

# The Case AG

Lynn, Gabriel

The case against  
ADT 8109



This pamphlet presents its case specifically against adventure strips and moronic creations parading under the banner of "comics." The case is against "so-called comics" which fail to meet the wholesome standards of good recreational reading; it is not a wholesale condemnation of "comics" per se.

The fact still remains, however, that many parents, misled by the ring of the word "comics," are unaware of the damage done by the moronic type. In view of this, we present Mr. Lynn's urgent plea to do something about the problem.

If your school has a Parent-Teacher group, you will want to make this pamphlet available to the organization. Copies will be sold below cost, at 3c each in lots of ten or more. Single copies 5c.

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128 E. 10th St., St. Paul 1, Minn.

# **The Case Against The Comics**

A Study  
by  
Gabriel Lynn

**Catechetical Guild**

**1944**

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## FOREWORD

Parents concerned with the growing problem of juvenile delinquency might do well to give close scrutiny to a contributing factor found in nearly every American home today—the misnamed comics and the multiple newspaper comic strips.

In order to determine whether there is any correlation between juvenile delinquency and the comics an exhaustive study and analysis of 92 comic books and more than 1,000 newspaper comic strips was made.

The facts and conclusions which follow in this **CASE AGAINST THE COMICS** are based on this survey and are of a nature to warrant the most thoughtful consideration of parents.

The conclusions concerning the content matter, the manner in which many of the comic books are merchandised and the organized campaign to lull the fears of parents and educators should be cause for judicious reflection.

Gabriel Lynn

## I: Statement of the Case Against the Comics.

Children, in increasing numbers, are arrested by police and juvenile authorities for the theft of merchandise from markets and other retail establishments. These unhappy youngsters have not lacked expert schooling in the methods used in such circumstances. The technique is depicted regularly in the comic-strip adventures of master chisellers, swindlers, and ne'er-do-wells.

Concerned observers are increasingly distressed by the problem of scantily attired girls of high-school age. Perhaps they have been reading and studying a comic saga adequately summed up in the words of the gray-haired mistress of a band of sharpers: "Bring on the suckers!" The title page describes this charmer with the legend: "She's rough, tough and nasty!" In the 31 panels of the particular episode studied there is supplied a detailed description of the measures employed in swindling victims. This character poses with abandoned seductiveness to lure susceptible males with the brazen invitation of her exaggeratedly feminine body. She employs "spiritualism" to hoodwink deluded women. Only an attempted holdup by gangsters brings the police and lands her in a cell. Good has triumphed—but not too definitely. The concluding panel hastens to assure the reader that next month will bring more "thrilling adventures" with this so-called "heroine."

In spite of the ultimate victory over evil which is the standard formula employed in nearly all of the comic books, this conquest by good almost invariably is deferred until the final action. The preceding portions, making up most of the whole, are devoted to the depiction of horror, assault, thinly veiled seduction, mayhem, sadism, murder, and extra-legal activities going counter to every basic principle of American liberty.

The standards of thought and behavior encountered in those portions in which the plot is unfolded are almost without exception bad. Violence is glorified. In the 92 comic books included in this study, deeds of minor or major violence were found illustrated in no fewer than 91 per cent! It must be emphasized that the one element which receives wholly disproportionate treatment in the comics is violence. Again and again scenes of physical assault, savage brutality, sadistic tortures are shown.

Parents of young children have frequently been obliged to withhold comic books of this nature from youngsters whose nervous excitement was so great as to prevent sleep. In an effort to abate the alarm of parents, an argument is offered by one group of apologists for the comics who declare: "Psychologists point out that it is not the comics which create fear or distress, but rather the child's own neurotic fantasy which fastens upon the pictured people and creatures to objectify his

fears. A child who lies awake nights because of frightening stories, whether in comics or classics, presents special problems which call for careful consideration not in relation to his reading alone but to more fundamental emotional needs.”\*

This statement receives little support from majority opinion. These unnamed psychologists claim the problem is traceable to more “fundamental emotional needs”—not saying just what these needs are, and leaving undeveloped the fact that every growing child presents an emotional problem.

Consider the case of seven-year-old Helen whose mother hastened to her bed when she heard the child weeping hysterically and in a panic of fear. Helen had been poring over a horror comic book early in the evening, one in which a monstrosity had suddenly “grown” several heads and arms and hands and had proceeded, unaided, to capture a band of evil-doers after first subjecting these criminals to savage physical assaults. When she quite naturally cried out and became fearful in the darkened room, she presented no “special problem.” Her “fundamental emotional need” was only for parents wise enough to do what her parents did do: shut off the supply of comic books.

