



# How to Talk about Games, Today

## Moral Panic and Misunderstanding

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**GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE**

MARCH 18–22, 2019 | #GDC19

# What's leisure and what's game addiction in the 21st century?

Are these people suffering from a disorder — or just having fun?



LINDSAY GRACE

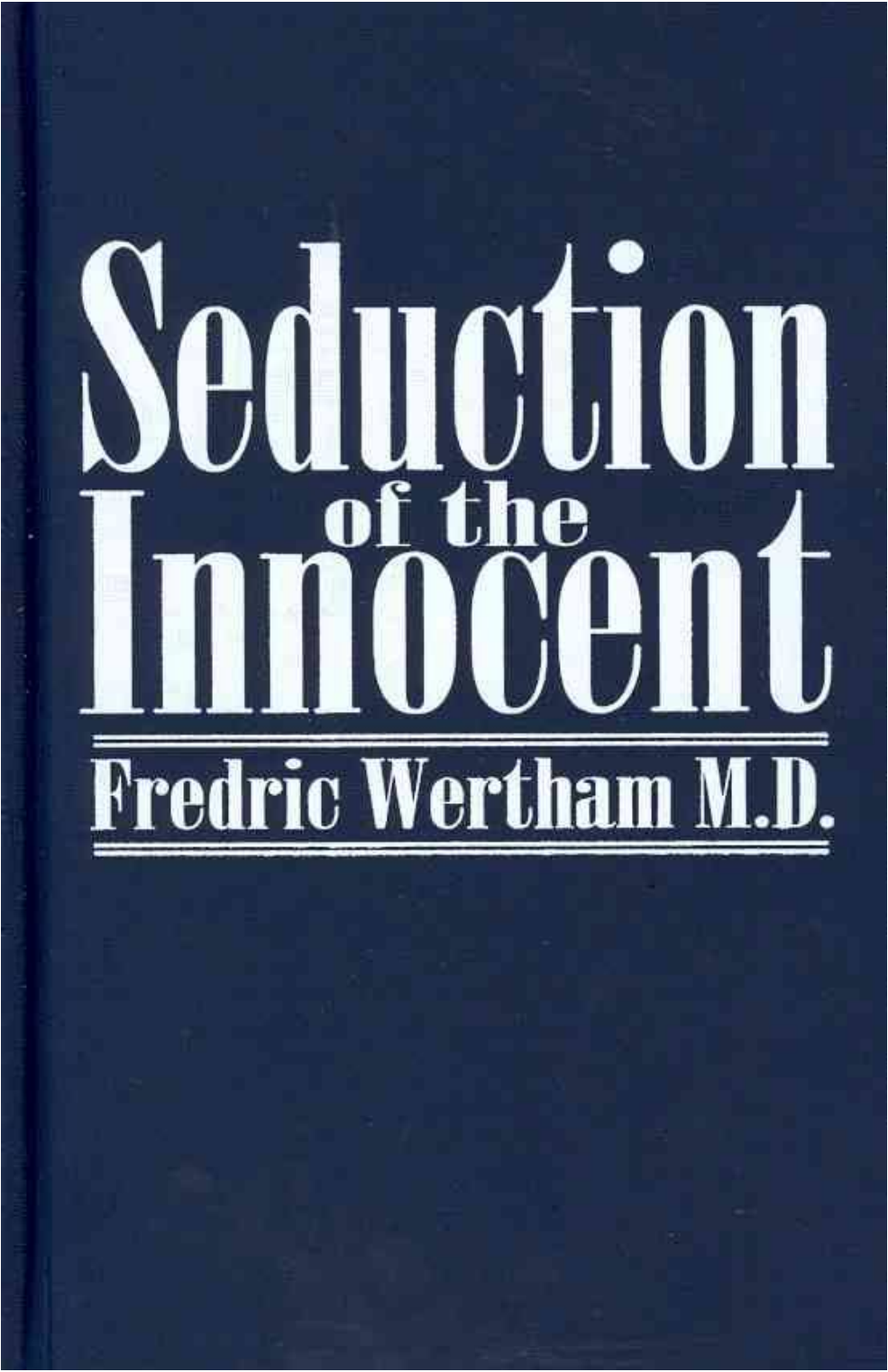
JULY 1, 2018 5:30PM (UTC)



We've been here in the past

# Comic Books



The image shows the front cover of the book 'Seduction of the Innocent' by Fredric Wertham M.D. The cover is dark blue with the title in large, white, serif font. The author's name is printed below the title in a smaller, white, serif font, separated by two horizontal white lines.

# Seduction of the Innocent

Fredric Wertham M.D.

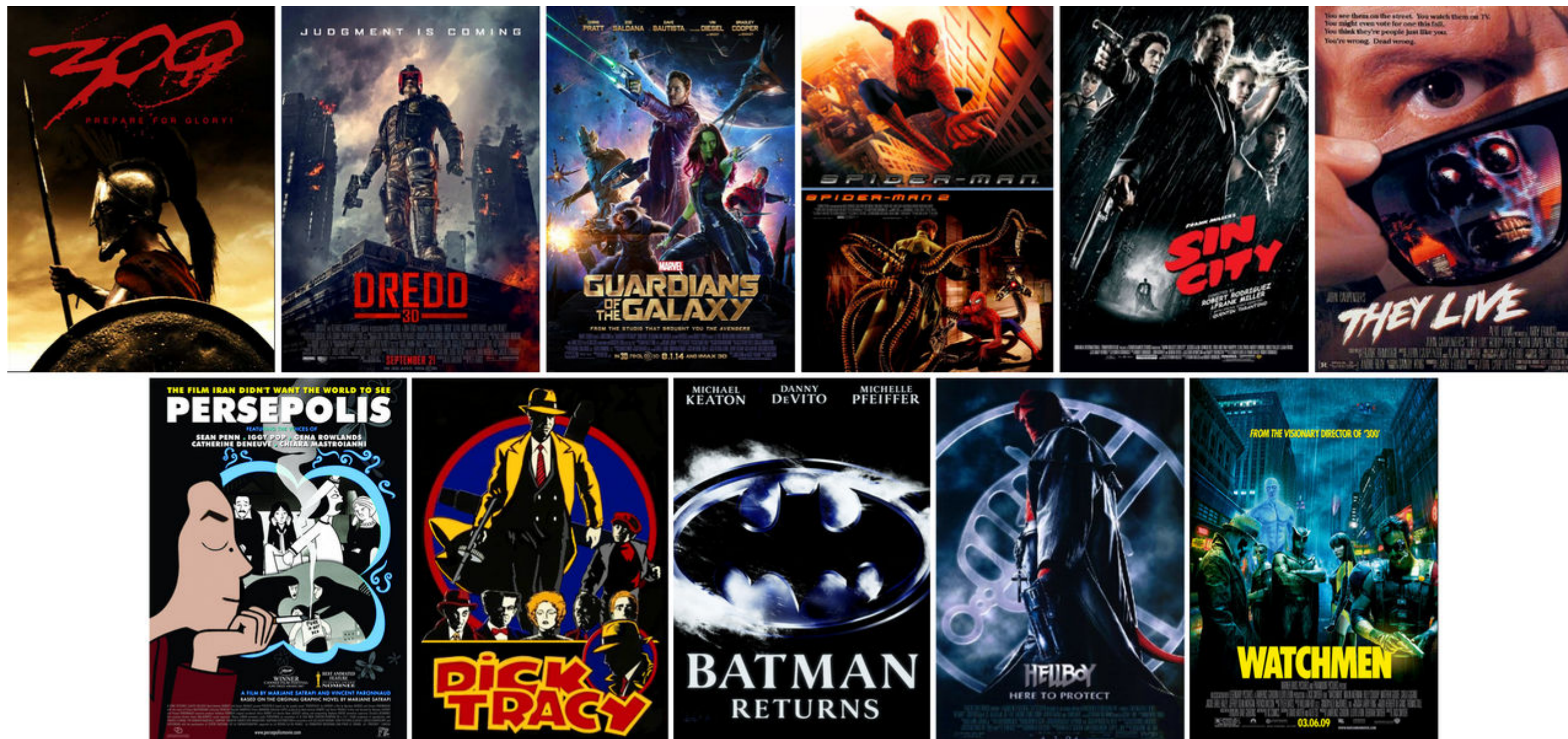
“I think Hitler was a  
beginner compared to the  
comic-book industry,”

