Oleg Benesch, Shaul Mitelpunkt, and Charlotta Salmi

Graphic Narratives and History in the Americas

In recent years, graphic narratives have gained greater recognition within the historical profession. University presses publish series of graphic histories, conferences include regular contributions from historians studying various kinds of sequential graphic narration, and an increasing number of historians are collaborating with artists in the production of graphic histories. In a profession struggling with job precarity, falling budgets, and the attacks of state officials, graphic narratives seem to represent reason for optimism: a medium through which historians might reach broader audiences, increase collaborations across industries, and support our work with students.

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While it is easy to notice the graphic boom in the historical profession, it is not so easy to fully comprehend its implications. In the *Graphic Narratives and History* project, we, a comics scholar and two historians, enter into conversation with dozens of scholars working on comics and history in various regional contexts to try and figure out the relationship between history and graphic narratives. As we thought about our approach to the project, we saw our role as that of convenors and facilitators; we wanted to learn from the many comics scholars and historians who have thought about the seam between history and comics for a long time. Our initial idea was to hold a plenary conversation on graphic histories and what academic historians can do with them before embarking on a range of regional conversations that examine questions of history and comics in a particular area of the world. In reality, conversations proved more fluid—regional examples were used in the plenary discussion, and the regional conversations contain insights on graphic narratives as a medium and historians' relationship to that medium. What we have here, then, is not a polished nor a comprehensive almanac of history and comics, but rather an effort to take stock of what experts on graphic histories in various regions consider to be some of the most relevant questions about the relationship between graphic history and history. This first installment includes our first three conversations: a plenary discussion on comics and history, a conversation on comics and Latin American history, and a conversation on comics and North American history.

Some of the questions we ask focus on the methodological end: What kind of history does the graphic narrative do? How do historians research, teach with, and produce graphic narratives, and how can we do it better? And how do scholars studying graphic narratives see the relationship between their work and history?

By contrast, some of our other questions focus on the history of graphic narratives as a cultural industry: What can historians learn by paying close attention to the production, distribution, and consumption of comics? How have imperial and national contexts defined the production of graphic narratives? And how do these contexts still shape and constrain our approach and access to various kinds of graphic narratives?

No definitive answers await here. Instead, this project compiles a series of conversations where scholars who have studied the problems of graphic narratives and history in various contexts share their expertise, ideas, how-to tips on teaching and research, and advice to historians who are interested in producing graphic histories. On a practical level, the project aims to create resources that scholars and teachers can use to learn about graphic histories from around the world, identify relevant comics archives in different regions, and gain insights on teaching with and about graphic narratives.

Readers can approach this installment of the project as they like: Those who would like to follow how our conversations developed over time should read chronologically. Or readers could, of course, focus on particular regions that interest them. A selection of recommended readings, including both graphic narratives and secondary works can be found in the supplementary data to this article.

Frontis: Detail from *Ghost River: The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga*.

Theorizing Graphic Histories

A Conversation with Jaqueline Berndt and Paul Williams

During our first conversation, a lot of the questions revolved around comics as a medium, and how historians can use them in our research and teaching. The popularity of comics and graphic narratives at specific places and times suggests that historians should care about these and examine them within an approach that tries to understand people's attitudes and interests. And yet, as historians we sometimes approach comics with unfounded assumptions that should be challenged.[1] In this conversation we speak with Jaqueline Berndt, a professor in Japanese language and culture at Stockholm University, and Paul Williams, an associate professor of twentieth-century literature and culture at the University of Exeter.

Asking Historical Questions of Comics

Shaul Mitelpunkt: When you write your scholarship, as comics scholars, what role does historical analysis play in your work? Are historical questions central to how you engage with comics in research and teaching?

Paul Williams: There is still a certain openness about what it means to do comics studies. As representations of history, comics do tell us a lot about the moment in which they're produced. So, a historical comic is not just telling us about centuries past. We can ask what it means when this text produced in this moment tells a story from the past: Why have the authors chosen that story and why have they shown it in this way?

Oleg Benesch: In important ways, comics on historical topics tell us more about the moment they were produced in than about the historical moment that is their subject matter. It makes me think of Jaqueline Berndt's work on *Barefoot Gen*, which is a manga about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and a child who lives through it. The manga was produced in the 1970s, several decades after the war, and the main use I make of it as a teacher is to examine how people in early 1970s Japan understood and depicted the atomic bomb.

Charlotta Salmi: And of course, that does not mean that comics work like some less-mediated reflection of popular sentiment. There is that temptation to cast comics as some extra-accessible expression of

1 This discussion took place in June 2022 over Zoom. This was our first recorded conversation on the topic, and we (the organizers) asked more questions than in later panels. We loosely directed the conversation through a series of questions that led to certain topics being discussed, but this also inevitably meant that some important issues will have been left out due to this framing, as well as the dynamics of live discussion. The process of authoring, including the conversation itself, as well as the subsequent editing and drafting of the discussion, means that we only seek to highlight certain aspects of this very rich topic. The quotations from the discussion have been edited slightly for readability.

grassroots sentiment. And of course, as we know, popular culture can be produced by corporations, rather than only by grassroots producers.

SM: It is striking that comics, and maybe graphic narratives more broadly, are often thought of as an easy medium—something that people can intuitively comprehend. What are the challenges that this perception presents us with?

Jaqueline Berndt: One reason for that misperception is that I think we are lacking a lot of historiography related to the different regions where comics are produced. Instead, we have certain mainstream historical narratives, for example, of how manga has developed. In addition, works that focus on history through comics garner significant interest and enjoy a certain prestige, but what a focus on comics through history can contribute to a better understanding of the medium itself is vastly underexamined.

Comics Among Other Media

How do comics compare to other forms of cultural production that historians have been grappling with in their work?

SM: It seems historians have been, for whatever reason, more explicitly comfortable with approaching film than comics. A demonstration of that is that there is a longstanding journal titled *Film & History*. It might be that historians have an easier time studying film productions because these are massive social enterprises, regularly involving hundreds of people and state bureaucracies during the production process, as well as the need to raise capital and mobilize labor—all these leave significant archival trails for the film historian to examine. In comparison—how do you research the history of comics? How do you build this source base for comics-based work?

PW: On the level of production history, film studies represents a massively important and useful model. If we engage with what is called "under the line" labor, or the processes of work behind the scenes that take place in order to allow the creation of the cultural product, we also gain greater access to questions about ethnicity and gender. Availability of and access to the medium matter a great deal. At particular historical moments, it has been quite hard to get hold of particular comics, but generally easier to get hold of certain landmark films, which meant those who work on comics had fewer shared areas of discussion—texts that everyone knows and can pile in and discuss. By comparison, for a long time, the landmarks of cinema allowed that.

OB: To some extent it is also a matter of being able to access a wide variety of comics in order to facilitate study.

PW: When there is an archive that makes it possible to trace wider aspects of comics production, it stands out. One really good place for contextual research is Michigan State University. There's a large archive there of published texts, but it also has the holdings of a comics publisher called Eclipse that was one of the really big US publishers in the 1980s. Because they have good holdings and very extensive archival holdings, you can actually go from the conception of an idea, you can look at the letters sent between the creators, the publishers, and the editors, you can move through different versions of the script, different versions of the art and character designs. You can then also look at things like the flyers and posters that were created to promote it, you can see some sales figures. So that's an example of a very rich archive that's well-preserved, in which you can reconstruct the process in a fairly thorough way.

