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Youth In Revolt. How Suburban Youth of the 1950s Rejected the Contradictions of an Affluent Society in Favor of Apocalyptic Zombies and Chicken Runs

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YOUTH IN REVOLT. HOW SUBURBAN YOUTH OF THE 1950s REJECTED THE
CONTRADICTIONS OF AN AFFLUENT SOCIETY IN FAVOR OF APOCALYPTIC
ZOMBIES AND CHICKEN RUNS

by

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B.S. Secondary Education and History, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2002

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts

Department of History
in the Graduate School
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THESIS APPROVAL

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Master of Arts
in the field of History

Approved by:

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TITLE: YOUTH IN REVOLT. HOW SUBURBAN YOUTH OF THE 1950s
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MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Robbie Lieberman

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, I will examine the influences shaping the choices of teenagers living in an affluent society during the early days of the Cold War, specifically 1950 - 1955. I will discuss the contradictions about society, the family unit, and gender roles teenagers attempted to sort out as they moved through adolescence. Secondly, I will focus on two forms of mass media, specifically comic books and movies of the 1950s. Media has always had the power to change and shape the opinion of the youth culture who consumed it. I will discuss the lengths parents, educators, law enforcement, and government officials went to in order to blame the messages media conveyed for the behavior of this youth in revolt.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT.....	i
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	iii
CHAPTERS	
CHAPTER 1 – Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 2 – Side Effects of the Perfect Monochrome World.....	6
CHAPTER 3 – The Dangers of Using Your Imagination	22
CHAPTER 4 – Juvenile Delinquency on the Big Screen	49
CHAPTER 5 –Conclusion	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	70
VITA.....	75

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<u>FIGURES</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Illustration 1. Jack Kamen, “The Neat Job,” <i>Shock SuspenStories</i> 1, no. 1	46
Illustration 2. Al Feldstein, “The Orphan,” <i>Shock SuspenStories</i> 1, no. 14.....	46
Illustration 3. Al Feldstein, “The Guilty,” <i>Shock SuspenStories</i> 1, no. 3.....	46
Illustration 4. Jack Davis, “Contact,” <i>Frontline Combat</i> 1, no. 2.....	47
Illustration 5. Johnny Severin, Bill Elder, “The Big If,” <i>Frontline Combat</i> 1, no. 5....	47
Illustration 6. Wally Wood, “Perimeter,” <i>Frontline Combat</i> 1, no. 15.....	47
Illustration 7. Al Feldstein, “In Gratitude,” <i>Shock SuspenStories</i> 1, no. 11	48
Illustration 8. Al Feldstein, “The Patriot,” <i>Shock SuspenStories</i> 1, no. 2	48

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Just picture this. You are walking on a suburban street among ranch style homes that look identical. From any angle you can spot manicured front lawns with sidewalks; safe surfaces for Tommy to ride his bike or Susie to skate or hula hoop. If you walked to any backyard, you would most likely find Dad grilling burgers, and Mom coming out of her well equipped kitchen, complete with the latest appliances in the perfect colors to match the décor. I am sure they would ask you to dinner, where you would eat together in the den using TV trays. The family you spent the evening with was well groomed, well dressed, healthy, and most definitely smiling. But fear not, you have not entered an episode of the *Twilight Zone*, but rather a walk through the nostalgic image of the perfect 1950s nuclear family in America.

Teenagers of the early Cold War era were born straddling the threshold of the Great Depression and World War II. As they grew into adolescence, a post-War consumer-driven society attempted to package the white middle class into a homogenized ideal version of what America should look like. As the Cold War began, the minds of adolescents became saturated with these “American Dream” material values directed by radio, comic books, movies, television, and magazine advertisements, as well as the choices their parents made to participate in this new consumer-driven spending. However, everywhere they looked these teenagers became increasingly aware of how quickly society was changing beyond the well-ordered suburban limits in which they were being raised. Every day they were inundated with news about issues such as the House Un-American Activities Committee Hearings, Communism, atomic and hydrogen bomb testing, Emmett Till, Brown versus the Board of Education, Sputnik, and the

Kinsey Report. These youth observed a nation grapple with a conflict in Korea they did not understand. To top it off, marketing agencies seized the opportunity to bombard this new demographic with advertising, magazines, movies, music, fads and fashion meant to direct their spending power in a way which was unprecedented.

As middle class America chased the dream they were encouraged to pursue in the suburbs, the predominant social mood during the post-war years became more about personal satisfaction through leisure and consumption. Advertisements for every product on the market told the consumer that purchasing “things” would be proof of your loyalty to capitalist ideals and that your family was not being infiltrated by Communism. At the same time, this personal satisfaction was to be attained as a family unit – not as an individual. Pursuit of individual satisfaction did not fit the mold the government was attempting to shape by encouraging suburban families to become militant against the subversive forces of Communism. After all, “individualism could easily undermine familialism, shattering the assumption that family members’ interests were always unitary.”¹ Individualism, however, is at the heart of American culture, and eventually the need to break out of that cookie cutter mold and draw attention to the societal contradictions beginning to unfold before the Baby Boomer generation would become too great for them to complacently observe. Contradictions existed in the home, where teenagers were told to act like adults but were scorned for pursuing adult activities. The media broadcast contradictions in television, film, and advertising when they portrayed the perfect American family as the one who had it all, yet teens knew from experience that having it all did not equal a perfect home environment. Teenagers also observed the

¹ Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 69.

contradictions they were being taught, specifically that all people were created equal, yet stories about bus boycotts and riots at high schools told a different story. They began to act up, act out, and draw attention to the fact that something wasn't quite right in America. As adults tried to come to grips with what might be causing this rise in rebellious behavior of teenagers from the "right" side of the tracks, they placed responsibility for their delinquent children on mass media outlets. Comic books and movies were put on trial for what some believed were the harmful messages they were sending the youth of America. In reality, the hype over juvenile delinquency was just a convenient excuse adults could use to block out what was really bothering these youth in revolt.

There are a few other theories about the timing of this rebelliousness among suburban teenagers. In *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*, Margot Henriksen argues that children and young adults were least able to block out the new fears the atomic age brought with it. This younger population was more "emotionally and psychologically susceptible to atomic nightmares and insecurities,"² not only because of their age, but also because they were being bombarded with imagery at home, at school, and through popular culture. While Henriksen discusses the rise in youthful discontent throughout her study, she argues that by "focusing on the psychological troubles of America's youth and by highlighting the social deviance and rebelliousness of American youth, the culture of dissent illuminated the social and psychological disruption that characterized life in the age of anxiety."³ When the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency set to work to put an end to the forces causing

² Margot A. Henriksen. *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1997), 149.

³ Henriksen, 149.

the rise in delinquent behavior, the Subcommittee was motivated by its own insecurities and fears linked to the Cold War. The government feared that any visible weakness displayed by Americans, including this rise in juvenile delinquency in “good” kids, would be taken advantage of by Communist nations, specifically the Soviet Union.

“Culture tilted toward the youth,”⁴ argues W.T. Lhamon. In *Deliberate Speed*, Lhamon discusses how the staying power of the youth culture was not at first evident to those who could capitalize on it, such as marketing executives in every mass media or business outlet. Gradually, however, society saw that these changes in manners, values, and styles were not simply a fad but a growing expression of youth rebellion against what teens viewed as conservative ideals they disagreed with. In fact, according to Lhamon, the youth culture was and still is something that has greater control in society than many realize. “There were structural reasons and material differences that explain the existence of a youth culture” argues Lhamon. He labels parents as foolish for “attack[ing] Elvis for his pelvis, Little Richard for his frenzy, Kerouac for his dislocations, without looking at the mutually generating matrix of their effects.” The youth culture came to be ‘the’ culture; “it became the atmosphere of American life.”⁵ Some could argue that it still is.

As someone who has enjoyed studying the Cold War era, I have often wondered if juvenile delinquency in the 1950s was a real problem or just something exaggerated by adults who could not understand why middle class suburban children who have it all would feel the need to rebel. The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, I will examine what, exactly, was shaping these children in their impressionable years during the early days of the Cold War. What contradictions about society, the family unit, and gender

⁴ W.T. Lhamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 8.

⁵ Lhamon, Jr., 8

roles do they appear to notice as they move into adolescence? Second, I will focus on two forms of mass media, specifically comic books and movies. Media has always had the power to change and shape the opinion of the youth culture who consumed it. Parents, educators, law enforcement, and government officials went to great lengths to blame the messages media conveyed for the behavior of these youth in revolt. Perhaps adults should have been listening to the message.

CHAPTER 2

SIDE EFFECTS OF THE PERFECT MONOCHROME WORLD

“The dwelling shapes the dweller. When all dwellings are the same shape, all dwellers are the same shape.”⁶

~John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window*

White suburban teenagers of the 1950s went to the best schools, ate the best food, and were arguably the best cared for generation in history. They were also the richest. Suburban teenagers of the 1950s had an abundance of leisure time, disposable income, and increased mobility. Ambitious marketing agencies and media outlets seized every opportunity possible to gain the attention of this new demographic in specific entertainment markets such as comic books and the motion picture industry, and those individuals would later be held responsible for the spike in juvenile delinquency on the “right” side of the tracks. It is difficult to determine the extent to which mass media played a role in inspiring some bouts of juvenile delinquency in the suburbs. However, the more important point is that there were clearly other mitigating factors in the lives of teenagers. It would be problematic to label all examples of teenagers “acting out” as delinquency when, in some cases, they were simply looking for a way to communicate to the adult world that they did not want to settle for a complacent and comfortable life when there were more important things to be considered and addressed. In this chapter I will discuss the impact of the “affluent society” on these teenagers in the 1950s. Not all teenagers chose to respond to the contradictions they noted in their perfect suburban societies with rebellion or delinquent acts. What forces encouraged those who did?

⁶ John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), 29.

An Affluent Cold War Society

White suburban teenagers of the 1950s were unknowingly trapped in a world of Cold War politics, specifically the politics of affluence. American suburbs were becoming the destination of choice for the college educated who were busy climbing their professional ladders in pursuit of the upper-income brackets.⁷ Families who could produce tangible evidence of achieving the American Dream – a suburban home for their nuclear family – were helping America win the war against Communism. A happy and homogenous family living in the suburbs or small town America provided a shield against what Stephanie Coontz refers to as the “multiplying problems and growing diversity of the rest of society.”⁸ As families were encouraged to do the “right” things to fight Communism, such as go to church, volunteer, be good neighbors, and instill a value system in their children, little did they know that they were actually producing children and adolescents who would, after taking these values to heart, notice the contradictions of this perfectly ordered world in which they were raised.

The affluence that was creeping into the suburbs in the post-war years was not just an economic phenomenon or matter of materialism. Affluence affected people psychologically. Americans were relentlessly encouraged to consume in order to strengthen the American way of life, beginning with owning their own home. And once they had those homes, additional consumer spending was required in order to meet the functional needs of the wife and mother who needed the latest and greatest appliances to

⁷ Philip Dolce, *Suburbia: The American Dream and Dilemma* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), viii.

⁸ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 34.

make her more efficient. “The impact of suburbia on consumer behavior,” argues Elaine Tyler May, “can hardly be understated. Family-centered spending reassured Americans that affluence would strengthen the American way of life. The goods purchased by middle-class consumers, like a modern refrigerator or a house in the suburbs, were intended to foster traditional values.”⁹ This push for consumers to become part of a classless, homogenous, family-centered society was also proof that they were not a member of the Communist party, as was suggested in this advertisement commonly seen during a television program warning about the dangers of communism:

“Fortunately we can move the clock back. The time is not yet, and let us pray that it never happens in our country. Before we meet the members of the American Legion Post 279 who helped make this picture possible, I’d just like to say it gives me a great deal of satisfaction to represent two outstanding shopping centers in California...they are concrete expressions of the practical idealism that built America. When you visit these two fine shopping centers, you’ll find more than four-score of beautiful stores. The sparkling assortments and attractive atmosphere, and of course, plenty of free parking for all the cars that we ‘capitalists’ seem to acquire. Who can help but contrast the beautiful, the practical settings of the Arcadia Shopping Hub and the Whittier Quad with what you’d find under Communism.”¹⁰

Government officials reasoned with the public that Communists did not want or need any of the modern conveniences American families were enjoying. During the televised “kitchen debate” in 1959, Vice President Richard Nixon attempted to articulate this to Soviet Premiere Nikita Khrushchev. Nixon focused on consumerism as a way to achieve “individuality, leisure, and upward mobility”¹¹ rather than focus on the vulnerability the United States faced now that the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons. Nixon argued the

⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008) 158.

