

The *Jewish* Comic Book Guys

The Unlikely Origins of The Comic Book Industry

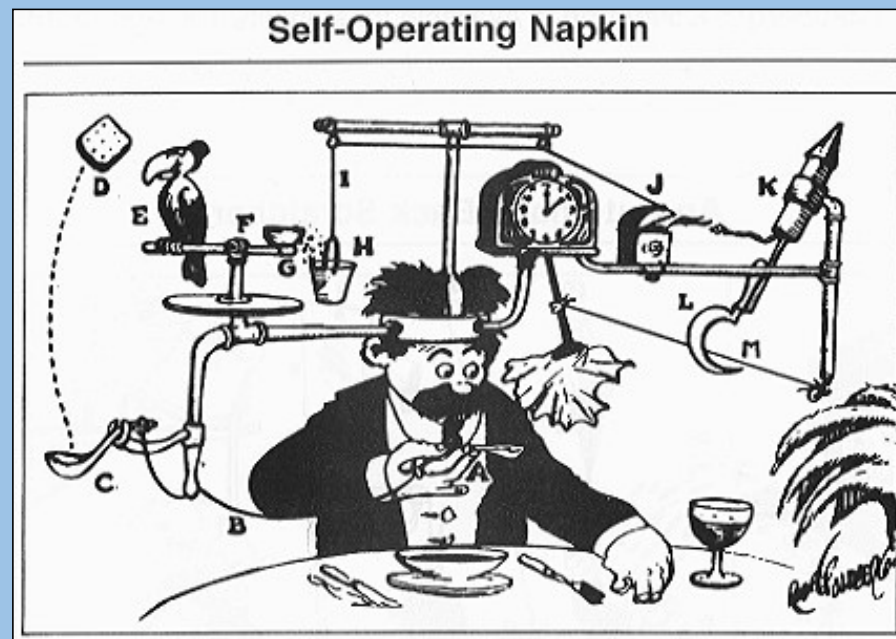
About the topic

- Jews did more than just work in the comic book industry.
- To a large degree, the industry was created by a group of Jews.
- Further, as I hope to show, the industry was shaped by the “Jewish experience.”
- Embraced elements of Jewish culture and values.
- Impacted the sense of Jewish identity.

Background: America post WW I

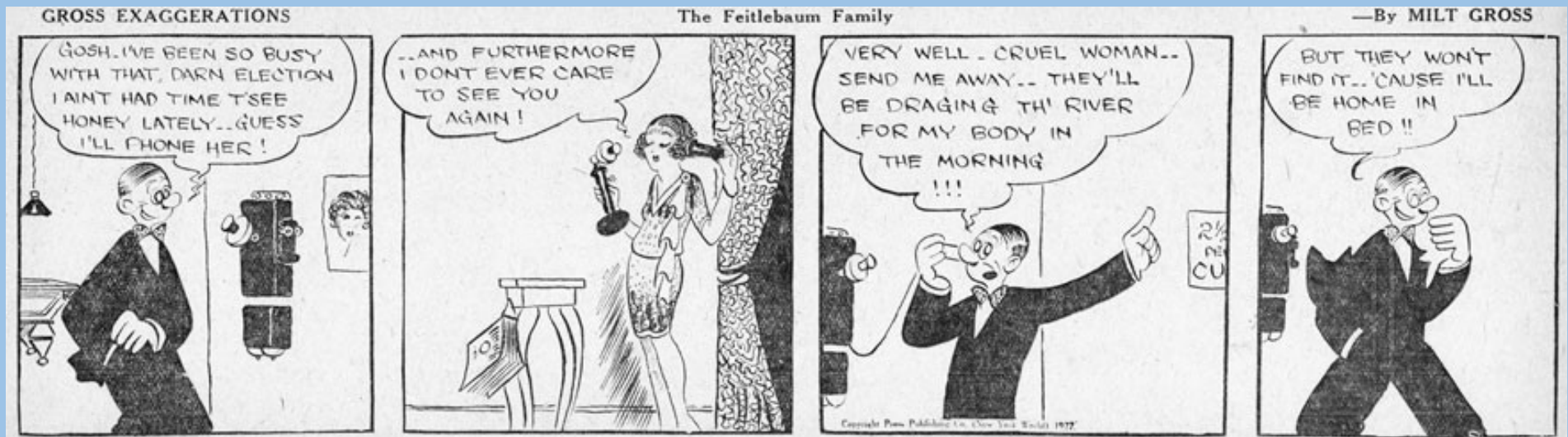
- Many Americans fear that Jews are “taking over.”
- Beginning in 1919, raids authorized by Attorney General Palmer target unions, socialist and Zionist organizations.
- 1922 Harvard caps the number of Jews to be admitted at 15%.
- The Immigration Act of 1924 restricts the number of Jews allowed in.
- Companies and industries won't hire Jews for certain jobs or set quotas limiting the numbers of Jewish employees.
- Jewish writers and illustrators are shut out from traditional jobs in the American newspaper and advertising industries.