JB: Film's very mode of public consumption made it, arguably, stand out for scholars as a medium of interest—its shareability in society at large, across genders, age groups, and classes. Comics, by comparison, are not consumed in a similarly public fashion.

CS: In terms of analytical interest, similar questions of narration and representation are central to scholars of both film and comics alike, although there are clear distinctions between comics and film as media, and the way that these are read.

JB: In comics, the images are not moving; they have to be "moved" by the reader. This results in a different type of reader agency. The reader decides the pace, the reader determines the visual frame focusing on individual panels and then again on the whole page, inspecting details or going on.

OB: One of the things I try to stress to students working on comics has to do with the agency that you have in terms of controlling the pace of what you look at them. With film you can't really do that, certainly not in a natural way. You could also read a book passage more slowly, but it's not really the same thing as lingering over a comics page and looking for different things in an image.

CS: There is often a temptation with both photography and with film to think about these as coming closer to a relationship to the "real," in comparison with drawn graphic narratives. This is a false dichotomy because it sidesteps the manipulations and selections involved in the act of photography.

JB: It might be worthwhile to explore why film tends to be more easily adopted by historians and history educators than comics—as this may be related to assumptions about "realism."

Materiality of Comics

Because of the growing interest in comics studies, there are now many recently published, remastered editions that help increase accessibility.

PW: You can now get hold of comics from the last hundred years, which are being reprinted to an extent that you just couldn't imagine even 10 years ago. But there is also the treachery of sources and editions. Remastered editions, which are essential for anyone teaching comics, give the illusion that we have access to the original comics as they appeared when they first came out. However, if you went back to the 1960s, a copy of *Archie* would look different depending on whether it was the first copy off the printing press or not. After the first copy, the quality of reproduction deteriorated. We should remain alert to how the politics of restoration lead us to think a comic looked a certain way when it really didn't. When we stray from the original and use restored collections, we also lose the discourse that surrounds a text—whatever surrounded a comic strip in the newspaper page, for example.

JB: In Japan, serialized comics were remediated for book editions in various sizes and formats until the 1970s. Libraries have privileged the more durable book editions over magazines but removed the paratexts such as the "belly bands" that carry advertising catch phrases. Similar things happened with newspaper comic strips elsewhere. Libraries discarded the Sunday supplements where comics appeared when they were preserving the newspapers. Examples like these indicate that the materiality of comics is not insignificant, because it affects the stories and the meanings readers invest in the text.

OB: Historians dedicate increasing attention to materiality. Historians of medieval history are probably more attuned to materiality of manuscripts, whereas modern historians are perhaps not always as attuned to the materiality of our sources. And yet, most historians working with comics are modernists. For people working on comics that's a really important point because, ultimately, the things I often use in teaching do tend to come in book form—largely because they're usually things that have been translated from Japanese. This means that there are key sources that I give the students, which look like a graphic novel, but you know that's not how it would have originally been consumed at all. Clarifying this to the students and keeping this critical appreciation of materiality are important. It can be useful to have a physical copy of the comic in question in its original form for students to handle, even if this is well-worn and/or in a language they may not understand.

SM: There is also the tactile element to comics as objects in original historical form. The medium activates readers' senses beyond the visual sphere alone. For example, Berndt's article on Fumio Kouno's manga *In This Corner of the World* examines the reader's experience: "What the reader's eyes are doing and what the reader's hands are touching," connecting these sensory aspects to the overall meaning of the work itself. How important is it to develop this sensitivity to the senses for historians who seek to work closely with comics?

CS: In English departments we certainly smell books and take the students to touch things. As a literature scholar, form is content, and you cannot think about content without thinking about form, because form is communicating so much.

Teaching and Researching Comics

There is a popular belief that comics are a useful teaching tool, because they render historical materials more easily accessible. But is that really the case?

OB: One of the challenges of working with comics is that both faculty and students tend to assume that students are intuitively literate with comics because comics are a part of visual culture. But that is a mistaken presumption. While students of current generations will have played video games and watched films, many of them probably won't have ever read a comic. The engagement with comics as a medium requires specific types of reading skills that are distinct from other media.

JB: I usually start my class by reading three or four double-page spreads of comics in a row, so I'm not just presenting isolated images. I also avoid presenting an interpretation before students had the opportunity to expose themselves to the work at hand—at least the few pages I show. In classes focused on history rather than comics, I use the affective reaction students develop to the images, and then go from there, bottom up. However, in my manga studies course, I foreground comics-related methodologies, and I engage with the rich factual knowledge that many students bring with them.

CS: I try to teach students a form of visual literacy. This often means spending a lot of time understanding how to look. The danger with comics work is the assumption that comics are easy or simple or straightforward, or that the first thing you see is the only thing. For that reason, one of the first exercises I do in class is to have students look at images from close up and from further away. What do you spot on the page?

How do the different elements or colors come out in different ways? We spend a lot of time thinking about how to close-read a page. Creating that explicit conversation helps mitigate the misguided assumption that we're all really good at reading visual messaging just because we live in a media-saturated environment.

PW: I try to make students meet the images in active and conscious ways. A few years ago, I decided not to put the images on a PowerPoint, but to actually print them and hang them on the wall. This means students actually have to stand up and more actively examine the image before them. That may or may not be similar to how it was historically received, but it at least guarantees that the class becomes active in the viewing of visual culture.

SM: I would add that there are also instances where history students are particularly well-positioned to examine the strategies of narration and historical methodology within graphic histories. Teaching with Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza* is maybe the paradigmatic example of that. As the book's title suggests, it focuses on Sacco's efforts to piece together evidence surrounding a mass killing in 1956 Gaza, but it is also an important reflection on what research methods like archival research and oral history interviews can tell us, as well as what the silences are that emerge from them.

Latin America and Graphic Narratives

A Conversation with Frederick Luis Aldama, Isabella Cosse, Carla Liliana Sagástegui Heredia, and James Scorer

The history of comics in Latin America is not a uniform one. For example, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico have had significant comics industries, while production in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru was much less formal due to those countries' relatively small periodical industries. The golden age of comics in Latin America is typically considered to be between the 1940s and 1960s, before the popularity of local comics was later eclipsed by imports. In fact, mirroring broader geostrategic processes, US comics loomed large over Latin America throughout the twentieth century. Local artists have had to engage with—and respond to—US influences and imports. In the 1970s, Juan Acevedo famously ran comics workshops in Peru, on the premise that citizens could only understand how to critique these foreign imports if they better understood the form.

In this same period, critics Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart published the pivotal *How to Read Donald Duck*—a text critiquing the export of US ideology into the form of comics and instructing readers to spot the kind of concealed doctrine that US comics presented. In one of many demonstrations of the links between soft power and hard power surrounding comics, *How to Read Donald Duck* was published in Chile in 1971, two years before the US-backed coup that overthrew Chile's democratically

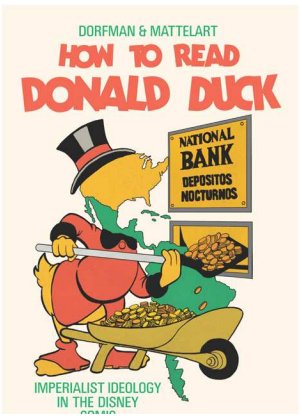

Figure 1. Cover of *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, originally published 1971, rereleased 2018. Courtesy of OR Books.

