his brief stint as a fashion illustrator gave him an interest in women's clothing styles, but for whatever reason, the women in McManus' strips are always correctly and fashionably dressed and the panels also contain an incredible amount of detailed interior designs. A study of early Bringing Up Father panels provides a guide to styles in both apparel and home furnishings in the art nouveau period preceeding World War I.

George McManus was born in St. Louis Missouri, January 23, 1883. Because his father was a theater manager, he came in contact with the well-dressed stars of vaudeville as a young boy. The fashionable dress of the turn of the century young McManus observed at his father's theater undoubtedly influenced his artwork in Bringing Up Father and the Newlyweds. McManus himself retained a fondness for formal attire throughout his long life. McManus was just an ordinary high school student until his English teacher caught him drawing pictures during class. When Miss Brown sent his artwork home to his father, young George expected a severe punishment. Instead his father was so impressed that he was instrumental in getting the sixteen-year old a job in the art department of the St Louis Republic. Although he started as an office boy, McManus' constant practice combined with study at art school finally won him the position of fashion artist. Because of the burgeoning popularity of the comic strip, McManus was asked to draw cartoons for the paper. His first attempt, a strip called Alma and Oliver was in his words "a terrible mess". However, the young man longed to try his luck in New York City; the goal of all aspiring cartoonists was to be hired by a major newspaper chain. The irony of fate

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55 Sheridan, Comics and their Creators, 44.
and an excess of Irish luck brought him to New York in 1904. He bet $100 on a horse race after getting the tip from a bootblack in the Republic building. The horse won, paying 30 to 1. With this nest egg, McManus left for New York, expecting to find a job quickly. He looked for months before he was finally hired by the World. At the World he struggled to produce a popular comic strip trying a number of themes with only modest success until he produced The Newlyweds in 1904. Some of the other strips he created and later abandoned were Snoozer; The Merry Marcelene; Panhandle Pete; Nibsy the Newsboy in Funny Fairyland; Cheerful Charley; Let George Do It; and Spareribs and Gravy.56

Unlike Outcault and Dirks, McManus had little interest in serious art. Although he worked on animated cartoons, and also produced some beautiful Art Noveau magazine illustrations, his first love was always the comic strip form. His outstanding talent brought its reward, and like most of the star cartoonists, he died a famous and wealthy man in 1954. Bringing Up Father has been continued by several artists after his death.57 It is undoubtedly his most popular work, having been printed in book form, translated into many foreign languages, adapted to the movie screen six times and made into animated cartoons. In addition, a Congressional Dinner was held in his honor on Bringing Up Father's Twenty-Fifth anniversary and Jiggs was the official emblem of the Eleventh Bombardment Squadron during World War I and World War II.

56 Horn, World Encyclopedia of Comics, V.4, 471.
57 Now drawn by Frank Johnson, it is still syndicated by King Features and runs in approximately 200 newspapers world-wide. King Features Promotion, 1988.
The enduring popularity of *Bringing Up Father* ranks it as an elemental strip. Not only is it family oriented but Jiggs’ successful struggle against his domineering wife and the restraints of polite society struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts of the American public. Roy Rosenzweig mentions that the reckless and boisterous behavior of working-class on holiday celebrations and in saloons was a rejection of social order and the rules of the upper class. He states that these celebrations helped preserve part of an ethnic identity and served as a basis for reinforcement of working-class culture and values. The early comic strips served a similar function in a more controlled manner.

In strips such as the German *Katzenjammer Kids* and the determinedly working-class Irishman Jiggs in *Bringing Up Father* there is both a continuance of the struggle against society and order and a celebration of ethnicity. The under-class hero is generally smarter and more successful than his social superiors and defiantly retains traits that identify his foreign heritage.

McManus’ first successful strip, *The Newlyweds*, is set in a middle class home, without any obvious ethnic connection. In this strip, the young

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58 In the early strips Jiggs and Maggie are drawn in a style similar to that found in the Irish cartoons of *Puck* and *Judge*. In the 1880’s, these magazines featured the poor Irish types, ignorant, given to drink and fond of emotional excess. The women were hard-working but homely and the men often had a baboon-like appearance. These street types were also found in the vaudeville sketches of Edward Harrigan in the 1880’s. His skits included street cleaners, contractors, grocers, butchers, shyster lawyers, policemen politicians truckers and washerwomen. In the 1890’s, lace curtain Irish began to appear. These upwardly mobile socially ambitious Irish Americans were a sharp contrast to the irresponsible Irish servants and laborers of the previous decade. See John J. Apel, "From Shanties to Lace Curtains: The Irish Image in Puck, 1876-1910" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (New York:Cambridge U.P.,1971), 375., and Carl Wittke, *The Irish In America* (New York, Russell and Russell,1956, 259. McManus satirized both types in *Bringing up Father*.

59 Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 76-78.
husband is bumbling and ineffectual, one of the first weak male husband-father figures. He is dominated by both his beautiful wife and his spoiled child. In contrast, the Irish laborer, Jiggs, a millionaire after winning a Sweepstakes lottery, prefers the simple working class lifestyle. He is involved in a constant struggle with his wife who aspires to exhibit a culture she does not really understand. She also wanted to gain social acceptance from the world of high society. Hasia Diner notes that wives and daughters in the Irish community struggled to bring the family to middle class status by imitating the manners and fashions of the middle class.\(^6\) It is not surprising that these efforts were resisted by the Irish males, especially since Ireland itself had a traditional male-oriented society. She also states that Irishwomen, many of them wage-earners, were noticeably well dressed, and were often admonished for spending too much on clothing.\(^6\) McManus uses both the upward-mobility of Maggie and the resistance of Jiggs to produce ongoing suspense and tension in Bringing Up Father. However his sympathy is almost always with Jiggs.\(^6\)

McManus did not limit his humorous focus to Maggie and Jiggs' marital struggles. He spent considerable time drawing the upperclass society that Maggie wanted to join. This continuing theme allowed McManus to mock the cold-hearted snobbery of the rich and the phony emptiness of their

\(^6\) Hasia Diner, Erin’s Daughters in America, Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1983), 149-141.

\(^6\) Ibid., 141.

\(^6\) McManus might have echoed the sentiments of Mr. Dooley’s Hennesy who responded to his wife’s Christmas gift with exasperated disappointment: “How thoughtful iv ye Mary Ann, to give me th’ essays of Emmerson. I wuz sayin’ on’ly la’ week to a friend iv mine in th’ pork pit that iv all th’ fellows that iv ever hurled the pen Emmerson fr me money.” Finley Peter Dunne, ”Mr Dooley’s Christmas Scene.” Ladies Home Journal December 1902, 14.
lives. Jiggs usually proves himself superior to the tuxedo-clad millionaires whose company his wife avidly seeks. In both *The Newlyweds* and *Bringing Up Father*, upper-class males in particular, are shown as weak, vain foolish, objects of ridicule.

*Bringing Up Father* is also a positive reinforcement of Irish culture. Although Jiggs is a stereotype, he is also shrewd and determined. Maggie, while homely and shrewish, has a good figure and equally determined to improve Jiggs. At the same time, *Bringing Up Father* manages to celebrate the vitality of working-class culture while slyly poking fun at high culture.63

A different vision of Irish ethnicity came to the comic pages in the work of Frederick Burr Opper, another successful first generation cartoonist. *Happy Hooligan*, Opper's most famous character, looked like the drunken Irish bum of stage and song yet looks were deceiving. *Happy* was one of nature's noblemen. There were certain similarities between Mcmanus' and Opper's work. Both were sympathetic to the plight of the common man. *Happy Hooligan*, hardworking, kind and naive, always tries to do his best but is constantly beaten(literally) by some agent of law and authority. The reader knows that *Happy* is innocent yet he cannot seem to convince anyone else of this fact. Opper took the caricature of the cartoon "Paddy" bloated and apelike and developed instead a lovable fool, an underdog with whom people could identify. Happy's constant failures pointed out the

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63 The same theme has had some recent popularity in television sitcoms like *The Jeffersons* and *Movin Up*. The Irish ethics have been replaced by black Americans.
inequities in American society at the turn of the century. Opper's anti-authoritarian views manifested themselves in his portraits of exploitative businessmen and brutal policemen. The metropolitan police of most eastern cities had a high percentage of Irish on the force, however, the Irish cop did not receive the respect and admiration of the Irish firemen. The police force in cities like Chicago were noted for their corruption and brutality. Despite the upward mobility the police force offered, many people regarded them with suspicion or contempt at this time, or as the agent of self-serving authority. Thus the police were often villains or buffoons in the comic strips or the movies.

Opper was born in Madison, Ohio in 1857, the child of Austrian immigrants. His father Lewis was a successful craftsman and his uncle Adolphe Opper gained fame as the Paris correspondent for the London Times in the 1880's. Young Friedrich believed that he had a special talent for drawing cartoons and left school at the age of 14 to work for the Madison Gazette. Ambitious and hard-working, Opper sent his cartoons to many

64 Opper followed in the 19th century stage tradition of dressing his hero in rags. According to Carl Wittke, before 1900, Irish stage characters usually appeared dressed in rags, after 1900, they generally had a more dapper appearance. Carl Wittke, The Irish in America, 259.

65 Opper himself felt that he drew from nature and considered himself an humorous character artist rather than a caricaturist. Frederick Burr Opper to Mr. Weller, 3 January 1906. Opper Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

66 Finley Peter Dunne, writing on the editorial staff of the Chicago Times Herald... "A misfortune to the Chicago fire department is a misfortune to the whole community... A majority of the community feel about the police force as the gambler felt when he was asked for $5 "to bury a policeman." "Here," he said, "take $10 and bury two policemen."...The firemen are always seen "on parade." They appear in the role of protectors of property and saviors of life, while the drudgery of police work brings the unfortunate "copper" into harsh opposition to individual liberty...The police department is full of unrest, intrigue and self seeking. Merit has never counted in promotions. No reward is offered for courage or fidelity. Chicago Times Herald, 7 August 1897.
famous magazines and was rewarded with some success. Encouraged, he left for the East coast in the seventies before the age of twenty. He worked for several newspapers and magazines, including *Harpers Weekly*, finally becoming *Puck*’s leading political cartoonist. The forty-two year old Opper was already famous as a book illustrator and cartoonist, when William Randolph Hearst asked him to draw a weekly comic strip in 1899. Opper’s first, and most successful comic strip, *Happy Hooligan*, was the result. 67

Although he produced several other popular strips including *Alphonse and Gaston* and *Maude the Mule*, *Happy Hooligan* was by far the longest running and most popular.

Opper’s experience as a political cartoonist made it easy for him to grasp the comic strip format and he was soon producing several Sunday strips and as well as topical daily cartoons for the Hearst press. 68 Opper was already famous for drawing political cartoons that poked fun at bloated tycoons and shrewdly caricatured politicians; in fact, his political cartoons were as stylistically recognizable as his comic strip characters.

*Happy Hooligan* was first drawn as a short and rotund (later tall and lean) figure with a small round head featuring bulging dot eyes, a huge upper lip, large red nose and deep lines running from nose to mouth. In spite of its doodle-like simplicity, the tramp’s face was very expressive and capable of showing a variety of emotions. *Happy* was dressed in tattered clothes and always wore a tin can on his head while his name suggested an

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67 Opper had produced the illustrations for the published volumes of Finley Peter Dunne’s *Mr. Dooley*, written for the *Chicago Evening Post*, and their success may have influenced his selection of an Irish tramp for his first comic strip.

Irish origin and the red nose a fondness for drink. *Happy Hooligan* remained popular because of his ever-present smiling optimism. He was the archetypical underdog who always lost and yet kept on trying. The difference between *Happy Hooligan's* success and the *Yellow Kid*'s brief run is that the *Kid* usually gave out blows while *Happy* received them and kept on smiling. 69 Although many of the early strips featured much violence which had its own appeal, characters like *Happy* who turned the other cheek were loved because they reinforced the better, more Christian or moral side of humanity. They also made the average person feel that there was someone worse off than themselves.

Opper drew *Happy Hooligan* until failing eyesight caused his retirement in 1932. He was recognized as the dean of American cartoonists due to both his age and accomplishments until his death in 1937. *Alphonse and Gaston* and *And Her Name Was Maud*, two other strips developed by Opper in the first decade were also quite successful. The first was a play on "polite society". All the problems of *Alphonse and Gaston* were caused by their exaggerated politeness. 70 This was an original idea that produced some fine humor, while slyly poking fun at the exaggerated propriety and overdone formality and convention of Victorian manners. *Alphonse and Gaston* became nationally recognized characters and remain part of our vocabulary even today, when the comic strip has been long forgotten.

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69 There is a similarity between *Happy Hooligan* and Charles Schultz' *Charlie Brown* in that they always lose and keep coming back for more but Opper's tramp remains smiling while *Charlie Brown* is usually depressed. They also share deceptively simple but expressive features.

70 For example, on an African safari, they are too polite to shoot a tiger. Captured by cannibals, they argue about whom should be eaten first. *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 January 1903, 25 January 1903.
And Her Name was Maud was one of the first strips to feature an animal as the main character. However, Maud did not speak or act like a human. She was able to administer justice in the form of a well-placed kick when a wrong needed righting. Again, the strip is a variation of the practical joke strip. The reader knows that Maud will kick some deserving human in every strip. Waugh suggests that this knowledge gave the reader a sense of superiority while Maud's revenge may have satisfied the hidden "pie-throwing" urge that all reasonable people share.\(^7^1\) Alphonse and Gaston and Maud, of course, were successful topical strips, while Happy Hooligan is numbered as an elemental, and probably would be popular today if it were reprinted.\(^7^2\) Unlike some strips which have been continued by another cartoonist, Happy Hooligan was not passed on to another artist but died with its author.

James Swinnerton is another cartoonist associated with the developmental period of the comic strip. Swinnerton first gained fame as a very young man when he created a group of tiny, minutely detailed bears (based on a cartoon version of the bear on the California state flag) for a California newspaper and later became a pioneer of the child-animal strip. James Guilford Swinnerton, 1875-1974, was born in Eureka California the child of comfortable middle class parents. His father, Judge J.W. Swinnerton, was the founder of the Humboldt Star, a Northern California weekly newspaper, and was active in Republican party politics. James Swinnerton

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\(^7^1\) Waugh, The Comics, 38.

\(^7^2\) A typical and wryly humorous Happy Hooligan is as follows... A number of important citizens dress in Happy Hooligan rags for the Gayety Ball, Only the real Hooligan is arrested and accused of vagrancy. Atlanta Constitution, 11 January 1903.
enrolled in the San Francisco Art School at the age of fourteen. At the same time, he got a job with the *San Francisco Examiner* as a cartoonist. Like many of the pioneering cartoonists, he seemed to combine precocious artistic ability with a powerful drive to create his own particular caricature of society. Fortunately for Swinnerton, *The Examiner* was part of the Hearst chain, and one of the first newspapers to feature color comics.

Swinnerton's bears were printed on the children's page in the *Sunday Examiner*. Clever and gently amusing rather than "funny", the bears appealed to adults as well as children. His simple style and miniature subjects had some similarity to Palmer Cox's *Brownies*. Their very smallness and neatness made a reader feel large and powerful. In addition, as the wilderness receded in the United States, Americans seemed more interested in watching and observing the actions of animals. They also endowed them with character traits that would not have been appreciated by frontiersmen. Thus the tiny bears of Swinnerton were received very well and his ability to produce original characters brought him early success. He was well-known, admired and financially secure by the age of twenty-one.

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74 Cox did not produce a comic strip but his *Brownies* were a popular feature in *St. Nicholas Magazine* and in book form. The *Brownies* were drawn with a fine detailed line and featured rather large heads on small bodies, which is a technique often used by comic strip artist.
75 See John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 1-8. Berger postulates that as America became more urban, and the majority of people lost daily contact with animals, they began to romanticize them and endow them with human traits and feelings. The observation of animals in zoos also became an important leisure activity at this time and animals became a popular topic in cartoons and comics.
76 Swinnerton, like several other artists from the first and second generation, also drew political cartoons for the *Examiner* in very large scale.
Unable to resist the dual temptation of a substantial offer from Hearst and the opportunity to work in that mecca for cartoonists, Swinnerton went to New York in 1899. *Little Bears* became *Little Bears and Tigers* (for the Tammany tiger) and was a hit but he also produced an amazing variety of other comics between 1900 and 1920. Working in the strip format that was a New York standard (*Little Bears* was first drawn on an open page without panels or balloons) he quickly developed two new strips that enjoyed considerable success, *Jimmy* or *Little Jimmy* and *Mr. Jack*. The second of these, first drawn by Swinnerton in 1902, is in some ways the more interesting. It originated from a strip featuring anthropomorphic striped animals that he called lynxes but that the public recognized as tigers. The girl-chasing, raffish *Mr. Jack* became the dominant character and the strip assumed his name. Considering the fact that comic strips were allegedly for children, and appeared in the children's section of the newspaper, it is surprising that this strip ran for almost two years before it was dropped. An amorous humanized tiger, chasing showgirls as a gay bachelor and later as a married man, seems more suited for *Playboy* than the children's corner. The early comic sections, in fact, did contain a number of strips with adult themes and were relatively uncensored. The restrictive conventions that still exist today were developed later as an unwritten code when comic strips and cartoonists became more structured and controlled after the development of syndication. Strips like *Mr. Jack* also provided ammunition

77 Among them were *Mt. Ararat* (a Noah's Ark theme), *Bad Mans*, *Anatole*, *Poor Jones*, *Jinks the Insurance Man*, *Professor Knix*, *the Great Scientist*, *Sweet Little Katy*, *Sam and His Laugh*, *Mr. Batch* and several daily strips, *Clarissa’s Chances* and *Mr. Nutt*. All these were in addition to his popular successes *Mr. Jack* and *Little Jimmy*. 
for the movement against comics that would develop by 1908. Hearst, undoubtedly torn between the obvious popularity of *Mr. Jack*, and its unsuitable themes, eventually dropped the strip. *Mr. Jack* surfaced in the comic section periodically in later years but never became a long-running regular feature.

Swinnerton's other popular strip, *Little Jimmy*, which debuted in 1905 was entirely different. It featured a small pop-eyed boy with a large round head. Charles Schultz' *Peanuts* may well have been influenced by Swinnerton, as Jimmy had several friends who were usually involved in his adventures. Drawn with a spare clean line and considerable detail, *Jimmy* was featured in a series of adventures along with a supporting cast of large adults. *Jimmy* was often both catalyst and hapless victim of fate in these episodes. Jimmy was not a devilish prankster like Buster Brown. He had a childish short attention span, was easily distracted and followed the course of least resistance, especially in the earlier episodes. As a result, in the last frame of each strip, Jimmy usually received a spanking from his father. Jimmy's ordinary childhood problems and mistakes which resulted in his punishment undoubtedly had an elemental underdog appeal for both children and adults. Consequently, *Little Jimmy* ran for forty years. Unlike the downtrodden loser, *Charlie Brown* in *Peanuts*, *Jimmy* was always optimistic and rebounded quickly from disappointment.78

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78 In a typical *Little Jimmy* plot, *Jimmy* is supposed to watch his baby brother. When a runaway pie wagon appears, *Jimmy* and his friends chase after it. Meanwhile the baby crawls under a donkey's hooves. *Jimmy's* father rescues the baby but gets kicked in the process. In the last panel, both parents spank *Jimmy*. *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 May 1909. In a similar episode, *Jimmy* is sent to the drugstore for medicine for his father's sore foot. He is distracted by a fistfight between two tough boys. His father is forced to hop to the drug store himself. He finds *Jimmy* still watching the fight and spans him. *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 April 1906.
Swinnerton did not stay long in New York despite his success. In 1903, he contracted tuberculosis and was almost written off by his doctors. He decided to move to Arizona for his health, fell in love with the desert, recovered and did his best work there. Swinnerton developed a life-long love affair with the desert and Indian culture. Although he continued to draw comic strips, he also won respect as a serious artist famous for his paintings of the southwest. From his home in Los Angeles, he often traveled to the desert where he painted scenes featuring the Navaho Indians and desert wildlife.\textsuperscript{79} Remaining active and interested in art and society during very long life, he died at the age of 98 in 1965.

The comic strips of Winsor McCay, particularly \textit{Little Nemo in Slumberland}, provide a bridge between the first and second generation cartoonists. His work was both strikingly original, and appreciated by both children and adults. Like Opper and Outcault, he came to the cartoon field as a mature artist, using his life experience and interests to provide unusual background and colorful characters. In order to fully understand Winsor McCay's work it is necessary to know something about his early life.

Winsor Zenis McCay was born in Spring Lake, Michigan on September 26, 1869. Like most comic strip artists, his artistic ability was evident very early. Even as a young boy, he knew that he wanted a career in art. McCay also had a desire for adventure and ran away to join a traveling circus, Cole and Middlesex' Wild West show, as a youth. This was the glory time for the American circus and its glamour and mystery had an

\textsuperscript{79} Swinnerton also drew the \textit{Canyon Kiddies} series, a feature rather than a comic strip, for \textit{Good Housekeeping} Magazine in the early 1920's, which received much critical acclaim.
irresistible attraction for young McKay. He was soon put to work drawing posters and advertising handbills. This undoubtedly gave him first-hand experience drawing exotic animals as well as personal knowledge of the circus fantasy world. He would later use both themes in his work. Although his father, a lumber mill worker, brought him back home to finish school, McCay did not forget the circus. After a month at a Chicago art school, the 17 year old McCay took a job with a traveling carnival.80 Tiring of the constant travel, he settled in Cincinnati, where he met and married Maud Defore in 1891. Before landing a job as a newspaper staff artist, he worked for the Vine Street Dime Museum, drawing posters for their freak and animal exhibits. Again, this experience undoubtedly influenced his later work.81 In 1898, while working for the Cincinnati Commercial Tribune and the Enquirer, he produced clever political cartoons and a comic strip, Tales of the Jungle Imps.82 The latter was noticed by James Gordon Bennett Jr., editor of the New York Herald.83 Bennett promptly hired McCay to produce comic strips for the color section of his paper. Like most artists of the first


81 McCay's masterpiece, Little Nemo in Slumberland, is full of illusion, dream-like perspectives, exotic animals, and people dressed in fantastic costumes who performed amazing feats of magic. It would be difficult to underestimate the effect of the circus on an artistically talented youth. McCay was later able to translate circus magic and illusion to the printed page.

82 Harroff notes that McCay also was involved in the production of a Triumphal Arch to celebrate the end of the Spanish-American war and staged a mock battle of Santiago harbor on the Ohio river.

83 This strip has a jungle setting and may have been influenced by the popularity of Tarzan of the Apes, and African exploration.
generation, McCay experimented with a variety of strips, all reasonably successful, until he hit on a winning combination. 84.

Strips created by McCay at this time included Little Sammy Sneeze, Hungry Henrietta and the Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend. Sammy Sneeze and Hungry Henrietta were directed mainly at children and featured misadventures caused by sneezing and a ferocious appetite, fantastic or freakish attributes similar to those claimed by the members of a circus freak show. The Rarebit Fiend, on the other hand, was an adult strip. Its grown-up protagonists, both male and female, suffered strange and fantastic nightmares caused by overindulgence in rarebit 85. The plot of Rarebit Fiend was simple. The subject would endure an increasingly frustrating, sometimes horribly frightening or acutely embarrassing experience. Only after enduring extreme anxiety, would the subject awaken safely at home, vowing never again to eat rarebit. The strip was drawn with a simple economy of line and its "humor" was both visual and verbal. Interestingly, the Rarebit Fiend unlike most early strips, had relatively little violence despite the cruelty of its episodes. Furthermore, the violent acts in Rarebit Fiend and Little Nemo had a dreamlike, unrealistic feeling. However, on several occasions, McKay alluded to the effects of both alcohol and drugs. In an October 21, 1904 strip, a man drinks wood alcohol and is joined by anthropomorphic animals, including a giant lobster and a huge snake who attack him. 86 In another strip, dated August 19, 1905, Professor Probe tries

84 Characteristically, all of McCay's work featured dreams or illusion, exotic people and locale, or magic.
85 Welsh rarebit is a dish that features seasoned melted cheese on toast, a popular supper dish at the turn of the century.
the "actual smoking of opium for educational purposes." This strip shows McCay's familiarity with street drug slang as it includes the following..."If you want to hit the pipe, I know a chink who can cook all the hop you can smoke...This gent wants to pull on the stem..." The professor was, of course punished in the last frame and woke up screaming. However, this type of social commentary was unique in the comic strips of the time.

In *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend*, the punishment or torture the subject endured was usually mental rather than physical, and often of his own making. Again, although it ran during the first decade, the *Rarebit Fiend* was more sophisticated than the average early strip because it could be interpreted on several levels, and probed the hidden fears and anxieties of the subconscious dream world. This strip probably touched a number of people in a society increasingly confused and anxious. However, its underlying theme was a joke or prank, a popular early topic, the difference being the type of joke.

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88 It is unknown whether or not McCay himself used drugs as a young man, although in later life he was abstemious. Working in a newspaper office with street-wise reporters, it would be odd if he was not aware of the urban drug scene.

89 It is particularly significant that the New York Telegram asked readers to suggest topics for McCay's Work. See Judith O'Sullivan, "The Art of Winsor Z. McCay", 79.

90 Even by modern standards, many of McCay's topics would be considered "sick". Some themes from a 1905 compilation, include: cannibalism; a missionary is stripped, boiled, and appears dead on a table with an apple in his mouth, insanity; husband and wife go insane from worry and are found chained like animals in a madhouse, euthanasia; an aged grandparent is chloroformed, and ritual humiliation, a man is tarred and feathered. See Winsor McCay, *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1905). Many of the other panels are equally frightening. This was definitely an adult strip, as many of the themes would not have been understood by children. Despite the fact that it broke many taboos, *Rarebit Fiend* was not the subject of extensive protest, perhaps because it was not as widely syndicated as other strips. In 1906, a short film based on this strip was made by Edwin S. Porter for the Edison Company. McCay himself traveled the country giving chalk talks based on his characters.
In October, 1905, McCay's masterpiece, *Little Nemo in Slumberland* appeared for the first time. It ran from 1905-1912 and was revived from 1924-1927.\(^{91}\) *Nemo*'s basic plot was very simple. Every night *Nemo*, a small boy clad in a nightshirt, modeled after McCay's young son, would climb into bed and fall asleep. He would then visit the magic kingdom of *Slumberland*. Each Sunday strip would have a complete episode, and a cast of characters that was fairly regular. Yet the strip also had a continuing story line very unusual at this time. Unlike the *Rarebit Fiend*, *Nemo* seldom had nightmares, although he was often reluctant to enter *Slumberland*. His adventures were wonderful rather than terrifying and he would always awaken at home safely in bed. His parents never seemed to worry about his dreams, attributing them to the fact that their son's dreams were caused from being too well fed.\(^{92}\)

*Nemo* contained a certain number of characters that appeared on a regular basis as playmates or companions of the little hero. Several had some association with McCay's circus and carnival background including a small black cannibal named *Impy* who communicated by making sounds and the other was the green-faced grimacing dwarf-clown, *Flip*.\(^{93}\) Typically the clown was usually responsible for creating some mischief which determined the plot line. There were several other characters who made periodic appearances such as *Dr. Pill*, *King Morpheus*, and *Slivers* the dog.

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\(^{91}\) *Nemo* comes from the Latin for "no one" but McCay felt it sounded right.

\(^{92}\) As Harroff mentions *Nemo* was popular at the same time that Freud was beginning his research into dreams, and the similarity is intriguing. There were many dream themes in the literature of the time and a keen public interest as well.

\(^{93}\) Unfortunately, although McCay's work was much more sophisticated and advanced than other cartoonists of his generation, his work was not free of the racial stereotypes so common in comic strips and other mass entertainments of the time.
but the most important was the *Princess of Slumberland*, the romantic interest for *Nemo* in *Dreamland*. *Nemo* and the *Princess* remained friends and comrades in adventure. This comic strip had no sexual connotation, and was also free of most of the frustration and latent aggression present in the Rarebit Fiend. Because McCay was also a political cartoonist of note, he sometimes included themes related to important social issues of the time. For example, the Mars sequence of 1910 was a criticism of monopolies while the Shantytown series showed the poverty of city slums. In addition, the force in his artwork provided powerful impressions of the wonders and isolation of the new urban architecture and technology. In *Nemo*, the city is a wonderland rather than a shabby ghetto.

In *Nemo* more than any other comic strip, the graphics define its individuality. Anyone familiar with comic strips can easily see that *Nemo* is totally different in appearance and in style. Harroff sees McCay's style as related to the European romantic revival of interest in folk and fairy tales at this time. However, although this may be possible, I feel that a Michigan farm boy, largely self-taught, with a background of work in the circus and carnivals, used his unique, fresh and original talent and his mastery of perspective to create a civilized image of the fantastic themes so much a part of American culture at this time.

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94 Harroff, "Winsor McCay".
96 Some popular fantasies of the time included *Alice in Wonderland*, which contains several instances where people get very large or very small, and animals assume human and threatening characteristics, and Gelett Burgess, *The Burgess Nonsense Book* (1901). Burgess'
McCay, working in New York, must have been familiar with the other worldly landscape of Coney Island. His imagination produced something truly original and beautiful with great and lasting popular appeal at a time when escapist fantasy was very popular. Little Nemo was a comic strip with both elemental and topical themes, freedom from control as well as fantasy, although it could be frightening and cruel.

Nemo brought a sense of wonder and beauty to limited discipline of the comic page. McCay's fantastic situations and his manipulation of time, space and the physical body in a dream world had a direct relationship with the expected scientific advances that could conquer time and space in the real world. However, despite its physical beauty, Nemo was not entirely free from the disquieting anxieties of the Rarebit Fiend. In Nemo, they were more acceptable because of their surreal and beautifully drawn surroundings.

