

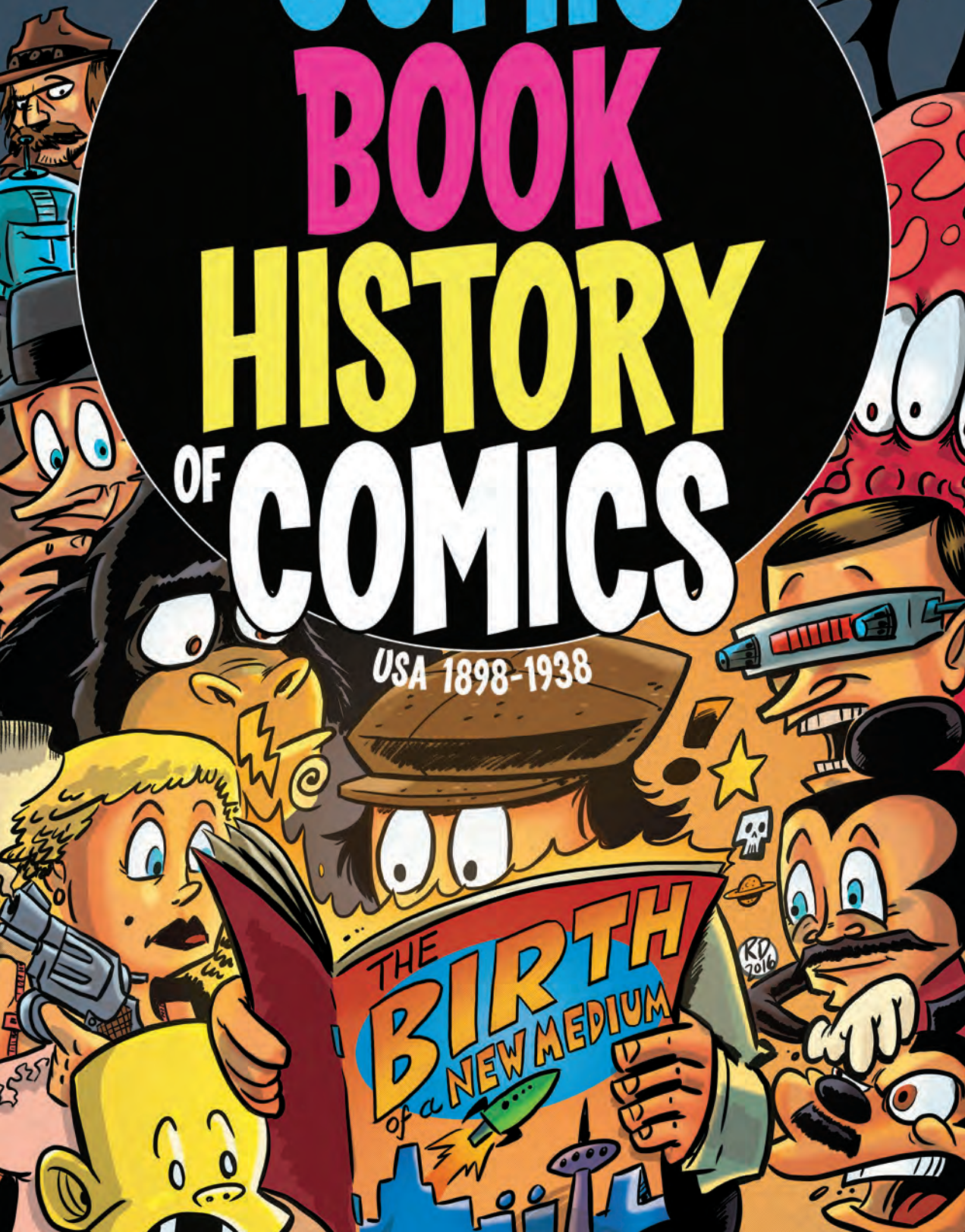
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VAN LENTE
DUNLAVEY
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THE **FOUR COLOR**

