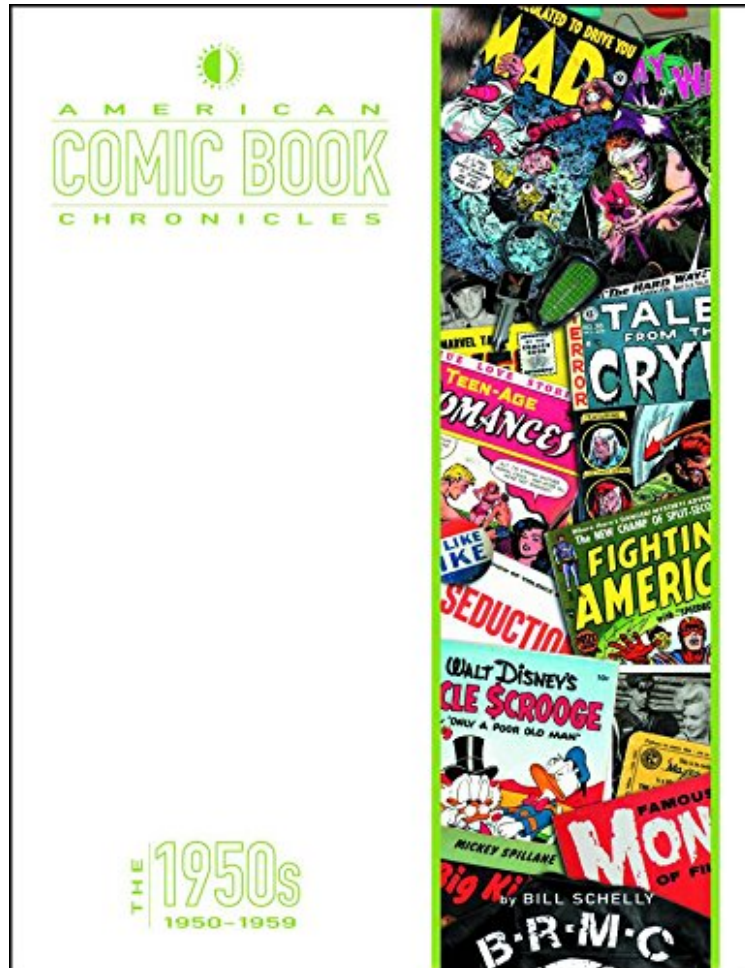


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American Comic Book Chronicles: The 1950s

Bill Schelly

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Bill Schelly : American Comic Book Chronicles: The 1950s before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Comic Book Chronicles: The 1950s:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Comics' crisis decadeBy David J. HoganAs part of the publisher's ambitious, multi-volume history of American comic books, historian Bill Schelly has written an incisive account of industry activity, 1950-59. Roughly, the story goes like this: 1950-54, comic book sales fly high, with multitudinous publishers and a boggling array of titles. Crime, western, horror, and funny animal titles sell well. Superheros are in remission, carrying on most noticeably at DC-National.1955-59: Excesses of the first five years of the decade, particularly sexual innuendo and depictions of violence, encourage opportunistic politicians and a shrewdly self-promoting NYC psychiatrist to attack comic books as unwholesome, squalid, and dangerous. An ostensibly self-imposed Comics Code allows the industry to survive, but helps destroy the legendary EC Comics, as well as many other publishers. During the last half of the decade, comics writers and artists scramble for work at reduced rates, or

