

# **Introduction: Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narrative**

**Derek Parker Royal**

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Comics are a composite text made up of words and images that, taken together, can have an impact far different from that produced by more traditional modes of narrative such as the short story or the novel. Much like film, comics rely on a visual language that encourages a more immediate processing time within the reader and, on the level of interpretation, a more “efficient” exchange between author(s) and audience—at least when compared to purely language-based mediums. This is not to suggest that comics are a more passive means of narrative (as many of its detractors have historically argued), nor does it assume any lack of ambiguity of intent or indeterminacy of meaning in graphic narrative. The images that serve as referential icons fall prey to the same kind of semantic slippage found in linguistic codes (which themselves, in the form of letters and words, also function as icons of meaning). Nonetheless, there is something relatively “direct” about an image’s ability to affect reader response. The figures that make up the comics rub up against reality in ways that words cannot, revealing the various assumptions, predispositions, and prejudices that author-illustrators may hold.

This power underlying the comic image becomes all the more evident when placed within the context of race and ethnicity. As legendary writer/illustrator Will Eisner points out, comics are a heavily coded medium that rely on stereotyping as a way to concentrate narrative effectiveness. He argues that unlike film, where characters have more time to develop, graphic narrative, with its relatively limited temporal space, must condense identity

along commonly accepted paradigms. Typing characters along physical, gestural, and even occupational assumptions “speeds the reader into the plot and gives the teller reader-acceptance for the action of his characters” (20). However, the “accursed necessity,” as Eisner puts it (17), of narrating through stereotypes takes on critical resonance when filtered through an ideological prism. Authors may expose, either overtly or through tacit implication, certain recognized or even unconscious prejudices held by them and/or their readers. In comics and graphic art there is always the all-too-real danger of negative stereotype and caricature, which strips others of any unique identity and dehumanizes by means of reductive iconography—the big noses, the bug eyes, the buck teeth, and the generally deformed features that have historically composed our visual discourse on the Other.<sup>1</sup> Witness, for example, the depiction of Africans in *Tintin in the Congo* (1931), the second Tintin adventure story from Belgian writer Hergé; side-kicks and antagonists such as *The Spirit’s* Ebony White, *Red Ryder’s* Little Beaver, and *Wonder Woman’s* Egg Fu; Angelfood McSpade, the “lovable darkie” created by Robert Crumb for *Zap Comix* in 1968; the racially-tinged violence of Barry Blair’s comic book mini-series, *Ripper* (1989-90); and, more recently, the twelve editorial cartoon depictions of Muhammad published in the Danish paper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in 2005, or even the Holocaust denial cartoon contest initiated as a reaction to the Muhammad editorials.<sup>2</sup>

This special issue of *MELUS* addresses the possibilities, and even the potential liabilities, of comics when representing ethnora-racial subject matter. In many ways, it is a response to what several critics of graphic narrative have seen as a defining mark of American popular culture: its problematic relationship to ethnic difference. Rebecca Zurier implies that scholarly studies of comics should focus less on the impact made by a few “exceptional talents” and more on how they have excluded a number of marginalized voices (102). Scott McCloud argues that in order to be taken seriously as a creative art form and stand alongside more traditional forms of literary narrative, contemporary comics should not only directly address the current state of race relations in the United States, but also reclaim the history of minority participation in the comic book industry (*Reinventing Comics* 109). Similarly, Matthew J. Pustz sees comics as a potential medium to take on

issues of diversity and otherness. "America would be a better place," he asserts, "if [alternative] voices could be heard in forums that were more accepting of outsiders. The truth is, we as a country need both a common (although diverse) cultural language that is used in a public forum in which everyone can participate and specific cultural sites where quirky, nonmainstream tastes and views can be allowed to grow and develop" (24-25).<sup>3</sup> For Zurier, McCloud, Pustz, and the authors in this special issue of *MELUS*, comics function as an appropriate cultural site for this kind of critical engagement. The essays and reviews in this issue follow up on a promise made in the silver age of comic books (roughly between the late 1950s and the early 1970s), articulated most famously in an issue of Denny O'Neil's *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* (no. 76, Apr. 1970). In it, an elderly African American man admonishes the Green Lantern for his selective heroism: "I been readin' about you . . . How you work for the *blue skins* . . . And how on a planet someplace you helped out the *orange skins* . . . And you done considerable for the *purple skins*! Only there's *skins* you never bothered with . . . ! The *black skins*! I want to know . . . How come?!" And to this, the superhero shyly responds, "I . . . can't."<sup>4</sup> In the shadow of such sentiments, the various contributors to this issue map out the theoretical, literary, and historical contexts of graphic narrative and their links to multi-ethnic subjectivity.

