

Claire Wellington, “Censorship in Comics: Debate, Diplomacy, and the Comics Code Authority” - Process Paper

Superheroes have always been an interest of mine, from the many animated shows I watched when I was younger to my favorite films today. This interest transitioned into a love for comics. The complications of having so many different iterations of the same characters, such as the many different portrayals of Batman, based on the time period, the writer/director, the target audience, and what message is trying to be put across at that moment lend room to some interesting conversations. Comics, overall, are a very flexible medium that can be the jumping off point for other discussions around social roles, gender, race, and class. Censorship constantly pops up in varying forms throughout time and across lands, making it the perfect topic for a project pertaining to history.

My biggest source of information was the online Boulder Public Library, specifically the U.S. History in Context database. Sources I'm particularly proud of include the Online U.S. capitol visitor center, and the Stan Lee documentary film, “With Great Power”. The online U.S. capitol visitor center had four great primary source documents: the two letters, the Crime SuspenStories #22 cover, and the Code of Comics rule packet that I drew excerpts from. The Stan Lee documentary was found by my NHD supervisor and teacher, Ms. Royal, which was a huge help as it provided a variety of multimedia footage for my website.

I chose to do a website as comics are a very visual medium. This means that I had hundreds of panels to choose from when finding images to support my claims. Websites also allow for more stylizing compared to essays but are easier to edit compared to documentaries and displays. The NHD website builder was hard to use at first, but once I had a better understanding of the mechanics, it was very fun to create my project with it. What was not as fun was discovering there was an auto-nav tool after spending a good amount of time implementing every single bright red link block for easy navigation between pages.

Debate and comics are used in conjunction with each other quite a bit, as the medium has existed for decades with plenty of controversial stories that plague it. The harder theme to fit in was diplomacy. I struck gold however when I looked further into Fredric Wertham and the ‘Comics Code Authority’. The event that was unraveled was a perfect combination of heated debate over children’s well being, an attempt at a diplomatic solution that both succeeded and failed, and past decisions that still impact our world today.