

Chapter 6

"'Operation Clean-Up'" and After: The Controversy Resolved

On March 18, 1954, as the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency approached its investigation of comic books, the newsletter of the ACMP warned publishers that "activity against comic magazines seems to have become more intense in all sections of the country."¹ Among over twenty incidents cited were drives to establish regulatory ordinances in Hackensack, New Jersey, and Erie, Pennsylvania; comic investigation committees in Springfield, Massachusetts, and Bentonville, Arkansas; and denunciations of comics as "'subversive'" in Newburgh, New York, and "'communistic'" by an intelligence officer at Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota.² Movements to regulate comics in Erie, Pennsylvania, and Hartford, Connecticut, were spurred by newspaper feature articles and editorials which directly preceded or accompanied the subcommittee investigation and its attendant publicity. Amazingly, the subcommittee hearings marked the introduction of many suddenly concerned observers to the world experienced by nine of every ten children and "caused the American parent to do a good deal of thinking regarding the flood of crime and horror comics now on the market . . ."³ The spectacle of a Senate body which

¹Senate Subcommittee, Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books), p. 61.

²Ibid., pp. 60-61.

³U.S., Congress, Senate, Senator Hendrickson speaking on Juvenile Delinquency Trends at the Student Level, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., June 16, 1954, Congressional Record 100:8349.

seriously questioned the guardians of arbiters of juvenile fantasies enraged the public where the less visible authors of fourteen years of persistent admonitions had failed.

Declining sales and renewed activity aimed at controlling or abolishing comics, together with the often grim resolve displayed by the Senate Subcommittee, finally convinced many of the leading publishers that cooperative action was again imperative. Several weeks after the hearings, shaken by his appearance before the subcommittee and the refusal of many wholesalers to distribute his comics, William Gaines called a meeting of comic book publishers in New York City. He proposed the formation of a new association which would work with educators and psychologists to determine if delinquency and comics were related, serve as a public relations group, and forestall the threat of legislation. However, the nine publishers present at the meeting voted, as their first action, to ban the words "crime," "horror," and "terror," from comic titles. The action would have eliminated Gaines's best selling comics. With the proceedings out of his control, he announced, "'This isn't what I had in mind,'" and walked out of the meeting.⁴

On August 17, 1954, the "top comic-book publishers" decided to seek a prominent jurist to serve as "'czar'" to censor the content of their products. The position, which was to be modeled after the motion picture censor's office and office of baseball commissioner, carried a salary of

⁴Jacobs, pp. 111-112; and Advertising Age, September 20, 1954, p. 73.

\$40,000 a year to ensure freedom from bribes.⁵ On September 7, the publishers announced the formation of the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA). The group, which claimed to represent 90 percent of the industry output, originally included only seventeen publishers. John Goldwater, president of the association and co-publisher of Archie Comics Publications, promised a code of standards and a program for its implementation in the near future. By December, twenty-eight of thirty-one publishers had joined the association. The holdouts were Dell, Gilberton, and Entertaining Comics.⁶

Gilberton, which published Classics, Illustrated, The Best of Boy's Life, and other comics which attempted to educate as well as entertain, and EC based their refusal to join the CMAA on grounds as different as their publications. Albert Kanter, part owner of Gilberton, denied that their products were comic books. Therefore, he stated, there was "no basis for our joining [the CMAA] . . ."⁷ Gaines asserted his decision was founded on moral grounds. EC would not join the group unless it indicated its sincerity by the construction of a code which eliminated crime and horror comics. On September 14, one week after the association was announced, Gaines called a press conference to proclaim that he had cancelled his horror and crime comics and substituted a "'clean, clean line'" at a loss

⁵New York Times, August 21, 1954, p. 19.

⁶Ibid., September 8, 1954, p. 29; Advertising Age, December 29, 1954, p. 8; Mort Weisinger, "How They're Cleaning Up the Comic Books," Better Homes and Gardens vol. 2 (March 1955): 254; and "Comics Publishers Plan Industry Czar," Printers' Ink, September 3, 1954, p. 24.