- psychiatrist Frederic Wertham

Widely debated-  
**Comic books** as the source of  
**Juvenile Delinquency**



Comic books were dangerous



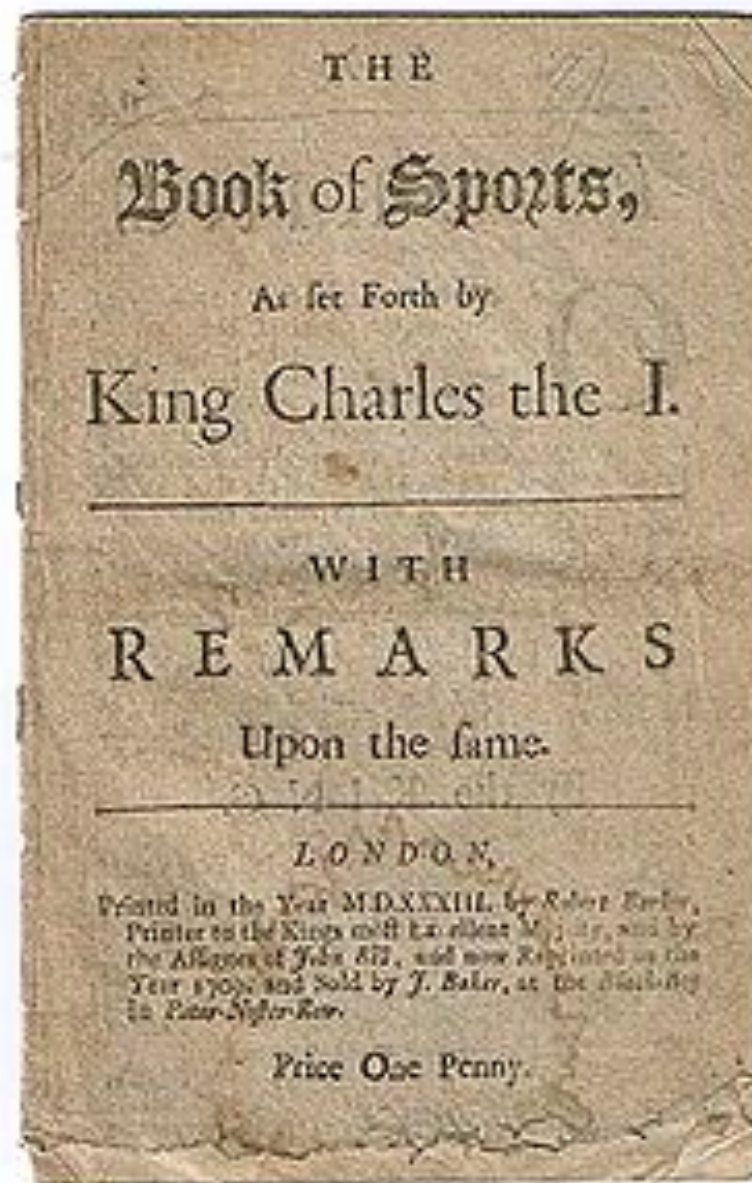
At some point,  
**all leisure** seems subject to **moral panic**

# Sport

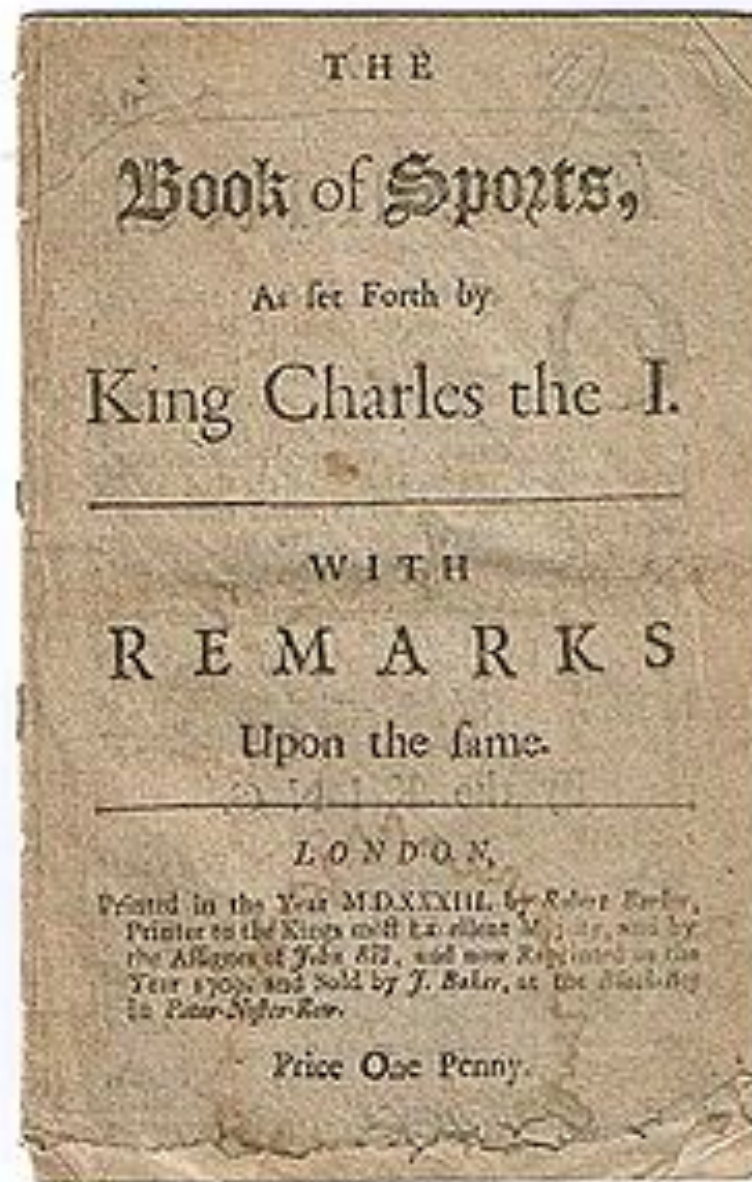


The Puritans “accepted the King James Bible, but they had the common hangman **burn the Book of Sports**, in which James I commended the games to be played after Sunday service