Dialogue had little importance in Nemo, the story was carried by the art. McCay was a master of perspective. As he humbly stated, "I admit I cannot draw any better than the average but critics say that my knowledge of perspective makes my drawings look snappy." One advantage the comic artists of the first generation had was the luxury of space. Each Nemo Sunday strip occupied a full page approximately 16 by 24 inches in full color.

Some examples of Nemo themes include the following: Nemo falls off nightmare into space 15 October 1905; he falls through the floor and is trapped in a forest of giant mushrooms, 22 October 1905; a giant turkey eats New York, 26 November 1905; he is chased by giant pie eaters who eat children, 25 February 1906; the Princess gets Nemo to ride on a frightening giant elephant, 30 September 1906. All from the New York Herald.

Editor and Publisher, 20 December 1909, 20.
Because McCay's style was so individual and complex, there were no serious imitations produced even though it was the most popular strip in the nation for a time. McCay is the only comic strip artist who has been honored to date with an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Winsor McCay did not retire to a career in the fine arts off his profits from Nemo. He was most interested in the application of the new motion picture technology to art. His experimentation with motion pictures brought him to the Vitagraph studio in New York where he produced the first animated cartoon, drawing the sheets for the film himself, with the help of two assistants. He took his animated film, Gertie the Dinosaur, on the road, touring the vaudeville circuit and once shared a vaudeville bill with Houdini and W.C. Fields.

Many feel that McCay was the most outstanding creative artist who has ever worked in the comic field as well as an innovative pioneer in the field of animation. However, his most important contribution to the comic strip medium was the liberating effect his style had on the more conventional comics format which had developed in the nineteenth century. His innovative style broke ground for others who would initiate new themes and styles during the second decade of newspaper comics history. However, the very existence of the supplement was threatened by a

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99 The irrepressible McManus did draw a burlesque of Nemo, Nibsy the Newsboy in Funny Fairyland for a brief period. It ran in the New York World from 1 April 1905, to 29 July 1906. McManus rudely transformed the romantics of McCay into something urban and vulgar. The boy hero is a teen-aged youth who can enter fairyland on any city street. He meets a fairy princess who had been turned into a donkey. When she is restored, she is uglier than the donkey. In the last strip, the fairy king visits New York and is trampled in a mob leaving a baseball game and run over by city traffic. New York World, 29 July 1906.

great crusade against the funny papers just as the comics reached their second decade.
CHAPTER V

THE COMICS, AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

In 1908, the conservative Boston Herald dropped its comic supplement. In the same year, the Christian Science Monitor was founded. Hindsight shows that these two events shared a similarity of purpose and location which was not entirely accidental. In the early 1900's, Boston remained the somewhat battered urban citadel of American Puritan culture, a culture that was also retained in the small towns of the east, midwest and south. The Herald's elimination of its comics, and the founding of the Monitor, were significant because they proved that middle-class protestant reformers still influenced public opinion in urban areas, at least on the east coast. ¹ Since the cities of the east and midwest were the main market, and contained the major publishing centers for the comic supplement, it seemed that the comics might be headed for extinction.

Public reaction against the excesses of the yellow press, and the comics in particular had grown steadily during the comics' first decade. The mindless violence, cruel pranks and sexual innuendos that were an integral part of the early comic supplement, offended parents and educators, while

¹ The drive to eliminate the comic section seems to have been a part of a general movement spearheaded by urban progressives to censor and control mass entertainments. In December, 1908, all the movie theaters and nickelodeons in New York City were closed down by the police, in response to a complaint presented by numerous Protestant churchmen. See Larry May, Screening Out the Past, 43. The main complaint against the motion pictures was their blatant sexuality and rejection of traditional morality, while the comics were cited for their anti-authoritarian violence and poor taste.
its garish colors and poor taste offended the aesthetes. Pulitzer and Hearst had proclaimed the comic section as the children's part of the newspaper, and especially for this reason, it was disturbing to middle class America. In the early supplements, the violence of the Yellow Kid and the Katzenjammer Kids was mixed with the amorous adventures of Mr Jack. In addition, other unpleasant or suggestive strips contained adult themes. In Reggie, a small weak-chinned college student chased two voluptuous beauties, The Heavenly Twins. Lulu and Leander and Mr. EZ Mark by F. M. Howarth, featured disagreeable lower middle-class couples who often quarreled or were involved in marginally legal schemes. It seemed to middle class readers that the majority of the early comic strip characters were unashamedly vulgar, disrespectful, brash and anarchic.

The Boston Herald, was a newspaper with a conservative, middle class readership in the most tradition bound city in American. Nineteenth century Victorian culture and morality had retained much of its original vitality in the Boston area. Thus, when the Herald’s management received numerous letters to the editor calling for the end of its comic supplement, the paper complied. The Christian Science Monitor was also launched in Boston in the same year. Funded by the Christian Science Church, the Monitor hoped to provide a superior interpretation of news and current events, free from the sensationalism and violence of the mass press. Both the Boston Herald and the Christian Science Monitor felt they were in the

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2 Atlanta Constitution, 4 January 1903, 18 January 1903. In one episode, MR. EZ Mark is duped playing the stock market because of his own greed. In another, he misses an important appointment because he buys a cheap second hand alarm clock. Howarth died a suicide in 1908. He was of the pioneering generation but never one of the star cartoonists.
forefront of a revival of the traditional values that had been an integral part of American in the nineteenth century.

The protestant clergy had considerable influence in the largely rural nineteenth century America. Thus, the churchmen who opposed Sunday newspapers had actually been able to prevent their publication in the 1830's at the peak of the Sabbatarian movement. However, urbanization and immigration had done much to dissipate this influence. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most ministers had retained little of this power. In October, 1909, Dr. David James Burrell, D.D. pastor of the Marble Collegiate Church on Fifth Avenue addressed the Women's Press Club on "Why We Should Not Patronize the Sunday Newspaper". His main argument centered on the fact that the Sunday paper had destroyed the "old time Sunday", by bringing in the cares of the world and its evils on God's day of rest. Yet, Dr. Burrell reluctantly concluded that the Sunday paper was probably here to stay.3

Most people had rejected Dr. Burrell's position by the late 1890's, and at the same time, newspapers gained increasing freedom from religious control. On March 15, 1897, Joseph Pulitzer boasted that the New York World addressed more people each Sunday than all the ministers in the state of New York combined.4 Even the generally conservative courts began to decide against the opponents of the Sunday press. In 1903, Judge J. E. Gorman rejected suits brought against the Philadelphia newspapers for

3 Editor and Publisher, 6 November 1909, 1.
4 Lee, The Daily Newspaper in America, 400. See also Gunther Barth, City People, The Rise of a Modern City Culture, particularly his chapter on the metropolitan press.
violation of Pennsylvania's Blue Laws dating back to 1794. World War I soon completed the work started by the Civil War. The last gasp of the reformers came in 1931 when a Kansas newsdealer was charged with "selling newspapers and employing persons to distribute them on Sunday" because this was "unnecessary labor" as defined by an old Blue Law. The Kansas Supreme Court ruled that "the Sunday paper is looked upon and has grown to be a necessity and this court so holds."

The conservative churches were grudgingly forced to acknowledge these changes in society and most abandoned their attempts to impose their standard of the Sabbath as a day of prayer and rest, on society as a whole. However, many conservative Christians continued to criticize the newspapers for their violence and sensationalism. This group, largely from small towns and rural areas, supported the urban progressives, businessmen and professionals in their attempts to halt the spread of urban corruption and the decline of traditional values. The comic supplement, in particular, received increasing numbers of complaints from this segment of the population. Most complaints were concerned with the comics' potential as a bad example for young readers.

The progressives considered the proper education of children, both immigrant and native born, extremely important for the development of a powerful and organized society. They quickly realized the seductive power of the comics inherent in its great popularity, particularly among children. Thus the crusade to eliminate the Sunday paper gave way to a brief

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5 Editor and Publisher, 2 4 April 1903, 2.
6 Ibid., 64, 14 November 1931, 8.
7 Lary May, Screening out the Past, 44-45.
campaign directed against the comic supplement. The progressive reformers hoped to eliminate the comic supplement entirely. Thus they developed several leagues to support their cause and enlisted the help of the women's clubs, whose ranks contained many concerned parents and educators.

The comic supplement was opposed by two groups, between 1900 and 1920. The earlier group, the genteel critics, were arbiters of literary or artistic tastes who wrote for the genteel magazines and erudite journals. They were offended by the vulgarity and poor taste of the comic strips. In addition, some art critics also objected to the style and coloration of the comics as well as their content. The genteel critics as a group felt that the comics were not worthy of publication as a popular art form and advised their readers to ignore them. Despite their lack of organization, the genteel critics had a certain amount of influence. For example, in 1906, literary critic, Ralph Bergengren, writing in *Atlantic*, criticized the poor taste of the comic supplement. He felt that the distinctive "American sense of humor" which the newspapers promoted was actually no different than the low comedy found in Europe and equally dull, vulgar and repetitious. He also was critical of the moral code and social values presented in the supplement.

Respect for property, respect for parents, for law, for decency, for truth, for beauty, for kindliness, for dignity, or for honor, are killed, without mercy. Morality alone, in its restricted sense of sexual relations, is treated with courtesy, although we find throughout the accepted theory that marriage is a union of uncongenial spirits and the chart of petty

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marital deceit is carefully laid out and marked for whoever is likely to respond to endless unconscious suggestions.9

Bergengren's complaints were little different from the cries of the religious reformers who wanted to retain the old time values. It was the constant lament of the middle class faced with the loss of their status and standards to the far-reaching machine age culture. Note that respect for property is the first item on his list and that parents and law follow close behind. Bergengren used his criticism of the comics to voice his own hidden fear of the changes occurring in American society, and the rise of an immoral, non-traditional mass culture.10

Bergengren correctly identified the most negative elements (to the middle class) in the comics, the preponderance of violence and the celebration of deceit. He was unable to realize that both these themes are and have been distinct and legitimate types of American humor. He was also swayed by appearance rather than content. Little Nemo, a comic strip, he singled out for praise, was also violent and cruel, although it was beautifully drawn.11

There were genteel critics even within the publishing industry. In the same year, M.J. Darby, president of the Newspaper Managers Association, read a paper at the National Convention of Newspaper Managers, entitled,


10 It is important to define the Victorian view of culture held by middle-class Americans in the late 19th century. Most felt that it meant a..."heritage from the European (English) past, including polite manners, respect for traditional learning, appreciation of the arts, and above all, an informed and devoted love of standard literature." Henry May, The End of American Innocence (New York: Knopf, 1959), 30.

11 Bergengren, 272-3. He cites its "charming draftsmanship" and "excellent decorative sense of color", which leaves the consideration that violence is acceptable if it is tastefully done.
"Is the Comic Supplement a Desirable Feature?". At this time, comic supplements had been in existence more than ten years and were part of all major American and many Canadian newspapers. Darby felt that the initial creativity of the first comics had declined and that the majority of current comics were stale and repetitious. He was concerned about the poor taste of the strips as well, but reluctantly conceded that they did sell more newspapers. Darby also mentioned their negative effect on child readers. Again it seems quite obvious that large numbers of adults read the comic supplement, given its early and lasting popularity with advertisers. Darby stated,

From the standpoint of circulation, the comic supplement may justify itself but the fact that a few hundred more newspapers are sold does not necessarily serve as a valid reason for its continuance. A large circulation of a certain kind might perhaps be obtained by the printing of immoral stories or giving away lewd pictures, but no member of this association, nor any reputable newspaperman would tolerate such a proposal.\(^\text{12}\)

When the Herald dropped its supplement, the genteel magazine, Nation applauded, declaiming that the end of the comic section might be near.\(^\text{13}\) The Nation approved the growth of a movement against colored comics spearheaded by both educators and parents. The journal's main objection to the comic supplement, however, was that the comics were tasteless and functioned at the lowest level of culture. The Nation complained that foreign visitors from Germany, France and England were

\(^{12}\) Editor and Publisher, 16 June 1906, 1. It is interesting that Darby equates comics with lewd pictures and immoral stories, thereby placing the comics outside the cultural pale.

\(^{13}\) The Herald's elimination of its comic supplement was also acclaimed by Outlook and Lippincott's magazine. See: "Comic Nuisance," Outlook, 6 March 1909, 527. and H. Scheffaur, "Comic Supplement," Lippincott March 1909, 381-3.
aghast when they looked at the vulgar and one-hundred percent American
comics, The magazine believed that the supplement actually lowered the
overall status of American culture and proved that our society was still raw
and childish.

Material which in no other country in the world would be offered to
anybody but infants or idiots is here thrust upon presumably intelligent
readers and hailed as a great advance in journalism.14

The Nation concluded that most sensible Americans probably discarded
the comic supplement, noting smugly that comics could only appeal to
"vacant-minded housemaids or casual coal heavers". The article rejected the
possibility that large numbers of cultured Americans read and enjoyed such
plebeian humor.15

The Nation's complaints provide a bridge between sporadic elitist
criticism of the comics and the vigorous organized protests of the
progressives. The Nation smugly applauded, but provided no active aid
outside of verbal appreciation. However while attacking the value system of
the comics, the journal subtly implied that only within its pages would the
reader find both cultural uplift and traditional values.

The negative attitude towards the comics held by the genteel critics of
the early twentieth century is still voiced today by people with similar
attitudes. However, genteel opinion has never been a danger to the comics'

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14 Ibid.
15 The Nation, like other magazines of its type, saw nothing worthwhile in an artform
directed at the lower classes. However, the editors of the Nation badly misjudged the
popularity of the comic supplement. Not only did American newspapers retain their comic
strips but after World War I, the comics became part of European newspapers as well.
existence, because it is intermittent, unorganized and found mainly in elitist publications. The position of this group towards the comics over the years has been that they were above such vulgar amusements which would disappear if ignored.\textsuperscript{16}

In sharp contrast to the genteel critics, the later protest against the comics was a highly focused movement supported by popular and respected civic leaders, social workers, ministers and educators. This group, the progressive critics, who were mainly parents and educators from urban and small town America, feared the influence of the supplement. They believed that the rampant popularity of violent and crude comics might corrupt (their) children and even break down the very fabric of society.\textsuperscript{17} They hoped, through boycott and protest, to force the newspapers to eliminate the comics.

The movement against the comics was part of a wave of criticism directed at mass amusements by the upper level of American society during the first two decades of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{18} The underlying issue seems to have been a power struggle between the genteel elites, the urban progressives and the commercial establishment to control the direction and content of mass amusements. The genteel critics feared that the freewheeling, popular and vulgar comics would further weaken the

\textsuperscript{16}The primary exponent of this attitude has been the \textit{New York Times} which has never carried any comic strips.

\textsuperscript{17}In the 1950's a similar movement surfaced, this time directed at comic books which had become very popular during World War II.

traditional WASP value system. The middle-class, urban professionals believed that entertainment in its highest form, meant that education and uplift should be combined with relaxation, within mannered patterns. To the entrepreneurs who promoted mass amusements, entertainment meant money. To the working class, the subject of this struggle, the best entertainment meant an exuberant release from care and order, often in the company of the opposite sex.

When heterosexual amusements with sexual overtones such as dancehalls, amusement parks and motion pictures, proved popular among the lower classes, businessmen did not hesitate to promote them, despite the Victorian social conventions then in place. The genteel critics saw this as a total breakdown; the corruption and vulgarization of American society.

When the violent and anarchic comics became both a popular and financial success, the progressives and their allies quickly directed the main force of their influence against an entertainment they felt might cause the breakdown of American society.

Certain conventions were observed in the comic supplement, despite the complaints of the critics. However, the comic strips never developed a

19 See Lewis Erenberg, Steppin Out, Chapters 2 and 3 and Lary May, Screening Out the Past, Chapters 2 and 3. Interestingly, the overtly sexual or determinedly low class comics largely disappeared by the beginning of the reform movement, although the violence remained. For example, the Hall Room Boys, a strip featuring two, low-class clerks, which enjoyed some popularity, was terminated in 1910. See Anna Slote "Some Figures in the New Humor," Bookman, May 1910, 286-7. Hearst himself dismissed A. Piker, Clerk for the same reason, and rejected Mr. Jack for his philandering.

20 See Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements, 163-184.

21 These attitudes were undoubtedly linked to the resurgence of nativist feelings outlined in John Higham's Strangers in the Land, Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925 (New York: Atheneum, 1966). The early comics, in particular, featured a variety of ethnic types, and many of the artists themselves had close ties to Europe.
censorship code like that later used in the motion picture industry. Generally what was acceptable behavior in the lower levels of American society was also acceptable in the comics. For example, a wife could beat her husband, but not vice versa. Women were not usually overtly sexual; romance rather than sex was the rule. Bad language was not allowed in the comics; instead, the cartoonists developed a whole series of meaningless expletives to take its place. During the first and second decades, deviant behavior was allowed only in unrealistic strips that featured animals, foreigners and people of obviously low social status or in dream-like situations. Religious and political topics were considered extremely controversial and were rarely found in the Sunday funnies of this period.

In most violent strips, the violence was directed at the weak and helpless, including children, minorities, vagrants and immigrants, which was not much different than what happened in the real world. Most of the beatings were administered by policemen or someone working for a wealthy figure

22 Arnram Schoenfeld, a pinch-hitting cartoonist (one who drew a strip when its creator was sick, noted that "if there is such a thing as striking a common denominator for the American people, the syndicated comic strip comes close. It must try to please everybody and hurt nobody. For peculiar reasons, people may be more offended by something in their pet comic strip than they would be by the same thing in the movies, the theater or literature. Amram Schoenfeld, "The Laugh Industry," Saturday Evening Post, 1 February 1930, 12.

14 The comic strip couple must be moral and faithful; divorce and infidelity was never mentioned at this time. Ibid., 12.

24 Language itself was the most heavily censored part of the comic strip. Despite the cartoonists efforts to replace offensive curse words or double entendres with nonsense or newly coined phrases, their inventions were also criticized. When the following rhyme appeared in a comic strip "ICK IBBITY BIBBITY GLIBBITY WOCK DOOBY IP MUGGLE ZOP OOP B=GULLOOP BUZAM UZZO BIP WOP KERBUM WUGGY BOW-WOW" both the Ladies Home Journal and Outlook called it an outrage. "Comic Nuisance," Outlook, 6 March 1909, 529.

25 Schoenfeld notes some other important taboos. The comics must be strictly law-abiding, and there must be no mention of illness, infirmity or death. He states that these taboos were not arbitrarily drawn up by newspaper editors but the result of negative public opinion or strip cancellations. Schoenfeld, "The Laugh Industry," 13.
of authority. In the world of the early comics, the police enforced the regulatory ordinances set in place by the Victorian elite. Despite the fact that they were usually portrayed as Irish ethnics, the police were not sympathetic to the lower classes. Neither were they respected by the cartoonists. The most common types of police found in the first decade of the comics were minor figures characterized by their cruelty and stupidity. The heroics of Dick Tracy were thirty years away. 26

Despite the lack of available statistics, it is quite obvious that large numbers of adults did read the comic supplement in 1905. 27 Perhaps, the most valid proof of this trend is that daily comics had been added to many newspapers by the end of the comics' first decade. The new daily comics were found in a traditionally masculine part of the newspaper, usually the sport section, not on the children's or women's page. A survey of their themes shows that many of the early strips were definitely directed at adults. 28 The Hall Room Boys, Lulu and Leander, A. Piker, Clerk, Sparky and Asbestos, and Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend, to name a few, had topics of

26Mack Sennett also satirized the police in his early films. The Keystone Kops were enforcers of repressive Victorian blue laws rather than noble protectors of humanity. The actors he cast for these roles were not noted for the physiques and their bumbling antics provided comic relief. See Lary May, Screening Out the Past, 104. However, in the comics, the Irish and Jews to allowed jokes about themselves if they written by a member of their own ethnic group. For example, two very popular ethnic strips, were the Irish Bringing Up Father, drawn by the Irishman, George McManus, and the Jewish Abie the Agent, drawn by the Jew, Harry Hershfield.

27 Even today's comics' surveys are not always entirely accurate because people are often ashamed to admit that they read the comics as they are considered to be vulgar low comedy.

28 Francis E. Barcus notes in his study of the Sunday comics that comic strips having adults as main characters have historically made up at least 75% of the total of all comic strips in any given year. Francis E. Barcus,"Trends in Sunday Comics,1900-1959," Journalism Quarterly 38(Spring 1961):179.
little interest for children. Others, like the Katzenjammer Kids and Happy Hooligan were enjoyed by both children and adults. Yet reading the comics was quickly promoted as a family activity. This was not an unreasonable expectation since the traditional family contained both parents and children. The early supplements had at least one adult strip, several that could be enjoyed by both parents and children on different levels, and one or more especially for children. This variety was important because the type of adult readers time was also an underlying concern of the progressive critics. They regarded the large number of urban immigrants from southern and eastern Europe as dangerous children who needed guidance. Instead, they feared that they would gain the wrong values from their exposure to the violent and anarchic comics.

The comic supplements of the first two decades had fewer pages, perhaps only two or four, and each comic took up a whole page. The early comic panels were larger, more highly detailed, easier to read and more open to scrutiny. The supplements held fewer comics during the first two decades especially in the smaller newspapers, therefore they were more closely read. In addition, their simplicity allowed them to be read and understood by people who had little knowledge of English.

The progressive critics began to appear in print as early as 1906, soon after the genteel critics. At first, the majority were women involved with children either as teachers or parents. Their major concern about the comics was that they were a negative influence on the young. A typical argument

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29 Their themes included social climbing, betting on horses, humiliation and sexual perversity.
30 In Europe, the first comics were published in magazine or book format, directed either at adults or children.
against the comics was voiced by Miss Maud Summers, a teacher, who addressed the Playground Association in 1908. She attacked the cartoonists of the Sunday Supplement as an evil influence on children. Miss Summers particularly castigated *Buster Brown* who in his pranks showed deceit, low cunning and a disrespect for his elders. Miss Summers concluded,

Humor has its place in the literature of childhood and it would be well if gifted writers for children could be found capable of substituting genuine fun for the coarse, vulgar type now so prominent. It is of the utmost importance that the picture or story for children have at the heart a spiritual truth or, in other words, that it shall have a right motive. This truth may be anyone of the many virtues such as generosity, kindness, hospitality, courage, heroism, chivalry etc.

It is interesting that this criticism was leveled at *Buster Brown* who was always punished and piously pledged repentance in a didactic frame at the end of each sequence, since Miss Summers recommended the same approach. Perhaps she was critical of this strip because *Buster* was obviously of the middle class and should have known better. Her suggestions for a "clean" comic would soon be taken up by Mary Baker Eddy when she established the *Christian Science Monitor*, but her newspaper was to be the exception rather than the rule.

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31 The Playground Association was founded in 1906 by citizen leaders with a concern for recreational programs in urban neighborhoods. It later became the National Recreation Association and merged with 5 other organization in 1965 to become the National Recreation and Park Association. See *Facts about the National Recreation and Park Association*(1986) National Parks and Recreation Printing Office.

32 *Editor and Publisher*, 19 September 1908 3.

33 Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University wrote about the importance of teaching manners in 1911. He considered this task part of the struggle against new immigrants, whom he termed "objectionable social groups." Charles W. Eliot, "Democracy and Manners," *Century* 1911-12, 173-8.
The movement to eliminate the comics gained momentum among progressive educators and parents. Even the august New York Times, which generally ignored comic strips, published several articles supporting this cause in 1911 and 1912. In 1911, the Times reported a mass meeting held by the League for the Improvement of the Comic Supplement, with speakers such as Lillian Wald, Dr Henry Van Dyke and Dean Thomas M. Balliett of the School of Pedagogy of New York University. Balliett is quoted as saying,

It is surely possible to change the character of these pictures so as to preserve humor but in a refined form. I am sure they will change as the newspaper managers respond to the demands of public sentiment. 34

In the following year it commented that the Era club, the largest women's club in the South had launched a crusade against the comic supplement. The clubwomen, according to the Times, hoped to substitute colored copies of famous paintings for the infamous supplement. 35 Finally, the Times noted that Maurice Low, the Washington correspondent for the London Post, blamed the comics for the bad manners of American children. 36

When the Boston Herald, a major paper, deleted its comics, it was seen, at first, as the death knell for the supplement by both the progressive critics, and the champions of culture and tradition. 37 In the Boston of 1908, only the ultra-conservative Transcript had not added a comic supplement.

34 New York Times, 7 April 1911, 18.
37 "Sounding the Doom of the Comics," Current Literature, December 1908, 630.
The Herald, which had a middle-class audience, bowed to the demands of parents and teachers to "banish the clown of the newspaper establishment."\(^{38}\)

In certain areas, particularly in the East, the Midwest, and the South, there was much pressure brought to bear on newspaper publishers to drop the comic supplement. A few other prominent newspapers nationwide, including the Milwaukee Journal, the Indianapolis Star, and the New York Tribune did briefly drop their comics between 1908 and 1912.\(^{39}\) All of them depended on a middle-class clientele similar to that of the Herald. This four-year period was the high point of success for the progressive critics. It seemed as though it might be possible to turn the tide against the comics.

The dedicated reformers continued their efforts to eliminate the comic supplement. The Ladies' Home Journal joined the fight, calling the comics "a crime against American children". It urged its readers to protest the supplement by refusing to buy newspapers that had one. The Journal complained bitterly of the comics as a vulgar mess...the work of a group of vulgarians whose only claim to fun lies in crude exaggeration".\(^{40}\) The

\(^{38}\) Nation, 5 November 1908, 426.

\(^{39}\) Mary Pedrick, a clubwoman, noted that the New York Post and Sun, the Boston Herald and a few others were managing very well without a comic supplement in 1910. Mary Garvin Pedrick "The Comic Sunday Supplement" Good Housekeeping, May 1910, 627. However, Moses Koenigsberg, who was one of Hearst's editors during this period stated that every newspaper that dropped its "funnies" suffered a setback. Although, according to Koenigsberg, dozens of Sunday newspapers had dropped their comic section during this period, the real reason was declining Sunday circulation reduced by the popularity of the automobile and the week-end outing. He felt that editors might have ordinarily ignored the criticism currently in vogue among "superior circles, especially among clubwomen" if it had not been coupled with a decline in revenue. Several years later, the family home center began to make a comeback, aided by the radio and the Sunday edition increased in size as well. Moses Koenigsberg, King News, 396-7.

\(^{40}\) The Ladies Home Journal, January 1909, 8.
Journal urged parents to unite with the International Kindergarten Union in a move to eliminate the vulgar and depraved comics that encouraged disrespect and lawlessness.

In 1910, Good Housekeeping entered the war against the comic supplement. Their salvo was Mary Garvin Pedrick's attack on comics, originally presented at a meeting of the Federated Women's Clubs of America. Her article featured the results of a study analyzing the content of comic supplements published throughout the country. Pedrick concluded that comics should be banished from the home. She argued that they glorified the "self-sufficient kid", the smart-aleck, who had little respect for his elders or society, and encouraged lawlessness and debauchery. She believed that since women largely controlled the selection of publications that came into the hands of their families, it was their responsibility to work for the elimination of the supplement. Both the Ladies Home Journal and Good Housekeeping somewhat lamely suggested that parents should either boycott papers with supplements or destroy the supplement when they bought the paper. However, Mrs. Pedrick also suggested that every man and woman write to their newspaper editors and complain about this menace, while alerting their neighbors of the problem.

Both these women's magazines voiced the anxieties of the suburban and small town middle class; the fear that a multitude of independent and disrespectful urban children would grow to adulthood without any

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41 See David Nasaw, Children of the City, Chapter 2. Nasaw's study of urban children at the turn of the century shows them to be independent, self-sufficient and reluctant to submit to the rules of the urban reformers.

42 Mary Garvin Pedrick, Good Housekeeping, May 1910, 625-7.

43 Ibid.
knowledge of traditional values. Their fears also extended to the type of knowledge the immigrants and their children might gain from the popular and easy to read comics. Yet none of the major papers directed at the urban masses had as yet dropped their comic supplements. Despite elitist complaints, parental protests, and the initial success of the Herald's conversion, the crusade against the supplement had succeeded in removing the comics only from the audience that was least influenced by them. The majority of newspapers continued to publish a supplement and the comics' popularity seemed greater than ever among the urban masses. The progressives slowly realized that the children most in need of proper instruction were still reading the dangerous comics.

Despite their continued lack of real progress, the progressive reformers, especially members of women's clubs, continued to agitate against the comic supplement. In 1910, the League of American Pen Women, a group comprising some 200 women journalists, authors, and illustrators, joined the crusade. They created a special Committee for the Suppression of the Comic Supplement. Mrs. Edith Kingman Kent discussed the negative influence of the comic strip for this group,

Parents and teachers labor through the week to inculcate the virtues, honesty, good manners, respect, morality and reverence in children, yet these teachings are counteracted by the pernicious influence of the Sunday supplement.