Before comic books, the Sunday funnies

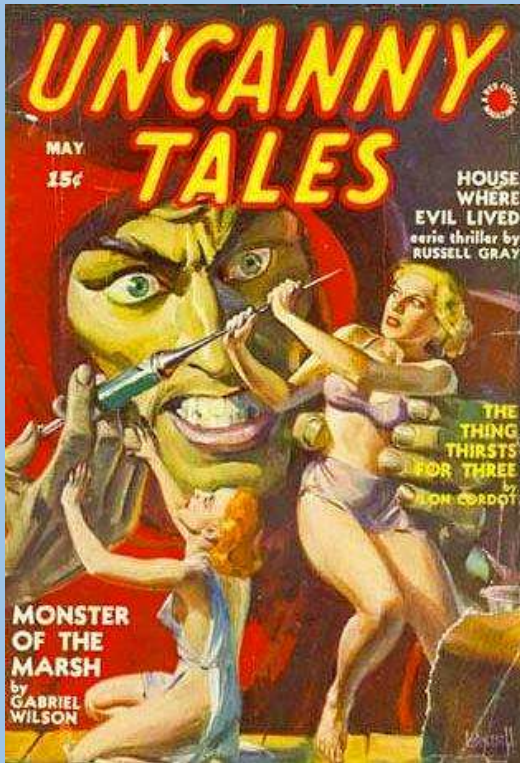


Rube Goldberg's Famous Machines Appeared In
The NY Evening Beginning In 1907.

Milt Gross, Cartoons and Parodies



The Pulp magazines



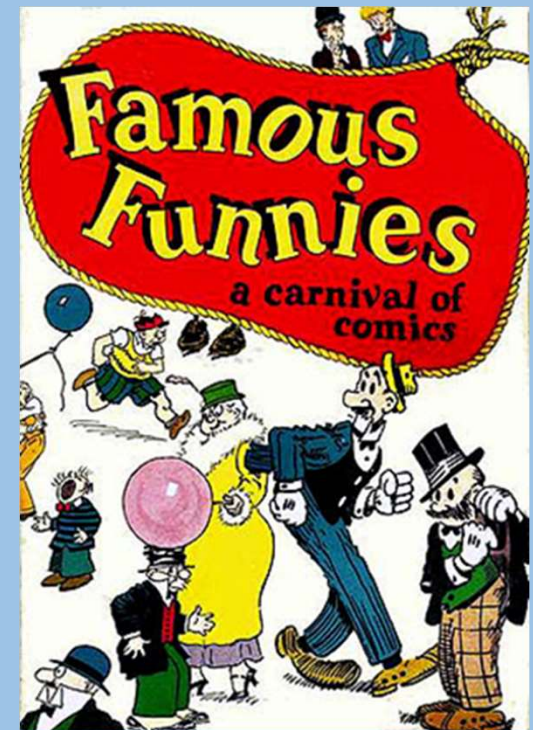
The other precursor to the comic book was the pulp magazine.

Often lurid, sometimes found to be obscene, the covers of pulp magazines were printed in color.

Many of the same people, in particular on the publishing and business side, would make the transition from the pulps to the comic books.

The Dawn of the Comic Book Age

- In 1928 Eastern Color Printing opens, as an adjunct to the Waterbury Republican newspaper.
- Harry Wildenberg is the general manager.
- Primary responsibility is to print the serials known as the “Sunday Funnies.”
- Also begins printing the covers for pulps, “racy” publications.
- Develops means of printing two color pages, front and back.
- Wildenberg hires Maxwell Charles “M.C.” Gaines (formerly Max Ginzberg) for sales.
- “What if we collect a bunch of funnies and print a full magazine? We could sell this for promotion.”
- *Famous Funnies* is a hit. *A Century of Comics* and *Skippy’s Own Book of Comics* will follow.
- The Platinum Age of Comics begins.



The Publishers

National Allied Publications to Detective Comics to DC Comics

- Major Malcom Wheeler-Nicholson (forced out)
- Harry Donenfield, born into a Jewish family in Romania, came to America, lived on the Lower East Side. (One of the founders of Albert Einstein College of Medicine.)
- Yakov "Jack" Leibowitz, born in the Ukraine, raised on the Lower East Side.



