

Film as Historical Document: The Hollywood Production Code Era
by Kelly Williams
History and Politics on Film
with Mark Soderstrom
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Utilizing film as a document for historical investigation or sociological investigation isn't as simple as it seems. As high-school teacher Ron Briley states, "visual literacy is necessary in our media-saturated society, and the visual elements of a film require investigation," (Briley, 217). The images won't just climb onto your lap and explain themselves. Viewing film is an active process that requires the viewer be aware of a number of factors, including being "more conscious of visual manipulation," and also to view them "in historical context as a means by which [one] may gain some new insights into American history and culture," (Briley, 218). In other words, film is a historical document in itself. It can provide a lens onto another time. For example, within the framework of film as historical document, "it is essential to consider what groups were left out of Hollywood's conception of the American consensus...neglected and stereotyped ethnic groups as well as sexism in film," and I would also add homosexuals as a neglected and stereotyped group (Briley, 219). Consensus, better known as Cultural consensus, is the unspoken agreement between peoples of a nation or area of the world in which they form behavior, values and expressions. Briley reminds us that "issues of race and gender are most essential to the examination of conflict and consensus," (Briley, 219). These issues are most essential because they help historians to examine the path of race and gender. In the following pages, I will review a brief history of the Production Code Era (1934-1955) and the social consensus of the United States, and also look at how political and social tensions helped to form and were formed by the era's films. Films of particular interest are those that can be labeled as nationalist drama and those that hold the quintessential gangster images.

Spaces of time do not manifest themselves apart from the times that came before them and are not separable from the times to which they lead. The decades of the Production Code Era are no different. Those years were informed by a long history and a blend of experiences that

built upon each other, culminating in the eventual rejection of the Code that they built. Hollywood is an interesting place to view these changes from. Richard Maltby tells us, “Hollywood’s ideological self-positioning obliged it to address cultural common denominators in an affirmative vision of national community, inventing the consensus that it claimed to be addressing,” and, “the movies themselves were textual manifestations of that debate as well as the textual evidence around which it was conducted,” (Maltby, 576). Maltby is suggesting that Hollywood envisioned itself as the transmitter of an ideological version of America. Through the cinema, they could spread a message through indirect dialogue with the audience. They created the ideal in images and transmitted it to the people they knew would want to copy what they saw, as they learned through ticket sales. Box office receipts were and are the heaviest influence on what films are produced.

Maltby’s use of the word *claimed* is important in the second meaning of his statement. It clarifies that Hollywood’s ideological vision may not have been the ideological vision of other groups; groups who also wished to “invent a consensus.” This fundamental difference is the main reason that there was debate over the images the movies presented. For instance, Lary May reminds us that “the rebellious views of racial minorities, women and youth had remained linked to comedy or deviancy in films of the twenties,” (May, 31). These themes were considered taboo and depending on their handling could result in a backlash to the film company who made a bad decision. Things were not very much different in the thirties. “In the 1930s, the cry was not so much for radical reform as for a restoration of the values of security and Anglo-Saxon Americanism,” (May, 13). Such values are what created the social consensus of the time, and was the white Anglo-Saxon patriarchy of years past. As such, it appears that the ideology of the twenties fed into the ideology being pushed in the thirties. However, this continuance reaches

farther back than 1920. Frances Couvares, in a review of Lee Grievson's Policing the Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth Century America, states that "between 1907 and 1915...emerged not only the durable stylistic conventions of classic Hollywood film but also cinema's social function and the methods devised to police it," and also, "the fundamental shape and function of the cinema were established during the period," (Couvares, 65). Even farther back than that, the model from the-turn-of-the-century was based on Victorian social fundamentals. The Hollywood film industry was working with a model built on the ideological consensus (social and political) from before the turn-of-the-century and modified to accommodate some of the experiences since, such as the loosening of strict roles for women in the 1920s and also the jarring effects of The Great Depression that questioned the class structure. May points out that "the coming of the Great Depression delegitimized the film formula," (May 30). What May means is that the consensus they had formerly been selling to their audiences was no longer applicable in light of the experiences. Audiences' attitudes had changed with the economic debacle. They were looking for an explanation and someone or something to blame.

Class issues were not the only concern of the American people, though. For instance, film themes were heavily influenced by one of the prime concerns of the nineteen-thirties: "The political influence of the depression in Europe was a turn toward authoritarianism with fascist governments in Germany, Italy and Spain; Stalin in the Soviet Union, and strong left vs. right polarization in such western democracies as France and England. Could it also happen in America?" (Briley 222). With the collapse of the United States economy and the average citizen's confidence, they were left to wonder if their democracy was also about to collapse and be replaced by a similar authoritarian regime. Some may have even wondered if the economic

collapse was a sign of that having already happened. Some were now suspicious of those in power having subverted the economy in order to set up a new regime

The many changes that affected American society in the 1930s also affected the Production Code era through the 1950s. For instance, “the growing public acceptance of Freudian psychoanalysis would set the stage for film reviewers’ responses in the 1950s and early 1960s,” (Noriega, 25). These phenomena suggest the power of film not only as art form, but also as a communication tool, which can be utilized in both educational endeavors and historical research. Also, reviews of those films can serve as educational and historical documents.

