

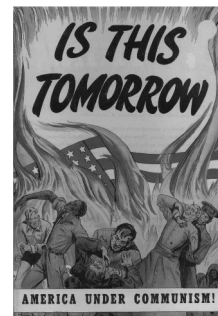
Comic Books in Crisis: The 1950s



1

The Cold War

- > 40 year long confrontation between U.S. and Soviet Union after WWII
- represented very different systems
 - democracy, capitalism (U.S.)
 - totalitarianism, communism (USSR)
- no direct war between the two sides
 - “wars” waged on political, economic, cultural fronts
 - direct wars elsewhere
- two major themes reflected in culture
 - fear of communism
 - atomic energy
 - enthusiasm
 - anxiety
 - Reflected in movies, literature, high & low art, music, comics, design, architecture, fashion, etc.



2

Comics after WWII: Crisis and Decline

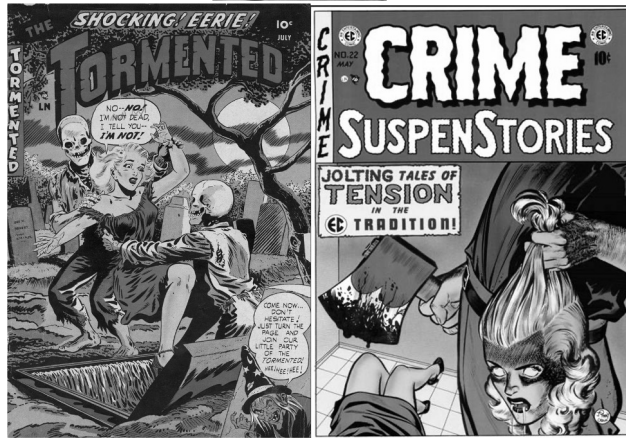
- Comic Book Industry went through a number of crises in aftermath of World War II
- initially industry was strong
 - in 1946, 546 million comics sold in U.S.
- But serious decline from mid-1950s
 - reputation of comics declined
 - demand fell
- Plus, growing criticisms against perception of “sex and violence” in comic books
 - Catholic Church
 - commentators connected rise in postwar “juvenile delinquency” to comic books
 - read Wright, p. 88
 - a low culture / high culture bias
 - superhero comics came under attack
 - read Wright, p. 92
 - most important critic: Frederick Wertham

3

- Fredric Wertham (1895-1981)
 - psychiatrist
 - wrote *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954)
- claimed comics caused American youth to become delinquents
- highlighted sex, violence, drug use, homosexuality, poor morals
- his research was not based on any systematic study (i.e., no actual correlation)
 - based on interviews with parents
- but was very persuasive to American public
 - read Wright, p. 96



- focused on “crime comics” – which included superhero comics
 - Superman, etc.
 - also Horror Comics
 - produced by Bill Gaines (EC Comics)
- read “The Superman Conceit”
- read Wright, pp. 162-163
- various politicians all over country introduced legislation to censor comics
- led to Senate Hearings [46:15-]
 - “Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency”
 - read Wright, p. 168
- creation of Comics Code
 - “Comics Magazine Association of America Code” (1954)
 - read Wright pp. 172-173



4



5

- **Late 1950s**
- Comic Book industry in stagnation
- Causes
 - Comics Code
 - lost older teen market
 - rise of Television
- Only company that stayed the course:
 - DC Comics
 - had always been 'clean-cut'
 - DC had always been on the side of "American values"
 - read Wright, pp. 184-185
 - by 1962, DC had cornered a massive 30% of all comic book market
 - main characters:
 - Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman
 - revived characters from World War II
 - the Flash (1956): read Wright, p. 183
 - writer Julius Schwartz reinvented the Green Lantern (1959)
 - Hawkman and Hawkgirl



Showcase # 4 (1956)



All-American Comics # 16 (1940)



Showcase # 22 (1959)

6

Justice League of America



The Brave and the Bold # 28 (1960)



Justice League of America # 1 (1960)