

⚡ COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND ⚡

DEFENDER



**CELEBRATE
DIVERSITY
IN 2016!**



**REGINALD
HUDLIN: BLACK
COMICS MATTER**



**PROFILES
IN BLACK
CARTOONING**



Director's Note

Everything is changing in 2016, yet the familiar challenges of the past continue to reverberate with great force. This isn't just true in the broader world, but in comics, too. While the boundaries defining representation and content in free expression are expanding, we continue to see biased or outmoded viewpoints stifling those advances. As you'll see in this issue of *CBLDF Defender*, we are working on both ends of the spectrum by providing vital education about the people whose work expanded free expression while simultaneously fighting all attempts to censor creative work in comics.

In this issue, we work the former end of the spectrum with a pair of articles spotlighting the pioneers who advanced diverse content. On page 10, "Profiles in Black Cartooning" introduces you to some of the cartoonists who used comics to express themselves about the African-American experience in the harsh racial climate of the United States in the 20th Century. "She Changed Comics," on page 7, introduces CBLDF's upcoming book, which will tell the story of how women changed free expression in comics.

In our lead interview, "Black Comics Matter," entertainment luminary and CBLDF Board Member Reginald Hudlin discusses how times have changed for Black creators since he started making comics, and he shares his thoughts on how much further we still have to go. His interview starts on page 8.

There may be no surer sign of the obstacles facing diverse content than the fact that books of that type are banned and challenged more often than any other. On page 6, we preview Banned Books Week's spotlight on diversity and how you can get involved.

Unfortunately, book censorship is still a vast problem that happens throughout the year. In our news section, we'll tell you about our most recent cases, starting with media attacks on the Caldecott honoree *This One Summer* by Jillian and Mariko Tamaki, attacks that vilified the book and led to its wrongful restriction in three high school libraries. Find out how CBLDF fought to get that valuable book back on the shelf on the next page.

All of this work is possible because of public support. If you value any of these efforts, please take a moment to become a member of the CBLDF. You'll see the rewards we created to thank you on page 15, including t-shirts, stickers, and other items featuring Craig Thompson's beautiful member art.

2016 is a turning point. We hope you'll join us in making it a change towards more inclusive free expression in comics by supporting our important work today!

—Charles Brownstein, Executive Director



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COMIXOLOGY



WARPED LENS

We're years past the Comics Code and the media attacks that helped fuel decades of comics censorship. But a Florida school district's recent decision to pull Jillian and Mariko Tamaki's *This One Summer* from high school libraries reveals that media attacks remain an effective way to stifle free speech.

"THIRD GRADER FINDS INAPPROPRIATE BOOK IN SEMINOLE COUNTY SCHOOL LIBRARY"

The headline screamed from a segment run by local news station WFTV. The scurrilous book in question? Jillian and Mariko Tamaki's critically acclaimed *This One Summer*, which last year made history as the first graphic novel to receive a Caldecott Honor.

The graphic novel had quite the ordeal over the past few weeks in Seminole County: First it was removed from three elementary school libraries due to a parent's challenge and trashed with biased and poorly researched reporting on local TV news. Then, it was restricted in three high school libraries in violation of district policy.

Due to its status as a Caldecott Honoree, some libraries and schools serving younger readers have been caught off-guard by the book's more mature content. There is no question, however, that *This One Summer* is appropriate for high school students. Publisher First Second recommends it for ages 12–18. In addition to the Caldecott Honor, it also received a Printz Honor for outstanding teen books, as well as starred reviews in *Booklist*, *The Horn Book*, *Kirkus*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *School Library Journal*.

"GRAPHIC NOVEL FOUND IN MULTIPLE SCHOOL LIBRARIES"

Despite the book's bona fides and age appropriateness, it was placed behind the counter in three Seminole County high school libraries, where students needed parental permission to access it. This overreaction was likely due to the negative publicity from WFTV, which reported that *This One Summer* is "filled with obscenities and sexual situations" and uncritically quoted an Amazon reader review who called it "practically porn for kids." The TV station continued to attack the book in follow-up stories.

In restricting a book at the high school level, the Seminole County School District contravened its own challenge policy. The challenge should initially be dealt with at the originating school, although it can be appealed to the superintendent and then the school board if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome. There is no suggestion whatsoever that a book judged inappropriate for students in a younger age group should automatically be restricted for all students without careful review and consideration.

CBLDF led the Kids' Right to Read Project and other advocates in defending *This One Summer*. In a letter to the school board, we pointed out that acting based on fear of



From *THIS ONE SUMMER* ©2014 by Mariko Tamaki, illustration ©2014 by Jillian Tamaki. Published by First Second Books. All rights reserved.

bad publicity rather than on sound policy exposes the district to future challenges from all quarters:

Parents who object to the book could easily supervise their children's reading choices. However, restricting student access violates the rights of students whose parents want their children to have access to a wider diversity of material... Decisions about school materials should be made for sound educational reasons and follow established policy, not because some people may or may not agree with the content.

"CONTROVERSIAL BOOK STILL IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN CENTRAL FLORIDA"

This One Summer is now back where it never should have left: the unrestricted stacks of the high school libraries. By all appearances, this was yet another case of a school district acting to restrict a book in response to biased reporting that abandoned First Amendment principles in order to garner ratings. Challenge policies like the one ignored by school officials exist precisely to guard against such individual biases. We are gratified that the school district has reconsidered this rash action, but we must remain vigilant to hold administrators and officials everywhere accountable for protecting students' First Amendment rights!

Maren Williams

Support the right to read and check out this amazing graphic novel, signed by Mariko Tamaki! Available now in the CBLDF Rewards Zone: <http://tinyurl.com/gsv88zx>

Virginia Bill Threatens to Undermine Education

CBLDF has joined two letters from the National Coalition Against Censorship to protest House Bill 516, a law being considered in Virginia. If passed, HB 516 would require public schools to notify parents of “sexually explicit content” in curricular materials. The bill has passed through both houses of the General Assembly, and Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe must decide whether to veto it.