Because of its foundational reliance on character iconography, comics are well suited to dismantle those very assumptions that problematize ethnic representation, especially as they find form in visual language. They can do this by particularizing the general, thereby undermining any attempts at subjective erasure through universalization. As Art Spiegelman makes clear, "Cartoons personalize; they give *specific* form to stereotypes," an aesthetic move aptly illustrated in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986, 1991), where the mouse heads become masks, "a white screen the reader can project on" ("Mightier" 46). Indeed, McCloud points out this almost counterintuitive ability of comics to specify, and personalize, through the indeterminate. He notes that the broader or more abstract a cartoon figure is depicted—that is, the more iconic its features are—the closer we come to identifying with that subject. As a result, nonrepresenta-

tional illustrations invite readers to “mask themselves” in a character and identity with his or her (or its) world. Conversely, a more photo-realistic style, which should theoretically emphasize the particularity of its subject matter, has the tendency to create a distance between reader and character, and in so doing emphasizes the “otherness” of the subject (*Understanding Comics* 43-44). McCloud and Spiegelman describe what I would call here the paradoxical effect of ethnic identification in comics. Graphic narrative, in allowing the reader to “mask” him- or herself in its non-mimetic figuration, invites empathy with the nondescript “Other” on the comic page, thereby encouraging the reader to connect to other experiences and other communities that might otherwise have been unfamiliar. As Gilbert Hernandez puts it in his interview for this special issue, “the more ethnic a piece is . . . the more universal it is.”

However, the significance of ethnic identity in comics is by no means limited to iconography or static imagery. The way figures are contextualized within a panel or laid out upon page, as well as their physical or speech behaviors, can tell us much about the construction of the ethnoracial subject. Because time is spatialized in graphic narrative, where readers see the character development across panels, comics can underscore the fluidity of ethnic identity. As Charles Hatfield observes, the “representation of time through space, and the fragmentation of space into contiguous images, argue for the changeability of the individual self—the possibility that our identities may be more changeable, or less stable, than we care to imagine” (126). In this way, comics’ spatio-topical system, as Thierry Groensteen puts it (21), can help reveal the dynamics of ethnoracial discourse. Groensteen defines the spatio-topical parameters of comics as being concerned with “two orders of curiosity: the description of figures (panels) *in itself*, and the observation of their *situated* coordinates” (168). So the spaces of graphic storytelling—the word balloons, the frame of the individual panels, the gutter (the “blank” space between panels), the strip (the horizontal ban of panel arrangement), and the page layout itself—foreground relational perspective between and among individual subjects. Such visual strategies are an essential component of multi-ethnic graphic narrative, writing that by its very

nature relies upon themes of cultural context and contingency to generate meaning.

Yet even the term “graphic narrative”—used throughout this issue in conjunction with multi-ethnic narrative—is contested. Eisner characterizes it as “any narration that employs image to transmit an idea,” while at the same time pointing out that film itself could be considered a form of graphic narrative. He distinguishes this from “comics” which he defines as the “printed arrangement of art and balloons in sequence, particularly in comic books” (6). While this differentiation is not without its limitations,<sup>5</sup> the subsequent essays and reviews will retain this relation, employing “comics” when referring to sequential illustrations or images whose meaning is contextualized within the page layout (or *mise en page*), and “graphic narrative” when referring to a broader mode of storytelling in which images are an inextricable component. For instance, Miné Okubo’s picture novel *Citizen 13660*, while not considered by most to be an example of *comics*—due primarily to its lack of sequential imaging within a single page and its lack of dialogue balloons or any variation of this verbal convention—would certainly serve as an example of *graphic narrative* due to its unqualified reliance upon image-based storytelling, as Zhou Xiaojing insightfully demonstrates in this special issue.