Timely Comics to Atlas Comics to Marvel

- Moe "Martin" Goodman, the son of Isaac Goodman and Anna Gleichenhaus, from Lithuania. Born in Brooklyn.
- Hires Stan Lee.



Classics Illustrated

- Albert Louis Kanter, born in Russia. Entrepreneur, supported many Jewish charities.



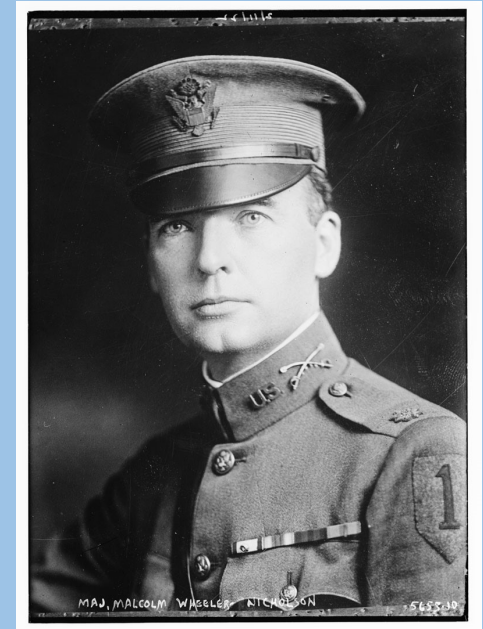
Archie Comics

- Maurice Coyne, Louis Silberkleit and John L. Goldwater, all Jewish.



Jews and the Comics

- Malcolm Wheeler- Nicholson – young, handsome, military hero. Helped found National Allied Publications. But couldn't manage money.
- Sent on “vacation” to Cuba by Harry Donenfield
- Returns to find that Harry has sued him for non-payment and forced into bankruptcy. Harry gains control of what will become DC Comics.
- Even today, people are still bitter about this.
- Movie portrayals of Jewish comic book characters (Magneto, Kitty Pryde, Quicksilver, and Scarlet Witch, etc.) deemphasize Jewish roots.



WOW!



- The first issue of *Famous Funnies* is a marketing success, but Eastern's partner, Delacorte or Dell, doesn't want to continue.
- Eastern continues to produce comics, this time for sale. (68 pages for 10¢)
- Initially losing money, after issue 12 Eastern had a net profit of \$30,000 per issue.
- Soon there were competitors. John Henle, formerly a manufacturer of shirts, creates *Wow What A Magazine!*
- Jerry Iger, son of an Austrian peddler who had apprenticed under Max Fleischer of *Betty Boop* fame, is hired as editor.
- *Wow* will only last three issues.
- But Iger will hire a young artist that will change comic books forever.

Over In The Bronx....



Will Eisner (left) and Bob Kane (right) were students at De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx. They both loved to draw. It was Kane that suggested to Eisner that he try to sell his work to *Wow*. Eisner's adventure hero, *Captain Scott Dalton*, was the cover story shown previously.

Iger and Eisner

After *Wow What A Magazine* closes, Samuel Maxwell “Jerry” Iger partners with 19 year-old Will Eisner to create a freelance comic studio.

The company produces comic strips “on demand.”

It becomes a “school” for comic artists. Alumni include:

Jack Kirby (*Marvel and DC*)

Bob Kane (*Batman*)

Lou Fine (*Fox & Wonderworld Comics*)

Jules Feiffer (*The Spirit, The Village Voice*)

Wallace Wood (*Daredevil, Mad Comics*)

Bob Powell (*Sheena, Mr. Mystic*)

