

R.F. Outcault's the Yellow Kid: A Centennial Celebration of the Kid Who Started the Comics

By *Richard Felton Outcault*


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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A bald, grinning street urchin in an oversized yellow nightshirt, Outcault's Yellow Kid sparked the "first definitive comic strip in history." With extensive text on the antecedents of the Kid (aka Mickey Dugan), historical information and discussion of the artist's evolution, this volume, collecting all of Outcault's Yellow Kid panels and strips, is a must for aficionados of the comics and of turn-of-the-century Americana. Blackbeard, director of the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art, has provided 15 chapters of commentary with details ranging from the origin of the Yellow Kid's baldness (slum-dwelling children often had their heads shaved to combat lice) to the history of the Hearst versus Pulitzer "newspaper wars." Although the Kid was not the inspiration for the phrase "yellow journalism," the character did cause a flood of mass merchandise—dolls, candy, even cigars. The book includes photos (by Jacob Riis and others) of real children who lived in tenements like those inhabited by the Kid and his pals. Since Outcault's characters often commented on conditions and events of the day, much of Blackbeard's background is useful, although the more casual reader may be overwhelmed. His enthusiasm for Outcault (who later created Buster Brown) often gives way to excessive detail and passive prose, not necessary to enjoying the whimsy of the cartoonist's "accidental" and wonderful invention. Color plates plus b&w illustrations. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

This year is the centenary of the comic strip, for 1895 was the year the first strip star, a street urchin in a yellow nightshirt, appeared in the *New York World*. It wasn't until the following year, however, after artist R. F. Outcault took the character to a rival paper, that the multiple-panel technique was used, inaugurating the comic strip as we know it. Color comic supplements soon became huge selling points for turn-of-the-century newspapers, and the Yellow Kid was their first main attraction. With the onset of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Kid vanished, apparently done in by public sentiment against the color yellow, the dominant hue in the Spanish flag. The 250 cartoons reproduced here, most in color, are pretty crude by today's standards, but their depiction of New York a century ago is culturally fascinating, and Bill Blackbeard's text tracing the development of the Kid and the birth of the comics is impressively detailed. *Gordon Flagg*

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