HB516 arose out of one parent’s attempt to ban Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Beloved* from her son’s AP English class after he complained that the book’s content gave him nightmares. Crafted by House Speaker William J. Howell, the intent of the bill is to force schools to create a policy that would require them to notify parents of “sexually explicit content” and give parents the option to opt their children out of reading the material if they personally find it inappropriate.

When the bill first passed through the House last month, it had the unanimous support of all 98 representatives. The subsequent Senate vote was more divided at 22-17. Since the Senate also amended the bill, it then went back to the House for another vote. By then, some members of that chamber had reconsidered their positions after hearing from constituents and receiving the first NCAC letter, but it was too little, too late: The amended bill passed the House

by a vote of 77-21.

How “sexually explicit content” will be defined would be determined by the State Board of Education, not local communities. If signed into law, HB516 could have a chilling effect on educators in the state. An overly broad definition of “sexually explicit content” may see teachers avoiding potentially controversial materials altogether.

Governor McAuliffe, a Democrat, has not publicly stated his views on the bill. In the most recent letter, NCAC urged McAuliffe to consider constitutional issues and the headaches that the legislation would create for school districts:

Singling out material with a certain type of content inevitably creates a biased perspective and casts a negative light on the material regardless of its educational value. The bill is silent on what content would be labelled “sexually explicit,” or how that term would be defined. On its face, however, the term is vague and could apply to a great deal of classic and contemporary literature, including Anne Frank’s The Diary of a Young Girl, Geoffrey Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales, Theodore Dreiser’s An American Tragedy, Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five, Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary, Sherman Alexie’s The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, the Bible, and most works by William Shakespeare.

Hopefully, McAuliffe will recognize the harm HB516 could do to the education system in Virginia, and he will veto the bill.

CENSORSHIP SCORECARD

CBLDF joins coalition efforts to protect the freedom to read comics. Taking an active stand against all instances of censorship curbs precedent that could adversely affect the rights upon which comics readers depend. Here are a few of our latest cases...

Seminole County, Florida

WIN: After a biased TV news report and a challenge at the elementary level, district officials restricted access to Jillian and Mariko Tamaki’s *This One Summer* in high school libraries in violation of school policy. CBLDF led the Kids’ Right to Read Project in protesting the move, and *This One Summer* is now back where it never should have left: the unrestricted stacks of the high school libraries.

Etiwanda, California

WIN: CBLDF joined KRRP to defend Todd Parr’s *The Family Book* after the parents of one formerly enrolled student challenged the book for its inclusion of families with same-sex parents. A review committee decided that *The Family Book* should remain available, but the decision was appealed to the school board. The board reaffirmed the review committee’s decision to keep the book.

Coeur d’Alene, Idaho

WIN: CBLDF joined KRRP to defend Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* after a high school teacher was denied approval to use the novel. The district’s Ad Hoc Literature Commit-

tee voted 4-2 against it due to “‘explicit’ sex scenes. The school board unanimously overruled the decision by voting to adopt the proposed curriculum, including *The Namesake*.

Rumson, New Jersey

WIN: In response to an online petition calling for the removal of Ariel Dorfman’s play *Death and the Maiden* and Bernard MacLaverty’s novel *Cal* from Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School, CBLDF joined KRRP to defend the books. A review committee determined that the books should remain part of the curriculum.

Knightdale, North Carolina

LOSS: CBLDF joined KRRP to protest the removal of graphic novel *Amityville: Jr. Graphic Ghost Stories* from the Lake Myra Elementary School library. The book was pulled from the Wake County school library after a parent complained to school officials. It was pulled without review in violation of district policy.

Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

LOSS: Administrators at Friends’ Central School pulled Mark Twain’s seminal classic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from the 11th grade curriculum after a group of students complained that it made them uncomfortable. CBLDF joined KRRP in protesting the removal. The school denies censoring the book, citing its inclusion in the school library and on extra credit reading lists.

Gene Luen Yang Named National Ambassador for Young People's Literature

Every two years since 2008, the Library of Congress has chosen a National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, an author charged with raising "national awareness of the importance of young people's literature as it relates to lifelong literacy, education and the development and betterment of the lives of young people." While that's always a worthy cause, this year we have particular reason to celebrate the announcement because for the first time ever the honor and responsibility has been bestowed on a graphic novelist: Gene Luen Yang!

Yang, creator of *American Born Chinese*, *Boxers/Saints*, and *The Shadow Hero*, will use his two-year ambassadorship to travel around the country promoting youth literacy in schools, libraries, and book festivals. Centering his term around a theme of "Reading Without Walls," he hopes to "excite young people about reading outside their comfort zones." And as he told *The Washington Post's* Michael Cavna, there is no doubt that he'll be giving comics and graphic novels "a little bit of an extra push."

Egyptian Novelist Sentenced to Two Years in Prison for "Violating Public Modesty"

Egyptian novelist Ahmed Naji was sentenced to two years in prison for "violating public modesty" with an excerpt from his book *Use of Life*, which was published in a state-owned newspaper two years ago. Naji was previously acquitted in January, but the prosecution was able to appeal that verdict, and he received the maximum sentence this time around.

Use of Life is an experimental work that incorporates visual elements, including comics drawn by Ayman al-Zorkany. The excerpt printed in 2014 in *Akhbar al-Adab* newspaper included references to sexual acts and drug use, and the 65-year-old reader who brought the charges claimed that it caused him heart palpitations, a drop in blood pressure, and severe illness. In addition to Naji's prison sentence, the newspaper's editor Tarek el-Taher also received a fine equivalent to about \$1,300.