The Inspiration

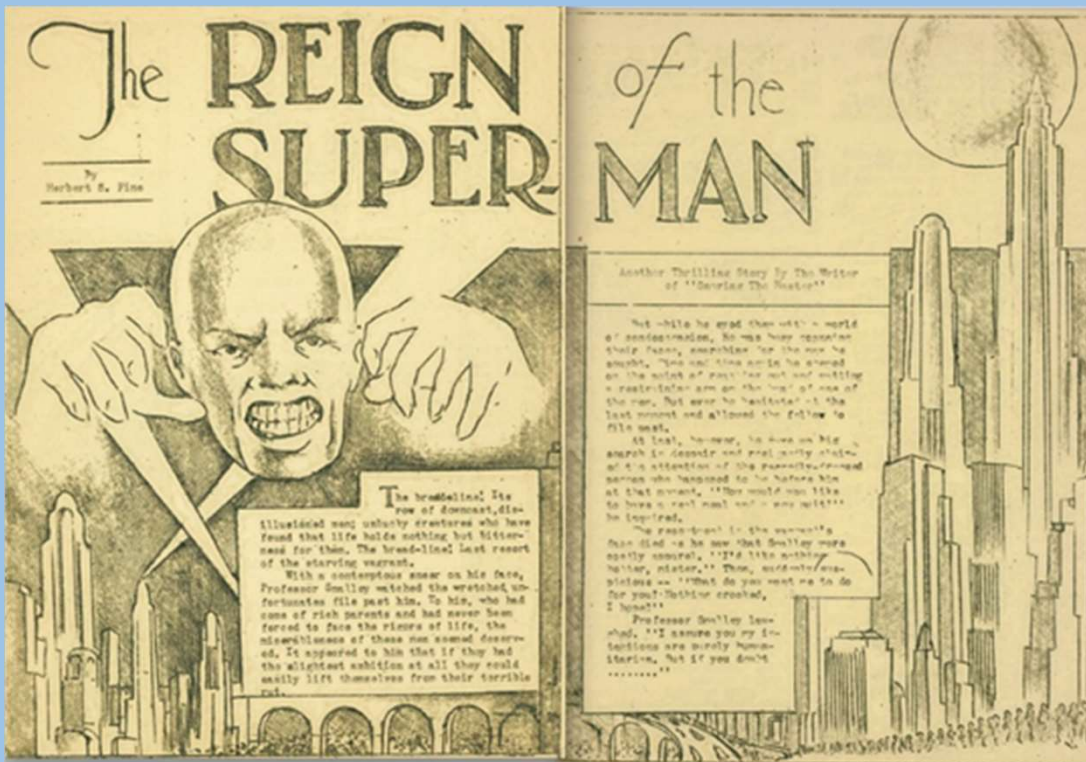
Comics were established, but it would take a major event to shift them from strip form to become a larger narrative. Inspiration can come from many sources, **positive** or **negative**. In this case the source was Nazi Germany, where Adolf Hitler had subverted the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, to declare that the Aryan German was more than other men, that he was a superman.

*The Übermensch shall be the meaning of the earth!
I entreat you my brethren, remain true to the earth,
and do not believe those who speak to you of supra-
terrestrial hopes! ...
Behold, I teach you the Übermensch: he is this
lightning, he is this madness! ...*



Hitler receiving Nietzsche's favorite walking stick from Nietzsche's sister, Lisbeth.

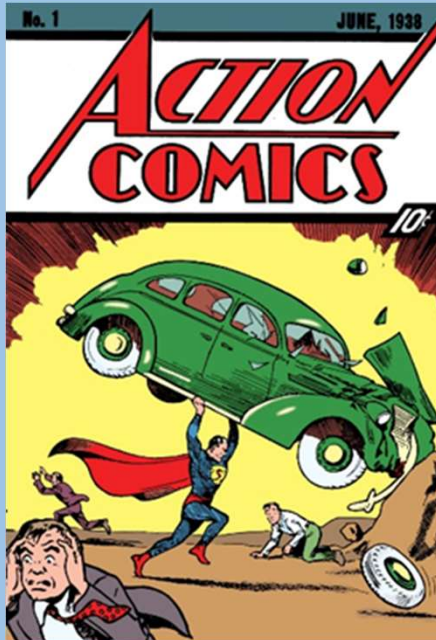
The Response



Jerry Siegel, a Jewish boy from Cleveland, saw things differently. He authored a story about a villain with mind-reading powers out to take over the world. The villain was called “the Superman.”

The story was originally published in the magazine *Science Fiction*, appearing in the January 1933 edition.

Jerry would get his friend Joe Schuster, also a Jewish boy from Cleveland, to do the illustrations. The two had worked for the comic *New Fun* creating the swashbuckler *Henri Duvall*. By 1938, the pair would go to work for Detective Comics.



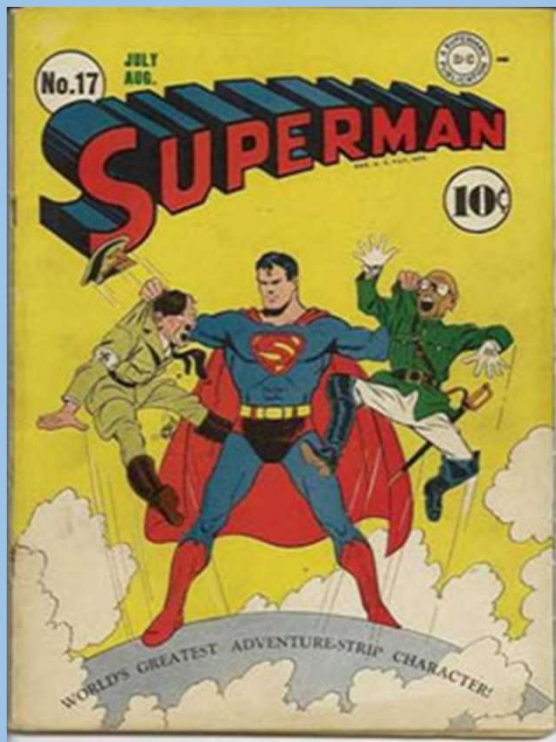
The Man of Steel

It would take five years and many re-writes for Superman as we know him today to emerge. At one point Siegel became so frustrated that he burned all the pages, only rescuing the cover.