⁷Ibid., December 13, 1954, p. 84.

of \$250,000 a year.⁸ The decision was made, Gaines said, because it "'seems to be what the American parents want.'"⁹ Actually, the change was an effort to keep his comics and company afloat by placating distributors who refused to carry the publications of the self-proclaimed creator of horror comics. Children who read comic books were informed of the realities of the decision, while their parents were presented with the fantasy. In an editorial which announced the demise of the five EC crime and horror comics, Gaines informed readers that, because of "hysterical, injudicious, and unfounded charges" it would be a "miracle" if the issue they were reading reached the newsstands.¹⁰ In a final gesture of defiance, Gaines virulently asserted that, "with comic censorship now a fact, we at E.C. look forward to an immediate drop in the crime and juvenile delinquency rate of the United States."¹¹

The CMAA conducted a major effort to enlist Dell, the industry sales leader, in the new organization. While association president Goldwater praised Dell comics as "'wholesome,'" he accused the company of "'shirking its public responsibility'" by its refusal to join.¹² Publisher George Delacorte countered with the charge that the CMAA only regulated rather than eliminated questionable comics. He vowed Dell would join only when

⁸New York Times, September 19, 1954, section IV, p. 2; and *Ibid.*, September 20, 1954, p. 73.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰"In Memoriam," in Barlow and Steward, eds., n.p.; and Jacobs, p. 113.

¹¹"In Memorium."

¹²Advertising Age, September 20, 1954, p. 73.

the CMAA adopted a code which conformed to the "'high standards'" of his own.¹³ Delacorte also inopportunately revived the failure of the ACMP when he again asserted that Dell would not, by endorsement of an association, ally itself with the publishers of comics "'less worthy'" than its own.¹⁴ One factor in their defiance of the self-preservation drive by other publishers may have been Dell's rising prosperity in the overcrowded comic book market. In 1953, their sales totaled 435 million, a 40 million rise over 1952.¹⁵

On September 16, the CMAA disclosed its selection of New York City Magistrate Charles F. Murphy as code czar, effective October 1. Murphy was also the creator and producer of a radio program in which he moderated high school students' discussion of their problems, and founder and president of Teen Plan, Inc., a private group which aided teenagers in their search for careers. On his acceptance of the post, the judge stated that, in his nine years on the bench, "'in no instance did I know anyone connected with a law case who attributed a youngster's misdeeds to the fact that he reads comics.'"¹⁶ However, as a condition of his acceptance of the office of administrator of the still tenuous Comics Code Authority, Murphy demanded that members cancel all "'horror and terror books.'"¹⁷ As a

¹³Ibid., October 4, 1954, p. 39.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., November 1953, p. 86.

¹⁶Ibid., September 20, 1954, p. 73; and Horace W. Greeley, "From Magistrate to Czar," Printers' Ink, October 29, 1954, p. 82.

¹⁷New York Times, September 23, 1954, p. 20; and Ibid., September 17, 1954, p. 25.

result, thirty-five titles were cancelled ever before the implementation of a code. On October 1, Murphy resigned his position as magistrate to assume his duties as code czar, but a salary of \$14,000 rather than \$40,000 a year. New York City officials praised their former judge and Mayor Robert F. Wagner directed Deputy Mayor Henry Epstein, Police Commissioner Francis W.H. Adams, and Corporation Counsel Adrian Burke to meet with the code administrator to work out a program of cooperation with the publisher group.¹⁸

Murphy assured the public that "'the new program of self-regulation will be based on a strong and effective code of ethics . . . the strongest code of ethics adopted by a mass media industry.'"¹⁹ On October 27, the provisions of the code of the CMAA were announced. Unlike the standards adopted by its predecessor, the ACMP, the forty-one provisions in the code were not "minimum," but constituted, according to the CMAA, "the most severe set of principles for any communications media . . ."²⁰ Its provisions attempted to answer the accumulated grievances of fourteen years and included the prohibition of the words "horror" and "terror" in comic titles. In addition, scenes of violence were restricted and respect for authority emphasized, and it was decreed that "in every case good shall triumph over evil . . ."²¹ Other general standards included prohibitions on dialogue and costume and the admonition that "ridicule or attack on any religious

¹⁸Ibid., October 2, 1954, p. 21; and Ibid., October 28, 1954, p. 20.

¹⁹Ibid., September 17, 1954, p. 1.

²⁰Facts About Code-Approved Comics Magazines, p. 11.