## Sports illustrated, 1962



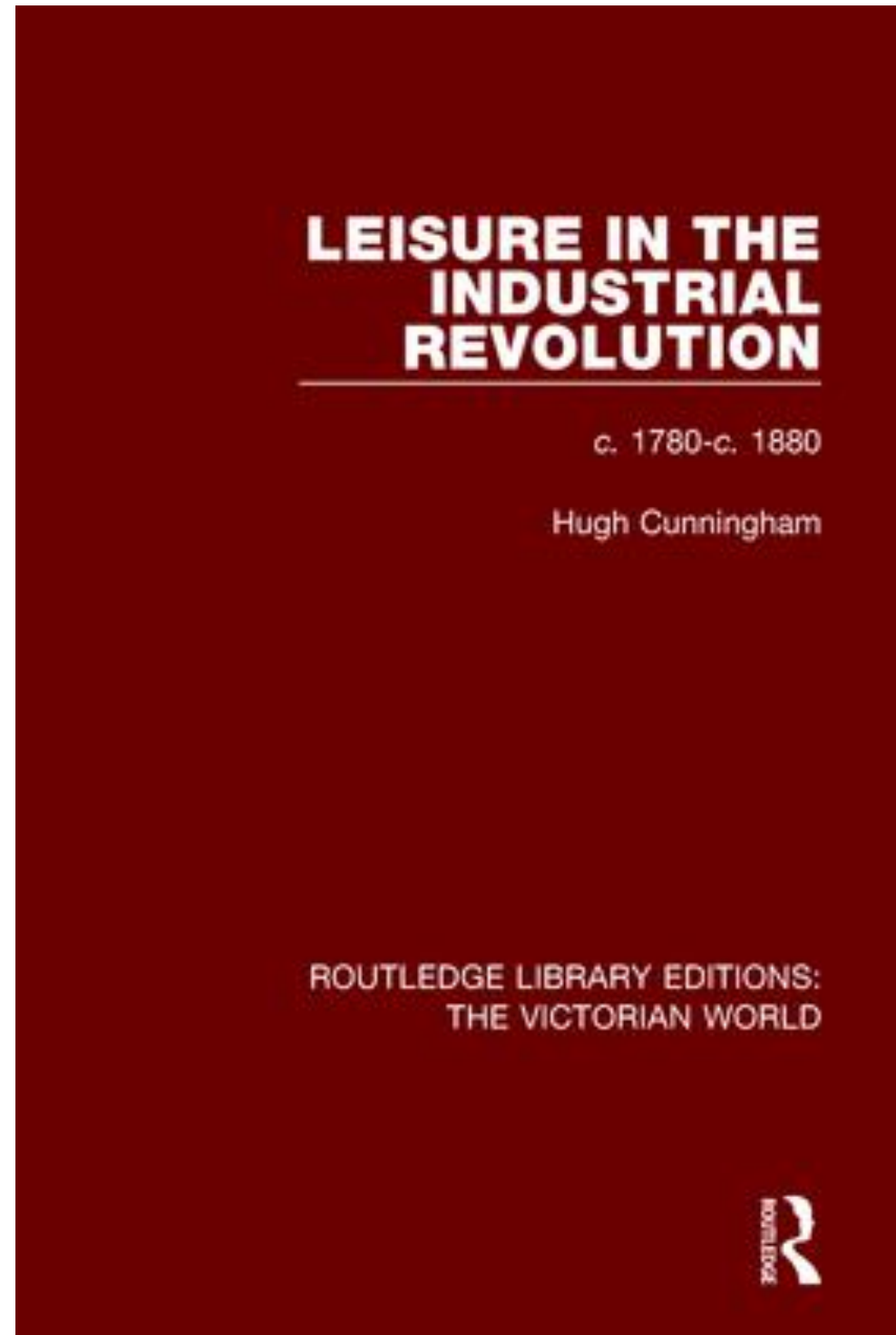
# A guide to Sunday **sports and recreations**



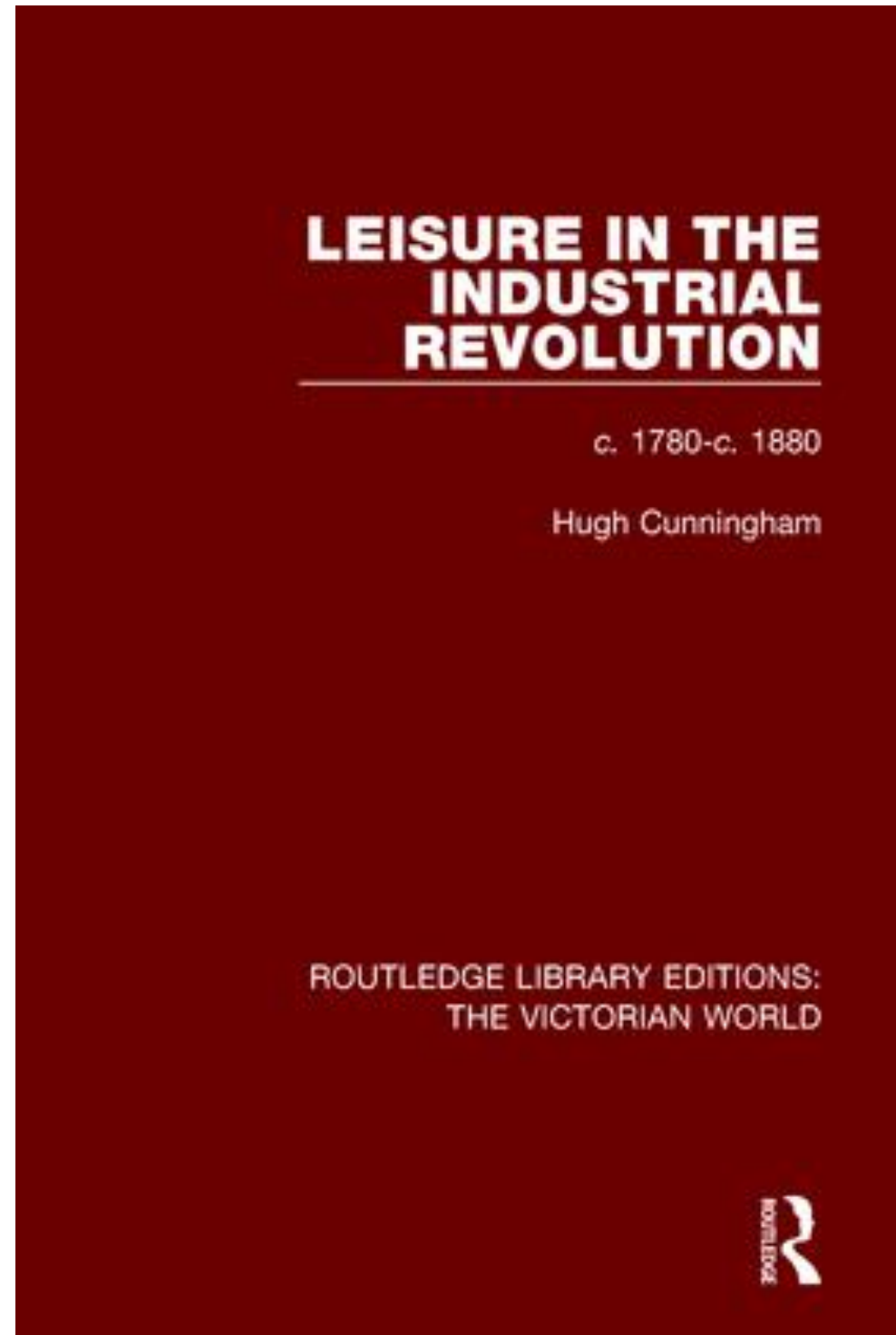
A guide to Sunday  
**sports and recreations**