An interesting example of film review as historical document is Eric Johnston’s 1947 write up in which he attempts to postulate the effect cinema will have on the people of the future. Johnston states at the outset of his piece that “The power of the motion picture as an instrument of culture and education is...immeasurable,” (Johnston, 98). Many years later, Lary May reviews classical cinema and its stars in light of the cultural inspiration Johnston saw them supplying their audiences with in his time: “film idols presented national models as leisure experts,” because they were “freed from any nearby reminders of social responsibility, in areas cleansed through vice crusades, the stars could create a new, uplifted life without the inhibitions of the past,” (May, 190). May suggests that through the sanitized and homogenous images, the audiences were exposed to what could be and often attempted to mirror the lifestyle of the film industry. He also argues that the West coast, through the image of Los Angeles, became a new “frontier [that] symbolized freedom from the hierarchical, industrial East,” (May, 183) and being that the heart of the film industry was located there, “Hollywood kept alive a key cultural myth... [although] the frontier was gone...one of the main utopian aspirations in American life,” through the promise of the film industry it gained new life, (May, 197). Though the physical frontier had

been conquered, there were intangible frontiers yet to be explored, such as social problems that barred certain groups from moving beyond the borders of convention. In this setting, “the movie folk could be universally loved because they were not socially powerful: they were purely a status group. Unlike politicians or manufacturers, they did not hold authority over large groups of employees or constituents...The force of the stars as popular idols lay in their leisure, rather than work lives...[and] that they rose from meager beginnings,” (May, 197). The stars were the epitome of what it meant to be free. They had success and were exceedingly glamorous. All of those points touch on the widely held ideology of American society.

May sees the cinematic world as providing a social consensus to the American public, one that had nationalistic pride at its heart and taught that public how to achieve the lifestyle through agreement with their ideology. He goes on to state, “the stars offered a number of solutions to modern problems...how to adjust to corporate order,” to name one, (May, 197). After The Great Depression, there were widely held class resentments which needed to be nullified before those resentments caused greater confrontations. Through the images on the screen “consumption on a mass level showed that resentment of the rich could be lessened...men and women would work for money to buy the trappings of the good life,” (May, 199). For example, May proposes that the population could “indulge in a DeMille type home, which promised compensations for both sexes for the limitations and frustrations of work and civic life...despite the criticism implicit in many films, much of the modern economy would run on the same tracks as the movies, gaining steam from the unfulfilled promise of a moral or economic revolution...with this, modern mass culture truly had been born,” (May, 236). In other words, though Hollywood criticized the bankers for the collapse of the economy, they were able

to manipulate the *American Dream* to still read that hard work can achieve those goals, and that straying from this belief was the reason for any failure.

Johnston reminds his readers that “the motion picture is, of course, an instrument of *mass entertainment*,” (Johnston, 98). I find this statement used in such a way as to divest the power of cinema of any sinister ends, such as a disclaimer. However, other forms of mass entertainment at the time, novels and the theater, were not viewed as a danger to the audiences they served. Johnston states that theater was not censored like film because people could not get to the traditional theaters, which were usually only in major cities. In the early part of the twentieth-century, travelling to the city to go to a show was an expensive affair, and also time consuming with only slow sources of transportation available. For entertainment, film and cinematic outlets were a low-cost-low-budget boon to the distant masses, and so they enjoyed the cinema often and it reached many more people than novels or plays. Then, Johnston contradicts himself in this defense when he says that “there was no snobbishness in the fact that Americans in years past were deprived of the chance to see” big name actors of the stage (Johnston, 99). He cites only geography as the issue, but then goes on to explain how expensive an affair it was to make the trip (Johnston, 99). In the same article, Johnston conversely raises cinema to the level of a great art, powerful in its ability to recount history and spread literature to the masses. He adds the very grandiose statement: “The potentiality of the motion picture is equally great as an instrument for securing world understanding and its more important by-product—peace,” (Johnston, 102). Johnston is hinting at the use of film as propaganda, which he would have seen quite a lot of during the Second World War. His assertion is actually a very linear result of that propaganda and a sample of how successful it was.

Johnston fails to reveal how filmmakers often took liberties with literature and history, though he does make a minor mention of the regulations filmmakers were pressed to abide in order to ensure a *wholesome* product (Johnston, 99). In discussing adaptation, Johnston is quick to state: “there are, without a doubt, times when the amendments and alterations could have been dispensed with, but for the most part such criticism is based on a lack of understanding that the motion picture is a distinct form of art unto itself,” (Johnston, 101). *Art unto itself* is insufficient in describing adaptation, but Johnston was working in a time that film theory was yet a fledgling practice and adaptation theory mostly non-existent. A book does not easily transfer to another medium of art. Combined with the restrictions of the code and expectations of the audience, there were even further hurdles to surmount.

In recounting the beneficial effects of film, Johnston reminds his readers that films turn the audience to the source material and resultant spinoff material for more, (Johnston, 98, 100). He says, “the radio is entitled to tremendous credit in stimulating interest in good music, but to hear is one thing; to hear and to see is quite another,” (Johnston, 100). The combination of visual and auditory stimulation woven around a narrative give a singular experience that only film can accomplish, (Johnston, 100). He goes on to water-down his enthusiasm: “the motion picture industry, like all other things man-made, makes its mistakes; its judgment is not perfect; its productions are not consistently excellent,” (Johnston, 101). This is to say, the power and scope of film was exercised by flawed beings whose egos tended to limit the result of their work. Johnston counsels his readers, “it is easy and it is also very human to criticize something one personally does not like,” (Johnston, 101). This statement reminds the reader that much of a critique is based on personal tastes.

It could be argued, that Johnston tries to tamp down any fears that sinister forces worked behind the scenes of film, and also to lessen the value of film for those who feared that its power was too great. This review is clearly excited about the power of film as the source of an American consensus, and also reveals some of the social tensions at the time. Johnston's waffling is an indication of the ambivalence felt by the public and reviewers regarding film's role in society or its usefulness.