The types for illustration are usually taken from low life, where bad manners, boisterous conduct and coarse language prevail. The characteristic language accompanying the illustrations is particularly

44"Women War on Economics; Call for Improvements and Suppression of Comic Supplements," Kindergarten Magazine, Fall 1911, 161.
demoralizing and mothers tell me that they find it difficult to eradicate.\textsuperscript{45}

However, a year later, the Committee for the Suppression of the Comic Supplement had become the League for the Improvement of the Comic Supplement. Realizing that the total elimination of the supplement was an impossible task and perhaps undesirable as well, the League members turned their energies to improving its content instead.\textsuperscript{46} A year later, they believed that considerable improvement had already been made in some of the comics, although much work remained. The committee recruited the support of many famous literary figures and educators such as Brander Mathews, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Jacob H. Schiff, and President Charles Eliot of Harvard. Settlement house founder, Lilian Wald, voiced the deepest concern of this group when she stated that it was the \textit{children of the poor} who most needed to be protected from the dangers of the comic supplement. They, according to Wald, were without the advantages and guidance as well as the reading material of the middle class. However, if the supplement were reformed, it could provide these children with the healthy intellectual food now missing from their homes.\textsuperscript{47} Thus a wholesome and didactic comic supplement might provide a graphic addition to the progressive movement to reform and organize children's play in urban areas.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Editor and Publisher}, 26 February 1910, 6.
\textsuperscript{46}According to Don Kirchner's "The Ambiguous Legacy", progressive reformers were very apprehensive over the threat of social upheaval. These fears colored their approach to social reform and caused their support of recreational facilities "as a means of minimizing social strife." See \textit{Historical Reflections} (Waterloo, Ont.: U of Waterloo, 1975), 72-75.
\textsuperscript{47}"Make Comics Educational," \textit{Survey}, 5 April 1911, 103.
The most unusual aspect of the crusade against the comics occurred in 1913 as an outgrowth of a publicity campaign for the fading comic strip, *Buster Brown*. Richard F. Outcault, *Buster Brown's* creator, seemingly at the height of his popularity, left the New York Herald syndicate for Hearst's Newspaper Feature Service. The Hearst group developed an elaborate plan to enhance *Buster Brown's* popularity and at the same time, develop the idea that comic strips were firmly on the side of truth and beauty. *Buster Brown* was to become the permanent leader of a section of *Young America*, as the head of a *Buster Brown League* open to every boy and girl in the United States. Outcault designed a membership button which was to be worn as a pledge of faith in the League's principles. Buster's code of conduct appeared in the Sunday page, printed on the pillow which he usually wore at the end of each episode. These pledges seem innocuous to today's reader as examples of the didactic entertainment so popular during the progressive period.

Resolved--That I must have sleep if I have to stay up all night to get it. The peace that passeth all understanding comes with honest, healthy sleep. You can't buy it. If you could, I'd want to own a sleep store.

Resolved--That the best policy is to be honest. But don't let anybody know it...People won't believe you, but it makes you happy and prosperous to be honest and you're not afraid of the dark.

Resolved--That truth is all right if used at the right time and place...Tact and truth are two different things. Tact is the polite name for lies you tell to sensitive people.\(^{49}\)

Hearst Features ordered three million badges with estimates that they might eventually need seven million and an organizational system was set up with the eager cooperation of participating newspaper editors. The syndicate decided to make the public announcement of the League at a formal dinner in Washington, D.C. which was to be attended by a number of leaders in the progressive education movement. In addition, the syndicate sent letters to a carefully selected list of 250 individuals prominent in the current uplift trend. It was hoped that they would serve as advisors while providing endorsements for the League.

The uplift trend was a major part of the progressive movement directed at the improvement of working class society through the development of coordinated educational and leisure time activities. This specially developed educational recreation would uplift the life of working class Americans. It was directed at both adults and children and hoped to offset the negative influence of commercial leisure activities by presenting a wholesome but attractive alternative. At the same time, they hoped that their deliberately structured and didactic activities would indoctrinate the working class with middle class values. Recreation experts, social workers and businessmen hoped to accomplish this goal through the development of parks, playgrounds and social centers as well as providing other educational advantages for urban workers and their families. The shrewd and opportunistic Moses Koenigsberg reasoned that the progressives

50 See Lawrence A. Finfer "Leisure as Social Work in the Urban Community: The Progressive Recreation Movement, 1890-1920," (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1974), Chapter VI.
involved in the uplift movement would consider the *Buster Brown League* a worthy move towards the reform of the comics.

Koenigsberg, the director of News Features Services, soon received a number of passionate responses from the noted ministers, philanthropists, authors, sociologists and clubwomen he had written. Much to his dismay he found that their letters were overwhelmingly negative. The *Buster Brown League*, which the hopeful Outcault had hailed as a *meteoric idea* soon proved to be a complete and total failure.

Koenigsberg had not considered one crucial factor. The individuals he contacted, including Jane Addams, Senator George Norris, Carrie Chapman Catt, Clarence Darrow, Thomas F. Dixon, Judge Ben Lindsay, and Samuel Gompers, to name a few, were united by the common cause of pacifism at this time. In his autobiography, Koenigsberg ruefully provided a condensed version of their emotional replies.

> We have gone through a generation of peace-making, we are at a threshold of the brotherhood of man. We have reached this high point of human development after sustained research, thinking and planning for permanent peace. We have found that the most fertile field for the seeds of war lies in the *regimentation of youth*. We have uniformly opposed any any all attempts to regiment the young. Now, when we have come so far away from that field of deadly ferment, you ask that we help you lead a return to the regimentation of youth. It is a vicious proposal that calls for vigorous opposition.  

Although the progressives favored organized and educational recreation, many of them were pacifists who rejected anything that seemed tainted with militarism. Even though they were realistic in defining the

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51 Moses Koenigsberg, *King News*, 376.
dangers inherent in the regimentation of youth, the pacifists were sadly mistaken in regard to the dawn of the millennium. Only a few months later, Europe was engulfed by World War I.

The critics were not alone in their passionate discussion of the comics. The supplement also had numerous supporters among newspaper readers. Robert Sterling Price, a fan of the comics, responded in a letter to the editor that the comics' critics were misguided and took far too serious a view of the issue. He felt that the comics were already established as an important part of children's literature and that children were able to distinguish between make-believe and reality. In addition, he felt that the comics of the day included many that were both suitable for children and educational as well as entertaining.52

Syndicate editors and cartoonists also rushed to the defense of most prized feature, particularly in Editor and Publisher, the trade journal of the industry. Albert Payson Terhune of the New York World, denied that the comics taught lessons of immorality and disobedience. Terhune defended the oft criticized Foxy Grandpa...

The Foxy Grandpa series, which has been much criticized, really taught a trenchant moral lesson. Reduced to bald language, it told of two bad boys who tried to play tricks on a nice old man. They were always putting up jokes on him, attempting to make him look ridiculous. But they never succeeded. He always got the best of them. Punishment generally follows their transgressions. People laugh when they look at the pictures, and chuckle reminiscently afterward, but the lesson does sink in. They see conclusively that to be bad does not mean that one is happy. The same may be said for every series of comic

52Editor and Publisher, 3 October 1908, 1.
pictures that has made more than a temporary success. We don't want to use pictures if they are the least bit indecent.

However, in the same article, Terhune also dismissed the comics as primitive art for people of little culture or taste.

It (the supplement) is designed for youngsters who have not had time to acquire much of an education, yet, and for older children who have had their educational opportunities crippled, through one cause or another.

Nobody contends that the colored comic supplement is artistic. It isn't. It isn't for you and it isn't for me. It is for the people who don't care for fine shades of humor, because they can't appreciate them. The man who finds Mark Twain, for instance, too subtle for his understanding, has no difficulty in laughing at the right moment when he reads of the adventures of Little Nemo.53

Rudolph Block, comics editor of the Hearst papers, wholeheartedly defended the comic supplement. He stated that intelligent Europeans, rather than despising the American comic supplement, were eager to have comics in their own papers. Block pointed out that the Katzenjammer Kids, "those poor victims of all anti-comic spleen" were not published in Germany only because of the four newspapers that had applied for an exclusive, none were willing to pay the price. Block went on to state...

I have seen a newspaper with a Sunday circulation of 100,000 without a supplement gain an additional 50,000 readers after the addition of a comic supplement. Are these 50,000 people necessarily clownish, vulgar or idiotic or people who are attracted by clownish, vulgar and idiotic publications?

He defended the taste of the public using the argument that anything actively sought by such large numbers of readers must provide some social

53 Current Literature, December 1908, 632.
necessity. Block went on to defend the ability and style of American artists against their European counterparts.

I have for many years followed *Punch*, *Judy*, *Pick-Me-Up*, *Ally Sloper*, *Comic Cuts*, *Le Journal Amusant*, *Le Petit Journal*, *Pour Rire*, *Fliegende Blatter*, *Meggendorfer Blater*, *Kikeriki*, *Simplicissimus*, *Jugend* and the humorous periodicals of Russia, Spain, Hungary and Norway...Making allowance for national characteristics which are as clearly marked in humor as they are in literature, in art, or even in food, you will find that what is truly humorous in these publications is alike in each. The best that is in each the others try to obtain or failing, to imitate. I have tried vainly to induce the best European humorists to come to this country. They preferred to draw... in their own country. ...Dirks, Opper, Outcault and Swinnerton have, in the past ten years, refused innumerable offers of employment in England, France and Germany.54

Cartoonist Gus Mager, creator of a number of gag comic strips (*Sherlocko the Monk*, *Groucho the Monk* and others) for Hearst's papers, also defended his work late in 1908. His popular comics had mainly an adult audience and poked fun at the weaknesses and flaws of human nature. Mager wrote that he received a number of letters from readers who recognized these flaws in their neighbors and friends but not in themselves. Mager concluded that,

There are quite a number of good human-nature series--the kind that depict virtues rewarded or misdemeanors ridicule or punished--appearing in the newspapers and what with their vast circulation, it would be strange, indeed, if some of them didn't hit even you and me now and then, and that is a good thing. They are tiny sermons which can only work for the general good, so it is safe to say that funny pictures on the whole have a very decided use in the world.55

54 Ibid., 632-3.
55 *Editor and Publisher*, 19 December 1908, 6.
Unwilling to offend readers who might enjoy comic strips, *Good Housekeeping* also printed an article defending the comics. It was written by William Johnston, the editor of a comic supplement. Johnston stated flatly that despite the efforts of the Kindergarten Union and other concerned groups, it would be impossible to "kill the comics". He felt that if it had been possible, it would have happened long ago, not on moral grounds, but for economic reasons. He stressed the fact that the comic supplement was by far the most expensive part of the newspaper. Not only did the cartoonists command large salaries but the colored inks used cost five times as much per page as an ordinary page of newsprint. The four color plates used for the Sunday color section were also much more expensive. There was only one reason why cost-conscious newspaper publishers would allow such an expense; because it was extremely profitable.

Johnston explained that newspapers derived their income mainly from advertising revenue and the sale of advertising depended largely on circulation. Thus when comic supplements doubled and tripled circulation, it would have been economic suicide for newspapers to drop their comic sections. He also intimated that although the *Boston Herald* might have dropped its supplement for ethical reasons, it was more likely because they were unable to get a really funny comic at a price they could afford. Johnston went on to defend the supplement, saying that most of the cartoonists were excellent craftsmen, and their content was steadily improving. If the colors were garish, it was the result of mechanical problems rather than design. He concluded that if parents and educators were dissatisfied with the supplement, the best way to bring about change was to write letters to the
editor about comics they felt were objectionable. However, at this point, Johnston stated that he only received four to six complaints a year about the content of the comics. 56

Even the *New York Times* printed the remarks of John Alexander, the Director of the National Academy of Design, a noted art school. Alexander stated that there was nothing wrong with the American comics, from an artistic point of view. Most of the cartoonists were good draftsmen and the color presses were steadily improving. He concluded that anyone familiar with *Max and Moritz* drawn by Wilhelm Busch would realize that the new comics were much less violent than the original. 57

Strangely enough, the mobilization for the American war effort feared by the pacifists, almost succeeded in the elimination of the comics sought by the progressive critics. In 1918, wartime paper shortages came close to accomplishing what educators and critics had failed to bring about. Newspaper publishers discussed the elimination of the supplement to conserve paper, but the war ended before this plan could be put into operation. 58

56 William Johnston "Curing the Comic Supplement, Advice from a Comic Editor," *Good Housekeeping*, July 1910, 81-3.

57 *New York Times*, 7 April 1911, 10.

58 *Editor and Publisher*, 14 September 1918. Thomas R. Donnelly, chief of the Pulp and Paper Section of the War Industries Board stated that he had received many complaints about the continuation of the colored supplement during wartime. He intimated that a plan would be put into operation that would reduce the comics to tabloid size or eliminate them entirely.
Between 1908 and 1915, the comics were alternately criticized and praised in women's magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal* and literary magazines such as *Outlook*, *Bookman*, *Survey* and *Current Literature*. Yet the overall effect of the negative comments was overset by both the great popularity of the comic and their extreme profitability. Both of these reasons helped prevent the total demise of the comic strip.

The movement to eliminate the comic supplement was not quite as simple as it had seemed on the surface. Initially the genteel critics rejected the comics as a vulgar art form that came out of and was directed at the lower classes. The progressive critics, led by parents and teachers were concerned with the mindless violence and immorality of the strips. They feared the corruption of children and the breakdown of traditional values. In addition, the great commercial potential of the comics made them a key part of the struggle between the business interests and the middle class for control of the mass entertainment media.

It seemed as if there was no middle ground where these opposing forces could meet. The commercial interests were just as determined to promote the comics as the progressives were to eliminate them. However, the gradual change in the attitude of the progressives in regard to the usefulness of the comics helped the resolution of the problem. They slowly realized that all comics were not inherently evil and could even be a force for good. The problem was also resolved in part by the approach to the comics taken by the *Christian Science Monitor*.

Not all newspapers joined the race to print as many of the popular comics as they could find. The *New York Times*, which considered itself a
newspaper for the educated and cultured, disdained the plebeian comics, and concentrated on the interpretation of important news. The Times, in some ways a nineteenth century newspaper for twentieth century America, has continued to reject the inclusion of comic strips even today when they have become much more sophisticated and politically aware. The New York Times, therefore, blindly accepted the opinion of the genteel critics, that comics were worthless and best ignored entirely.

The approach taken by the Christian Science Monitor, was an attempt to reconcile the comics with the goals of the progressive critics. In fact, the Christian Science Monitor stood alone in the first decade of the twentieth century as a newspaper whose editorial staff wholeheartedly endorsed the views of the Committee to Improve the Comic Supplement. Although the Monitor was not a direct result of the crusade against the comics, it was part of the movement to educate and uplift American society. Its editorial staff, with the support of Mrs. Eddy hoped to set the standard for a wholesome, educational and entertaining family newspaper. The Christian Science Monitor was started late in 1908 by Mary Baker Eddy, the wealthy founder of the Christian Science religion. She hoped to develop a national newspaper that would provide an alternative to the violence and sensationalism of the large urban dailies. Mrs. Eddy was determined to sponsor a newspaper that would avoid stories that dealt with crime, disasters or death, in accordance with Christian Science beliefs. The Monitor, from the beginning, rejected
the popular comics of the color supplement because of their violence, although it was not inherently opposed to the idea of the comic strip. 59

Mrs. Eddy's goal was not to use the Monitor as a direct outlet for Christian Science beliefs, but rather to develop a serious newspaper that would serve as a skilled interpreter of important news events, from a Christian Science mindset. Christian Science was based on the theory of mind cure. According to Mrs. Eddy's views, in her bible, Science and Health, if one believed, one could be healed. If the tumult and conflict of the outside world were shut out, it would cease to exist. 60 The Christian Science view of the world was similar to that of a semi-cloistered Victorian female, secure from outside influence in the sanctuary of her home. 61 The comics, however, dealt with the real world, rough, vulgar and violent.

Although she died, two years after its founding, Mrs. Eddy set the standard for the Monitor for hiring the most qualified people available. She also studied the techniques of other major papers to develop the best possible format. 62 The editorial staff of the Monitor, following Mrs. Eddy's

59 Today, the New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor and the more recent USA Today, are the only three major daily papers published in the United States that have never carried any of the popular syndicated comics.

60 For example, following Christian Science doctrine, the word death was never mentioned. Important personages "passed on", while the deaths of lesser mortals went unreported. The sinking of the Titanic was ignored by the monitor. True to its teaching, the paper lost thousands of dollars in declining to accept liquor, shotgun or tombstone advertisements. See Sidney Kobre, The Development of American Journalism (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1969), 619.

61 The cover was illustrated with a pretty design and on the editorial page was the motto: "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Contained in Mrs. Eddy's first editorial were the words, "The object of the Monitor is to injure no man but to bless all mankind." This was the heart of the Monitor's philosophy. See Lyman P. Powell, Mary Baker Eddy, A Life Size Portrait (Boston: Christian Science Publishing Society, 1930), 230-33 and Norman Beasley, The Cross and The Crown, The History of Christian Science (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), 476-7.

62 Mrs. Eddy was, at this time, the richest woman in America, a self-made millionaire who had the available capital to launch a major newspaper directed at a national market in
guidelines, rejected comic strips they considered either "too banal or too bloodthirsty." Since the majority of the most popular comics contained some of these elements in 1908, they were discarded as unsuitable for the Monitor's audience. However, because it avoided sensational news items, the Monitor had more room for articles devoted to literature, music and art. By the twenties, it had developed a children's section complete with its own wholesome comic strips, which were heartily endorsed by parents and educators.

The Monitor's rejection of the popular syndicated comics was possible only because the paper was supported by a wealthy church. It was much more expensive for any newspaper to develop its own comics instead of paying the weekly subscription rate to a syndicate. The Monitor hired cartoonists to produce wholesome non-syndicated comics, such as The Busyville Bees and The Diary of Snubs Our Dog. The Monitor's editorial policy did not reject comic humor but felt it should always be moral, non-violent and in good taste. According to an approved history written by former editor-in-chief Erwin D. Canham, the paper even hired popular syndicated cartoonists to create special comics that would follow their editorial guidelines. They undoubtedly used pseudonyms because none of the cartoonist's names are familiar. Under the leadership of Canham, the Monitor became one of the most respected newspapers in the world, well

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64 Ibid., 359.
written and organized, it continues to focus on significant issues of world news. Politically independent, it is a moral force in world journalism.65

In the twenties, the Monitor's "Family Features" page developed the form it would retain for many years. It was the home for a group of comic strips created especially for the Monitor's readers, These strips were mainly wholesome animal stories directed at younger children but were read by parents as well.66 For example, Waddles was the story of a duck family written in verse by three generations of the Hager family. Tubby and Buddy and Co, a series of schoolboy adventures was drawn by their political cartoonist, Guernsey Le Pelley from 1930 to 1981. Snubs, a Dog was drawn by Paul Carmack, political cartoonist from 1934-1961. The Monitor's comics had a strong resemblance to the better type of children's literature, approved by librarians and teachers.

Although none of the major newspapers was immediately converted to the Monitor's method of creating wholesome new comics, there was both a gradual improvement in the comics' content as well as a reduction in critical opposition. Thus the progressive critics' movement to eliminate the comic supplement began as early as 1905, peaked around 1910 and continued until 1914. It was then replaced by weightier matters, particularly the growing concern about American involvement in world affairs. The last

65The Monitor consistently ranks in the top 10 or 20 of the world's newspapers and has won hundreds of awards in various fields. It has never missed a day of publication and its five daily editions go to readers in more than 120 nations, despite the fact that it has a circulation of less than 300,000 daily. See John C. Merrill, The Elite Press, Great 8Newspapers of the World(New York: Pitman Publishing Co.,1968), 111-12.

66 Letter from Barbara Entress, Christian Science Monitor Reader Representative to Elsa Nystrom, 9 October 1986. Although the Monitor's strips had a devoted following among the paper's reader's, none of its strips enjoyed the popularity of the nationally syndicated strips and the Monitor has recently dropped its comics.
years of the movement saw the beginning of a reconciliation between the
comics and their critics, as the progressives noted the inherent usefulness of
the comics as a learning tool.

The time frame of the crusade against the comics coincides with, and
was actually related to the rise and fall of the powerful, literate, urban
progressive movement. Certainly, the same progressives who wanted to
improve and upgrade American society also sought a comic supplement
that was educational and disciplined. For good or ill, their reform efforts
were halted by America's impending entry into World War I, and many of
the reformers turned their energies to the support of the war effort.

By the war's end, the increasingly powerful newspaper syndicates
were firmly in control of both the creation and distribution of comic strips.
Syndication reformed the unruly comics to a certain extent just as the
commercially controlled mass culture triumphed in the marketplace. Thus
the end result of the crusade against the comics was that it had little effect on
either the type of comic in the supplement or its popularity nationwide.67

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67 The Boston Herald, which had gained both publicity and applause for dropping its
comic supplement was ironically the leader in returning to the comics fold. The Herald, a
newspaper with a "silk-stocking" clientele, became one of Hearst's Newspaper Feature
Service' best clients. Newspaper Feature Service rationalized the value of the comics as
always providing punishment and repentance in the last frame. The Herald, along with
other papers having a similar audience, like the Milwaukee Journal, the Indianapolis Star,
and the New York Tribune, had reinstated their comic supplement by 1914. Moses
Koenigsberg, King News, 398.
CHAPTER VI

THE SYNDICATES TAKE CHARGE

The dominance of urban values in the 1920's completely disarmed the movement to ban the comic strip which had developed between 1906 and 1912. However, because the syndicates wanted to reach the largest possible audience, they encouraged the development of strips that had a broad popular appeal, and had them drawn by their most talented artists. Thus although the older urban, working-class favorites were retained, by 1920 the syndicates had added strips like *The Gumps*, *Polly and Her Pals*, and *Toonerville Folks* which brought middle-class topics and values into the comics. For example, *The Gumps* centered around the daily life of a middle class family, *Polly* featured the adventures of a college student and *Toonerville Folks* was set in the suburbs. Most of the characters in these strips spoke in the refined language of the middle class as instead of a street dialect or the *pidgin* German of the vaudeville halls.

In the introduction to his pioneering study of comic strip culture, Sol Davidson called the comic strip "A child of the city streets." Davidson felt that the language and images of the comics' first generation had come out of the urban ghettos. Street slang, through its use in vaudeville, popular music and the comics, was gradually accepted for common usage by a majority of Americans. Urban scenes also became a predominant feature of
the American landscape. Yet the comics are not just a child of the city, but rather a child of the new homogenizing urban culture. A culture, reinforced by the first generation of syndicate-developed comics, available by 1925, in the daily newspapers of even the smallest towns all over America.

Cartoonist Amram Schoenfeld writing about the early years of syndication perceptively noted that

Within twenty-five years, the comic cartoon has evolved from an unimportant newspaper by-product kicked about by scuffling editors, into an industry whose importance is reckoned not so much in millions of dollars as in the part it plays in the fortunes of the nation's newspapers and in American home life. The comic strip reaches a far greater audience each day than even the motion picture. It goes wherever the newspaper goes...It is read by the vast majority of Americans of all ages, day in and day out.

Schoenfeld's words are still true today. The comic strip format remains little changed and reaches an even larger audience. However, the nationwide distribution of the comic strip, which he mentions, would not have been possible without the more sophisticated marketing and distribution methods developed by the syndicates, as well as syndication itself.

The standardization of American culture that occurred in the twentieth century was undoubtedly aided by the syndication of daily and Sunday comic strips. Although syndication of comic features had long been a minor part of the newspaper industry, the rise of these powerful groups in their modern guise, took place between 1915 and 1920. They distributed a

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1 Sol Davidson, "Culture in the Comic Strips" (Ph.D. Diss., New York University, 1959), 1-2.
more polished and sophisticated product that was read by millions of Americans and made both the characters and the vocabulary of the comics household words throughout the country. For example, the vocabulary as well as the fashions associated with flaming youth and the "roaring twenties" were actually popularized nationally by a comic strip. *Harold Teen*, created by Carl Ed with suggestions from Captain Joseph Medill Patterson of the *Tribune*, featured the trend setting fashions and slang of urban youth. Shortly after debuting in 1919, it quickly became one of the most popular strips distributed by the new *Chicago Tribune-New York Daily News* Syndicate. Thus, a syndicated comic initiated the young of rural areas into the use of urban teen slang terms such as "Sheba" and "Queen" (girl) and "Sheik"(boy) as well as the wearing of slickers and bell bottom trousers.\(^3\) This is just one area in which the comics contributed to the urbanization of American society.

Another aspect of "big" syndication was its emphasis on the more conventional, popular comics and an unwritten code that kept sexually-oriented topics out of the newspaper comics until the seventies. However, the censorship code was not used to eliminate the more anarchic and vulgar qualities that first made the comics so popular with the urban mass audience. Finally, as the major syndicates gained control of the comic industry in the twenties, there was an increasing emphasis on middle class themes, especially those relating to financial success and respectability.

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\(^3\) This strip was another idea of Captain Patterson, who felt that a teen strip would be successful with the increased interest in youth culture. *Harold Teen* made its debut in the *Chicago Tribune*, 4 May 1919, in the Sunday comic section. In 1919, Patterson had Carl Ed, its creator, develop a daily strip that ran in the *New York Daily News*. The *Tribune* ran only the Sunday panel for some time. See Maurice Horn, *World Encyclopedia of Comics*, 304-5
These themes were undoubtedly promoted because they were so important to both the syndicate management and a majority of the top cartoonists at this time.

The continued expansion of the newspaper industry, immediately before World War I, was beneficial to the growth of the comic supplement. Despite their determined efforts, the organized forces of genteel society had wrought few changes in the overall content of the comic section. Distracted by political issues, the movement declined just as the syndicates rose to prominence. Rowdy and vulgar comics like the Katzenjammer Kids and Happy Hooligan were, if anything, more popular than ever in 1915. It is very difficult to link the rise of syndicates to the influence of the reform movement, although they are curiously inter-related. It may well be that the reformers' complaints actually stimulated the sale of newspapers that featured a comic section. Coincidentally, the big syndicates would make some of the critics' suggestions, particularly the censorship code, part of their own policy. The syndicates, however, were motivated by financial rather than moral reasons. The reformers' desire to incorporate educational or didactic comics into the comic section, was completely rejected by the syndicates. With a few exceptions, educational comics have had little place in the modern mass newspaper. The comics have remained solidly in the ranks of the entertainment industry, responsive to popular interests, but resisting any attempts to make them a teaching tool or a civilizing

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4One of the exceptions is Mark Trail, a comic that provides nature lore centered around a thin story line. The strip was created by the Georgia cartoonist Edward Dodd (1902-) out of an early nature panel, Back Home Again, originally developed for United Feature Syndicate in 1930. Mark Trail dates to 1946, and is still syndicated today. The strip is notable for its respect for nature and emphasis on conservation, well before this became the trend.
influence. Syndicate editors have also been equally reluctant to add comic strips with a commercial message, in fear that this would weaken the overall effect of the comic supplement.

Invigorated by their chaotic early years, the comics gained new life in the second decade of the twentieth century. Their audience grew by leaps and bounds and reached an ever larger portion of the population. American comics even crossed national boundaries as syndicates sold them to newspapers around the world. Many elemental comics, those with universal appeal, translated easily into a number of foreign languages. The rapid proliferation of American comic strips was a direct result of the development of dynamic well-organized feature syndicates. These syndicates successfully exploited the growing popularity of the new daily comic strip (*Mutt and Jeff*), and the family adventure series (*The Gumps*). Syndicate editors, themselves, provided the initial ideas for a number of innovate and groundbreaking strips in their endless search for new themes and fresh material. The syndicates also retained the most popular strips from the first two decades of the comics.

As mentioned earlier, all the newspapers that had dropped their comic supplements between 1908 and 1912, reinstated them by 1915. They realized that the publication of a comic supplement was an important promotional tool in an extremely competitive market; comics drew readers and increased profits. Publishers like Hearst and syndicate editors like

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5By 1920, many popular American comics were carried by foreign newspapers, both in Europe and Latin America. Despite language compatibility, many American comics are not popular in England. Despite our Anglo-Saxon heritage, American comic humor is a mixture of continental and native themes.

6The early years of the twentieth century were the peak years for the newspaper industry in America in terms of individual newspapers in print. The number of daily
Patterson were still wary of the lingering power of the genteel critics. They praised the positive aspects of comic strip morality and pointed out that in the comic strips they carried, bad children were always spanked and evildoers were punished in the end. These smug platitudes salved the consciences of high minded newspaper editors and critics, as well as concerned parents, who had earlier rejected similar comics. Strictly speaking, the syndicate editors were not entirely truthful in their appraisal of the comic supplement's content in 1915, because little had changed at this point. The development of more realistic comics in the late 'teens and twenties would slowly upgrade the roster of the comic page, as it added a number of strips that derived their humor from normal family situations, and downplayed violence.

Even before the development of the major urban syndicates, the comics had become such a popular and profitable asset that many newspapers decided to include them as a regular daily feature. In fact, the innovative invention of a daily comic strip in 1906 may well have hastened the growth of syndication. The commonly accepted belief that comics were just for children was downplayed when circulation managers observed that large numbers of men bought newspapers just to read comics like Mutt and Jeff, with its masculine theme of horseracing. More adult-oriented strips were added during the second and third decades of the twentieth century.

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newspapers reached its highest total before World War I, and then begin a slow decline, that rapidly accelerated after World War II. The increase of publication and distribution costs in recent years has forced the less competitive papers into bankruptcy. Moses Koenigsberg stated emphatically that the papers that gave up their supplements between 1908 and 1912 suffered severe financial losses. See M. Koenigsberg, King News, 397-8.

7It would be difficult to consider the punishment of the Katzies as providing a good example, because no amount of spankings reformed those fiends. Other strips, like Happy Hooligan and Mutt and Jeff also had a number of violent frames.
These new comics were directed at both male and female readers as they included wholesome family themes, and continued adventure stories, as well as the traditional standard humor strips. Several of the most popular and long-lasting strips in comic history, with broad audience appeal, particularly *Gasoline Alley* (1919) and *Little Orphan Annie* (1924) date from the period immediately after World War I.