**Publicly burned in  
England, 1643**

Sport was evil and dangerous



**Class, religious,**  
and **ideological**  
tensions of **leisure**  
from 1780-1880



Travel, Music, Racing:  
Linked to  
**anti-social behavior**

# Dungeons and Dragons





Magazine

# The great 1980s Dungeons & Dragons panic

# Dungeons and Dragons

“a fantasy role-playing game which uses **demonology**, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape, blasphemy, suicide, assassination, insanity, sex perversion, homosexuality, prostitution, satanic type rituals, gambling, barbarism, cannibalism, sadism, desecration, demon summoning, necromantics, divination and other teachings”

# Life Sentence Given In 'Dungeons & Dragons' Killing Case

May 31, 1985



 Click to copy

## RELATED TOPICS

[Archive](#)

CLAYTON, Mo. (AP) — A man who said the fantasy game "Dungeons and Dragons" played a role in the killing of a college student has been sentenced to life in prison.

Darren Lee Molitor, 19, of St. Louis, was sentenced Thursday for the strangulation death of Mary C. Towey, 18, in April 1984. He had been convicted earlier of first-degree murder.

Another man, Ronald G. Adcox, is awaiting trial on a capital murder charge.

Molitor told St. Louis County Circuit Judge Alphonso H. Voorhees before he was sentenced that his trial was not fair because he was not permitted to present expert witnesses to give evidence about the role playing fantasy game "Dungeons and Dragons."

“It is a way of letting tension and anxieties loose .. But subjecting the mind to the **amounts of violence involved** isn't. It is far more bad than it is good. Especially to a young mind. And an 18 or 20 year old still has a young mind. Its effects are both mental and physical. It is in comparison to drugs, alcohol or tobacco. **It is very possessive, addictive and evil.** Evil may sound wrong or peculiar to explain a game, but there is no other way to describe it. It is a device of Satan to lure us away from God. It is an occult.”

**- The “Darren Molitor” letter, 1985**

D & D was addictive and inspired violence

# The founding of BADD: **Pat Pulling** **B**othered **A**bout **D**ungeons and **D**ragons (1983)

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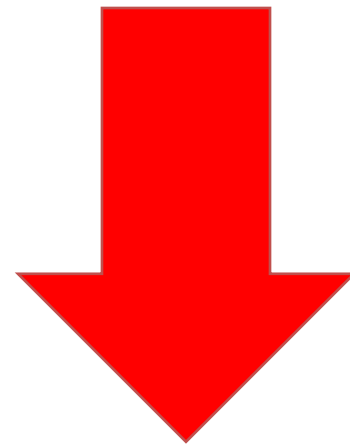


**Director:**  
National Coalition on TV Violence

# The founding of BADD: Pat Pulling **B**othered **A**bout **D**ungeons and **D**ragons (1983)



**Director:**  
National Coalition on TV Violence



**Earned support of US Surgeon General**

# Television



40+ years

TV and aggression research

Eron, L. D., Huesmann, L. R., Lefkowitz, M. M., & Walder, L. O. (1972). Does television violence cause aggression? *American Psychologist*, 27(4), 253-263.

**“3rd graders** who preferred violent TV programs **were rated more aggressive** in school by peers. In a 10-year follow-up . . . [it] **was even more strongly related to aggression 10 years later.** ”

PAIK, H., & COMSTOCK, G. (1994). The Effects of Television Violence on Antisocial Behavior: A Meta-Analysis<sup>1</sup>. *Communication Research*, 21(4), 516–546.

*"We find a **positive and significant correlation** between television violence and aggressive behavior"*

Science proves television fosters aggression?

“ Mean effect sizes from aggregate and experimental studies **do not suggest that media violence and criminal aggression are positively associated**, but findings from prospective longitudinal studies are more **ambiguous**”

Savage, J., & Yancey, C. (2008). The effects of media violence exposure on criminal aggression: A meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 35(6), 772-791.

# No link between Violence and TV

- Kaplan, R. M., & Singer, R. D. (1976). Television violence and viewer aggression: A reexamination of the evidence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 32(4), 35-70.
- Freedman, J. L. (1984). Effect of television violence on aggressiveness. *Psychological bulletin*, 96(2), 227.
- Savage, J., & Yancey, C. (2008). The effects of media violence exposure on criminal aggression: A meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 35(6), 772-791.

# Television Addiction

is no mere metaphor

By Robert Kubey and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Photoillustrations by Chip Simons

**P**erhaps the most ironic aspect of the struggle for survival is how easily organisms can be harmed by that which they desire. The trout is caught by the fisherman's lure, the mouse by cheese. But at least those creatures have the excuse that bait and cheese look like sustenance. Humans seldom have that consolation. The temptations that can disrupt their lives are often pure indulgences. No one *has* to drink alcohol, for example. Realizing when a diversion has gotten out of control is one of the great challenges of life.

74 SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

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## February 2002

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“Most of the criteria of substance dependence can apply to people who watch a lot of TV.”

—Robert Kubey & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi


# TV is the Dominant Leisure Time Activity

Table 2.4. **Watching television is the preferred leisure activity across all surveyed OECD countries**

Prevalence of different types of leisure activities percentage shares of total leisure time

	TV or radio at home	Other leisure activities	Visiting or entertaining friends	Participating / attending events	Sports
Australia	41	47	3	2	6
Belgium	36	42	8	8	5
Canada	34	34	21	2	8
Finland	37	40	7	8	8
France	34	45	6	7	8
Germany	28	46	4	15	7
Italy	28	48	6	10	8
Japan	47	42	4	0	6
Korea	35	41	16	1	7
Mexico	48	33	10	4	5
New Zealand	25	45	24	2	5
Norway	31	33	14	15	8
Poland	41	38	6	8	6
Spain	31	41	4	12	12
Sweden	31	42	7	11	8
Turkey	40	25	34	0	2
United Kingdom	41	39	7	10	4
United States	44	32	16	2	5
<b>OECD18</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>

Source: Secretariat estimates based on national and multinational time-use surveys (2006 where available). It is important to point out that conclusions derived from these figures should be tentative: national time-use surveys' methodologies differ in the way they choose to include or exclude the measure of secondary activities.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/551081652177>

39%  
of leisure time  
in 19 countries

<https://www.oecd.org/berlin/42675407.pdf>

Meta-analysis “results suggest **there is a smaller effect of violent video games on aggression than has been found with television violence on aggression.**”

Sherry, J. L. (2001). The effects of violent video games on aggression: A meta-analysis. *Human communication research*, 27(3), 409-431.