From early in cinematic history, social reform groups took notice of this new communication tool: "certain elites were anxious about the cinema," and reformers quickly sought social controls to limit the effect of film (Couvares, 65). Then, with "the advent of sound...[studios] generated films that officials saw as capable of reversing the basis of cultural authority from the top to the lower classes," (May, 62). Characters were modeled after real life images (the working man and the boss) and were often sympathetic to the average working man. With sound, this average working man image could now speak the words that his real life counterpart longed to speak and possibly incite him to action. May says, "the power of the talkies to strike 'deeply home' continued as producers created films that utilized sound to create characters who challenged inherited visions of art and civilization," (May, 64). No longer were the elite the soul arbiters of culture. May describes the cinematic themes of this time: "*timely, topical, but not typical*...along with a shift to *realism*," (May, 65). The cinema was reflecting the American back at him or herself, and reaffirming what they felt and experienced in their everyday lives. One common theme from which film drew was the top news stories of the days, such as high profile court cases. Couvares makes note of the 1906-7 portrayal of the "Thaw-

White¹ murder and sex scandal,” which reform groups immediately wanted sanitized and muted even in the newspaper (Couvares, 65). Steven J. Ross, author of Movies and American Society, puts their fears into perspective with the economic crisis of the 1930s: “unhappy with the ability of politicians and business leaders to solve the crisis, a wide variety of citizens began questioning the dominant values and institutions of American society,” (Ross, 128). Ross’s model can apply to the classical film period as well, as there were economic issues throughout the early part of the 20th century, like in widening income gaps. In light of the coverage of the Thaw-White case and tense class relations, plus a desire to keep sex off topic, reform groups demanded censorship, believing that a return to Victorian moral values would save the nation. Their voice was loud and in the ensuing years, “the problem was tackled by the establishment of an industry-wide censor,” (May, 204).

In the early days, filmmakers preferred to deal with reform groups by censoring themselves, establishing the 1907-9 National board of Censorship (Couvares, 65). The National Board of Censorship was the first structure the industry used for self-regulation. It was made up of “volunteers from civic groups, [who] had performed this regulatory function with some success until its effectiveness was severely damaged by the public controversy over *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915,” (a film that fanned the fires of racial tensions and opened old national wounds in attempting to rewrite the history of the Civil War Era) (Maltby, 558). Other issues on their plate included: “nineteenth-century temperance melodrama (over exaggerated musical dramas), the problem of what was then termed *deviant masculinity* (homosexuality), the crucial tension between reformers’ educative and repressive tendencies, and the equally important tensions between maternalist moral authority and patriarchal gaze,” (Couvares, 65). Richard Maltby

¹ According to the PBS website, the case was one of class issues with the added scandal of a love triangle. Uruburu, Paula, *The American Experience: The Love Triangle*, PBS, 1999-2003, accessed November 7, 2012, www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/century/sfeature/sf_interview.html

notes, in this era, “the revolt from Victorianism was by no means confined to deliberate acts of provocation in books and on stage,” (Maltby, 575). He means that cinema was just one of the many avenues that Americans were critical of conventions. This often resulted in film being an “ideological subversion of the precursor text,” (Maltby, 570). The text wasn’t just the source novel or short story, but also society at large.

The cry for censorship was due to the fear of reform groups who believed the average citizen was an impressionable person who may develop *ideas* after viewing a film, and attempt to act out the screen images for themselves, (Maltby, 576). Thus, a long list of legal decisions affected the film industry despite self-regulation, and efforts to insist on their rights of free speech. For example, there was the Sims Act of 1912 (the first enforcement of censorship) and the “Mutual decision of 1915, which defined movies as mere commerce and thus unworthy of First Amendment protection, a ruling that stood until 1952,” (Couvares, 65-66). The Mutual decision had a strong effect on cinema, “ruling that movies were ‘a business pure and simple...not to be regarded...as part of the press of the country or as organs of public opinion’,” (Noriega, 22). It was based off of popular political ideology of the time: “Progressive opinion that *pure* entertainment—amusement that was not harmful to its consumer—was commodity comparable to the pure meat guaranteed by the Food and Drug Administration,” (Maltby, 558).

Maltby goes onto vaguely cite, “two other short-lived trade associations had subsequently sought to resist the implementation of federal and state censorship legislation by pledging themselves to voluntary codes of practice over screen content,” (Maltby, 559). It was obvious the industry did not want government or some other organization coming in to tell them how to do their job. Maltby then goes on to explain just who was behind all these calls for censorship and sheds some possible light on why the film industry tried to self-regulate instead: “organized

Catholicism was a prominent influence on the mediation of film content from the early 1920s. The activities of the Legion of Decency in 1934 are properly understood not as a sudden outburst of indignation but rather as the culmination,” (Maltby, 572). The Legion of Decency was focused on making cinema adhere to their ideology, despite what the box office takes told the industry would sell.

The box office was another consideration that caused the film industry to self-regulate. The loss of income was a very real threat from either end of the argument. If they offended their audience or these legions with unsuitable images, they faced serious monetary loss and possibly legal recourse (Maltby, 557). There were several approaches the industry could take. One of the most common took place in the adaptation process. In order to protect Americans from the content of uncensored books they planned to adapt, the stories were changed to more acceptable and muted topics (Maltby, 557). In Maltby’s words, the process of censorship was as such: “the regulations it devised to render objectionable books or plays unobjectionable sought both to maximize commercial advantage and to distribute an affirmative cultural vision,” (Maltby, 558).