¹⁰ *The Atomic Café*, directed by Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, Pierce Rafferty (1982. New York, NY: Docurama), VHS.

¹¹ May, 21.

modern conveniences available to the wives and mothers of America made the United States superior to the Soviet Union. “We have many different manufacturers and many different kinds of washing machines so that the housewives have a choice... Would it not be better to compete in the relative merits of washing machines than the strength of rockets?”¹² Khrushchev had attempted to articulate his observation of America’s obsession with consumerism by pointing out the contradiction of a society that boasts of its individuality while encouraging everyone to conform and purchase the same thing just to prove they were capitalists. However, that message was lost in translation on a vice president who was convinced there would never be room in the kitchen for Communists. Khrushchev, visibly frustrated, simply brushed off Nixon’s plethora of examples and referred to the kitchen gadgets as interesting, yet not necessary.¹³

Perhaps one of the strongest voices regarding the consumer choices Americans were making and the impact those choices were having on society was John Kenneth Galbraith and his work *The Affluent Society*. Galbraith emphasized the stark contrasts between the limited economic resources Americans allowed in their budgets relating to essential social services, health care, and education. Yet there were plenty of resources for an outing in the new family car, the purchase of art, and the consumption of “delicately packaged food from an expensive portable refrigerator.”¹⁴ The consumer’s demands, he argued, would never be satisfied because they were born out of wants rather than needs, and in terms of economics, this was directly related to the psychological needs of the individual whose income continues to grow. “As a society becomes increasingly affluent,” Galbraith reasoned, “wants are increasingly created by the

¹² Ibid., 20.

¹³ May, 155, 164.

¹⁴ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 4th ed. (New York: New American Library, 1984), 128.

processes by which they are satisfied. Expectation rises with attainment. Or producers may proceed actively to create wants through advertising and salesmanship.”¹⁵

Fortunately for the company’s manufacturing these creature comforts, contentment was never quite attained. As Galbraith argues frequently, people with the means to purchase would never be satisfied.

The media did its part to assist this “need” to consume as it created its own set of contradictions to sort through, thanks in part to Henry Luce’s American Century campaign in *Life* magazine. Every week approximately twenty million readers viewed images of what Natasha Zaretsky refers to as “American family life that fused collective ideals of middle-class consumption of Cold War imperatives.”¹⁶ Among those imperatives included constantly smiling parents and children living in suburbia and exceeding all standards that fit society’s idea of the American Dream. The images produced weekly, argues Zaretsky, implied that “new household commodities and technologies were creating unprecedented leisure, and that the sacredness of the domestic realm made the Cold War worth fighting.”¹⁷ As the Cold War intensified and the strength of the United States was compared to the strength of the Soviet Union, there were some, including Luce, who began to question whether this obsession with consumption and leisure that the middle class had come to personify was weakening the country. The question was whether or not the United States was “losing the spirit of individuality that had supposedly shaped the American character from its inception.”¹⁸ In many aspects, the United States had the financial resources to maintain its role as a world

¹⁵ Galbraith, 126.

¹⁶ Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968 – 1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁷ Zaretsky, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

power, but the question was whether or not Americans were willing to sacrifice their personal resources and shiny toys in order to meet the demands this may truly entail?

Todd Gitlin's account of his own experiences as a teenager in the 1950s in *The Sixties: Years of Hope Days of Rage* serves as an accessible and complementary companion to Galbraith's study of political, social, and economic contradictions. From the perspective of his generation, contradictions were formed in the "jaws of an extreme and wrenching tension between the assumption of affluence and its opposite, a terror of loss, destruction, and failure."¹⁹ Gitlin's specific focus on the Atomic Bomb or what he calls the "underside of affluence" provides another perspective into the ill effects of a country that was thriving on the idea that anything was possible when, in reality, annihilation had to also be considered a possibility. As he recalls:

"The Bomb actually disrupted our daily lives. We grew up taking cover in school drills – the first American generation compelled from infancy to fear not only war but the end of days. Every so often, out of the blue, a teacher would pause in the middle of class and call out, 'Take cover!' Sometimes the whole school was taken out into the halls, away from the windows, and instructed to crouch down, heads to the wall, our eyes scrunched closed, until further notice. Sometimes air raid sirens went off out in the wider world, and whole cities were told to stay indoors. Who knew what to believe? Under the desks and crouched in the hallways, terrors were ignited, existentialists were made. Whether or not you believed hiding under a school desk or in a hallway was really going to protect us from the furies of an atomic blast, we could never quite take for granted that the world we had been born into was destined to endure."²⁰

The Bomb itself created its own variety of contradictions. It created a rift between generations. One generation remembered the horrors of World War II. While they were aware of the terrors a bomb like that could bring, from their perspective it symbolized an end to war. President Eisenhower, who had at once discussed (and

¹⁹ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 12.

²⁰ Gitlin, 22-23.

dismissed) the possibility of using it in Korea, and who had, according to Gitlin, offered it to the French to use in Indochina, spent time referring to atomic power with the slogan “Atoms for Peace.” For the younger generation, the Cold War was a nerve-wracking experience for children and adolescents literally afraid they might die at any moment, but the President was assuring them the Bomb could “tranquilize their fears.”²¹ According to Gitlin, his generation viewed the Bomb as a shadow that threatened the potential each of them had to successfully achieve anything in the future.²²

There was more to the life of these suburban youth than consumerism and fearing the Bomb. Inside the home, private contradictions existed which also affected the development of these young impressionable minds. During the 1950s, teens witnessed a society that preached one set of moral standards for children, yet allowed a different set of standards for adults. For example, a drink after work, or several when company visited, was considered a necessary part of life for many adults, yet parents were shocked when they learned of the widespread drinking of imitative and bored teenagers. In *The Affluent Society*, Galbraith points out that the United States was a nation that drilled the need for both economic and social restraint into the minds of the young. At the same time, Galbraith argued, youth saw adults who modeled the “desire for more food and the frivolity of the desire for a more expensive automobile.”²³ He reasoned that parents should not have been surprised when their young emulated their purchasing habits. After all, they learned early that “one man’s consumption becomes another man’s wish.”²⁴

²¹ Ibid., 23.

²² Ibid., 23.

²³ Galbraith, 117.

²⁴ Ibid., 123.

Perhaps one of the largest and most frustrating contradictions in the 1950s was the role women were expected to play. TV personality Allen Ludden once shared his “expert” opinion about the historical roles of men and women in his 1950s teen advice books *Plain Talk for Men Under 21!* and *Plain Talk for Women Under 21!* “Mentally, woman was made to serve. She was emotional, irrational, gentle, obedient, cheerful, and dependent. Man, conversely, was rational, individualistic, unemotional, solid, and aggressive.”²⁵ Women who asserted strength and independence would, it was theorized, ruin not only familial harmony, but society in general. As early as 1942, Philip Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers* warned of how a “middle-class mom smothered her sons, emasculated her husband, and chose crass material gain over civic commitment.”²⁶ As Wylie saw it, as long as women were the heads of middle-class families, America would be destroyed by what he called “Momism.” This sentiment was echoed by the 1947 book *The Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, by Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg, who charged that women who wanted to be “independent” were victims of a “deep illness.” Women who sought a college education or employment, according to Farnham and Lundberg, were “engaging in symbolic ‘castration’ of men.”²⁷ In his book *Educating our Daughters*, Lynn White, Jr., president of Mills College, led debates against educating women in the same way one would educate men. “Higher learning” he stressed “was harmful to women.” In addition to college education being irrelevant because it was not applicable to their futures as wives and mothers, White added his concern that the process

²⁵ Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, in *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 153.

²⁶ Zaretsky, 8.

²⁷ Coontz, 32.

would be frustrating for young women because “few of them would ever get to use [their education] anyway, and it would make them resent doing all the household tasks.”²⁸

As teenage girls looked to their mothers to model what type of women they should become, they saw suburban middle class women who had lost their identity. These mothers had submitted to the cultural idea that those who refuse to conform to societal standards of what the wife and mother should be “were likely to be marginalized, stigmatized, and disadvantaged as a result.”²⁹ These were women who were programmed in the post-war years to believe that “no other experience in life [would] provide the same sense of fulfillment, of happiness, of complete pervading contentment as motherhood.”³⁰ Instead of chasing dreams of a career or independent future, women should make children their life. If a teenage daughter were to step back and take a good look at her mother’s life, she may see very few alternatives to “baking brownies, experimenting with new canned soup, and getting rid of stains around the collar.”³¹

Regardless of gender, in the end, it was the truth behind those perfectly manicured lawns and eager smiles – the contradictions of the well-ordered and perfect society – that caused the youth of the 1950s to rebel. The “rebellious” behavior most of them expressed was not only a response to the contradictions they witnessed, but also a wake-up call to the adults of society to make the changes to a society the youth would one day inherit.

²⁸ Miller, 160.

²⁹ May, 15.

³⁰ Coontz, 32.

³¹ Ibid, 32.

Juvenile Delinquency and Government Intervention

Juvenile delinquency was rising rapidly in the post-World War II years, and it was a subject that should have been addressed. However, contrary to what some adults in the 1950s believed, juvenile delinquency was not a new issue. Delinquent behavior became associated with criminal law in 1899 when Illinois legislators established laws addressing delinquency as an “act committed by a child which, if committed by an adult, would be a crime.”³² These acts included minor crimes such as disorderly conduct and vagrancy, but also felonies such as burglary, larceny, robbery, and rape. A juvenile can also be considered delinquent specifically for being “incorrigible,” “associating with vicious or immoral persons,” “being absent from his home without consent,” or “growing up in idleness.”³³ Labels such as incorrigible, immoral, or idle are left entirely to the interpretation of a justice system whose biases can change with time and experience. During the 1950s, any teenager could have been labeled a delinquent, regardless of committing a concrete crime or not.

What does this concept of a consumer-driven homogenized society full of contradictions have to do with juvenile delinquency in the 1950s? Looking back at teenagers of the 1950s, we initially see them in superficial ways. They listened to rock and roll, had their own style of dress, and guarded their time for leisure activities. Beyond the surface, however, there existed individuals who were confused by an adult society that had stereotyped them as unappreciative or spoiled kids from the affluent society into which they were born. Many teenagers grew tired of being so

³² Joseph S. Roucek, *Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1958), 4.

³³ Roucek, 5.

misunderstood, as this letter to the editor by teenager Patricia J. Bodell bluntly announces:

“We young moderns know that growing up in these insecure times is a big job full of problems. First of all, there is a constant threat of a third world war. All draft age boys all over the country are torn between college, volunteering rather than being drafted, or working until the Army catches up with them. Then there’s the world we live in. We youngsters are told to ‘quit acting silly and be your age!’ and then slapped in the face with ‘Hey, you’re too young to do that!’ What would you do?”³⁴

The voices of teenagers like Patricia who wrote letters to the editor in publications around the country, as well as letters to the newly formed Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, were unfortunately not given much attention when the “experts” tried to decide what to do about a growing epidemic of juvenile delinquency. As the Senate prepared to confront juvenile delinquency with intense investigations, Senator Estes Kefauver urged the subcommittee to focus only on testimony before the committee in an “attempt to find facts and figures to demonstrate the various national, class, and rural and urban characteristics of delinquency.”³⁵ No testimonies were heard from actual adolescents who were experiencing the societal challenges, temptations, or contradictions about which they wrote to the committee members, newspapers, or magazines.