Zunar Sedition Trial Delayed Yet Again

The sedition trial of Malaysian cartoonist Zunar has been delayed yet again. After multiple delays while separate challenges to the country's Sedition Act are pending, the trial is set to begin on April 7, 2016. If convicted on the nine counts of sedition for statements he made on Twitter, Zunar could face up to 43 years in prison.

Zunar's trial was originally set to begin on May 20, 2015, but it has now been delayed four times while courts await decisions on constitutional challenges to the Sedition Act, which predates the Malaysian constitution and independence from British colonial rule. Given his history, we wouldn't be terribly surprised if the trial is delayed further.

Find out more about these stories and get the latest news every day at www.cbldf.org!

CBLDF RELOCATING TO PORTLAND, OREGON, IN 2016!

The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is moving to Portland, Oregon, in 2016! In relocating, CBLDF brings its 30 years of experience at the nexus of comics, free expression, and advocacy to one of the nation's most vibrant communities of comics creators, readers, and educators. The relocation will help the organization reduce operating expenses, while improving proximity to industry partners on the West Coast and allowing engagement with local creators and volunteers.

CBLDF President Larry Marder says, "The Fund thrives when we are near to our industry partners and can engage with a dedicated and diverse pool of volunteers, thriving talent scenes, and, above all else, a community that will benefit from and support our work. Portland abounds in all of those areas. We look forward to being of service to the city's community and to working with them to continue developing our ongoing program work in support of the freedom to read comics."

CBLDF Executive Director Charles Brownstein says, "It's important to all of us at CBLDF that our work will add value to Portland's extraordinary culture. We want to hear from people in the community about how they would like to become involved and how our work protecting the freedom to read comics can serve the needs of Portland's readers, creators, students, and educators. If you'd like to volunteer or if you have suggestions for what you'd like to see from us, please email portland@cbldf.org. Your feedback is important to us as we develop programming to serve our new local community!"

CBLDF's Portland office will open by June 1. The Fund will continue to operate out of its NYC office during the transition. In the event of a First Amendment Emergency, call 1-800-99-CBLDF and email info@cbldf.org for assistance.



BANNED BOOKS WEEK CELEBRATES DIVERSITY!

JOIN THE CELEBRATION OF THE RIGHT TO READ
SEPTEMBER 25 - OCTOBER 1, 2016!

Why are so many diverse books banned? The 2016 celebration of Banned Books Week will examine this important question as part of its thematic focus on diversity! Banned Books Week, the annual celebration of the freedom to read, will run from September 25 – October 1, 2016, and will be observed in thousands of libraries, schools, bookstores, and other community settings across the nation and the world.

According to ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, more than half of all banned books are by authors of color or contain events and issues concerning diverse communities. This year's Banned Books Week will celebrate literature written by diverse writers that has been banned or challenged, as well as explore why diverse books are disproportionately singled out by censors in the first place.

"It's alarming to see so many diverse voices facing censorship," says CBLDF Executive Director Charles Brownstein, who chairs the 2016 Banned Books Week committee. "2016's Banned Books Week is an important moment for communities to join together in affirming the value of diverse ideas and multiple viewpoints. By shining a light on how these ideas are censored, we hope to encourage opportunities to create engagement and understanding within our communities, and to emphasize the fundamental importance of the freedom to read."

The Banned Books Week Coalition is a national alliance of diverse organizations joined by a commitment to increase awareness of the annual celebration of the freedom to read. The Coalition seeks to engage various communities and inspire participation in Banned Books Week through education, advocacy, and the creation of programming about the problem of book censorship. The Coalition will be partnering with library, reader, and author groups, including We Need Diverse Books™ (<http://diversebooks.org>), to bring meaningful conversation to this year's programming.

Individuals, institutions, and other groups seeking to join in the celebration are encouraged to visit www.bannedbooksweek.org to learn how to become involved. The Banned Books Week website is a hub for information, activities, and resources to help encourage communities to be a part of the celebration of the week. Join the conversation using #BannedBooksWeek, and follow activities and watch for updates on Twitter and Facebook.

CBLDF will also have comics-specific resources available for librarians, educators, and parents. In the coming months, look for an all-new edition of the *CBLDF Banned Books Week Handbook*, our premier resource for making a celebration of Banned Books Week and the freedom to read! We'll also have free resources, including posters, shelf talkers, discussion guides, and more. Visit <http://cblldf.org/resources/banned-books-week> to view current resources, and check back for updates!

Banned Books Week is sponsored by American Booksellers for Free Expression, American Library Association, American Society of Journalists and Authors, Association of American Publishers, Association of American University Presses, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, Dramatists Legal Defense Fund, Freedom to Read Foundation, National Association of College Stores, National Coalition Against Censorship, National Council of Teachers of English, People For the American Way Foundation, PEN American Center, and Project Censored.





Women have been making comics since the beginning.

But there's an important story that hasn't been told: how women changed free expression in comics.

CBLDF will finally tell that story.

Women are still underrepresented in the comics industry, but that's changing thanks in large part to the women who came before—the women who changed free expression in comics. These women ventured into unexplored creative territories, opened doors for their contemporaries and those who followed, broadened the scope of comics, and faced down those who would silence them.

CBLDF will tell the story of how women changed free expression in comics with *She Changed Comics*, a dynamic full-color book coming out this fall. In *She Changed Comics*, we will profile more than 60 women whose work changed the landscape of free expression, from the turn of the 20th century to present day.

We'll look at women who worked during the Golden Age and before the advent of the Comics Code—women like Nell Brinkley and Jackie Ormes, whose cartoons weren't just hugely popular. They helped define fashion and society in their eras.

She Changed Comics will explore the work of women who were saddled with and overcame the Comics Code, which in many ways disproportionately targeted comics for and by women. Some of these women, such as underground comix artists Trina Robbins, Lee Marrs, and Dori Seda, circumvented the Comics Code entirely, telling candid stories about female sexuality, feminism, and women's rights. Some helped break down the legacy of the Comics Code in mainstream comics, such as modern era writer Gail Simone, who deconstructed the trope of women in refrigerators—women who served only as plot devices to drive male characters—by reinventing female comics characters that had long been trapped by the male gaze.