The process of Hollywood adaptation led to many works adapted in name only, “bearing only the vaguest resemblance to the original,” and causing tensions for the industry in other areas. Authors often sought legal recourse, along with the publishing companies who supported them and what was viewed as their vanity (Maltby, 554). Because of their special status as objects of free speech, books were privileged a different set of principles than film. Therefore, filmmakers soon found that “the novel was exactly the kind of literary object that presented the industry’s adaptors with its most difficult problems. Its burdensome length...detailed actions and its thematic concerns were inappropriate” if exhibited to large audiences in a cinematic form (Maltby, 564). Though the industry wanted to cash in on the success of a book, the novel’s

privileged stature (it could present subjects of sexuality, class tensions, race or other contested issues) made that process very tricky. Books were less censored due to the belief that they had a limited place in culture, whereas film was not viewed as so limited in reach (Maltby, 557).

Regardless of the hardship, the material the film industry purchased was vast and a good deal of it never has made it to full production, due to problems in the adaptation process, one of which was complying with the censorship that was unique to the film industry (Maltby, 560).

Therefore, authors who fought the code and industry found themselves on the losing end of the argument, because often there was little resemblance to the source material left to make any substantial claim (Maltby, 565). Also, the film industry was heavily involved in creating the national consensus and had money and leverage on their side. Maltby says, “the definition of the profession of authorship had already come into conflict with the brute economics of Hollywood on several occasions in the 1920s,” (Maltby, 566). Also, trial judges usually sided with what they viewed as the welfare of the viewer over the rights of the author and their property (Maltby, 567). In response, “writers repeatedly accused producers of timidity and conformism in their dependence on convention,” trying to leverage their art to a space above fickle social mores, though they failed to do so in the courts (Maltby, 568). Maltby reminds the reader,

“The discursive framework of censorship has been one of the mechanisms by which Hollywood has been blamed for what it is not, rather than blamed, endorsed, or simply acknowledged for what it was. But those who have castigated Hollywood as imitative rather than progressive, repressive rather than liberating, have seldom explained how it could have occupied any location in American cultural topography other than its assigned place as the primary instrument of the mass culture against which modernist cultural leadership and innovation defined itself,” (556).

The film industry is a unique industry on the American landscape, subject to just as many unique exceptions, options and standards. This is the basis for many of the misunderstandings between publishing and film, but also between reform groups and the audience at large. It is hard to discern though, if the film industry purposely blurred the lines, in order to do as they pleased with the story material, feeling they had purchased the rights and could therefore do whatever they wanted at that point, or if they truly had no choice but to change a large portion. It is also understandable that the authors, though they sold rights, were loath to really let those rights go. However, when Maltby adds, “the industry’s blunt commercial interest was in occupying both a mediating position between authors and audiences and a cultural median point, in being a subject of interest but not of concern, a topic for conversation but not action,” may help to clarify (Maltby, 570). From this statement, you get the sense that it was more about how the cinema was a money making industry first and foremost, and it appears they thought they could cut their losses by ignoring the concerns of the authors who supplied their material.

Returning to the 1930s a, The Great Depression had a nearly immeasurable effect on the film industry. May puts it best when he says, “The advent of the Depression...collapsed the old barriers that allowed the lures of mass culture to move from the private to the public domain, altering both in the process,” (May, 59). With the threats from special interest groups and the economic uncertainty of their future, the moguls had no choice but to comply with the cries for censorship. In the previous decade, “The Big Eight hired William Harrison Hays in 1921 to run the Association,” which resulted in the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of American (MPDAA) in the following year (May, 179, Ross 78). MPPDA’s “public relations policy was indicative of the larger project of culturally legitimating the amusement industry it represented. This strategy presumed a degree of cultural consensus,” (Maltby, 559). Cultural consensus was

the main reasoning for censoring any material, because certain groups believed they should be the source of the consensus. Yet, as previously stated, the standards the film industry were held to did not initially extend to books or plays, showing the hypocrisy in the system (Maltby, 559, 571).

“The MPPDA’s first regulation of motion pictures content was instituted in June 1924 and dealt exclusively with the problem of adaptation” and came to be known as “The Formula,” (Maltby, 561). The *Formula* refers to a process of cleaning up material to make it palatable for mass consumption, and was already in wide practice by this time. The regulation simply sought to formalize the process in use (Maltby, 561). This is the structure that is commonly referred to as the Hays Office. Ross describes in great detail how the office came into being and coordination between Mr. Hays and church representatives: in meetings with church leaders from December 1929 through January 1930, “the basic tenets of the code were accepted,” (Ross, 105). Several of the authors quoted above describe Hays as a church man, and there is an implication that this process was not much of a battle. However, Ross frames the scene with the nuances of war, inviting an image of a battle weary film industry: Hays “accepted the terms of surrender dictated by the church and its legions,” (Ross, 99). Terms *dictated by the church leaders* were “that ‘no picture should lower the moral standards of those who see it’,” (Ross, 104). It may seem a simple request, but the ambiguous state of what specifically constituted *morally lowering* made the job of filmmakers very hard, as they leapt over hurdles for the offices seals of approval.