leave the industry altogether. Atlas/Marvel loses its distributor and becomes essentially irrelevant, as least insofar as industry leaders DC and Dell are concerned. Comic books grow blandly inoffensive, ignoring the older readers that had sustained them during the war and into the '50s, and concentrating instead on the grade-school crowd. But then, unexpectedly, the superhero genre is reborn. Summed up like this, the tale of comics in the 1950s seems tidy enough, but it's actually complex, tangled, and fascinating. Written by Schelly with lively directness and clarity, and scrupulously researched, the book reveals how culture, technology, media, politics, and business--as well as newsstand product that was variously awful and sublime--drove the industry to great heights, and then nearly destroyed it. Each year is covered in a discrete chapter, with clearly organized sections devoted to each publisher's activities for the year. DC, Atlas, Dell, Fawcett, and other major players are well covered, and so are more modestly sized outfits (EC, St. John), as well as numerous fringe players that made impacts. Schelly has acute critical insights--praising, for example, the striking EC output, the exciting late-decade evolution of DC artist Carmine Infantino, and the vital, often ingenious contributions of such writers as John Stanley, Otto Binder, Jerry Siegel, Harvey Kurtzman, and Richard E. Hughes. Editors, too, from Stan Lee to Mort Weisinger, are smartly discussed. Because Schelly understands that comics are a business, his unsentimental portraits of Harry Donenfeld, Martin Goodman, Bill Gaines, and other publishers give the book the dimension it needs to transcend mere aesthetic history, and become a broader and hugely intriguing account of business strategies and alliances, moves and countermoves, profit and loss, ambition and hubris. Printed on glossy stock and abundantly illustrated with vintage covers, interior pages and panels, original art, and photos of key players, the book is a visual feast. Toth, Gil Kane, Maneely, Barks, Sprang, Kirby, Ingels, Heath, Kubert, Boring, Baker, Cole (L. B. and Jack), Wood, Dillin Cuidera--all the heavy hitters are here, plus lesser lights that deserve your attention. Nicely designed timelines put each year's comics activity into a somewhat larger context, referencing, for example, Sputnik and teen movies. Extended, illustrated sidebars cover a nifty range of topics that includes blacks in comics, women in the business, atomic anxiety reflected in comics, the birth of Sgt. Rock, and more. What may be most pleasing is that Schelly, who has already written splendid histories of comics fandom, as well as fine books about Joe Kubert, "gets" something that eludes many non-academic cultural historians: the decade of the '50s was no Happy Days idyll, but a period of enormous cultural and political tension, with developing battles over the responsibilities of media, evolving sexual mores, clashing philosophies of child-rearing, the nascent teen culture, and postwar consumerism. This fine book encompasses all of that, to explain and illustrate how and why comic books were unique parts of this American quilt.

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Great content in an awful package
By Taylor A. Ramsey
I first bought the vol 1 of the 1960s book and it was amazing. Then the 80s one, and content wise it was every bit as good. Unfortunately the book was falling apart as soon as I opened it. It took two returns to get one that was intact. Now the 50s volume is here and has the same issues. The last signature (each group of bound pages is called a signature) is falling out of the book. I'm have just gotten the second one and it is only a marginal improvement. If the outstanding content is more important to you than having a book that will last, buy this. But if, like me you are likely to read it more than once and would like it to last, this is not worth the money. I am seriously debating if I want the next volumes or if I am just going to give the rest of these a miss. And that is a bummer. Books like this deserve a better quality of printing.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great Content, Terrible Package
By Stan Horzempa
Buyer beware! Great content - one of the best comic book books I own (and I own a boatload of comic book books). The content deserved 5 stars, but the package is the worst I have ever encountered. I returned two copies to because the binding fell apart after I opened the cover of the book. The binding of third copy that sent me as a replacement also fell apart, but I was so disgusted by then that I kept the book and used white glue to repair the binding as best as I could. What I find odd is that I own the 1960-1964 edition of the American Comic Book Chronicles and the binding is perfect.

The American Comic Book Chronicles continues its ambitious series of full-color hardcovers where TwoMorrows' top authors document every decade of comic book history from the 1940s to today! Bill Schelly authors the volume on the 1950s era of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley, with a year-by-year account of the most significant publications, notable creators, and impactful trends, including: the rise of the great EC "New Trend" titles (Tales of the Crypt, Weird Science), Harvey Kurtzman's Mad, and Carl Barks' classic work on Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge! Plus, read about the publication of Dr. Fredric Wertham's notorious anti-comics book, Seduction of the Innocent, and the Senate hearings on juvenile delinquency that led to the creation of the Comics Code, changing the face of comics for decades to come!