We'll also take a look at women who have been censored, like Phoebe Gloeckner, Alison Bechdel, and Marjane Sa-

trapi, who shared deeply personal coming-of-age stories in graphic novels, stories that have been embraced by millions and found homes beyond the bounds of comics. Their inspiration made way for Jillian and Mariko Tamaki, whose book *This One Summer* became the first graphic novel to receive the Caldecott honor and subsequently became the book CBLDF has had to defend most frequently in 2015.

We'll also examine the plights of female cartoonists who've been imprisoned or threatened. Atena Farghadani, who is currently serving a nearly 13-year prison sentence for mocking Iran's parliament in a cartoon. Women who literally put their lives at risk every time they put a line on paper, like Doaa Eladl and Kanika Mishra, both of whom have been threatened by religious fundamentalists in their home countries.

These are just a few of the women we'll profile. *She Changed Comics* will also highlight the work of more obscure creators, women whose powerful contributions to free expression haven't been adequately recognized.

Finally, *She Changed Comics* will feature interviews with some of the most influential women working in the medium today, as they share their perspectives on free expression and how women will continue to contribute to comics in the future.

We can't tell this story without you! With your help, we can inspire the next generation to appreciate the place women have held in the fight for free expression. Please visit <http://cbldf.org/she-changed-comics/> for updates and to find out how you can support this important project!

Betsy Gomez



BLACK COMICS MATTER

Reginald Hudlin on censorship, why we need diversity in comics, and the future of Black comics.

From writing some of the most seminal issues of *Black Panther* to directing and producing some of the most beloved films, Reginald Hudlin isn't just a successful entertainer. He's an advocate for other creators and artists. Interview by Betsy Gomez

Please describe the landscape and climate for Black content and creators when you got into comics. How has it changed?

The market is far more open today than when I first started having conversations with comic publishers a decade or more ago. Back then, there was no acknowledgment of the value of the Black consumer or the idea that Black product could be broadly popular. The comic book industry was far behind film, television, live theater, and mainstream publishing in that regard. That's not to say those other mediums were progressive. It's just that when it came to non-white product, the comics industry was far and away the most backward medium in entertainment.

In the last couple of years there's been a decrease in the resistance to Black protagonists in comics and in entertainment in general. There's still a presumptive automatic devaluation of Black product, but as each generation is less prejudiced than the one before it, it's getting easier to do business.

Your work in entertainment has consistently sought to elevate larger appreciation of Black

*content. Your comics work, including *Black Panther*, has done the same. How much further do you think we need to go, and what do we need to do to get there?*

I think we've only scratched the surface of what Black comics could be. There are so many genres to be explored, so many stories to tell. I think we have barely tested the limits of the marketplace. Black women are a huge part of the book-buying marketplace. Where are the comic books for them?

In your experience, how is content by and about Black people treated differently from a censorship or self-censorship standpoint?

Black people and all their expressions are typically seen as dangerous, edgy, and aggressive, even when all we are doing is what our white counterparts are doing.

Black artists are aware of that double standard and either tone their work down to not offend buyers or play into the extreme stereotypes to satisfy white presumptions. Both approaches undermine the integrity of their work.

In an attempt to improve the representation of minorities in comics, Dwayne McDuffie, Denys Cowan, Michael Davis, and Derek T. Dingle founded the short-lived Milestone imprint with DC Comics in 1993. Last year, you joined Cowan and Dingle to resurrect Milestone Media, or "Milestone 2.0." How do you think the original incarnation of Milestone impacted the comic



book industry? What are some ways in which Milestone Media will continue to change the face of comics?

Our goal is the same as the original incarnation: to tell human, relatable stories about people of color using the fantastic. The original books affected a generation of readers of all races, and the Static Shock television series touched even more people. With our greater experience in film, television, and comics and a more receptive marketplace, we see no limit to what the new Milestone can be and do.

You've credited creators such as McDuffie, Cowan, and Kyle Baker as mentors. What did they teach you about making comics?

Well, everything. Denys took me to my first comic book convention and introduced me to everybody. Kyle taught me about panel and page flow, and word balloon placement. Dwayne explained... well, they all explained the politics of the business to me. There's no way to sum up the hours of instruction they all gave me.

You partnered with Baker and The Boondocks creator Aaron McGruder on Birth of a Nation, a brilliant political satire that examines what would happen if your hometown of East St. Louis seceded from the United States. In what ways is the book a reflection of the reality in your hometown and in the United States as a whole? How does the book relate to today's landscape, with the advent of

movements like Black Lives Matter?

The book describes life in my hometown pretty accurately. I didn't make up any stories. People really did steal a high security fence and the guard dogs, too. I'm sure there are similar stories in Detroit and Newark and Compton. As War said, the World Is A Ghetto.

There's a great tradition of protest that stretches from the abolitionist movement to Black Lives Matter, but too often it boils down to us fighting the power, not being the power. I grew up in a town where everyone in charge was black—the mayor whose sons I went to school with, the fire chief who lived next door. Why couldn't we take that authority and make transformative change, not just make the same mistakes as the previous regime did but now in blackface? That's what that book—and my life—are about.

On your website, you advocate strongly for the work of other people, especially work that improves the diversity of entertainment media. What current comics and creators excite you the most? What are they saying that you think the world needs to hear?

Here's a list, but it's not limited to comics. I'm digging the music of Kanye West, Donny Hathaway, and Kamasi Washington; the Broadway musical *Hamilton*; the comics *Ms. Marvel*, *Hip Hop Family Tree*, and *Bitch Planet*; and the movies *Dope* and *A Ballerina's Tale*.

