

American Comic Strips

During their early days, comic strips were published exclusively as weekly features in the Sunday supplement of American newspapers. The term “comic strip” in its strictest sense now refers to a syndicated newspaper feature that appears daily in a single row of three or four panels, together with other comic strips that form a page, and is printed in black and white, except on Sunday, when it appears in two to four consecutive rows and is printed in color in the comic section.

Although there is evidence of comic strips appearing in American newspapers as early as 1892, it is the year 1896 that commonly marks the birth of the genre in the American press, with Richard Felton Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* as its first true representative, appearing in Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*. The popularity of *The Yellow Kid* resulted in an immediate increase in the *World's* circulation and paved the way for succeeding comic strips.

Rudolph Dirks, in the *Katzenjammer Kids* (1897), was the first to make consistent use of a sequence of panels to tell his stories. With the creation of such pioneering strips as *Happy Hooligan* (1899) by Frederick Burr Opper, Charles (“Bunny”) Schultze's *Foxy Grandpa* (1900), Outcault's *Buster Brown* (1902), and James Swinnerton's *Little Jimmy* (1905), all the essential components of the comic strip (e.g., regularity of cast, use of sequence of panels, and speech-balloons) were refined and securely established.

In 1907, Bud Fisher created the first successful daily strip with his *Mutt and Jeff*. With syndicates distributing plates of their comic features to many newspapers, the characters acquired national readership. The enormous influence of comic strips on the public was first demonstrated by *Buster Brown* fashions early in the 20th century. It was evidenced later in the century by the proliferation of *Peanuts*, *Doonesbury*, and *Garfield* products; many comic strip characters have also made the transition to television, film, and the theater via animation or live actors.

Adventure and suspense had been elements of comic strips since Charles W. Kahles's popular strip *Hairbreadth Harry* (1906), but they appeared in the form of burlesque. In 1924 Roy Crane, with *Wash Tubbs* (later retitled *Captain Easy*), was the first to add these features to a strip in a strictly dramatic format. Some of the earliest examples of this new genre—invariably drawn in a more realistic style than the early “funnies”—were Tim Tyler's *Luck* (1928) by Lyman Young, *Tarzan* (1929) first drawn by Harold Foster, and *Buck Rogers* (1929) by Phil Nowlan and Dick Calkins. These led to such classics as Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* (1931), Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* (1934), and Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* (1934), and culminated in the most consciously artistic strip of all, Harold Foster's *Prince Valiant* (1937).

<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/ent/A0857476.html>

Modern Trends

Beginning with the [pop art](#) movement of the early 1960s, comics have been appropriated in the works of Roy [Lichtenstein](#), Kenny Scharf, Art Spiegelman, and others. At about the same time, underground comics, aimed primarily at an adult audience, began to be published. Their controversial humor is directed at such diverse topics as sex, violence, politics, art, and music. Erotic comic strips found a place in some alternative publications; Robert Crumb's lewd, finely drawn strips, which have included the adventures of Fritz the Cat, his most famous character, attracted a limited but enthusiastic readership.

Meanwhile, the superhero genre, which first flourished in the mid-20th cent. in such characters as Superman, Captain Marvel, and Wonder Woman, was revived in later strips with, for instance, the surreal chiaroscuro of Steve Ditko's *Spiderman* and, further afield, in the multimedia antics of such characters as the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and the *Power Rangers*. In addition, the 1960s and subsequent decades saw the international popularity of comic strip clubs and associations, whose members collect vintage strips, write critical studies about them, and publish the results of their research in specialized journals.

Book-length fiction in comic strip form has acquired a sizable adult readership in Japan, in the “novelas” of many Spanish-speaking countries, and in the wide variety of “graphic novels” now popular in the United States. In the United States, the genre is considered by many to have begun with Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978) and continued in the 1980s with autobiographical strips written by Harvey Pekar and drawn by R. Crumb and others. The graphic novel achieved considerable notice in the early 1990s with the publication of Spiegelman's *Maus*, a strip about the Holocaust that originally appeared in the American Jewish press, where it generated controversy for its treatment of such a serious subject in comic strip form; Spiegelman won a Pulitzer Prize (1992) for the *Maus* books. Among the practitioners of the graphic novel form who have achieved notable success in the United States during the early 2000s are Chris Ware, Marjane Satrapi, Daniel Clowes, and Joe Sacco.