When the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency began to hear testimony from professionals in fields such as sociology, psychology, and law enforcement as to their theories behind the rise in juvenile delinquency cases, social scientists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck provided some of the most insightful testimony recorded. The Gluecks studied the multitude of variables that could play a role in a child’s life which may ultimately lead them to deviant behavior. While critics often

³⁴ “Letters to the Editor,” *Saturday Evening Post*, February 19, 1955, page 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

blamed mothers for their children's ills, the Gluecks testified that the root cause of delinquency was more likely a lack of affection from one or both parents. Just prior to these hearings, the researchers had noted that on average the fathers of delinquent boys were quick to ridicule their sons and that, in general, an overall ambiance of hostility existed between fathers and sons.³⁶ They argued that other variables in family relationships could lead to delinquency, including child abuse, neglect, children being rejected by family (parents and/or siblings), inconsistent discipline, divorce of parents, witnessing spousal abuse (verbal and physical), drunkenness, mental retardation, and delinquent parents or siblings.³⁷

Between 1954 and 1956, in addition to focusing on the social causes for juvenile delinquency as discussed by the Gluecks, the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency held hearings which placed the spotlight on comic book publishers, executives from the television, radio and film industry, and members of social service organizations. The government was on the brink of taking federal action to put an end to juvenile delinquency by enforcing censorship laws. James Gilbert argues that these televised hearings "publicized delinquency and thereby lent credence to the impression of a mounting youth crime wave. They transformed the issue from a question of local pressure on news shops, movie theatres, radio and television stations, into an issue of whether or not to establish federal regulations and censorship."³⁸ The public responded to these televised hearings by sending countless letters to the Subcommittee agreeing that blaming the media for delinquency was the right thing to do.

³⁶ Sheldon Glueck and Eleanor Glueck, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), 125.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁸ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 143.

As the two-year investigation continued, Subcommittee members had the opportunity to observe the social concerns discussed during the hearings, specifically testimony offered by the Gluecks, reflected in the 1955 movie *Blackboard Jungle*. After teacher-hero Mr. Dadier is mugged by some of his students in an alley, he steadfastly refuses to name names. The police detective (Horace McMahon) assigned to the case opines about the changes he has seen. “I’ve handled lots of problem kids, kids from both sides of the tracks – they were five and six years old in the last war – father in the army – mother in the defense plant – no home life – no church life – no place to go. Maybe kids are like the rest of the world today: mixed up, suspicious, scared.”³⁹

As various groups would testify, and popular culture would coincidentally reflect, affluent families were not immune to the issue of juvenile delinquency because, as the Gluecks testified, lack of attention or supervision was a main contributor to these delinquent behaviors. This is a variable which can transcend all socio-economic classes. The movie industry chose to reflect these theories in the dialogue of law enforcement officials in both *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), two movies about juvenile delinquency that showed both suburban and inner city perspectives of the effects of lack of attention and supervision of teenagers. Both movies produced controversy among parents, religious leaders, politicians, and educators who were concerned that the rebellious attitudes, style, and ideas of these movies, including the rock and roll soundtrack of *Blackboard Jungle*, would encourage teens to act out in unacceptable ways. In addition, parents were also offended that the movie industry

³⁹ Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*. (Durham, NC: Drake University Press, 2005), 150.

would make pointed accusations that parents should be, to some extent, held accountable for their children's behavior.

In the end, the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, led by Senators Robert C. Hendrickson, William Langer, Thomas C. Hennings, Jr., and Estes Kefauver, ruled that media, and media alone, was responsible for the rise in juvenile delinquency. The committee saw this as an opportunity to press for legislation regulating comic books, television, and the movies. However, as they focused only on media, there were important societal aspects being ignored, such as lack of recreation, poor schools, and broken families,⁴⁰ aspects that, ironically, Senator Kefauver had initially ordered be investigated in an effort to look at multiple causes of juvenile delinquency. Those issues would not be addressed, at least not by Senator Kefauver or federal regulations because the crimes were in violation of local and state laws and had to be addressed in those jurisdictions. The comic book industry self-imposed the Comic Code, while the other industries agreed to be more careful in their portrayal of adults and authority figures as they continued to produce their media and earn a profit.

Despite the Senate's conclusion that mass media was to blame for the rise in juvenile delinquency, the Subcommittee refused to take action and slammed the door on the issue. This of course did nothing to help the search for solutions for juvenile delinquency, and the next year the Federal Bureau of Investigations issued a report that concluded more than half of all major crimes – robberies, burglaries, larcenies, etc. – were committed by persons under 21. In fact, the report showed the number of boys and girls under eighteen accounted for nearly 46% of all the arrests for serious crimes. In an effort to drastically decrease that number, J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, urged

⁴⁰Ibid., 143.

that in such cases the “names of juvenile delinquents – and the names of their parents – be made public.”⁴¹ This report by the FBI encouraged the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency to meet and give additional consideration to social issues that had been clearly addressed by “expert” testimony. Rather than seriously consider specific issues or testimony, the Subcommittee instead blamed “weak family life and lack of psychiatrists, social workers, and other therapeutic forces to prevent or cure the personality problems arising from family and social strains at all economic levels.”⁴² Rather than suggest any real action be taken to address the situation, the Subcommittee repeatedly urged more research in the social sciences to address areas of special concern. They also asked schools to consider trying more effectively to meet the different personality needs of their pupils.⁴³ The Senate Subcommittee, in effect, just passed the buck and closed the book. These decisions made by the Senate Subcommittee ran counter to what investigators suggested, which was to create a “broad, concerted plan of action”⁴⁴ that involved all Americans. Finding a solution to curb juvenile delinquency should have been everybody’s business.

Conclusion

As the government shifted its attention specifically to comic books as a leading cause of juvenile delinquency, it became clear that the Senate Subcommittee was not done investigating the causes of juvenile delinquency in suburbia. After all, did Americans really want the “good” kids exposed to such atrocities as dismembered parts

⁴¹ Joseph S Roucek, *Juvenile Delinquency*. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1958), 1.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser, “The Shame of America,” *Saturday Evening Post*, February 5, 1955, 30.

of a body – ears, nose, and eyes - stuffed in a whisky bottle, or ghouls eating rotting flesh of a cadaver? How many parents would be happy with their children reading tales of a boy content to watch his stepmother sink into quicksand or a little girl faking evidence that sends her mother and her mother's lover to the electric chair? It would only take the expert testimony of one psychologist to convince much of the nation that comic books were the direct cause of juvenile delinquency.

CHAPTER 3

THE DANGERS OF USING YOUR IMAGINATION

“The truth is, that delinquency is a product of a real environment in which a child lives –
and not the fiction he reads!”
~Bill Gaines, Senate Testimony, 1954

The glossy covered 32-page adventure lands that rose to popularity among imaginative audiences everywhere in the 1930s survived the home front perils of World War II prepared to face the challenges ahead. With the help of Superman, Captain America, and The Flash, comic book heroes battled Nazis, the Japanese, and supernatural forces, and encouraged the patriotic spirit of young audiences and G.I.'s around the world. After World War II the comic book superheroes no longer needed to fight the Germans or Japanese, and the market gradually became saturated with comic books that featured criminals, mad scientists, and the supernatural. It started innocently enough with the Lev Gleason *Crime Does Not Pay* series, which vividly animated real cases that had been solved by the FBI or other law enforcement agencies. Many of these comics featured crime and mayhem in a way that shocked adults who were collectively bringing order to their world after having lived through the disorder of the Great Depression and World War II. As cases of juvenile delinquency began to rise in those early post-World War II years, so did the blame that the mass production of crime and horror comic books were among the causes. Adult groups, led by psychiatrist Frederic Wertham, crusaded against all comic books out of fear that they would one day lead to a country full of adults too weak to fight Communism. Writers and artists of the main comic books under fire, specifically Entertaining Comics (EC), argued that Wertham and his army of anti-comic crusaders were fighting the wrong foe. Wertham's opponents argued that he should be

more concerned about the inspiration for those stories – the real occurrences behind the walls of what appeared to be a well-ordered society.

Law enforcement officials, educators, parents, and clergy called upon the federal government to regulate the comic book industry in order to maintain the health of the nation and curtail what they considered one of the driving forces behind a deteriorating image of America. At a time when Cold War culture demanded that all Americans strive to be middle class suburbanites who must model the nation's morals and values for all to see, the idea that Communist nations could exploit any of the nation's weaknesses was frightening to many. The Soviets were already aware of moral issues on the American home front that were affecting the health of the nation, such as civil rights, sexism (sexual confusion), a rise in fascism, and juvenile delinquency. In the following chapter, I will discuss the arguments that comic books were the source of juvenile delinquency among middle class teenagers as Fredric Wertham charged in his book *Seduction of the Innocent*. In addition, I will examine ways in which Entertaining Comics (EC) pushed the envelope and challenged Cold War standards of ideal middle class values, including specific challenges regarding the issue of race in America. Their creative resistance, I believe, led to the federal investigation which nearly destroyed the comic book industry.

“A young child hangs himself and beneath the dead child is found an open comic book luridly describing and depicting a hanging (as had happened in a number of cases), the mechanics of the relationship between the three have to be investigated.”⁴⁵ In *Seduction of the Innocent*, Fredric Wertham used arguments such as this to appeal to adults that comic books, specifically the crime and horror genre, were ruining the youth

⁴⁵ Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York and Toronto: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1953), 46.

of America. Wertham stressed that it was comic books, and only comic books, that were responsible for the increased brutality of delinquent crimes; juveniles were simply repeating scenes they read. As a result of interviews with young patients at Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital in New York, Wertham further claimed that comic books distressed children and led to their internalization of crime-comic situations such as sadism, masochism, masturbatory situations, and homoerotic art.⁴⁶

As the mass media began to cater specifically to youth with comic books, among other forms of media, cases of juvenile delinquency began to rise. Some may have dismissed the rise in theft, violence, or copycat acts as a coincidence, but psychologist Frederick Wertham exploited these occurrences as a direct correlation to what adolescents were absorbing in crime and horror comics. His “proof,” which he repeatedly shared with news media, began with the case of William Becker from Sweickley, Pennsylvania. William was found in the basement of his house where he had strung a clothesline over a rafter, wrapped it around his neck, and hanged himself. During the coroner’s inquest, William’s mother told the authorities that the boy was an avid reader of comic books and was obviously enacting a scene from them. “I burned every one I found,” she testified, “but Billy always found a way of hiding them.”⁴⁷ It did not take long after this story made national headlines for a variety of service organizations and influential writers to interpret delinquency as a product of a modern mass media. Groups such as the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, as well as the National Bar Association, became active participants in the national debate that began

⁴⁶ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 92.

⁴⁷ David Hajdu, *The Ten Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How it Changed America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 88.

to rage over the effects of the media and the rights of society to limit what it saw as destructive influences.⁴⁸

As a result of Frederic Wertham's book full of shocking accounts of crime and death at the hands of youth, many parents, teachers, clergy, and law enforcement officials became active in seeking a ban on comic books. No one discounted the statistics presented by many in law enforcement that crimes committed by youth were on the rise. What could be challenged was that comic books were solely to blame. According to the comic book industry, ninety percent of American youth were reading some form of comic book, including the crime, horror, war, romance, or superhero genres. Some in the industry argued that if comic books were the direct cause of juvenile delinquency, the entire country would be turned upside down with crimes committed by juveniles – delinquent or not.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, groups of adults would often gather as many comic books as they could find and burn them, often on playgrounds in front of school children.

In the midst of these “innocent” scenes reminiscent of book burning ceremonies in Nazi Germany before World War II, a few parents did speak out on behalf of the comic book industry. Robert Warshow was not only a parent, but also an author who focused on popular culture of the 1940s and 1950s, specifically western and gangster film genres. He was not a fan of comic books, but his son, Paul, devoured them. His personal favorites were *Shock SuspenStories*, *Crime SuspenStories*, and the *Vault of Horror*, all published by EC Comics. Many of the stories found in these issues, according to Warshow, “if one takes them simply in terms of their plots, are not unlike the stories of

⁴⁸ Gilbert, 80.

⁴⁹ *Comic Book Heroes Unmasked*, directed by Steve Kroopnick (2003; Los Angeles, CA: Triage Entertainment, 2004), DVD.

Poe or other writers of horror tales.”⁵⁰ Warshow felt the immediacy of comic books, having an entire story drawn out in six to eight pages, did take away from young readers developing the skill to learn to appreciate the complexity of good literature, but he believed the majority of youth in society remained as well adjusted after reading the comics as they were before. In regards to his son, Paul, Warshow explained,

“I can’t see that his hundred or hundred and fifty comic books are having any specific effects on him. The bloodiest of ax murderers apparently does not disturb his sleep or increase the violence of his own impulses. If there were no comic books, Paul would be reading things like *The Pit and the Pendulum*, which, to be sure, would be better, but just as violent. As far as I can judge, he has no inclination to accept as real the comic book conception of human nature which sees everyone as a potential criminal and every criminal as an absolute criminal.”⁵¹

Warshow went on to make the point, directed specifically at Frederic Wertham, that children who were committing these terrible acts of violence or crime were probably seriously disturbed before they ever read a comic book. If comic books were banned, Warshow reasoned, “Something on an equally low level would appear to take their place.”⁵² Wertham disagreed with Warshow’s analysis, of course, and he was determined that comic books would be the first domino to fall in the reform of mass media in the lives of American youth.