Despite the adversity they would pose, the Hays Office was created by the industry to “ensure that its product was acceptable to audiences in all parts of the country and abroad,” but with an eye on industry coffers (Maltby, 573). They wanted to be sure the product they produced

could be delivered to as many ticket buying people as they could reach. To accommodate the censors, filmmakers held special regard for the *sensibilities* and conventions of certain sub groups of the American culture. For example, Maltby says, “white Southerners received disproportionate attention,” meaning that their ideology was taken into greater consideration when making a film than any other (Maltby, 573). This explains a lot when the rewriting of the American Civil War commonly took place on the screen, or the Southern secessionists were shown as the nobler of the two sides. The use of politics in such a manner became popular because, “convinced that films could educate, the purpose of the code and the PCA was to use popular entertainment films to reinforce conservative moral and political values,” (Ross, 119). The moral and political attitudes of white southern males became the attitudes of the films released, regardless of their truths. The office was also used to enforce industrial status quo. For example, “Hays coordinated a unified front against labor unions in the studios, quelling a number of strikes in the late teens and twenties,” (May, 179). With the White Southern Male ideology as his basis, “Hays promised to maintain ‘the highest possible moral and artistic standards in motion picture production’,” (Ross, 78).

The effectiveness of this system was constantly in question, as Maltby explains: “much of the running public debate over the regulation of the industry concerned itself with how effectively Hays had made good on his promises, but the industry had very early accepted that it needed to convince these politically influential groups of its respectability,” (Maltby, 577). “By 1927 the association had extended its mechanisms for the regulation of content by compiling a code to govern production,” (Maltby, 562). With actual rules of conduct on paper, the Hays Office believed that it would hold more sway over the artists it purported to regulate. This is also the production code that became standard through the 1950s. It seems that the code, even at this

stage was mostly ineffectual, as “Hays initiated a further elaboration of the code, which after prolonged internal discussion emerged in April 1930 as *A Code to Maintain Social and Community Values in the Production of Silent, Synchronized and Talking Motion Pictures*,” (Maltby 562). Then in 1934, “rather than risk possible state and federal censorship as well as anticipated boycotts by the ten-million member Catholic Legion of Decency, Hollywood studios proffered strict self-regulation, empowering the Hays Office...to enforce its four-year-old Production Code,” (Noriega, 22). Chon Noriega is telling his readers that the code was still not considered strong enough and was being asked to reign in filmmakers or the film industry would feel it at the box office. Yet there is no proof that the groups crying for censorship had, as yet, made good on their threats. Was this due to blowing their influence out of proportion? Had they been satisfied with one of their own infiltrating the board (Hays)? But, to imply that a small group has little power over a larger group is historically inaccurate, considering the response in to the depression resulted in the National Socialist Party in Germany. Or, one could point to the much more beneficial insurrection of colonists in the beginning days of the United States. Such historical examples could have informed the decisions the moguls made in self censoring their work.

Remarking on his experience, Hays did not think the film industry was capable of self-regulation to any positive affect (Maltby, 558). From the viewpoint of critics, it was successful in preventing very specific social themes, but far more successful in gaining Hollywood a reputation for mutating other art and not creating much of its own. As Maltby says, “on the assumption that the Hays Office’s function was to prevent particular kinds of representations from reaching the screen, industry censors have been blamed almost as frequently as the producers for Hollywood’s failure to transcend itself,” (Maltby, 556). It appears that the Hays

Office was doomed from the start. As film moved from the margins of art to the center, it grew out of the short-pants the regulators and censors had put it in. It was naturally only a matter of time before the code would be discarded and more mature themes would be possible to approach on screen.

Before the film industry could show more mature themes, they were in the business of preventing the image of extramarital sexuality and homosexuality, demonizing, pathologizing, and likening such behavior to Nazis during the Second World War and later to communists in the Cold War. Andrea Slane writes an eye-opening critique of both German and American film in [A Not so Foreign Affair: Fascism, Sexuality and the Cultural Rhetoric of American Democracy](#). Under the Production Code, censors “explicitly disallowed the portrayal of illegitimacy, extramarital relations, and perversion but allowed some handling of these topics as a means of moral education as long as the characters were ultimately punished for their sexual misdeeds,” (Slane, 55). Returning to Noriega’s piece, the author states that “although the code placed numerous restrictions on sex, it was most emphatic about homosexuality,” adding that it was usually termed as “sex perversion” or “corruption of sex,” and further informs the reader that it was the longest running of all the codes, forbidding homosexuality on the big screen until October 1961, (Noriega, 22). This code, much like the other codes, depended on the viewing. What I mean by this is that it depended on the perspective and type of sexuality that was portrayed. For instance, much more so than lesbianism, “male homosexuality was seen as an individual problem,” that society needed to cure. It was seen as a psychological malady, as Noriega describes in the context of psychoanalysis used in film reviews: “In the film reviews, homosexuals were more often described as *abnormal* than *immoral* and homosexuality was considered a *condition, practice, and social problem*, rather than a *tragedy and evil*. The medial

framework opened up a space for sympathy and tolerance, since homosexuality was a *disease* that could be cured or at least isolated... In discussing the existence of the *problem*, film reviewers and others began to speak about homosexuals as members of a distinct sexual group, if not community, rather than as tragic individuals,” (Noriega, 33). This was a slight change from the installment of the code, to the advent of American psychological practices toward, and finally the end of the code era. Lesbianism was viewed with the perspective of male fantasy that imbued it with voyeuristic eroticism and a case can be made that it was not quite treated the same as male homosexuality (Noriega, 27). This is not to say that lesbians were not considered to have a psychological defect by certain ideologues, but that this defect was perhaps all right, because it did not subvert the patriarchy of society within the heterosexual male fantasy, which I will discuss shortly.

