

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE AMERICAN  
GRAPHIC NOVEL

*The Cambridge Companion to the American Graphic Novel* explores the important role of the graphic novel in reflecting American society and in the shaping of the American imagination. Using key examples, this volume reviews the historical development of various subgenres within the graphic novel tradition and examines how graphic novelists have created multiple and different accounts of the American experience, including that of African American, Asian American, Jewish, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ communities. Reading the American graphic novel opens a debate on how major works have changed the idea of America from that once found in the quintessential action or superhero comics to show new, different, intimate accounts of historical change as well as social and individual, personal experience. It guides readers through the theoretical text-image scholarship to explain the meaning of the complex borderlines between graphic novels, comics, newspaper strips, caricature, literature, and art.

JAN BAETENS is Professor Emeritus of cultural studies at the University of Leuven. His work focuses on the theory and practice of contemporary French poetry, cultural theory, and visual narrative in popular print genres. Some of his recent publications include *The Graphic Novel* (2014, coauthored with Hugo Frey), *Novelization: From Film to Novel* (2018), and *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel* (2018, coedited with Hugo Frey and Stephen E. Tabachnick).

HUGO FREY is Professor of Visual and Cultural History at University of Chichester. With Jan Baetens he has published *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (2014) and with Baetens and Stephen Tabachnik coedited *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel* (2018). He has written extensively on French cinema (*Nationalism and the Cinema in France*, 2014) and the director Louis Malle. He has conducted research for the British Council and in 2022 was a Visiting Professor at the University of Ghent.

FABRICE LEROY is Professor of French and Francophone Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He has published numerous book chapters on French and Belgian Francophone literature and graphic novels, as well as articles in leading scholarly journals. His most recent monographs devoted to comics are *Sfar So Far: Identity, History, Fantasy, and Mimesis in Joann Sfar's Graphic Novels* (2014), and *Pierre La Police: Une esthétique de la malfaçon* (with Livio Belloi, 2019).

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-37934-2 — The Cambridge Companion to the American Graphic Novel

Edited by Jan Baetens , Hugo Frey , Fabrice Leroy

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

---

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
THE AMERICAN  
GRAPHIC NOVEL

EDITED BY

JAN BAETENS

*University of Leuven*

HUGO FREY

*University of Chichester*

FABRICE LEROY

*University of Louisiana at Lafayette*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-37934-2 — The Cambridge Companion to the American Graphic Novel

Edited by Jan Baetens, Hugo Frey, Fabrice Leroy

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009379342](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009379342)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009379311

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2023

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2023

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Baetens, Jan, editor. | Frey, Hugo, editor. | Leroy, Fabrice, editor.

TITLE: The Cambridge companion to the American graphic novel / edited by Jan Baetens,  
Hugo Frey, Fabrice Leroy.

DESCRIPTION: New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2023. | Series: Cambridge  
companions to literature | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2022061989 (print) | LCCN 2022061990 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009379342  
(hardback) | ISBN 9781009379359 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009379311 (epub)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Graphic novels—United States—History and criticism. | Comic books,  
strips, etc.—United States—History and criticism. | Literature and society—United States—  
History. | Art and society—United States—History. | LCGFT: Comics criticism.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PN6725 .C36 2023 (print) | LCC PN6725 (ebook) |

DDC 741.5/973—dc23/eng/20221228

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022061989>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022061990>

ISBN 978-1-009-37934-2 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-009-37935-9 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <i>List of Figures</i>   | page vii |
| <i>List of Contributors</i>  | ix       |
| <i>Editors' Acknowledgments</i>  | xv       |
| <br>Introduction: What Is the American Graphic Novel?<br>JAN BAETENS, HUGO FREY, AND FABRICE LEROY                         | <br>I    |
| <br>PART I HISTORY AND GENRE   |          |
| 1 The “First” Graphic Novel in America: Revisiting <i>He Done Her Wrong</i> and <i>It Rhymes with Lust</i><br>LIVIO BELLOÏ | 19       |
| 2 The <i>Mad-Men</i> Generation: Kurtzman and Feiffer<br>FABRICE LEROY   | 38       |
| 3 From Justin Green and Art Spiegelman to Alison Bechdel:<br>Writing the Self in the Graphic Novel<br>JAN BAETENS          | 57       |
| 4 Graphic Journalism<br>LAURIKE IN ’T VELD   | 72       |
| 5 “Great” American Graphic Novels: Canon Formation<br>and Literary Value<br>DANIEL STEIN AND ASTRID BÖGER                  | 89       |
| 6 Crime: From EC Comics to Ed Brubaker<br>ANDREW J. KUNKA  | 106      |
|  | v        |