A dark, atmospheric scene of a treehouse at night. The treehouse is built into a large, leafless tree. Inside, two children are visible: one is kneeling and the other is standing. The treehouse has a small window and a door. The background shows a dark sky with a full moon and some distant lights. The overall mood is mysterious and slightly eerie.

# Games

# One way to talk:

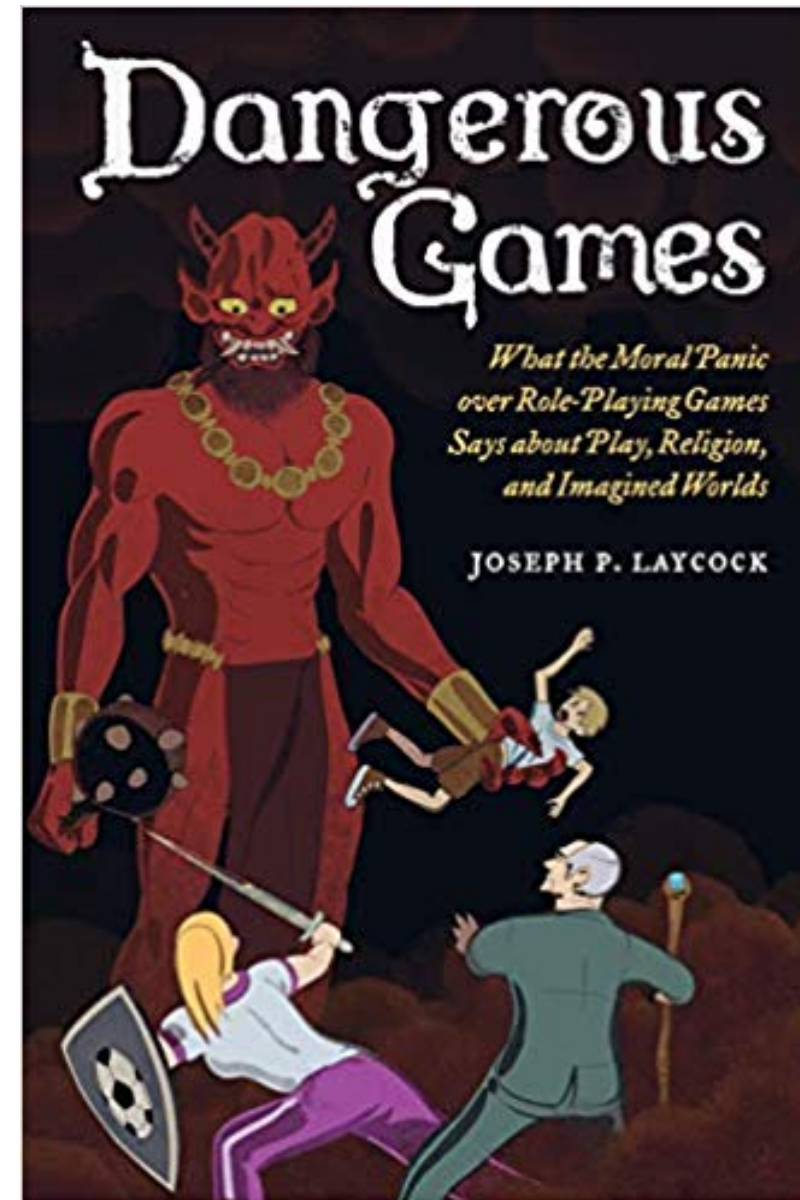
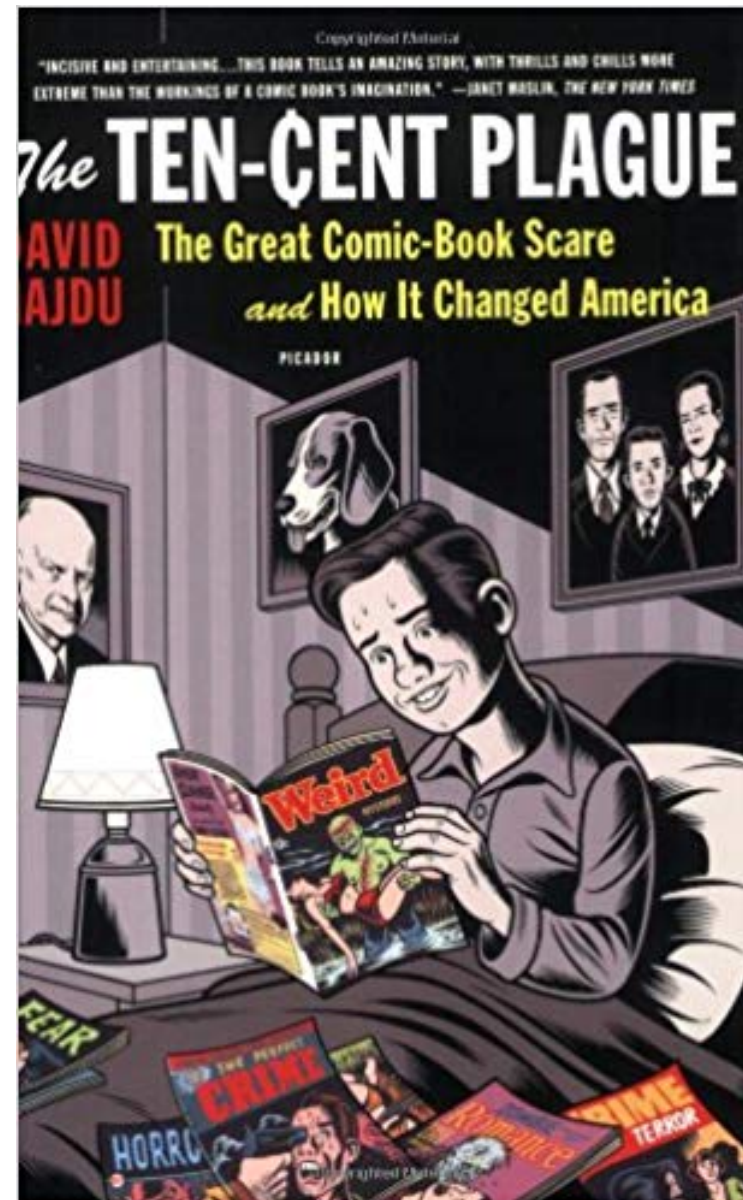
Remind people of our  
worldwide **political past with leisure**