Even before the advent of daily comics, the location of a comic strip in a particular section of the daily paper has always been determined by its audience. Strips that were not suited for the general public were quickly moved by the editor from the color supplement to a more masculine part of the Sunday paper, usually the sports section, or a more sophisticated part, the arts and theater page. The first irregular daily comic, *A.Piker Clerk*, was initially placed in the sports section because it was a masculine strip based on the adventures of a racetrack gambler. As more papers included daily comics, they were not printed on a single comic page at first, but instead were found throughout the paper. Depending on their topics, individual comic strips might be placed anywhere from the feature section to the financial page. Certain strips never ran with the weekday comic page regulars. For example, William R. Hearst had his editors place *Krazy Kat*, the darling of the genteel critics, in the Theater Arts sections of his newspapers. Hearst, who enjoyed *Krazy Kat*, despite its lack of popular success, felt it would be read by people who otherwise ignored the comics in this section.  

8 *Smilin' Jack*, a strip with an aviation theme, first appeared in

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8 Unfortunately, this also meant that the strip ran in black and white rather than the glorious desert colors of Herriman's Sunday panels. Color makes little difference to most comic strips but some, including *Krazy Kat*, some of the early *Polly and Her Pals*, *Bringing Up Father*, and later *Tarzan* and *Prince Valiant*, were diminished by its lack.
the sports section. Today, many newspapers isolate controversial strips. *Doonesbury* by Gary Trudeau, and *Bloom County*, by Burke Breathed, are often printed in the arts or editorial section rather than on the regular comic page. Sports oriented strips like *Tank Macnamara* by Jeff Miller and Bill Hines, and *Gil Thorp* by Jack Berrill, are still found in the sports section.

By the late 'teens, even the smaller newspapers carried at least three or four daily comics.9 The daily comic page as it exists today, was formed by the steadily increasing popular demand for daily strips. By 1940, most newspapers carried at least one complete page of comics every day. The daily comic page has traditionally been printed in black and white, rather than the color of the Sunday section. Before World War II, the comics were printed in a much larger size than today's strips, probably because they were fewer in number. Each block (a daily strip contained three or four blocks) measured an average of 4" by 4" as opposed to an average of 2" by 2 1/2" today, while a Sunday strip often covered an entire standard newspaper page. 10 This larger sized format allowed the cartoonist more room for detailed work. 11

The profit oriented focus of the new comic syndicates slowly began to change the content of the comic supplement after 1915. The best of the comics from the first and second decades, specifically those with elemental themes, retained their popularity, well into the thirties and forties.

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9 These daily newspapers had far fewer pages and sections than the modern paper, although their Sunday edition was quite large in proportion. The *Atlanta Constitution* had only twelve pages in 1920, and ran 3 daily comics which it bought from the newly formed *Chicago Tribune-New York News* syndicate.

10 A recent trend by some cartoonists has been to reduce the number of blocks in a strip panel from four to two or three, thus increasing the width of each block as well as reducing the content of the strip.

11 Judging by the cartoonists' fan mail, the comics were closely scrutinized by their readers who were quick to comment on any error or change.
However, many others fell by the wayside. Comics editors, like Patterson of the Tribune, often promoted strips that appealed to an audience at least one level up from its working class base. The inclusion of middle-class concerns did not diminish the comics' ability to remain outside the control of polite society. Instead the strips widened their horizons, and the very group that had been most critical of the supplement began to appear regularly within its pages, often to its disadvantage. It was also an indication of the growing respectability of the mass newspapers as well as blue-collar acceptance of white-collar standards.

By the end of the comics' third decade, the major syndicates had gained almost complete control of the comic strip market. As a result, they were able to set in place an unwritten code that provided a standard for controlling or censoring the content of the comic pages. Even before the advent of syndication, most newspaper editors and publishers had been well aware of the middle class opposition to the comic supplement. A number initially attempted to solve this problem, behind the scenes, by rejecting comic strips that they felt were not suitable for a family audience. Yet, they did not want to give up their most popular and profitable comics, even if they did offend a relatively small but influential group of readers. This problem was solved for them by the emergence of the major syndicates. These agencies quickly gained control of the publication rights to the most popular New York and Chicago comics and sold them to newspapers throughout the country. Because these strips were so much in demand, everyone wanted to read them, even if they were violent or crude at times. The best of the traditional comics soon became so widely distributed,
running in hundred of newspapers every week, that their publication caused little comment.

Not all newspapers adopted the syndicate strategy at first. A number hired artists to draw comics that were published only in their own papers. This approach was not always rewarding for the newspaper. If a staff cartoonist hit on a format that was popular, it was more than likely that he would be hired by one of the larger syndicates, at a much higher salary. Thus it was difficult for a paper to keep an outstanding talent for any length of time. The independent newspapers that followed this strategy were usually forced to print the work of mediocre artists. Naturally, by 1930, when the major syndicates paid very large salaries and commissions, it was the goal of most aspiring cartoonists to sign a contract with one of them. Even when such a contract was signed, there was always the danger that a cartoonist might receive a better offer from a competitor and "jump" to another syndicate. Harried editors were able to exert control over their most popular artists only by signing them to "cast iron" contracts. To protect themselves, most syndicates tried to gain control of the copyright to the comic strips their artists had created, when the contract was signed. The syndicates kept their artists happy by paying them large salaries and allowing them considerable freedom. By the twenties, for example, a number of cartoonists had demanded and gained the right to work at home if they so desired. Cartoonists became specialists who were totally involved with drawing their own comic characters in splendid isolation. They worked in a quiet office or

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12 The sole exception was the Christian Science Monitor which has always rejected using any of the popular syndicated comics and followed a policy of developing their own wholesome, family-oriented comics.
at home, apart from the noise, camaraderie and spontaneity of the traditional newspaper office.

Historically, the content of individual comics has been closely scrutinized by its readers. They often write to their favorite cartoonists with praise or complaints about their strips and gleefully point out any errors. However, since the failure of the movement against the comics, the majority of comics have been criticized and controlled from within the industry, rather through the efforts of outside groups. Because the cartoonists who worked for the major syndicates produced material for a national market, their editors usually encouraged them to develop strips that were safe and reasonably genteel. Conversely, the same editors often rejected strips with regional appeal, or those beyond the norms of acceptable social standards. This process, of course, was another step in the standardization of American comic culture.

Journeyman cartoonist, Amram Schoenfeld commented in 1930,

For if the syndicated comic series has become the most carefully self-censored, and if analyzed by the reformer perhaps the purest form of widespread reading, visual or auditory entertainment offered to the American public today, it is largely for sound business reasons. The comic-cartoon series has become a commodity, produced and marketed much like any other commodity, and it is just as bad business to release a comic strip with an objectionable feature as to sell complexion soap with grit in it...There is no question of morals here, it is chiefly a matter of dollars and cents. 13

13When Schoenfeld referred to the purity of the comics, he undoubtedly meant the absence of sexuality. Any hint of sex or sexual misconduct was ruthlessly excised from the comics by the syndicate editors. The is true today in newspaper comics with a few exceptions including Doonesbury and Bloom County, both relatively recent strips.
Schoenfeld cynically but truthfully described the syndicates as driven by the profit motive, rather than a moral code. However, he correctly assessed the comics' great popularity and their ability to influence Americans. Money, success, and the American dream became an integral part of both the comic strip and the comic industry after syndication. Cartoonists, syndicates and newspapers used the comics to gain financial success just as the "struggle for success" became an important theme within the new middle class comic strips like the *Gumps, Gasoline Alley* and *Little Orphan Annie*.

A discussion of the comic strip syndicates would be incomplete without a brief overview of the developmental period of newspaper syndication. The feature syndicate as we know it today, was a product of ante-bellum America. In the first stage, it was seen as a way to protect original work. The profitability of syndication became evident quite early although it was initially utilized mainly to help smaller papers more successfully compete with their larger rivals. The pioneers usually developed independent operations, many based in the midwest because of its distance from New York, that sold to all comers. By 1900, the major newspaper publishers in Chicago and New York, had begun to develop their own feature syndicates. They almost immediately became involved in a fierce competition for the contract rights to the most popular comic strips. Although at first the comics they controlled were kept for the exclusive use

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14Syndication seems ideally suited to the mass communication and entertainment industry. Radio and television stations, as well as movie theaters, are often controlled by a major chain or network.
of their own newspaper chains, popular demand, and the lure of huge profits, soon won out. The major syndicates developed a business strategy that involved marketing their packages of strips to newspapers across the United States and eventually in foreign countries as well. The larger and more successful organizations gradually weakened the position of the smaller ones. They were able to pay higher salaries and offer more perks to the star cartoonists, and they were usually backed by the financial power of a large publishing chain. Despite these advantages, it would take several decades before they were able to dominate the market.\(^\text{15}\) By the second decade of the twentieth century, rural and urban newspaper editors were able to buy comic strips from a variety of sources, choosing those that most suited their audience.

The history of the feature syndicate is naturally tied to the history of the newspaper in America, as discussed in Chapter Three. However, they, unlike the newspaper, developed with only one purpose in mind, increased profit. The thought that syndication might inadvertently play a major role in the standardization and even the control of American culture, was not even considered.

Although the feature syndicate came into its own only after the turn of the century, their development for the sole purpose of selling a newspaper feature or insert was not a new idea.\(^\text{16}\) After the Civil War,

\(^\text{15}\)Even today, although most modern comics are distributed by the major syndicates, there is still a place in the business world for the small syndicates. There are a number that distribute a variety of lesser known comics and features.

\(^\text{16}\)Syndicates were also used in Europe for the distribution of feature material at this time. However, the first European comics were printed in separate magazines, rather than as part of the newspaper, and were not considered at first as desirable material. If as it seems to me, the syndication of comics was the key to the profitability and growth of feature syndicates, American enterprise had the edge.
enterprising newspaper publishers realized there was a market for the
distribution of special material for small rural newspapers that had a limited
staff and budget. A central office, the fore-runner of the syndicate, supplied
pre-printed "patent insides" to these newspapers, saving them both time
and money.17 These early syndicates contributed much to the
standardization of American culture by supplying similar features
nationwide, not just in urban areas but in small towns as well. This was
important for the development of the comic strip, because until the United
States developed a homogeneous national culture, the potential for the
comics' national acceptance and profitability was greatly reduced.

In its most primitive form, the syndicate was concerned only with
protecting the original material of a newspaper's star writers, rather than
fully exploiting its profitability. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,
newspaper publishers were noted for recycling material first printed by
another paper. Plagiarism was popular and profitable because there were no
copyright laws to protect the rights of the writer or artist. Hezekiah Niles
wrote in 1813,

I have been amused at the progress of some of my work, and counted
up to twenty-one articles written for the Register,taken as their own by
the folks of Boston and elsewhere, and republished as something
new.18

Niles and other editor-publishers tried to find a way to prevent others
from stealing their material. If blatant theft was unavoidable, perhaps it

17 Lee, The Daily Newspaper in America, 212.
18 Baltimore Weekly Register, 8 May 1813, quoted in Frank Luther Mott, American
Journalism, Niles, the founder of the Niles Weekly Register, was a highly respected
journalist for many years.
might be possible to offer the material to others at a price. More than fifty years would pass until the newspaper business was organized enough to lobby for patent laws developed to prevent such piracy. In fact, foreign literature remained unprotected by American law until 1891, and provided a free source of filler for our newspapers. However, the first syndicates, small as they were did address this problem somewhat successfully. With the development of regional and national groups came additional control over both writers and material which gradually eliminated blatant plagiarism.

The feature syndicate, today associated with large and powerful press organizations such as United Press and King Features, was first used to distribute the text of a presidential address. In the 1840's, Moses Y. Beach, founder of the New York Sun, received transcripts of President John Tyler's inaugural address by messenger. He then ran off preprints for smaller papers throughout New York state. 19 Most journalistic historians feel that this was probably the initial utilization of syndication for profit. Beach's original idea was fully developed after the Civil War, by small midwestern groups that sold articles to rural newspapers, allowing them to compete to a certain extent, with the larger urban papers.

The early newspaper syndicates, or "unions" as they were first called, distributed a selection of news, feature articles, illustrations and cartoons on the new thin stereotype plates which were soon called "boiler plate" by their critics. 20 In 1876, R.W. Shoppell of New York started a business that

19 Lee, The Daily Newspaper in America, 212.
20 Although stereotypes were invented during the latter half of the eighteenth century, and are the oldest form of duplicate plates, they were not widely used in the newspaper industry until the nineteenth century. They are still used today although some of the materials have changed. The use of boiler plate stereotypes was also dependent on the development of a machine to set type. Ottmar Mergenthaler, an inventive genius, developed
supplied illustrated matter such as cartoons, sketches, maps and eventually half-tone illustrations to newspapers. Shoppell felt that "because illustrated newspapers are among the most patronized...an important number of newspaper readers read for recreation rather than for solid intellectual gain".  

Although Shoppell's instincts were correct and he had hit upon the format that would bring wealth and power to the great newspaper barons of the mass press, his timing was not quite right. His service enjoyed a moderate success but many editors continued to help themselves free of charge to humorous articles and cartoons from any newspaper that had a competent humorist on its staff. This practice finally came to a halt when the humor magazine *Life* successfully sued violators of the new copyright laws (passed in 1870 and 1874) before the turn of the century.  

The legal support of the copyright laws, and another federal postal law, passed in 1879, which forbade the mailing of illegally copied material, insured the eventual success of the feature syndicate. In the twentieth century, the newspaper barons of the east coast made syndication their own and eventually took over the majority of the midwest syndicates.

The development of newspaper chains (a number of papers owned by one publisher) was another move towards that eventually aided both

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a machine which punched letters into a papier-mache mold in which a stereotype plate was cast. This machine eventually revolutionized the type compositors trade. The making of a stereotype or a duplicate metal printing plate cast from a mold or matrix of composed type has two steps. First a moulding material such as wet paper pulp or plaster of paris is pressed against a relief printing surface. Then molten metal is poured into the mold to make the cast stereotype plate. This is the boiler plate itself. The boiler plate is curved over a wooden block. This curved plate is clamped directly on the surface of the printing cylinder. See Victor Strauss, *The Printing Industry*, (New York: W.W. Bowker Co., 1967), 224-5.


standardization and syndication. After the Civil War, a few wealthy newspaper publishers diligently acquired controlling interests in papers throughout the country. The member newspapers of a chain were not exact duplicates, but they were forced to adhere to a standard editorial policy. For example, Hearst newspapers were governed by William Randolph Hearst's credo...

Get the News...Get it First...Spare no Expense... Make a great and continuous noise to attract readers; denounce crooked wealth and promise better conditions for the poor to keep readers...INCREASE CIRCULATION!" 23

In addition, most chains had centralized accounting systems, national advertising sales agencies and central purchasing agencies which aided in efficiency and increased profit. The monetary backing and prestige of the larger chains would later enable them to attract and sign many of the star cartoonists to contracts for their own feature syndicates.

The power of modern newspaper syndicates also owes much to the development of modern technology in both the printing and transportation industry. New technology in the printing industry was an integral part of syndicate development, because it made the color supplement, which was crucial to the success of the comic pages, a reality. The stereotype machine, and the connection of folding and collecting machinery to the printing press, made a larger newspaper physically possible, just as the increasing

23 John Kennedy Winkler, *W.R. Hearst* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1928). The impact of William Randolph Hearst on the American newspaper cannot be underestimated. He was responsible for the expansion of the newspaper chain and syndicate, and the typographical format of the daily paper, including the placement of the editorial on the last page. His papers were responsive to the public mood and highly influential, but his motives have always been viewed with suspicion by the public at large. Winkler, 303-4.
amount of advertising revenue made it financially feasible. Stereotyping made typeset material easier to duplicate. The folding and collecting mechanisms also allowed the production of newspapers larger than four pages. Perhaps the single most important invention of the period was the linotype machine, a semi-automatic type compositor, developed and improved by Ottmar Merganthaler. This machine was used by all of the major papers in the 1890's, and allowed the composition of a much larger newspaper much faster than had been possible setting type by hand.  

The growth of manufacturing and the increased buying power of many Americans also stimulated the growth of commercial advertising in newspapers. While the increased demand for advertising space made a larger newspaper profitable, it also called for a much larger amount of feature material, to fill the other parts of the pages.

The overall expansion of the publishing industry in the United States, as well as the rise to prominence of New York as a publishing center, also hastened the growth of syndicates. As the population of the United States increased, the total number of weekly and daily papers of all sizes, grew with it, especially between 1860 and 1900. This unprecedented expansion of the popular press increased both the demand and competition for more original features.  

In 1860, there were 387 daily newspapers, in 1880 there were 909, in 1890, there were 1,662, and in 1900, there were 2,190. During this forty year period, the number of daily newspapers in the United States, as well as the rise to prominence of New York as a publishing center, also hastened the growth of syndicates. As the population of the United States increased, the total number of weekly and daily papers of all sizes, grew with it, especially between 1860 and 1900. This unprecedented expansion of the popular press increased both the demand and competition for more original features.

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24 See George Corban Goble, "The Obituary of a Machine, the Rise and Fall of Ottmar Mergenthaler's Linotype at United States Newspapers," (Ph.D. Diss., Indiana University, 1984) for an interesting discussion of the use of new technology in the newspaper business. The linotype, so important in its time, was replaced ten years ago by computerized photo-typesetting. This new technology is about to be replaced by laser typesetting.

States multiplied almost seven times. The growth of the newspaper industry peaked in 1915, when 2,457 dailies were published across the county. Despite some fallout due to economic trauma and overexpansion, the number of papers held steady at more than 2,000 until the late thirties. 26

The Sunday edition also grew in size and popularity during this period. Moses Koenigsberg, keenly concerned with circulation figures as the head of Hearst's syndicates, stated that there were 2,580 daily papers in the United States in 1914. Of these, 571, 22%, of the total, had a Sunday edition with a circulation totaling 16,479,943. This was approximately 57% of the daily(weekday) distribution of 28,777,444. By 1940, the total newspaper list had shrunk to 1,878, but the Sunday editions had decreased only 8% while the Sunday circulation had increased to 32,271,092, more than 78% of the combined morning and evening daily(weekday) total of 41,131,611. 27 Even though these figures are a merely a rough estimate, they give some indication of the increasing importance of the Sunday edition. This edition, which had now grown to a very large size, included the perennially popular colored comic supplement.

Most of the small early syndicates lacked either the vision or the financial backing that helped the major urban syndicates to gain control of the feature market, although a majority were at least marginally successful. 28 Unfortunately, much of the history and records of these ephemeral organizations has long been lost. We do know that Ansel Nash


27 M. Koenigsberg, King News, 397.

28 According to Mott, the first instance of syndication in America was the "Journal of Occurrence" of 1768, edited by Boston Patriots which sent political news throughout the colonies. "Jenny June" wrote a syndicated fashion letter as early as 1857. See Frank L. Mott, American Journalism, 99,482.
Kellogg of the *Baraboo Wisconsin Republican*, founded the first real syndicate, The A.N. Kellogg News Co., in 1865.\(^{29}\) As mentioned earlier, one of the basic ideas behind the syndicate or feature service had originally been to provide affordable and more attractive content for small town newspapers. Chicago's favorable location as the communication and transportation hub for numerous small towns and cities of the Midwest, made this city a center for these services after the Civil War. The feature content of many newspapers suffered severely until Chicago recovered from the devastating fire of 1871. The most successful midwestern syndicate in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was the World Color Printing Company of St. Louis, Missouri, (completely unrelated to the *New York World*). This syndicate supplied Sunday comics to rural newspapers until 1937. During the early years, the World Color Printing Co. carried an incredible number of comics drawn by a sizable group of artists, most now long forgotten.\(^{30}\) Although *Slim Jim*, a comic that just missed the top rank, was its most popular strip, World also had, for a time, several artists who would later develop strips that were nationally syndicated. They included C.W. Kahles (*Hairbreadth Harry*) and George Herriman (*Krazy Kat*). World Color Printing, as successful as it was, could not compete with a powerful press organization like that of Hearst. Therefore, World eventually lost its


\(^{30}\) Some of the artists and strips included; Herriman's *Butch Smith, the Boy Who Does Stunts*, *Bud Smith, Ozone the Fresh Air Fiend*, *Handy Andy, Bruno and Pietro*, and *Alexander the Cat*; Clarence Rigby's *Little Ah Sid the Chinese Kid*, and *Pinky Prim the Cat*, *The Almost Family*, *Jingling Johnson the Poet*, and *Fitzboombo the Anarchist* by Bradford who later himself became a radical and *Smith and Muggsy* by Frank Crane. Maurice Horn, *Encyclopedia of Comics*, 722-3. The other smaller syndicates had similar offerings. Note the presence of ethnic names. However, these syndicates gradually gave way to the giants. Their most talented artists were lured away by the higher-paying New York based syndicates.
talented people when they produced a comic successful enough to be noticed by a major syndicate. Most cartoonists also wanted the recognition, prestige and financial security that came with working for a first rank organization.

Despite his determination to develop the nation's largest publishing empire, William Randolph Hearst did not immediately recognize the potential of large-scale syndication. At first he regarded it only as a way to provide material for the Hearst chain of papers. However, because he was an astute businessman, Hearst quickly realized the profitability of syndication. When one of the editors of the Pittsburgh Press noted the popularity of many Hearst features and inquired about buying some for his paper, Hearst formed an organization bearing his own name in 1895. The Hearst syndicate then supplied features to a number of other newspapers as well as to members of the Hearst chain. In 1906, Hearst developed the International News Service which supplied news feature stories, and the Hearst syndicate became part of this organization. Hearst had one of his key editors, Moses Koenigsberg, develop a more sophisticated feature agency in 1913, the Newspaper Feature Service. The next year Koenigsberg founded King Features syndicate and the Premier syndicate. Koenigsberg eventually became the head of all the Hearst feature operations, as they were merged into one company. Newspaper Feature Service and Premier syndicate were the producing agencies while King Features was the sales agent. In other words, the producing agencies took charge of developing and channeling

31Elmo Scott Watson, A History of Newspaper Syndicates, 1865-1935(Chicago,1936), 55. The features syndicated by this somewhat primitive organization included the popular "Mr.Dooley" of Finley Peter Dunne, articles and stories by Ambrose Bierce and "Dorothy Dix" and several comic strips.

32Koenigsberg was one of Hearst's chief editors and trouble shooters who later headed the feature syndicate that bears his name.
the work of all the Hearst writers and cartoonists. King Features then sold this material to newspapers in the Hearst chain, just as they sold them to other newspapers.33

In 1902, the Scripps newspaper chain, one of Hearst's major competitors, developed its first syndicate, the Newspaper Enterprise Association, in 1902. The NEA was the first of the powerful syndicates related to a major publisher. Scripps later added the United Features Syndicate in 1919 and Newspaper Information Service in 1921. Scripps, United and NEA provided a variety of comics, feature articles and news photos, although United did not furnish Sunday funnies until 1930 when it bought out the Metropolitan syndicate.34

Hearst's chief New York rival in the nineties, Pulitzer's World, started syndicating some of its features as early as 1898. However, the World syndicate did not become a separate subsidiary of the Pulitzer organization until 1905. In 1931, when the World newspapers had declined in power and prestige, it merged with United Features owned by the Scripps-Howard chain. A number of the smaller syndicates were also swallowed up during the thirties and forties, due to the economic hardships of the depression, by either King Features, United or NEA.

Another aspect of this consolidation and growth was a gradual decline in the competition for star cartoonists. A cartoonist under contract was committed to work for a particular organization, and the syndicates tried to sign their best artists to lengthy contracts. As part of the contract,

33Elmo Watson, A History of Newspaper Syndicates, 56.
34Both NEA and United Features are still going strong today. They, together with the Scripps-Howard Feature Service, are part of United Media, one of the larger comic syndicates.
they also demanded the legal rights to the copyrights for their comic features. Most modern syndicates have a "gentleman's agreement" that prevents them from actively recruiting the best talent of their competition. Hearst, himself, was appalled by the escalation of the bidding wars which he had initiated to attract the most popular cartoonists to his Sunday supplements. As a result, he established a policy of paying salaries to cartoonists and attempted to control the copyrights for as many of their characters as possible through his new King Features.35 This practice spread, and more and more small newspapers were then forced to buy the offerings of the larger organizations if they could afford them in order to meet their competition.

Each of the smaller syndicates such as McClure's and Bell's had their own group of lesser strips which included one or two popular stars. They also often carried the moonlighting efforts of prolific New York cartoonists such as Dirks, Outcault, Dwiggins and others. Some newspapers, including the Boston Globe, the Philadelphia North American, the Christian Science Monitor and in particular, the Chicago Tribune, also developed their own

35 According to its founder, Moses Koenigsberg, King Features Syndicate, was incorporated on November 16, 1915. Its original intent was to form a separate agency for the discovery and development of journalistic talent. The development of a separate agency became necessary, according to Koenigsberg, because of a successful marketing strategy that backfired. Unlike NEA, which sold its features on an individual basis, Newspaper Feature Service offered a budget plan providing a fixed payment for a minimum supply of listed materials. Unfortunately, many publishers misinterpreted this agreement and felt that they were entitled to everything copyrighted by Newspaper Features for the same price. The Hearst Corporation was forced to add a new agency in order to make a profit on any new features they added. King Features was used mainly for comics and will celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary next year, as one of the largest and most successful feature syndicates. Moses Koenigsberg, King News, 402-4.
comic strips. Thus the large color supplements that had originated in New York, were gradually duplicated in other parts of the country.

The evolution of the color supplement in the Chicago Tribune provides a classic example of how an independent newspaper developed its own comics and later developed a major comic syndicate that rivaled Hearst's King Features and Scripps' United Press. In the 1890's, the Tribune was a major Chicago newspaper, yet by no means controlled the market. It had to compete with a variety of other popular papers; the Inter-Ocean, the Daily and Evening Journal, the Daily News, the Evening Post, and later Hearst’s American and Examiner. In addition, the Chicago area supported a number of smaller weekly and daily papers, as well as many foreign language papers which served various ethnic communities.

The Tribune had a comic page in the 1890's, but it was merely a black and white section that featured cartoons, printed jokes and a few undistinguished comic strips. When the Tribune first printed a Sunday Color Supplement, it contained "artistic" prints of children, historic events

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36 Even the Boston Herald came out with two of its own comics, Bolivar by Hal Coffman and The Kid Klub by Wallace Goldsmith. Both of these men became successful political cartoonists. Maurice Horn, Encyclopedia of Comics, 724.


and an occasional tasteful nude to edify its readers rather than vulgar comic strips. This was in agreement with the middle-class view of entertainment as both education and uplift. It was also an attempt to establish the Tribune as a paper worthy of genteel support. At this time, the Tribune management considered their paper the premier daily and Sunday journal in the Chicago area.

However, the Tribune's complacency was shaken when William Randolph Hearst established the Chicago American in 1900 and began to compete for the Sunday reader in the Tribune's home territory. His comic section featured the Katzenjammer Kids who were very popular with Chicago's numerous German-Americans. The Tribune's general manager, James Keeley traveled to Europe and Germany in particular, to search out promising cartoonists. Hoping to attract German-American readers, Keeley found Lyonel Feininger, a young artist and caricaturist, American-born, but trained in Germany. Feininger's German-born musician parents had sent him to Hamburg to study music. When the young man arrived in Europe, he quickly switched to the study of art, his first love. Feininger became a noted caricaturist at an early age and signing him to draw a comic strip was a considerable coup for the Chicago paper.

The Tribune used posters and notices to advertise the debut of this new genuine German artist, particularly directed at the German community. Feininger drew a strip for the Tribune called The Kin-der-Kids which featured a group of childish mischief makers. Its title is quite similar to the Katzenjammer Kids, and was probably a deliberate attempt to attract German readers. Feininger's strip was visually striking and original, a combination of elements from Little Nemo and the Katzenjammer Kids yet
strictly his own. Although Feininger only worked in the comic strip field for a year, his work made a considerable impact despite the fact that it was not published in New York.\textsuperscript{39} However, according to \textit{Tribune} sources, Feininger balked at continuing the \textit{Kin-Der-Kids}. He wanted instead to draw a new strip he called \textit{Wee Willie Winkie's World}.\textsuperscript{40} The \textit{Tribune} was forced to agree to Feininger's demands because of the popularity of his comic strip among \textit{Tribune} readers, but he soon quit anyway to concentrate on his work in the fine arts.\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{Tribune} desperately wanted to keep Feininger's strip because it was both artistic and wholesome but although the artist continued to submit individual cartoons to European publications he never drew another American-style comic strip.

Despite Feininger's defection, Keeley continued to promote the comic supplement and the \textit{Tribune} developed a four-page comic section which contained mainly gag strips. The exceptions, besides Feininger's two strips, were \textit{Mama's Little Angel}, an attempt to counteract the influence of the

\textsuperscript{39} Ernst Scheyer, \textit{Lyonel Feininger: Caricature and Fantasy} (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1964), 28. Scheyer noted that, "Feininger's achievement as a cartoonist lies like an erratic rock on the plains of the American comic strip.". Scheyer also mentions that Feininger had an American childhood, and grew up in New York City. He had a passion for locomotive, bridges, viaducts and elevated trains with an interest in fantasy as well. According to Scheyer, many artists employed by humor magazines in America were German or Austrian by birth or descent. Their illustrations, chiefly lithographs and wood engravings show some of the ideas and stylistic mannerism of the old country, where cartooning had been an offspring of the political revolution of 1848. p. 36 There was also a close connection between the fine arts and the early cartoonists. The "Eight of 1908", the famous ashcan school of realists, was made up of former newspaper artists. Lately, there has been considerable interest in Feininger's work, and several books and articles have been published on this topic. One of the most recent is Ulrich Luckhardt, Martin Sonnabend and Regina Timm, \textit{Lyonel Feininger, Karikaturen, Comic Strips, Illustrations 1888-1915} (Hamburg: Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe. Hanover: William Busch Museum, 1981).