²¹Ibid., p. 28.

or facial group is never permissible."²² A separate Code for Advertising Matter was also drafted which forbade advertisements for such products as liquor, tobacco, "concealable weapons," and sex instruction books. Each publisher was also required to "ascertain that all statements made in advertisements conform to fact and avoid misrepresentation."²³

Publishers who subscribed to the new set of regulations agreed to "adhere to its principles and to abide by all decisions based on the Code made by the Administrator."²⁴ The decisions of the Comics Code Authority (CAA) were independent of the CMAA and absolute "'in respect to everything . . . from a cover to a caption.'"²⁵ Murphy and a staff of five reviewers applied the code provisions prior to publication. Original storyboards were inspected for compliance and suggestions offered to bring the material within association guidelines. Each approved page was granted the code seal of approval, microfilmed, and then compared against the published issue several months later. Since its inception, the code authority had reviewed 400 issues of 285 titles. Of 126 stories rejected and 5,656 individual panels replaced, the most frequent changes involved the depiction of females. To standardize their appearance with code guidelines, they were altered to conform with what Murphy termed "'the Dior look!'"²⁶ In December, Murphy announced that from 70-75 percent of the

²²Ibid., p. 29.

²³Ibid., pp. 30-31.

²⁴Ibid., p. 27. For the full text of the code, see Appendix 2.

²⁵Weisinger, p. 254.

association members' publications would bear the new stamp-shaped seal which proclaimed their contents were "Approved by the Comics Code Authority." Because of "production complexities," both code-approved and non-approved comics would continue to circulate, but by late February, he promised, all books produced by association members would bear the seal.²⁷

Although the progress toward self-regulation by the CMAA was more rapid than the sluggish efforts of the ACMP seven years earlier, many critics remained skeptical of its aims and its ultimate effectiveness. While they mildly praised the formation of the CMAA and appointment of the code administrator as "steps in the right direction," the Senate Subcommittee warned that, if this effort at self-regulation also failed, "other ways and means must--and will--be found to prevent our Nation's young from being harmed by crime and horror comic books."²⁸ James Fitzpatrick, chairman of the New York State Joint Committee, greeted the publishers' action as "'welcome news'" and offered "'every cooperation to the industry.'"²⁹ However, in the interim the committee continued to draft legislative proposals to control the distribution of horror comics in New York. Armed vigilance was also practiced by the General Federation of Women's Clubs, which lauded the industry's objectives but resolved to continue the war against crime comics. The abortive ACMP was easily recalled to question the resolve of the CMAA. In an editorial favorable

²⁶New York Times, December 24, 1954, p. 8.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Senate Subcommittee, Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency, p. 32.

²⁹New York Times, September 17, 1954, p. 25.

to the code, Christian Century tempered its enthusiasm by asking: "If some of the comic book publishers who have not joined . . . do not observe this code and profit thereby, how long will the others stick to their good resolutions?"³⁰

Other criticisms diminished in the fury of the attack leveled by the comic book's most persistent critic. According to Wertham, the association and its code were an effort to divert an aroused public from substantive action, a "publicity stunt,"³¹ and a "cover-up continuation of the cruelty-for-fun education of children."³² The same familiar reliance on violence, brutality, and "pornographic sadism" were as apparent in code approved comics as in their predecessors, he charged. In fact, "at present it is far safer for a mother to let her child have a comic book without a seal of approval than one with such a seal."³³ To illustrate his charges, he circulated a copy of the cover of the March 1955 issue of Lorna, the Jungle Girl, a "'typical comic book with "Czar" Murphy's new seal . . .'" Wertham condemned the cover, which depicted "'colored howling savages about to attack a sexy white girl in a bathing suit and a handsome white man'"

³⁰"Comic Book Publishers Promise Reforms," Christian Century, November 10, 1954, p. 1357; New York Times, March 30, 1955, section IV, p. 48; Ibid., November 25, 1954, p. 32; and Ibid., September 17, 1954, p. 25.

³¹Wertham, "Reading for the Innocent," Wilson Library Bulletin 29 (April 1955): 613; and Idem, "The Curse of the Comic Books," p. 405.

³²Idem, "It's Still Murder," p. 48.

³³Ibid.

as an example of "'the same corruption with sexiness, violence and race prejudice'" which characterized pre-code comics.³⁴

On February 5, 1955, Wertham repeated his evaluation of the CMAA at a one-day hearing conducted by the New York State Joint Legislative Committee. Flourishing a bullwhip and a throwing knife ordered from an ad in a code-approved comic, Wertham asserted the clean-up had altered "'none of the points we regard as harmful to children.'"³⁵ Murphy challenged the psychiatrist's claim and produced examples of ads for whips which he had rejected. However, he conceded that the process of regulation required refinement and "'a little understanding . . . we are in the growing-up process.'"³⁶ Murphy refused to endorse committee chairman Fitzpatrick's proposal of a statute which would enact code provisions as law. Although the committee cited fifty comics which it judged contained "'excessive violence,'" it disavowed legislation and pledged "'to cooperate with any agency in an endeavor to eliminate this menace.'"³⁷

Following adjournment of the hearings, both Murphy and the Joint Committee verified Wertham's charges that, through a catalogue advertised in forty-seven comics, children could purchase knives and whips. Murphy cancelled the ads and labeled the incident an oversight by his office and the two publishers who printed the ads, but the revelation preceded an

³⁴Advertising Age, January 3, 1955, p. 8.