It must further be recognized that the comic books in far too many instances are a menace to chastity, a fact equally applicable to many newspaper strips. There is a ten-

\*Child Study, Summer, 1943.

dency to present female characters scantily attired and with their sexual characteristics emphasized to the extent of exaggeration. Male heroes are often clad in garments which stress their masculinity. Episodes abound in which relations between the sexes are given lewdly provocative treatment and there is often a furtively latent rather than overt suggestiveness which is extremely likely to stimulate unwholesome sexual curiosity in the young.

There is an additional sexual menace in the frequency with which physically abnormal characters are presented. Such monstrosities and the unnatural situations in which they are depicted tend toward the development of an unhealthy mental state which is recognized as favorable to the growth of serious sexual disturbances. The behavior of these abnormal persons—in the episodes in which are enacted the evil eventually to be overcome by good—tends to pervert moral character, thus providing fertile soil for the growth of sadistic and masochistic traits. Schrenck-Notzing coined the term "algolagnia" to describe the connection between sexual excitement and pain. Dr. John Rathbone Oliver, associate in medicine on the faculty of Johns Hopkins University, records his observation of the excited lustfully gloating intentness with which victims of algolagniacal urges watch any type of action, real or portrayed, in which pain is inflicted by one person upon another. While such discussions are properly



to be reserved for clinical circles, it is manifest that children should not be permitted to form reading habits which may with the passing of time develop into tragically serious conditions.

A large number of the comic books depict the heroic adventures of one or more characters whose philosophy may only be described as un-American and in a few instances, anarchistic. The vigilante spirit is rife in the comics: the gestapo method is glorified. A plot-pattern is used by many script-writers with a self-imposed mission to correct injustices, to eradicate evil and its practitioners. Throughout subsequent episodes he will be shown ferreting out criminals, determining their guilt, pronouncing judgment, inflicting punishment—usually capital—upon them, all this without reference to due processes of law. Always, in these sequences, the offenses committed by the malefactors are portrayed in such detail as to constitute a veritable handbook of criminal techniques for impressionable young readers.

An important part of what we proudly esteem as "The American Way" has to do with our lawfully established methods of dealing with lawbreakers. We set up and maintain police organizations, prosecuting attorneys, grand juries, judges and trial juries, and have created an elaborate series of safeguards to assure that no man, however grave his offense, shall be tried, convicted, and punished except by due process of law. Any lim-

itation placed upon these safeguards constitutes a threat to the perpetuation of American liberties and represents a step toward the type of oppression of which Adolf Hitler stands as a current symbol.

Of late, there has been a tendency on the part of comics to glorify characters who are engaged in crusading activities which infringe upon these liberties. Even harmless appearing child "commandos" act in the comics, as investigating police officers, as grand juries, as trial judges and juries, and, in certain instances, as jailers and even as executioners. The individuals upon whom all of these illegal attentions are visited are, of course, shown to be lawbreakers—but where in all the body of our laws is to be found provision for such action by volunteer vigilante groups working outside the regularly constituted agencies of law and order?

Manifestly the ultimate result of a steady diet of such fare must be to condition the child mind for a philosophy akin to that fostered by the dictators. Certainly all of it is in conflict with the standards and principles of the United States and of our democratic form of government. It is one of the noble and inspiring tenets of our national creed that it is better that a hundred guilty persons should escape than that one innocent individual should unjustly suffer—and to this principle the whole spirit of vigilante procedure is in opposition. The vigilante spirit is the mob spirit, the Ku-Klux spirit, the unleash-

ing of wild, unreasoning passions to deal with situations which call for the calm deliberation and impartial judgments which are provided by our laws.

It is a serious count in the indictment of the comic books and strips that they do violence to this American principle. The sensational exploits of individuals or groups engaged in executing masked and hooded justice have proved profitable for the purveyors of comic books, but this fact remains unshaken: No matter how despicable the villains against whom this "justice" is aimed, no matter how triumphant the final defeat of vice by virtue, it is neither Christian nor American to permit the young to be taught in this way the pernicious totalitarian doctrine that the end justifies the means. This is, in a majority of all the instances studied in this survey, the principle upon which the creators of the comic-book characters operate, and it is a wicked fallacy toward whose exposure every generation of Americans from the time of George Washington has contributed, many with their lives.