\textsuperscript{40} The \textit{Kin-Der Kids} ran in the Tribune from May 6 to Nov 18, 1906 while \textit{Wee Willie Winkie's World} ran from Aug 19 1906 to Jan. 20, 1907. This probably proves that the \textit{Kin-der-Kids} theme was suggested by the \textit{Tribune}, while the creative Feininger chafed at having to produce something that was not entirely his own work.

\textsuperscript{41} Wendt, \textit{The Chicago Tribune}, 403.
fiendish *Katzenjammer Kids* and Sidney Smith's *Old Doc Yak*, a strip featuring anthropomorphic animals in human situations.

The *Tribune* comic supplement did not radically change until Joseph Medill Patterson took charge of the *Tribune* Feature and Sunday section. Patterson and his cousins Robert and Medill McCormick were young progressives belonging to Chicago's elite who were determined to make the *Tribune* both dominant and successful. However, Patterson unlike his more conservative cousins, had strong ideas about social justice and reform. He subscribed to socialist beliefs, and was sympathetic and open to the needs of the ordinary citizen. Perhaps because of his understanding of working class culture, Patterson later gained fame as an astute comics editor in the twenties and thirties. He had an innate feeling for the development of successful comic strip themes and a shrewd eye for selecting the right artists to draw them.

From the beginning, Patterson was determined to direct the *Tribune’s* cartoonists towards his primary goal of producing comic strips that featured realistic, ordinary people. He also believed that strips with continuing story lines would eventually be more successful than gag strips, because they would keep the reader in suspense as to what would happen next. At first the paper's cartoonists were reluctant to change the style and content of their strips. Patterson was particularly determined to have Sidney Smith, the *Tribune’s* most popular cartoonist, change his anthropomorphic animal characters into simple human beings. Despite the interruption of World

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42 Patterson was asked by Eugene Debs to be his national campaign manager in 1908, much to the consternation of his Republican family. Wendt, 377.
War I and military service, Patterson did not forget his plans for the revitalization of the Tribune’s comic supplement.

After the war, Patterson moved to New York and established the tabloid New York Daily News, eventually linked to the Tribune by a feature syndicate. Patterson acted as comic editor for both newspapers, and the results were spectacular. The new Chicago Tribune Newspapers Syndicate, later the Chicago Tribune-New York Daily News Syndicate which he established, quickly emerged as a rival to powerful Hearst Features, the leading comic syndicate at that time. Most important for Patterson, his ideas were also proven right, as the new strips he favored quickly gained favor with the general public. Eventually Sidney Smith gave in to Patterson's demands and Old Doc Yak became The Gumps, one of the most successful and popular of the new-style story strips.43

In the twenties and thirties, Patterson was involved with the direction and creation of numerous other popular comics including Harold Teen, Winnie Winkle, Smitty, the Office boy, Moon Mullins and the perennially popular Orphan Annie. He also recognized the potential of Chester Gould’s plainclothes detective, and offered Gould a contract if he would change the strip's name to Dick Tracy and consult him about the story line. Patterson’s reputation as a genius in the area of comic syndication due to his ability to determine what topics would be popular with the mass audience. For example, he knew that a law and order strip would appeal during the traumatic years of the Depression. Patterson also insisted that

43 The public became so involved in the lives of Smith's characters that newspaper buyers often asked for the Andy Gump paper.Ibid., 404.
comic strip characters should reflect the reality as well as the dreams of the people who read newspapers.

The Tribune's successful development of its own feature syndicate was repeated by other major newspapers as well as independent groups. As a result, by 1925, the large color sections that were once the sole property of the New York papers in 1897 were available to newspapers throughout the country. The mechanics of transporting the comic material from point of origin to individual customers was developed at this time and has changed little to the present date. After the cartoonists delivered their completed drawings to the syndicate, photo engravings were made of them. This "cut" was used to produce as many duplicates as necessary. These duplicates are called matrices or "mats"; a patented combination of tissue paper, a material similar to blotting paper and paste. (Today a form of plastic is used.) This compound was put on the engraving when it was soft; after the application of heat and pressure, it was formed into a rigid board containing the impression of the original. The lightweight mats were sent by mail or express to the subscribing newspapers. Most cartoonists work well in advance of the publication date, often six to eight weeks ahead, so shipping was not usually a problem. 44

Between 1898 and 1920, before the larger syndicates dominated the comics field, the supplement varied in size and content across the United States. A number of smaller syndicates like World Color Printing Co. provided a great variety of lesser known comics for a much larger audience than that of the New York papers. Initially, the big city newspapers kept

their comics to themselves or sold their rights through syndicate contracts. Thus the more creative small syndicate cartoonists known as idea men, were urged to produce a large variety of different comics. These were often passed on to less talented journeymen cartoonists to continue. Some of these strips were original ideas but the majority were merely reworked copies of strips that were already popular. Quantity was more important than quality in this competitive market. By the thirties, however, the public had become familiar with the major New York-Chicago strips and wanted to read them in their local newspaper. Thus the smaller organizations gradually failed or merged with larger ones because they could not provide the most wanted strips, and the public was no longer willing to accept substitutes. Gradually, their number as well as the variety of comic strips they offered was reduced. Today, with a few exceptions, the majority of comic strips read across the United States are distributed by a handful of syndicates.

By 1931, World's Work magazine reported that the industry providing wholesale printed entertainment to American newspapers was a deadly serious business. The competition among the top syndicates for dominance was a no holds barred struggle. The powerful independent syndicates, and those controlled by large urban newspapers, used the corporate tactics of expansion and consolidation. The journal felt that these syndicates had managed to change the character of the American newspaper between 1910 and 1930. Before this time, a paper's popularity was measured by its news and editorials, but after the syndication of the comic strip, features rather than news, became crucial to a newspaper's success. Because popular features were so important for market control, the syndicate field
began to constrict due to mergers and takeovers. At the beginning of 1931, there were 95 syndicates marketing 235 separate comic strips, but 90% of the comics were controlled by the twelve largest syndicates.45

In 1933, the syndicate ranking continued to fluctuate. While King Features (Hearst Newspapers) was still very powerful, it was closely rivaled by the Chicago Tribune - New York Daily News Syndicate, according to Fortune magazine.46 The Tribune was the first to specialize in the serious continuity or continued-story strip, beginning with the Gumps in 1917, while most of King Features' strips were in the original comic tradition, in other words, the gag strip.47 They were distantly followed by the United Features Syndicate (Scripps-Howard Papers) and the New York Herald Tribune Syndicate. The Herald Tribune syndicate specialized in "civilized" comics, or those with genteel middle class appeal, like H. T. Webster's Timid Soul. It also paid its cartoonists a salary rather than paying them a percentage of the gross revenue of their strip, a more common practice at this time.48 The two independent syndicates mentioned by Fortune were the Bell syndicate (formerly the Wheeler syndicate), the McNaught syndicate and the Adams syndicate, which specialized in supplying comics to small town newspapers ignored by the major syndicates. Bell and Adams have

46"The Funny Papers," Fortune, April 1933, 45.
47The Tribune also had Little Orphan Annie, Gasoline Alley, Moon Mullins and Dick Tracy.
48The Chicago Tribune artists got a 50/50 split during the thirties, and most of the other syndicates gave the creator of the comic at least a 50/50 split. Only Clare Briggs, Percy Crosby, Fontaine Fox and Bud Fisher retained their own copyrights; all the others were salaried employees. However, in the worst days of the depression, the top cartoonists made about $1,500. dollars a week from their comics, and probably at least that much from royalties on advertising use. "The Funny Papers," Fortune April 1933, p. 49. Fortune states that out of the 2,300 daily newspapers in the United States, in 1933, the New York Times and the Boston Transcript were the only papers of note without comics.
vanished through consolidation and the McNaught syndicate no longer offers comic features. *Fortune* magazine felt that the independents were merely lucky survivors from the early days and had little chance against the major syndicates backed by large press organizations.\(^49\) However, even the mighty *Tribune* syndicate has fallen to fourth place in today's rankings as several independents including Universal Press and Creators have moved up in the standings.\(^50\)

Syndicates have done much to insure the continuing popularity of the comic strip, through the active promotion of their clients.\(^51\) Although the number of comic strip titles initially declined after the development of big syndicates, the thirties and forties saw a period of steady growth in the comics field. In his study of the Sunday comic, Francis Barcus counted the number of titles that appeared in the Sunday editions of American newspapers during five-year periods from 1900 to 1959. Only in the period 1905-09, probably the most competitive and creative period of comic strip history, and before syndicates were well established, were there more titles listed than in 1955-59, the last period of his study. In 1905-09, there were 165

\(^{49}\)Ibid., 45.

\(^{50}\)Fortune mentioned that the major syndicates had a gentlemen's agreement to prevent recruitment of their star cartoonists by their major rivals. This type of agreement would also work to hold down the cartoonists salaries.Ibid., 46.

\(^{51}\)In 1926, there were 120 syndicates of all types with 1,200 features under contract. Today there are 346 syndicates with 2,788 comic columns and other miscellaneous features under contract. The most current listing of comic strips shows that a total of 226 comic strips and panels currently appear in American newspapers. These 226 comic features are distributed by thirty-five syndicates, however twenty-two of the syndicates control less than four comic features each an most promote only one. The remaining 195 comic features including the most popular nationally circulated strips are held by thirteen syndicates. *Editor and Publisher's Syndicate Annual*, 30 July 1988, 15. King Features has the world's most popular comic, Blondie(1930) which appears in over 2,000 papers worldwide. Their top five comics include Beetle Bailey(1950),1700+ clients, Hagar the Horrible(1973), 1600+ clients and Hi and Lois(1954), 1110+ clients. All of these comics are more than thirty years old.
separate titles counted as opposed to 133 in 1955-59.\textsuperscript{52} In 1988, the Syndicate Annual listed 154 separate Sunday comic features and panels, from \textit{A Boy and his Dog} to \textit{Ziggy}.\textsuperscript{53} Interestingly, all of these titles were distributed by the thirteen largest groups headquartered in major urban centers. This shows clearly that the big city comics still dominate the newspaper market just as they did from the onset of syndication.

If syndication was responsible for the promotion and development of a national comic culture, the end product was rooted in the life of our nation's largest cities. The new humor it featured was sharper, cosmopolitan and more critical, and was determined by the tastes of the new mass society. Because the cutting edge for cartoonists was mainly in New York, and to a certain extent, in Chicago, the big city comics with few exceptions become nationally known, long-lived favorites.

Syndication gradually reduced the total number of comic strips produced every week. Most of the sometimes amateurish yet unique strips of the provinces were slowly but surely replaced by the offerings of the major syndicates. The difference between success and failure for a strip after the rise of syndication, was not always talent and originality but rather the perseverance and luck of the cartoonist in getting signed by a major syndicate.\textsuperscript{54}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52}Francis E. Barcus,"A Content Analysis of Trends in Sunday Comics, 1900-1959,"\textit{Journalism Quarterly} (Spring, 1969): 173.
\item \textsuperscript{53}Editor and Publisher 63rd Annual Syndicate Directory 30 July 1988, 134.
\item \textsuperscript{54}The number of Sunday comic strips based on a study of Boston Sunday Comic Supplements was as follows 1900-5, 65 titles, 1905-9, 165 titles, 1910-14, 87 titles, 1915-19, 96 titles. These figures reflect a similar distribution at this time for all other major U.S. cities except New York which had the largest amount of comics. By 1955, the total had climbed to 133 titles, but in the 1980's the number had declined severely, due to the shrinking newspaper
\end{itemize}
During the same period that the comic supplement became the leading mass entertainment, urban culture was well on the way to becoming the dominant culture in America. The sleek new success-oriented culture of the city glorified wealth and possessions; its idols and interests constantly changing in search of novelty and profit. New York and Chicago, and later Los Angeles, served as a nucleus for the development of other new entertainment media such as motion pictures and radio. New York, in particular, had long been accepted as having the best theaters in America. During the developmental years of the comic strip, there was considerable crossover between vaudeville, legitimate theater, motion pictures and the comics. Because vaudeville and movie producers were familiar with the big-city strips, they were the ones that were used in movies, plays, vaudeville acts and popular songs. Comic characters were also parodied in the less respectable burlesque houses. For example, as early as 1897, a comedy based on the adventures of Outcault's *Yellow Kid* played on Broadway. In 1900, several live action films had already been based on the adventures of *Happy Hooligan*. In 1902, Schulze's *Foxy Grandpa* was the subject of a musical. Edwin S. Porter, an outstanding early film director who worked for the Edison Company produced a seven-minute live-action film based on *The Dream of the Rarebit Fiend* in 1906. This film still exists and is considered a classic of the early cinema. He also signed a contract to develop a comic opera or musical extravaganza on the same theme but it was never

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produced. Both musicals enjoyed considerable popularity throughout the United States and in Europe. Winsor McCay animated both *Little Nemo* (1909) and *Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend* (1917-1918).59 In 1916, *Bringing Up Father* was made into a popular farce. In later years, McManus' characters appeared in both the radio and movies.60 In addition, many popular songs based on the comics came out of Tin Pan Alley during this period and the scandalous burlesque houses used comic strips titles for their "variety" shows. Comic strip characters were also used by advertisers to promote items ranging from matches and playing cards to clothing and toys.

The traditional American Victorian WASP culture prized by the small town elites was fragmented by World War I. It lost its power to lead and influence the majority of Americans and was replaced by the prophets of the mass media.61 This change was aided by the rapidly increasing daily exposure of most Americans to the same forms of mass entertainment. Newspaper comics and motion pictures were the first to reach a national audience. They were soon followed by radio and eventually by television.

57The thirty-three inch tall midget comedian, although in his thirties at the time, seems amazingly childlike in the cast photos.
59Ibid., 116-121.
60Movies based on *Bringing Up Father* were made by Christie Brothers, Vitagraph and Metro Goldwyn Mayer McManus himself played Jiggs in four of these films. Judith O'Sullivan, *The Art of the Comic Strip* (New York: U of Maryland Art Dept.,1974), 80.
61However the traditional small town middle-class society was preserved in the comics, the movies, radio and eventually on television.
These mass entertainments worked together to break down regional differences and develop a national mass culture. The comics of the second generation were in the forefront of this cultural revolution as the growth of the mass press and syndication brought them to an ever larger audience.
CHAPTER VII

COMIC STRIPS TRIUMPHANT

On March 15, 1922, Robert Sydney Smith signed a million dollar contract with the Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate. He was the first but by no means the last comic strip artist to achieve this height. The contract alone was not enough to insure the continued services of Smith. The Tribune included a brand new Rolls Royce convertible as a signing bonus and agreed to Smith's demand of an oriental rug for his office. Smith was guaranteed a minimum of $100,000 a year for the next ten years at a time when President Harding received a salary of $75,000. Baseball's biggest star, Babe Ruth did not make $80,000 until 1929. The only comparable salaries at this time were found in Hollywood.

The Gumps was the most prominent of the second generation syndicated comics that featured ordinary people from a lower-middle class perspective. These strips projected middle class values that appealed the the upwardly mobile new urban white collar workers yet their prosaic homeliness and critical attitude attracted the working class audience. They were the beginning of a changing emphasis in the comics that was supported by syndication. No longer were the comics directed at a restricted group of workers and immigrants. Instead they presented a variety of

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2 Many Cartoonists were highly paid but much of their income came from royalties. The highest-paid cartoonist at this time was Bud Fisher who earned over $78,000 a year in salary alone.
themes that touched almost every element in the new homogenous mass culture promoted by the press and mass amusements in the late 'teens and early twenties. They did this by combining the egalitarian anarchic first generation themes with the new middle class oriented topics in one large comic section. Several other themes that first appeared in major strips during this period added the old; nostalgic views of the past and the new: youth culture. Both had meaning and value to an urban mass audience that included both middle and working class readers. As a sop to concerned parents, the editors even included a few new strips that were actually directed at children.

The direct and immediate success of the *Gumps*, the first of the realistic continuity strips, was due to the sensitivity and shrewdness of Captain Patterson. Patterson, despite his patrician background and high social status, held radical political views, and unlike most members of his class, was familiar with the problems and values of lower-middle and working-class Americans. He was also a shrewd and competitive newspaperman who realized the value of innovative continued features as circulation builders.

The installment novel enjoyed great success in magazines and newspapers at this time, as did serial feature films such as "The Perils of Pauline" in the movie theater. Patterson was eager to utilize the potential of continuity or serialized features in the comic section of the daily newspaper. As early as 1913, the Tribune had joined in a cooperative venture with the Selig Polyscope Company, a Chicago film studio. Together, they produced a serial feature "The Adventures of Kathlyn" which ran concurrently in both
the Tribune and movie theaters. "Kathlyn" was so successful that the Tribune added 35,000 new readers. Continuity had already been used in a few comic strips but not as yet in one that developed wide appeal. The Gumps was the first, and perhaps the most successful, of the new continuity story strips that would become a mainstay of the comics in the twenties and thirties.

Captain Patterson, through his own experience, gradually developed an uncanny ability to select the type of comic strips which would appeal to a wide audience. He became so successful in determining the public taste that he was widely regarded as the most astute comics editor in the newspaper business. One of his best ideas was the creation of a new type of comic strip that would follow the lives of ordinary people and feature a continuing story line. That strip was The Gumps.

In 1917, the Tribune was a rather conservative paper that carried relatively few comic strips, in contrast to the large variety printed by the Hearst and Pulitzer chains. However, comic strips had become a proven circulation builder in the Chicago market, even for the Tribune. Patterson realized that the development of some new comics would aid the Tribune in its battle for a larger share of the market. Yet he wanted to find a strip that would also fit the Tribune's image. In fact, he had already selected a name for this strip, The Gumps. "Gump" was a slang expression the Patterson family had used to describe a loud boorish adult. With

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3 Smith, "The Gumps", VII.
4 The Tribune had already developed a new comic strip in 1906, when it signed Lyonel Feininger to draw a strip that would attract German-Americans.
5 Smith, The Gumps, VIII. It was also mentioned in L. Frank Baum's, The Wizard of Oz, where they probably picked it up. In Oz, a gump was an elk-like creature, according to David
intriguing title in hand, his main problem was to pick the right cartoonist to
develop his idea.

Patterson's selection of Sidney Smith to draw *The Gumps* remains
something of a mystery, although Smith had been one of the most popular
staff cartoonists on the *Tribune* since 1911. Before coming to the *Tribune*, he
had previously drawn several strips for Hearst's *Chicago Examiner*. These
strips had proved so popular that the *Tribune* hired him away from the
Hearst organization. Smith continued to produce the strips he had
developed at the *Examiner*, for the *Tribune*, particularly *Buck Nix* and *Old
Doc Yak*. In both of these strips, Smith used anthropomorphic animals in
human situations, particularly a goat that had become his trademark. *Doc
Yak* was a more of a gag strip while *Buck Nix* featured adventure and
continuity.\(^6\) None of Smith's work up to this point was realistic although
his animals had normal rather than fantastic adventures. Both strips were
competently drawn, as Smith's artistic ability was at least adequate, and the
humanized animals, especially *Buck Nix* had a strange appeal. When
Patterson first approached Smith in 1916, with his ideas about making his
strips more realistic, the latter was reluctant to change his style. Patterson
was determined, and Smith finally agreed a year later, to accept the

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\(^6\) Smith had begun as a sports and political cartoonist for the *Examiner*. There he
developed *Buck Nix*, which was probably the most successful of the early humanized animal
strips. *Buck Nix* was a daily strip which revolved around the hero's need for money, as in the
title. The adventures featured continuity and suspense and were very popular in Chicago. The
*Tribune* hired Smith away from the *Examiner*, for this reason. There to avoid legal problems,
he changed both title and content of his strip while retaining his anthropomorphic animals.
*Doc Yak*'s adventures centered mainly around his love for his sports car (also a hobby of
Smith's). The car had a huge license plate #348 which also became famous. *Doc Yak* ran on
Sunday until 1919 when *The Gumps* became a Sunday feature. Smith later revived it in 1930.
commission. He then produced a family group of unique appearance, combining his sense of the ridiculous with Patterson's demands for realism.

As a whole, *The Gumps* contain the comic world's darkest graphic portrait of lower-middle class America. Chinless, gangling **Andrew Gump** and his equally chinless dark-visaged billionaire **Uncle Bim** were cruel caricatures of American manhood; they differed radically from the square-jawed, handsome middle-class males popularized by Charles Dana Gibson, some twenty years earlier. They were also unlike the standard of male beauty found in movies, advertisements and other comic strips. **Andy**'s wife, **Min**, was plain but not homely and she became better looking in the later strips. Smith continued to draw Andy as gangly and chinless, although he eventually changed the shape of his head and made his expression more kindly and his eyes brighter. Smith originally drew *The Gumps* as a family strip that featured **Min** and **Andy**, their son **Chester** and a cat and dog. In the twenties, he gradually added a large supporting cast of characters, many of whom were also harshly drawn. During this period, the strip changed into a complex and suspenseful adventure story with continued story lines.

*The Gumps* started out as a prosaic but realistic tale of lower-middle class married life. **Andy Gump**, the husband was optimistic, lazy, and often a loser in the battle of the sexes. His wife, **Min**, was kind and good, an ordinary housewife not a shrewish caricature, concerned about the problems of everyday life. Sometimes the *Gumps* were in accord with each other, unlike *Bringing Up Father*, where the husband and wife always have an adversary relationship. In the early strips, there was little continuity.

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7 See the *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 January 1920.
8 Only children and animals were usually spared by Smith's sharp pen. **Andy** and **Uncle Bim** were always drawn without chins.
Instead, every day, Smith illustrated one of the dilemmas of ordinary life. Early strip topics included a desire to keep up appearances as well as marital problems. For example, on New Year's day, Andy has a hangover and Min scolded him for his intemperate behavior. She also complained that he had acted like a fool in front of the neighbors.\(^9\) Andy and Min argued about prices, styles, saving, in-laws and manners. In a 1918 episode, Andy thought that enlisting in the army might not be so bad when Min made him clean the ring he left in the bathtub.\(^10\) Andy Gump always expected to become a millionaire, yet remained cheerful in the face of constant disappointment.\(^11\) He shared the optimism of millions of readers who believed that financial success was just around the corner. Andy was a faithful and devoted husband and father, although he occasionally fell off the wagon and came home drunk, and was not above hiding a bottle in the furnace.\(^12\) Min was a traditional housewife, busy around the home. She cooked and cleaned and shopped. Both Andy and Min felt unappreciated by each other at times, but were still in love.

Smiths's realistic plots and starkly drawn characters rapidly gained a large audience among adult readers in the Chicago area and throughout the

\(^9\) *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 January 1920.
\(^10\) *Chicago Tribune*, 23 October 1918.
\(^11\) Any number of episodes during the early years showed Andy coming home, proclaiming that the deal was closed and they would soon be millionaires. See Sidney Smith, *The Gumps*, 7, dating from 1917. Smith never did say what business Andy was in. He felt that he might not be as interesting to the audience if people knew what type of work he did. Neil M. Clark, "Sidney Smith and His Gumps," *American Magazine*, March 1923, 78.
\(^12\) Ibid., 3, dating from 1917.
The Gumps was later a model for the soap opera comic strips as well as the radio dramas that gained a large audience in the thirties. Because it featured stories about the lives of ordinary people, The Gumps shared an elemental humanity in common with its readers. Smith's characters were homely and ordinary rather than glamorous and exciting. Min and Andy were by no means charismatic, but they were engaged in the daily struggle for existence. They were underdogs who sometimes had their moments of success, and were realistic enough to avoid most of the pitfalls of self-delusion and escapism. In a comic section that leaned heavily towards exaggeration, romance, juvenile humor and slapstick even in adult-oriented strips, The Gumps portrayed a reality that readers could and did identify with. In 1923, the editor of American magazine wrote the following:

WE ARE THE GUMPS. Sidney Smith gets a laugh out of the millions because he shows us folks as they are. We can see ourselves and our relatives and friends in his comic pictures. He walks right into our homes and caricatures us. In other words, we are the Gumps...  

Patterson continued to provide Smith with advice concerning the character and plot development of The Gumps during the twenties. As a result, Smith gradually changed The Gumps into a serial adventure. As a result, the strip changed from the best portrait of ordinary family life to a gripping adventure that had elements of a morality tale. Although the homely Gump family continued as the heart of the strip, the new format

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13 By 1920, the Tribune was syndicating it in other areas as well. The Atlanta Constitution carried the Gumps in that year.

14 American Magazine, March 1923, 19
allowed Smith to add a large supporting cast. He drew many of these characters in the same harsh and unflattering style he had used for Andy. They not only looked hard, but their dialogue was an indication that appearances did not deceive. Although they contained some elements of fantasy, authenticity was evident in the way his characters thought and acted. As a result, Smith's scripts were very realistic for the time and the medium. In one episode, the scheming Widow Zander, out to capture billionaire Uncle Bim, visits the Gumps and gushes over baby Chester. In the next frame, driving off in a taxi she thinks to herself...

That little brat, he wiped his feet all over my skirt--could have choked him--wish I had him for a few weeks--what he needs is a good spanking before and after each meal!15

Such realism was a total departure from comic strip conventions, but very much in the vein of what Captain Patterson wanted.

Although the Gumps lived in modest circumstances, they believed that they were part of genteel society. As one of the Gumps stated...

Take the proud old name of Gump and nail it to the topmost rung of the social ladder with spikes of gold. Make the smart set sit up and smart. Remember you're a Gump and keep your head up like a farmer looking for rain!16

Perhaps because social status was a common concern of many Americans during the twenties, social climbing played an important part in many Gump plots. It was also an important topical theme in other family

15Coulton Waugh, The Comics, 87.
16Ibid., 87.
strips particularly *Bringing Up Father* and *Abie the Agent*. While Smith (and Patterson) were usually sympathetic towards the *Gumps'* desire for social status, social climbers came off very poorly in the strip. They were usually unmasked as the worst sort of villain, but not until they had caused a great deal of heartbreak and torment for a large number of people.

Smith's storytelling ability was so great that the *Gumps'* readers were kept in almost unbearable suspense until his plots were resolved. The Minneapolis Board of Trade actually suspended operations for a few minutes until the members could read a crucial episode in an early edition.\(^\text{17}\)

In May 1929, Smith developed another sensational plot. The beautiful and saintly *Mary Gold* seemed doomed to die just as she was to be married to her noble true love, *Tom Carr*. *Tom* had been wrongfully jailed through the machinations of an evil fortune hunter. When he was finally exonerated and gained the wealth he had been denied, *Mary's* health began to fail.\(^\text{18}\) Readers bombarded the Tribune with calls and letters begging the paper's management not to allow the death of *Mary*. When Smith penned the episode showing *Mary's* death, the pleas turned to anger. Irate readers vowed to cancel their subscriptions if *Mary* was not brought back, and Loyola University students picketed the Tribune in protest.\(^\text{19}\) Smith did not relent and Mary went to her death. *The Gumps* was unique because the realism inherent in this strip did not always allow a happy ending, although

\(^{17}\) Smith, *The Gumps*, VII. According to *American Magazine*, when a family crisis was imminent, the cartoons were carried on the front page of some newspapers with streamer headlines. *American Magazine*, March 1923, 20.

\(^{18}\) See Smith's *The Gumps*, 55-66, for a reprint of the "Death of Mary Gold". It is still compelling melodrama.

\(^{19}\) See the *Chicago Tribune*, 23 May 1929.
happy endings were common in most story strips. Contrary to popular belief, the early comics did not always present a sugar coated or escapist view of American society. The elemental themes were not always pleasant. Strips like The Gumps' were popular because their characters yearned for love, schemed to get rich and tried to climb a slippery social ladder in common with millions of its readers. The strips popularity continued to grow and it helped build the Tribune's circulation in a period of intense competition, when Chicago had at least six daily newspapers. By the time Captain Patterson had returned from military service in France, The Gumps was a hit. The strip also helped increase the business of the new Tribune Feature Syndicate.

Smith's fantastic success piqued the curiosity of his readers just as the general public has expressed considerable interest in the lives of other popular cartoonists during the course of comic history. The readers seem to have particularly enjoyed reading about how much money they made, and their often lavish lifestyles. As a result, a variety of articles have been written about famous cartoonists in the popular press between 1900 and the present. The great financial success achieved by the top stars seems to have reinforced the belief in the American dream of success held by the average citizen.

Sidney Smith's life was as fantastic and improbable as those of the characters he drew. Born on February 13, 1877, in Bloomington, Illinois, Smith grew up in a comfortable, middle-class family. His father, a dentist,

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20See Atlanta Constitution, 2 May 1929.
21Patterson left the Tribune in 1919 to found the tabloid New York Illustrated Daily News, and soon afterward, the Chicago Tribune-New York Daily News Feature Syndicate. Comics became an important part of the Daily News, which under Patterson's leadership, had become the nation's largest daily paper by 1924.
wanted his son to follow in his footsteps, but young Sidney was only interested in art. Smith quit Illinois Wesleyan University as a freshman when he was sent home as the result of a prank that misfired. He then took to the road, riding the rails, as an itinerant chalk talker. The supremely confident and outgoing Smith supported himself by traveling around to small towns giving illustrated lectures. This was a popular and inexpensive form of entertainment in a semi-rural America still somewhat isolated from the rest of the world. Smith developed a gimmick that made his talks stand out. He used a painted velvet backdrop on which he had drawn mountains and seas with transparent glue. During the talk, he would amaze his country audience by throwing colored sand at the velvet. They were astonished to see pictures appear as if by magic. Sometimes, however, the sand would not stick because the weather was too cold and Smith would make a hasty exit.