³⁵Bill Greeley, "Legislators Attack Comics Code Violations; Industry Czar Sharpens Clean-Up," Printers' Ink, February 11, 1955, p. 31.

³⁶New York Times, February 5, 1955, p. 17.

³⁷Ibid.

apparent reversal of the Joint Committee's earlier conciliation. In their report, the New York legislators denounced the industry as "'completely irresponsible.'"³⁸ The goals of the CMAA were praised but considered incompatible with its voluntary structure since "'violence and brutality continue to be portrayed to an intolerable degree.'"³⁹ In a denial of its earlier resolve, the committee recommended four bills directed against offensive publications to the 1955 legislature. A measure to forbid the inclusion of the words "crime," "sex," "horror," or "terror" in the title of "'any book, pamphlet or magazine consisting of narrative material in pictorial form, colored or uncolored, and commonly known as comic books . . .," proposed to legislate compliance with portions of the CMAA code.⁴⁰ The projected misdemeanor, which entailed a \$500 fine, a year in prison, or both, also prohibited the publication of comics "'devoted to or principally made up of methods of crime, or illicit sex, horror, terror, physical torture, brutality or physical violence.'"⁴¹ Three proposals affected comic books only as part of a larger group of proscribed materials. The committee recommended bills to prohibit the sale of obscene publications to persons under eighteen, to empower officials to obtain injunctions against publishers of obscene materials, and to require the inclusions of publishers' names and addresses on their publications.⁴²

³⁸New York Times, March 26, 1955, p. 10.

³⁹Ibid.; and Ibid., February 12, 1955, p. 17.

⁴⁰Ibid., March 23, 1955, p. 33.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

As the bills effortlessly progressed through the legislature, CMAA President Goldwater, code administrator Murphy, and Henry Schultz, general counsel of the eternal ACMP, pleaded with the lawmakers to "'hold their fire'" until self-regulation received a fair trial.⁴³ Schultz declared the measures were unconstitutional and invoked former Governor Dewey's persistent veto of similar measures. Despite their protests, all four bills passed the legislature. On May 2, Governor W. Averell Harriman vetoed the bills which would have allowed officials to serve injunctions against publishers and required publishers' names and addresses to appear on their periodicals. The bills to control the sale of obscene publications and to regulate comic books were approved. In his approval message, the governor agreed the responsibility for shielding their children from harmful influences rested with parents, but it was virtually impossible to separate children from "'improper'" comic books. In this case, he concluded, "'the State must step in and help.'"⁴⁴ Following passage of the comic book bill, the ACLU filed a statement with the Senate Juvenile Delinquency subcommittee which termed the measure unconstitutional and unjustified. In a darker vein, the American Book Publishers Council warned that the action paved the way for censorship of "'books of distinction.'"⁴⁵

⁴³Ibid., March 23, 1955, p. 33; and Ibid., March 30, 1955, pp. 1 and 22.

⁴⁴Times Educational Supplement, May 13, 1955, p. 473.

⁴⁵"Horror Comics (Contd.)," Time, May 16, 1955, p. 50; New York Times, May 3, 1955, p. 22; and Ibid., May 9, 1955, p. 25. On April 22, 1960, Governor Nelson Rockefeller signed a bill which required all comic books to carry the name and address of their publisher and printer. Ibid., April 23, 1960, p. 11.

The enactment of self-regulation by the industry occurred too late to circumvent the distrust and disaffection which years of accusations and imprecations had fostered. By July 1955, twelve other states⁴⁶ had joined New York and banned crime, horror, or sex comics completely, or had restricted their sales to persons over eighteen years of age. In nine states,⁴⁷ legislation had been submitted but failed to pass. Projected measures awaited disposition in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania, and special committees had been established in Rhode Island and Vermont to study the effects of comics. The activities of state legislatures only reflected the prejudice of public opinion faced by the new industry association. On November 21, 1954, the Gallup Institute of Public Opinion released the results of a survey which questioned popular acceptance of the averred connection between crime and comics. Seventy percent of respondents expressed the belief that part of "the blame for teen-age crime can be placed on the reading of comic books . . ." Only 24 percent replied that they believed that comics and delinquency were not related.⁴⁸

Acceptance of the new authority and a visible seal of approval only justified the insistence of some critics that comics were harmful and stigmatized the industry for its years of denial. Association president

⁴⁶California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Texas.