There is reasoning behind this terminology, which takes into consideration both the imprecision and the inadequacy of other commonly used terms. Of particular interest here is the much-used label, “graphic novel,” a term that will only be used in a limited way within this special issue to specify an original work of long-form graphic fiction. The significance of “graphic novel” resonates in a number of ways relating to the reception of comics, and of ethnic American graphic narrative in particular. More than any other, this term is the one most embraced not only by many in the critical community, but also by publishers and the wider reading public to designate a medium of art that is worthy of our attention. For better or for worse, “comics” suggests a kind of frivolousness and ephemerality. However, there are a number of problems with this “graphic novel” as a descriptive tag. Hatfield notes that while “misleading from a literary standpoint, [graphic novel] is now commonplace enough that it needs no air quotes around it” and then goes on to employ it. He does this because, as he sees it, “a

too-exclusive embrace of the term *graphic novel* risks eliding much of what is interesting in comics history, mystifying the economic relations on which the art form depends, and cheating us of an appreciation of those great comics that do *not* look at all like novels” (162). Hatfield’s careful analysis of the graphic novel form as a function of serialization and market forces is valuable, yet there nonetheless remains here an acquiescence to nebulous terminology. The matter is one of semantic precision, something that needs to be addressed if we are serious about making generic distinctions and understanding the fluid language we use to make those distinctions.<sup>6</sup>

Accuracy of description is also potentially troublesome. The “novel” part of the formula assumes, perhaps too readily, a congruity with fictional prose. Because of this, some prefer the label “graphic album” or even the French term *bande dessinée*. And there are other problems of cohesiveness. As Hatfield has rightly shown, serialized works make up the bulk of what are considered graphic novels (153). Many longer and more “novelistic” graphic works were originally serialized as smaller sections within individual comic book issues. Such is the case with *Love and Rockets* (1981-1996, 2001-present), where many of Gilbert Hernandez’s Palomar stories, interspersed with the work of his brothers, were culled to form longer books. “Graphic novels” are also created when issues of an entire mini-series (titles sustained over a limited period of time) are collected together, as we find in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’s *Watchmen* (1987), Steve Darnall and Alex Ross’s *Uncle Sam* (1998), Joe Sacco’s *Palestine* (2001), Adrian Tomine’s *Summer Blonde* (2002), Nunzio DeFilippis and Christina Weir’s *Skinwalker* (2003), Jessica Abel’s *La Perdida* (2006), and Jason Aaron and Cameron Stewart’s *The Other Side* (2007). Yet these works’ serialized genesis does not seem at odds with our common understanding of the novel, especially when we consider that many nineteenth-century British and American novels were published in installments or through subscription. To use an even more recent example, Michael Chabon’s *Gentlemen of the Road* was serialized in *The New York Times Magazine* (28 Jan.–6 May 2007). Yet what becomes less clear is the practice of collecting as one volume previous issues of an ongoing comic book series. With series such as Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* (1989-1996), Garth

Ennis's *Preacher* (1995-2000), Brian K. Vaughan's *Y: The Last Man* (2002-present), and Bill Willingham's *Fables* (2003-present) comics within individual narrative arcs are collected and then published together as a "graphic novel." In *The Sandman*, Gaiman neatly and successfully wraps up the various story threads, so its ten volumes compose a sort of epic with a novelistic feel. But how do we approach comic book series still under production, such as *Fables*? Do we still want to call each of its individual volumes, which comprise four to six comic books each, a graphic novel, especially given the fact that we know there will be a continuation of the series and that the "novel" is not yet done? Publishers regularly market their books as such, thereby encouraging our already loose understanding of the concept of the graphic novel.