Static Shock, one of Milestone's most popular characters.

(Art by John Paul Leon. Courtesy DC Comics.)



In 1993, Black artists Denys Cowan, Michael Davis, Derek T. Dingle, Dwayne McDuffie, and Christopher Priest assembled like the Avengers to create an imprint that would flourish with Black characters. There was a need for diversity, and these Black creators came together to fill the void.

The result, Milestone Comics, specialized in peak Blackness. In the Milestone universe, the characters were prominently Black and other people of color. When there's a multitude of Black character titles to choose from, such as *Static*, *Hardware*, *Blood Syndicate*, or *Icon*, there isn't a pressure for them to be the representation for their entire race. The characters were allowed to be humorous, serious, or even arrogant without fear of stereotyping or typecasting.

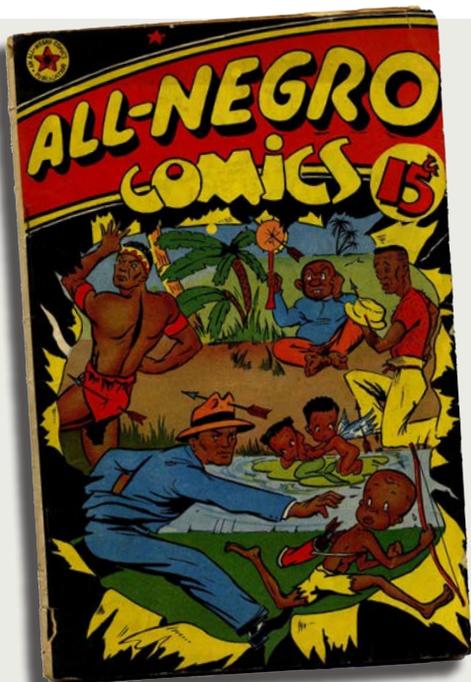
Milestone was under DC Comics' umbrella but operated independently. Milestone ran story arcs revolving around action, but also looking at race and Black sexuality. Being a part of DC Comics helped open a wider distribution for Milestone that would be hard to achieve for most independent publishers.

When sales declined, Milestone closed up shop, but it had gained a cult-like following. Enter 2015, when we received word that there would be a revival of Milestone from one Reginald Hudlin. Hudlin, along with Cowan and Dingle, announced the return of Milestone, dubbed "Milestone 2.0."

Milestone's success showcased what was possible for creating diverse characters, and we see how necessary this company still is today. Milestone still serves as an beacon towards better inclusion and more thoughtful representation.

Omar Holmon • <http://blacknerdproblems.com>

PROFILES IN BLACK CA



The only issue of *All-Negro Comics*
© Orrin C. Evans.)

In celebration of Black History Month, CBLDF partnered with Black Nerd Problems to spotlight Black comics creators and cartoonists who made significant contributions to free expression...

Orrin C. Evans

A man whom *The New York Times* proclaimed “The Dean of Black Reporters,” Orrin C. Evans rose to a position of becoming one of the first Black comic book writers as an outsider to comics himself.

Evans’ first journalism gig was with *The Sportsman’s Magazine*. He moved on to the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the oldest Black newspaper in the country, and he would cross over into the mainstream with the *Philadelphia Record* as its first Black writer. He drew accolades for speaking about segregation in the armed forces, but in 1944—war time—it drew threats of violence, too.

After the paper shut down in 1947, Orrin developed an interest in comic books, noting he might be able to widen his readership and still produce the same message he had as a journalist. He didn’t see much representation in the heroes of most popular comics, so he went to work on sculpting his own comic book, drawing a number of past and present colleagues to aid in his vision. The result was *All-Negro Comics*.

All-Negro Comics #1 was released in June 1947. It presented a number of stories that depicted Black heroes. A second issue of *All-Negro Comics* was planned, but it never came out—vendors would not sell Evans paper for printing and distributors mysteriously pulled out. The success of *All-Negro Comics* and other comics focused on Black audiences did not start a groundswell for Black comic books, so Evans returned to journalism, where he stood out among his White colleagues by covering events dealing with the Black experience. Regardless, the many battles fought today concerning representation in comics began with Evans, who had no Twitter coalition or public opinion at his back, just sheer will to see himself in the stories he loved to read.

William H. Evans • <http://blacknerdproblems.com>

Jackie Ormes

Zelda Jackson Ormes, better known as Jackie, was the first African American woman to make a living as a cartoonist. Between 1937 and 1955, her strips were syndicated extensively nationwide in the Black press, featuring Black women front and center in roles and social situations they were never accorded in the mainstream media of the day.

Originally a journalist, Ormes tried her hand at cartooning with her first strip, *Torchy Brown in “Dixie to Harlem”* in 1937. Through *Torchy*, a southern transplant to New York who became a performer at the Cotton Club, Ormes was able to address racism, prejudice, women’s careers,



Patty-Jo 'n' Ginger by Jackie Ormes
© Jackie Ormes. Published April 7, 1951. From the collection of Nancy Goldstein.)

"It would be interestin' to discover WHICH committee decided it was un-American to be COLORED!"

CARTOONING

and other issues she felt strongly about. She later described herself as “antiwar [and] anti-everything-that’s-smelly.” Torchy initially appeared only in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, but the strip was soon syndicated in 14 Black papers across the country.

In 1940 Ormes brought the original Torchy Brown to an end and briefly moved with her husband to Salem, Ohio. They soon moved again, to Chicago, where Ormes got a reporting job with the *Chicago Defender*. In 1946 she started another single-panel strip, *Patty-Jo ‘n’ Ginger*, which featured the acerbic little girl Patty Jo and her fashion-plate older sister Ginger. Ormes again commented on issues of the day, such as racism, sexism, the military-industrial complex, and McCarthyism.