⁴⁷Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah, and Wisconsin.

⁴⁸New York Times, July 11, 1955, p. 24; and George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971, vol. 2: 1949-1958 (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 1284.

Goldwater continued to assert that the majority of publishers joined, not because they needed regulation, but because they hoped to "clean up" the few "that were giving comic books a bad name."⁴⁹ Although several distributors were members of the CMAA, Goldwater contended they would not block distribution of non-code comics because of the action's questionable legality. Despite Goldwater's assurances, the ACLU questioned many of the code provisions as restrictive beyond their professed intent of protecting children from violence and bloodshed and opposed the establishment of "rigid . . . standards to which all publishers are constrained to abide."⁵⁰ In a questionnaire which he circulated among distributors, William Gaines described the industry code as "'what our forefathers came to America to escape.'"⁵¹ Despite his entreaties they refused to distribute EC comics without a CCA seal. Near the end of 1954, Gaines agreed to join the regulatory group. However, the decision was a bitter one. According to the publisher, he "had to choose between closing our offices . . . or join this censorship body."⁵² Even with the seal, Gaines's comics were untouchable and, after a running battle with Murphy for ten months, Gaines

⁴⁹Advertising Age, April 4, 1955, p. 76.

⁵⁰"American Civil Liberties Union," in Kingley Widemar and Eleanor Widemar, eds., Literary Censorship: Principles, Cases, and Problems (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1961), p. 82.

⁵¹Jacobs, p. 113; Advertising Age, November 1, 1954, p. 69; and Inglis, p. 120.

⁵²Advertising Age, January 3, 1955, p. 34.

cancelled his comic book line, resigned from the CMAA, and concentrated exclusively on magazine publishing.⁵³

The largest publisher of comic books was also constrained to respond to the code and its implications of acceptability. Although Dell publisher George Delacorte praised the CMAA's efforts, he persisted in his refusal to join the group, citing his earlier ACMP experience. However, the decision to stand outside the influence of the code seal resulted in suggestions that Dell comics were "'bad,'" according to Delacorte.⁵⁴ To offset the criticisms, Dell comics drafted a "Pledge to Parents," which appeared with the March 1955 issues of their comics. The pledge, which coincided with the release of the first CCA-approved comics, assured parents that "'the Dell trademark is, and always has been, a positive guarantee that the comic magazine bearing it contains only clean and wholesome entertainment.'"⁵⁵

Questions of the effectiveness of the new code persisted through its first year of operation, as its efforts provoked both praise and distrust. The CCA and its administrator received endorsements from such groups as the Boy Scouts, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the American Legion, and the St. Louis Council of Parent-Teacher Associations. However, many parents and civic groups remained critical of code-approved publications and challenged the CCA as only a partial and preliminary stage. In its August 1955 appraisal of comic books, the Cincinnati committee

⁵³Jacobs, p. 114.

⁵⁴Advertising Age, February 7, 1955, p. 32.

⁵⁵Ibid.

concluded "comics seem to be growing worse and not better."⁵⁶ The committee reported that 63 percent of all comics rated objectionable or contained some objectionable elements, while the number without objection declined from 41 percent in 1954 to 37 percent in 1955. In contrast, their 1956 rating was guardedly optimistic. The number of comics which were not objectionable totaled 57 percent and those considered objectionable or represented some objection dropped to 43 percent. A comparison of code and non-code comics presented a more unfavorable summary. Of 268 comics reviewed, 203 carried the CCA seal. They judged 105 of these objectionable or some objection, while of sixty-five non-code comics, only ten received the unfavorable ratings.⁵⁷

Continued distrust and suspicion, together with the industry's own purge, also resulted in a decline in the total number of titles, circulation, and revenue. In July 1954, 364 titles were published. By May 1956, the total had dropped to 293. Circulation figures for comic books remained elusive, at best, but Printers' Ink estimated that, in July 1955, monthly sales were only fifty million, compared to an estimated high of ninety million a month in 1953. By the end of 1955, sales had declined an additional ten million copies a month. Printers' Ink, which attributed the erosion to the "progress of the drive to oust horror and terror comic magazines from the stands," commented that sales of "the solid comic

⁵⁶Murrell, "Are Comics Better or Worse?" Annual Rating of Comic Magazines, "Parents' Magazine 30 (August 1955): 48.