The code “also proscribed the positive portrayal of American institutions of government, justice and church as well as any foreign nation with which the United States was on friendly terms,” (Slane, 56). Those nations and peoples viewed as enemies of the United States suffered very negative portrayals on film. “Issues of Democracy and fascism lead logically to a discussion of American foreign policy in the 1930s and American’s entrance into World War II... [change] from isolationism to involvement,” (Briley, 222). Briley is talking about the use of propaganda films to achieve the policies of the American government. This was not unique to the United States, being employed by both the Axis powers and the Allied forces. In film, certain story formulas were more useful to the project than others, though a review of the period’s film shows that they managed to sneak in jabs everywhere. I would call the most common type nationalist film, or nationalist melodrama, for its use of emotion based propaganda. Homosexual labeling was one of the tools of this form of propaganda, using it to show how evil the enemy was

through the consensus that non-conformist sexual practices were the purview of the mentally ill and evil. As Slane puts it: “Fascism was theorized as perverse through the invocation of sadism, masochism, homosexuality, and unresolved Oedipal dynamics,” (Slane, 115).

Social psychology was commonly used to explain the reasoning behind the rise of fascism in Germany and the new society that was being constructed by them, (Slane, 114). Slane tells her readers: “Freud’s theories of social and individual psychology have been by far the most influential of the body of work analyzing the fascist mind,” (Slane, 114). However, “the dominant American version of Freud did not include a critique of the patriarchal family,” (Slane, 117). The American version of Freud took what it needed to justify the sexual ideology of the American consensus (sex within marriage only, marriage between one man and one woman only, and subservience of the woman to the man always). Instead of questioning this system, its failures were blamed on the matriarch of the family. Slane explains the ideas behind this construction: “the background to this concept of the bad mother derives from,” the idea that, “women were...responsible for the ‘moral education of their citizen-sons,’ a role considered essential to democracy. In the course of the early nineteenth century, the belief in original sin was replaced with a faith in childhood innocence and susceptibility to influence, and so mothers could be blamed for their children’s failures,” (Slane, 117). Another great change in American society which may have been at the heart of this construction was the changing role of women in the workforce, during and after the war. With men vacating their jobs to participate in the military, women were called upon and eventually proved they were “clearly competent to do men’s work,” (Briley, 227). Once men returned from military service, the women were still asked to leave those jobs despite their performance, and made to feel guilty if they balked. To aid in the transition, “it was necessary to create the feminine mystique to convince women that they

wanted to get out of the work force and back into the home,” (Briley, 227). However, this shift in roles created a dramatic change in how society conducted itself. Lary May discusses the post war period and how the change was manipulated to maintain the status quo: “the collapse of barriers also serves to reconstruct inherited sexual roles, using that transformation to include the vitality of the new woman in public life,” (May, 35).

Returning to the genre most associated with this, Slane explains the formula of Nationalist Melodrama films: “like ordinary melodramas, nationalist melodrama is characterized by plots in which the nuclear family is threatened by an external force, the life or chastity of an innocent is endangered, or the family is potentially destroyed from within by the bad behavior of its members...explicitly codes these plots in political terms...threats to the nation, the life and chastity of innocents represent the nation’s future and ideals, and internal dissonance must be quelled in the name of national unity,” (Slane, 23). She goes on to say, “the social conservatism of the outcome of most melodrama (nationalist or not) organizes narrative tensions in that social transgressions indulged in during the course of the film are typically punished by its end,” (Slane, 27). This film formula, according to Slane, was “typical of Nazi cultural expression but also that the genre’s emphases on family issues and women’s place therein lie at the core of Nazi ideology,” (Slane, 27). Slane also describes it in way that defines fascism from the inside out: “rather than being privatized, family life and the personal dramas it entails become political in the Nazi melodrama: personal drama is collective drama,” (Slane, 40). However, this formula was not linked to Nazi fascism alone. Slane directly connects this same ideology to the Allies: “the Nazi regime enforced a kind of prudishness that was in step with conservative Christian morality rather than diametrically opposed to it, as much as U.S. and British wartime rhetoric would have it,” (Slane, 45). Nationalist melodrama was therefore critiqued on biased perspective.

Slane explains this bias: in the U.S. before the war, “conservative critics were often rather temperate in their criticism of the Nazis until war compelled them to become more pointed,” (Slane, 45). In other words, critics were fine with the Nazi images, until they were all but forced to decry them as the epitome of evil. Then, they were quick to note “fascism’s primary difference, and hence its threat to democracy, is the obliteration of the private sphere,” (Slane, 45). They had to clearly define the difference between the two governments, in order to squash the similarities that could connect them and undermine the authority of the patriarchal order. “Both Nazism and [the] conservative form of democracy are fundamentally patriarchal,” (Slane, 129). Slane lists how they were able to accomplish this: “the rhetorical tactics for countering Nazism included the deployment of sentimentalism and religiosity to claim that Nazis were inhumane, cold, calculating, and soulless or the deployment of Christian moral order to claim that Nazis were psychologically disturbed or morally depraved,” (Slane, 53). Moral depravity ranged from homosexuality to having babies outside of marriage, though it is “difficult to discern how much of the reportage on Nazi sexual practices was printed to help sell magazines as much as it speaks to genuine moral outrage,” (Slane, 52-54). This harkens back to the patriarchal gaze toward lesbians. It’s all right as long as it doesn’t undermine the authority of the consensus. For instance, “a marked woman... is both sexually and politically disreputable, her sexual impropriety interchangeable with sedition,” (Slane, 126).

“Gay and lesbian film critics have employed a wide range of interpretive strategies to recuperate a history of homosexual images from the censored screen,” (Noriega, 21). Some changes in the law assisted in this recuperation. In 1934, “a federal appellate court rejected the precedent set in an 1868 English case, *Queen v. Hicklin*, that published texts could be censored on the basis of isolated passages that were believed to have the power to *deprave and corrupt*.”