Chilean American literary critic Ariel Dorfman (who was also the cultural advisor to Salvador Allende, Chile's Socialist president) and Belgian sociologist Armand Mattelart offered a critique of how Disney comics promoted US imperialist interests in Latin America. The book outlined how Donald Duck modeled an interventionist economic policy in its storylines and reinforced a US neo-imperialist agenda.

elected socialist leader Salvador Allende. The United States, of course, was not the sole state using comics for political ends in the region. Many Latin American states turned to comics for educational purposes and propaganda of their own. More recently, comic production has been boosted by the graphic novel's rise in popularity, which has resulted in the establishment of a number of small independent publishing houses, and by the internet, which has enabled transnational collaborations and wider dissemination of work. There's been a growth in conventions, prizes, festivals, and state-sponsored initiatives. At the same time, support for comics libraries and archives remains scarce in most locations.

This discussion took place in May 2023 in a hybrid format, necessitated by the spread of participants across three continents and two hemispheres. We spoke with Frederick Luis Aldama, an award-winning author; Carla Liliana Sagástegui Heredia, a professor of literature at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú; and James Scorer, a senior lecturer in Latin American cultural studies at the University of Manchester, on Zoom, with Isabella Cosse, professor in the history program at Universidad Nacional de San Martín, contributing in writing. The organizers loosely directed the conversation through a series of questions that led to the discussion of certain topics, but also inevitably meant

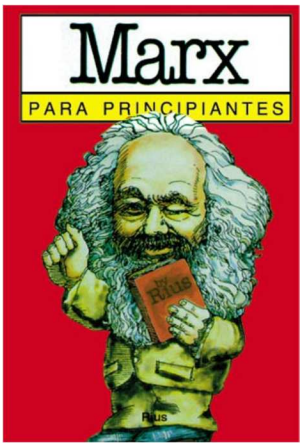

Figure 2. Cover of *Marx Para Principiantes* (*Marx for Beginners*), published by Era Naciente in 2004.

This introduction to Marx's influential ideas in comics form was produced by the popular Mexican cartoonist Eduardo del Río ("Rius") in 1972. Rius was behind two popular series in Mexico, *Los Supermachos* (1966–67) and *Los Agachados* ("the stooped ones"; 1968–77) which presented satirical takes on Mexican life and offered a biting critique of US foreign policy in the region. He was dedicated to using his art form to address political questions, and often critiqued the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (IRP), as well as world affairs. He partook in the 1968 student protests in Mexico and made posters (he was eventually arrested for his political cartoon and faced a mock execution), and he illustrated public health pamphlets for the Sandinistas.

His work *Marx Para Principiantes* (*Marx for Beginners*), with its tongue-in-cheek form and accessible explanations of complex political theory, soon garnered international attention. It was translated into English in 1976 by Richard Appignanesi for the Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative in Hackney, London, and became the first book in a series of comics-based "introductions to . . ." that is still running today. The comic book was a hit around the world, inspiring, among others, anti-apartheid activists.

that some important issues have been left out due to this framing, as well as the dynamics of live discussion. The regional approach taken by the organizers should not be accompanied by the implication that national contexts are less relevant, nor is this intended to be an effort at a comprehensive summary of Latin American comics. The process of authoring, including the conversation itself, as well as the subsequent editing and drafting of the discussion, means that we only seek to highlight certain aspects of this very rich topic. The quotations from the discussion have been edited slightly for readability.

Infrastructure and the Study of Graphic Histories

CS: What is the situation regarding archives, or lack thereof, for Latin American comics?

Carla Liliana Sagástegui Heredia: In the context of Peru, the first challenge in writing histories of comics is that there doesn't exist a national archive, neither public nor private. That's difficult for all our investigations. The Peruvian National Library keeps the newspapers, but we have published more in comic books and magazines. Graphic novels are now also really spreading. It leaves a gap of more than three decades of comics production.

James Scorer: In the larger regional context, there are very few public archives of Latin American comics. The ones that exist are often not particularly well-funded and there can be holes in collections. If you're thinking regionally, that situation is exacerbated because most of the collections that exist are very much focused on national traditions rather than cross-national collections.

Frederick Luis Aldama: The biggest issue is money: money to hire staff, money also, of course, to collect, but it's not just going out and getting them, it's a huge amount of skilled staffing labor to be able to curate and do something with the comics. Even digitizing something that already exists is extremely expensive. As a result, some of the most extensive archives of Latin American comics are in relatively well-funded institutions in the Global North, such as at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin), the University of Iowa, or Freie Universität Berlin.

JS: Fortune often plays a role in terms of what survives. Also due to funding issues, the construction of Latin American comics archives is rarely systematic, even on national levels. Some specifically national collections are also held in overseas institutions. Many of the most comprehensive collections of earlier comics, especially, were gathered over

time by private individuals, and are more recently being purchased by libraries and other institutions.

CLSH: In Peru, this connects to the fact that the comic as a cultural artifact was recognized only a few years ago—no more than 10 years ago. This situation is related to the traditional notion that comics are only for children and young people.

FLA: The conscious or unconscious exclusion of comics from official archives is also a problem in North America, as we can see at UT Austin, which has a good holding of Cuban and Chilean comics, but it doesn't have any US Latino comics. There is a lack of understanding of a hemispheric dimension to Latin American and Latino comics. If Latin American comics are barely seen, then US Latino comics aren't even a blip on the radar. So there is also a kind of prejudice that works, not just as Carla was saying, against comics themselves, but there are also other layers of prejudice even within that archival space.

Marginalized Comics Traditions

SM: To what extent are these layers of prejudice further complicated by the outsize role played by the United States in the production, content, reception, and collection of Latin American comics?

CLSH: Our comics history in Peru and Latin America, in the 20th century, was always one of American culture being imposed on Latin America. We just tried to imitate, to copy, what was being done in the United States. It was a very strong influence. It was different in countries like Argentina or maybe Mexico because these countries also have many relations with Europe, but in the other countries that were so economically dependent on the United States, it was almost an obligation to have national comics like the United States. This dynamic was reinforced by the US government sending institutional comics, such as those related to health services and other public services, to Peru and other countries. In this context, the politics of developmentalism are a key consideration in the history of Latin American comics.

JS: Histories of Latin American comics can be very focused on national traditions and national histories. There's a kind of blindness to the history of, say, transnational exchanges—at the point of creation, with people being employed in other countries and with people sharing ideas, at festivals, or events, or in publications. That's a history that is yet to be written, even if people are starting to work that way.

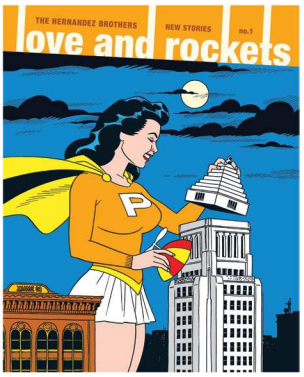

Figure 3. Cover of the September 2008 volume of *Love and Rockets*, by the Hernandez Brothers. © The Hernandez Brothers. Courtesy of Fantagraphics Books, www.fantagraphics.com.