Entertaining Comics

On September 3, 1949, U.S. intelligence discovered that the Soviet Union had tested an atomic bomb. The Cold War was no longer an abstract concept described by

⁵⁰ Robert Warshow, “Paul, the Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham,” in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Illinois: The Free Press & The Falcon’s Wing Press, 1957), 200.

⁵¹ Warshow, 204.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 210.

politicians. They had spent the last few years discussing foreign lands and economic theories, but now the threat of devastation at home was palpable. Suddenly, zombies with their hollow eye sockets and flesh peeling off their bones in the 38 panels of *The Crypt of Terror* [later known as *Tales from the Crypt*] were not so far-fetched in the minds of readers who now had a mental picture of their fate in the wake of a possible nuclear holocaust.⁵³ It was these horrific images, as well as the commentary and portrayals of a variety of other social issues that would make Bill Gaines and Entertaining Comics (EC) a prime target for Fredric Wertham's crusade against comic books.

With all of the comic book companies going to extremes to compete for readers, why pick on EC? In *Comic Book Nation*, Bradford Wright argues that "EC challenged prevailing assumptions about race, democracy, anticommunism, authority, warfare, the atomic bomb, history, marriage, family, children, and ultimately, taste."⁵⁴ Bill Gaines, and his writers at EC, took their stories very seriously. His perspective was simple: the stories found in his publication were imitating social interests in mature themes, such as murder, lust, psychosis, and political intrigue. To put it more simply, EC comics reflected what Bill Gaines would later explain was his own basic conviction that "people are no damn good," and he matter-of-factly explained that EC gained mileage out of scheming wives and vengeful husbands." In the EC crime and horror paradigm, Bill Gaines considered the true graveyard to be inside the average American home.⁵⁵

Writing up to their readers rather than down, and incorporating themes often compared to those found in Alfred Hitchcock films or episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, EC

⁵³ Hajdu, 177.

⁵⁴ Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 153.

⁵⁵ Wright, 136.

provided storylines which “unmasked respectable fathers who torture their children, big-eyed toddlers who plot their parents’ deaths, young couples who seethe with homicidal venom, and most of all, sexy women who lure horny young blockheads to hideous doom.”⁵⁶ In addition to those storylines, many times authority figures, such as parents, teachers, law enforcement, or adult authority in general, were depicted as unwelcome parts of daily life. No person or subject was safe from the power of their pen and ink drawings. There was no such thing as a happy home in EC family.

Bill Gaines was one of just a small number of mass media puppet masters who were attempting to use their influence to expose what was truly going on behind the doors of the cookie cutter homes with the perfectly manicured lawns. Many times EC exaggerated the “real lives” of people in suburbia in order to make a critical point, which was things may have seemed perfect to the outside world, but in many cases they were not. In fact, EC made looking through what Elaine Tyler May called the “window of vulnerability” into an art form as he showcased the lives of people trying to live up to the expectations of the well-ordered Cold War society.

EC has countless examples of its primary, and arguably easiest, target: marriage. Children of white middle class suburban homes in the early atomic age typically grew up observing a mother who had been contained in her “sphere of influence,” and her children viewed her accept, embrace, or reject what Elaine Tyler May refers to as domestic containment. In *Homeward Bound*, May discussed what once appeared to be a metaphor for the Cold War on the home front, but actually referred to “the way in which

⁵⁶ Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 257.

public policy, personal behavior, and even political values were focused on the home.”⁵⁷

In order to contribute to the safety and security of her family, as well as her husband’s career success, a woman was supposed to bring balance to the inside of her home and to the family itself. EC drew upon the feelings of the women who rejected those spheres. In fact, the first story in the first issue of *Shock SuspensStories* features such a tale. In “The Neat Job,” Eleanor Berdeen married a man she did not love, but considering her options, she felt that he was her best bet as she felt she needed a husband badly. In this fictional account of a loveless marriage, however, Eleanor soon learns how much her husband is obsessed with neatness and accountability. For three years he complained on a daily basis about her inability to be as neat and orderly as he wanted her to be. He even built a workroom in the basement that he forbade her enter because he knew she would spread her disease of untidiness to his inner sanctum. In traditional EC style, the story concludes with a twist (Illustration 1). Eleanor tells the detectives that she wanted to show Arthur that she could be neat and that she cleaned up every drop of blood. Eleanor had neatly dissected Arthur and deposited his remains in his precious jars on his perfectly ordered workbench.⁵⁸

Most of EC’s stories were told from the perspective of an adult, but one of the most famous *Shock* comics, “The Orphan,” is narrated by a ten-year-old girl. Lucy’s father is an alcoholic who beats her. Lucy’s mother tells her that she was a mistake conceived when father was drunk. Lucy tells readers, “I hated them both. I don’t know who I hated more...Daddy, because he beat me and yelled at me and came home drunk all the time...or Mom, because she never wanted me.” Lucy discovers that her mother is

⁵⁷ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 16.

⁵⁸ Jack Kamen. “The Neat Job.” *Shock SuspensStories* 1, no. 1 (September 1952): 8.

having an affair with a man named Steve, so she devises a plan to escape from her family. She murders her own father and frames her mother and Steve for the crime. The story ends with Dad murdered, Mom and Steve in the electric chair, and Lucy living happily ever after with her aunt in a nice home where she gets all the love and toys she wants.⁵⁹ According to Lucy (Illustration 2), it was “just the way I hoped it would work out when I shot Daddy from the front bedroom window with the gun I knew was in the night table and went downstairs and put the gun in Mommy’s hand and started the crying act...”⁶⁰ Despite its morbidity and shock value, “The Orphan” called attention to what *some* children inside these perfectly happy well-ordered homes were really living through. The actions of the characters, especially Lucy, may have been exaggerated, but in reality some children witnessed the abuse, neglect, or infidelity that was going on inside the home as a result of their parents’ unhappy lives. This, of course, ran completely counter to what Americans were supposed to do: turn to the family as the safety net in an increasingly dangerous and insecure world and adhere to codes of conduct created by experts, leaders, and politicians.⁶¹

Entertaining Comics stories critiqued more than just murder and mayhem associated with real domestic issues in the middle class white world that needed attention in this newly ordered society. Bill Gaines was not oblivious to the contradiction of the U.S. government promoting goodwill ambassador tours of entertainers, for example, as a “symbol of the triumph of American democracy”⁶² when in reality, violence and discrimination against African Americans was reaching new highs. In addition to EC’s

⁵⁹ Wright, 149.

⁶⁰ Al Feldstein, “The Orphan,” *Shock SuspenStories* 1, no. 14 (December 1954): 6.

⁶¹ May, 9.

⁶² Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 2006), 4.

commentary about the intimate personal lives of people, Gaines and his staff also delivered timely social critiques aimed at racial injustice, a subject few in the comic book industry would acknowledge at the time. One such story is *The Guilty*, which appeared in *Shock SuspenStories* in 1953. The story takes place in the South in small town America where a murder has been committed. The accused killer is in police captivity, but the evidence given against him is shoddy at best. His fate is as good as sealed because he is a black man accused of killing a white woman. The sheriff tells the civil rights attorney that he will not defend the accused if a lynch mob shows up at the jail house. The attorney cautions the sheriff, “A man’s life is at stake! And even if we feel he did it, he’s innocent until proved guilty.” The sheriff responds, “A man’s life! Hah! He’s only a dirty n----r! And he’s guilty...unless they can prove he ain’t!” Ultimately the sheriff and his boys take the law into their own hands and execute the prisoner during a staged escape attempt. When the group of men arrives back in town, the real killer has come forward to confess, but it was too late. In the final box (Illustration 3) the narrator levels a solemn warning that “for any American to have so little regard for the life and rights of any other American is a debasement of the principles of the Constitution upon which our country is founded.”⁶³ The final panel commentary, which became a standard feature in many EC comics, urged readers to challenge the country’s position on racism. Young Americans began to identify with commentary such as this as youth of different races were being brought together through other forms of mass media in the 1950s, specifically rock and roll. While the government was busy looking at comic books as a strong link to juvenile delinquency, it overlooked EC’s message encouraging its readers to take action on key issues worth fighting for during these early Cold War years.

⁶³ Al Feldstein, “The Guilty,” *Shock SuspenStories* 1 no. 3 (March 1953): 10 – 16.

Cold War Fears

As America mobilized for a war against Communism, some questioned the moral character of the children who would one day wage it. There were those who believed traditional values and civic virtue could not possibly be preserved when American youth were being seduced daily by the mass media's appeal to a new and growing consumer culture and its promise of instant self-gratification. Was it a feasible argument that comic books could actually cause a decline in morality, or was this form of popular culture simply being used as a scapegoat for the causes of societal ills?

One of the first real Cold War tests the United States encountered was America's military involvement combating communism in the Korean War. Without having a sufficient understanding of why the country was involved in this conflict, some Americans were at first detached from the events taking place around the thirty-eighth parallel. *Frontline Combat*, an EC creation, produced thought provoking stories with their realistic look at events taking place in Korea. Their honest depictions proved to be confusing to a nation who had triumphed over not just one enemy, but two, less than a decade earlier. The stories in *Frontline Combat* raised troubling questions about the strategy and purpose of the Korean War. Who was the United States fighting to defend, the South Koreans or the entire peninsula? What should America be doing to win this war? Would the atomic bomb be necessary? Why was Korea worth the risks?

Frontline Combat was primarily written and illustrated by Johnny Severin and Bill Elder, two veterans who saw action in World War II. Bill Gaines hired them to head this branch of EC because they were dedicated to telling the story of the men who were on the front lines defending America. Their attention to specific weapons details, history,

geography, and every job imaginable in the military was appreciated by the enlisted men and veterans who read this publication. But that attention also drew intense criticism from officials who felt their realistic portrayals were unpatriotic at a time when public support for a police action in Korea was very low. Patriots to the end, Severin and Elder were simply trying to be as realistic as possible in telling stories the press would not dare to tell.

As a magazine, *Frontline Combat* was a constant contradiction. In one story, a reader would find patriotic messages as a reminder that if citizens all work together and support our troops and the American way of life, the United States will remain superior to all other nations, governments, or military threats we encountered. For example, after being separated from their unit in “Contact” and pinned down by Chinese near the 38th parallel, a frightened Private Weems asks his sergeant how they will ever be able to win against North Korea. “An American is a man just like an Asiatic is a man. But America is a way of life. We can produce. We can turn out bullets by the billions for war, and we can turn out automobiles and washing machines for peace. As long as we believe in good we can’t go wrong!”(Illustration 4)⁶⁴ Three issues later, *Frontline Combat* contradicted itself with a story that was a blatant plea for America to realize that war was futile. In the “Big If,” a soldier laments “what if” about all events that day. What if he had stayed near the tanks? What if he hadn’t gotten separated from his unit? What if the stray mortar had landed five feet to the left? What if he had not stopped to adjust his buckle on his shoes? In the end, the soldier, who we learn is really speaking from the grave, makes his final

⁶⁴ Jack Davis, “Contact” *Frontline Combat* 1, no. 2 (September/October 1952): 28-29.

lament of “What if I had never been born? Then I would not have to die this way.”(Illustration 5)⁶⁵

Frontline Combat also addressed the issue of racism in the military. Due to President Harry Truman’s order for integration in the military after World War II, the Korean War proved to be the first real test of how whites and African Americans would co-exist in the heat of battle. The best story to address this issue in *Frontline Combat* is “Perimeter” in issue 15. The story centers around a soldier named Miller, who is not only sick of fighting a war he does not believe in, but he is also an equal opportunity discriminator with a big mouth. He particularly dislikes Private Matthews, an African American soldier who spends his free time reading the Bible and trying to keep the peace between the various races and nationalities in the group. One night the platoon takes heavy fire from a Chinese squad. It is dark and rainy and it becomes every man for himself. A soldier who goes by the name of Tex comes across a wounded American soldier whom he not only helps to safety but spends the night defending against a continuous assault of Chinese soldiers. When he is discovered by the rest of the platoon in the morning, Miller launches into an assault on Tex to let him know in no uncertain terms that he should be ashamed for protecting a black soldier. Tex grabs Private Matthews’s bible and hands it to Miller, telling him he needs that more than anyone else in the Platoon. The Bible opens to the verse “Hath we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?”⁶⁶ Bill Gaines and his infamous final pane commentary summed up an entire eight page story in one box (Illustration 6).