The decision opened the way for more sexually explicit literary production,” (Noriega, 22). With this freedom, writers could reclaim what could not be stated on film and state it in their reviews or novels. For instance, “reviews would generate interest on the basis of reading against the grain of censorship,” meaning that the audience would get the book and look for what was *cleansed* from the film version (Noriega, 20). Also, depending on the level of education or particular experience of a viewer, what was supposedly left out could be found still inside the film. However, reviews of the day were not always bent toward reclaiming the space of a marginalized group. Noriega says that “by limiting the description of or comment on the homosexual characters, the film reviews shift the focus from homosexual identity...to homosexuality-as-narrative-device,” (Noriega, 28-29). Some reviewers pushed back on the homosexual identity, making it no more than a literary device and one that supported the consensus. This was “emblematic of what the Production code Administration or Hays Office had done in prohibiting the suggestion of homosexuality,” (Noriega, 20).

Prior to World War II, “the Catholic Church and anti-gay groups “created an atmosphere that made a *conspiracy of silence* preferable even to public condemnation of homosexuality,” (Noriega, 23). If they ignored it, it would go away. “The consensus among film reviewers and society at large that homosexuality was an *unsavory theme*” shows how stifling the anti-gay atmosphere had become, (Noriega, 23). “The *conspiracy of silence* would predominate even during World War II, when manpower requirements meant that the military had to tolerate the million or more homosexuals in its ranks. The war has been likened to a nationwide coming out experience...After the war, however, American society would reaffirm traditional gender roles...a shift that would involve open persecution of homosexuals,” (Noriega, 23). The open persecution manifested itself in propaganda films that termed fascists as homosexuals, thus

creating fear in the minds of the community toward all homosexuals, American or otherwise. In the face of this opposition, literature, as well as scientific studies, continued to treat homosexuality differently than mainstream media outlets and film (Noriega, 24-25). In the area of film reviews, writers “reflected a shift from moral and legal definitions of homosexuality to psychiatric definitions,” (Noriega, 34). Though this suggests there was some form of empathy, homosexual themes on film still only enjoyed two determined stereotypes: that it was a mental disorder, or the result and cause of tragedy (Noriega, 24-25). In speaking about the film *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), Noriega refers to a specific line that infers homosexuality as the cause of the drama, and infers a shift in the portrayal of homosexuals in cinema: “In the changing discourse on homosexuality, the nature of that something and whether or not it was actually missing would come increasingly into question as the laws, social reform movements, sexual norms, and economic structures that underlay the Production Code began to change. In the end, censorship could neither *silence* nor *protect*. Instead, censorship incited and multiplied discourse within the field of *nonfilmic events*: literary sources, film reviews, editorials, and advertisements,” (Noriega, 35). In other words, keeping the image of homosexuality, or any other taboo topic, from the screen started people talking about that which was missing.

Returning to the 1930s, I want to review the image of the gangster on film and how successful the Hays Office was in censoring the glorification of criminal behavior. Right away, Steven J. Ross supplied the major problem that Hays faced in censoring this material. He states that “Gangster films questioned the premises of the American Dream and recast popular ideas about heroes and villains,” (Ross, 163) and that “the popularity of the gangster films illustrated the problems of enforcing the code,” (Ross, 108). Gangsters were not new subject material for cinema, having been used by reform groups seeking a moral cleansing of society by showing

them the fate of non-conformists and criminals. “The fusion of reform and moral revolution also yielded films that challenged racial divisions that thwarted radical politics since the era of Black Reconstruction,” (May 35). “Between 1927 and 1931...the type is basically Anglo-Saxon, aristocratic, polished in speech and bearing, and dressed in formal clothing of the wealthy...so much did the gangster resemble a blue-blood financier that he needed crude, proletarian sidekicks to make his criminality manifest...the early gangster was often an explicit capitalist in his methods,” (Eckert, 21). It was a natural fit to use the gangster in later years to criticize the capitalists that audiences most likely blamed for the Depression.

In the shadow of the Great Depression, the gangster film provided a portrait of moral revolution, which attracted the suffering masses. These films took hold of the reformer’s ideology and used it as a mask to critique society. This was possible because, “in the thirties there was a much closer relation between working-class spectators and what appeared on the screen,” (May, 90). The result was that “characters in some of the most popular films of the early thirties learn that their personal success and individualism have created not progress, but decline,” (May, 66). This is in sharp contrast to the ideology of American Individualism and American Exceptionalism, the consensus that moral crusaders had been hard at work creating and enforcing up to this point. “The new films also interjected into the public domain formerly silenced groups and repressed wishes. Moralists criticized these new films and called for censorship, but nothing could thwart the popularity in the early Depression years of gangsters, ribald ethnic comics, and fallen women. In the past, the middle class saw criminals as the exemplars of racial minorities and deviants who disrupted modern life. But the Italian or Irish criminal in *Scarface* (1932), *Public Enemy* (1931), *Little Caesar* (1931) reversed the

formula...the hoodlum featured in the talking films ‘thirsts primarily for power’,” (May, 68). This was the magnetic theme that a powerless public wanted to view.

Power was not a theme that was limited to the realm of just men. May tells his reader’s “films featuring the rebellious outsider shattered stereotypes in what many saw as truly the most sacred realm of all—that of gender. The gangster rebel was in fact often accompanied by his female counterpart, the fallen woman... [they] were condemned and criticized by moral guardians for undermining the female identity as mother and wife,” (May, 70). Though they were condemned, these roles helped women imagine a life apart from the consensus of traditional female roles in society. These images conveyed an alternate choice to consensus society that reached across all kinds of boundaries. “Fundamental to these converging trends—the rise of the social problem, gangster, fallen woman, and ribald comic films—is a major transformation in mass art. This shift generated renewed cries for stiffer censorship,” (May, 75). This transformation in mass art was the exposure of ideologies that challenged the current structure as it was then understood.