FLA: Regarding the transnational, there is a persistent stubbornness in not including Latin American comics in, for instance, more US- or Western-based histories of the rise of, say, alternative comics. That story persistently focuses on three figures, and it forgets that, for instance, Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman revitalized US independent comics by looking across the border to Latin America and to comics creators, zine creators, and so on that were really a force, but also US Latinos like the brothers Hernandez. But we continue to see scholarship that repeats the same story, that leaves out the significant, even if small, presence of Latin American comics and zine makers, as well as those like the brothers Hernandez in the US. Comics history thus reflects different prejudices and processes of marginalization at play in society more broadly.

Zines and Latin American Comics

OB: It seems that zines play an especially important role in the history of Latin American comics.

JS: Now most of the people making zines are also publishing other kinds of comics and magazines, sometimes graphic novels. Historically, there was a countercultural element, particularly with zines and comic zines that grew up around the punk music scene in the 1980s. There was an element of necessity, particularly in the 1990s, with the rise of neoliberal economics and the collapse of domestic cultural production. Zines then became the only way that you could publish, because nothing else was being published. There was no other way of getting anything out there other than self-made, self-published publications.

CLSH: There was a similar evolution in zines from the 1980s to the present in Peru, with many of the same authors producing across the period. Despite their historical significance across the region, however, zines present research challenges for historians.

CS: Exactly—zines are often independently produced, so there's no publisher; they're quite flimsy objects that are easily destroyed or disposed of.

JS: [Aldama] was talking about different invisibilities; zines tend to be somewhere near the bottom, and archives of zines are very uncommon. The University of Iowa has quite a good collection of Latin American zines, but there are not that many of them around. There's also a distinct sense that zines, historically, were countercultural, and therefore didn't really belong in an archive or library, or didn't really want to belong. But my impression is that that may be shifting slightly, with

creators desiring an archive so they can be shared. I think digitization will be quite an interesting way of approaching that.

Comics as Historical Sources

CS: Comics offer an interesting resource for historians studying or teaching Latin American history. Not only do comics—whether zines, comic strips, or series—address historical events and characters in different ways, but they offer a window into understanding different cultural contexts.

CLSH: Certainly—in Peru, there are three different ways that comics address history: One is the portrayal of official history. Comics are often based on historic heroes and their feats. The history of the winners. The second one is historical episodes where the author investigates and creates or revives underground or censored heroes like Túpac Amaru and the comics creator Juan Acevedo. And now there is also the memory and post-memory of the diverse armed conflicts in Latin America. It's an explicit attempt to prevent foreclosure of the traumatic recent political past. There are these three different discourses, and maybe there are more. There is also a metahistorical discourse that addresses the different ways in which history is created.

FLA: This triadic impulse is also present in Latin American US comics. Alongside superhero comics there are the creators who are really interested in resuscitating heroes—both US Latino, like Cesar Chavez, or going back to a pre-Columbian history and bringing that into the contemporary imaginary of readers and those who are very much focused on a contemporary moment, with issues like immigration and

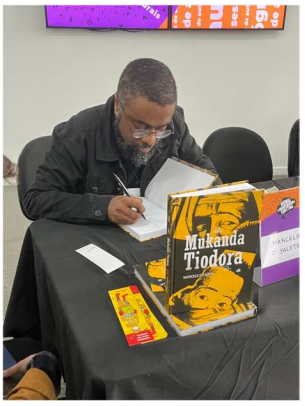

Figure 4. Marcelo D'Salete. Photo by Luio Luiz/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0.

Marcelo D'Salete is a Brazilian cartoonist and teacher whose work has focused many topics, including the history of slavery in Brazil, particularly the Palmares Kilombo—a free state set up by runaway slaves. D'Salete combines archival research with fictionalized storylines that synthesize historical events through the eyes of the Afro-descendant population in Brazil. His significant works include *Cumbe* (2014) and *Angola Janga* (2017), the latter of which took more than a decade to research and illustrate. The English translation of *Cumbe*, titled *Run for It: Stories of Slaves Who Fought for Their Freedom*, won the Eisner Award in 2018.

Figure 5. ***Mafalda*** **comic strip. © 2025, Sucesores de Joaquín Salvador Lavado, Quino.**

The popular cartoon character created by Joaquín Salvador Lavado Tejón (Quino) is an inquisitive six-year-old girl who loves democracy, the Beatles, and human rights while railing against injustice in the world. She first appeared in a comic strip in an Argentinian weekly magazine in 1964, showing the world through a child's eyes. Quino continued to draw *Mafalda* until 1973, and the strip has now been translated into 27 different languages.

immigration policy, and then building stories and adventures around that.

Isabella Cosse: These interventions also reflect social and cultural debates of their time. I recall noticing that *Mafalda* [an Argentinian comic strip that first appeared in 1964] had contributed to shape an intellectual and progressive middle class, which took on full significance through its embodiment in the strip. Comic strips like Quino's *Mafalda* offered the documentary resources—press articles, media discussions, interviews with the author, reviews of the comic strip at the time of its initial run, letters from the readers—or the possibility of creating those resources or evidence to study different social phenomena, through interviews and the gathering of personal files. Alongside such social transformations—the rise of a middle class or of women's rights movements, both of which can be traced through *Mafalda*—comics allow us to grapple with humor, which presupposes shared codes that require a tacit understanding between those who produce it and their audience: listeners, readers, viewers.

SM: To what extent do comics raise methodological challenges for researchers?

IC: While the classical methodological "toolbox" is extremely useful for thinking through cultural history, visual narratives and graphic humor undermine or challenge those approaches through their very characteristics. That is to say, in another sense, those approaches are no longer

enough. As visual storytelling undergoes rapid changes in contemporary culture—shifting from comics and graphic novels to memes—we have to reassess our methods. Identifying the meanings assigned to the comic strip by its readers and those who used it in very specific ways, for their political struggles, demands, and public expressions, can therefore offer insights into different movements and subcultures. In other words, *Mafalda* was so popular that it was easy to collect and to access the information about the audience, the way in which the audience received the strip, filled it with meaning, and used it.

JS: The form certainly offers these benefits, although I'm not convinced that you learn, or can potentially learn, anything different from comics that you can learn from other cultural forms. Maybe you could learn something about how childhood was perceived by looking at certain kinds of comics. But then you could say the same thing about cartoons, or literature that's specifically written for children. It's more a question of thinking about how the particular traits of comics can convey things about the past in meaningful ways.

The Challenges of Teaching Latin American Graphic Narratives

JS: Teaching Latin American comics can be challenging as so few Latin American comics are translated, and the ones that are tend to be the very canonical ones.

IC: At the same time, comics offer opportunities for not only understanding key changes or characteristics of an era, through the transformations in styles and forms of humor, but for reflecting on the changes in historical consciousness as understood by Agnes Heller; the relationship between past, present, and future—what François Hartog has called "regimes of historicity." In fiction, it is not only possible to time travel; time itself can be created in an unending dynamic. It is a very difficult horizon to take in for the generations of historians that emerged in the linear horizon of the relationship between past and present.

OB: The content of teaching is determined by many factors, including our own personal interests and priorities, but also institutional and disciplinary requirements, biases, resource issues, or other barriers to convening dedicated comics courses.