⁶⁵ Johnny Severin and Bill Elder, “Big If” *Frontline Combat* 1, no. 5 (March-April 1952): 27-33.

⁶⁶ Wally Wood, “Perimeter” *Frontline Combat* 1, no. 15 (January 1953): 1 – 8.

Frontline Combat was not the only EC publication to address the idea of men of every race fighting and dying for the United States. In a *Shock SuspenStories* tale, “In Gratitude,” EC pointed to the hypocrisy of a nation who was said to protect freedom and equality in countries around the world during the Cold War, but denied basic freedoms to its own citizens. The story opens with a hometown parade to welcome a wounded Korean War veteran home. After he has time to reunite with his parents, he learns that they did not honor his wishes to bury a G.I. who died while saving his life. The deceased soldier was black, but his parents did not know that when they promised to bury him in their family plot. The veteran’s parents were pressured by the community to bury the soldier in the segregated cemetery. Outraged, the veteran used a welcome home ceremony later that day to express his disappointment with his neighbors. “They drafted me into the Army...and sent me to Korea,” he says. “They said I was fighting for democracy...helping to turn back the tide of slavery that threatened to overrun Europe and Asia...and the world!” The soldier then reminds the crowd (Illustration 7) that the “grenade that killed his buddy did not discriminate on the basis of color. That man died defending democracy, and for this he endures discrimination at home, even in death.” The veteran shouted, “You say you’re proud of me! Well I’m not proud of you! I’m ashamed of you...and for you!” The people leave in silence, leaving the veteran alone, on the stage, crying.⁶⁷

In addition to commentary or critique of aspects of the Korean War, EC also pointed to the “dangers of political hatred and intolerance masquerading as patriotism.”⁶⁸ This message was a specific jab at the forces Bill Gaines believed were driving HUAC.

⁶⁷ Al Feldstein, “In Gratitude,” *Shock SuspenStories* 1 no. 11 (October – November 1953): 11 – 16.

⁶⁸ Wright, 142.

In a 1952 issue of *Shock SuspenStories*, “The Patriot” deliberately pointed the finger at those they considered to be caught up in McCarthy’s anti-communist hysteria. “The Patriot” opens with a small-town parade honoring returning Korean War veterans. As soldiers march past the crowd, a group of unruly citizens notice one onlooker who appears to be indifferent to the parade. “Look at his nose,” says one of them. “He must be a foreigner,” adds another. The mob quickly decides that the silent observer must be a “lousy Red.” When the stranger neglects to remove his hat in the presence of the American flag (illustration 8), the crowd attacks the man, calling him “traitor,” “subversive,” and “Red rat!” They beat him to death. After the attack the man’s wife arrives on the scene and the crowd learns that this “commie” they just killed is a blind American war veteran (illustration 9).⁶⁹ This powerful story, which angered some readers, was meant to make people reflect on the reality that loyal Americans were being questioned and attacked based on mere assumptions of others.

EC editor and owner Bill Gaines wanted to be real. His need for realism with Korean War stories in *Frontline Combat* displeased the U.S. Army, which “considered these publications subversive because they tended to discredit the army and undermine troop morale.” EC’s creation and promotion of *Frontline Combat* led to Gaines earning an FBI file and increased attention from Senator Estes Kefauver, who was in the process of investigating issues related to juvenile delinquency. In an interview with Gerard Jones, Gaines said this was “just the kind of attention the EC gang loved.”⁷⁰ Soon after the creation of Gaines’s FBI file, the entire comic book industry was almost ground to a screeching halt. According to Fredric Wertham and his supporters, comic books were

⁶⁹ Al Feldstein, “The Patriot,” *Shock SuspenStories* 1, no 2 (December 1952): 21, 24.

⁷⁰ Jones, 257.

poisoning American society and would have to stand trial for having the nerve to encourage readers, particularly the youth, to challenge the “idea” of American home life, families, relationships, and the United States military.

Comic Book Industry Hearings

“Some of the most offensive infractions of the moral code were found to be contained in the low-cost, paper-bound publications known as pocket-size books, in so-called cheesecake magazines, and in the flagrantly misnamed ‘comics’.”⁷¹ And this was just the opening statement made in the House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials Committee Hearing. The committee met in 1952 to serve two purposes. First, it was charged to “determine, by investigation and study, the extent to which books, magazines, and comic books containing immoral, obscene, or otherwise offensive matter, or placing improper advertising emphasis on crime, violence, and corruption, are being made available to the people of the United States through the United States mail and otherwise.” Second, it was to “determine the adequacy of existing law to prevent the publication and distribution of books containing immoral, offensive, and other undesirable material.”⁷² The House Committee heard testimony from church organizations, priests, police officers from Detroit and New York, magazine distributors, post office officials, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the National Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Of the nearly fifty witnesses called to testify,

⁷¹ House of Representatives Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, Investigation of Literature Allegedly Containing Objectionable Material: Eighty-Second Congress, Second Session on H. Res. Nos. 596 and 597, 1952, page 1.

⁷² House Committee, 1.

only five were from publishing companies, and of those, the comic books they published were not part of the crime and horror genre.

Claiming that freedom of speech and press were not issues in their investigation, the Senate Committee came to one seemingly important conclusion in 1955:

“Delinquency is the product of many related causal factors.”⁷³ After a two year investigation, including multiple hearings, Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver submitted an interim report detailing the findings of the Senate Judicial Committee’s investigation of juvenile delinquency in the United States. The Senate had taken into consideration the testimony submitted by the House, but had made a much more extensive investigation, which included testimony from Fredric Wertham as well as publishers, artists, and writers for the main comic book companies in America. The Senate Investigation gave Fredric Wertham the opportunity to work toward official means to shut down the comic book industry. During testimony, Wertham argued the comics were nothing but short courses in “murder, mayhem, robbery, rape, cannibalism, carnage, necrophilia, sex, sadism, masochism, and virtually every other form of crime, degeneracy, bestiality, and horror.”⁷⁴ Wertham gave numerous illustrated examples of issues, specifically found in EC comics, which dealt with forms of insanity and stressed sadistic degeneracy. He also showcased examples of issues “devoted to cannibalism with monsters in human form feasting on human bodies, usually the bodies of scantily clad women.”⁷⁵

When comic book publishers and editors were called to testify, EC’s Bill Gaines gave blunt and honest responses to Senator Kefauver’s questions. His testimony about

⁷³ Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Interim Report on Comics and Juvenile Delinquency: S. Res. 89 and S. Res. 190 (83rd Cong. 1st Sess.) – (83rd Cong. 2nd Sess.), 1955, 3.

⁷⁴ Senate Committee, 8.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 8.

one of his comic book covers in particular made headlines. Gaines was seated next to a giant reproduction of the now infamous Johnny Craig cover for Issue 22 of *Crime SuspenStories*, which depicted the severed head of a woman held by her hair in the hand of the ax murderer in the foreground and a portion of her lifeless body in the background.⁷⁶ Kefauver asked Gaines if he thought it was in good taste. “Yes sir, I do, for the cover of a horror comic.” Gaines went on to explain that, “a cover in bad taste, for example, might be defined as holding the head a little higher so that the blood could be seen dripping from it, and moving the body over a little further so that the neck of the body could be seen to be bloody.”

Quite a bit of diversity of opinion entered in to the testimony received during the Senate hearing. Experts from the fields of criminology, psychology, and sociology contributed their findings, and several were critical of Wertham’s crusade. Professor Frederic M. Thrasher cautioned the Senate Committee, for example, to weigh Wertham’s testimony with this in mind: he based his case on a study of a thousand children in his clinic, under his control. “His claims rested upon a select group of extreme cases. It may be said that no acceptable evidence has been produced by Wertham or anyone else for the conclusion that reading comic magazines has, or has not, a significant relation to delinquent behavior.”⁷⁷

In the end, in regard to the claim that juvenile delinquency is caused by comic books, the Senate Committee concluded that a variety of factors contribute to juvenile delinquency. Comic books, specifically the crime and horror genre, may be a symptom, but, they reasoned, an “endless variation of circumstance, opportunity, and personal

⁷⁶ Johnny Craig. Cover Art. *Crime SuspenStories* 1 no. 22 (April – May 1954) Cover.

⁷⁷ Senate, 13.

history must be taken into account”⁷⁸ about the individual committing the delinquent act. They argued that “although comic-book reading can be a symptom of such maladjustment, the emotionally distrusted child because of abnormal need may show a greater tendency to read books of this kind than a normal child. This theory appears as valid as thinking that alcoholism is a symptom of an emotional disturbance rather than a cause.”⁷⁹

While the press reported this hearing as a focus on the link between comic books and juvenile delinquency, there was another issue being discussed, and that was the exportation of crime and horror comics abroad. Senators verbalized their concerns about the comic book industry being responsible for giving young people abroad an “unfavorable and distorted view of American values, aspirations, and cultural patterns” through crime and horror comics. Among their main concerns was “evidence” they received that the U.S.S.R. was utilizing comic books to “undermine the morale of youth in many countries by pointing to crime and horror as portrayed in American comics as one of the end results of the most successful capitalist nation in the world.”⁸⁰

Ambassador Chester Bowles discussed Communist propaganda at length with the Committee and explained that the favorite anti-American theme used by the Soviets is the “degeneracy of American culture.” Comic books were not the only instrument used by the Soviets. Bowles gave examples of American motion pictures, television shows, literature, drama, and art in addition to his testimony on comic books.⁸¹ The final word by the Senate Committee on the contribution comic books made to Soviet propaganda

⁷⁸ Senate Committee, 13.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁸¹ Ibid., 22

was a bit harsher than what Bowles had to offer. Comic books are “represented in the Soviet propaganda that the United States crime rate, particularly the incidence of juvenile delinquency, is largely incited by the murders, robberies, and other crimes portrayed in ‘trash literature’”. The reason such reading matter is distributed, according to that propaganda, is that the ‘imperialists’ use it to condition a generation of young automatons who will be ready to march and kill in the future wars of aggression planned by the capitalists.”⁸²

In the end, few were safe from blame from the Senate Committee. They not only blamed publishers, editors, writers, and artists for the issues brought to light in this hearing, but also parents, educators, citizen groups, and social welfare agencies. The Committee did, however, offer praise for the comic book industry’s effort in the months following the hearings to make an effort to regulate itself.

The Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) was established in the fall of 1954 to “provide a ban on all horror and terror comic books, but not on crime comic books.”⁸³ The CMAA would have to place its seal of approval on the front of every comic book in order for publishing of that issue to be possible. In order to earn the seal, the following editorial guidelines were established:

General Standards – Part A

1. Crime shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.
2. No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of crime.
3. Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.
4. If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.
5. Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates the desire for emulation.

⁸² Senate Committee, 22.

⁸³ Ibid., 31.

6. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.
7. Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gun play, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.
8. No unique or unusual methods of concealing weapons shall be shown.
9. Instances of law enforcement officers dying as a result of a criminal's activities should be discouraged.
10. The crime of kidnapping shall never be portrayed in any detail, nor shall any profit accrue to the abductor or kidnapper. The criminal or the kidnapper must be punished in every case.
11. The letter of the word "crime" on a comic magazine shall never be appreciably greater than the other words contained in the title. The word "crime" shall never appear alone on a cover.
12. Restraint in the use of the word "crime" in titles or subtitles shall be exercised.