What is more, the "novel" part of the graphic novel equation is equally imprecise. Although distinctions between fiction and non-fiction can be fuzzy, we usually infer that novels are primarily imaginary narratives distinguishable from more "real life" writings such as memoir, autobiography, reportage, and criticism. Yet such is not necessarily the case when it comes to comics. In any larger bookstore, there usually will be a good-sized section devoted to graphic novels, and on those shelves you will find works of graphic fiction such as Howard Cruses's *Stuck Rubber Baby* (1995) and Mark Kalesniko's *Mail Order Bride* (2001) lumped together with Alison Bechdel's recent graphic memoir *Fun Home* (2006), Joe Sacco's journalistic work *Palestine* and *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000), David Collier's historical vignettes in *Portraits from Life* (2001), Ho Che Anderson's graphic biography *King* (2005), illustrated editions of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, anthologies such as Harvey Pekar's "Best of" edited collection for Houghton Mifflin (2006), and even works of comics aesthetics such as Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) and McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993). Obviously, not all of these works are "novels" or even fiction in the traditional sense, but because of forces surrounding the direct market and trade publishers—and perhaps because of the more popular need to categorize or come to terms with a rather disparate collection of texts that appear to have something visual in common—they are all considered either "graphic novels" or "graphic fiction."<sup>7</sup> Even the paramount example of the graphic novel is not without its genre problems. Art

Spiegelman's *Maus* reads more like a memoir than it does a work of fiction, with the protagonist not so much telling the story of his father's life—as one would do in a biography—but revealing facets of his own life as he documents that of his parents in the concentration camp. And yet this book is usually cited as one of the main reasons for not only comics' recent respectability, but the rise of the graphic novel. It is important to remember that *Maus* did not win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Given all of these considerations, the term “graphic narrative” best captures the comics medium in most of its permutations. If we define narrative as the representation of an event/action or a series of events/actions, then most of what we see out there would certainly qualify: various forms of fiction, memoir, autobiography, and journalism. In this way, we consider the *narrativity* of a particular graphic text, its set of properties that characterize it as narrative and distinguish it from non-narrative forms of graphic representation.<sup>8</sup> This would always be a matter of degree and context, but saying that a comic contains more or less narrativity would not be the same as making an aesthetic or cultural judgment of value, however inadvertent those judgments might be.

Questions surrounding definitions and labels are also crucial in another context: the “literary” merit of graphic narrative. As scholars of multi-ethnic texts can attest, how texts are conceptualized plays a large role in what is accepted in the classroom and seen as “legitimate” within our various fields of scholarship. A number of studies attempt a more inclusive understanding of graphic narrative or comic art,<sup>9</sup> yet there is nonetheless a tendency by some to qualify the scope of comics as a viable area of critical discourse, or at least as a topic for “serious” consideration. This limitation usually takes the form of privileging “alternative” graphic narratives and devaluing more generic—usually fantasy-based or escapist—comics.

Some of this may be due in part to the sheer dominance of superhero comics and their saturation of the market, usually to the economic exclusion of non-genre or independent comics. (When one hears the term “comic book,” such figures as Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, and the X-Men immediately come to mind.) Furthermore, alternative or independent artists have themselves been instrumental in formulating a loose “canon” of serious



comics. In 2006, two impressive collections of graphic narrative were published, both edited by highly regarded comics writers: Ivan Brunetti's *An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons, and True Stories* (published by Yale UP), and Harvey Pekar's contribution to Houghton Mifflin's "Best American Series," *The Best American Comics, 2006*. Neither of these collections feature anything from mainstream comics publishers (DC Comics, Marvel, or Dark Horse), which is curious given their titular ambitions to "anthologize" or collect the "best" that has been published in comic art.<sup>10</sup> Pekar himself, long known for his aversion to conventional comics, alerts the reader to the fact that "no superhero stuff is included [in the collection]. I looked at superhero stories but just didn't run across any that (I thought) were particularly good" (xvii). He later concludes his introduction by chiding, in an almost defensive matter, the "comics-is-for-kids" attitude he perceives as the antithesis of his project: "even if you don't like every choice in this collection, [comics] don't have to be about costumed superheroes, cute little kids, and talking animals" (xxii). One wonders what kind of mainstream comics Pekar sifted through when compiling his volume. It is difficult to believe that not one fantasy comic was published in recent years to rival even the weakest entry in his collection.