JS: If we are not able to offer foundations in comics studies on syllabi, and yet include one or two comics within a larger course, one of the big challenges becomes, how do you help students understand how to read a comics page in 20 minutes? Basically, because that's the only time that you've got in your lecture to try and explain that. Or in a seminar

when you need to also be looking at history, and all the kinds of contexts around it, and it's just one week that you happen to be looking at that.

FLA: Understanding comics requires an understanding of how this storytelling, this narrative form functions, the grammar of this narrative and the effective and cognitive entanglements that arise from being guided and shifted in these certain kinds of ways. So from lettering, font styles, to design layout—all of these things that we all attend to, which become important parts of teaching with comics.

CS: Teaching also offers a space where some of the biases of comics histories can be corrected.

FLA: I very deliberately do not pick as my primary objects the ones that are always picked. I pick some comics from Chile and from Mexico, from Argentina, from the United States, from the Dominican Republic, from Puerto Rico, and also comics from the Black creative storytelling communities, from Asian American storytelling communities, because we need to be decisively shifting the direction of our focus. As a result of that, we will also be opening the students and ourselves to new kinds of questions about the archive and what constitutes comics history and how it's been shaped.

North America and Graphic Narratives

A Conversation with Jean Lee Cole, Kate Masur, Lara Saguisag, and Paul Williams

North America is one of the largest comics producers in the world. The US in particular has a long history of shaping new comics genres and graphic narrative forms. The earliest political cartoons appeared in the US in the mid-eighteenth century and developed during the Civil War with political messages crystallized into pithy visuals on envelopes or in pamphlets. With European immigration, the comic strip took hold at the end of the nineteenth century. While comic strips such as *Hogan's Alley* (featuring the Yellow Kid) by Richard F. Outcault were printed in newspapers, the twentieth century saw the establishment of the comic book.[2]

Most readers associate comics with the funny animal stories, adventure tales, and superhero comics of the "golden age" of comics (from the 1930s up to roughly the mid-1950s). In this era, both Timely Comics (now Marvel) and Detective Comics, Inc. (now DC) began publishing comics, eventually coming to dominate the US market. This age of growth came to an end in the mid-1950s, which coincided with the implementation of the Comics Code in 1954. The Comics Code limited what could be presented in comic books.

The Comics Code Authority was a direct response to growing concerns about how comics might be corrupting young minds and an attempt to stave off government intervention through industry self-censorship. While mainstream commercial comics became less gruesome and had to fit their storylines to reflect the restrictive moral guidelines of the Comics Code, an underground "comix" scene was slowly developing in the first half of 1960s on or near college campuses, becoming a full-blown underground comix industry by the end of the decade. These comix of the 1960s and 1970s engaged in social commentary and satire, as well as offering deeply personal accounts in the form of confessional comics. Often explicit, these comics reflected both the liberalization of US culture and the rise of a counterculture. They were aimed at adult readers and were printed and circulated by small independent presses.

Canada has a slightly different comics history; the Canadian comics scene was largely dominated by US imports up until the Second World War. The war put a stop to imports, enabling a local industry of "Canadian Whites" (after the paper they were printed on) to flourish. After the war, Canada's nascent comics industry had to compete

2 This discussion, which was our second recorded conversation on the topic, took place in November 2022 on Zoom. We loosely directed the conversation through a series of questions that led to certain topics being discussed, but this also inevitably meant that some important issues will have been left out due to this framing, as well as the dynamics of live discussion. The process of authoring, including the conversation itself, as well as the subsequent editing and drafting of the discussion, means that we only seek to highlight certain aspects of this very rich topic. The quotations from the discussion have been edited slightly for readability.

Figure 6. "Yellow Kid and His Phonograph" in *New York Journal*, Sunday, October 25, 1896.

Considered one of the first comic strips in the United States, *Hogan's Alley* first appeared in *The New York World* in 1895. Richard F. Outcault's strip followed the adventures of the Yellow Kid, a street urchin, and the immigrant residents of New York's East Side tenement blocks. *Hogan's Alley* captured urban life in all its exuberance and brutality, but the strip is also famous for its formal innovation. Outcault has been credited with popularizing the use of word balloons, after first placing speech inside the Yellow Kid's yellow gown. The strip itself was so popular that it sparked a circulation war between the newspaper and its competitor, The *New York Journal*, which succeeded in luring Outcault over in 1896 and dramatically increasing its sales. The battle over the Yellow Kid has allegedly inspired the term "yellow journalism," denoting sensationalist coverage of events designed to increase the number of readers.

with the commercial success of US comics and focused on developing their own brand of national superheroes. More recently, there has been greater diversity in comics and graphic novel production. Indigenous publishers are turning to the form to create informational comics and to respond to the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples and their stories in mainstream comics.

Comics fans have long communicated with each another via self-published pamphlets called "zines," a shortened form of "fanzine." During the 1960s and 1970s these activities solidified into a network known as "fandom," which was organized through zines and the first comics conventions and specialist comics stores. Zines, of course,

Figure 7. The Comics Code seal.

In 1954 American psychiatric Fredric Wertham published a book titled *The Seduction of the Innocent*. Wertham's book provided respectability to anticomics sentiments that grew in the post-World War II United States by making the case that comic books corrupted the minds of American children. Seeking to defend itself from government intervention, comics publishers established the Comics Magazine Association of America in 1954 and announced a restrictive editorial code. Books carrying the seal of the code promised that the product was free of poor grammar, excessive violence, and supernatural beings. The code severely limited what comics artists could distribute to a broad audience. The underground comix movement of the 1960s emerged in large part as a rebuttal against the code.

were not restricted to comics fans, and the 1970s saw a growth in their numbers due to the increasing affordability and accessibility of photocopying (the most famous zines of the 1970s were the punk zines, and their aesthetic of felt-tip pens and letters cut out of magazines and newspapers have influenced the look of zines ever since). Historical estimates suggest the number of zines being produced peaked in the 1990s, and comics creators such as Julie Doucet and Adrian Tomine are well-known for their zines and minicomics (small, photocopied comics assembled by hand), formats which—even in the era of the World Wide Web—remain vital and innovative in North American comics.

A further major development at the end of twentieth century was the graphic novel, a term coined in 1964 by Richard Kyle in his article "The Future of Comics", who lamented that comics in the United States lacked an adult readership. Kyle thought terms like "comic book" "may easily prevent the early acceptance of the medium by the literary world," so he proposed the graphic novel as a longer, more "artistically serious" comic. Of course, calling a long-form comic a "novel"—or publishing it as a book—wasn't new, as demonstrated by the woodcut novels of the 1920s and 1930s; some of the other fans with whom Kyle debated the idea of the graphic novel via letters pages in fanzines pointed this out. This didn't stop the term from circulating among fans, writers, artists, editors, and publishers in the 1960s and 1970s, and it was also featured in advertisements and reviews. The term first appeared on a front cover of a book with the publication of

Figure 8. Covers of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, volumes 1 and 2, by Art Spiegelman. Photo by sjbooks/Alamy Stock Photo.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* is the first American comic book to win highbrow literary acceptance. The graphic memoir, framed autobiographically around Spiegelman's relationship with his Holocaust-survivor father, revolved around the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust and Jewish Americans' reckoning with the memory of the Holocaust in the late twentieth-century United States. After serialization between 1981–91 in *Raw*, the comics magazine Spiegelman edited with his wife, Francoise Mouly, *Maus* was first published in book form by Pantheon in 1992—and became the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize that same year. In 2022 the McMinn County School Board in Tennessee voted to remove *Maus* from the school curriculum, citing disturbing imagery and language. The following year, *Maus* shot to the top of the best seller list.