⁵⁷Ibid.; and Charles F. Wheeler, "Annual Rating of Comic Magazines," Parents' Magazine 31 (July 1956): 48.

offerings . . . are good . . . the rest of the comics are in the best position ever to gain increasing public acceptance."⁵⁸

The crusade against comic books resulted in no obvious or satisfactory victory for any of its participants. Following the establishment of widespread industry self-regulation and some statutory controls, the process of accumulation of the fragments of triumph began. The General Federation of Women's Clubs equated the drop in sales of crime comics to its long-term campaign against objectionable literature. Other critics recognized the effect of the CMAA and CCA and sought to define the influence which finally resulted in viable self-regulation. Senators Hendrickson and Kefauver credited the publicity accorded their subcommittee hearings and findings with the adoption of the code. Mort Weisinger, an editor for National Comics, attributed the decline in comic circulation to a "grass-roots rebellion against offensive comic books," but believed the New York State Joint Legislative Committee investigations prompted the establishment of the publishers' group.⁵⁹ The movement for regulation was "a spontaneous grass-roots movement," according to T.E. Murphy, author of the Hartford, Connecticut, crusade. Because of pressure from small, non-spectacular local movements and parents, the editor of the Hartford

⁵⁸"Comic Books and Magazines," Printers' Ink, October 21, 1955, p. 321; Ibid., August 24, 1956, pp. 341-342; and New York Times, January 3, 1956, p. 29.

⁵⁹Weisinger, p. 254; New York Times, January 3, 1956, p. 29; Hendrickson, p. 226; U.S., Congress, Senate, 84th Cong., 1st sess., March 18, 1955, Congressional Record, 101: 3183; and Ibid., Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, Juvenile Delinquency (Treatment and Rehabilitation of Juvenile Drug Addicts): Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 173 and S. Res. 303, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956; reprint ed., (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 1.

Courant wrote, "the naked have been clothed; a lot of pistols have been put back in the holsters; horror, terror and sadism have been wiped out."⁶⁰

Enactment of a code of self-regulation enabled the industry to remain victorious in concession. Although they failed in their major goal of preventing outside regulation, the New York statute which affected most publishers only affirmed their resolve. In a fanciful interpretation of the fourteen years of often savage attacks, the CMAA praised its code as the culmination of "years of efforts by its readers to unite the industry in an integrated group for the purpose of advancing the standards and techniques of the medium."⁶¹ Self-regulation as a solution was apparent from the onset of criticism and, as practiced by the individual firms, it had succeeded. However, industry-wide adoption required not only the threat of imminent and irreversible public reaction, but consolidation within the industry. As titles and companies decreased before the economic inevitabilities of anti-comic book drives, the survivors recognized and accepted the realism of a public purge. Because their adoption of a code permitted continued distribution "of the same basic material which had always characterized their product," David Finn, co-founder of Ruder and Finn, public relations counsel to the ACMP, awarded the major share of victory to the publishers.⁶² According to Finn, "it was . . . clear that

⁶⁰T.E. Murphy, "Progress in Cleaning Up the Comics," Readers' Digest 68 (February 1956): 105-106.

⁶¹Facts About Code-Approved Comics Magazines, p. 10.

⁶²Finn, p. 176.

the industry had solved its problem without coming to grips with the basic social issues implicit in its business."⁶³

The odyssey of opposition to the comic book was varied and circuitous, rarely approached directly and even less often with complete resolve. Only in rhetoric was it accorded a status of undisguised menace and the cheap pastimes of children elevated to a status which rivaled the obvious and persistent dangers of the Cold War world. In a time in which there was an abundance of hysteria, it was not unusual to see the pursuit of a new one. In the general climate of suspicion, it would have been more unusual if such a pervasive and dubious triviality as the comic book had been overlooked. Yet, the convictions of many critics were sincere, and at least one never wavered in the ultimate resolve to protect the innocent. The crusade was essential, according to Fredric Wertham, although "there are larger issues in the world today, and mightier matters to be debated. But maybe we will lose the bigger things if we fail to defend the nursery."⁶⁴

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Wertham, "The Curse of the Comic Books," p. 406.