CONTENTS

|  |  |     |
|--|--|-----|
| 7  | Superheroes in Graphic Novels  | 122 |
|  | MARC SINGER  |     |
| 8  | Science Fiction and Fantasy: New Works of Imagination  | 139 |
|  | IAN HAGUE  |     |
| 9  | “Scared Witless”: War in the American Graphic Novel  | 155 |
|  | HUGO FREY  |     |
| PART II GRAPHIC NOVELS AND THE QUEST FOR AN AMERICAN DIVERSITY |  |     |
| 10   | Expressions of Jewishness alongside Grief in American Graphic Novels   | 177 |
|  | TAHNEER OKSMAN   |     |
| 11   | Black Looking and Looking Black: African American Cartoon Aesthetics   | 193 |
|  | JOANNA DAVIS-MCELLIGATT  |     |
| 12   | African American New History-Writing in Graphic Narratives   | 210 |
|  | MICHAEL A. CHANEY  |     |
| 13   | Coming to America, “Land of the Free”: Asian American Representations in Graphic Narrative                             | 226 |
|  | MONICA CHIU  |     |
| 14   | Spatiotemporal Projections: Los Bros Hernandez, Fantagraphics, and the Rise of Latinx Creating and Reading Communities | 242 |
|  | FREDERICK LUIS ALDAMA  |     |
| 15   | Queer Graphic Novels: A Paradigm of Paradox  | 256 |
|  | ALISON HALSALL   |     |
| 16   | American Women’s Lives in Graphic Novels: Becoming and Unbecoming Women  | 272 |
|  | MARTHA KUHLMAN   |     |
|  | <i>Index</i>   | 291 |

FIGURES

|      |  |         |
|------|--|---------|
| 1.1  | One of the saloon customers is about to assault the Girl in her dressing room. Milt Gross, <i>He Done Her Wrong</i>                                | page 24 |
| 1.2  | The Hero throws the customers out of the saloon, before kneeling in front of the Girl, whom he helped rescue. Milt Gross, <i>He Done Her Wrong</i> | 25      |
| 1.3  | The Villain and the vending machine. Milt Gross, <i>He Done Her Wrong</i>  | 26      |
| 1.4  | “Bullets, not ballots,” from <i>It Rhymes with Lust</i> (1950)   | 30      |
| 1.5  | Attenuated violence in <i>It Rhymes with Lust</i> (1950)   | 35      |
| 2.1  | Jules Feiffer’s antimilitaristic satire in <i>Munro</i> .  | 51      |
| 4.1  | Tings Chak, <i>Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention</i> (2014)  | 82      |
| 4.2  | Guy Delisle draws himself taking pictures in <i>Jerusalem</i>  | 85      |
| 9.1  | Thom Rooke, <i>Gene Basset’s Vietnam Sketchbook</i>  | 167     |
| 9.2  | The work of Vernon Grant   | 168     |
| 14.1 | Top two tiers: Heraclio, Guadalupe, Carmen, and infant. Bottom tier: Howard and Cathy. <i>Love and Rockets: New Stories</i> , “Human Diastrophism” | 248     |
| 14.2 | From <i>Love and Rockets: New Stories</i> , “Human Diastrophism”   | 249     |
| 14.3 | Izzy Ortiz in <i>Love and Rockets: New Stories</i> , “Perla La Loca”   | 250     |
| 16.1 | Eliot Lady depicts a Madonna drawn in the style of Duccio  | 284     |

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-37934-2 — The Cambridge Companion to the American Graphic Novel