- Superman needed to be reinvented as a hero.
- He had to be given powers that were physical.
- A back story to explain his origin had to be conceived.
- He needed a secret identity or alter-ego.
- The supporting cast needed to be developed.

Finally Superman would make his appearance in Action Comics #1, June of 1938. He shared space with a number of other stories. But he would become so popular that he would get his own comic and full-length stories. The modern comic had been born.

Superman versus the Nazis



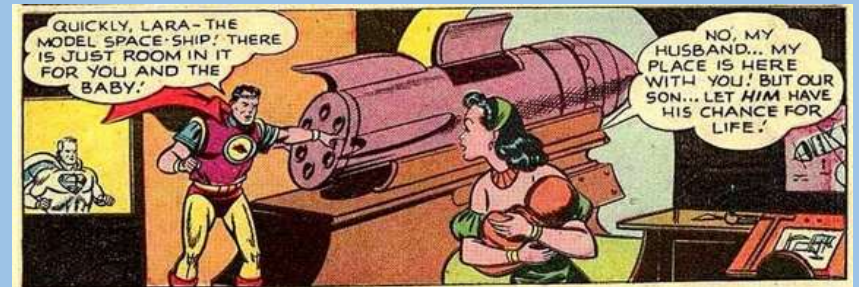
Early on, Superman fought both the Japanese and the Nazis. In Superman Issue 17, October 1942, he sinks battleships, lifts submarines out of the ocean, destroys tanks. On the cover The Man of Steel is shown holding Hitler and Emperor Hirohito by the scruffs of their necks.

Of course the question arose why he didn't end World War II in a single day. The story was created that he had to stay at home and defend the US from the likes of Luthor, The Prankster, Toyman and the Insect Master.

To make this somewhat plausible, Clark Kent failed his military physical when he inadvertently used his X-Ray vision to read the eyechart in the **next room**. He would be declared 4-F.

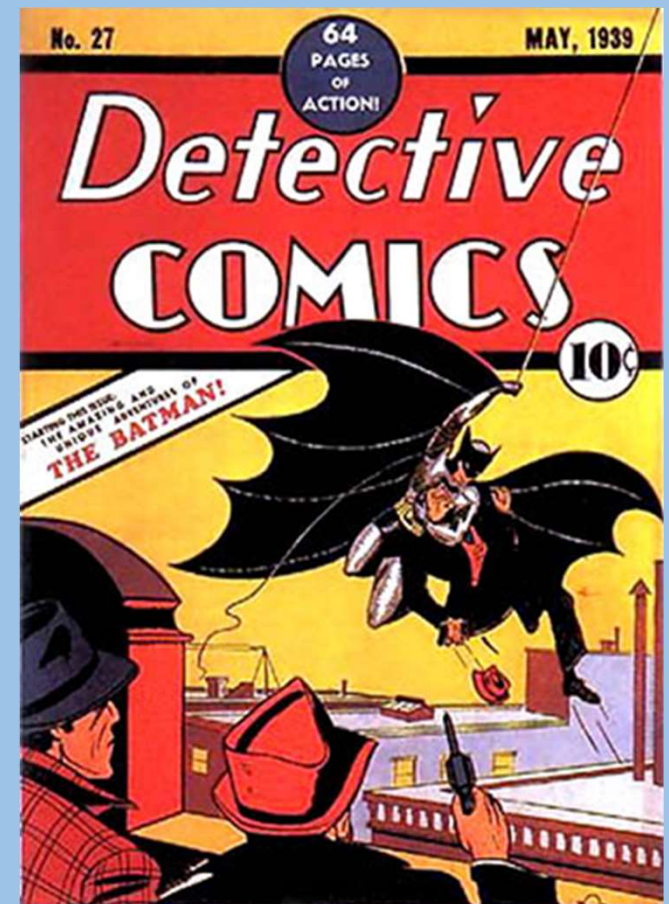
Reasons Why Superman Is Jewish

- His origin story is based on Moses.
- His Kryptonian name, Kal-el, is based on “Elohim” and roughly translates to “The Voice of G-d.”
- In an interview, Siegel stated that Superman was modeled on Samson.
- “Truth, justice and the American way” is similar to the rabbinical quote “The world endures on three things: truth, justice and peace.”
- The Nazis certainly believed that he was.