Another serious objection to many of the comics is that they depict characters and situations which bear no practical relation to real life and real persons.

The immature mind, raptly following these fantastic adventures, becomes ill prepared for the realities of existence. The world of the comics is, in the main, an incredible world of make-believe, with heroes utterly heroic and

villains unrelievedly villainous. In this respect the comics recognize but two tones: a spotless white and an inky black. There are no grays. The effect of this upon the child moving toward maturity must be damaging.

One need not go beyond the newspaper comics to obtain corroboration of this. In real life, the "hero" of one particular strip would rarely if ever be outside of jail. His activities, between amorous interludes with waitresses and chorus girls, consist almost entirely of swindling operations of one variety or another. A feminine character in the same strip is regularly shown engaging in escapades suggestive of adultery. A recent chapter dealt with the reappearance of one of her former suitors who was promptly taken into her home as a "boarder," and the ensuing episodes could scarcely fail to suggest even to youthful readers that her relations with her returned admirer exceeded in intimacy the conventional landlady-boarder connection. The youthful brother of the "hero" in real life, would assuredly be a regular ward of the authorities dealing with juvenile delinquents, so lawless and antisocial are his exploits.

No attempt is made by the artist or writer of this "comic" plot to suggest that this misbehavior is anything but "smart," or that retribution awaits the wrongdoer. It appears daily and Sunday in a large number of newspapers and also in comic-book format—evil consistently "outsmarts" good.

There is the further sexual danger in such

comic books that they condition the youthful reader for the openly salacious literature which has become so grave a menace to American youth. The youthful comic-book addict soon finds that he craves ever stronger and more vicious fare for his thrill-jaded appetite. Like the drug addict, he begins with the comparatively light dose afforded by certain of the comics and then, after a conditioning interval, seeks more extreme material. He then becomes a ready "prospect" for the peddlers of the indescribably vile pornographic literature concerning the widespread sale of which Courtney Ryley Cooper has convincingly written in his invaluable book, **Designs in Scarlet**. Such vulgar books and pamphlets depict the men and women made popular in the regular comic books and strips as engaging in unspeakably obscene behavior. Mr. Cooper, an observer and investigator thoroughly hardened and "seasoned"—or so he believed himself to be at the outset of his investigations into this evil which covered a period of more than a year—found himself sickened by the widespread prevalence of this highly organized corruption of American youth. In roadhouses and other resorts where mere children nightly gathered to engage in forbidden drinking, improper dancing, and general dissipation, the peddlers of obscene literature were almost invariably present and active.

Children do not walk until they have learned to crawl. Neither do adolescents

plunge abruptly into the slime of such depraved pornography without having first undergone a term of conditioning in which they have been led, step by step, to the extremes which Mr. Cooper discovered.

It must not be assumed that there is any intention here to hold the creators of the standard comic book and comic strip characters in any degree responsible for the vile productions of those who publish and distribute the pornographic material herein described. But the unpleasant fact must be faced that in catering to the sensation-craving tastes of youthful readers as they do in all too many instances in their books and strips, they contribute measurably toward conditioning a market for the filth-peddlers.

## **II: What Do the Publishers of Comic Books Say in Defense of Their Product?**

The defensive campaign is conducted on two principal lines. The first of these is based upon a slogan of the comic book publishers, i.e., "Good triumphs over evil in the comics." The second line consists of variations on the theme that the comic book is here to stay, whether parents like it or not; that it isn't really so bad, especially when compared with the penny-dreadfuls of an earlier age; that even if it does present certain undesirable aspects, it is nevertheless a force which must be reckoned with and endured because children insist upon its continuation.

This line of argument leads inevitably to some amazing conclusions. For example: in a survey entitled "Looking at the Comics," prepared by the Children's Book Committee of the Child Study Association, parents are warned not to prohibit reading of the comic books by their children, as such interdiction "may only shake their confidence in our ability to 'understand'." Furthermore, this group cautions, "Prohibitions are likely to invite undercover reading, black market trading, and other evils." And then, in a perhaps unintentionally revealing afterthought, the dictum follows: "All taste is a process of development of the crude to the more subtle forms."