This critical stance has also found its way into some recent criticism. Journals such as the *International Journal of Comic Art*, *Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies*, and the online *ImageText* have a (relatively) long and inclusive history of publishing essays on a variety of graphic narrative forms—and some of this criticism discusses race and ethnicity in comics. Yet scholarship in more traditional English studies outlets (that is, journals and book collections that do not specialize in comics) seems limited at best. Most of these analyses focus on the work of Art Spiegelman or other recent writer/illustrators known for "literary" sophistication of form and theme in their work, such as Marjane Satrapi or Chris Ware. One of the most striking examples of this is a recent special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to graphic narrative. The editors of this volume point out that theirs is the "first special issue in the broad field of modern and contemporary narrative devoted to the form of graphic narrative" (Chute and DeKoven 767), apparently dismissing such publications as *ImageText* and *Popular*

*Culture Studies* as unengaged in the “broad field” of narrative analysis. The editors then point out that there is not yet “an established critical apparatus for graphic narrative. In fact, from a literary perspective—as regards critical works by professional academics—there is little rigorous critical apparatus for any genre of comics” (770).<sup>11</sup> Such an assertion privileges the literariness—and along with that, the critical value—of a graphic text. Only those comics that are “serious” enough for literary investigation should be given scholarly consideration. So it is perhaps unsurprising that with few exceptions, the essays in this collection focus exclusively on “hugely talented authors” (771) whose work is nowhere near the mainstream of comics, underground and “alternative” artists who define their work against conventional comic genres and modes.

We would do well, here, to recall Rebecca Zurier’s warnings against limiting our readings of graphic narrative to a few “exceptional talents” (102) and instead look at the way that the medium represents our culture on a much larger scale. It is understandable that scholarship on graphic narrative should include innovators of the medium like Spiegelman, Ware, and other “serious” authors—especially given their attempts at expanding the form and subject matter of their storytelling. However, such investigations should not preclude the appreciation or the analysis of more generic or mainstream forms of comics. In privileging the “marginal” within graphic narrative—writers who feel alienated from or set themselves against the mainstream industry—we may be inadvertently marginalizing or “othering” an entire community of writers, ethnic or otherwise, whose work resonates with multi-ethnic import. The ways in which we conceptualize, represent, and consume our superheroes, for instance, can speak volumes about the ways we frame the ethnic subject. Discounting generic comics from “serious” scholarly study would be analogous to overlooking nineteenth-century sentimental women’s fiction just because it was formulaic, conventional, and had an enormous readership. Comics, then, should be read not only as aesthetic works of narrative art, but as rich cultural documents that can truly become vehicles of American ethnoracial expression.

The essays and reviews that make up this special issue of *MELUS* are drawn from the broadest field of comics analysis.

They focus on graphic narrative in a variety of forms: daily strips, one-panel cartoons, superhero comics, graphic history, underground comix, gag strips, alternative comics, graphic novels, ongoing comic book series, graphic albums, children's and adolescent writing, comic journalism, and other kinds of graphic narrative that cannot be easily categorized. The contributions look at contemporary expressions of the form as well as examples from the opening decades of the twentieth century. Some of the analyses that follow are specifically concerned with ethnic American writers and illustrators—and even question our very notions of the “ethnic” artist and the ways in which they contextualize their own subject position. Others are more concerned with the strategies authors employ to represent those outside of their own ethnic communities.

The first two essays concern graphic narratives that reveal the American ethnic subject in the middle of the twentieth century. Edward Brunner focuses on Jackie Ormes, whose daily strip, *Torchy Brown*, was the first syndicated comic by an African American woman. He shows how Ormes translated the experiences of the Harlem Renaissance into visual form, with the peregrinations of the strip's titular character paralleling much of what occurred during the black migration in the early part of the century. American racial history during this tumultuous period is also the subject of Zhou Xiaojing's insightful analysis. She gives a close reading to Miné Okubo's graphic memoir *Citizen 13660*, a mix of traditional narrative and illustration that frustrates any attempt to pigeonhole the “graphic novel” as a form. Zhou highlights how Okubo employs “spatial-corporeal visualization” to reveal the raced body and its relation to authority during Japanese American internment in the 1940s.