General Standards – Part B

1. No comic magazine shall use the word "horror" or "terror" in its title.
2. All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.
3. All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.
4. Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly nor so as to injure the sensibility of the reader.
5. Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited.⁸⁴

By today's standards, these regulations seem laughable, but they reflect a very real fear middle class parents had about the future of the country at the height of the Cold War. General Standard A3, for example, addresses respect for established authority. In the event of an emergency, such as a threat of attack from Russia, the country would need to rely on law enforcement officials to guide them. If an entire generation was being encouraged through the influence of comic books to look upon law enforcement officials with little respect, society could possibly break down during a time of crisis. Law enforcement was also in charge of ensuring that good would triumph over evil, as General Standard A6 requests, and that every criminal be punished for his or her

⁸⁴ Senate Committee, 36 – 37.

misdeeds. This is a standard plot line in most literature, and during the Cold War, the government wanted to ensure the public that they were doing all they could to combat evil, specifically Communism.

The General Standards B list created censorship standards that were, in reality, left to a person's perception. For example, words such as lurid, unsavory, and gruesome to describe illustrations can mean different things to different people. I would argue that some of those "unsavory" illustrations, such as illustration 3 of this chapter, acknowledged a world of racism that the white middle class suburban crowd did not want to face.

Not all comic book publishers were quick to jump on the CMAA bandwagon. The economic backlash of pre-approval of comic books would trickle through the entire industry from the publishing company to the distributors, and even down to the news stand. As a response to legal challenges that began to arise to such regulation, the Harvard Law Review published its interpretation of standing and pending laws regarding the regulation of comic books, as well as legal suggestions for the industry. The Harvard Law Review agreed that pre-censorship would have a negative effect on the industry at first, but it suggested they felt that once the industry was accustomed to the regulations, this economic hardship would lessen. After careful dissection of every option of regulation which could be considered, the Review suggested the industry would be better off self-regulating rather than allowing the state or federal government to do so. The industry was advised to be specific with its regulations, and to recognize the legal meaning of words such as "obscene," "lewd," and "lascivious," and the "limited

protection which the First Amendment gives to the literature those words describe.”⁸⁵

Since the original 1954 guidelines, the CMAA has revised its standards only twice in fifty-five years as a response to cries from comic book editors to keep up with the times in order to stay competitive with non-regulated comics.⁸⁶

Conclusion

In September 1954, Bill Gaines called a press conference to announce his decision to cancel all EC crime and horror comic books in order to substitute a “clean, clean line” of comics in order to satisfy American parents. In the final issue of *Tales from the Crypt*, Gaines used the Crypt Keeper to be more to the point with this narrative statement: “As a result of the hysterical, injudicious, and unfounded charges leveled at crime and horror comics, many retailers and wholesalers throughout the country have been intimidated into refusing to handle this type of magazine.”⁸⁷ From a financial standpoint, EC had no choice but to pull its crime and horror lines. To Gaines, there was “no point going into a defense of this kind of literature with comic magazine censorship now a fact. “We at EC,” he added, “look forward to an immediate drop in the crime and juvenile delinquency rate of the United States.”⁸⁸

EC folded with the exception of one lone publication, MAD Magazine, which continues to show steady sales in the industry fifty-seven years later. MAD magazine was overlooked by Senate Subcommittees and Comic Code Authorities because it was

⁸⁵ Regulation of Comic Books. *Harvard Law Review* 68 (January 1955) 493.

⁸⁶ Amy Kiste Nyberg, “Comic Book Censorship in the United States,” In *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign*, edited by John A. Lent (London: Associated University Press, 1999), 60.

⁸⁷ Wright, 177.

⁸⁸ Wright, 177.

seen as a funny book. Cartoonist Rick Griffin vividly remembers the first time he saw MAD. “There was something unusual about the format of this book. The strange use of ‘doctored’ photographs mixed with weird art struck me as rebellious and antiestablishment.”⁸⁹ Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein decided to disguise the same social issues they addressed in their crime and horror comics as satire. They could “revel in contrariness, point out skeletons in closets and dirt swept under the rugs.”⁹⁰ They made fun of the American Dream in every issue, and they soon became a favorite among high school and college students nationwide.

Despite what was seen by most critics to be a flawed and problematic argument about the impact of comic books on juvenile delinquency, Fredric Wertham’s warnings about the implications of the influence of mass media on the youth culture may have been a serious prediction of things to come. By the mid-1950s Hollywood was beginning to exploit the teenage market and the theme of juvenile delinquency with movies such as *The Wild One* (1953), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). Regardless of facing its own charges in front of Senate committees, Hollywood did not face the same regulatory limitations as the comic book industry, and its “rebellious” hits continued to earn the film industry a comfortable living.

⁸⁹ Maria Reidelbach, *Completely Mad: A History of the Comic Book and Magazine* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 186.

⁹⁰ Riedelback, 188.



Illustration #4: Jack Davis, "Contact" *Frontline Combat* 1, no. 2 (September/October 1952): 28-29.

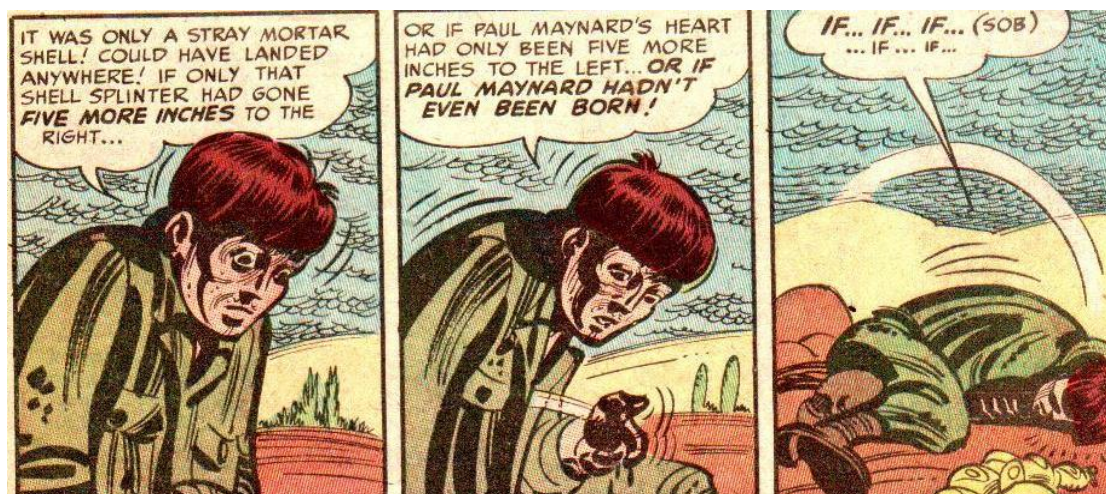


Illustration #5: Johnny Severin and Bill Elder, "Big If" *Frontline Combat* 1, no. 5 (March-April 1952): 27-33.



Illustration #6: Wally Wood, "Perimeter" *Frontline Combat* 1, no. 15 (January 1953): 1 – 8.



Illustration #7: Al Feldstein, "In Gratitude," *Shock SuspenStories* 1 no. 11 (October – November 1953): 11 – 16.



Illustration #8 - 9: Al Feldstein, "The Patriot," *Shock SuspenStories* 1, no 2 (December 1952): 21, 24.

CHAPTER 4 JUVENILE DELINQUENCY ON THE BIG SCREEN

Mildred: “What are you rebelling against, Johnny?”

Johnny: “Whaddya got?”⁹¹

~Johnny Strabler, *The Wild One*

While the minds of approximately 20,000 children were being corrupted by comic books, others were being ruined by movies such as *The Wild One*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, and *Blackboard Jungle*. Parents, teachers, and law enforcement officials accused the motion picture industry of showing juvenile delinquency in a favorable light – as something exciting. The studios viewed this increased attention as an opportunity. At a time when the pressure was on the motion picture industry to present films that projected wholesome images of youth, the increased box office receipts for delinquency films was proof enough that a market existed for such a story. This chapter will focus on how the movie industry exploited the idea of delinquency as they cranked out movies that appealed specifically to the alienated youth in America. I will also discuss two films, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle*, which were meant not only to appeal to both teenagers and parents, but also to raise genuine concerns about the societal factors which can contribute to delinquency in the suburbs and schools. Finally, in the ongoing saga of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, I will discuss Senator Estes Kefauver’s investigation of the movie studios and their specific link to juvenile delinquency.

⁹¹ *The Wild One*, directed by Laslo Benedek (1953; Los Angeles, CA: Columbia Pictures), DVD.

Teenpics

Television had taken over the family home in the evening. The adult world controlled programming the images of the wholesome Cleaver family or the socially accepted variety found on the Ed Sullivan Show. Many teens from the suburbs were tired of television flashing perfect images of the average home that they had observed were simply not true. They saw flaws in the depiction of the American Dream; the contradictions of a society that could have it all on the outside yet at the same time were unhappy or distant from each other inside the home. The movie industry, which had been struggling since the integration of the television in American homes, saw an opportunity to identify – or exploit - a new demographic with a different type of movie. The teenpic was born.

By the late 1950s, the marketing gurus in Hollywood played with a range of genres and styles to find just the right formula of images, stories, and sounds to exploit youth's potential as a new market. The answer was the character of the teenage rebel. The rebel offered a character that helped to establish a difference between the teen and adult markets. With the exception of a handful of teenpics, the teen rebel appeared as a juvenile version of the Hollywood gangster, casting the antagonism of cop and robber in specifically generational terms. The rebel also offered an emotional justification for a distinct teen film culture that operated outside the traditional standards of Hollywood film.⁹²

Film historians argue that 1955 was the year the true modern teen film was born with the release of *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle*. However, *The Wild*

⁹² Leerom Modovi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham, NC: Drake University Press, 2005), 184 – 185.

One, released in 1953, set the stage. Marlon Brando's performance as Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One* was widely viewed by teenagers and film critics as a celebration of the very outlaw behavior the film's introductory disclaimer condemned. Early in the film when Johnny Strabler is asked what he was rebelling against, he simply replies "Whattya got?" and teenagers immediately identified with his plight throughout the movie. The box office receipts quickly encouraged the studios to establish a marketing formula to encourage a repeat performance of the success of this film.⁹³ The success of *The Wild One*, the publicity over Frederick Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent*, the downward spiral of the comic book industry, and Senator Kefauver's hearings on juvenile delinquency seemed to create the perfect storm for the attention needed to make *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle* such controversial successes in 1955.

"You're tearing me apart!"

In contemporary America, the concept of the alienated teenager is a cliché, but in the teenpic that touched off the firestorm in 1955, that teenager was meant to be a wake-up call. Director Nicholas Ray had intended *Rebel Without a Cause* to especially speak to middle class white parents living in posh suburbs to start listening to their kids and to start taking care of them. The movie shows that disaster is the only result of kids left to walk through adolescence with no parental involvement or interaction. In the course of the two hour film, James Dean's character Jim Stark gets arrested for public intoxication and being out after curfew, has a knife fight on his first day of school in a new town, gets suckered into a "chickie run" with the leader of the tough gang at school that leads to the

⁹³ Jon Lewis, "1955: Movies and Growing Up...Absurd" in *American Cinema of the 1950s: Themes and Variations*, edited by Murray Pomerance (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 144.

rival's death, trespasses and hides out at an abandoned mansion where it is implied that he has sex with Judy, and then to top it all off gets shot at and bears witness to his friend Plato's death in his arms.⁹⁴ Not necessarily a typical day of a teenager. But the scenes between all of these highlights show the forces responsible for the internal struggle many suburban teenagers felt, specifically unsupportive parents and adult authority figures.

Rebel Without a Cause is a middle-class juvenile delinquency film about the confusion, doubts, and fears of both teenagers and adults. These well-off suburban families inhabited the same world as many of those in the real middle-class audience that Hollywood began to cater to. Thomas Doherty argues that director Nicholas Ray used this familiar 1950s milieu of "well-ordered households and disciplined high schools to dramatize"⁹⁵ the unseen tensions behind the outward walls of tranquility in perfect middle class neighborhoods. In the world of teenager Jim Stark, the lack of parental guidance, or the inconsistent messages from his parents, makes it difficult for him to distinguish exactly what it is that his parents and society expect from him.

From the perspective of *Rebel* as strictly a juvenile delinquency film, audiences focus in the opening scene on the three young protagonists who are simply unwilling victims of various forms of parental failure. Each teenager has been separately hauled in to the local police station for a minor act of delinquency. Within the first ten minutes, the chief police officer, Ray, teases out a psychiatric exposition of each of the youth's home problems which largely revolve around the inadequacies of their respective fathers. The

⁹⁴ Lewis, 145.