A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories (1978), pitched as "a graphic novel by Will Eisner."

The concept of the graphic novel came into broad public prominence with the publication of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*—two darker, self-contained book-length takes on the superhero genre—and the first volume of Art Spiegelman's Holocaust memoir *Maus*, all initially published around 1986. *Maus* reached *The New York Times'* Best Seller list, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and paved the way for new content and new readers. Today, graphic narratives are mainstream and there is also increasing interest in webcomics through online platforms like Comixology or Webtoons.

Writing history in graphic form, rather than in the traditional textual form, can offer historians not only a way to reach new audiences, but also a different approach to historical sources and narratives. While comics in many ways confirm many of the theories that historians already have about the methodologies and challenges of making history, the objectivity question (examined in Peter Novick's book *That Noble Dream*), for example, does not appear to concern comics authors as much as it does historians. In our conversation, Jean Lee Cole, professor emerita of English at Loyola University Maryland; Kate Masur, a professor at Northwestern University; Lara Saguisag, the Georgiou Chair in Children's Literature and Literacy at New York University, and Paul Williams, associate professor of twentieth-century literature and culture at the University of Exeter, touched on a number of aspects of graphic histories that can be beneficial to historians, while also considering challenges and potential limitations.

Between History and Comics History

Lara Saguisag: Comics often reveal how history is interpretation, and many graphic histories speak from an unapologetically personal point of view. For example, Brian K. Mitchell's *Monumental: Oscar Dunn and His Radical Fight in Reconstruction Louisiana*, which tells of the first Black lieutenant governor of Louisiana—who also became an acting governor—is framed through Mitchell's own relationship to his ancestor Oscar Dunn, the protagonist of the graphic narrative.

SM: Historians will sometimes position their own lives in relation to the topic of study in a preface or in an introduction, but by and large most histories seek to go beyond a single individual's vantage point at events.

OB: As many historians will recognize from *Maus* and other works, graphic histories are also reflexive about the historian's position, but may be more willing to explicitly privilege an individual actor's viewpoint. In this sense, how would we define the differences in narrative commitments and norms between history writing and graphic history writing?

LS: Alongside the personal angle that informs many graphic histories, they are often also highly metatextual. While historians are already familiar with counternarratives and the recovery of silenced or denied histories, reading comics confirms the difficulty of recovering materials that have been suppressed, lost, or omitted.

OB: Graphic histories sometimes include scenes of speculation, or they narrativize the difficulty of putting together a personal, family, or national history. One could say that graphic narratives require a different kind of reader participation in their commitment to the points of view of their characters, rather than to a broader arranging principle set around a historical question.

LS: Perhaps that's also a way to confirm the legitimacy of those vantage points that were not fully recognized in traditional historical narratives. It's about filling in these gaps.

CS: Filling in the gaps is also how comic reading works. Readers have to complete images outside of what is framed on the page and string together scenes and actions from panel to panel in a process called "closure." Comics histories also often demonstrate specific methodological commitments.

Jean Lee Cole: Some of the graphic histories I've used in my teaching are really about questioning the conventional pursuit of history and the privileging of textually based documentary evidence.

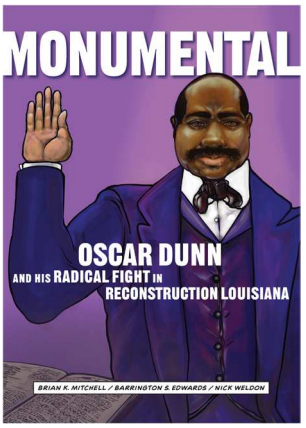

Figure 9. Cover of *Monumental: Oscar Dunn and His Radical Fight in Reconstruction Louisiana*. Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection.

SM: Of course, historians have long used oral histories and a variety of ego-documents that go well beyond the state archive, but there is no denying the dominance of print culture as evidence for most historians.

JLC: Graphic histories offer a way to recover histories that weren't written down or weren't printed on paper. Many graphic histories question the idea of, "What is a document?" And how do we actually recover history that wasn't documented?

OB: This tendency can present challenges to historians, who are often uncomfortable asserting facts that cannot be confidently backed by primary sources.

JLC: Graphic histories represent an opportunity, as they challenge us to recall what scholar Saidiya Hartman calls "speculative history," a history that doesn't work through the same documentary evidence—including, especially affective histories. While history privileges what happened when and who did what, the question of how people felt—whether those who performed actions or those who were acted upon—is frequently undocumented, especially in state and institutional documents. That doesn't mean that the feelings were not real or were not worth documenting.

SM: Graphic histories can create a space whereby we are further challenged to consider the existence of affective history and speculate about what it might be. Such affective or alternative histories may seem to be well-served by a form which, at first glance, appears more approachable than a history monograph. But what are some of the challenges readers face when accessing a graphic history?

PW: Graphic narratives are a medium that stands out in the contemporary moment through its very "stillness." In a world saturated with moving images and plasma screens, the stillness of comics is radical in an era in which everything else is moving quickly. Comics grab attention by not moving. They grab attention by forcing that investment from the reader; the silence is deafening because they are still.

Kate Masur: In my experience co-authoring a graphic history with illustrator Liz Clarke, I learned how the visual language of comics can carry a narrative in ways that traditional history writing cannot. The process of working on the graphic history made me very aware of my tendency to rely on text . . . I think of myself as someone who is very interested in visual imagery, yet I realized in this project that I wasn't accustomed to using images to tell a story, or to making text take a backseat to illustrations. I felt that the graphic history form was especially good at representing mundane aspects of people's lives in a beautiful and compelling way. In the area I work on, which is nineteenth-century US

Figure 10. Illustrations from *Freedom Was in Sight!*, written by Kate Masur and illustrated by Liz Clarke. Courtesy of the University of North Carolina Press.

history, there's a huge amount of documentary evidence, but there are also many gaps. Consider women's lives, for example. Women in this period often spent most of their lives working in other people's homes and doing domestic labor in their own households, including raising children, growing food crops, sewing, cooking, and cleaning. It can be difficult to document such activities and even harder to write about them in interesting ways. I was pleased with how the graphic history allowed us to represent these aspects of the past with nuance and detail. The illustrations could also reveal people's lives as part of communities, capturing both the tragedies—the violence and the things that went horribly wrong—and the joy of community members building institutions and taking care of each other.

CS: It strikes me that by giving authors the freedom to position readers' gaze within domestic spaces, comics allow us to show facets of history that might otherwise remain abstract—acknowledged in general, but unexamined and undetailed.

OB: Graphic histories can actually cater to some of the professional commitments of historians better than traditional histories do.

PW: One example of that is documentation; it's pretty common for graphic history to work documents into the page, to juxtapose it to an image—a photo or a map. This allows readers to casually feast their eyes across the page between primary sources and the historical narrative in a way that forces the reader to consider the relationship between documents, analysis, and argument. Yet, we must keep in mind that it is still the author who dictates which documents to share with the readers.