Caricature and the ethnic subject is the focus of Menachem Feuer's contribution to this special issue. Using the work of brothers Drew and Josh Friedman, he maps out the contours of “the freak” in popular culture of the 1970s and 1980s and links it to Jewish representations of the schlemiel. Drawing on Susan Sontag's critical writings on photography as well as the tenets of 1970s Pop Art, Feuer shows how the parodic process of “othering” the ethnic body becomes a democratic act, where individual subjects receive their moments of “fame” through the visual

language of celebrity. Lysa Rivera, too, centers her analysis on the disfiguration of the ethnic body. She reads Dwayne McDuffie's racialized version of the superhero, Deathlok, as an analog for the African American diaspora. Contextualized against such backdrops as the classic *Tarzan* comics and Arnold Schwarzenegger's highly iconic Terminator figure, Rivera uses the trope of the cyborg to problematize blackness and argue for the always fragmented nature of African American identity.

Sandra Oh's essay revolves around the work of Adrian Tomine, one of the most significant graphic artists working today. She argues convincingly that the body of Tomine's work reflects a struggle with the ethnic self, where what is not stated—the various visual icons and verbal signifiers of Asian Americanness—can be just as telling as what is revealed on the comic page. Tomine's resistance to racialized identity in his works, for which some Asian Americans have criticized him, is called into question by his recent efforts to confront Asian American subject matters. As a result, one can read his semi-autobiographic comics as a chronicle of the limits and responsibilities of ethnic representation. Ben Katchor's work also concerns the individual subject's relationship to his ethnic community. In her essay, Jennifer Glaser looks at Katchor's most ambitious serialized work to date, *The Jew of New York*, as a commentary on Jewish ethnic "authenticity." She argues that by placing his narrative in an imagined Jewish past, Katchor has created a graphic "historical romance" that reconceptualizes, and revitalizes, contemporary ethnic identity in ways similar to recent Jewish American novelists such as Michael Chabon and Jonathan Safran Foer.

Essays by Michael Chaney and Leslie Paparone round out the critical concerns of this special issue. In his contribution, Chaney examines the revision of African American history in the recent graphic narratives of Ho Che Anderson, Lance Tooks, and the collaborative efforts of Aaron McGruder, Reginald Hudlin, and Kyle Baker. He argues that in their works, these authors have recontextualized current African American politics by graphically re-visioning the enduring historical legacies of slavery, minstrelsy, and economic apartheid. Paparone takes on the metatextual themes of Mark Kalesniko's graphic novel, *Mail Order Bride*, in its commentary on the unsteady role of art in representing the ethnic

subject. She shows how Kalesniko juxtaposes pornography (a form of photography that objectifies the body) and the “high” art of creative photography (which purports to reveal the inner human subject) in order to complicate issues of Asian American female identity. The result, Paparone concludes, is a heterogeneous understanding of Asian and Asian American womanhood that radicalizes “otherness” by resisting both hypersexualized assimilation and hyperfeminized exoticism.

My interview with Gilbert Hernandez provides another take on ethnoracial themes in graphic narrative, one from an actual comics artist. In it I ask him about the cultural impact of his (and his brothers’) comic book series, *Love and Rockets*, his fascination with popular culture, and the roles of ethnicity and gender in graphic narrative as a whole. The last part of this special issue consists of a variety of reviews of critical works relating to comics, graphic novels and collections, and even current comic book series that engage multiculturalism in one form or another.

The goal of this special issue is not only to introduce readers to a facet of ethnoracial narrative with which they might not otherwise be familiar, that of graphic narrative, but to encourage teachers of multi-ethnic writing to consider using comics in the classroom. Graphic narrative is a varied medium. Scholars should expand their understanding of ethnic American writing, as well as the developing “canon” of comics itself, to include a wide range of graphic narrative—from its most pedestrian expressions in the popular media, to its fanboy base in mainstream comics, to its most obscure manifestations in the niches of art culture.

### Notes

There are several people whose support and assistance were central in pulling together this special issue of *MELUS*. I thank Gilbert Hernandez for his time and talent, not only for his commentary in the interview, but for providing, along with colorist Adam Grano, the cover illustration. I am also grateful to Eric Reynolds and individuals at Fantagraphics Books, as well as those at Drawn and Quarterly, for providing avenues of communication with a number of professionals in the comics field. Thanks also to the writers and illustrators who spoke with me and shared their insights on the place of race and ethnicity in graphic narrative. These include Jessica Abel, Ho Che Anderson, Drew Friedman, Jaime Hernandez, R. Kikuo Johnson, Mark Kalesniko, Ben Katchor, Keith Knight, Scott McCloud, Trina Robbins, Wilfred Santiago, Robert Schmidt, James Sturm, and Adrian Tomine. Finally, I am especially indebted to Verónica Makowsky

and Martha J. Cutter, the former and current *MELUS* editors, for all of their efforts regarding this project.