Smith also worked on a number of newspapers as a journeyman cartoonist, usually bluffing his way into a job, and learning as he went along. He had worked on newspapers in Bloomington, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, Pittsburg and Toledo, before he ended up with the Tribune. There was always a need for illustrators and cartoonists on smaller newspapers, particularly for the sports pages, during the infancy of the then expensive wire service photo. Between 1897 and 1917, Smith

\[22\] To give an example of Smith's self confidence and sense of humor, as a youth, he painted a picture with house paints on a panel the size of a door. He placed the painting, titled, "The Mother and Child" in the window of a friendly shopkeeper, with a sign that said: For Sale, $500. For a day, the townspeople laughed and criticized Smith's effort, but they next day Smith put up another sign that said: Sold! The "topper" in the last frame would become one of his comic strip trademarks. Sidney Smith's, The Gumps, XI.

worked with many young men who would also gain fame as cartoonists, including Harold Gray (*Little Orphan Annie*), Frank King (*Gasoline Alley*) and Carl Ed (*Harold Teen*)\(^{24}\)

When Smith finally achieved success, his happy-go-lucky, free-wheeling nature did not allow him to plan his strips very far in advance. As a result, he sometimes worked his characters into tight corners but Smith felt that this approach gave the strip freshness and vitality. As *The Gumps* evolved, he continued to accept suggestions from Captain Patterson, as well as from several other idea men. The most important of these was a Chicago jewelry salesman, Sol Hess. Hess, who enjoyed socializing with the press, had a local reputation as a storyteller and humorist. He told many jokes to cartoonists and reporters that he later enjoyed seeing in print. Hess was urged to start his own strip but rejected the idea until he read of Smith's million-dollar contract. He then teamed up with artist Wally Carlson to develop *The Nebbs*, another adult strip about married life that enjoyed a long run.\(^{25}\)

After *The Gumps'* popularity was established, Smith began to reap profits from *Gump* merchandise such as toys, books, games and novelty items. In addition, Universal pictures produced a number of silent two-reel films featuring *The Gumps*. There were also several attempts to develop *The Gumps* into a format suitable for the new and growing radio market. A manager at WGN (Chicago) suggested to two local vaudeville song and patter men, Gosden and Correll that they develop a new routine based on

\(^{24}\) Unlike Dirks, McManus and Swinnerton, Smith did not gain fame as a very young man. He developed *The Gumps* at the age of forty.

\(^{25}\) Sidney Smith's *The Gumps*, XIII.
The Gumps. They tried but it was not in their style. Instead, they built a comedy routine based on black life called Sam 'n Henry. They later moved to another station and changed the title to Amos and Andy, which eventually became one of the most popular radio programs ever. WGN finally did produce a Gumps radio show which was picked up by CBS and broadcast nationwide in 1934.26

In 1930, the Tribune extended Smith's original million-dollar contract to 1936, but the expanding popularity of The Gumps caused them to renegotiate in 1935. On October 19, 1935, Smith signed a new contract at a minimum of $150,000 per year with an option for a two-year extension.27 An exuberant and fun-loving individual, Smith celebrated the event with an extended party at his country place. While driving home after taking his friends back to Chicago, he was killed in a head-on crash on a rural road outside Harvard, Illinois.28

Smith's untimely death at the age of 58 did not end the comic strip which had made him an extremely wealthy man over an eighteen-year

26 Agnes Moorehead played Min Gump and the novelist, Irwin Shaw was one of the scriptwriters for the network show.
27 This was during the depth of the depression.
28 Chicago Tribune, 12 October 1935. See also the New York Times, 21 October 1935. The elitist Times, which usually ignored the comic strips noted the following: "The death of Sidney Smith, creator of Andy Gump and Min and Uncle Bim, will be felt by literally millions of Americans. Few of Smith's readers followed the remarks and adventures of aviators, Congressmen, generals, Prime Ministers, dictators or even prize fighters with the faithfulness and absorption that they did those of his cartoon creations...When his creator piled up too much trouble for Andy, readers wrote into protest that they could not endure any more. When one of the 300 newspapers that printed his adventures was held up...anxious telephone inquiries would come to the paper's home office. For the delight that he brought, Smith was rewarded with a contract of $150,000 a year. With all the suspicions cast on high salaries in the last few years, this is among the last that the lovers of Andy and Min would have questioned." New York Times, 22 October 1935, 20. The high living Smith left an estate of only $100,000 to his wife and child.
29 Patterson determined that *The Gumps* would be continued by Stanley Link and Blair Walliser who had been working with Smith. However, Link refused to continue *The Gumps* because he felt that Smith's work would die with him. 30 Patterson then chose Gus Edson, a staff artist for the *New York News* as Smith's successor. Although Edson had drawn a mediocre Sunday comic called *Streaky*, he was mainly known as a sports cartoonist. Even though Edson did not have Smith's flair and excitement, he was able to continue the strip in a diminished form for another twenty-four years. During Edson's tenure, Smith's harsh lines were gradually softened. The characters became better-looking and thus more ordinary but less realistic. Under Edson, *The Gumps*' adventures were often fantastic, and the strip lost its elemental appeal. Although circulation declined only a little at first, *The Gumps* began to fade rapidly after World War II and the strip was retired in 1959 after a run of forty-two years, a very long time in the comic strip world. 31

The late 'teens and early twenties saw the development of a number of strips that utilized the same type of elemental theme, middle-class married life. All had something to recommend them, and many were popular for a number of years. None reached the heights or provided the

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29 Smith was three months ahead at the time of his death, as he had planned an extensive vacation, and these strips were used first.

30 Link, a talented Chicagoan, stubbornly refused an assignment that would have made him a fortune out of somewhat misguided principle. The refusal effectively destroyed his own career. See Maurice Horn, *World Encyclopedia of Comics*, 453.

31 It is important to remember that after the development of comic strip syndicates, an artist's creation rarely remained his own property. Part of the lucrative contract he signed gave the right of ownership and reproduction to the syndicate. Thus if an artist died or retired, the syndicate merely hired another artist to continue the strip. Sometimes, two or three might be tried until they found the right combination, but a financially successful strip was never dropped.
excitement of *The Gumps* or had its stark and relentless realism. Among them were *The Bungle Family* (1918) by Harry Tuthill, *The Nebbs* (1923), by Sol Hess, *Mr. and Mrs.* (1923) by Clare Briggs, and *The Timid Soul* (1925), by H.T. Webster.  

Family life strips were not confined to those that related the adventures of middle America. The other side of the tracks was also well represented. George McManus' *Bringing Up Father*, discussed in Chapter III, had debuted four years before *The Gumps*, on January 2, 1913. McManus was already a popular cartoonist but *Bringing Up Father* was his first big hit. By 1912, Americans had begun to appropriate certain aspect of Irish culture. Millions of non-Irish celebrated St. Patrick's day and cheered for the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame. In addition, the stage Irishman was a popular figure both in the theater and vaudeville. A study of the Irish-American dramas of Harrigan and Hart show that before 1900, the Irish characters usually appeared in rags but after 1900, they were more respectable.

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32 *The Nebbs* (the name comes from the Jewish *nebbish* or *poor sap* ran from 1923-1946. However, after Hess' death in 1941, the strip's quality declined rapidly. *The Nebbs*, syndicated by Bell, was a family strip that featured a blustery martinet of a father, a goodnatured wife and two seemingly docile children. *The Bungle Family* started in 1918 as *Home Sweet Home*, and was renamed *The Bungle Family* when its creator, Harry Tuthill, changed syndicates. It was both inventive and critical of American society and had a combination of realistic and fantastic characters. *Mr and Mrs*, developed by Clare Briggs after he left the *Tribune* in 1919, had only two main characters. Joe and Vi constantly fought with each other while their son Roscoe looked on. Briggs' work was accurate and realistic but it was also dull and predictable, yet it was continued for almost twenty years after his death in 1930. *Caspar Milquetoast*, *The Timid Soul* was started by H.T. Webster in 1924, appearing intermittently at first. The popularity of its weak and put-upon hero was so great that it became both a Sunday and weekday panel, and its title became part of our vocabulary. *Milquetoast* was so ineffectual that he was a black parody of refined middle class manhood.

33 Harrigan's characters included street cleaners, contractors, grocers, butchers, shyster lawyers, policemen, politicians, washerwomen and teamsters. See Carl Wittke, *The Irishman in America* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1956), 258. McManus, himself the son of a theater manager, may well have filled his comic strip with characters he had seen in Harrigan's plays.
Bringing up Father followed this pattern. Maggie and Jiggs were a celebration of ethnicity on one level although their adventures also had a universal elemental appeal.  

Bringing Up Father takes place in the city, and had a urban locale familiar to millions of its readers. quite different from middle-class strips like The Gumps which were obviously set in the suburbs or a small town. The early Jiggs had the rough edges of a man who had lived and labored in an ethnic ghetto. He spoke with a slum-dweller's slang using words such as "dese, dem, dose and youse and smoked the traditional Irish clay pipe. Jiggs delighted in the simple pleasures of escaping to the corner saloon (absent in much of small-town America after Prohibition). He also played poker with the boys and went to a baseball games. These were all working class entertainments in contrast to those enjoyed by Andy Gump and his suburban cohorts who went to the country to fish or golfed at the club. fishing or golf. Jiggs was more practical than Andy Gump. He already had millions and knew that riches were not as satisfying as time spent with old friends. Yet getting rich was an important theme in both of these strips. Although the Protestant work ethic stressed getting rich through hard work, luck, not work was an important element in comic strip success. Maggie and

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34 The fact that Bringing Up Father was eventually published in forty-six countries and translated into sixteen languages shows how strong its elemental message was. For example, in the Mexican version, corned beef and cabbage became tacos and frijoles.

35 The strip took place in a city large enough to have a major league ballpark which was often featured in the action.

36 This can be determined from the suburban activities of the Gumps and the scenery which has a small town look.

37 Although the majority of Gump episodes take place indoors, there is a sense of suburban rather than small town life in the strip. The Gumps have access to big city shops and activities yet live in a quiet area removed from the heart of the city.
Jiggs gained their money through change although it brought them little good. Jiggs longed for the past while Maggie was unable to gain the social acceptance she sought. I Andy Gump always believed that he would get the lucky break that would bring him wealth.

McManus, a self-made man, had little sympathy for those who had inherited wealth and almost always portrayed the rich as vain and self-seeking. However, although *Bringing Up Father* featured a working-class hero, McManus was not afraid to portray the working class in an unfavorable light. This strip is unusual because it contained an everchanging portrait gallery of all levels of American society. A study of *Bringing Up Father* provides ironic caricatures of genuine and bogus princes, business tycoons, social climbers, petit-bourgeois, slow-witted cops, lazy workmen, crabby maids, smart aleck errand boys, small-time con men, and a great variety of bums and moochers. 38

Harry Hershfield's *Abie the Agent* was another urban ethnic strip that became popular in the late Teens and the first to feature a Jewish hero. Hershfield started drawing newspaper comic strips when he was fourteen. He gained some fame with *Desperate Desmond*, a strip based on the melodramatic movie serials so popular in the first two decades of the twentieth century. One of the characters in the *Desmond* strip was a cannibal chief named Gomgatz. Gomgatz was supposed to speak in a strange language, so as a joke, Hershfield had him speak in Yiddish. The businessman and philanthropist Nathan Straus, a friend of newspaper

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38 This is a strip that I remember well from my childhood. McManus' large Sunday panels in the *Chicago Herald Examiner* were always filled during the forties and fifties with a larger variety of urban workers, all with snub noses, dot eyes and a bemused expression. Also see Maurice Horn, *Encyclopedia of Comics*, 132.
editor Arthur Brisbane, enjoyed Gomgatz' sayings so much that he felt that the character could become the basis of a new comic strip.\(^{39}\) Brisbane agreed and Hershfield turned Gomgatz into a Jewish businessman, *Abie Kabibble*, the hero of *Abie the Agent*.\(^{40}\)

*Abie the Agent* was an adult strip set in New York City, with realistic urban scenery including of offices, apartments, dance halls and parks. The plot follows the optimistic yet realistic life of an upwardly mobile Jewish businessman. Hershfield endowed Abie with all the Jewish personality traits commonly accepted as true by a majority of Americans.\(^{41}\) He poked fun at the style and accents of Jewish immigrants but always without cruelty. He was not a coldly calculating *Shylock* although he did try to buy "wholesale" and scrambled gain financial success. *Many* of the early strips centered around the difficulty *Abie* had selling the *1914 Complex*, a poorly designed lemon of a car that always broke down. However, unlike *Jiggs* and *Andy*, *Abie* worked hard for his financial success. In many ways he was modeled after Hershfield himself. His accent and syntax, ably employed by Hershfield, placed him firmly within the Jewish community. Despite his ethnic characteristics, *Abie* was actually a positive image for first and second generation Jewish immigrants. Both Gentile and Jew could empathize with his struggle for success in the business world. *Abie* was not a big-nosed, calculating, greedy caricature like the *Diamondsheens* and *Hockheimers* popularly featured in *Puck* and *Judge* at the turn of the century. Hershfield, addressing a Chicago Women's Club in 1916 stated that he wanted to make

\(^{39}\) Brisbane was editor of Hearst's *New York Journal*.

\(^{40}\) Martin Sheridan, *Comics and their Creators*, 33.

Abe Kabibble a "clean-cut, well-dressed specimen " of Jewish humor to counteract the negative stereotypes of Jews present on stage and in burlesque. These images he felt portrayed "at type of Jewish humor not at all complementary to the Jewish people and not at all justified." He must have succeeded because he was never criticized by the Publicity or Anti-Caricatural Committees (Later the Anti-Defamation League) of the B'nai B'rith. This organization was founded in 1913 by Americanized German Jewish community leaders in an attempt to reduce anti-semitism in mass culture.42

Abie, his wife Reba and son, little Sidney, his friends and rivals, Minsk and Sparkbaum, amused Americans for over twenty years. As drawn by Hershfield, they were a warm and appealing group of characters that provided a realistic picture of urban life for millions of readers. As might be expected, this strip was more popular in the larger cities rather than in the more rural areas.

Although Hershfield was born in the small town of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1885, his Russian immigrant parents soon moved to Chicago where Hershfield attended school. After a brief period of study at the Chicago School of Illustration, at the age of fourteen, he developed his first strip for the Chicago Daily News. He drew his first major strip, Desperate Desmond, in 1910, when he was twenty-five. Hershfield continued Abie for the Hearst-owned King Features Syndicate from 1914 until 1940, except for a brief period between 1933-35 when he was involved in a bitter contract disagreement. Hershfield who was well known as a humorist, wrote movie

scripts, a newspaper column and appeared on a radio show, "Can You Top This". He was active as a writer and toastmaster until his death in 1974 at the age of 89.

Hershfield retired Abie in 1940 when urban ethnic communities were fast passing from the scene due to urban blight and social change. Syndication also helped in the gradual elimination of ethnics and minorities from the comics because it was concerned with mainstream mass culture. The melting pot theory had worked too well and all except the racially unalterable were assimilated. The new comics of the thirties and forties featured characters with ethnic names but not their corresponding physical characteristics. By the mid forties, there were few racial or ethnic minorities visible in the comics. 43

Although most ethnic strips had urban settings, at least one featured the life of rural immigrants which was far different from that of Abie or Jiggs. Han Ola og han Per was a Norwegian-American comic strip published in the Decorah (Iowa) Posten, a Norwegian language newspaper, between 1918-1935. 44 It was the work of a first generation American, whose parents had immigrated from Norway. Peter J. Rosendahl (1878-1942) lived his whole life in the small Norwegian settlement of Spring Grove, Minnesota, but he was a talented and imaginative individual who found time for

43 A study of the ethnic content of comics between 1943 and 1958 identified 532 different regular characters. This total included one black and no Jews. Eighty percent were one hundred percent American and the rest came from preferred Anglo-Saxon or Nordic stock. During World War II, the strips that included the war often treated orientals in a negative way. Ibid., 9.

44 This strip was recently studied by a group of Norwegian and American scholars, who recognized that it was an important source for information on immigrant culture. See Peter J. Rosendahl, Han Ola og han Per, A Norwegian-American Comic Strip, Joan N. Buckley and Einar Haugen, eds. (Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1984)
writing and sketching despite the heavy demands of farming. The comic strip he drew was a humorous chronicle of life in his home town, written in a somewhat Americanized Norwegian. Its two protagonists were Per, a lanky farmer-inventor who always dressed in a battered tailcoat and bowler hat and his neighbor, Ola, who always wore in overalls and alternately helped and hindered Per. During the course of the strip, Per married a city girl from Fargo, North Dakota, who struggled to adapt to farm life. Her mother Vaermor, followed Polla to Spring Grove, where she functioned as both a traditional comic strip mother-in-law and hard working pioneer farm wife. Another important character was Per's brother Lars, a newcomer to America whose education at several European universities had done little to prepare him for farm life. Lars suffered all the ridicule and misfortune of a newcomer in a closed rural community, and his troubles were enhanced by his addition to liquor. Rosendahl's characters had elemental qualities that its audience appreciated. The fool, the underdog, realistic male-female relationships and a true picture of the isolated and self reliant farmer were part of its appeal. Rosendahl seldom used the themes of financial success or luck that were so popular in urban strips. Human relationships were more important than riches in his rural world. Although it ran in only one newspaper, Han Ola og han Per was well known in many Norwegian-American settlements and treasured as a record of their early struggles in the farm country of the midwest. Rosendahl was undoubtedly familiar with the more famous syndicated comics because the development of his strip followed a similar pattern. At first, it had slapstick humor like the Katzies and Happy Hooligan. In the twenties, it changed to a family strip and in the thirties it resembled the adventure strips so popular in that decade.
Unfortunately, Rosendahl's humorous outlook on life eventually deserted him and in 1935, he refused to continue the strip. He sank into a depression and took his own life in 1942. The Decorah-Posten continued to reprint the strip until the newspaper ceased publication in 1972.45

It is hard to visualize today, the profusion of comic strips that were published between 1900 and 1920. This period was the golden age of the newspaper in America, with several thousand daily papers and six times as many weekly journals. The majority had some kind of comic drawing, either original or syndicated. Even the earnest tabloid, The Chicago Socialist had comics. Many foreign language newspapers, like the Decorah-Posten and those that served the black community also developed their own comic strips.46 One of the more interesting of these was an urban Yiddish comic, Gimpl Beinish the Schadchen (Matchmaker) which was read from right to left. This strip was first published in Die Wahrheit (Truth) in 1912.47

Family strips, ethnicity and continuity were not the only new developments in the comic world during the second decade of the twentieth century. During this period, the comic strip also became an important,

45The Decorah-Posten had its peak years in the 1920's when its circulation reached 45,000 subscribers among midwestern Norwegian-American immigrants and their descendants. At this time the Norwegian-American population numbered about two million, and was primarily a rural culture with strong traditional ties. They attempted to retain the language of the old country as part of the curriculum and for religious services. By 1972, however, the ties to the old country had weakened and the paper was no longer in demand. See Peter Rosendahl, Han Ola og han Per, 10.

46There are undoubtedly many of these treasures in obscure newspapers in remote areas of the country, yet to be discovered by historians.

47This strip was drawn from 1912 to 1919 for Die Wahrheit by Samuel Zagat (1890-1964) who had a long career in the Yiddish press of New York. The plot of Gimpl centered around the pint-sized matchmakers attempts to unite the most unpromising males and females in order to make a living. The ideas were supplied by Louis Miller, the editor of Die Warheit. For more information see Charles Hardy and Gail Stern, Ethnic Images in the Comics.
adult-oriented fixture on weekdays. The growth of weekday comics was stimulated by urban expansion and the rise of the suburbs. Many daily papers were bought by commuters on the way to and from work. Since these commuters were mostly male, the editors selected strips based on topics of interest to this audience.\textsuperscript{48} Of course the old favorites were still popular, but a variety of new male-oriented strips appeared at this time. They utilized topics that interested a male audience such as horse racing, fishing, golf, and male-female relationships in which the wife (and mother-in-law) is usually an unsympathetic character.\textsuperscript{49} There was also an increasing emphasis on success, the get-rich-quick scheme and social status. The cartoonists were not always kind to these new character types and perhaps for this reason, they quickly became very popular.

Male-oriented comic strips with a sports theme have had limited popularity, throughout the history of comics. However, there was one sport that proved to be an exception to this rule. Horse racing, the most popular spectator sport from 1900 through 1930, inspired the development of four comic strips for week-day consumption.\textsuperscript{50} Why were strips about horse racing so popular when other sports-oriented strips failed at this time?

\textsuperscript{48}The Gumps, of course was one of these strips. Andy was a typical male who participated in sports such as baseball and golf, went fishing and hid whiskey in the basement.

\textsuperscript{49}The Sherlock Holmes craze also briefly filtered into the comic pages. Several topical strips, Sherlocko the Monk and Hawkshaw the Detective, both developed by Gus Mager, had brief runs at this time, while detectives wandered into other strips.

\textsuperscript{50}Two of them can legitimately claim the honor of being the first daily comic strip. Bud Fisher's Mutt and Jeff, first published in 1907, is usually listed as the first regular gaily comic strip by most comics' authorities. However, Clare Briggs developed A. Piker Clerk for the Chicago American in 1904. Briggs's strip had a short run, while Mutt and Jeff became a classic. Gilbert Seldes placed Piker's debut in the Chicago Tribune while W. Murrell's, A History of American Graphic Humor ignored him entirely, naming Bud Fisher's Mutt and Jeff as the first daily comic. See Gilbert Seldes, The Seven Lively Arts, (New York: A.S.Barnes, 1924, 1957), 195.
Gambling and the chance of easy money have traditionally been connected with horse racing. Thus these strips were part of the trend towards the use of topics that emphasized luck and financial success.

After 1900, daily strips began to appear intermittently in the Hearst newspapers. They were usually black and white versions of Sunday favorites reduced to a smaller size. Surprisingly, no one at first realized the potential of a regular daily comic. However, in 1904, the newspaper market in Chicago was extremely competitive. Moses Koenigsberg, Hearst's trouble-shooter, wanted to increase the circulation of the American, locked in a struggle for the afternoon-evening reader, with the Daily News. After researching the market, Koenigsberg selected the sports pages as the part of the newspaper that might draw more readers if he could offer them something new and exciting from day to day. Because of the proven success of the Sunday supplement, he felt that a continuing sports comic might be the answer. Developing a feature that would maintain daily suspense was only part of the problem. What sport should be selected? Eliminating the seasonal sports, and boxing, which was illegal in some areas, he picked horse racing since it was the most popular spectator sport of the time. Of course an interest in horse racing also included the fascination of gambling and the chance of easy money.

Koenigsberg visualized a comic strip that featured a "small time blowhard with abundant eagerness but deficient wherewithal to back the horses..." He felt..."that the average reader would surely notice in the type some familiar quirk or facet..."51 He also astutely determined that to sustain reader interest, the hero's struggle to place a bet would not be resolved until

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51 M. Koenigsberg, King News, 381.
the next day when the race results were published. Here was the basis for the first serial story strip as well as the first daily comic.

Realizing that the strip's success depended on its presentation, Koenigsberg selected Clare A. Briggs, then the American's local staff cartoonist to draw the strip. Briggs, later to become a famous chronicler of small town life; provided Koenigsberg with a dozen sketches. He selected one of a thin, lanky fellow with a receding chin, pop-eyes, pompadour hairstyle, a bushy mustache, and dressed in the flashy apparel of a "dude".52

Briggs blocked out eighteen serial episodes, three weeks worth. They were sent to the copy editor who suggested the name, A. Piker Clerk. The strip ran six days a week in the sports section, the full width of the page. It was an instant hit, soon reflected by the American's circulation figures. Briggs injected local color into his strip, to whet the interest of Tribune readers. In one curious episode, Mayor Carter Harrison, strapped for municipal funds, bets city money on a horse.53

Koenigsberg and Briggs' elation over the success of A. Piker Clerk was short lived. An unscheduled visit from Hearst's personal representative, Foster Coates, brought them the bad news. Hearst felt that the strip was vulgar. In 1904, vulgarity was the worst offense that could be committed in the Hearst establishment so the successful A. Piker Clerk was dropped.54

52 A "dude" was an urban male who imitated the flashy clothing of show business and the nouveau riche rather than the more conservative dress of the middle class.


54 Ibid., 384. Unfortunately, Maurice Horn discounts Koenigsberg's very plausible story. See Maurice Horn, World Encyclopedia of Comics, 85. My recent study of Hearst's Chicago American and Examiner, from the years 1903 and 1904, shows that the strip ran intermittently over an 18 month period. This seems to prove Horn's statement that it was neither banished by Hearst nor a huge success. Because it featured tips about real horse races, it was tied to the racing season, which was not a year long event. Koenigsberg, writing thirty
Twenty years later, Hearst's standards had changed. Several racing strips, including Ken Kling's *Joe and Asbestos*, which actually provided race tips, ran in Hearst papers.

Three years later, in 1907, Bud Fisher developed the first long running daily comic strip *Mutt and Jeff* almost by accident. Fisher, a sports cartoonist for the *San Francisco Chronicle* covered the track for the paper. As Fisher recalled fifteen years later:

> One evening I came into the office late. My ponies had all run backward that day and I was feeling low. I sat down, drew a picture of my own idea of myself, labeled it "A. Mutt" and handed it to the night editor.
> That's a funny looking bird, said the night editor. Who is he?
> That's me, I answered, "A. Mutt."
> The next day they sent A. Mutt to cover the races. 55

*Mutt* was actually a composite of all the pathetic gamblers Fisher's artistic eye had noted at the track, a type later popularized by Damon Runyon. Fisher based the strip's plot on Mutt's ability to pick winners at the track and he was amazingly successful, from the beginning. The strip's popularity soared as race fans lined up to buy papers with Mutt's hot tips. However, Fisher was not satisfied with this narrow focus and gradually began to develop the storyline of his strip so that it would have a broader appeal. In a 1908 strip, the bumbling, ignorant, blowhard, *Mutt*, visited an insane asylum. 56 There he rescued a little man who was in danger of being torn years later, must have embellished the facts. However, it is likely that some elements of his story are correct. He may well have developed the idea of a daily strip, but *Mutt and Jeff* was the first comic strip to be printed regularly on a daily basis.

55. "Seven Men Who Draw Funny Pictures and Large Salaries," *Literary Digest*, 14 August 1920, 56. *Mutt* was a short version of the slang term *muttonhead* or dolt.

56. When the origins of *Mutt and Jeff*'s relationship was reprinted in the 1950's, insane was changed to feeble-minded.
apart by the inmates. The little man's name was Jeffries (The great fight between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries was heavily publicized at this time). Because of his gratitude, Jeffries became Mutt's constant companion. The tall Mutt and short Jeff eventually developed such a high recognition factor that they are still an accepted slang term for two people of unequal size.

It took Fisher some time to develop his own personal style, which eventually evolved into two basic themes. One centered on the lovable underdog Jeff, who was constantly beaten down but usually won the prize at the end of the strip. The other followed the conniving and overconfident Mutt who almost always lost out to his friend Jeff, despite his superior attitude. These are of course elemental themes with lasting appeal, as well as examples of the new urban humor. Mutt and Jeff's relationship illustrated the personal dilemma of many urban males. Although they were friends, Mutt and Jeff often found themselves competing for the same prize. They were locked into an adversary relationship, that was fostered by their urban environment. Two displaced persons in a hostile world and cut off from familial ties, Mutt and Jeff, like the new urban folk were unable to completely trust each other. Fisher, himself a product of urban society, and successful in a very competitive field, knew his subject matter very well. He too, sought both companionship and entertainment in the unforgiving arena of the racetrack and knew the self-disgust that came with losing. Thus

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57 McLean see the Mutt and Jeff relationship as symbolic of the contradictory needs of the new mass man..."If on one hand, they desire a dialogue and companionship, on the other they find themselves, by virtue of their urban predicament, in a state of unrelieved competition. In the material order of an industrial society, the very closeness that brings friendship, brings also exploitation, antagonism and ultimately violence. McLean, Vaudeville as Ritual, 131.
his strip had an underlying core of reality that enhanced its appeal despite the fantasy of its plots. 58

Fisher’s success continued because he had both a fertile imagination and a good sense of humor. He worked hard to develop Mutt and Jeff into a strip that provided entertainment for both parents and children. Slapstick humor alternated with more adult themes on a regular basis. In fact, he developed a three-day rotation; one day to please the women, next day, the children, and then the men. 59 Mutt and Jeff would leave the racetrack in later years when horse racing declined in popularity as a spectator sport. Their adventures took them all over the world, but they eventually settled down in the suburbs in the forties and fifties. During its long run, Fisher, like Winsor McCay, sometimes incorporated real people and events to add interest. Thus despite the prior claim of A. Piker Clerk, Mutt and Jeff’s durability proved that it deserved its recognition by most historians as the first daily comic strip.

Mutt and Jeff started on the daily sport page, but soon moved to the Sunday Comic section as well. Fisher also moved from the West coast to New York, eventually landing on Hearst’s American. An astute businessman, he was one of the few cartoonists to copyright his own work. This worked to his advantage as he left Hearst for the Wheeler Syndicate in 1915. There he received a $1000. a week guarantee as well as a percentage of the syndication profits. The irate Hearst had the strip copied but Fisher was

58 Berger sees the comic violence in Mutt and Jeff as "a somewhat distorted reflection of the brutalization and exploitation suffered by the ordinary man in the course of his work and life" However he feels that social conditions have improved in recent years (the seventies) and perhaps for this reason, today (1988) Mutt and Jeff is no longer a part of the comic page. Arthur Asa Berger, The Comic-Striped American, 58.