In 1950, a national syndicate persuaded Ormes to bring back Torchy Brown for a new strip, *Torchy in Heartbeats*. However, the syndicate only wanted her to provide the art for a male writer’s storylines. This did not work out, as Ormes constantly had to remind the writer that the character she created “was no moonstruck crybaby, and that she wouldn’t perish between heartbreaks.” Eventually Ormes regained full control over the strip, which ran until 1955, when papers like the *Courier* and the *Defender* cut their comics sections to cover the Civil Rights Movement.

Ormes died in 1985, and while she inspired confidence in Black women, her own industry remains virtually off limits to them. From 1989 to 2005, there was exactly one nationally syndicated Black woman cartoonist, *Where I’m Coming From* creator Barbara Brandon-Croft, who credits Ormes as an inspiration. Brandon-Croft ended the strip over a decade ago, and any potential successors have apparently been stifled not only by the familiar combination of racism and sexism, but also by syndicates’ heavy reliance on rerunning old strips.

Maren Williams

Matt Baker

In the 1940s and 1950s, Clarence Matthew Baker—best known as Matt Baker—was widely regarded as the master of the “good girl” style and is credited as the first successful Black comic book artist in the comics industry.

From *Phantom Lady* (Fox Features Syndicate, 1947) to what many consider the first graphic novel, *It Rhymes with Lust* (St. John, 1950), Baker’s fun-loving, glamorous gals and classy, statuesque women could be seen on every newsstand across the United States (and most likely in many G.I. quarters overseas).

Baker worked on *Phantom Lady* from 1947 through 1949. He took over illustrating the series at issue #13, and he overhauled Phantom Lady’s design and gave her the classic look we have come to associate with the character.

The buxom beauty that Baker created would not only attract the attention of fans, though. In 1954, Brooklyn-based



Phantom Lady #17 by Matt Baker
(Character © and ™ DC Comics)

child psychologist Dr. Fredrick Wertham published his book *Seduction of the Innocent*. Wertham singled out Baker’s cover of *Phantom Lady* #17 as an example of an image that promoted “sexual stimulation” and sadistic behavior.

Wertham’s crusade appeared to have little impact on Baker—there’s no evidence he was asked to redraw any of his comics after the advent of the Comics Code. On August 11, 1959, Baker passed away at the age of 37. Although, his career was shorter than most, there is no question about the magnitude of the impact he left on the comics industry. “Matt Baker was one of the first important artists in comics,” Arnold Drake, co-writer of *It Rhymes with Lust*, recalls. “Not one of the first important black artists, one of the first important artists, period.”

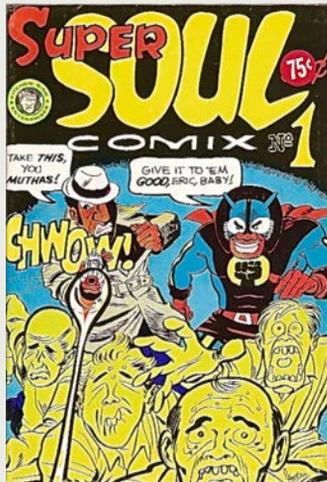
Caitlin McCabe

Richard Eugene “Grass” Green

To understand the work of Richard Eugene “Grass” Green, a pioneering fan artist and cartoonist, it helps to know about the Comics Code and its impact on comic book publishing. In an attempt to head off official censorship from the government, comics publishers created their own governing body, responsible for setting decency guidelines and handing out their seal of approval, in 1954. Reputable bookstores and newspaper stands wouldn’t stock comics that didn’t bear the code seal.

Unsurprisingly, the censorship that resulted pushed Black comics creators and Black issues out of mainstream publications and into the fanzines of the 1960s. Fanzines are produced by and for fans of a particular pop culture topic. These non-traditional publications are mail-ordered or passed person to person—censors couldn’t stop their distribution. It is into this arena that Richard “Grass” Green brought his art, debuting in fanzines like *Star Studded Comics* in 1964. He quickly became a fan favorite.

Green continued to create comics for both fanzines and



Grass Green used underground comix to address Black issues.

(© Richard "Grass" Green)

professional publications throughout the late 1960s, coming into his own in the early 1970s with the underground comix movement. Underground comix existed in direct defiance of the Comics Code, featuring crime, corruption, drug use, and sexual expressions of all types. Often pigeonholed as a white cultural product of 1960s drug culture, underground comix provided space for Black creators to produce and distribute comics without requiring the rubber stamp of mainstream media.

Green's *Super Soul Comix* featured Soul Brother American, a Vietnam War veteran who, after taking a beating from some police officers, takes something suspiciously similar to a super soldier serum and becomes a fighter against Bigots, Inc.—a nasty corporation of racist thugs who are terrorizing his city. The comix sold 200,000 copies and is collectible to this day. It featured a characteristic blend of social commentary and sexually explicit content.

Green used underground comix as a medium for commentary on American social life, a tradition that continues in modern indie, artist-owned publications. His work, along with others in the underground comix movement, introduced inclusive stories for Black people and set the stage for many of the comic book tropes we see today.

Leslie Light • <http://blacknerdproblems.com>

deserves. Years before Aaron McGruder's *The Boondocks* became one of the most recognizably Black comic strips with important political commentary, Brandon-Croft's *Where I'm Coming From* reclaimed the funnies as a space for Black women's voices.

Brandon-Croft's big break arrived when she published the first *Where I'm Coming From* strips in the Detroit Free Press. Two years later, she signed a contract with Universal Press Syndicate. Eventually "the girls," as Brandon-Croft referred to her characters, would not only span over 100 U.S. cities, but also stretch across the diaspora by appearing in Jamaican and South African publications.

Brandon-Croft wanted white readers to fully grasp the struggles of Black Americans as people in their own right, not just characters that happened to be brown-skinned. As she explained in an interview with *The New York Times*, "If mainstream folk understood the black perspective better, they wouldn't be surprised at the rage we're holding. We know white people because we're exposed to them, but they don't know us. If we're going to have a peaceful existence, they have to understand our perspective."