COMIC BOOK HISTORY OF COMICS

USA 1898-1938





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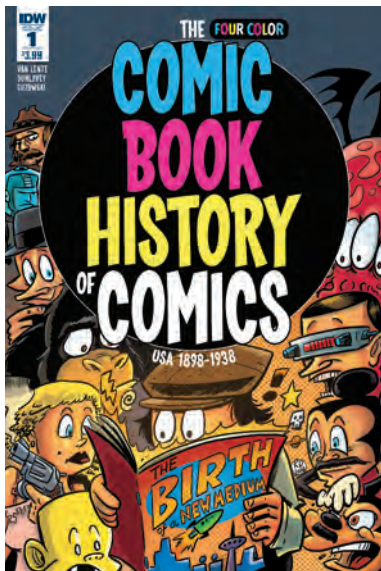
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Funnies get Famous

October 18, 1896...

...WAS, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, A FAIRLY UNREMARKABLE DAY, AS DAYS GO...



...SOMEBODY TRIED TO KILL THE KING OF SPAIN BY LAYING DYNAMITE IN FRONT OF THE ROYAL LOCOMOTIVE AS IT CHUGGED TOWARD MADRID...

(THE GOVERNMENT BLAMED INDEPENDENCE-MINDED CUBANS.)



...AN ACCUSED BURGLAR NAMED JAMES SWEENEY SLIPPED THROUGH THE BARS OF HIS CELL AND WALKED OUT OF THE BROOKLYN JAIL WHERE HE HAD BEEN AWAITING TRIAL...

(MUST BE HOW HE GOT INTO HIS VICTIMS' HOMES SO EASILY.)



...IN BUDAPEST, DUE TO AN UNACCOUNTABLE BLUNDER BY HIS OPPONENT, A DR. NOA WON HIS MATCH IN THE TENTH ROUND OF THE INTERNATIONAL CHESS TOURNAMENT...

(THOUGH MR. CHAROUSEK REMAINED IN THE LEAD.)



...AND WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST PUBLISHED THE FIRST ISSUE OF THE AMERICAN HUMORIST, A COLOR SUPPLEMENT TO THE NEW YORK JOURNAL THAT FEATURED SOMETHING THAT HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE...

...SOMETHING THAT WOULD CHANGE THE LIVES OF EVERY SINGLE PERSON HOLDING THIS BOOK, EVEN THOUGH NO ONE, NOT EVEN HEARST HIMSELF, SUSPECTED IT AT THE TIME...

INNOVATION: IMITATION OF LIFE!

...FOR THE HUMORIST CONTAINED THE FIRST MODERN COMIC STRIP: RICHARD F. OUTCAULT'S THE YELLOW KID!

AS HISTORIANS BILL BLACKBEARD AND MARTIN WILLIAMS WRITE, THE KID EARNED THIS DISTINCTION BECAUSE:



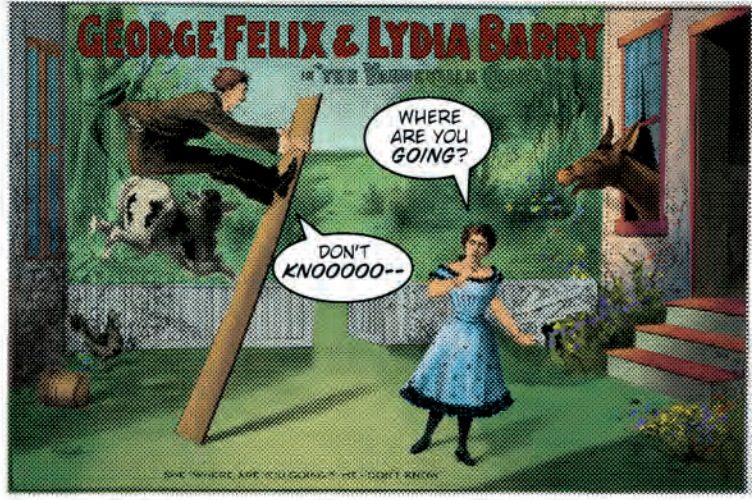
"THE WHOLE POINT OF THE VAUDEVILLE GAG DEPENDED ON THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE KID AND THE PARROT, AND THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME THIS HAD OCCURRED IN A GRAPHIC WORK WHICH ALSO MET THE OTHER PREREQUISITES OF THE STRIP FORM."

