

The UNICOR Comics Saga

The Full Version 5/20/19 Eric Pepke

The UNICOR corporation uses federal prisoners for labor, paying 23¢ to \$1.15 per hour. Other federal prison jobs only pay 12¢ to 40¢ per hour.

UNICOR jobs are highly valued, especially by prisoners owing thousands to millions in restitution or having families to support. Veterans get preference.

I make 12¢ per hour 4½ hours per week. That buys one medical visit or four stamps per month. As indigent, I also get five discretionary stamps per month. It is hard to publish on this little, especially as nearly everyone ignores prisoners.

Still, I do not envy UNICOR workers. They work rush job "death marches" 15½ hours a day with unpaid lunch and dinner but no other breaks, several days in a row. Even workers over age 75 do this.

I consider this slave labor by any reasonable or even sane standard. I use the term without apology or further justification.

One UNICOR makes plastic cups for prison meals, with "UNICOR" clearly embossed. Another typesets patents. The UNICOR here at Petersburg Low is a print shop.

The Inmate Information Handbook states, "UNICOR prints for a broad range of Federal Agencies." UNICOR does print many military manuals and government forms. Check the margins of the next one you fill out. It might have been printed here.

UNICOR also prints comics and graphic novels for Source Point Press, Zealous Creative, and Charon, White Ash, and Dark Horse Comics, all for public sale.

UNICOR is not supposed to compete with companies or provide them the competitive advantages of slave labor. To justify printing comics, they reportedly say companies such as Source Point Press are Japanese, not American.

Yet the books are clearly for American markets. The art uses American styles. The language is colloquial American English. The names of contributors reflect a cross-section of America.

The federal government routinely uses making local telephone calls, driving any distance on roads that would eventually lead out of state, and producing for yourself what others might buy to imprison arbitrarily overriding jurisdictions of states with better laws and much shorter sentences. Yet it uses such a flimsy ruse to suggest its slave labor has nothing to do with America.

It works beautifully. Federal overreach and draconian sentencing with vague and overbroad laws ensure a reliable supply of slave labor. Antiquated machines and safety nowhere near OSHA further reduce costs.

Nevertheless, the printing is excellent and affordable. So I am sure were cotton products in the antebellum South, for much the same reasons. Judging by the lack of attention by the press and others, this seems just how Americans like it.

UNICOR keeps its comics under tight control. Only a few leak out. Most are deceptively anonymous, with little indication of origin.

One exception is "Wild Bullets Christmas." It sports a logo for Michigan Comics Collective, which sounds nicely American. The bar code rectangle prices it at \$4.95 from www.SourcePointPress.com.

The back cover advertises other Source Point Press comics. Another prisoner at UNICOR remembers printing "Wild Bullets Christmas" and most listed issues.

These include "The Rot #1," "Norah #1," "Dead Duck and Zombie Chick: Rising From the Grave," "Salvagers: Abandoned Cargo," "Made-Up Zombie Clown Circus," "The Cabinet 1901," ED a Novel by Chris Sun, "The Seance Room: The Seed of Change," and the ironically named "Monstruous: Keepin' em Out of Jail." He remembers printing issues not listed of "Savants" and "Holliston." He doesn't remember only one: "J Werner Presents Classic Pulp."

Inside, an ad for "Holliston: Friendship is Tragic" quotes Entertainment Weekly: "Mad killers, giant monsters, and evil aliens are on the loose, as well as the deadliest threat of all: success!" It is unclear whether they mean slave labor issues, too. The Movie Crypt, TwiztidShop.com, arieScope Pictures, and ComicsExperience.com also advertise.

Slave labor is definitely mainstream!

Inside the front cover is a legitimate-looking publishing statement. It credits Greg Wright, Stephen Sharar, Jason Jimenez, Sean Seal, Joe Freyre, Sara Dhyne, Joshua Werner, and Travis McIntire. None of these names sounds particularly Japanese to me. What do they think of how their work is printed?

At the bottom it says, "Printed in the USA by KrakenPrint." There is no mention of UNICOR or prison labor. Do customers think they are supporting independent comics, or do they know they support slave labor?

Do they care? Are they as blase' as Entertainment Weekly appears to be? Do they only like good vale for their money? Does slave labor make comics more collectible?

What if they realized they almost certainly have drawings, such as "X-rated" parodies of popular cartoons that could land them in prison for longer than raping a minor? Then they could print comics, too. Would you take notice?

Paying for your own oppression and political imprisonment is not without elegance and symmetry. Doing it voluntarily, even if due to duplicitous marketing, adds a certain American charm. In any event, it works.

I have given up trying to figure out why people so vigorously support and even crowdsource their own oppression. Do you imagine rights, race, religion, or most laughably innocence of wrongdoing will protect you? They won't.

Whatever the reason, historically the results are always the same. By the time people realize it, it's too late to stop.

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