59 Sheridan, Comics and their Creators, 77.
able to obtain a court order that forbade Hearst from using his copyrighted
characters. In a 1916 interview with American magazine, Fisher said he
received $78,000 a year for drawing Mutt and Jeff. Additional income came
from vaudeville engagements at $1,000 a week, royalties from five Mutt and
Jeff shows, animated cartoons, an annual book, post cards, figures and
toys. His total income was estimated at between $150,000 and $250,000 a
year, a princely sum at this time. Fisher's salesmanship and confidence in
the value of his work helps to explain the extent of his financial success. As
he said,

Make up your mind what you are worth and stick to it. Never ask
more than you know you are worth. The other fellow may say you are crazy
but if you prove he is wrong, he will not haggle with you the next time you
come to sell your goods.

Although not as opportunistic as Outcault, Fisher knew the value of
his work and quickly capitalized on it. Like Outcault, he quickly tired of the
daily grind necessary to produce a successful comic strip and not long after
he had achieved stardom, Fisher hired ghosts to do most of the work. By
1916, although Mutt and Jeff had been popular favorites less than ten years,
Fisher was already a celebrity who was courted by the rich. The use of
ghosts provided him with ample time to enjoy his celebrity status.

60 Ibid., 77,78.
comic strip roughly coincided with the development of big-time advertising and the growth
of brand recognition. This undoubtedly helped break ground for the commercial exploitation
of entertainment personalities, both real and imaginary.
62 "Seven Men Who Draw Funny Pictures—And Large Salaries," Literary Digest, 8
August 1920, 56.
63 At this point, he was regularly invited to hunt at the plantation of George
Stallings, manager of the Boston Braves, where he mingled with Ty Cobb and other baseball
Another midwesterner, Harry Conway *Bud* Fisher was born in Chicago in 1884 into a middle-class family. He attended Hyde Park High School and spent a semester at the University of Chicago before setting out to try his luck in California. Fisher had an urban upbringing and his strip shows it with its emphasis on current events and the use of the latest city slang. A brash young newspaperman of twenty-three when he first developed Mutt and Jeff, Fisher made the strip a lifelong career that furnished him with a very high standard of living until his death in 1954, at the age of 69. It was continued until 1981 by Al Smith who had been hired by Fisher to ghost the strip in 1932. After this date, the strip was never entirely Fisher's own, but he undoubtedly controlled its general theme and format, which remained true to the original. As a result, it retained its popularity and became one of the longest-lived comic strips ever, with a run of seventy-four years. 64

An interest in the up to date world of the new city and a movement towards adult themes, was not the only new direction taken by the comics of the second decade. Despite an overwhelming interest in progress, many Americans also yearned for the idealized rural life of the recent past during the 'teens and twenties. 65 Although many eagerly accepted the changes that progress brought there was a vague longing for the simpler days of childhood. Syndication now reached both rural and urban audiences as it

64 *Chicago Tribune*, 26 November 1986. Al Smith retired Mutt and Jeff in 1981, when he, himself, retired, although it was still reasonably popular. He died in 1986 at the age of 84. When Fisher hired Smith, in 1932, he was then the world's highest paid cartoonist, making $4000. a week. Fisher was a difficult employer, and fired Smith numerous times, but Smith continued the strip alone for another 27 years after working with Fisher for 22.
65 This is reinforced by the parallel movements to enforce prohibition, traditional values and old-time religion, to an already urban America.
provided comics for almost every newspaper in the country so it was necessary to include rural themes. Finally, during the twenties rural America made its last major attempt to impose its culture on urban society. The rural themes so popular at this time struck a familiar response with this group as well. The comics of the 'teens capitalized on this wave of nostalgia, focusing on youthful adventures in the country and in small towns. Up to this time, no one had fully utilized this theme in a major syndicated comic. It is true that a number of the popular early strips featured children but they were urban or foreign children. The exception was found in two strips that featured black children, R.F. Outcault's *Lil Mose* and E.W. Kemble's *Blackberries*. Both featured rural black children (or picaninnies as they were then called) in mildly stereotyped humorous adventures. 66 They ran mainly in New York papers like the *World* and *Journal* for only a few years. The only cartoonist who drew ordinary white children was John T. McCutcheon of the *Chicago Tribune* who produced daily panel scenes of rural America along with his more famous political cartoons. 67

The focus on childhood would change in 1915 when a confident young cartoonist developed a strip that featured the daily adventures of normal kids and their families. Locating the strip in the suburbs that were springing up all over America at the end of the trolley tracks was a

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66 The rural black stereotype at this time exaggerated laziness, stupidity, thievery and a fondness for watermelon and fried chicken. Very few urban blacks appeared in the comics during this period except as servants. The rare exceptions were drawn as gaudily dressed, pretentious and ridiculous imitators of white middle class culture. According to Francis J. Martin, the blacks were satirized for acting like blacks in a rural setting, and in the cities, they were satirized for imitating white people. This statement is proved by their portraits in the comic strips. See Francis John Martin "The Image of Black People in American Illustration from 1825-1925," (Ph.D.diss. UCLA, 1986), 435-7.

completely original and successful idea. *Toonerville Folks* was the first of a genre that would become increasingly rural and nostalgic. The young cartoonist was Fontaine Fox, who took a job with the *Chicago Post* in 1908. Fox had been drawing cartoons since his high school days and felt that the time was right for a comic strip based on real kids. He approached the *Post's* editor, Leigh Reilly with his idea of replacing some of his political cartoons with scenes of childish humor. Reilly was amazed that Fox had the gall to try to compete with McCutcheon’s extremely popular work in his own home town.68 Fox replied that his work was different; that his kids were the more modern suburban kids who lived along the trolley lines. Reilly finally agreed to give Fox's comic a try, and his work was almost immediately successful. By 1915, Fox had signed with the Wheeler syndicate and his comic panels featuring suburban life had a national audience.69

Along the way, he developed the famous *Toonerville Trolley* that meets all the trains and a cast of original and lively characters. Among them were the Terrible tempered Mr. Bang, Powerful Katrinka, the skipper, Flem Proddy and Mickey "himself" McGuire. As a background for his characters, Fox drew a world of vacant lots or prairies as they were called in Illinois, railway lines, houses built next to cornfields and commuting parents. *Toonerville Folks* was an ensemble comic; each character was important but they were all an integral part of the whole. None had star billing except for the *Toonerville Trolley* which Fox had endowed with considerable personality for an inanimate object. The Trolley was the personification of

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68McCutcheon's view of childhood was a nostalgic portrait of rural life on the family farm before the turn of the century.
the problems and pleasures involved in using public transportation during the early years of the twentieth century and had an almost human identity.

In *Toonerville Folks*, ethnic and native Americans worked and played together on the common ground of the suburbs. The names Fox selected for his characters told a lot about their personalities, individualizing them in an increasingly impersonal world. *Mickey McGuire* was the tough Irish kid later played so well by James Cagney in the movies. *Powerful Katrinka*, the ultimate fat woman was noted for her strength and stupidity. *Mr. Bang*, a mild mannered suburbanite turned into a volcanic eruption of violence when thwarted. *Toonerville Folks* succeeded because it provided something for almost everyone to identify with at any given time. In addition, Fox had an eyecatching unusual sharp scratchboard style and highly visible trademark square black and white boxes. His unique figures leaned more to caricature than realism and became so well known that Joe Yule Jr., a popular child actor, tried to adopt the stage name of *Mickey McGuire*. Fox sued and Yule was forced to change his name to Mickey Rooney instead.70

Fontaine Fox was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1884. He early demonstrated his interest in art when at the age of seven, he drew a train with four hundred freight cars on the parlor wallpaper. Fox, senior, was a judge and editor, who did not appreciate his son's choice of a career, hoping instead that he would become a doctor or lawyer.71 Young Fox went to Louisville's Boy's High School and also briefly attended Indiana University. There he supported himself by drawing a daily cartoon for the *Louisville

70 Ibid., 1.
71 *Literary Digest*, 14 August 1920, 56.
Herald at $12. a week. After a year of moonlighting, Fox quit university life to work full time in the newspaper field. He also spent some time playing semi-professional baseball, a sport he starred at in college and high school. After four years of experience in Louisville, he headed for Chicago where he developed Toonerville Folks. Fox's creation rapidly gained in popularity and eventually appeared in over 300 daily and Sunday newspapers. Toonerville also influenced the creation of a number of movies, books, games and toys. Already wealthy from his cartoonist's salary and royalties, Fox decided to produce his own line of Toonerville toys. He contracted with German manufacturers in the twenties and thirties to produce several models including a Powerful Katrinka toy and, of course, the Toonerville Trolley itself. The Trolley, by the twenties, was a part of the American vocabulary; a term used by many to describe the inefficiencies of the second-rate rail and street-car lines that ineffectively linked the city and suburbs.

Fox retired at the age of seventy in February 1956, and permanently retiring the Trolley at the same time. Fox had always drawn his unique characters himself, although he sometimes had help with the backgrounds. Both he and his syndicate felt that it would be difficult to find a satisfactory replacement at a time when the Toonerville world was rapidly disappearing from the American scene. In the fifties, many streetcar lines were long overgrown with weeds and the prairie lots had disappeared and the

72 Judge Fox frowned on Sabbath baseball so young Fontaine told him he visited a farm girl in Indiana when he had a Sunday game. He actually did make the visits but only when the games were rained out.
73 Robert Lesser, A Celebration of Comic Art and Memorabilia, 77
74 Fontaine Fox died in 1964 at the age of eighty.
automobile replaced mass transit lines as the most popular means of commuting.

Another comic strip that took a more traditional approach to childhood also became popular at this time. Clare Briggs, the unlucky cartoonist who had his promising strip, *A. Piker Clerk*, abruptly canceled by Hearst, had developed another. Frankly influenced by the *Tom Sawyer-Huck Finn*, nostalgia of McCutcheon, Briggs drew a new strip loosely based on his own boyhood adventures. His panels were often based on the theme of either the best or the worst that could happen to a person. He developed several popular series with the following self-explanatory titles: "When a Feller Needs a Friend,", "Ain't it a Grand and Glorious Feelin'", "Somebody's Always Taking the Joy Out of Life", "How to Start the Day Wrong" and "Oh Skin-nay, The Days of Real Sport".

"Oh Skin-nay" was the first of Briggs' work to become a real success. This panel series followed the boyhood adventures of Briggs, himself, as he grew up in a semi-rural countryside. *Skin-nay* and his friends went swimming, played baseball and met girls in humorous but realistic episodes. Briggs excelled at a nostalgic recreation of boyhood (and childhood) in the recent past which had great appeal in a fast-paced modern society. His late-nineteenth century scenes were well-drawn and their gentle humor was enjoyed by both children and adults. Briggs was also adept at depicting the problems and triumphs of the urban lower-middle class male and female at home and at work. He always used a realistic but incisively humorous style that is still fresh and enjoyable today. His best strip of this type was *Mr. and

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75 It was published in a compilation as early as 1913. Clare Briggs, *Oh Skin-nay, In the Days of Real Sport* (Chicago: Volland, 1913).
Mrs. which featured the true-to-life and funny marital warfare conducted by Vi and Joe Green. This strip was made into a radio serial in 1929 and was the only one of his efforts to be continued after his untimely death. Even this partial listing of his work shows the depth of his talent and diversity.

Clare Briggs credited his Chicago colleague, John McCutcheon of the Tribune, with having the most influence on his work as a cartoonist. McCutcheon, five years his senior, was the first to draw small town boys and use a motto series. However, Briggs went on to develop a different and distinctive style of his own which in turn influenced any number of aspiring cartoonists. In fact, Briggs received so many letters from young people asking advice on how to draw cartoons that he eventually wrote an interesting book on the topic in 1926. By this time, he was both highly successful and financially secure.

Briggs also had something of a social conscience rarely found in the comic pages at this time. Some of his city kids' cartoons point out the callous unconcern of the wealthy towards the needy. His most interesting series, from an historical point of view was called "Real Folks at Home". Briggs used his cartoonist's imagination to draw attention to the importance of ordinary people, including streetcleaners, cab drivers, traffic cops and hod carriers by basing a strip on their homelife. Briggs was a pioneer in the production of a comic strip that functioned as social critic without losing its sense of humor.

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77 Clare A. Briggs, How to Draw Cartoons (New York: Harper, 1926)
Clare Briggs was born in Reedsburg, Wisconsin in 1875. His family later moved on to Dixon, Illinois and finally to Lincoln, Nebraska where he attended the University of Nebraska. Briggs had started drawing as a boy and eventually had a few sketches accepted by the *Western Penman*. After a number of years as a journeyman cartoonist he was hired by Hearst at the turn of the century to draw cartoons for his Chicago papers. Briggs's work was so popular that he quickly became a local celebrity; no mean feat in McCutcheon's home base. He was eventually hired by the *Chicago Tribune* in 1907 where the development of his humorous panel series made him nationally famous. In 1917, he moved to the *New York Tribune* where he did his best work. In 1920, he was listed as one of the country's highest paid cartoonists by the *Literary Digest*. Briggs, his wife and three children enjoyed a comfortable life, at his country home in New Rochelle, New York. However, all this success was to last only ten years. Clare Briggs died in New York, January 10, 1930 at the age of 59. He had endured a long illness complicated by problems with his optic nerve which made drawing difficult.

A type of comic character that is very popular today was strikingly absent in the early 'teens. Until the development of *Polly and her Pals* in 1912, there were no comic strips about older teen agers or young college-age adults still living at home. Although youth culture is an important part of modern mass entertainment, its roots extend only to the second decade of the twentieth century. This is reflected by its absence in the early comics. However Cliff Sterrett, with his pioneering strip *Positive Polly*, later *Polly and her Pals*, developed a character that would be both a forerunner of the trend towards female heroines in comics of the twenties and thirties and an
example of the emerging youth culture of the "flapper age".\textsuperscript{78} A few years later, in 1919, Harold Teen, another influential youth comic became even more popular with newspaper readers.

\textit{Polly} is important because she is the first symbol of the new and influential youth culture to appear in a major syndicated strip. Just as Hearst was ready to publish the first full continuing page of daily comics in 1912, he noticed the Sterrett-drawn strip \textit{For This We Have Daughters} in the \textit{New York Evening Telegram}. Its theme centered on the trials of parents with college-age daughters but the emphasis was on the parents. Hearst felt it would be more effective if the focus was on the daughter, because he hoped to gain more teen and college age readers for the \textit{Journal}. He offered Sterrett a much higher salary if he would develop a strip with the daughter as the central character. Although Sterrett agreed, and \textit{Positive Polly} ran for the first time in December 1912, the stubborn cartoonist was not happy with Hearst's meddling. As a result he made \textit{Polly} plain and submissive. A Hearst directive forced him to make her attractive and more dominant, but Sterrett eventually got his way.\textsuperscript{79} Gradually Hearst allowed him to develop the strip in his own way. The title, \textit{Polly and Her Pals} was misleading, almost from the first, because the youthful heroine and her adoring suitors gradually became a secondary theme in the strip. Unlike most cartoonists, Sterrett was fond of experimentation in both style and theme.\textsuperscript{80} By 1920, he had begun to include elements of cubism and surrealism in his art work. It


\textsuperscript{79} Bill Blackbeard, \textit{Polly and Her Pals, a complete compilation, 1912-1913}, Cliff Sterrett, Hyperion Press, Inc. Westport, Conn. 1977, V-VIII.

\textsuperscript{80} The usual rule was that if you had a successful formula, it was not changed.
was visually striking in the Sunday color section but its originality often confused less sophisticated readers. The youth culture theme was gradually overshadowed by Paw and Maw and a Dickensian cast of supporting middle-class characters from town and country. Although Polly never reached the top rank of popular comics, it developed a loyal following. Polly and Her Pals developed into an original and creative view of American family life drawn in a distinctly personal way, instead of a teen strip. However, Sterrett left the field open for the creation of numerous American girl heroes in the twenties. 81

Yet another midwesterner, Cliff Sterrett was born Dec. 12, 1883 in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. When he graduated from high school, he knew he wanted a career in art and moved to New York where he studied at the Chase Arts School for two years. After leaving school, Sterrett worked as a staff artist for several years until he got a job drawing comic strips for the New York Evening Telegram in 1911. There he drew four strips for simultaneous publication six days a week and soon became the paper's most popular artist. At this point, he was noticed and signed by Hearst. Sterrett produced Polly and Her Pals both Sunday and daily after 1913. He also developed several other strips for the Hearst syndicate over the years but Polly was by far the best known.

Although Polly and Her Pals is cited by students of the comics as the most important of the new youth oriented strips, between 1920 and 1940, Harold Teen was far more influential. This strip took off in the twenties as Americans became more youth oriented. Only 28 when he started drawing

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81 A earlier strip, Somebody's Stenog, drawn by A.H. Hayward, dating from 1910, featured a working girl heroine, in an office environment. It too would have imitators in the twenties, most notably, Winnie Winkle the Breadwinner by Martin Branner.
Harold Teen, Carl Ed studied current newspapers and magazines for the latest youthful fads and styles from his home in Evanston Illinois. He later used his own teen-age daughter and her friends to provided material for the strip. As the New York Times later commented,

Carl Ed...demonstrated his influence time and time again by literally forcing into the language such expressions as Sheba, pantywaist, lamb's lettuce and fan mah brow. Harold Teen also popularized the oxford bag (English baggy trousers) fad and when he became fond of a mythical gedunk sundae at Pop Jenks Sugar Bowl, Ed was forced to invent one due to pleas from Soda Shop owners throughout the United States. 82

The teen age and college world that Carl Ed drew in Harold Teen was in complete accord with Paula Fass' groundbreaking study of youth culture in the twenties. According to Fass, the youth of this period were pioneers because they existed at a strategic point in history when the modern perception of youth culture was created. At the same time they felt isolated by the changes and therefore slavishly copied the current fads of their peers to identify with the "in" group. 83 Knowledge of current trends in dress, speech, recreation and dating habits became an important part of the contemporary youth scene in the twenties. The better educated white middle class youth that romped through the panels of Harold Teen were a product of the new attitudes that changed societies' perception of adolescence. These changes were accomplished over several decades by an extended period of education, increased dependency on parental support

82 New York Times, 11 October 1959, 86:4. At the time of Carl Ed's death, Harold Teen was still carried in ninety newspapers. It retained some of its initial popularity because of its realistic portrait of adolescence and its problems, despite competition from other sources.

and more free time for recreational activities. By the twenties, young people were increasing leisure oriented and believed that acceptance by the peer group was of primary importance. The social habits, dress code and slang prominently featured in Harold Teen provided valuable information for young readers and their parents for several decades.

Urban and rural adolescents were not the only part of youth culture that was represented in the comics during the twenties. Several strips directed at very young children also were added to the comic section during this period. They were undoubtedly included by the syndicates to prove that the comic section actually did provide wholesome children's entertainment. While the work of Clare Briggs and Fontaine Fox was family oriented, its nostalgic portrait of an era appealed more to adults than to children. As a result, many newspapers ran a few strips that were geared for the enjoyment of young children and most were widely praised by parents and educators. However, none of them had the impact of their more vulgar cousins until Charles Schultz drew Peanuts, fifty years later.

One of the best of these children's strips was the Teenie Weenies, developed by William Donahey and syndicated by Captain Patterson's Chicago Tribune in 1914. The Teenie Weenies were a colony of lilliputian adults and children, of different ethnic groups and occupations, who had charming and wholesome adventures. The strip was drawn in a realistic manner, without cloying sweetness or moralizing, so that it could be enjoyed by both children and adults. Donahey based the figures on a set of

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84 The Teenie Weenies was mainly a Sunday panel with text rather than a comic in strip form. During the thirties, Donahey used a strip format, but he returned to the single panel in the forties. It was found in the Sunday comic section, and I remember it with pleasure from my childhood.
imaginary playmates he had invented as a child. The fresh approach of this large panel comic soon developed a devoted audience among Tribune readers, and Teenie Weenie merchandise sold well in the Chicago area at department stores like Marshall Field and Company. Donahey himself wrote to Captain Patterson that he wanted to devote all his time to the Teenie Weenies and keep himself (and his work) clean and wholesome. He was especially concerned about the content of his strip because it was read by so many children. Both children and parents scanned the strip very carefully and often wrote to complain if anything in the strip was changed or left out. When Donahey eliminated a black character that had become part of the Teenie Weenie village, he received an angry letter from a black parent. Otis Fletcher was distressed because one of the few relatively normal black characters had disappeared from a child oriented comic.

Fletcher wrote,

Gentlemen: For the information of many subscribers and readers of your paper, will you tell us what became of the little black boy that had fallen in with the Teenie Weenie band that you parade before the public each Sunday? Was he mobbed, burned at the stake or thrown in the lake or did he become disgusted with such company and of his own accord desert them. Please answer publicly or privately so that I can relieve the anxiety of my little girl.

85 Although there was a certain similarity of ideas found in both Palmer Cox' Brownies and the Teenie Weenies, Donahey emphatically denied any familiarity with this work when he created his characters. Joseph M. Cahn, The Teenie Weenies Book. The Life and Art of William Donahey (La Jolla, CA: Green Tiger Press, 1986), 13.

86 Letter from William Donahey to Captain Joseph Medill Patterson, dated 25 June 1917, from the William Donahey Collection, Mass Communications History Center of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI.

87 Otis Gene Fletcher, Director, Bureau of Colored American Literature to Chicago Sunday Tribune, 1 July 1920. From the William Donahey Collection, Mass Communications History Center, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison WI.
There is no record of Donahey's reply but he did save the letter. The casual and heedless portraits of blacks, both children and adults, in the comics must have given black parents much anguish. Unfortunately racial humor did not become controversial in the comics until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's. Because they conveyed the mainstream working and lower middle class attitudes of their time, the comics continued the cruel stereotypes that had originated in the nineteenth century. Black characters in the comics were usually a caricature of reality taken from the minstrel show and vaudeville. Black adults were drawn with round densely black heads, large white eyes and whitened oversized lips. They spoke in the black dialect of the minstrels and filled subservient positions as maids, valets and porters. This image was actually originated by white actors who "blacked up" for the minstrel show. As Stephen Loring James stated,

The image of the stereotypical black servant or fool permitted middle-class white audiences to vicariously indulge in attitudes and behaviors otherwise off limits to them in genteel society. At the same time, the pathetic black character offered the white working class an image to whom they could feel superior, no matter how bad their lot in life might be.88

Of course black community activists and the NAACP fought to change the negative images of blacks in the mass press but there were few victories. Leading black papers like the Chicago Defender, the Pittsburg Courier and the Baltimore Afro-American also worked to eliminate the minstrel image and also printed their own alternative comics. However it was not until the sixties and seventies that the Civil Rights movement was incorporated into the comics. Even then, residual hatreds often caused the cancellation of

88 See Hardy and Stern, Ethnic Images in the Comics, 23,24.
integrated strips. Even the black character in the *Teenie Weenies*, whose disappearance concerned Mr. Fletcher, was endowed with some of the negative black character traits so readily accepted by white society at the time. Gogo was rather lazy, superstitious and gullible, yet reliable and brave and until the sixties, he spoke in the black minstrel dialect. 89

Donahey made a comfortable living from the strip but he never reached the top rank of highly paid star cartoonists. The *Teenie Weenies* did not have the huge circulation of the *Katzies* or *The Gumps*. 90 If the comics had really been intended for children, it should had become one of the most popular syndicated strips.

Despite the fact that the *Teenie Weenies* were not widely syndicated they were often published in book form, and translated into several languages. Their gentle and orderly miniature world had great appeal. It was usually peaceful and cooperation was the rule among the culturally diverse group that had to work together to overcome obstacles. They lived in a secluded wilderness and were close to nature and wild life. Donahey had perhaps unconsciously tied together many of the elements of the progressive movement in his make-believe world.

Another cartoonist who drew inoffensive and didactic, child-oriented comic strips was Grace (Gigi) Drayton. Although not as creative and original as Donahey, Drayton's work is worth notice both because of its content and

89 In 1960, Donahey changed the name of the Chinaman to the Chinese Teenie Weenie, in response to a complaint from the Toronto Star Weekly. At the same time, Gogo dropped his dialect. Cahn, *The Teenie Weenies*, 67.

90 The strip was first syndicated by the Tribune in 1923. About thirty newspapers carried it in the major cities of the United States and Canada. See Cahn, *The Teenie Weenies*, 63. *The Gumps* and the *Katzies* were in over 200 papers at this time. The *Teenie Weenies* never became a daily feature, and this no doubt limited its syndication to some extent.
because she was the first woman to draw a syndicated comic strip. The newspaper art rooms were a masculine province in 1900 and would remain so for many years. Perhaps because her father was Philadelphia’s first art publisher, the young Grace Gebbie had as entre into the art world that was denied other talented young women.

Grace Gebbie was born into a successful middle class family in Philadelphia on October 14, 1877. She married Theodore E. Wiedersheim when she was in her twenties. As Grace Wiedersheim, she developed her first comic strip, *Bobbie Blake and Dolly Drake*, for the *Philadelphia Press*. Together with her sister, Margaret G. Hayes, she drew the *Terrible Tales*, a takeoff on the *Kin-der Kids* of Lyonel Feininger. In 1911, she divorced her first husband and married W. Howard Drayton III. Although she later divorced him in 1923, she continued to use the name Grace or Gigi Drayton on her work. Although Grace Drayton was somewhat unconventional in her personal life, her artwork was conservative. She excelled in drawing sweet and wholesome children with chubby cheeks and curly hair in strips like *Dolly Dimples*. Her plot lines were simple; she stressed kindness and thoughtfulness rather than cruel pranks. For example, in a strip that ran during World War I, children were urged to help feed the hungry war orphans of France. Grace Drayton was also free of conventional prejudice and actually drew a strip that showed two children, one black and one white, preparing to sleep in the same bed. This was too much for the managing

91 Woman who draw widely syndicated comic strips have been noticeably scarce during the long history of the comics. There are only two today, Lynn Johnston, *For Better or Worse*, and Cathy Guisewite, *Kathy*
93 *Atlanta Constitution*, April 5, 1918.
editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. He let out a howl of protest, as he felt that this scene was too much for Atlanta readers to bear in 1916. As a result, King Features allowed him to drop that episode of *Dolly Dimples*.\(^94\) The children she drew for this early strip are better known to millions of modern Americans as the *Campbell Soup Kids*. In 1935, she developed a new strip, *The Pussycat Princess*, which again was wholesome and creative. It was based on the adventures of a variety of cats and featured detailed drawing and puns. The storylines were fanciful but treated contemporary problems as well. Unfortunately, Grace Drayton died a year later, and the *Pussycat Princess* never became a big hit although it lasted until 1947. The only other woman to make her mark in the comics' field in any major way in the comics early years was Rose O'Neill (1874-1944), who created the *Kewpies*. Her curley headed, winged cherubs found their way into several syndicated comic strips from 1917 through the thirties. Her cute and wholesome characters were more popular as dolls and in magazines than they were in the comics. The limited success of wholesome comics allotted them only a small part of the comics page during its first thirty years.

Finally, no discussion of the comics' formative years would be complete without an analysis of *Krazy Kat*, the most unusual and unconventional syndicated comic strip ever produced. A fantasy in a time that demanded reality and a confusing blend of order and chaos, it was ahead of its time and never gained favor with the mass audience. In 1912, the same year that Cliff Sterrett created *Polly and Her Pals*, George Herriman developed *Krazy Kat*. By 1920, this comic strip made him the darling of American intellectuals and critics such as H.L.Mencken, Gilbert Seldes and

\(^{94}\) M. Koenigsberg, *King News*, 411.
Deems Taylor. *Krazy Kat* was also highly praised by artists and poets including William de Kooning and e.e. cummings. Jack Kerouac felt that *Krazy Kat* was an early member of the "beat generation" whose roots could be traced back to "the glee of America, the honesty of America, its wild self-believing individuality." Through the years, many working cartoonists have loudly praised Herriman's creativity while incorporating many of his ideas into their own. Walt Disney wrote to Herriman's daughter Mabel after his death,

As one of the pioneers in the cartoon business, his contributions to it were so numerous that they may well never be estimated. His unique style of drawing and his amazing gallery of characters no only brought a new type of humor to the American public but made him a source of inspiration to thousands of artists. 96

Disney told nothing but the truth. Both the appearance and the antics of his early animated cartoon figures, especially Mickey Mouse, bear a striking resemblance to Herriman's work. Many other cartoonists as well as serious artists were strongly influenced by his unique style. Herriman was a comedic genius who worked in a field populated by more ordinary human beings. Yet despite, or perhaps because of the brilliance of his work, *Krazy Kat* never had the huge circulation of less complex strips and it was not continued after his death. Of course, the strip was so unique that it would have been difficult for another artist to imitate such a personal style. It is also true that there was little demand for *Krazy Kat*’s continuance. At the time of Herriman’s death, it was carried only by the Hearst papers at

96 Ibid., 26.
William Randolph Hearst's personal order. There is a mystery here. If Herriman's work was so good, why was it rejected by the mass audience? For some reason it did not feel right to the average reader, despite the fact that Krazy was a perennial underdog, a consistently popular comic type. Perhaps the inner tension caused by Herriman's hidden background found its way into the strip and made the reader feel uneasy. Krazy was not just an underdog, he was an outsider, a black outsider, racially incapable of social acceptance during the twenties and thirties. The cartoonist seemed trapped by his success during this period and feared that his concealed racial heritage would be discovered.

What is it about Krazy Kat that sets it apart from the other comic strips? Its primary themes, role reversal and obsession, were found in many other comic strips, although Herriman used a different angle. The basic plot of Herriman's most famous strip was based on the adventures of Krazy, an androgynous black Kat with no outstanding sex characteristics, who fell in love with Ignatz mouse. Herriman was often asked about the sex of Krazy Kat, particularly because he might refer to the cat as "he" or 'she" in the strip. He once replied as follows...