SATIRICAL PICTURES IN PRINT IN AND OF THEMSELVES WERE NOTHING NEW. IN FACT, THEY'RE NEARLY AS OLD AS THE PRINTING PRESS ITSELF, WHICH WAS INVENTED IN 1440.



THE ENGRAVING AT LEFT BY GERMAN ARTIST ERHARD SCHÖN DEPICTING RELIGIOUS REFORMER MARTIN LUTHER AS THE LITERAL INSTRUMENT OF SATAN IS BELIEVED TO BE THE FIRST POLITICAL CARTOON... PUBLISHED IN THE 1500s!

PICTURES TALKING INSIDE THE CONFINES OF WORD BALLOONS WERE NOTHING NEW EITHER; AS SEEN BELOW, THAT DEVICE HAD BEEN USED SINCE AT LEAST THE 18TH CENTURY.



BUT WHILE PREVIOUS "PROTO-COMICS" MAY HAVE HAD SUCCESSIVE IMAGES AND/OR DIALOGUE, OUTCAULT'S INNOVATION WAS TO MERGE THE TWO TOGETHER INTO A NARRATIVE CADENCE THAT RENDERED A FACSIMILE OF REAL LIFE AS IT WAS LIVED BY HIS READER...

...OR, AT THE VERY LEAST, COPIED THE RAT-A-TAT, BACK-AND-FORTH COMEDY ROUTINES COMMON IN THE VAUDEVILLE THEATRE OF THE DAY.

IT IS *DIFFICULT* FOR US TO WRAP OUR BRAINS AROUND HOW *REVOLUTIONARY* THIS CHANGE WAS, SINCE WE ALL *GREW UP* IN A WORLD ALREADY FULLY MADE BY IT.

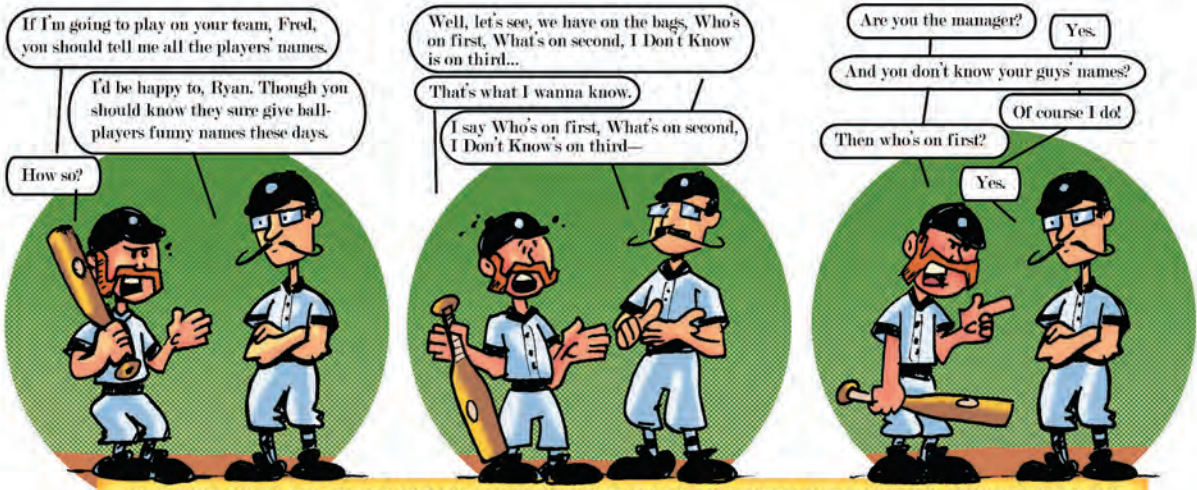
HERE WE'VE TRIED TO IMAGINE JUST HOW *DIFFICULT* IT WOULD BE TO REPRODUCE THE MOST *FAMOUS* VAUDEVILLE ROUTINE OF ALL TIME IN THE STYLE OF COMICS, *PRE-OUTCAULT*...