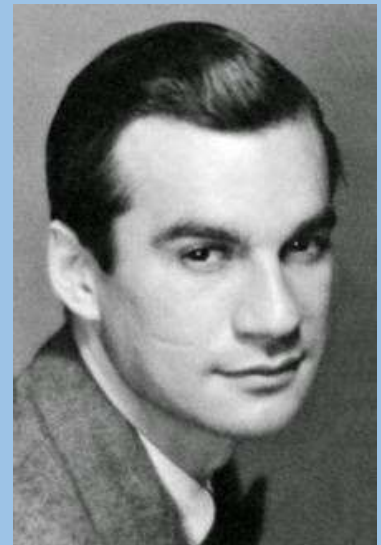
Enter The Batman

- The success of Superman creates a demand for similar works.
- Bob Kane had worked at the Max Fleisher Studio (*Betty Boop*) as a trainee animator.
- Joined his old friend Will Eisner at Eisner and Iger.
- Hired by DC Comics in 1939 to create another franchise hero.
- Drew inspiration from 1930 movie *The Bat Whispers* and his childhood hero, *Zorro*. Also influenced by Da Vinci for flight.



Milton “Bill” Finger – the “Forgotten” Man

- Also attended De Witt Clinton H.S.
- Co –creator of Batman. It was Finger that changed Kane’s original design to what we now think of as Batman’s look.
- The Batcave, the Batmobile, the utility belt were all his ideas.
- Wrote the initial script.
- Created the identity of Bruce Wayne.
- Kane stole all the credit.





The Green Lantern

Created by Martin Nodell – born in Philadelphia, attended the Art Institute of Chicago. Came to New York to study at Pratt.

Hired by Sheldon Mayer at All-American Publications, part of DC.

Drew his inspiration from the NYC Subway.

"I picked out the name from the train man on the tracks who was waving a lantern, going from red to green.... Green meant go and I decided that was it. Then I needed a colorful and interesting costume. I was interested in Greek mythology and so the costume took on elements of that. It just all fell into place."

DC would bring in Bill Finger as the writer and the two would partner from 1940 until 1947 when Nodell left to join Marvel Comics.



1939 Logo



Marvel Comics

- Moe “Martin” Goodman born 1908 to Lithuanian parents. One of 13 children.
- Grows up in Brooklyn. During the Depression, travels around America, living in hobo camps.
- In 1929, Moe is hired by Louis Silberkleit (who will co-found Archie Comics) to work at Eastern Publishing.
- In the 1930s, Goodman becomes a publisher of pulp magazines.
- By 1939, seeing the success of comics, Goodman launches issue 1 of Marvel Comics (Marvel is originally the name of the comic and Timely the publisher) introducing the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner as characters.

Simon and Kirby

- Hymie “Joe” Simon was born in Rochester, N.Y.
- His father was a tailor, the family so poor that they lived in the first floor flat that was also the shop.
- Joe started working for *Funnies, Inc.* that supplied the material for Marvel Comics.
- Jack Kirby was born Jacob Kurtzberg on the Lower East Side, the son of a garment worker.
- A self-taught artist, he learned to draw from copying comics.



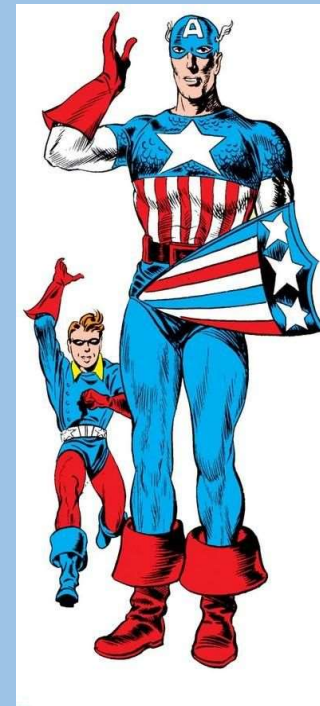
What They Created



The Human Torch – originally an android, not a human, he graced the cover of Marvel Comics Issue # 1.



The Submariner - Prince Namor - was the first anti-hero to appear in a comic He was a prince of Atlantis, not truly human.