1. Art Spiegelman makes this point succinctly in his cover illustration for the June 2006 issue of *Harper's*. In this issue, his article, "Drawing Blood," takes on the recent controversy surrounding the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* and the power of cartoons to stereotype as well as raise public awareness. His satiric illustration is a smorgasbord of tried and true racist caricaturing, including a poor African American with large red lips, bug eyes, and a pair of dice; a horned Jew with a big nose and dollar signs all over his topcoat, as well as one wafting from his cigar; a Chinese coolie, complete with bucked teeth and queue; a turbaned Arab with a bloody assassin's dagger; a Mexican in a sombrero, with a gun in one hand, a bottle of booze in another, and odor signs emanating from his body; a drunken Native American in feathered headband and tomahawk; and an Italian in fedora and pinstripes wielding a knife. For more sustained analyses of racial stereotypes in comic books and newspaper strips, see Christian Davenport, and Jack Glascock and Catherine Preston-Schreck.

2. The Muhammad cartoons originally appeared in the *Jyllands-Posten* on 30 September 2005, as part of their coverage on media self-censorship regarding the criticism of Islamic fundamentalism. The result was massive—and at times violent—protest throughout the Muslim world, reaching its crescendo in early 2006, part of which included an announcement in February from the Iranian newspaper *Hamshahari* that it would sponsor a competition for the best political cartoon depicting the "reality" of the Holocaust. For discussion of stereotypes in the comics of Barry Blair, see Boyd; for discussion of stereotypes in Crumb, see his interview. Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo* has been criticized as a racist and colonialist text almost since its publication. In July 2007 the UK's Commission for Racial Equality called the book's depiction of Africans inappropriate, prompting Borders in that country to move the book from the children's section to the adult graphic novels section.

3. Several museum exhibitions, showcasing the work of multiple artists, have likewise underscored the links between comics and multi-ethnic expression. In 1986 (Sept. 15–Dec. 20) Philadelphia's Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies sponsored *Ethnic Images in the Comics*, Atlanta's William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum held *ZAP! POW! BAM! The Superhero: The Golden Age of Comic Books, 1938-1950* (24 Oct. 2004–28 Aug. 2005), and in 2007 (Apr. 5–25) the Jackson State University Art Gallery presented *Other Heroes: African American Comics Creators, Characters and Archetypes*. Catalogues have been published for each of these exhibits.

4. As Marc Singer aptly says of this "heroic" exchange, "In other words, superhero comics represented every fantastic race possible, as a means of ignoring real ones" (111). Singer's is perhaps the most insightful analysis available on the subject of race in superhero comics.

5. I agree with Eisner's *technical* inclusion of cinematic storytelling as a form of graphic narrative, and as such, all references to graphic narrative throughout this issue will exclude those of film. However, graphic narrative could also include

fumetti, comics which use photographic images (along with balloons or dialogue add-ons) as a basis for sequential storytelling. Eisner's definition also does not adequately account for all forms of Internet-based comics (fumetti or otherwise), especially those in which the narrative sequence is presented one image at a time, somewhat similar to film, and not conceived as a page layout, or *mise en page*. This limitation is primarily due to the dearth of online comics when Eisner defined his terms in 1996.

6. Although commonly believed to be the first to go by such a generic marker, Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978) was not the first book to claim the label "graphic novel." As Robert C. Harvey points out, publisher Richard Kyle referred to the long-form comic book as a "graphic novel" in 1964, and in George Metzger's 1976 work, *Beyond Time and Again*, the term appeared on both the title page and the dust jacket flaps. Two other comic works from 1976, Jim Steranko's *Red Tide* and Richard Corben's *Bloodstar*, referred to their works as, respectively, a "visual novel" and a "graphic novel."

7. For a useful discussion of the direct market in comic sales and its impact on the aesthetics of graphic narrative, see Hatfield (20-29).