Edited by Jan Baetens , Hugo Frey , Fabrice Leroy

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

---



## CONTRIBUTORS

FREDERICK LUIS ALDAMA is the Jacob & Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities at the University of Texas at Austin. He also holds a Faculty Affiliate appointment with UT Austin's Radio-Television-Film as well as an Adjunct Professor appointment at Ohio State University. He is the award-winning author, coauthor, and editor of over forty-eight books. In 2018, *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics* (University of Arizona Press, 2017) won the International Latino Book Award and the Eisner Award for Best Scholarly Work. He is editor and coeditor of several academic press book series as well as editor of *Latinographix*, a trade-press series that publishes Latinx graphic fiction and nonfiction. He is the creator of the first documentary on the history of Latinx superheroes in comics (Amazon Prime) and the author of *The Adventures of Chupacabra Charlie* (Ohio State University Press, 2020), a children's picture book illustrated by Chris Escobar.

JAN BAETENS is Professor Emeritus of cultural studies at the University of Leuven. His work focuses on the theory and practice of contemporary French poetry, cultural theory, and visual narrative in popular print genres (novelization, comics, photonovels, and film photonovels). Some of his recent publications include *The Graphic Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2014, coauthored with Hugo Frey), *Novelization: From Film to Novel* (Ohio State University Press, 2018), *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2018, coedited with Hugo Frey and Stephen E. Tabachnick), *The Film Photonovel: A Cultural History of Forgotten Adaptations* (University of Texas Press, 2019), and *Rebuilding Storyworlds: On the Obscure Cities by Schuiten and Peeters* (Rutgers University Press, 2020). He is also a published poet (in French) and the author of several collections of poetry, some in collaboration with visual artists such as Olivier Deprez and Milan Chlumsky.

LIVIO BELLOÏ is Research Associate at the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS) and Associate Professor in the Media, Culture and

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Communication department of the University of Liège (Belgium). His research focuses on early cinema, experimental cinema, contemporary comics, and text-image relationships. His monograph publications include *Le regard retourné: Aspects du cinéma des premiers temps* (Nota Bene/Méridiens-Klincksieck, 2001), *Film ist: La pensée visuelle selon Gustav Deutsch* (L'Âge d'Homme, 2013), *Pierre La Police: Une esthétique de la malfaçon* (coauthored with Fabrice Leroy, Serious Publishing, 2019), and *L'image pour enjeu: Essais sur le cinéma expérimental contemporain* (Éditions Mimésis, 2021). He coedited *L'oeuvre en morceaux: Esthétiques de la mosaïque* (Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2006), *La mécanique du détail: Approches transversales* (ENS Éditions, 2013), and *Boucle et répétition: Musique, Littérature, Arts visuels* (Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2015).

ASTRID BÖGER is Professor of North American Literature and Culture at Hamburg University. She has published three monographs to date, *Documenting Lives: James Agee's and Walker Evans's "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men"* (Peter Lang, 1994), *People's Lives, Public Images: The New Deal Documentary Aesthetic* (Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001), and *Envisioning the Nation: The Early American World's Fairs and the Formation of Culture* (Campus Verlag, 2010). In addition to coedited volumes on gender studies and transnational visual culture, she has published numerous scholarly articles on diverse topics in contemporary US culture.

MICHAEL A. CHANEY is Professor of English and American Literature at Dartmouth College. He specializes in nineteenth-century American literature and African American literature, race representation, visual culture studies, and autobiography. He is the author of two monographs, *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative* (Indiana University Press, 2009) and *Reading Lessons in Seeing: Mirrors, Masks, and Mazes in the Autobiographical Graphic Novel* (University Press of Mississippi, 2017). Chaney's latest edited collection, *Where Is All My Relation? The Poetics of Dave the Potter* (Oxford University Press, 2018), explores the multifaceted artwork of David Drake, an enslaved ceramicist and poet who worked in antebellum South Carolina. Chaney's academic essays on visuality and race have been published in *American Literature*, *African American Review*, *Callaloo*, *SubStance*, and *MELUS*.