Here, surely, is great nonsense. Dangerous nonsense. Here, moreover, are half truths which demand close scrutiny and appraisal. Consider, for instance, the slogan, "Good triumphs over evil in the comics," already discussed in the first section of this report. The evils over which final victory is gained are first depicted in the most graphic detail, with the result that youthful readers become familiar with criminal techniques in every imaginable department of crime. In the 92 comic books which form the basis of the present study, I found 14 distinct techniques of murder, each shown in sufficient detail to leave nothing to the imagination. True, the murderer or murderers were in each instance brought to justice (more often than not by unlawful means!) but without erasing from

the mind the details of the crimes perpetrated.

Do children remember the ultimate triumph of good and forget the details of the evil? Here is a revealing light on this question, reported by a prominent state official who is the father of two small children less than ten years of age.

This gentleman, hearing excited outcries from a group of children playing in his yard, went out to inquire into the cause. He found them dancing and shouting about one of their young playmates who had been fastened to a tree: he was the "bad man" in a scene they were re-enacting from one of the good-triumphs-over-evil comics. Lacking rope with which to bind the juvenile villain of their game, they had procured a wire clothesline; when the official cited went over to unfasten the now terrified child, he found that his arms were already swelling from the tightly wound wire which confined him. Only this father's curiosity prevented serious consequences. On another occasion, reported in the newspapers, a small boy met death by hanging while trying to imitate the flying feats of a comic book hero.

Do children relish the depiction of evil before the eventual triumph of good? Not so generally as propagandists for the comic books would have us believe. The state official mentioned above "eavesdropped" on his young daughter and a few of her playmates as they looked through a stack of comic



books, and was struck by their rejection of certain of these because "they show people all bloody," and was impressed by the comment of one little girl who remarked that "I can't sleep so good after I read that kind."

Is it true, as the propagandists allege, that "children enjoy silly language" and that they find a certain pleasure in "words that are not 'refined'?" Is it true that even members of the youngest age group (under 12) demand blood-and-thunder and tales of horror?

Here is an answer supplied by children of this group, as gleaned from their written statements, prepared without knowledge of the use to which these statements were to be put. Cooperating with this survey, Sister Jane Frances of the Marquette (Michigan) parochial schools gave to a group of her pupils as an assignment in composition the problem of explaining in their own words what they liked—and what they did not like—in comic books. On one point, these children were unanimous: without exception they mentioned by name one or more of the animal characters of the comic books and strips—Donald Duck, Porky Pig, Bambi, and others. Elsewhere there was less unanimity of opinion. For example, 66 per cent specifically opposed "killing people," "too much shooting," "bad things that get you into trouble," etc. Nearly half (48 per cent) referred to the presence in the comics of unrealistic characters and actions: "I don't believe some of it," "they don't have true pictures," "people couldn't do those

things," were observations noted among the comments.

Even after allowing for the probable desire of children to include comments likely to earn the approval of their teacher, the percentage of replies in which the words "right" and "good" and "bad" and "wrong" appeared is too great to be regarded as other than significant.

Similar responses from non-parochial schools, would afford a basis for comparison between the reactions of children who do not receive systematic religious instruction and those who do.

The conclusion drawn from this, in the light of the comic book propagandists' assertion that children prefer violent action, "silly language," and the like, is that these are preferred chiefly by those children who do not receive instruction and guidance designed to eliminate such preferences if they do indeed exist as claimed.

These claims of the comic book propagandists find little or no support in the written works of such eminent psychologists and specialists in child psychology as Dr. Carl R. Rogers (**Clinical Treatment of the Problem Child**), Dr. John Rathbone Oliver (**Psychiatry and Mental Health**), the Rev. Ioanne B. Ferreres, S. J., the Rt. Rev. Louis J. Nau, Drs. Karl Menninger, Starch, Klapper, and others of equal standing.

The persistence with which these assertions are made in written and oral defense of the

comics suggests that they may have been devised to bewilder and even mislead parents distressed by what they sense to be the menace inherent in many of the publications under consideration. Since the parroting of "silly language" and the imitating of swash-buckling, reckless action almost invariably follows the youthful perusal of the comics, the propagandists seek to allay parental concern over these manifestations by the assurance that they are "natural," that they are in effect a standard behavior pattern for children, and that the comics, therefore, represent no new potential threat responsible for them.

Further to minimize adult concern, the comics are casually dismissed as "the Fred Fearnots and the Frank Merriwells of today." In other words, the same negative argument is employed: earlier generations had bad reading habits, is the implication, so do not be alarmed because the present generation also has; the modern super-hero is no worse than Frank Merriwell. So runs the appeal. It is a half truth.