Brandon-Croft also sought to speak on politically-charged issues through a Black woman's perspective and to create characters that Black women readers could readily identify with. In the same interview, Brandon-Croft claimed that the simplistic style of the comic strip was instrumental in achieving this since Black women "are too often summed up by our body parts" and tend to be viewed as "at the bottom of the totem pole."

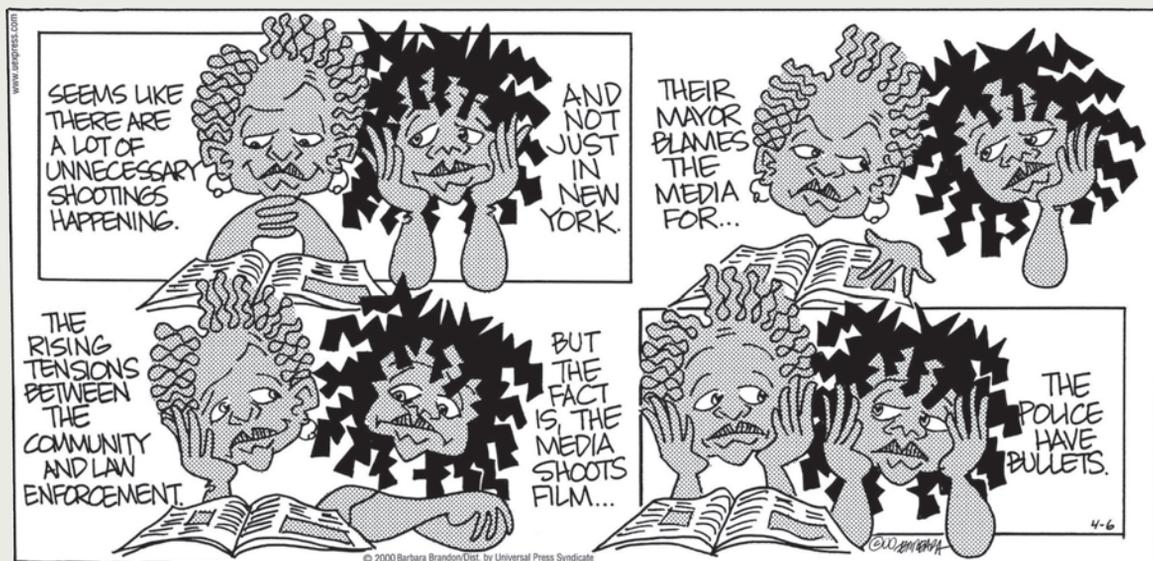
From rape convictions to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" to the challenges of being a single mother, the diversity of Brandon-Croft's characters' conversations showcased a depth of feeling and sharpness of intellect that representations of Black women in media so desperately needed.

Lauren Bullock • <http://blacknerdproblems.com>

Barbara Brandon-Croft

Although she was the first African American woman to publish a nationally syndicated comic strip, Barbara Brandon-Croft's incredible impact with her all-Black-women strip unfortunately does not get nearly the recognition she

These profiles are abbreviated versions of much longer articles. To view the full profiles and pieces about other Black cartoonists, visit <http://cblidf.org/profiles-in-black-cartooning/>



© 2000 Barbara Brandon-Croft, by Universal Press Syndicate

Where I'm Coming From by Barbara Brandon-Croft

(© Barbara Brandon-Croft. Dated April 6, 200. From the artist's Facebook page.)

DEFENDING DIVERSITY

In the last several years, free speech advocates have noticed a disturbing trend: Books that incorporate diversity are more likely to be targeted by censors and those attacks are happening with greater frequency. Here's a look at how some diverse comics have been attacked.

Religion

The First Amendment doesn't just protect speech—it also guarantees freedom of religion. Unfortunately, some individuals seem to think those protections extend only to certain faiths. CBLDF saw this first hand with several attacks on Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. Challenges in Illinois and Texas specifically targeted the depiction of Islamic faith in *Persepolis*, and children's picture books were challenged in Florida and Michigan for the same reason. Interestingly, none of the books challenged focus on Islam. The faith appears as a background element of the story, and in no way is it depicted as the indoctrination detractors claim it is. That is, if Islam is mentioned at all: One challenged book, *The Librarian of Basra*, doesn't mention Islam. The story just happens to be set in Iraq.

LGBTQ

Books featuring homosexual and transgender characters are among the most frequently challenged. For example, Raina Telgemeier's eternally popular middle-grades title *Drama* was banned in a Texas elementary school for being "sexually explicit," most likely because it includes gay characters.

Almost every attack on Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* is focused on its depiction of homosexuality. The most egregious case was in South Carolina, where the state legislature debated punitive budget cuts against the College of Charleston because it used *Fun Home* in a voluntary summer reading program for incoming freshman. That funding

wasn't cut, but ironically, it was reallocated to books that teach the Constitution.

In a rare higher education challenge, the second volume of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*, *The Doll's House*, was among several books attacked at Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa, California. The book includes a transgender woman amongst the main characters.

Race

Fortunately, we haven't had to deal directly with racist attacks against comics (although, some of the attacks on *Persepolis* have racist overtones). But we have taken action to defend other books from racially-motivated bans: In 2012, the Tucson Independent School District dissolved their acclaimed Mexican American Studies program in response to a state law that specifically targeted the program for fomenting "racial hatred." Subsequently, several books by Mexican American and Native authors were banned.

CBLDF defended the books and filed an amicus brief challenging the constitutionality of the law. While comics weren't attacked directly, it could happen. If the work of prominent Mexican American authors can be banned, what's to keep authorities from attacking comics by creators like the Hernandez brothers?