SM: The examples you've provided suggest that by personalizing accounts, showing the hidden or forgotten parts of history (the domestic, the mundane, the marginalized figures) and engaging the reader in different ways of filling in the gaps in historical accounts, comics can produce both affective and highly self-reflexive histories. They can marshal representational strategies more commonly associated with fiction while highlighting their own constructedness. As such, comics can potentially increase readers' awareness of the processes behind constructing historical narratives. Whether or not that potential is fulfilled is up to the author.

The Production of Graphic Histories

CS: The distinctions between textual history and graphic history mean that the narrative norms and strategies of authoring textual history books do not necessarily translate to graphic histories in a straightforward manner. Might one thing to consider be that while history books

Figure 11. Women in Comics Panel at the 1982 San Diego Comic-Con International. Photo by Alan Light/CC BY 2.0.

Wimmen's Comix (1972-1992) is an influential comics anthology authored by women comics creators. The anthology, which formed part of the underground alternative comics movement, published feminist comics that touched on sexual politics, women's rights, and the creators' daily lives. Artists such as Trina Robbins, who was one of the first to explicitly depict lesbian narratives, and Aline Kominsky, an influential artist in the underground scene, were both members of the collective. *Wimmen's Comix* formed a clear riposte to the male-centered narratives of the underground comix scene—exemplified by the confessional, sexually explicit comics of Robert Crumb. Kominsky left the collective in 1975, along with Diane Noomin, after a disagreement with Robbins. Kominsky and Noomin put together their own comic, *Twister Sisters* (1976), and Kominsky, who married Robert Crumb in 1978, went on to collaborate with Crumb on various comics projects until her death in 2022.

often adopt the perspectives of different historical actors at certain points, they do not generally commit to a single character's voice?

KM: The multiplicity of voices and sources that provides richness in a history book may undermine narrative coherence in a graphic history. When Liz Clarke and I were working on our graphic history, *Freedom Was in Sight!*, midway through the first chapter we decided that there should be a narrator throughout the whole book to help create continuity. We chose Emma V. Brown—a real person from the past—as our narrator. She was the first Black teacher in the public

schools of Washington, D.C. She eventually became principal of the Charles Sumner School, a state-of-the-art school at the time. Married women were not allowed to work for the school district, so she had to quit her job when she got married. She continued to be involved in educational activities, however.

CS: I appreciate that casting an educator as the narrator in this case made it possible to combine the author's objective voice, as in a textual history, with that of an involved historical character herself explicitly implicated in the history she narrates.

OB: Another aspect of history writing that is worth noting is that historians engage in workshops and seminars, but they often write alone. Comic books, on the other hand, have traditionally been collaborative productions (involving not just artists and writers, but also inkers, editors, colorists), offering more opportunities for co-creation between scholars and communities. While this has changed with the growth of the graphic novel, many creators make use of this trend in comics production to co-create histories.

JLC: *Ghost River: The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga* is a good example of this. It was produced by the Library Company of Philadelphia, which holds a large amount of documentary evidence of the Paxton Massacre of the Conestoga people in 1763. They wanted to produce a visual history, but they wanted to do so together with the affected Indigenous communities. The Library Company wanted to acknowledge the native people who were massacred and include them to produce a history that would be more attentive to their perspective. To this end, they brought in elders and members of the contemporary nation to weigh in on the project. *Ghost River* was created as a history that is explicitly committed to the vantage point of the Conestoga people. The source base combined documentary evidence of different kinds (scraps of letters, diaries and account books, as well as political cartoons and engravings, all now available through the Library Company's digital history project, *Digital Paxton*) with a script by Dr. Lee Francis IV (Laguna Pueblo) and artwork by Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva). Since neither the writer nor artist belonged to the Conestoga people, they needed support from historians and local Indigenous community members.

SM: To reiterate a key distinction, while academic historians are usually concerned primarily with analytical questions of causality, comics producers often foreground their present-day political commitments. Traditional (textual) histories are political as well, but as a professional class historians tend to foreground analytical questions rather than the political impetus moving them. In that, historians and comics producers often write in different registers, with different purposes in mind.

Figure 12. Detail from *Ghost River: The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga*, Credit: Library Company of Philadelphia, https://www.librarycompany.org/.

Looking at the *Ghost River* website, the project seeks to incorporate both (or perhaps even merge) the perspectives/registers of historians and comics producers, both in terms of what is said and the implementation of formal aspects of graphic narrative. The introduction reads:

"*Ghost River* is not a eulogy for some lost tribe; it's an act of active and ongoing recollection sustained by and responsible to living, breathing people."

JLC: *Ghost River* is an interesting example because, as a project, its makers considered carefully who was going to participate in the production of the story, how the story was going to be told, and how it was going to be disseminated. What I love about the digital version online is that you can click on buttons inside individual frames and receive further information: video responses from the artist, historians at the Library Company, or members of the Conestoga nation. You get a sense of what these different participants in the production of the comic think about not just the events, but also their depiction in the graphic history.

Periodizing Comics History

Next, the group moved to a discussion of the history of comics production in the North American context.

CS: Are there key historical developments or moments in comics history in America that are worth thinking about when studying comics as objects of history?

JLC: There is a teleological orientation in comics studies, which is somewhat problematic in terms of understanding comics as a form, because you hear a lot of people talk about comics starting in 1939 with Superman and so it's all about capitalism, and American exceptionalism . . . But there's this whole rich history of comics that precedes that.

PW: Comics refer to so many different types of physical objects—different types of storytelling—that we should be mindful when trying to pinpoint particular points of origin. However, some of the broad turning points that can be helpful are the 1880s to 1910s with the standardization of techniques and institutions; the period between the 1930s and the 1950s with surging popularity and sales, including individual issues that could sell up to a million copies, as well the anti-comics scare of the 1950s; the 1960s and 1970s, with the development of underground comix, a direct market for distributing comics that circumvented the Comics Code Authority, and the re-centering of the industry away from a mass audience; and the more recent turn to the graphic novel and webcomics. However, while these turning points might help us with basic orientation, our main ambition should be to problematize periods—it's what historians do. So we should probably put pressure on those rough periodizations.

OB: So once scholars more closely examine questions surrounding production, distribution, and reception, do complexities that stretch this

familiar timeline emerge? Locating national narratives within a broader transnational context often reveals links to colonial and imperial relationships. Does this apply to comics as well?

LS: The history of comics is also a history of labor and labor exploitation. Take the Filipino artists who labored under US-based DC Comics and Marvel and other publishers in the 1970s and 1980s, for example. When we think about North American comics or, more specifically, US comics, what they can say about history is that they remind us that the United States has long been and remains an empire, and that shapes the way comics are produced and distributed in the nations that it colonizes.

CS: Comics have played a geopolitical role. The comics industry has often been run by migrants and their American-born children—golden age comics were shaped by European Jews fleeing Nazism and its aftermath, and Captain America punches Hitler on the comic book cover a year before the United States entered the Second World War. For example, Superman was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (both children of Jewish migrants from Europe) for DC, and Stan Lee (who later created Spiderman) and Jack Kirby (creator of Captain America) were both starting out at Marvel.

OB: Comics have been used as a form of soft power in Latin America and were distributed by US forces in the Middle East during the Iraq War to win "hearts and minds." It is not surprising that comics and graphic narratives more broadly are now thought of and taught as part of larger historical developments and geopolitical strategies.