⁹⁵ Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1988) 106.

character Plato is the only exception. Arrested for shooting puppies, Plato is a child abandoned by both his parents and left to the care of their black maid.⁹⁶

How does the inadequacy of the father, according to director Nicholas Ray, encourage teenagers to make poor choices? Judy consorts with a gang of hoodlums because her father is unable or unwilling to express his affection for her. Jim is unable to make an important choice, and lacks the protection he needs when he is confronted with one of the biggest moral dilemmas of his young life. In all cases, including Plato's, the fathers deny their children something vital to the development of their maturity, and as a result the three teens act out in order to get the attention they desperately need.

Rebel also identified with teenagers in that each character is also in search of an identity. Teenagers were not only confused with the question "Who am I," but also with thoughts about what makes up one's identity. When Jim's parents come to pick him up at the police station, the confrontation that takes place makes it clear that the issue of consumerism clouds both groups' idea of what creates an identity. As Jim's father is unable to understand his son's rebelliousness, he wonders aloud about the material comfort of his son. "Don't I give you everything you want?" Jim coolly responds, "You buy me many things." In Margot Henrikson's study of delinquency films, she suggests that in this scene Jim is able to convey the "emptiness of the older generation's materialistic conception of security and fulfillment in which the more important emotional and psychological needs remain unmet."⁹⁷ Jim is also confused by the inconsistent arguments and interchangeable roles he witnesses between his parents and

⁹⁶ Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham, NC: Drake University Press, 2005), 181.

⁹⁷ Margot A. Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 163.

grandmother as they talk about which adult's fault it is that Jim has become a delinquent. After listening to the three swap arguments, Jim yells in exasperation, "You're tearing me apart! You! You say one thing. He says another, and everyone changes back again!"⁹⁸ Jim may not have been able to sort through the arguments and contradictions to find his identity in this two hour film, but that single outburst struck a chord with teenagers who were as confused by these mixed messages as Jim Stark.

While the focus of *Rebel* is about the plight of the teenager, it is also about the adult male in middle class society. In theory, according to Elaine Tyler May, it did not matter what "indignities and subordination [men] might suffer at their unseen places of employment, fathers exercised authority at home."⁹⁹ What the audience sees in Frank Stark, however, is a decent man who has become enfeebled and, Alan Petigny argues, poisonous to the ones closest to him if he is placed in a situation which requires him to make a moral decision. From Jim's perspective, his father is "a particular source of disappointment because he is a weak man who permits himself to be bullied by his dominant wife."¹⁰⁰ As a result, he is rejected by the son because he cannot provide a model for the identity Jim seeks. "I'll tell you one thing," proclaims Jim as he gestures toward his father, "I don't ever want to become like that!" Jim's refusal to identify with his father is also powerfully captured in a memorable scene when, hearing a crash at home, Jim looks down the stairs only to find his aproned, kneeling father cleaning up a spilled tray of food intended for mother. As his father mumbles, "Better clean it up before she sees it," Jim becomes sickened at the sight of the domesticated male and

⁹⁸ *Rebel Without A Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray (1955; Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers), DVD.

⁹⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 138.

¹⁰⁰ Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America 1941 – 1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 202.

stutters: “Let her see it. What can happen? Dad...stand...don’t...you shouldn’t...what’re you...?” Leerom Medovoi suggests that in *Rebel*, Jim’s dilemma is premised on a series of equivalences: a father’s domestication equals his feminization, which equals his loss of authority, which equals his symbolic castration. It is significant, Medovoi argues, that this scene is very much about pain in the son’s gaze upon his father.¹⁰¹

In his book *Growing Up Absurd* Paul Goodman emphasizes the importance of masculinity when he argues that the nation’s “youth problems” could only be meaningfully understood alongside the dissolution of “manliness” as a result of “conformity of the organization.” Published at the end of the fifties, when the juvenile delinquent and teen rebel had already become established icons in the mass media, Goodman’s book argued that America’s youth problem did not stem from its boys’ failure to get a clear message about how to grow into men. Rather, they had understood the organized society’s instructions all too well and had rejected them. Any boy who obediently “adjusted” himself to the demeaning roles of organizational manhood, and thereby forfeited his “manly independence,” was simply “growing up absurd.” Goodman’s national narrative of “absurd development” dramatized nothing less than the “son of the suburbs refusing to become like his father.”¹⁰²

In the volumes of information read for this project, time and again there was a noticeable absence of reports of female delinquents. One of the reasons for this is that the female delinquent in the 1950s was minimized. In fact, in “Where the ‘Bad’ Girls Are (Contained),” Ramona Caponegro states that the criminology reports she examined which were published in the 1950s and 1960s include no chapters or index entries about

¹⁰¹ Medovoi, 180.

¹⁰² Ibid, 168.

the female delinquent.¹⁰³ With such vague descriptors for what delinquency applied to, most offenses recorded related to ‘incorrigibility, sex offenses [usually pre-marital sex], or truancy from home.’¹⁰⁴ According to Caponegro, most female offenses in the 1950s were not seen as a threat to the ideal American home so they were often ignored. This choice to ignore female adolescents defying the authority of their fathers sowed the seeds of discontent for these young ladies who, in the 1960s, would refuse to accept their expected place at the nuclear family table.

“Don’t be a hero, and never turn your back on the class.”

Blackboard Jungle, based on the Evan Hunter novel of the same name, was marketed primarily to adults to address the social problem of juvenile delinquency in inner city schools and the heroism required of teachers who chose to overcome it. But it clearly presented what was to become the driving premise of subsequent delinquency films – the division of American society into two conflicting cultures made up of adolescents on one side and adults on the other.

At a time when the State Department was trying to promote the image of ideal harmony and equality abroad, a movie about conflicts between groups of Americans was seen as a threat. Despite never having seen the movie, US. Ambassador Claire Booth Luce and the State Department took the official position that the film was at heart anti-American. They pulled the movie from its premiere screening at the Venice Film Festival at the last minute and threatened to work to ban it in America. After the flap over the

¹⁰³ Ramona Caponegro, “Where the ‘Bad’ Girls Are (Contained): Representations of the 1950s Female Juvenile Delinquent in Children’s Literature and Ladies Home Journal,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, 34 no. 4 (Winter 2009): 313.

¹⁰⁴ Caponegro, 219.

festival screening, executives at MGM responded to the news of this international ban by adding a disclaimer to run just before the opening credits:

We in the United States are fortunate to have a school system that is a tribute to our communities and our faith in American youth. Today we are concerned with juvenile delinquency – its causes – its effects. We are especially concerned when this delinquency boils over into our schools. The scenes and incidents are fictional. However, we believe that public awareness is a first step toward a remedy for any problem. It is in this spirit and with this faith that *Blackboard Jungle* was produced.¹⁰⁵

The film succeeded with adults, but it was unexpectedly embraced by teenagers as well. MGM claimed *Blackboard Jungle* would help the public tackle juvenile delinquency by telling the truth about it, but many adults feared the depiction of youth violence on screen would simply amplify the problem. Adults were also bothered by the way youth responded to the song “Rock Around the Clock” when it hit the screen during the opening credits. Some theatres reported young audience members dancing in the aisles to the rock and roll music.¹⁰⁶ In addition, adults were shocked by audience reaction to a few pivotal scenes. For example, in Rochester, New York, there were reports that “young hoodlums cheered the beatings and methods of terror inflicted upon a teacher by a gang of boys pictured in the film.”¹⁰⁷ In the weeks following the film’s release, the press also reported several scattered incidents of juvenile delinquency allegedly linked to the film. In a column titled “Police Seek to Finger *Blackboard Jungle* as Root of Hooliganism,” for example, *Variety* reported that the film “was blamed by Schenectady police for prompting several teenagers to form a gang, which proposed to wage a battle with an Albany group.”¹⁰⁸ Other stories of violent outbreaks were also attributed to

¹⁰⁵ Lewis, 149.

¹⁰⁶ Gilbert, 184.

¹⁰⁷ Medovoi, 138.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 138.

Blackboard Jungle. Sergeant Joseph Monaco and Patricia Wellman of the Youth Aid Bureau conducted a study that reported several teenagers were picked up by police for questioning about their alleged involvement in delinquent activity, and they ‘admitted’ they were inspired after seeing *Blackboard Jungle*.¹⁰⁹

Censor boards banned the film in major cities such as Memphis and Atlanta where they had deemed the film “immoral, obscene, and licentious.” Objections to showing the film were also raised in many other southern parts of the United States due to Dadier’s desegregated classroom, which included a blend of Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Asian students. The casting of African American actor Sidney Poitier as the film’s young hero and the Caucasian actor Vic Morrow as the film’s young villain also led to the film being censored in the South.¹¹⁰

Despite the criticism, including the American Legion’s declaration that the film hurt the image of America in foreign countries as Ambassador Claire Booth Luce charged before its release,¹¹¹ MGM could hardly afford to pull the film from distribution, since the box office receipts quickly revealed it to be a smash hit. Within one year of its release, *Blackboard Jungle* had grossed nearly \$7 million, becoming the company’s top money-making film of the decade.¹¹²

Blackboard Jungle was by design a message picture. Not only did it focus on juvenile delinquency in low income neighborhoods in America, but it also addressed a Cold War ideological interest more loyally than the novel. In the true spirit of the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 138.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Tropiano, *Obscene, Indecent, Immoral, and Offensive: 100+ Years of Censored, Banned, and Controversial Films*. (Milwaukee, WI: Limelight Editions, 2009), 154.

¹¹¹ Lucy Rollin, *Twentieth-Century Teen Culture by the Decades: A Reference Guide*. (Westport: CN, Greenwood Press, 1999), 185.

¹¹² Medovoi., 139.

government's need to showcase Americans as being able to civilize and reform people rather than oppress, the film concludes with Mr. Dadier transforming not only the students in his classroom, but also all of Manual High. His efforts in his classroom inspire other teachers in the building to begin looking at students as people with potential rather than criminals or animals. The film sends the viewer the message that integrity and dedication of a single good person can reform a broken system, in this case a teacher in the education system. The novel, based on the actual experiences of author Evan Hunter, has a much more realistic ending, in which Dadier wins only a limited victory against the worst of the delinquents.

The film also addresses the pedagogical issue many educators faced as they worked with students who seemed to have all odds stacked against them; educators who were expected to teach while using the very limited resources provided by the public education system. Both the novel and the film methodically analyze the desperate situation of those who live in what Math teacher Jim Murdock calls the "trash can of the school system." "They hire chumps like us to sit on their garbage can to keep them in school and off the streets."¹¹³ *Blackboard Jungle* attempted to explain why juvenile delinquents behaved as they did, and demonstrated the naïveté of middle-class faith in the public educational system as an engine for social mobility. Medovoi suggests that in doing these things, Hunter's novel, however sensational, actually subverted comfortable American assumptions about prospects for economic uplift among the urban underclass.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Blackboard Jungle*, directed by Richard Brooks (1955; Los Angeles, CA: Metro-Goldwyn Mayer).

¹¹⁴ Medovoi, 143.

Despite the criticism from the public, as well as being a subject of debate at the Senate Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency, *Blackboard Jungle* survived to become not only a commercial success, but also a model for an entire subgenre of delinquent teenpics. The shock value of both *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle* has diminished with time, but they both remain a harsh testimony to how wide the gulf between parents and teenagers had become by the mid-1950s. Throughout these films there was a real sense that the terms of relationships between young and old had changed. These were not just film themes. As teens searched to make sense of the mixed messages around them, the relationship had never been so frightening, ambivalent, or antagonistic.

Movie Industry Hearings

With the comic book industry grinding to a slow and almost halting pace, Senator Estes Kefauver had energy to turn to another form of media which had not been subject to regulation since 1934: the movie industry. The comic book industry had voluntarily self-imposed new guidelines for publication, and that measure saved Kefauver from having to intervene with federal censorship legislation. Not only did he personally oppose government censorship, but he and other politicians knew that attacking the media too sharply would result in backlash that could potentially hurt their chances for re-election. If they attacked the movie industry next, would they be fortunate enough to get the industry to update its self-regulated guidelines without having to intervene on a federal level?