8. One of the best (and eclectic) attempts to define "narrative" can be found in the work of Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck. Although they do not consider comics in their analysis, their more inclusive understanding of sequentiality (12-14) could rightly accommodate it.

9. Some of these more inclusive studies are those by M. Thomas Inge, David Carrier, Robin Varnum and Christina T. Gibbons, Charles Hatfield, and Thierry Groensteen.

10. Another graphic narrative collection that neglected mainstream comics was Chris Ware's edition of *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* (no. 13, 2004), perhaps the most impressive recent collection of alternative comics. However, the McSweeney volume stands out from that of Pekar and Brunetti in that it never professes to be anything other than a collection of disparate and even offbeat pieces.

11. It is difficult to see how Chute and DeKoven can make this claim, especially given the emerging body of literature on the medium. Joseph Witek's *Comic Books as History* (1989) was one of the first in-depth looks into the narrative art of comics, Hatfield's *Alternative Comics* follows suit by focusing on the alternative scene, and the aforementioned texts by Inge, Carrier, Varnum and Gibbons, and Groensteen are just a few examples of the ever-growing critical works available on the study of comics. Indeed, Groensteen's theoretical analyses, as well as that of other Continental scholars, have been available for years, underscoring Europe's long-held appreciation for comics as a serious narrative form.

### Works Cited

- Boyd, Robert. "Racist Murder as Entertainment." *The Comics Journal* (Feb 1990): 3-4.

- Carrier, David. *The Aesthetics of Comics*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2000.
- Chute, Hillary, and Marianne DeKoven. "Introduction: Graphic Narrative." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52 (2007): 767-82.
- Crumb, R., and Aline Kominsky-Crumb. "A Joint Interview with R. Crumb and Aline Kominsky-Crumb." Interview with B. N. Duncan. *Tele Times* July 1980: 35-45. Rpt. in *R. Crumb: Conversations*. Ed. D. K. Holm. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2004. 117-32.
- Davenport, Christian. "Black Is the Color of My Comic Book Character: An Examination of Ethnic Stereotypes." *Inks* 4 (1997): 20-28.
- Eisner, Will. *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*. Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse, 1996.
- Glascocock, Jack, and Catherine Preston-Schreck. "Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Daily Newspaper Comics: A Time-Honored Tradition?" *Sex Roles* 51 (2004): 423-31.
- Groensteen, Thierry. *The System of Comics*. Trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2007.
- Harvey, Robert C. "The Graphic Novel, Will Eisner, and Other Pioneers." *The Comics Journal* May 2001: 103-6.
- Hatfield, Charles. *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005.
- Herman, Luc, and Bart Vervaeck. *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. Trans. Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2005.
- Inge, Thomas. *Comics as Culture*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1990.
- McCloud, Scott. *Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology Are Revolutionizing an Art Form*. New York: Perennial, 2000.
- . *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Perennial, 1993.
- Pekar, Harvey. Introduction. *The Best American Comics, 2006*. Ed. Harvey Pekar. Boston: Houghton, 2006. xv-xxiii.
- Pustz, Matthew J. "Discovering Comic Book Culture." *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1999. 3-25.
- Singer, Marc. "'Black Skins' and White Masks: Comic Books and the Secret of Race." *African American Review* 36 (2002): 107-19.
- Spiegelman, Art. Cover illustration. *Harper's Magazine*. June 2006.
- . "Mightier Than the Sorehead." *Nation* 17 Jan. 1994: 45-46.
- Witek, Joseph. *Comic Books as History*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989.
- Varnum, Robin, and Christina T. Gibbons. *The Language of Comics: Word and Image*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001.
- Zurier, Rebecca. "Classy Comics." Rev. of *The History of the Comic Strip: The Nineteenth Century*, by David Kunzle, *America's Great Comic-Strip Artists*, by Richard Marschall, *Comics as Culture*, by M. Thomas Inge, *The Great American Comic Strip: One Hundred Years of Cartoon Art*, by Judith O'Sullivan, *Batman: Arkham Asylum, A Serious House on Serious Earth*, by Grant Morrison and Dave McKean, and *Raw: Vol. 2, No. 2: Required Reading for the Post-Literate*, by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly, eds. *Art Journal* 50.3 (1991): 98-103.