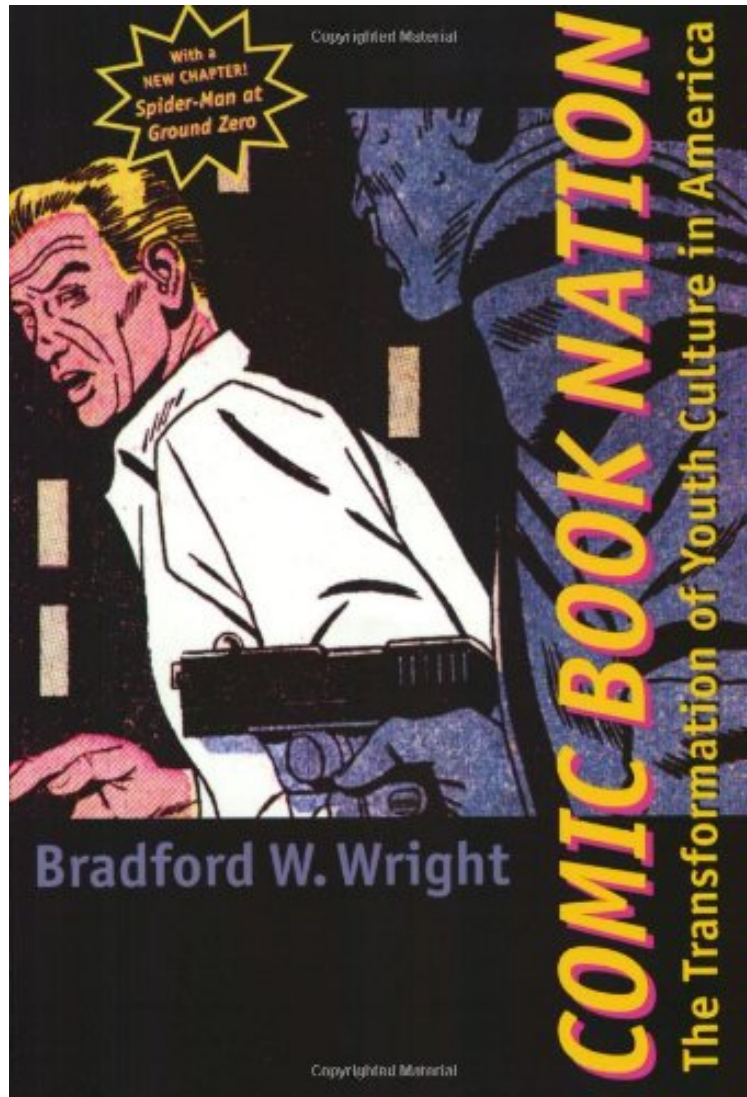


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## Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America

Bradford W. Wright

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**Bradford W. Wright : Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Gregory M.great0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Andres Pedraza A classic with great comics. Highly recommended. 0 of 0 people found

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As American as jazz or rock and roll, comic books have been central in the nation's popular culture since Superman's 1938 debut in *Action Comics* #1. Selling in the millions each year for the past six decades, comic books have figured prominently in the childhoods of most Americans alive today. In *Comic Book Nation*, Bradford W. Wright offers an engaging, illuminating, and often provocative history of the comic book industry within the context of twentieth-century American society. From Batman's Depression-era battles against corrupt local politicians and Captain America's one-man war against Nazi Germany to Iron Man's Cold War exploits in Vietnam and Spider-Man's confrontations with student protestors and drug use in the early 1970s, comic books have continually reflected the national mood, as Wright's imaginative reading of thousands of titles from the 1930s to the 1980s makes clear. In every genre—superhero, war, romance, crime, and horror—comic books Wright finds that writers and illustrators used the medium to address a variety of serious issues, including racism, economic injustice, fascism, the threat of nuclear war, drug abuse, and teenage alienation. At the same time, xenophobic wartime series proved that comic books could be as reactionary as any medium. Wright's lively study also focuses on the role comic books played in transforming children and adolescents into consumers; the industry's ingenious efforts to market their products to legions of young but savvy fans; the efforts of parents, politicians, religious organizations, civic groups, and child psychologists like Dr. Fredric Wertham (whose 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent*, a salacious exposé of the medium's violence and sexual content, led to U.S. Senate hearings) to link juvenile delinquency to comic books and impose censorship on the industry; and the changing economics of comic book publishing over the course of the century. For the paperback edition, Wright has written a new postscript that details industry developments in the late 1990s and the response of comic artists to the tragedy of 9/11. *Comic Book Nation* is at once a serious study of popular culture and an entertaining look at an enduring American art form.

From Publishers Weekly: Pow! Bam! Crash! Analysis! According to this insightful and highly entertaining political and cultural history of comic books, Superman was not just "fighting for the American way"—he was inventing it. Comic books, perhaps the central staple of U.S. youth culture, have been fundamental in both shaping and reflecting the country's political, social, ethical and even sexual mores ever since Superman made his first appearance on the cover of *Action Comics* in 1938. Wright, a faculty member at the University of Maryland's University College, charts how these popular pulp stories (over 100 million comics were printed in 1949) mirrored a myriad, often conflicting, political positions: Superman's first enemies were corrupt politicians and slum lords aligned against the New Deal; '50s books reflected national anticommunist hysteria as well as mixed messages about the Korean War; violent "crime comics" of the 1950s reflected the decade's social unrest; Iron Man in the 1960s found his earlier anticommunist politics shaken by the war in Vietnam. Wright explores how the politics of the writers and artists, usually liberals and often Jewish, were reflected in their work, while at the same time they had to conform to frequently more conservative cultural standards that often led to a backlash against the genre. By the late 1940s, comics were at the center of a full-fledged cultural war; claims that they corrupted youth and caused crime and juvenile delinquency, resulted in congressional hearings and laws that banned the books. Carefully placing comics in their broader social contexts and weighing seriously their critics' charges, Wright creates an intelligent study not only of comics but of shifting attitudes toward popular culture, children, violence, patriotism and America itself. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal: At last, a substantive book studying the effect of comic books on American culture and vice versa. Wright (Univ. of Maryland's University Coll., European Division) departs from the tired formula of celebrating comics' golden age in the 1940s or focusing on one company's experiences. Instead, his extremely well-organized book traces the genre's birth, expansions, and retractions from the 1930s to the present. The fascinating result highlights an increasingly intriguing interaction between pressing events in American society and what was written and published on colorfully paneled pages. Wright's style is intellectual but not lecturing, informed but not boorish, and he maintains an admirable balance between minute detail and breezy highlight. Recommended for all public and academic libraries looking to offer a truly worthwhile study of comics as part of American culture rather than in the usual vacuum. Chris Ryan, New Milford, NJ Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist: The comics, like jazz, is an American popular art that has been enthusiastically adopted worldwide, and the comics' brash sibling, the comic book, is even more quintessentially American. Wright's readable study traces the history of comic books during the past six decades and demonstrates the interaction between politics, social trends, and popular culture in them. Early comic books adopted Depression-era values; hence, Superman's first battles were against greedy capitalists as well as criminal masterminds. In the early 1940s, comic-book heroes fought Nazis and the Japanese and reflected wartime jingoism and racism. After the war, crime and horror comic books came to be apprehensively regarded by some as "harbingers of a degenerate and disturbingly confrontational youth culture," and there was widespread censorship of the medium. Wright points out that comic books preceded rock 'n' roll as an entertainment marketed to youngsters rather than parents and thus were a key in developing teenagers as consumers. Solid though seldom revelatory, Wright's book is more a well-documented comics-industry chronicle than a penetrating social