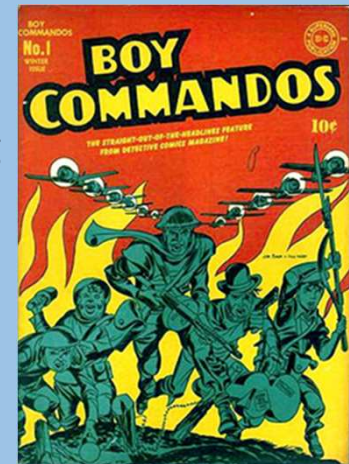
Captain America was the first hero created **specifically** for World War II. Steve Rogers was weak in body, but strong in spirit. The US Army gives him a potion that makes him a super-soldier.

Leaving Marvel, Going To DC



As part of his signing deal with Timely for the Marvel titles, Joe Simon had negotiated terms that included a share of the profits. As Captain America had become Marvel's best-selling title, Simon became convinced that they were not receiving their fair share. Simon was getting \$85 and Kirby \$75 in weekly salary. Simon negotiated jobs for them with National, one of the companies that would become DC, for a combined salary of \$500. At first no one knew what to do with artists. Jack Liebowitz told them "just do what you want."

At National, the pair created the *Sandman*, the *Manhunter* and a mash-up of two comic genres, "kid gang" and war comics, the highly successful *Boy Commandos*. The pair were now established as geniuses.



World War II - The War Years

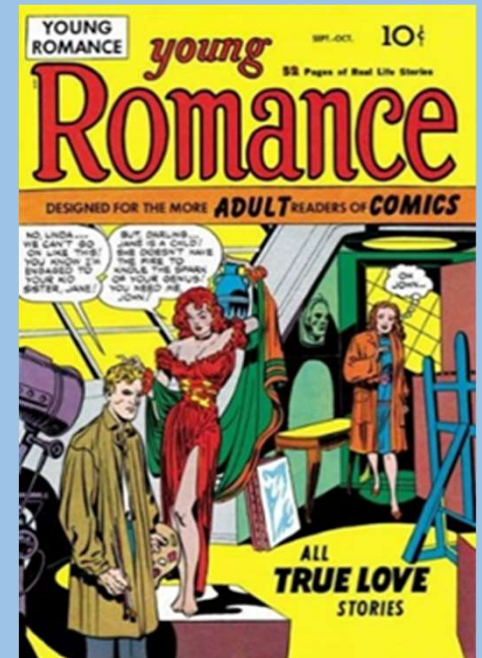
Almost all of the young comic book guys would serve in some capacity.

- Joe Simon joins the Coast Guard. While patrolling the New Jersey shore, he meets Milt Gross. Gross gets him a job doing comics and the two of them write *Adventure Is My Career* for the Coast Guard, as a recruiting tool.
- Will Eisner will also be assigned to cartoonist work.
- Jack Kirby, in contrast, becomes an infantryman and is assigned scouting duties because of his abilities to make maps. It is dangerous work. In 1944, he is sent home because of severe frostbite to his legs.



After the War

- Simon and Kirby return to comics, working for Alfred Harvey (born Alfred Wiernikoff) at Harvey Comics.
- In 1947 Joe Simon invents a whole new comic genre- the Romance Comic.
- Again, issues over compensation arise.
- In 1955 Simon and Kirby split – Simon goes into advertising, Kirby to Classic Comics.



Stan Lee

- Born Stanley Martin Lieber in Washington Heights section of Manhattan; moved to University Ave. in the Bronx.
- Attends De Witt Clinton High School.
- His cousin, Jean, marries Moe Goodman.
- Begins working at *Timely* at 19 as the Interim Editor, then Editor in Chief. The title of Art Director is added.
- His duties included “seeing that the inkwells were filled for the artists, getting them lunch, erasing pencil marks and proof-reading.”
- When Simon and Kirby leave, he takes over Captain America.
- During World War II, he serves first in the Signal Corps, then in the Training Film division writing slogans, manuals and cartoons.
- After the war, he returns to Marvel.
- By the late 1950s, DC is outselling Marvel by a huge margin and Lee is charged with turning the company around.



Lee and Kirby



- Jack Kirby returns to Marvel as a free-lancer, working 10 and 12 hour days because his pay is so low.
- Soon Lee and Kirby are working as a pair.
- They are assigned to create a super-hero team.



- Enter the Fantastic Four.
- Created by Lee and Kirby in 1961.
- Features the first of Marvel's “tortured heroes.”
- Benjamin Jacob Grimm, aka “The Thing” is actually based on Jack Kirby.





Lee and Kirby had always conceived of this, but the actual reveal did not take place until *Fantastic Four* (Vol. 3) #56, published in August 2002 in a story titled "Remembrance of Things Past", written by Karl Kesel, pencilled by Stuart Immonen, and inked by Scott Koblish.