The whole truth is that only a minority of any of the earlier generations cited became addicted to the Frank Merriwells and other unrealistic characters of the paper-back school of "dime novels." Moreover, comparison of the Merriwell books with the average modern comic leads nowhere. The implausible Merriwell fought his battles on the baseball diamond, the football gridiron, and in other

such arenas. He did not engage in mass murder, in vigilante crusades against lawbreakers whose crimes were first described in informative detail. He did not inculcate in his readers a habit of vulgar speech; indeed, the heroic Merriwell was a purist in speech. The choice of this character and the stacks of books recording his saga was an unfortunate one for the comic book propagandists.

As for the argument that children must not be forbidden to purchase or read the comics lest we "shake their confidence in our ability to 'understand,'" or for fear of inviting "undercover reading, black market trading, and other evils," little can be found to recommend this line of reasoning.

If it were true, then parental bans on tobacco, narcotics, alcohol, and fornication might with equal wisdom and propriety be omitted. But it is not true. Most children between the ages of eight and fourteen—the group which the comic book publisher must enlist if his enterprise is to prosper—are not merely willing but eager to be guided by their parents' wisdom, so long as this wisdom is imparted to them in an understanding and understandable way. A more careful, objective study by the "child psychologists" so often referred to by the comic book propagandists would have revealed the truism that young children tend to look upon their mothers and fathers as the very fountainheads of wisdom; that they are anxious to gain parental approval; that most juvenile

misbehavior results from improper handling by parents rather than from an innate urge to misbehave or disobey in the child.

That the comics constitute an actual menace rather than a force which is here to stay and which therefore must be tolerated by parents, is suggested by such an authority as Judge J. M. Braude, of the Chicago Boys' Court, a wise, experienced, understanding jurist who has handled thousands of youthful offenders. Judge Braude does not share the easy complacency of the apologists for the comic book publishers. He says:

"As long as parents continue to let their youngsters read them just so long will comic books and newspaper strips continue to instill into children a **distorted and depraved conception of the meaning of real life and living.**"

"Distorted," "depraved" — severe words, these, but they represent the deliberate judgment of one who has for years dealt with the youthful victims of parental unwillingness to control the child's actions. Listing as "the motivating forces behind most juvenile and adolescent crimes" such factors as "improper literature, shady movies, 'he-man' radio thrillers, and the comics," Judge Braude blames these in turn upon "nagging or uninterested parents," and asserts that they all flourish in one soil—"inadequate homes," and by this he does not limit himself to homes which are economically inadequate.

Many parents have no idea of the danger-

ous influence of comic books. Perhaps the word comic has led them to believe that the subject matter of comic books is humorous and laugh provoking. Yet this is far from the truth for the word comic is a misnomer when applied to the adventures of mythical characters.

It is hard to believe that a parent who hands a child a comic book would ever for a moment dream of permitting that child to associate with the character types portrayed in comic continuities.

Without exception parents spend a great deal of time and go to much trouble to protect their children from the harsh unpleasant realities of life.

Yet the parent who hands a child an uncensored comic book is literally saying to that child: Meet these murderers, sadists and degenerates; observe and study how these inhuman monsters torture and kill their helpless victims; notice how inadequate the law enforcing authorities are in handling these criminals, and how necessary it is to set up illegal methods to bring about law and order.

Sister Mary Clare, S. N. D.,\* has a reply ready for the propagandists who would like to induce parents to regard the comic book as a force which is here to stay. She says: "Decent living, God loving parents will not sit back complacently and let money-mad pagans carry moral disease germs into the souls of their children. Such parents will re-

\*Comics. Our Sunday Visitor Press, Huntington, Ind., 10c.

double their efforts to train their children in self-mastery and self-sacrifice, knowing that only through self-discipline can there be true freedom."

Do the comic books, in fact, carry "moral disease germs into the souls of children?" Here are the findings.

### **III: Analysis of Contents of Comic Books.**

The comic books employed in this study were selected indiscriminately from the total number available to children and others at newsstands and "drugstores." Altogether, a total of 92 were studied; in several instances these included one or two successive issues of the same book. In addition to these, more than 1,000 newspaper comic strips were analyzed. The latter represents 27 different strips appearing during the months of August, September, and October, 1943.

