

The head of the U.S. postal service urges every citizen to join a new crusade against mailbox smut directed at our teen-agers

Let's Stop FILTH

by Arthur E. Summerfield
Postmaster General of the United States



THE POST OFFICE Department has declared war on the mailing of obscenity into American homes.

I call upon all citizens — especially the parents of our 20 million teen-age youngsters —

to enlist in this crusade to rid the nation's mails of lewd material soliciting the purchase of vile pictures, slides, films, and related filth.

I wish we could show every American parent these materials, or conduct him through the exhibit we have arranged for members of Congress, law-enforcement officers, and civic leaders. One special alcove of the exhibit hall is reserved for the worst of it. Here, behind thick curtains, we hold confiscated books, paintings, photographs, and statues representing every depraved human appetite. It has to be seen to be believed.

Unless we stop the filth merchants, close to one million children in America will find such material in their family mailboxes this year, carried by the United States postman.

Just how serious is this problem to you and me? To our children? To our communities and our country?

My own feeling is expressed in a statement I made recently before a subcommittee of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee investigating the mailing of obscene and pornographic material:

"It is my deep conviction that one of the most serious moral and social problems in the United States today is the multimillion-dollar mail-order traffic in obscenity."

We can estimate at present that the sale of such material through the mails is running at more than \$500 million a year!

The especially disturbing aspect of this racket is the fact that these purveyors of filth are aiming their attention more and more at children. This is how they work:

First, they get a line of merchandise consisting of filthy cartoons, art studies, comic books, color slides, and perhaps movies in color.

Then they write come-on literature, describing their offerings in the most provocative phrases they can invent to excite the senses of curious teen-agers.

Then they reach out for customers through the U. S. mails. They place dummy ads in inexpensive teen-age and pre-teen publications, offering such items as baseball bats for boys and doll-dress outfits for girls. These attractive and harmless items are offered below legitimate prices and, as a result, thousands of children send in their pennies with their names and addresses. The latter is what the muck merchants seek, a list of adolescent and pre-

adolescent boys and girls with access to money.

Another list for their pandering comes from high-school annuals. Each season these are collected and their thousands of names and addresses used by filth peddlers. Their shameful solicitations are written with special emphasis on teasing and tempting the growing, curious mind.

ONE RAID on a filth firm in New York turned up 17 tons of obscenity ready to be mailed and a list of 100,000 names of prospects, including those of many high-school students.

With their first mailing, in a plain, sealed envelope, they are in business. Their investment is negligible and their profits astronomical.

Inevitably, they get some orders; later, after other mailings, they get reorders. These latter children, girls as well as boys, become their special victims. Follow this chain of events—it could happen to your boy or girl.

After several reorders, a youthful customer is likely to receive a phone call from a woman who says she represents the X Company, that she is looking for a local sales agent, she has heard that he is a live-wire, and she has some new merchandise to show him. Can they talk?

So the boy who answered an innocent ad for a baseball bat, after 18 months or so, may become a small-time filth merchant on his own, with sub-agents working for him, all spreading vile literature and art through the community.

The worst exhibits we have ever confiscated, as a matter of fact, came from the storeroom of a 14-year-old high-school student.

But the story is not finished. Pornography often leads to worse things. Drug pushers have discovered that kids who read for "kicks" are good prospects for another thrill. Somehow, the pusher learns the names of a half-dozen youthful filth peddlers, makes their acquaintance in a drug store, invites them up to his room for a drink, and introduces them to marijuana. Then, offering an even bigger "kick," he persuades them to try a shot of heroin.

In the investigation of armed robbery, extortion, embezzlement, and forgery, authorities continually find that those guilty of such crimes were early collectors of obscene pictures and films.

Sex criminals and sex murderers almost always prove to have a long record of addiction to pornographic and sadistic material. Here again, the blight of such material goes beyond its original mark. Children who have never been exposed to it can nevertheless be victims of sex criminals who have been exposed.

No child is immune. Obscene material is sent to girls as well as boys. It has been sent to orphanages and summer camps. It is addressed to children as young as eight years.

And it is obvious that many children, without

parental attention, fall into the trap of ordering the filth for sale, for smut merchants regard traffic with children as a major part of their highly lucrative business.

THIS MONSTROUS assault can be stopped. I am determined that the Post Office Department will do everything possible to stop it. This determination is shared by our postmasters around the country and by my associates in the department.

But we recognize that the final answer lies in adequate public support. The time for action is now.

As far back as 1865 Congress made it a Federal offense to mail obscene matter. Nevertheless, commercialized pornography has continued to grow.

It has expanded tremendously since World War II.

It has doubled in the past five years alone. There appear to be two basic reasons for this rapidly growing volume:

First, the huge profits realized from a relatively small capital investment; and second, the broad definition of obscenity handed down by certain courts, notably in Los Angeles and New York, where the great bulk of the mail-order business in obscenity and pornography originates.

Over a period of time, these liberal rulings have established virtual sanctuaries in which dealers in obscenity operate with impunity and in defiance of the Post Office Department's efforts to bar their use of the mails or bring them to justice.

Until last year, controlling decisions of the courts held that prosecutions could be carried out only in the districts where materials were put into the mails—which, of course, were the most liberal districts. For years, we in the Post Office urged legislation that would allow prosecution not only at the point of mailing but in the communities where the filth is received—where the actual damage is done—and where citizens should have the opportunity to express their standards of morality and decency.

Such legislation finally was passed by the 85th Congress and signed into law by President Eisenhower last year. We are convinced that it provides an effective weapon for dealing with this problem. The first case following its passage was in Boise, Idaho, and related to mailings of obscene material from California and Oregon. The offenders, a man and his wife, each received a ten-year prison sentence and a fine. Other cases are now pending in the courts.

IT IS in our efforts to make full use of this new legal weapon that the Post Office most needs the cooperation of parents and decent-minded citizens everywhere.

The privacy of the mail is one of our basic American rights. The Post Office Department cannot, and will not, violate this right, even when it

Through the Mails!

has strong evidence that the mail is being used for unlawful purposes.

Therefore, the Post Office can legally identify and take action against violators of the mails only on complaint of citizens who receive such material. We can act only after the recipient of obscene mail has opened it and placed it in the hands of the local postmaster as evidence. This will not involve the addressee in public embarrassment or testimony in court. The law is clear, as is our duty, but we must have evidence of this illicit material being received through the U. S. mail.

Unfortunately, smut merchants make profits which enable them to retain high-priced lawyers adept at hamstringing, delaying, and confusing court action until their clients go free or receive only small prison terms or fines. By getting off lightly, the peddlers can move back into their racket under a new name, in short order.

They are also experts at sounding wounded cries about "censorship," "freedom of the press," and "civil liberties." And all too often they are able to find well-meaning persons to take up their cry and carry on their insidious battle.

Don't be deceived. This is cynical nonsense. Preventing the peddling of pornographic poison to children is no more a violation of civil liberties than is preventing the sale of liquor or dope to children.

The community which does not fully punish those guilty of any of these crimes is tragically failing its duty.

Accompanying this article you will find the steps you can take to help your community clean up this mess. Act promptly! Act vigorously!

I pledge that the Post Office Department will lead the way. And I am confident that when the American people are fully aware of the vicious extent of the challenge, they will fight this battle through to certain victory.

This Is What You Can Do

1. If obscene material arrives in your mailbox, save all material received, including the envelope and enclosures.
2. Report the matter immediately to the local postmaster and turn the material over to him, either in person or by mail.
3. Actively support members of Congress and community officials in their efforts to help bring this racket to an end.



Drawing by Edmund Duffy