MONICA CHIU is Professor of English at the University of New Hampshire. She teaches courses in Asian American studies, American studies, comics and graphic narrative, and race and ethnic studies. Her monographs include *Filthy Fictions: Asian American Literature by Women* (Alta Mira, 2004) and *Scrutinized! Surveillance in Asian North American Literature* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2014). Her edited collection *Drawing New Color Lines: Transnational Asian American Graphic Narratives* (Hong Kong University Press, 2014) is the first to address this transnational medium. Her latest monograph, *Show Me Where It*

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

*Hurts: Manifesting Illness and Impairment in Graphic Pathography*, is forthcoming from Penn State University Press.

JOANNA DAVIS-MCELLIGATT is Assistant Professor of Black Literary and Cultural Studies in the department of English at the University of North Texas, where she is also affiliated faculty in the Women's and Gender Studies department. She is coeditor of *Narratives of Marginalized Identities in Higher Education: Inside and Outside the Academy* (Routledge, 2019), *Narrating History, Home, and Diaspora: Critical Essays on Edwidge Danticat* (University Press of Mississippi, 2022), and *BOOM! Splat: Comics and Violence* (University Press of Mississippi, 2024). She is currently at work on her first monograph entitled *Black Aliens: Navigating Narrative Spacetime in Afrodiasporic Speculative Fiction*, a critical exploration of representations of immigrants of African descent to the United States from Afropolitans to Wakandan Americans. Her work on comics has appeared in *The Comics Journal*, *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults* (University Press of Mississippi, 2017), and *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing Is a Way of Thinking* (University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

HUGO FREY is professor of cultural and visual history and Director of Arts and Humanities at the University of Chichester. He is the author of monographs on *Louis Malle* (Manchester University Press, 2004) and *Nationalism and the Cinema in France* (Berghahn Books, 2014). With Jan Baetens, he coauthored *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), and coedited, with Jan Baetens and Stephen Tabachnick, *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). His articles have been published in *Art History*, *South Central Review*, and *Yale French Studies*, among other journals. In 2019, he was a co-recipient of a British Council grant to support an oral history of folk theater in Vietnam. With Jan Baetens and Fabrice Leroy, he coedited *Intermediality in French-Language Comics and Graphic Novels* (University of Louisiana Press, 2022).

IAN HAGUE is a Contextual and Theoretical Studies Coordinator and Research Coordinator in the Design School at London College of Communication. His research looks at sensory and material cultures, with a particular focus on comics and related forms. He is the author of *Comics and the Senses: A Multisensory Approach to Comics and Graphic Novels* (Routledge, 2014). He coedited *Representing Multiculturalism in Comics and Graphic Novels* (Routledge, 2015), *Contexts of Violence in Comics* (Routledge, 2020), and *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* (Routledge, 2020). He is currently researching digital comics.

ALISON HALSALL is Associate Professor in the department of Humanities at York University. She specializes in Victorian and modernist literatures, with a particular emphasis on visual cultures, which includes the study of paintings and illustrations, contemporary film, comics, and graphic narratives. She coedited the first-ever

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

collection of LGBTQ+ comics criticism, *The LGBTQ+ Comics Studies Reader: Critical Openings, Future Directions* (University Press of Mississippi, 2022).

MARTHA KUHLMAN is Professor of Comparative Literature in the department of English and Cultural Studies at Bryant University. She coedited *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing Is a Way of Thinking* with Dave Ball (University Press of Mississippi, 2010) and *Comics of the New Europe* with José Alaniz (Leuven University Press, 2020). She served on the MLA Forum on Graphic Narrative and on the executive board of the Comics Studies Society. She has contributed chapters to a number of books on graphic novels, including *Drawing from the Classics: Essays on Graphic Adaptations of Literary Works* (McFarland & Co., 2015), *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), and *Teaching the Graphic Novel* (MLA, 2009).

ANDREW J. KUNKA is Professor of English at the University of South Carolina Sumter. He is the author of *Autobiographical Comics* (Bloomsbury Comics Studies Series, 2017) and the Eisner Award-nominated *The Life and Comics of Howard Cruse: Taking Risks in the Service of Truth* (Rutgers University Press, 2021). He has also published on Will Eisner, Kyle Baker, Jack Katz, crime comics, and Dell comics, among other topics. He serves as book review editor for *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*, is on the board of the International Comic Arts Forum (ICAF), and serves as the Comics Studies Society Ombuds. He is currently cowriting *The Routledge Introduction to American Comics* with Rachel R. Miller.