The following are the principal objectionable features noted in the material studied. It will be understood that if, for example, four major crimes are depicted in four separate panels of the same issue, these have been counted as four.

#### **MAJOR CRIMES DEPICTED—216**

By this is meant 216 separate major felonies, depicted in greater or lesser detail, but in every instance included, in detail sufficient to afford at least a working knowledge of the technique employed by the criminal or criminals.

## MINOR CRIMES DEPICTED—309

In this group are included actions depicted in which the offenses were less than felonious, i.e., misdemeanors as defined by the criminal codes of most states.

### ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR—271

Antisocial behavior, actions not in themselves violations of either felony or misdemeanor statutes. Mere mischievous acts or annoying conduct are not included.

### PHYSICAL ASSAULTS—522

These include scenes in which acts of physical violence are performed upon human beings, with no obvious sadistic connotations but tending to glorify brute force, nearly all depicted with complete detail and an abundance of gore as the aftermath.

### LARCENIES—39

These represent individual panels or series of panels in which are shown the exact method employed in carrying out various forms of larceny, ranging from shoplifting and pocket-picking to complicated confidence game swindles.

### SADISTIC ACTS—86

Included here are clearly defined acts of sadism, of a type clearly recognizable as such. Included are several (11) instances of whipping, revealed in its true light in Courtney Ryley Cooper's shocking expose, **Designs in Scarlet**, as a vice far more prevalent in modern America than is suspected by most Americans. A typical sadistic performance included in this category: A



young girl is shown being beaten by a degenerate who is clubbing her about the head with the butt of a revolver; one panel shows the girl in close-up, prostrate on the floor, one ear torn loose, her mouth an unrecognizable pulpy mass, blood pouring from her wounds. (After eight pages, Good Triumphs over Evil; a self appointed crusader shoots the degenerate; following this extra-legal retribution the police are notified.)

#### VULGAR BEHAVIOR—186

The greatest single source of examples for this classification was a particular strip in which, for the three-month period studied, not a single day failed to contain one or more examples of gross vulgarity.

#### SUGGESTIVE ART—114

This ranges from the moderately suggestive to the patently pornographic, and examples were especially noteworthy on the luridly colored covers of certain comic books. The suggestiveness commonly takes the form of scantily clad females, frequently shown in wantonly seductive postures. The female form is drawn so as to emphasize, often almost grotesquely, the breasts, hips, and legs of the subjects. Several of the newspaper strips offend in this particular.

#### VULGAR SPEECH—491

This fault is widespread. Included as "vulgar" are examples of words and phrases of underworld origin and use, and manufactured words intended to suggest commonly employed profanity and blasphemy, such as "Judas

Priest," "gol dang," "jeez," and the like.

#### GROSS GRAMMATICAL ABUSES—194

This classification is self-explanatory, examples included being of the nature of "I seen," "I done," "He hain't," etc.

#### ONOMATOPOEIA—362

These manufactured words include the usual specimens, "glunk," "zock," "pow," and the rest.

#### PHYSICAL MONSTROSITIES—161

These present the total number of drawings of actual physical monstrosities, ranging from the merely grotesque to the revolting.

#### FANTASTIC SITUATIONS

#### AND ACTIONS—204

Included are scenes clearly divorced from any reasonable resemblance to reality—men walking up and down the sides of skyscrapers, holding a battleship up from the water, growing twenty pairs of arms and hands and a dozen heads, etc.

#### UN-AMERICAN, VIGILANTE

#### ACTIVITIES—246

Those listed include the activities of self-appointed crusaders for righteousness, working without knowledge of or association with the regularly constituted agencies of law enforcement, presenting a picture wholly un-American in principle and practice.

**There are the facts as gleaned from the specimens included in this study. They supply the evidence upon which The Case Against the Comics is based.**

#### IV: Who Sponsors This Literary Diet for American Youth?

Aside from the actual publishers of comic books, a new sponsorship for these publications has been obtained by certain publishers who have established "advisory boards," consisting of men and women of high national repute.

Such names as those of Mrs. Eleanor B. Roosevelt, Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd, Commander Gene Tunney, Dr. Allan Roy Dafoe, and others of equal renown are to be found in the various comic books, listed as members of an advisory board or committee, the implication being that these persons have placed the mark of their approval upon the contents of the book.