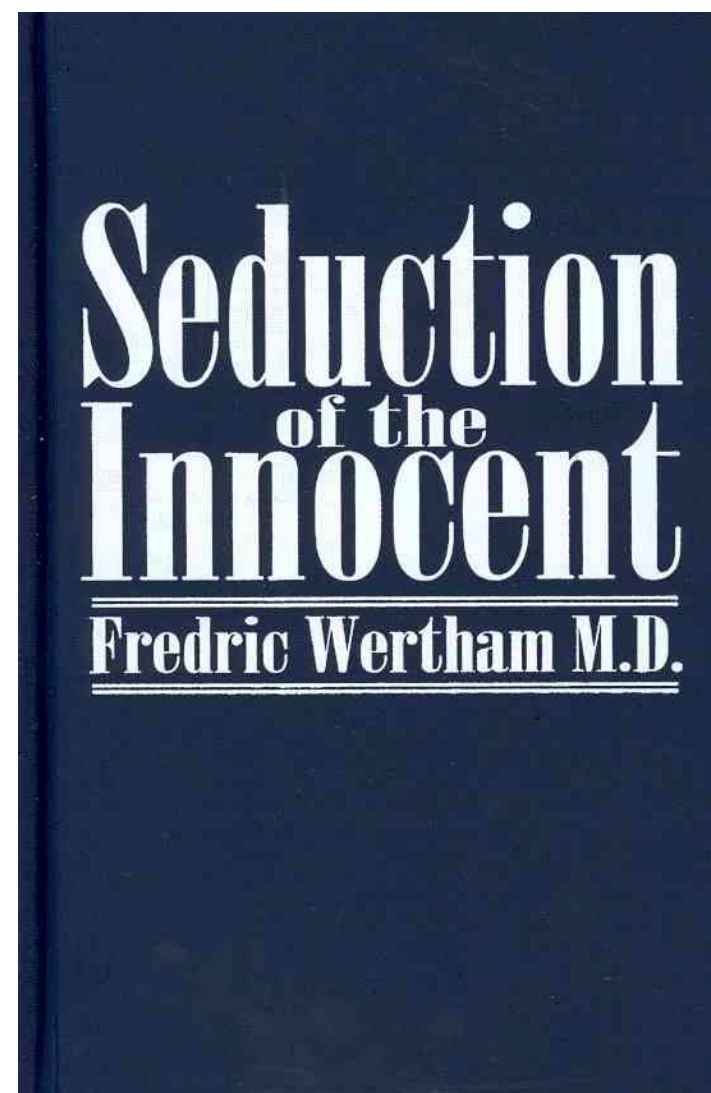
# LEISURE IN THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