"THEY SURE GIVE BALLPLAYERS FUNNY NAMES THESE DAYS"

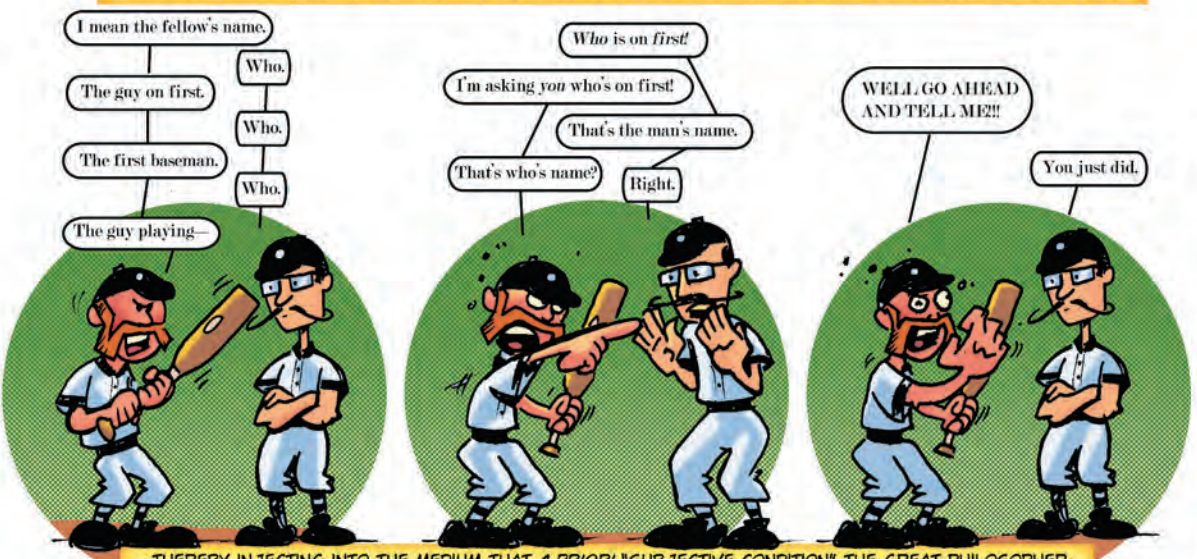


...IN WHICH A SERIES OF *HUMOROUS DRAWINGS* WERE ARRAYED ON A PAGE, LINKED BY A *SIMILAR THEME*, PERHAPS, BUT WITH NO *NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN THEM*.

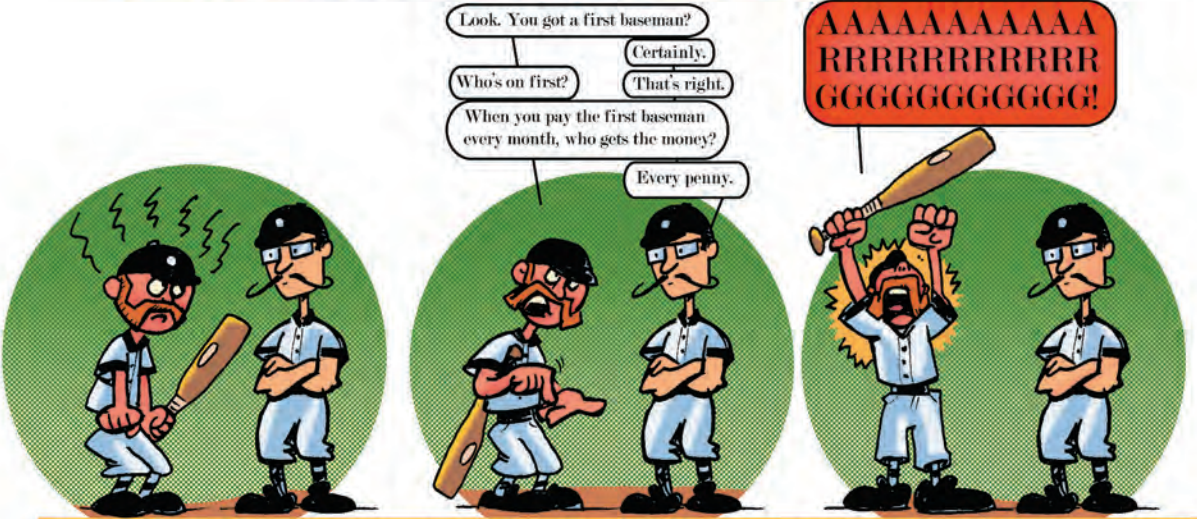
THEY WERE NOT YET "*SEQUENTIAL*" ART IN THE SENSE OF THE TERM COINED BY THE LEGENDARY *WILL EISNER*...