A question of grave ethical import is raised by this practice. Aside from the fact that the name of Dr. Dafoe continued to appear after his death, there remain the living whose actual service in this connection may fairly be questioned. It appears to be beyond the limits of probability that such men as Rear Admiral Byrd and Commander Tunney, both officers in the armed forces of a nation engaged in war, could have any time to devote to a study of the material which is presented to the public with this suggested stamp of their approval and sponsorship.

Publishers who employ this device do not make any specific statement to the effect that these advisory board members do per-

form any actual duties. The implication to troubled parents, however, is clear. Opening a comic book, finding the names of prominent men and women listed as members of the publisher's advisory board, these parents are quite likely to conclude: "This book must be all right, or such people wouldn't approve."

Have they approved it? Have these editorial advisors, in fact, inspected the contents of the issues of comic books in which their names appear as a suggested pledge of good faith?

These are questions which may fairly be asked of the publishers employing this method of sales promotion. If the method is to be employed regularly for the purpose of allaying the doubts of parents, would it not be reasonable to suggest that these lists of apparent sponsors be accompanied by a definite statement as to the exact advisory duties performed by each member of the board?

The use of "big names" in sales promotions is an old American custom. We have all read testimonials to a cigarette by some prominent man—who never smokes. We have seen the glowing laudation of a cosmetic by a socialite matron who has never in her life used the brand she has "endorsed."

If the members of the advisory boards retained by comic-book publishers are actually performing a definite supervisory or advisory function, it should be so stated in clear English. If, on the other hand, names are used as mere window-dressing to lull parents into

an unwarranted sense of security concerning their child's reading, the practice should be discontinued.

### **V: A Threat to the America of Tomorrow.**

The comic book plot pattern which appears with more frequency than any other deals with the adventures of a self-appointed crusader or liberator who undertakes, wholly on his own responsibility, to combat crime, evil, and international intrigue.

He will be, this Whattaman, an incredibly powerful, superhumanly intelligent individual whose achievements will surpass anything ever accomplished by any known law-enforcement agency. Alone and unaided he will discover the identity of criminals, will pursue and capture them, will determine their innocence or guilt, pronounce judgment upon them and, in many instances, execute the sentence, often death.

What of today's children whose minds are being conditioned by a regular diet of this type of adventure? Is it a training calculated to imbue these future citizens with respect for the slower methods of constitutional and statutory procedure? Are Whattaman addicts likely to have patience with the doddering oldsters who cling to the American conceptions of law and order and human liberties?

Even juvenile characters in the comic books engage in un-American activities of

this nature. Fictitious "junior commando" groups bear a strong resemblance to the bands of child militarists in Nazi Germany. Impatience with the regular forces of government and law is the keynote in all of these features. One such little heroine couldn't wait for the Army and the Navy and the F.B.I. She and her "commandos" ferreted out the espionage gang; they discovered the hidden submarine nest; they imprisoned scores of Nazi spies, sailors, and soldiers; before the end they destroyed a fleet of submarines, snuffed out the lives of many enemy invaders—while carrying on, as an ennui-relieving sideline, a municipal election campaign against political forces of evil.

The appalling by-product is that it is teaching impressionable youngsters to hate, to hate savagely, and to applaud and emulate those who would demonstrate that two wrongs make one right. Children all too soon mature, and if, upon reaching maturity, they are solicited to follow some leader who promises fast action against individuals and forces which he, the leader, declares to be evil, what reason, what hope is there to assume that they will not gladly enlist under his banner?

It is not enough that good should triumph over evil. The triumph must be gained by lawful, American methods. In the study of the comic books upon which this report is based, there were discovered 246 un-American plots or episodes of a vigilante nature, a total

which indicates the extent to which the masked-and-hooded-justice falsity appeals to those who produce the features in which these were found.

## VI: Conclusion.

The overall picture, no matter how persuasively the comic book apologists may seek to minimize the objectionable features of their product, is a disheartening one. The actual figures, based upon a thorough study of a representative collection of the books and strips, reveal the evil phases of this contemporary American menace to childhood.

The books paint an unreal and unwholesome world and fail miserably to prepare youthful readers for good living. Success, in the comics, is gained rapidly, in the grand manner, and often by questionable means. Long years of preparation for success, years of toil and application and frugality, the frustrations and obstacles of real life all are lightly passed over or ignored. The world of the comics is an unreal world.