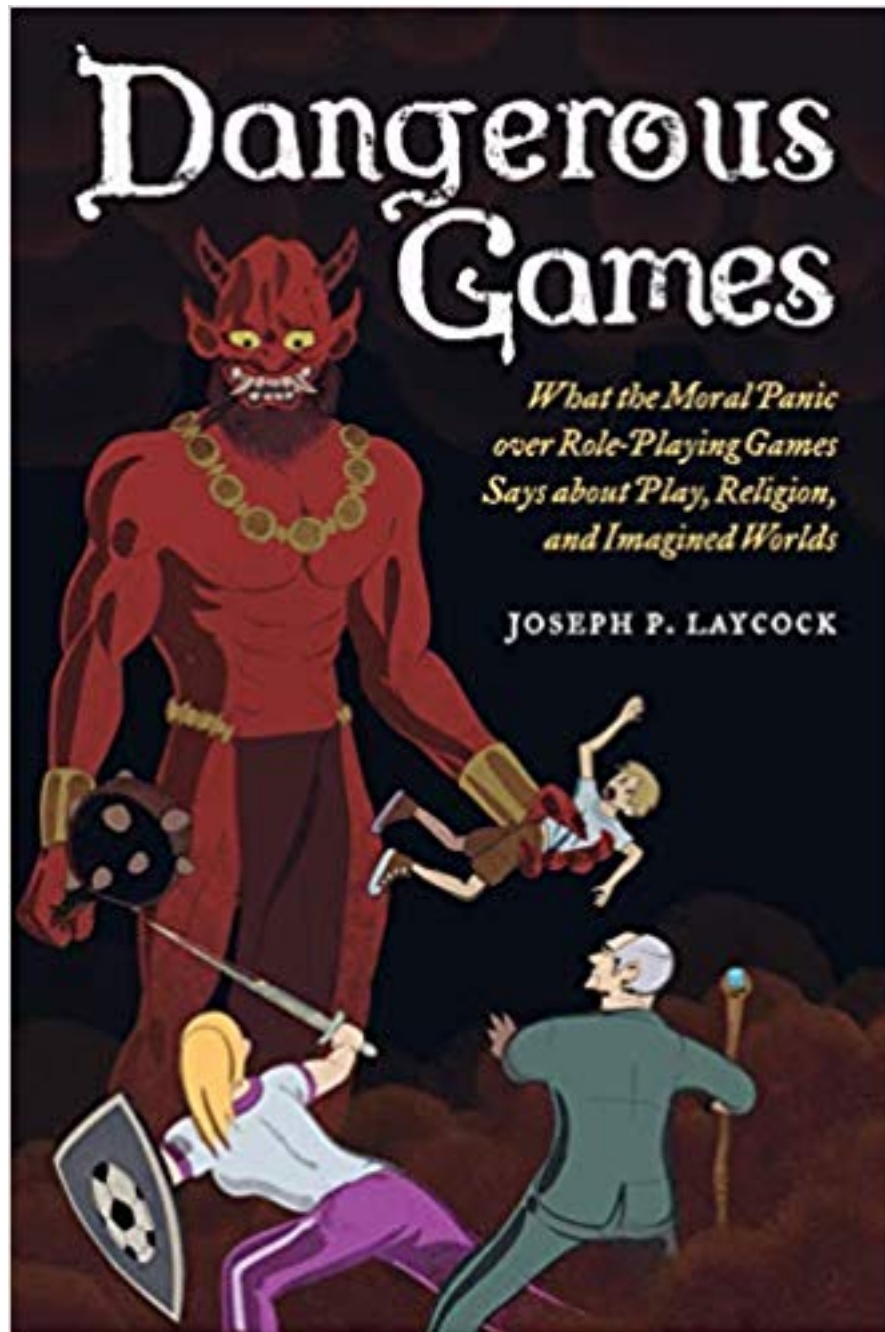
c. 1780-c. 1880

Hugh Cunningham

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
THE VICTORIAN WORLD







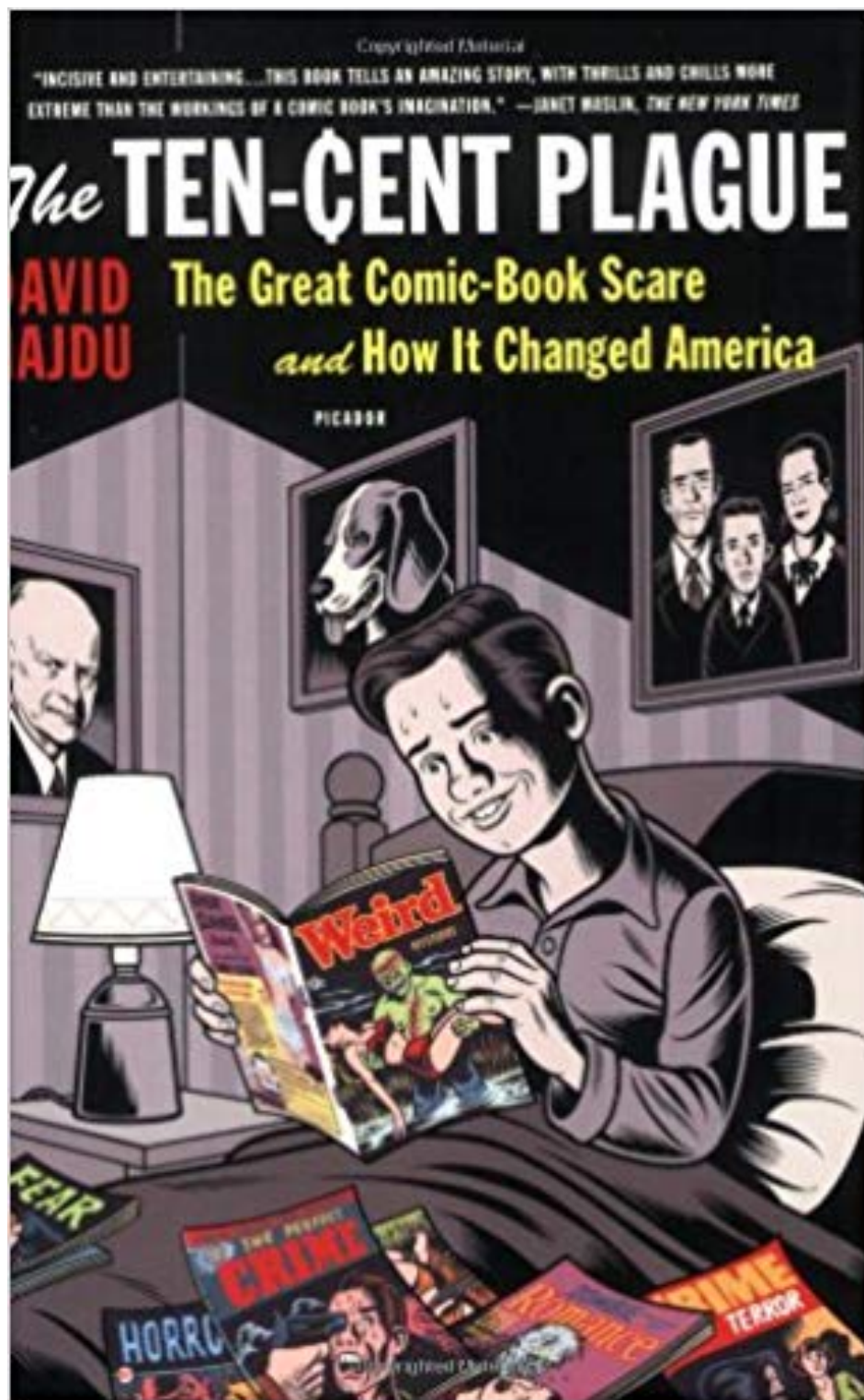
# The dangerous game of pitting leisure against **morality**