FABRICE LEROY is Professor of French and Francophone Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He has published numerous book chapters on French and Belgian Francophone literature and graphic novels, as well as articles in leading scholarly journals (*Image & Narrative*, *European Comic Art*, *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, *Neuvième Art* 2.0, *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies/Sites*, *The International Journal of Comic Art*, among others). He contributed thematic entries to Thierry Groensteen's comics dictionary, *Le Bouquin de la bande dessinée* (Robert Laffont, 2020). His most recent monographs devoted to comics are *Sfar So Far: Identity, History, Fantasy, and Mimesis in Joann Sfar's Graphic Novels* (Leuven University Press, 2014) and *Pierre La Police: Une esthétique de la malfaçon* (with Livio Belloï, Serious Publishing, 2019).

TAHNEER OKSMAN is Associate Professor in the department of Writing, Literature, and Language at Marymount Manhattan College. She is the author of "*How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses?*" *Women and Jewish American Identity in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs* (Columbia University Press, 2016) and coeditor of *The Comics of Julie Doucet and Gabrielle Bell: A Place Inside Yourself* (University Press of Mississippi, 2019), winner of the Comics Studies Society Edited Book Prize for 2019. Her cultural criticism has appeared in *The Believer*, *The Comics Journal*, *The Forward*, *The Guardian*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*,

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

*Public Books*, and *Women's Review of Books*, and her academic writing can be found in journals and collections including *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies*, *Keywords for Comics Studies*, *Life Writing*, *Literature and Medicine*, *Pathographics*, *Shofar*, *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, *Visualizing Jewish Narrative*, and *Women's Studies Quarterly*, among others.

MARC SINGER is Professor of English at Howard University. He studies twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature, with interests in contemporary fiction, comics, and film. He is the author of *Breaking the Frames: Populism and Prestige in Comics Studies* (University of Texas Press, 2018) and *Grant Morrison: Combining the Worlds of Contemporary Comics* (University Press of Mississippi, 2012), and the coeditor, with Nels Pearson, of *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (Ashgate, 2009). He previously served as the chair of the International Comic Arts Forum, and his own research on comics has twice won the M. Thomas Inge Award.

DANIEL STEIN is Professor of North American Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Siegen, Germany. He is the author of *Authorizing Superhero Comics: On the Evolution of a Popular Serial Genre* (Ohio State University Press, 2021) and coeditor of *Comics and Videogames: From Hybrid Medialities to Transmedia Extensions* (Routledge, 2021). He is currently finishing a monograph titled *Strange Fruit and Bitter Roots: Black History in Contemporary Graphic Narrative* (University Press of Mississippi, under contract).

LAURIKE IN 'T VELD works as a Graduate School Coordinator at the Delft University of Technology and is a research associate at the Center for Historical Culture at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. She is the author of *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: Considering the Role of Kitsch* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-37934-2 — The Cambridge Companion to the American Graphic Novel

Edited by Jan Baetens , Hugo Frey , Fabrice Leroy

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

---

## EDITORS' ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book represents the current state of research on the birth, development, diversification, and contemporary trends of the American graphic novel. It seeks to allow students, scholars, and general readers to gain knowledge of the specifically American story of the rise of the graphic novel and to critically define its formal and thematic characteristics in comparison with other visual and narrative arts. To explore the distinctive elements of the American graphic novel, the essays included herein describe its publishing history, retrace the genealogies of its main subgenres, and analyze how it imagines diversity in US history and society.

The editors would like to thank the chapter contributors, whose combined expertise and original scholarship in various manifestations and tendencies of the graphic novel provided an exhaustive survey of the genre. By extension, we are also indebted to the publishers who authorized the reproduction of illustrations, the editorial staff of Cambridge University Press who made this book possible, and all the researchers, professors, journal and newspaper editors, critics, students, and readers who have contributed to the recognition and visibility of this particular narrative form. Our gratitude goes to Shelly Miller Leroy for her assistance in copyediting and indexing this book.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-37934-2 — The Cambridge Companion to the American Graphic Novel

Edited by Jan Baetens , Hugo Frey , Fabrice Leroy

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

---