It is, moreover, an almost totally irreligious world. Moral and Christian values are rarely to be found identified as such in the comics. Night clubs, gang hideouts, worldly scenes are to be seen with wearying frequency, but the church is practically never seen or referred to. The world of the comics is an irreligious world. It is, in the main, a Godless world.

The editor of the NEW YORK SUN has

said: "The paganism of our times flows out of a general denial of all obligations save those of self-advantage." This is the outstanding theme of the overwhelming majority of comics: A general denial of all obligations save those of self-advantage.

The cure for this cancerous growth must be administered by three agencies: Church, school and home. The urgings of those whose self-interest is involved may be disregarded. The services of law-enforcement agencies may be utilized only when the products of Church, school, and parental failure have been led into court.

In count upon count in the indictment, we find evidences of the danger to American children inherent in the comic books. They threaten the welfare of our boys and girls. This is the case against the comics.



## Timely Quotes

Members of the American Association of University Women in Gary, Indiana, working with the schools, made a survey to find how widespread was the influence of the comics among school children. During the week of survey a committee questioned 696 grade school pupils with the following findings: these children had read 915 books, of which 137 could be termed "good." But, they had read a total of 2,370 comic magazines, or about 3.4 comic books per pupil. Thirty-five per cent had read nothing but comics!

THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY, Nov. 4, 1942. Comics Are No Longer Comic. By Margaret Frakes.

Two factors have combined to skyrocket comics in the realm of big business: (1) the well-filled pockets of the nation's school children; and (2) the war-developed soldier market. But children remain the best customers. A recent readership survey revealed that regular readers comprise 95% of the 8 to 11 age group; 84% of the 12 to 17 age group, and 35% of the 18 to 30 age group. After 30, comic-book publishers sadly confess, the urge for their product slackens off. Six thousand schools now use the comics as supplementary texts.

NEWSWEEK, Dec. 27, 1943.—Escapist Pay-dirt.

Seventy-five per cent of leisure-time reading of children in the 9-14 age group is spent on 125 different comic magazines, of which there are sold 180,000,000 a year. These facts were presented to three hundred thirty persons attending a children's Book Week luncheon in November, 1941, at the Hotel Roosevelt in New York City. The facts were compiled by George J. Hecht, President and Publisher of PARENTS MAGAZINE, who termed this form of reading a threat to character de-

velopment and called on publishers of children's books to counteract the comics' effects.  
RECREATION, February, 1942.

During a hearing on parole petitions, Criminal Judge Charles W. Lusk of Chattanooga, Tenn., blamed the comic strips as one of the primary causes of crime. "I am fully convinced," he said, "that some of these strips based on disreputable, well-nigh criminal acts, are responsible for creating ideas in the minds of children," . . . The unfortunate influence of the comics on the youth of the country has either been ignored or deprecated in deference to their money-earning potentialities. . . . Ultimately, the fate of both comic strips and comic magazines, must rest upon the action of the nation's parents.

THE CATHOLIC WORLD, February, 1943.

What's Wrong with the Comics?

By Thomas F. Doyle.

The "comics" are a many-sided tragedy. The chief ill effects are mental and emotional; sometimes the harm is physical also. Instead of filling the children's minds with a balanced understanding of life-as-it-is and life-as-it-could-and-should-be, the "comics" gear the kids to an impossible unrealistic, fantastic life. But the bad effect on the moral and religious life of the youngsters is something far worse. The "comic" books specialize these days in filling innocent minds and hearts with hate. Considering that the children in the lower grammar school grades are with their "comics" much more than with books proper for youngsters—and this goes for Catholic children as well as non-Catholic—what chance do Our Lord and His Gospel stand of becoming the dominant Person and the governing force in the lives of our boys and girls?

OUR SUNDAY VISITOR, June 20, 1943.

By Rev. Frank E. Gartland, C.S.C.

In presenting an unbiased case against the comics, it is only fair to state that there are some commendable comics with genuine "kid appeal" or "adult appeal"—lamentably few and hopelessly outnumbered by those for which no practical justification may be advanced.

Into the "kid appeal" category fall such strips as "Mickey Mouse," "The Teenie Weenies," "Peter Rabbit," "Uncle Wiggly" and, generally speaking, all the animal comics. Into the "adult appeal" group fall "Little Lulu," "Blondie," "They'll Do It Every Time," and so on. But for adventure strips masquerading as "comics" and having only moron appeal there remain the incriminating words of the case against the comics.