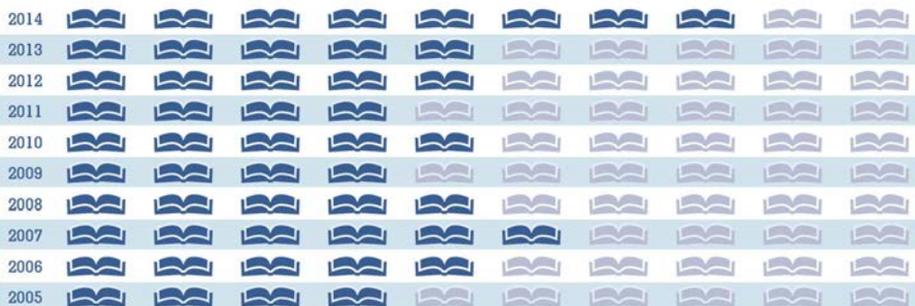
What can we do to defend diversity?

In short, as educators and advocates, we can decide to incorporate diverse materials into classrooms and libraries and stand ready to defend the books when they are challenged. Many challenges happen because the complainants have a narrow worldview. Normalizing diverse content helps broaden perspectives, but the result won't be instantaneous. As more diverse materials become available, we'll see more attacks, but we can hope they will abate as people adapt to—and personally experience—diverse art.

CBLDF is ready to help if diverse materials are attacked! Don't hesitate to contact us at **1-800-99-CBLDF** or info@cbldf.org. We've helped stop challenges to books before they happened, and we're ready to take action when they do!

Betsy Gomez

DIVERSE* CONTENT IN TOP TEN CHALLENGED BOOKS 2005 – 2014



*Definition for diverse content from the work of Malinda Lo: non-white main and/or secondary characters; LGBT main and/or secondary characters; disabled main and/or secondary characters; issues about race or racism; LGBT issues; issues about religion, which encompass in this situation the Holocaust and terrorism; issues about disability and/or mental illness; non-Western settings, in which the West is North America and Europe.

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Black Panther #1 CBLDF Comics Code Variant

Story: Ta-Nehisi Coates
Art: Brian Stelfreeze
Cover: Todd Nauck

A new era for the Black Panther starts here!

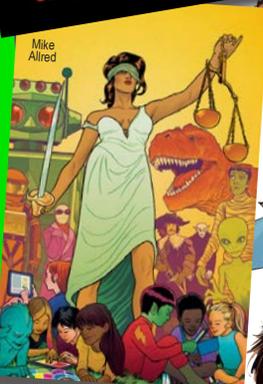
Written by MacArthur Genius and National Book Award winner Ta-Nehisi Coates (*Between the World and Me*) and illustrated by living legend Brian Stelfreeze, "A Nation Under Our Feet" is a story about dramatic upheaval in Wakanda and the Black Panther's struggle to do right by his people as their ruler. The indomitable will of Wakanda—the famed African nation known for its vast wealth, advanced technology and warrior traditions—has long been reflected in the will of its monarchs, the Black Panthers. But now the current Black Panther, T'Challa, finds that will tested by a superhuman terrorist group called The People that has sparked a violent uprising among the citizens of Wakanda. T'Challa knows the country must change to survive—the question is, will the Black Panther survive the change?



Batman #50 CBLDF Comics Code Variant

Story: Scott Snyder
Art: Greg Capullo & Danny Miki
Cover: Paul Pope

Batman has returned to Gotham City! In this extra-sized conclusion to Snyder and Capullo's epic story "Superheavy," Bruce Wayne returns to the cape and cowl to battle Mr. Bloom alongside Jim Gordon for the fate of the city they both love.



UPCOMING EVENTS

April 7–10, 2016: Emerald City Comicon

- Washington State Convention Center, Seattle, Washington
- Booth 2224
- www.emeraldcitycomicon.com

May 14–15, 2016: MSP ComiCon

- Minnesota State Fairgrounds, St. Paul, Minnesota
- <http://www.mcbacomicons.com>

June 24–27, 2016: American Library Association Annual Conference and Exhibition

- Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida
- Graphic Novel/Gaming Pavilion
- <http://2016.alaannual.org>

July 20–24, 2016: Comic-Con International

- San Diego Convention Center, San Diego, California
- www.comic-con.org/cqi

Schedule subject to change. Visit cbldf.org for updates.

PREMIUMS SPOTLIGHT

If you missed out on one of our old t-shirt designs—or need to replace a worn out one—you can now get them on Threadless! Designs currently available include our original logo by **Cliff Chiang**, Just One More by **Frank Miller**, Fancy Froglin by **James Kochalka**, and two previous CBLDF Liberty Annual covers: **Duncan Fegredo's** State of Things (2015) and **Michael Allred's** Lady Liberty (2014).

Each design is available in t-shirt, triblend t-shirt, or sweatshirt. Threadless offers women's sizes S-2XL and men's S-3XL. More designs will be added, so check back often! <https://cbldf.threadless.com>



JOIN THE FIGHT!

Joining the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund puts you on the front lines of the fight against censorship! When you join CBLDF, we'll thank you with the best incentives and benefits in the free speech community, starting off with a stunning membership card by cartoonist Craig Thompson! We have membership plans for donors in every budget, and all of them are tax-deductible:

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- **Associate Member (\$30):** CBLDF membership card
- **Supporter Member (\$50):** CBLDF membership card, CBLDF button set, CBLDF sticker set, CBLDF pocket sketchbook, CBLDF member patch!
- **Defender Member (\$250):** All of the above, plus the CBLDF water bottle and *CBLDF Liberty Annual* Volume 1!
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Art by Craig Thompson



RADIO FREE COMIX!

CBLDF is now part of the audio-sphere! A mix of interviews, discussions about censorship, convention panel recordings, and archival materials, the CBLDF Podcast is a monthly event, from our keyboards to your ears. The CBLDF Podcast is made possible in part by a donation from the Gaiman Foundation and member support.

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