I don't know. I fooled around with it once: began to think the Kat is a girl--even drew up some strips with her being pregnant. It wasn't the Kat any longer; too much concerned with her own problems--like a soap opera. Know what I mean? Then I realized Krazy was something like a sprite, an elf. They have no sex. So that Kat can't be a he or a she. The Kat's a spirit--a pixie--free to butt into anything. Don't you think so? 97

97 McDonnell et al., Krazy Kat, 56.
Ignatz, aggressively masculine with a wife and children, hated cats and responded by beaming him/her with a brick whenever possible. Always looking for love in the wrong place, Krazy believed that Ignatz' actions were really a sign of his love. The triangle was completed by the presence of Offissa Bull Pupp, a canine policeman, who loved Krazy and tried to maintain order while protecting the Kat from Ignatz' bricks.98

The story line seems deceptively simple but Herriman endowed his cartoon characters with distinct personality traits. Krazy was sweet, loving, dreamy and innocent; an observer rather than a actor. The Kat often suffered and never actually received the love he needed yet travelled through life with a Chaplinesque dignity. He had a screwball comic logic reminiscent of Gracie Allen in vaudeville and Lucille Ball in "I Love Lucy". Ignatz, on the other hand, was skeptical, anarchic, opportunistic and shrewd. He was the pragmatic, worldly man of action, with a certain similarity to the persona of Groucho Marx in the Marx brothers' movies. Bull Pupp was an upright defender of the law, somewhat slow-witted but determined. Originally a minor character, he eventually completed the triangle as Krazy's protector. Herriman also created a number of interesting subordinate characters who supplied local color and added interest to the strip. The love triangle revealed Herriman's feelings on how obsession could control the lives of his characters. Krazy's obsessive love was as aberrant as Ignatz' obsessive hate. In both cases, the characters were totally oblivious of each others feelings and completely misread their actions.

98 As e.e. cummings describes the plot, "Dog hates mouse and worships "cat", mouse despises "cat" and hates dog, cat" hates no one and loves mouse. O'Sullivan, The Art of the Comic Strip, 24.
Role reversal, the other major theme is fairly common in the comics. In *Krazy Kat*, however, it is subordinated by the characters' love triangle. *Krazy* was not like the aggressive cats of Disney cartoons and Ignatz was no *Mickey Mouse*. In every strip, the tiny mouse knocked out the large *Kat*, however Herriman provided a twist. The *Kat* not the mouse was the more sympathetic character. Even though he was beamed in almost every strip, the *Kat* was not a weak fool but merely guilty of self-deception, just as the mouse was not physically weak despite his small size. The final irony was that the *Kat* actually enjoyed being beamed because he felt it proved he was loved. Herriman had a psychologist's understanding of human nature and mankind's capacity for self-deception. Although it contained elements of tragedy, *Krazy Kat* was often undeniably funny. Herriman used elements of slapstick from vaudeville routines and the antics of early movie comedians such as Chaplin and the Keystone Cops to add visual humor to his graphics.

The clever dialogue of the strip, its most original feature, also added both charm and complexity to the strip. The multi-lingual Herriman created a unique dialect, part vaudeville Yiddish, part French, part Spanish and Indian. It was linked together in rhythmic phrases that had ties to black rap and Navaho imagery. Herriman was a creole from New Orleans. His boyhood in the Crescent City with its rich heritage of black jazz musicians was evinced by the rhythms of *Ignatz* and *Krazy*’s dialogue. Judith O’Sullivan noted the similarity between the boasting of Herriman's characters and H. Rap Brown's example of the black folk-game of 'rappin' given in his autobiographical work, *Die Nigger Die*.⁹⁹ There is also a

similarity to modern "rap' music in its linguistic style. It was Herriman's language that undoubtedly intrigued poets such as cummings and literary critics like Seldes, just as the beautiful desert backgrounds of the later strips interested serious painters.

This is one strip that the author probably did consciously develop so that it could be read and enjoyed at several levels, but its very complexity kept it from becoming one of the major strips. To fully appreciate Krazy Kat took time, while the major objective of most comic strips was quick recognition and identification. The average reader did not appreciate fully Herriman's humor. While all of its parts, the artwork, the color in the later strips, the language and the plots were all excellent, in this case, the sum was less than the whole for the mass audience.

A careful reading of Seldes and another literary critic Robert Warshow, provides few clues to understanding Herriman's work. Seldes' essay was long on praise and short on insights. He called Herriman a "great ironist", and determined that Krazy Kat was a true work of art without providing any concrete analysis. Warshow, on the other hand felt "that Krazy Kat was best left alone." He along with other elitist critics, felt that Herriman's strip was a prime example of alienation in Lumpen culture. Warshow did not approve of mass culture. To him, it was not worth the effort to analyze Krazy Kat. Radical writer Franklin Rosemont came closer to the heart of Krazy Kat when he called it a utopian fantasy of an

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100 Krazy Kat undoubtedly gained popularity among the more educated members of society because Hearst first ran the strip for some time as a full page in "Arts" section of his papers. During this period, Krazy Kat was done in black and white.
101 Seldes, The Seven Lively Arts, 207-219.
idealized free society. To him, the black cat was a symbol of sabotage often used by IWW songwriters and cartoonists in the twenties. Rosemont felt Herriman used the Kat to show his sympathy for the underdog, in this case, the oppressed workers. In light of recent discoveries, it is more likely that he had an optimistic vision of a happier time free from racial hatred.

Current evidence seems to indicate that Herriman was passing for white. Had his racial background been known, he certainly would not have been welcome in the same newspaper circles. Is it possible that Krazy Kat failed to attract the mass audience because it was not ready for its hidden message. Krazy was a black Kat who suffered constant persecution from Ignatz yet managed to retain a love for humanity. The strip projected a message of hope for an integrated society years before the civil rights movement.

Discrepancies in Herriman's early biographical information have recently been uncovered by his most recent biographer, Patrick O'Donnell. As late as 1976, Maurice Horn listed him as the son of Greek immigrants. However, on his death certificate, his surviving daughter Mabel listed his grandparents as having been born in France. O'Donnell found that when George Joseph Herriman was born on August 22, 1880, his birth certificate classified him as colored. The census of 1880 listed both his parents as mulattoes and showed that several generations of his family had been born in Louisiana. Herriman may have been reluctant to admit his black

103 Franklin Rosemont, "Surrealism in the Comics I: Krazy Kat (George Herriman)," in Paul Buhle, Ed., Popular Culture In America (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1987), 119-127.
104 Maurice Horn, World Encyclopedia of Comics, 314.
105 McDonnell et al,Krazy Kat, 30.
heritage because his light-skinned parents had fled the Creole community in New Orleans to make a fresh start in California where they could pass as white. The fear of discovery may have reinforced his reluctance to talk about his personal life after he became a well-known figure in the world of show business and the arts.\textsuperscript{106} He was also always photographed wearing a hat, and seemed to be inordinately sensitive about his kinky hair.

Although nothing much is known about them, Herriman's family must have been part of the free black middle-class community in New Orleans. When increasing segregation at the end of the Reconstruction period in the South greatly limited opportunities for blacks, Herriman's father moved his family to Los Angeles. Herriman, senior, established several moderately successful businesses in California, including a barber shop and a bakery. He was prosperous enough to send his soon to high school.

Herriman attended St. Vincent's College, a small Jesuit secondary school in Los Angeles between the ages of eleven and seventeen. The precocious Herriman received a well-rounded and disciplined education in the humanities, philosophy and religion, which probably contributed greatly to the literary quality of his work.

Young Herriman also developed his artistic talent and was fined for drawing on the sidewalks of the Los Angeles business section. A rebellious youth, he was finally kicked out of the house when he sabotaged the family

\textsuperscript{106}Herriman drew \textit{Krazy Kat} in Hollywood for a time, and was acquainted with many movie comedians and writers, including the young Frank Capra. See Frank Capra, \textit{The Name above the Title}(New York:Macmillan,1971) He also wrote at least one movie review (of Charley Chaplin's film "Gold Rush" in 1925 for Motion Picture Classic). During this period, he undoubtedly became familiar with the antics of movie comedians which he later incorporated into his comic strip.
bakery products by adding salt to the doughnuts and putting a dead mouse in a loaf of bread.\textsuperscript{107} His father wanted him to choose a more respectable career, but when Herriman left school, talented sketch artists were still in demand. After a modest initial success in Los Angeles, he headed for New York in 1900 to seek his fortune. Unable to land newspaper work, he took a job with a Coney Island sideshow painting backdrops and was briefly a barker for a snake act. His cartoons began to appear in the humor magazines, and then the Pulitzer chain also carried some of his work. In 1901, he drew strips for two of the early syndicates, the Philadelphia North American and T.C. McClures'.\textsuperscript{108}

Herriman believed that he could produce a popular comic that would bring him financial success. In pursuit of this goal, he drew a variety of different strips trying to find the right format. The most self-revealing of his early works was a comic strip called \textit{Musical Mose} which he drew in 1902 for Pulitzer. \textit{Mose} was a poor black musician who got jobs performing for various ethnic groups by pretending to be a member of that particular nationality. At the end of each strip, he was unmasked as an impostor and his true identity was revealed. \textit{Mose} then fled, chased by an angry audience. The strip seems to have been an enactment of Herriman's innermost fears. However, despite, or perhaps because of his racial heritage, Herriman drew \textit{Mose} and his wife with the ugly stereotypical racial characteristics that were the accepted standard in cartoon art at the time, including thick lips and pop eyes.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{107} See Horn, \textit{World Encyclopedia of Comics}, 314.
\textsuperscript{108} McDonnell et al, \textit{Krazy Kat}, 32,33.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 34.
Herriman's comic talent was recognized quite early in his career. In 1902, he was prominently mentioned in an article about important cartoonists of the period along with the more established Swinnerton and Outcault. In the same year, he returned to Los Angeles to marry his (white) childhood sweetheart, Mabel Lillian Bridge. After the birth of their first child, Herriman was hired first by Pulitzer's *New York World* and then by Hearst who early recognized and appreciated his talent. In the freewheeling atmosphere of the first comic decade, he and many other cartoonists constantly developed new strips searching for a hit. They worked and played together in the high-flying, convivial and bohemian newspaper atmosphere, artist-journalists rather than specialists. Cartoonists from rival newspapers often covered the same events and were familiar with each other's style. During this period, young Herriman was a fun loving bon vivant, far from the shy and reclusive man he later became.

Unhappy with his job on Hearst's *American*, Herriman returned to California. There he continued to submit a variety of strips to the St. Louis based World Color Printing Co., a syndicate based in St. Louis. He eventually became a very successful staff cartoonist for another Hearst newspaper, the *Los Angeles Examiner* in 1906. In 1909, he was summoned to New York by Hearst where he had an opportunity to work with the star cartoonists under contract to his powerful organization. It was here that he would develop *Krazy Kat* in 1913. The cat and mouse first appeared in an earlier strip, *The Dingbat Family*, occupied more space in *The Family Upstairs* and finally took over as *Krazy Kat* and company became the most important part of the

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strip in Herriman's mind. Hearst admired Herriman's work, and began printing a full page of *Krazy Kat* in the Arts section. This undoubtedly helped make the *Kat* known to artists and intellectuals and to the more cultured better-educated readers. Although the Hearst papers were scorned by the intelligentsia, they read the theater and arts section. When Gilbert Seldes' book *The Seven Lively Arts* was published in 1927, its section on the comics highly praised *Krazy Kat*. Seldes' approval undoubtedly increased the strip's popularity among the educated classes.\(^{111}\)

Hearst eventually gave Herriman a lifetime contract with King Features to draw *Krazy Kat* and other strips exclusively for his feature service. Herriman continued to create new strips until the thirties when he began to devote all of his time to *Krazy Kat*. Many of his other comic strips were innovative and creative and he produced at least a dozen good ones. However, only *Krazy Kat* became a long running if not widely syndicated popular strip, mainly because it was the one that most interested Herriman.\(^{112}\)

Hearst's vote of confidence gave Herriman carte blanche to experiment and change *Krazy Kat* without fear of editorial coercion. Because he had complete artistic freedom unheard of in the comic world at this time, Herriman gradually made the strip more intellectually satisfying and philosophical but less commercial. After the tragic deaths of his wife and one of his daughters in the thirties, *Krazy Kat* became Herriman's private

\(^{111}\) According to Seldes, "*Krazy Kat*, the daily comic strip of George Herriman is, to me, the most amusing and fantastic and satisfactory work of art produced in America today." See Gilbert Seldes, "The *Krazy Kat* that Walks by Himself", *The Seven Lively Arts*, 207.

\(^{112}\) In the late thirties, when the nation's most popular strip, *Blondie*, ran in 1,000 papers, *Krazy Kat* ran in less than 50.
world. As the strip became more cerebral, it suffered a corresponding drop in popularity. It eventually became a cult comic strip that was praised by critics simply because it was not like the others. In the later stages of his career, Herriman gave the public what he wanted to produce, whether they liked it or not. He created strips that were so innovative that they were an inspiration to many other artists in various fields. However, the average person read the comics for a variety of reasons which did not necessarily include artistic inspiration or intellectual stimulation. This explains why *Krazy Kat* did not have the same audience as *Mickey Mouse*. While *Bringing Up Father* and *Mutt and Jeff* were popular in vaudeville sketches, *Krazy Kat* was made into a ballet. 113

In 1969, poet and novelist Conrad Aiken wrote the following,

> I get fun out of the comics. Indeed, they're so real to me that I actually find myself dreaming about them and becoming part of their tapestry. I have always since the *Yellow Kid* in my childhood and *Krazy Kat* in college, been an addict and a great believer in the comic strips—both comics and non-comics—as being of tremendous importance as a social force. This cannot be underestimated... the comics reach people who are in other ways inaccessible, and it's extraordinary how quick the comic artists are to seize on social wrongs and weaknesses and expose them in a way that really gets home to the people who need to be got home to! Marvelous, and done with such unerring skill. As for me, I read a great many. I take three papers a day to get my bellyful. 114

Aiken provides an excellent argument for the lasting popularity of the comics in American society. First of all, they are entertaining and provide a

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113 A jazz pantomime ballet, *Krazy Kat* was scored by John Alden Carpenter and choreographed by Adolph Boehm. It was first performed in New York city, Jan. 10, 1922. Herriman wrote the scenario and designed the costumes and scenery. The ballet was not very successful but was favorably reviewed by Stark Young and Deems Taylor. See Stark Young, "*Krazy Kat*", The New Republic, 11 October 11, 1922, 175.

sense of belonging and continuity. Next, they are readily available and reach people on all levels of society, even those normally "unreachable". Finally, they are responsive to the concerns and problems of all segments of American society, and remain irreverent, outspoken and unabashedly lowbrow.

Even after they became part of big business under syndicate management, the funnies retained their uncanny ability to transmit their own sympathetic version of the basic American values. They have continued to maintain their position as the nation's most widely circulated entertainment for almost one hundred years. The elemental themes developed in the nineteenth century are still popular while short-lived topical comics project current interests and problems. The newspaper comic strips remain an accurate barometer of cultural trends and changing values in our society. They continue to provide pleasure and comfort for millions of Americans every day just as they keep making substantial profits for their creators.
Psychologist Martin Grotjahn wrote in 1957,

Man has just begun to find some of the answers to the problems of survival; he must now tackle the problems of prosperity. If he does not start soon, technology with its efficiency may lead to annihilation.\footnote{Martin Grotjahn, Beyond Laughter, 205.}

Although he was referring to the problems of the atomic age, Americans of the 1890's experienced similar anxieties related to the expansion of technology and prosperity. They were alternately worried and confused by their rapidly changing society. Increasing secularism and materialism had eroded traditional religious beliefs yet provided no satisfactory substitute. Large numbers of immigrants threatened the very structure of society. Mechanization and consolidation of industry drastically changed the nature and intensity of work just as the rapid growth of the cities increased the isolation of the individual. In an attempt to find some relief from the pressures of society, the new urban society eagerly accepted the escape provided by mass entertainments such as the comics. Many undoubtedly took comfort in the comic trials of the symbolic everyman figures that were so popular during the comics' early years. The misadventures of an Andy Gump or a Happy Hooligan helped the newspaper audience to more easily accept their own problems, while the antics of the Katzenjammer Kids allowed readers to vicariously thumb their
noses at organized society. Even under syndicate management, the Sunday and weekday funnies retained their uncanny ability to transmit a sympathetic understanding of the basic American values.

The formative years of the comics ended as the third decade of the twentieth century began. At this time, they were firmly established as the most important part of the newspaper. They had also become a significant part of the daily routine for most Americans. Although the purpose and style of newspaper comic strips have changed little since they first appeared in the 1890's, their content has varied over the years. None of the popular strips from the first decade is carried today by a major American newspaper. There are several reasons for this. All the cartoonists from the first three decades are no longer alive. Their comics were either withdrawn or faded because they were continued by a lesser talent. Even strips with established elemental themes fail if they are poorly plotted or drawn. Readers lost interest in other because they were too closely tied to short-lived topical themes. Lack of available space also terminated some strips. The reduction in size of most comic sections adopted during World War II was retained by many papers after the war. This effectively reduced the space available for the Sunday comic section. Increased paper and production costs in recent years have also hurt the newspaper industry and have helped make comics editors more selective. Finally, the total number of daily newspapers has been severely curtailed due to intense competition from radio and television. The decline in daily and Sunday newspapers has further reduced the available space for comic strips. Despite all of these problems, the demand for comics remains strong in the United States as well as in the rest of the world.
On the positive side, newspaper comic strips have retained their original ability to grow and change along with American society and culture. Each decade has seen the emergence of up to a dozen or more innovative new strips featuring elemental or topical characters. The best and/or the most popular of these usually are signed by a major syndicate and incorporated into the comic strip family on the funny pages. If a new strip manages to gain a sizable audience after syndication, it is usually secure for a decade or more. The comic medium has not stagnated since it reached maturity in the twenties. Many different comic characters have filled the panels and boxes that have been the standard on the comic pages during the last ninety years.

During the twenties the trend was toward an increased emphasis on the single woman in the comic strips. For the first time young, attractive, working women like Winnie Winkle The Breadwinner(1920) and Tillie the Toiler(1921) were the heroines of their own strips. This genre was initiated by A.E.Heyward(Somebody's Stenog) in 1910, but did not really take off until the more liberated twenties. The domestic life and youth oriented strips that were a product of the previous decade also retained their audience during the twenties.

The Depression decade of the thirties brought a new type of escapist entertainment, the continued adventure, to the comic pages. A large number of suspenseful story strips were added to the comic section at this time. They ranged from the jungle drama of Tarzan (1929) and The Phantom (1936) as well as the medieval pageant of Prince Valiant (1937), the space fantasy of Buck Rogers (1929) and the cliff-hanging plots of Little
Orphan Annie (1924).\(^2\) The elemental anarchic themes so popular in the early years were also briefly threatened during the thirties. The trauma of the Depression created a desire for law and order themes in the comics. The most famous of the detective strips, *Dick Tracy*, dates from 1931.\(^3\)

During the thirties, comic strip characters also became a major part of the motion picture industry due to the success of Walt Disney's animated cartoons. The new cartoon shorts were so popular that the most visible comic character of this decade was *Mickey Mouse*, who came from the movies not the comic pages. Most of the early comic characters developed for animation on the silver screen followed in the anarchic footsteps of first generation comic strip characters like the *Katzenjammer Kids*. Even *Mickey Mouse* who worked hard and lived right triumphed over the threatening agents of organized society. At first glance *Mickey Mouse* seemed to be an anthropomorphic WASP, yet a close analysis of his behavior showed that he was not as conformist and diligent as he initially seemed. Mickey's size, cuteness, and most importantly, his place as a non-human, allowed him to act in ways that were forbidden in the real world. Despite his industry and patriotism, he brought with him something of the *Katzenjammer's* mischief. Grotjahn saw *Mickey Mouse* as...

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\(^2\) Although this strip made its debut in 1924, when it was first developed by Harold Gray, Sidney Smith's assistant on The Gumps, it did not hit its stride until the thirties. Then Daddy Warbucks turned into a millionaire adventurer who involved Annie in his exploits.

\(^3\) William Henry Young, "Images of Order: American Comic Strips during the Depression, 1929-1938," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1969) unpublished doctoral dissertation. Young had some good insights on this type of strip. He contended that the comic strips of the thirties contained a definite response to the Depression because of their continued emphasis on stability and order. Young found a number of law and order messages in the plots of the comics, the types of characters used and even the style of illustration.
the small invincible invulnerable utterly victorious and triumphant, old child...He is funny and lovable and his smallness enables him to do the forbidden things we wished to do as children but were not allowed to...Mickey is not intimidated by knowledge and experience. Reality has no power over him. His superiority guarantees him more than old fashioned immortality. In an offhand way, he conquers the most powerful enemy mankind has today; the machine. With the help of magical tricks he forces the machine into submission...He humanizes all machines and makes them live and he mechanizes all living things just as he himself seems to be a mechanized toy.4

This was particularly comforting to a generation that had seen their faith in technology and progress destroyed by a crippling economic depression fed by industrialization. Many also feared that their lives were being taken over by the ever smarter machines created as labor saving devices for use at home and at work. Mickey Mouse is also the parent of the superhero of the forties. Superman, created a few years later appeared to be human, but had the same magical powers and mastery of the machine first utilized by Mickey. The superheroes were more idealistic and directed their powers at saving mankind from destruction. Mickey’s powers were used in a personal, selfish and childish way his own benefit. Once again he fulfilled the wishes of his audience.

Most of the adventure and detective strips popular during the thirties reinforced the values of social order and control, particularly Little Orphan Annie and Dick Tracy. Despite the popularity of law and order strips, the irreverent anarchic strips of the early years were never completely displaced. However, although adventure strips retained their audience during World War II, their popularity gradually declined during the more permissive sixties and seventies. Soap opera strips based on the realistic home dramas

4See Martin Grotjahn, Beyond Laughter, 220.
so popular on radio during the Depression had their counterparts in the comic pages at this time. *Apple Mary* (1932) still running today as *Mary Worth* is the best known of this type.

Another important vehicle for the publication of comic strips, the comic book, became part of the comic strip industry during the thirties.\(^5\) For the first time in the United States, a variety of comic strip adventures were created for publication in book form rather than in the newspaper. Compilations of popular newspaper comic strips had been printed in book form since the first decade of comic strip history and sold very well. However, they were collections of strips first drawn for newspaper readers rather than new material.\(^6\) Comic books featured original work, often on topics that were taboo in the family-oriented newspaper comic sections. Eventually many Americans became upset by the violent and gory themes of comic books particularly because they were read by millions of children and young adults. In the early fifties, concerned parents and educators banded together in a nationwide effort to ban comic books. This was a much broader-based movement than the one directed against the newspaper comics forty years earlier. Perhaps our fear of decay from within fed by the communist menace of the cold war years created a paranoid attitude towards comic books that was missing in 1910. This time the controversy generated so much heat that the comics were eventually investigated by Estes.

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\(^5\) The Japanese were the first to print large numbers of comic books in the twenties and they are still avid comic book readers.

Kefauver's senatorial committee in 1954. To prevent the crippling government-imposed censorship which seemed likely, the comic book publishers quickly created the Comics Code Authority. The Code, which is still operative was concerned only with the content of comic books not the family-oriented newspaper strips.

In the forties, American anxiety over world affairs also helped the popularity of a completely new kind of adventure strip that featured a hero with super-human powers. Superman, the first of the superheroes, was created by a couple of seventeen-year-olds in 1938 and made his debut in a comic book in that same year. However the superhero comic strip was a child of the forties. A number of these invincible characters, all sporting dual identities (mild mannered citizen/powerful fighter for truth and justice) fought crime and the Axis powers in the funny pages during this decade. Superhero comics are still very popular today in comic book format, but most have faded from the newspaper pages.

In the fifties, an old favorite, the joke or gag comic strip regained its original vitality in the comic pages. A number of new humor strips have been added to the comic section in recent years. In the fifties for the first time the newspaper comic pages added strips that featured social and political satire. This new genre actually started in the forties started with the gentle Pogo (1948), but Walt Kelley, its creator was ahead of his time. Satirical strips first became widely syndicated in the fifties. It was followed

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7 It also resulted in the publication of a polemic against the comics, Frederic Wertham's Seduction of the Innocent. (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1954).
8 Snoopy the Beagle and Garfield the Fat Cat are the two most widely syndicated.
closely by the wistfully insightful *Peanuts* (1950) drawn by Charles Schultz. Schultz' parable of modern society acted out by children who reason like adults has emerged as the most popular comic strip of all time. It is consistently ranked as a top favorite of both readers and professional cartoonists.

Aggressive and outspoken satire came to the comics in 1970 when Gary Trudeau's *Doonesbury* first appeared and took the country by storm. It was later followed by Berke Breathed's *Bloom County*. Neither Trudeau nor Breathed have shied away from satirizing controversial political, social and environmental issues in their strips. The post-war strips on the whole have been more sensitive to social issues and have improved their treatment of minorities, although more progress is needed in this area. There are still very few major strips that feature women or minorities as a primary character and even fewer that are drawn by members of these groups.

The seventies saw a brief decline in the number of syndicated newspaper comic strips. Many of the older cartoonists retired during this decade and were not immediately replaced by fresh new talent. This trend seems to be reversing in the eighties. A number of strips drawn by people new to the comic field have recently gained national recognition. They

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9 In the late sixties, it was estimated that Charles Schultz earned approximately $50,000,000 a year from the strip. It has been made into numerous animated television cartoons, several feature-length films and a musical while a large number of *Peanuts* book reprints have been published. A spiritual exegesis of the comic strip has also been provided by theologian-evangelist Robert L. Short. See Robert L. Short, *The Gospel According to Peanuts* (Richmond va.:John Knox Press,1964).

10 Al Capp's *Lil Abner* deserves a mention in this category, however this strip moved from liberal to conservative and from comedy to serious story depending on the changing mood of its creator.
include *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson, *Cathy* by Cathy Guisewite, *For Better or Worse* by Lynn Johnston, *The Far Side* by Gary Larson and *Garfield* by Jim Davis.\(^\text{11}\) Despite economic problems in the newspaper field, the number of newspapers nationwide, seems to have stabilized. The number of nationally circulated syndicated comics has recently increased and a major new syndicate, Creators, has attracted attention in the publishing end of the comics industry.

Censorship of the newspaper comics is still a controversial issue. The trend towards the graphic presentation of sex and sex-related themes including homosexuality and abortion has reached the comic section in the eighties. However, controversial strips are still held out of the comic pages by many newspaper editors who feel that they are out of place in a family oriented section of the paper. When Gary Trudeau drew a series of strips that satirized the "Right to Life" movement it was run by only a tiny percentage of the more than eight hundred newspapers that subscribed to *Doonesbury*.\(^\text{12}\) In 1984, Henry Raduta, who writes the script for *Winnie Winkle*, developed a story line that had *Winnie’s son Billy* announce that he and a male friend were lovers. However, when it was immediately rejected by the two largest papers running the strip, the plot line was changed.\(^\text{13}\) Newspaper editors and syndicates continue to censor the

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\(^\text{11}\) *Cathy* and *For Better or Worse* are also important because they are the first major new strips drawn by women, Cathy Guisewite and Lynn Johnston, respectively. See Elsa Nystrom, "Comic Women of the ’80’s," unpublished paper presented at Kennesaw State College, January 19, 1988. In 1986, Lynn Johnston won the Reuben Award for the outstanding cartoonist of the year. This was the first time a woman was nominated for the prestigious 40-year-old award. See *Editor and Publisher*, 26 April 1986, 64.

\(^\text{12}\) See *MS*, November 1985, 10-11.

\(^\text{13}\) See *Editor and Publisher*, 21 January 1984, 41.
comics, imposing their standards on the industry. The attitude of the people involved with producing the comics has remained conservative in regard to sexuality and "bad" language. Adult topics are confined to *Doonesbury* and *Bloom County* although they are sometimes used in soap opera and adventure strips. In addition, today's comics are carefully scrutinized to eliminate any of the racial or ethnic stereotypes or slurs so common in the early strips.

Unfortunately, general prejudice against comic strips has not been eliminated. Periodically parents and educators make a determined effort to eliminate them. All these attempts have failed because the comics do not deserve to die. They remain a valid expression of American society and culture presented in an entertaining manner. They ask little and provide much in the way of amusement and stimulation, with a quickness that suits a fast-paced modern society.

Comics are a true American folk art, a technically sophisticated yet emotionally primitive expression of American life made possible by a union of art and technology. They are expansive rather than inward-looking and provide a common denominator for our urban community. Newspaper comic strips are an art form that efficiently utilizes our love of speed and technology. The comic strip has total freedom to grow and change. Unlike the television series which is limited by its character's growth, aging or

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14 In the sixties, uncensored and irreverent underground *comix* gained popularity with the youth culture. These *comix* which often included pornography and scatological language began in *The East Village Other* and *Zap Comix*. The *comix* had several talented artists, particularly Robert Crumb, but despite a brief period of widespread underground popularity, they have not become part of the mainstream in America. See Les Daniels, *The Comix*, pp. 168-180. Also see "As the Artist Sees It: Interviews with Comic Artists R. Crumb and Bill Griffith," in Paul Buhle, ed., *Popular Culture*, 132-135.
contract disputes, the cartoonist alone decides the fate of his characters. This freedom and flexibility has been a major factor in the continued success of the comics. Comic strips should continue to bring daily entertainment and comforting continuity to millions of Americans in a changing world as long as newspapers are able to provide a format for their distribution.
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**UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS**


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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date 2/7/87

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