The Production Code of the Motion Picture Industry was a self-regulated guide written in 1930 and officially put in place in 1934, in part as a response to films moving

from silent to talking pictures and the increased freedom of expression production companies were seizing. As stated in the preamble to each revised version of the Production Code, the Motion Picture Industry felt that self-regulation identified with “freedom of expression for the motion picture art,” and the Industry welcomed “an alive and responsible public opinion [to be] the guiding force in this, as in all systems of self-government.”¹¹⁵ As a document, overall, it presents a vague representation of what was acceptable in 1934. It does not allow for instances of morality shifts or messages that might be meant to awaken a nation blind to the changes taking place right outside its front door. This, in effect, created an opening for intense criticism during investigations and hearings about how carefully Hollywood was following these self-regulation guidelines.

The energy that these televised hearings on regulating the movie industry created was much more powerful than the comic book hearings in the sense that these hearings were more sensationalized than the formal and stoic House and Senate trials over comic books. Since the time of the original Senate Subcommittee hearings on Juvenile Delinquency, the public had time to respond with letter writing campaigns. Between 1954 and 1956, the subcommittee was bombarded with letters from national organizations such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, juvenile court justices, women’s clubs, and the League for the American Home, not to mention thousands from individuals across the country.¹¹⁶ In addition to Communism, some of the suggested causes of juvenile delinquency were movies, progressive education, fluoridated water, labor unions, working mothers, and racial integration. “Responsible

¹¹⁵ The Production Code of the Motion Picture Industry (1930 – 1967), accessed 15 February 2011, http://productioncode.dhwritings.com/multipleframes_productioncode.php.

¹¹⁶ Gilbert 154.

citizens,” such as business organizations, judges, school teachers, and librarians, argued that no matter what reforms were made in a community, mass media – or culture – would always be there to undercut the strength of local institutions.¹¹⁷

Countless examples of letters of concern existed, but one which the Senate Subcommittee chose to feature during the hearing concerning motion pictures and juvenile delinquency was written by an anonymous representative of the Newport, Rhode Island Citizens Committee on Literature. She and a friend viewed the teenpics *Rock All Night*, and *Dragstrip Girl*. “Isn’t it a form of brainwashing?” she asked. “Brainwashing the minds of the people and especially the youth of our nation in filth and sadistic violence. What enemy technique could better lower patriotism and national morale than the constant presentation of crime and horror both as news and recreation?”¹¹⁸ Not all of the letters were quite as dramatic as this unknown author’s, but this example was what was needed for the world of televised hearings.

During hearings, members of the Motion Picture Producers of America (MPPA) stepped forward to assure the subcommittee that “all Hollywood productions began and ended with the censorship office: ideas, scripts, costumes, and advertising had to pass before industry censors before a picture received its seal of approval.”¹¹⁹ In fact, according to item three under “Resolutions for Uniform Interpretation,” adopted on June 13, 1934,

Each production manager of a company belonging to the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., and any producer proposing to distribute and/or distributing his picture through the facilities of any member of the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., shall submit to such Production Code Administration every picture he produces before the negative goes to the

¹¹⁷ Gilbert, 154.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 155.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 157.

laboratory for printing. Said Production Code Administration, having seen the picture, shall inform the production manager in writing whether in its opinion the picture conforms or does not conform to the Code. In such latter event, the picture shall not be released until the changes indicated by the Production Code Administration have been made; provided, however, that the production manager may appeal from such opinion of said Production Code Administration, so indicated in writing, to the Board of Directors of the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., whose finding shall be final, and such production manager and company shall be governed accordingly.¹²⁰

In theory, at some point along the way in pre-or post-production, the standards should be applied and no controversy should ever come to pass. However, several critics of the code came forward to bitterly detest its quality control standards, such as motion picture and television editor of *Catholic Tidings* William Mooring. According to James Gilbert, Mooring “lambasted the industry for producing crime films the new wave of, what he labeled, delinquency films such as *The Wild One* and *Blackboard Jungle*.”¹²¹

Hollywood executives, directors, and producers found it much easier to defend the industry when specific films were being criticized instead of answering vague sensational accusations. MGM’s Dore Schary repeatedly addressed complaints about *Blackboard Jungle*. He defended the film to Kefauver, explaining, “We knew that it would be controversial from the story, but with the increasing vandalism being reported in schools, we thought that the picture would represent a dramatic report to the people. We are not frightened or intimidated by criticism of this picture.”¹²² Later, Schary stated that films such as *Blackboard Jungle* “reflect public opinion, and in some instances accelerate public opinion.”¹²³ He even produced documentation from teachers who

¹²⁰ The Production Code of the Motion Picture Industry (1930 – 1967).

¹²¹ Gilbert, 157.

¹²² Tropiano, 152 - 153.

¹²³ Quoted in Gilbert, 157.

previewed the film and served as technical directors, offering suggestions for changes to certain elements of the film which were in fact changed prior to nation-wide release.

During Schary's testimony on that occasion, Senator Kefauver interrupted and asked Schary to respond to a report that Memphis teenagers had burned down a barn at their fairgrounds after seeing the film. Schary responded to Kefauver's interruption with two statements. First, that movies do not cause delinquency. "It must be blamed," he insisted, "upon a national and social family crisis. Films could inform and change opinions, but they could not change behavior for the worse."¹²⁴ Schary followed this up with a second statement: "There's no fire in the picture. They can't pin that on us."¹²⁵

New York Times critic Bosley Crowther, who had reviewed *Blackboard Jungle* as "the toughest, hardest hitting, social drama the screen had seen in years," could not help but editorialize the situation taking place on the other coast. "The entire incident smacked suspiciously of federal censorship. Certainly juvenile delinquency is a problem today. The details of some of the problems plaguing America's inner city schools were not exaggerated. Misrepresenting and sensationalizing this movie during an unnecessary trial will not help the root of the problem."¹²⁶

By the time Jack Warner testified a few weeks later, Kefauver had begun allowing unscheduled witnesses into the room that created outbursts and stirred the hearing rooms into a frenzy on national television, similar to some of the more famous McCarthy hearings in the early 1950s. While Jack Warner was attempting to discuss *Rebel Without a Cause* as being a movie not just about juvenile delinquents, but also about the delinquency of the nation's parents, Warner was harassed by a hostile audience accusing

¹²⁴ Quoted in Gilbert., 157.

¹²⁵ Tropiano, 153.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 155.

him of producing films that glorified drinking, smoking, and gangsterism for no reason other than to make a dollar. Jerry Wald and Harry Brown of Columbia Pictures endured the same criticism during their testimony. The executives from the major studios conceded to the subcommittee that there were a few films that perhaps went too far in regards to violence, but according to Stephen Tropiano “they would not concede to the suggestion that there was any link between the movies and the reported rise in teenage delinquency.”¹²⁷

James Gilbert reasons that public outbursts during the hearings was a way for Kefauver to channel the anger of the public into better enforcement of the code on Hollywood’s part. It is understandable, then, that the Senator would be disappointed upon hearing a witness from the American Civil Liberties Union denounce any type of censorship, no matter how minor. “But the point is, actually what we are doing is helping to prevent censorship,”¹²⁸ Kefauver angrily shot back. It is difficult to understand by what name other than censorship, then, Kefauver was logically labeling this process.

Conclusion

While it is clear that Senator Estes Kefauver turned up the heat on these trials by sensationalizing them in many ways, the Senate subcommittee did have ground to stand on when challenging specific scenes of *Blackboard Jungle*. There are three scenes in particular that run completely counter to the Production Code: the attempted rape of a female teacher, the robbery of a newspaper delivery truck, and the violent beating of Dadier and another teacher in the street by their own student. In a variety of memos

¹²⁷ Ibid, 153.

¹²⁸ Gilbert, 158.

highlighted in *Obscene, Indecent, Immoral, and Offensive*, Stephen Tropiano states that MGM got the scenes passed through the Production Code office by defending them as a necessity to keep the film ‘real.’ The scene on which the Production Code fought MGM hardest was the rape scene. In a 1954 memo, it considered “the assault of Miss Hammond unsuitable ‘for inclusion in that type of entertainment envisioned as being acceptable for general patronage; and the ‘brutality and violence’ of the other two scenes to be ‘particularly spectacular and dramatized in unacceptable length and detail.’”¹²⁹ Multiple memos were sent to the studio advising them to tone down the rape scene, but in the end, no changes were made.

In 1956, the film industry report summarized the testimony at the Senate hearings and took a middle of the road position regarding reform of the MPPA code. The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency concluded “that the mass media including the movies, definitely shape attitudes, and, therefore, in varying degrees, the behavior of youth.”¹³⁰ The report concluded with a commitment to revise the code and “eliminate some of its archaic moralisms, and then enforce it firmly.”¹³¹ The movie industry agreed to update its production codes and continue self-regulation; however, no formal censorship of the industry came to pass, and the motion picture industry continued to do as it pleased in regards to presenting its art.

A focus on the Senate Subcommittee’s response to only two movies from 1955 may seem a bit narrow when examining the degree to which the media has the ability to impact youth culture. But the messages about the actual problems presented in these two movies were not lost on filmmakers, and the ground work was laid by these two films in

¹²⁹ Tropiano, 153.

¹³⁰ Gilbert, 159.

¹³¹ Ibid., 159.

regards to how the media would encourage society to recognize that juvenile delinquency is not necessarily the problem, but rather a convenient excuse for society's ills. *Rebel Without a Cause* would continue to inspire works that focused on juvenile delinquency, the family structure, and the impact on society beginning with *The Delinquents* (1957) and *The Outsiders* (1967, 1983). *Blackboard Jungle* became a precursor for films such as *To Sir With Love* (1967), another story about a teacher with limited experience in the classroom who engaged a group of "delinquents" and chose to stay rather than quit as many had done before in order to work closely with his students to help them overcome obstacles. Both types of stories continue to reappear in film today because they are based on what appears to be a timeless contradiction that youth have grappled with since the 1950s: a society that expects and requires them to act like adults yet only listens to them when it suits their needs.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

When I began this research, one question lingered in the back of my mind. What specifically is influencing these teenagers to rebel in such a dramatic way that would influence them to break the law and commit crimes? As I have waded through the vast amount of sources for this project and considered the perspective of those who lived it as well as those who have painstakingly studied it, I believe the concern over juvenile delinquency in the 1950s was blown out of proportion. Let me be clear. I am not questioning the statistics that say crimes committed by white middle-class delinquent-aged youth from the suburbs were on the rise. And I will submit to the fact that some of those cases were serious crimes which deserved attention, such as theft, battery, rape, and murder. However, as several of my sources have illustrated, the blanket label of “juvenile delinquent” was so vague from the beginning that the idea of what makes a person a delinquent could be left entirely to interpretation. The majority of these teenagers were not delinquents. They were a youth culture in revolt.

It has been tempting for me to rebel and break some of the rules I learned about historical research when studying *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* by Peter Novick. I found it difficult to restrain from inevitability or causality statements. However, I was driven by the question I had thought about for several years regarding the phenomenon of the rise of the middle class during the early post-World War II years, and whether that influenced popular culture in America or whether it was popular culture that encouraged the conformity of residents of these “perfect” suburbs. I believe the challenge I encountered in this research is that the vast amount of information comes from an almost perfect blend of what Novick would suggest are both “Old Left” and “New Left” historians. The obvious variations of

historical perspectives that are a result of that blending not only challenged me, but also provided reminders to me that there will never be a “chicken or the egg” answer for this question. And that is the frustrating beauty of historical research.

All good things must come to an end, and as the 1950s began to wind down the ideal image and appeal of the suburbs did not have a lasting effect. In *Suburbia: The American Dream and Dilemma*, Margaret Marsh and Samuel Kaplan discuss the mid-fifties as a time when critics began to use the suburbs as a scapegoat for the origins of the undoing of modern civilization in the United States, specifically as a result of youth rebelling against affluence, conformity, and contradiction.¹³² A claim of the undoing of modern civilization is a bit dramatic, but these youth were growing into young adults who were filling college campuses in the early 1960s. These young adults would take their place as leaders in a louder rebellion which would force the older generation to take a look at life beyond the picture windows and manicured lawns to see the inequities in race, gender, and class. Social revolutions of global proportion were about to take shape. That topic is an excellent starting point for further research.

¹³² Margaret Marsh and Samuel Kaplan, “The Lure of the Suburbs,” in *Suburbia: The American Dilemma*, edited by Philip Dolce (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), 115.

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