...UNTIL OUTCAULT PIONEERED EXCHANGES BETWEEN CHARACTERS IN THE FORM OF "LIVE" DIALOGUE, LIKE THIS...



...THEREBY INJECTING INTO THE MEDIUM THAT A PRIORI "SUBJECTIVE CONDITION" THE GREAT PHILOSOPHER IMMANUEL KANT WROTE IS REQUIRED FOR THE VERY CONCEPT OF "SEQUENCE": TIME!



SEE HOW EASY IT IS TO DO A VALDEVILLE ROUTINE IN THIS STYLE, WHICH MIMICS THE RHYTHMS OF SPEECH? THE CHANGE IS AS SIMPLE AND AS PROFOUND AS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MERELY LOOKING AT PICTURES ... AND READING THEM!



HOWEVER ONE WISHES TO DEFINE THE DIFFERENCE, THE PROOF THAT SOMETHING BIG HAD HAPPENED WAS IN THE PUBLIC REACTION TO IT: THE YELLOW KID BECAME AN INSTANT CULTURAL PHENOMENON. HIS BUCKTOOTHED MUG APPEARED ON BOOKS, SHIRTS, TINS OF "GINGER WAFERS," BOWLING PINS... THERE WERE EVEN YELLOW KID CIGARETTES!



OUTCAULT HAD CREATED THE KID IN "HOGAN'S ALLEY," A SERIES OF SLUM VIGNETTES HE DREW FOR THE NEW YORK WORLD... BUT HEARST LURED HIM TO THE JOURNAL WITH A HUGE BUMP IN SALARY!

THE PUBLISHER MADE A SHREWD INVESTMENT: THE JOURNAL'S CIRCULATION EXPLODED ALONG WITH THE KID'S POPULARITY!



OUTCAULT'S OLD BOSS AND HEARST'S ARCH-NEMESIS, JOSEPH PULITZER, CLAIMED HE OWNED THE RIGHTS TO THE NAME "HOGAN'S ALLEY," HOWEVER, AND HIRED AN ARTIST TO CONTINUE THE STRIP AFTER ITS CREATOR'S DEFECTION!

FOR ALMOST A YEAR THE KID APPEARED IN PULITZER'S WORLD AND HEARST'S JOURNAL SIMULTANEOUSLY...



...LEADING MORE RESPECTABLE (AND LOWER-SELLING) DAILIES TO REFER TO THEM CONTEMPTUOUSLY AS THE "YELLOW KID PAPERS"...

...AND THE BRAND OF SENSATIONALISTIC, JINGOISTIC MUCKRAKING THEY PRACTICED -- PARTICULARLY IN THE HYSTERIA-FUELED LEAD-UP TO THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR OF 1898 -- WAS DUBBED "YELLOW JOURNALISM!"

OUTCAULT'S SUCCESS WAS NOT LOST ON OTHER NEWSPAPER ARTISTS, LIKE HENRY CONWAY "BUD" FISHER, SPORTS-PAGE ILLUSTRATOR FOR THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND HORSERACING JUNKIE.