Jewish Comic Characters

Iceman (Marvel, part of the X-Men)

Sandman (DC)

Quicksilver (Marvel, named Pietro)

Magneto (Marvel, Holocaust survivor)

Night Owl II (The Watchmen)

Sabra (Marvel, Israeli)

Kitty Pryde (Marvel, X-Men)

Moonknight (Marvel)

Scarlet Witch (Marvel, named Wanda)

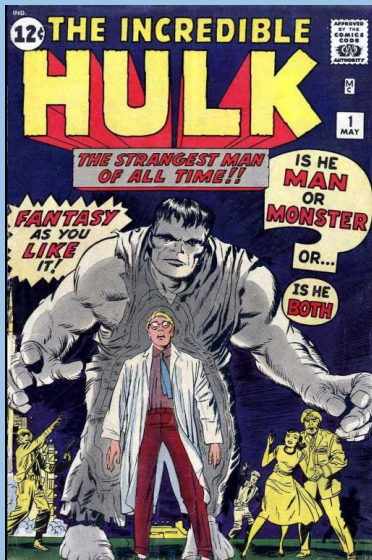
Wiccan (Marvel, The son of Reform Jews
Jeff and Rebecca Kaplan, grandson of
Magneto)

Atom Smasher (DC)

Doc Samson (Marvel, appears in the
Hulk)



Lee and Kirby Creations



Redefining the Medium: The Life of Will Eisner



At 19 years old, Eisner had started a talent studio whose alumni had revolutionized the industry. At 23, he sold his share to his partner for \$20,000. A new opportunity was calling him.

He would go to work for the newspapers whose circulation had been impacted by comics creating a “comic book insert.”

"They gave me an adult audience and I wanted to write better things than superheroes. Comic books were a ghetto. I sold my part of the enterprise to my associate and then began The Spirit. They wanted a heroic character, a costumed character. They asked me if he'd have a costume. And I put a mask on him and said, 'Yes, he has a costume!'"

Eisner: The Father of the Graphic Novel



Comic Books Grow Up



During Eisner's time in the Army, beginning in 1942, he had become a cartoonist for a program called "preventative maintenance." He worked as consultant through 1972. This led to his writing a collection of war stories "Last Day in Vietnam."

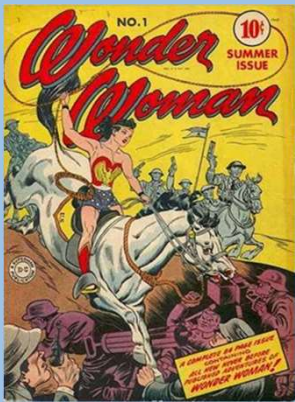


Eisner's Legacy

- Eisner and Iger provided the talent for the Golden Age.
- The Spirit was the first comic targeted at an adult audience
- Promoted the graphic novel as a vehicle and helped gain recognition of comics as art.
- The comic book awards for excellence bear his name.



Post Script – What I Left Out

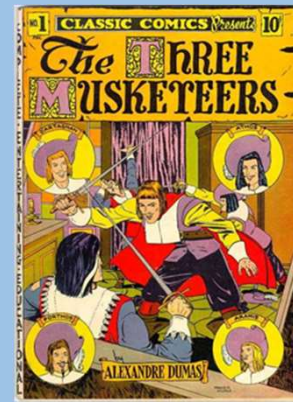


William Moulton Marston was a psychologist, a lawyer and an inventor. Created Wonder Woman in 1940

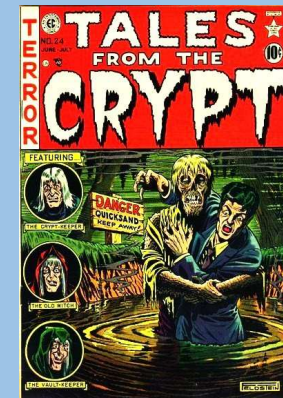


Gold Key Comics was started in 1962 by Random House, later sold to Dreamworks. In the 1990s, rights to three major franchises were licensed to Valiant Comics

Classics Illustrated was a line of comics created by Russian-born Albert Lewis Kanter in 1941 and introduced classic literature to generations of kids.



Max Gaines created EC Comics in 1944. After he died in 1947, his son William took over and began publishing highly influential suspense and horror comics.



Mad Magazine



- The last title from EC Comics to survive, on July 3, 2019 it was announced that Mad would no longer be sold on newsstands and would only reprint material from its 67-year history.
- The first issue in 1952 was almost entirely written and drawn by Harvey Kurtzman.
- After Kurtzman left in 1956, editorial duties were taken over by Al Feldstein.
- Feldstein changed Mad to a magazine format to remove control by the Comics Code Authority.

This presentation as well as numerous others
are available from
LarryKuperman.com