

The New York Review of What?

by STEVEN HELLER on JULY 26, 2012

I was the art director and co-publisher of a late-sixties underground paper titled *The New York Review of Sex (& Politics)*, a curious mix of new left politics and sexual "liberationsploitation" that grew out of a socio-political paper called *The New York Free Press*. When it was discovered that the *Freeep*, as it was known, only sold out an edition when nudes ([preferably women](#)) were put on the cover, we participated in the launch of the first underground sex paper, *Screw* (and [I became the first art director](#)). But after some internal disputes with *Screw*'s legendary publisher, Al Goldstein, the *Freeep* folks broke away and founded the *NYRS*, mostly out of "revenge." (I wrote about that for [the Daily Heller here](#).) Like other New York underground papers in 1969 (*The East Village Other* and *Rat*), the *Free Press* started a sex paper to subsidize our host publication. However, after a month or so of simultaneous publishing, we folded the *Freeep* and devoted our energies to the potentially more profitable sex paper. Sex was political back then, we thought.

David Platzker's recent "Screw You" [exhibition](#) at the Susan Inglett Gallery in New York, which opened in May and closes tomorrow, July 27, gathers together all the yellowing sex-oriented underground tabloids. Since its opening, people have asked me to see a complete run of my "infamous" periodical. Platzker has done a good job of digitally cataloging most issues of *NYRS* [here](#), including "[Our Especially Clean Issue](#)," for which my cohorts and I were twice arrested and brought to justice in New York State Supreme Court. We won because the above title was the truth: All the sexual content in that issue was innuendo (including a photo of a woman sitting on a fire plug, two lady bugs together in passionate embrace, and a sudsy naked woman taking a bath). Platzker did, however, leave out the very last issue (which I don't have either) -- the ultimately re-titled *New York Review of Sex, Politics and Aerospace*, our "screw you" to the porn world and its unsavory distributors.



Here are most of the issues from Platzker's site, starting with the elegant first issue (above), which my co-publishers and I wanted to come across as more "high-class" than *Screw*. We printed on whiter, heavier (50-lb offset) paper in full color from separation negatives. Yet for all the "class" we brought to the underground porn field, after the first few issues, we lost money and readers. Our unsavory distributor used to say about me in nasal tones, "He's da only guy in New Yawk who could make a sex paper fail!" Hey, what did they expect from a repressed prepubescent kid, anyway?

Nonetheless, New York District Attorney Richard H. Kuh, who prosecuted [Lenny Bruce](#) and Claus von Bülow, arrested us and enjoined the *NYRS* twice for what amounted to two innocuous issues that today cannot compare with the sexual content on HBO, most R-rated films, and even many edgy magazines for currently acceptable prurience and pandering. We were all so idealistic, innocent, and youngish. Yet the government was afraid we'd corrupt society and the free world.

In the end, between the D.A. harassment on the one hand (twice busted, legal fees, appeals, etc.), and the unsavory distributors urging more hardcore content (less "pinko-lefty" wit) than we were willing to include, the *NYRS&P* fell afoul of creditors. I moved on to a music tabloid called *Rock*, and then back to *Screw* [as art director](#) until getting my job at *The New York Times*. ([Read more here](#).)