Leisure is political

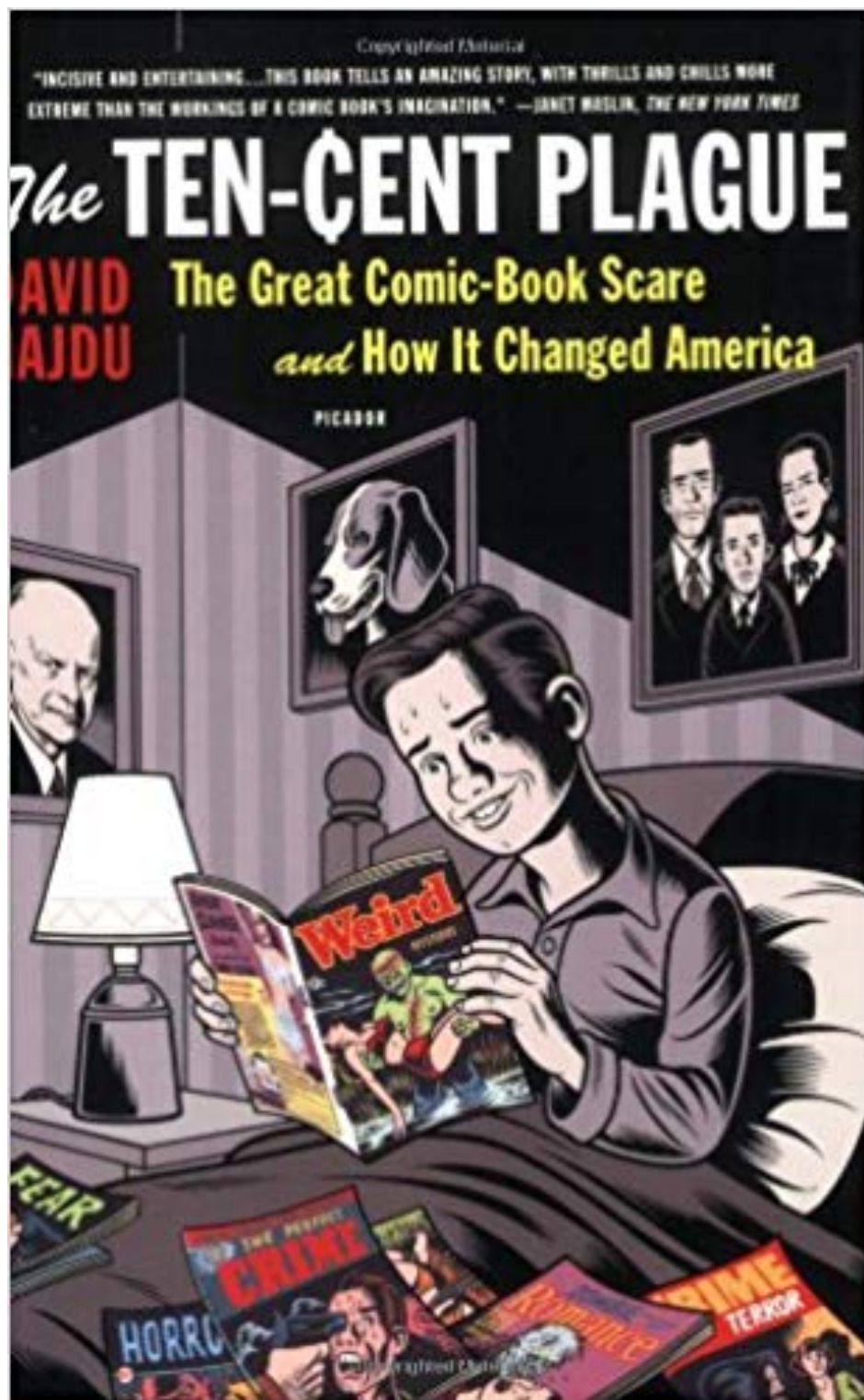
Leisure is political

**Attacking Leisure is an opportunity to chip  
at culture**

**Attacking Leisure is an opportunity to chip  
at culture  
and enforce your own culture**



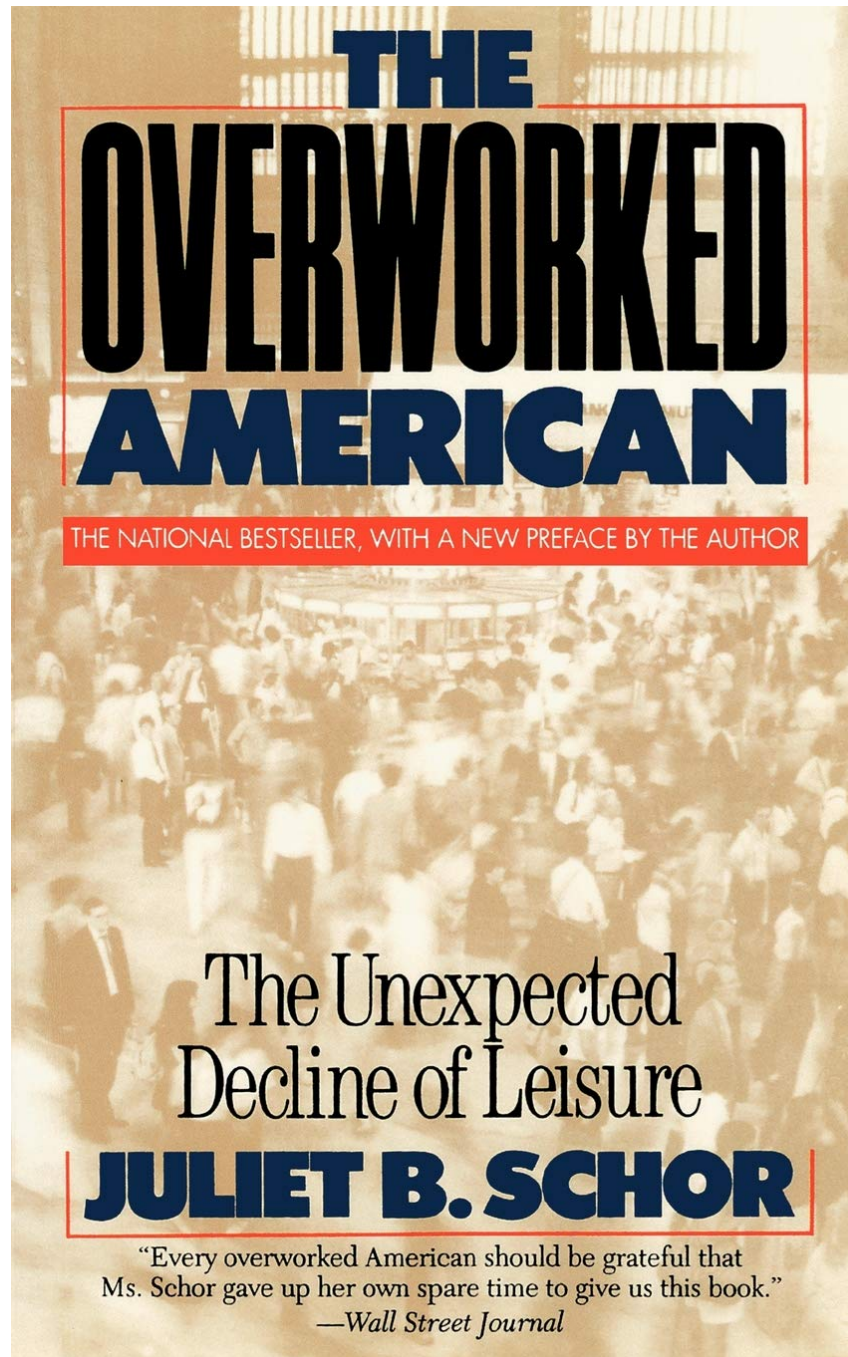
“psychiatrists, politicians, and editorial writers feared the most extreme comic books – filled with crooks, monsters, and voluptuous women – would drive innocent children into the clutches of juvenile delinquency.”



"Comic books . . . attracted a **high quotient of creative people** who thought of more established modes of publishing as foreclosed to them"

David Hajdu

# Attacking games mirrors past **attacks on leisure**



In an era of declining leisure

IDEAS

# Workism Is Making Americans Miserable

For the college-educated elite, work has morphed into a religious identity—promising transcendence and community, but failing to deliver.

FEB 24, 2019



**Derek Thompson**  
Staff writer at *The Atlantic*

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## Report finds work has become the new religion

Mic

### Millennials Are Literally Dying From Overwork

By Benjamin Cosman | Dec. 18, 2013



**The news:** Yet another millennial has died after working insanely long and strenuous hours. Mita Dizon, a copywriter at Young & Rubicam,

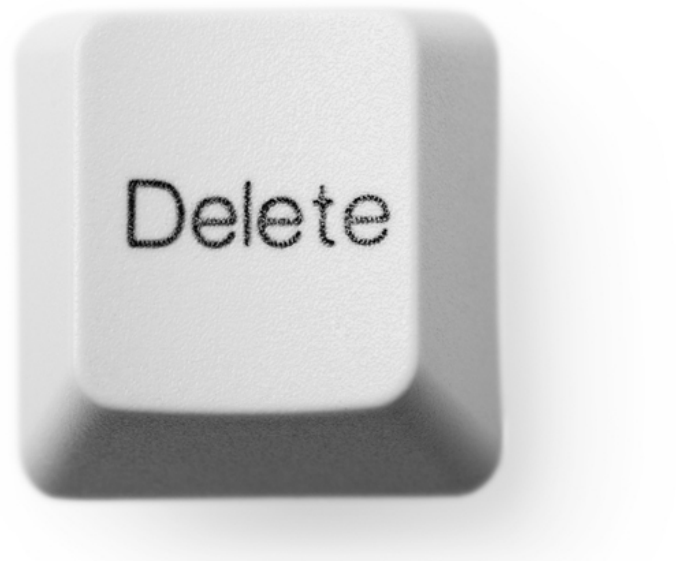
**Maybe, we should not attack leisure**

We should **ask about the root** of our **discord**

Like TV, **it's going to take a long time to**  
determine Aggression, Addiction link

Games don't need to be burned,  
**to be erased.**

Erasing our cultural contribution  
is often **much easier**



# On games, censorship and bans

## Discomfort Design: Critical Reflection through Uncomfortable Play

**Lindsay Grace**  
**C. Michael Armstrong Professor**  
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School of Fine Arts  
Oxford, OH, 45056  
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### Abstract

Consider that uncomfortable moment in life when people discover a playful experience ceases to be worth playing. Just as an arm is broken on the playground, or a relationship can no longer be mended, there are explicit moments when art transgresses some unforeseen territory leaving us with fear of its potential. This paper explores the potential of taboo game design.

### Introduction

Taboo is a construct that defines borders. It tells us where we can and cannot go. The social more is as much a looking glass to reflect on our values as it is a place to test our mettle. This paper seeks to explore how games offer unique critical experience through socially prohibited play. It simply seeks to discuss how play through taboo gameplay exposes that which we may not want to discuss. Taboo game experiences are more than just uncomfortable situations, they are opportunities in rhetoric. They punctuate an experience and offer opportunities for thoughtful reflection on social values.

**Grace,**  
**L. 2011. [Discomfort Design: Critical Reflection through Uncomfortable Play](#), [17th International Symposium on Electronic Art \(ISEA\)](#), Istanbul, Turkey**

# Thanks for listening!

Lindsay Grace

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University of Miami, School of Communication

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[ProfessorGrace.com](http://ProfessorGrace.com)