Comics in the Classroom

SM: Comics are increasingly popular teaching tools. What are some of the benefits and challenges of turning to comics in the classroom?

KM: Comics are appealing tools for many educators because students in high school and college have less experience reading entire books than they used to. Their relation to visual culture has also changed; today's students are accustomed to learning from visual sources like memes and video. Teachers often discuss how students have less stamina for reading. Their learning practices have changed and their relationship to books has changed. I've talked with many teachers who say graphic nonfiction helps them meet their students where they are.

LS: At the same time, we must be cautious about the belief that comics are more accessible and more easily readable. They can be a very useful pedagogical tool, but there are also settings where students are

confounded by the form and respond skeptically—"What is this? I don't know how to read this."

JLC: I assigned a comic, *A Short History of America* by Robert Crumb, for the first day of a class on the American West, thinking I can just share this comic, and just in one page the students will get a sense of the entire narrative of settler colonialism and suburbanization, but the students didn't understand it. I realized I was bringing a lot of my own historical knowledge to the understanding of this, and I had completely forgotten that the students didn't have it. We may be overestimating our students' ability to read content through visual images.

CS: Comics reading requires a certain level of familiarity with the form and its conventions. In which order readers string together panels, for example, depends on cultural contexts (Japanese manga, even when translated, is sometimes presented right to left) and knowledge of comics' narrative structure. Webcomics, which present panels one at a time for scrolling, are also impacting on how students consume comics and how they approach printed graphic narratives in the classroom.

SM: Given the pervasive idea that graphic narratives are supposed to be approachable, students may be even more surprised to discover their lack of comprehension than they might be with regard to a difficult text.

JLC: Both approaches to comics—as accessible but also potentially difficult—can be addressed at the same time in the classroom. I think one of the reasons why graphic history is really great for teaching and for learning is because it is not as passive, and it's not as linear as video. For example, if you think about this idea of closure that Scott McCloud talks about [in his book *Understanding Comics*], i.e., what readers do in order to make sense of the images, comics can raise important questions. By juxtaposing temporalities, color, documents, and illustrations in their form, they can draw attention to questions like "Who's telling the story? What is the truth?"—that's a way to think about graphic history as not dumbing down the content or simplifying the content, but actually bringing complexity to a subject in a very compact way.

Supplementary Data

A suggested reading list for each panel can be found in the supplementary data for this article.

Oleg Benesch is a professor of East Asian History at the University of York. He is the author of *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushido in Modern Japan* (2014), co-author

of *Japan's Castles: Citadels of Modernity in War and Peace* (2019), and *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth-Century Asia and Europe* (2015), and co-editor of *Drugs and the Politics of Consumption in Japan* (2023).

Shaul Mitelpunkt is a senior lecturer in US history at the University of York. His first book was *Israel in the American Mind* (2018), and his articles have appeared in *Diplomatic History, Modern American History*, the *Journal of American Studies*, and *Gender & History*, among others. Shaul is currently working on a book on how freedom from military labor became common sense in the United States.

Charlotta Salmi is a senior lecturer in postcolonial and global literature at Queen Mary University of London. She has published research on the graphic human rights narrative, graphic narratives from conflict zones, comics collectives, the graphic protest narrative, and street art in women's rights campaigns. She is currently completing a book titled *Picturing Protest in the Global Graphic Narrative*.

Interviewees

Frederick Luis Aldama, also known as Professor Latinx, is an award-winning author of over 50 books, including novels, comics, and scholarly books. He is the editor of several scholarly and trade series, including *Biographix* (University Press of Mississippi), *World Comics & Graphic Nonfiction* (University of Texas Press), *Critical Graphics* (Rutgers University Press), *Latinographix* (Ohio State University Press), and *Brown Ink* (FlowerSong Press). He is an inductee of the National Cartoonist Society, Texas Institute of Letters, and The Ohio State University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion Hall of Fame. He is founder and director of University of Texas at Austin's Latinx Pop Lab, editor-in-chief of *The Latinx Pop Magazine*, and holds the Jacob & Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities at the University of Texas at Austin.

Jaqueline Berndt is a professor in Japanese language and culture at Stockholm University. Her main academic work is in comics/manga studies, with a special emphasis on media aesthetics. She is the chairperson of the open access book series *Stockholm Media Arts Japan* (Stockholm University Press) and a managing co-editor of *Comics Studies: Aesthetics, Histories, Practices* (de Gruyter). Her newest publication is *The Cambridge Companion to Manga and Anime* (2024).

Jean Lee Cole is professor emerita of English at Loyola University Maryland. She is a scholar of nineteenth-century US literature and American studies, specializing in periodical studies. Her most recent

book is *How the Other Half Laughs: The Comic Sensibility in American Culture 1895–1920*.

Isabella Cosse is a historian and researcher at CONICET (National Council of Scientific and Technological Research) and professor in the history program at Universidad Nacional de San Martín. She is author of *Estigmas de nacimiento*; *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en los años sesenta*; and *Mafalda: historia social y política*, which has received the Premio Iberoamericano, as well as an award that allowed for its translation and publication as *Mafalda: A Social and Political History of Latin America's Global Comic*. She has also published six other books and edited several dossiers. She has been a visiting researcher in El Colegio de México, a Fulbright Fellow, and Tinker Professor at Columbia University, and has taught in different universities in Argentina and Latin America.

Kate Masur is a Board of Visitors Professor and professor of history at Northwestern University. She is co-author, along with Liz Clarke, of *Freedom Was in Sight! A Graphic History of Reconstruction in the Washington, D.C., Region* (UNC Press, 2024). Her previous book, *Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (Norton, 2021), was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

Lara Saguisag is the Georgiou Chair in Children's Literature and Literacy at New York University. Her monograph, *Incorrigibles and Innocents: Constructing Childhood and Citizenship in Progressive Era Comics*, received several honors, including the Charles Hatfield Book Prize from the Comics Studies Society. She currently serves as associate editor of *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*.

Carla Liliana Sagástegui Heredia is a professor of literature at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. Her published works include scholarly treatments about Peruvian comics history and graphic novels in a range of reviews, catalogs, and book chapters. She has published collages, comics—including *La mujer nueva*—and, together with Jesus Cossio, *Ya nadie te sacará de tu tierra: un cómic sobre la Reforma Agraria en Perú*. She is associated with the Latin American collaborative *Red de Investigadores de Narrativa Gráfica* (RING) and serves as a consultant for the *Comics and Race in Latin America* project at the University of Manchester.

James Scorer is a senior lecturer in Latin American cultural studies at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *Latin American Comics in the Twenty-First Century: Transgressing the Frame*, and *City in Common: Culture and Community in Buenos Aires*. He is also the co-editor of *Comics and Memory in Latin America*. Beyond his work

on comics, Scorer has published articles on Latin American literature and photography.

Paul Williams is associate professor of twentieth-century literature and culture at the University of Exeter and specializes in North American comics from the 1960s to the 1980s. In addition to articles published in journals such as *American Literary History*, *American Quarterly*, and the *Journal of American Studies*, he has written four books: *The US Graphic Novel* (2022), *Dreaming the Graphic Novel* (2020), *Paul Gilroy* (2012), and *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War* (2011).

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