Counter ideologies brought conflict. “Class conflict and implicit criticism of the world of business and finance are unmistakable in these films,” (Eckert, 22). The filmmakers were banking on or making critique of the moneyed class they understood the rest of society blamed for the economic collapse. “The mask of the gangster film, fragile as it was, seems to have provided the right degree of displacement needed at this time for class criticism,” (Eckert, 22). In reality it was an image that was recycled from earlier less positive ideas. A shift in characterization, Eckert notes, may have been because after the stock market crash “public attitudes were suddenly less mild,” (Eckert, 22). The next generation of gangster, as opposed to the gentleman of the twenties, was of “lower-class origins” styled through a “simpleton grin, his

oversize hands and nose, his rough vitality and illiteracy,” (Eckert, 22). From this vantage, the gangster was able to criticize capitalism without attacking real capitalists, but also taking the heat off the wealthy by firmly placing him as a member of a lower class (Eckert 22-23). Thusly, “with official institutions in disarray... film signaled the incorporation of politics and popular arts into remaking the nation. At a time when established institutions continued to exclude racial minorities and women, a new mass culture arose that evoked dreams of a more inclusive modern culture... films evoked the vision of a modernized republic, rooted in citizen action, pluralism, and dreams of contemporary morals and abundance,” (May, 99). On the surface, the gangster represented all that was wrong with America and the source of the economic failure by giving a face to the criminal who undermined American values with his refusal to conform and therefore caused economic hardship through his uncultured and unrefined appetites. The immigrant was also a site of “cultural mixing [and] also suggested the opening up of the class order,” (May 174). There was now upward mobility available to a greater number of people, regardless of their backgrounds. Film, as I have shown, has some basis in the historical and political structure of its respective time. Yet, gangsters were almost always from immigrant groups and they were always looking for the easiest route to the American dream.

Returning to cinematic images of class conflict, “the effect of these operations is to attenuate conflicts at the level of real conditions and to simplify and resolve them at the surrogate levels” of the film, mostly to put out the flames of violent confrontation which could erupt if the people truly understood what had happened in the Crash (Eckert, 11). In other words, Eckert says that “class opposition... is displaced into a number of surrogate conflicts,” (Eckert, 23). These conflicts could be between gender role expectations, or muffled oppositions to the glamorized vision of organized crime. More directly, the confrontation was displaced onto the immigrant or

outsider. “The class criticism displaced upon the gangster’s methods, tastes and acquisitiveness is obscured by his transformation into a sadistic villain who deserves death solely for his cruelty. His exploitive methods, unlike those of the wealthy, are ultimately crude and palpable, and he can be brought to the bar of justice or shot like a mad dog without guilt,” (Eckert, 23).

Displacing the gangster’s actions by dismissing them as the manifestation of mental illness suppressed the power of his image and made him safe for the viewing public at large, containing him within the consensus of right and wrong, and displaying the punishment that came along with breaking away from conformity. It also helped to turn attention away from the corporatist or banker that might have otherwise been in the social focus.

“By 1937 the figure of the gangster had acquired a remarkable symbolic richness. Every personal mannerism and every artifact of this world resonated with meaning,” (Eckert, 21). It is inside of the characterization of the gangster that the above meanings can be found, but not without understanding the history surrounding the period that gave rise to such characters. The gangster was a real life figure, though far less humanized in the nation’s journals and newspapers, whose writers were more focused on sensationalizing, if not demonizing, their stories. Eckert thus introduces the theory of the gangster: “the gangster-racketeer: since he is a heavily stereotyped figure bringing with him not simply the swagger and jargon of dozens of previous incarnations but a specific aura of significances and values, understanding him requires what we might call a *theory of the gangster*,” (Eckert, 10-11). This theory of the gangster can range through all of the forms of theorizing, such as Marxist theory, gender theory, structural theory and especially psychoanalytic theory, popularized in the early half of the twentieth century. Importantly, reception theory can give us a window into the construction of the gangster from the point of view of those who were expected to view him. For example, “equally active are

the conceptions that the gangster is egotistic, ruthlessly acquisitive, and ambitious to control or torment other people...the classic Freudian anal-sadistic,” (Eckert, 22). Eckert touches on a number of other theories within this statement, and this reveals the vast amount of material an audience can be working with in a single viewing. This raises the question of intent on the side of the filmmakers. Did they assume what their audience would understand, specifically choosing signs and symbols they made use of (such as costume, facial expressions, lingo and accents, and even settings). For example, dressing the gangster in high fashion suits was symbolic costuming. The gangster, usually from a lower class, is seen as class cross-dressing. As much as he wants to own these fine garments, they instead mark him stereotypically and create the mental image that the film audiences have had for decades. In addition, this symbolism is a language communicating to the audience in visual terms: the gangster has money, but he’s still low class. Dressing the themes in carefully chosen symbols and language is key to making the desired associations click in the mind of the audience.

Looking at a quote from Eckert, I want to examine if it was possible for the audience to interpret the screen images and make the associations that were suggested in them. “The anal-sadistic formation is appropriate to the real capitalist character, but the emphasis upon sadism to the exclusion of acquisitiveness has an obscuring effect upon the gangster’s identity, since it tells us that the formal clothes, limousines and penthouses are not his goals in life,” (Eckert, 22-23). When viewing films such as *Scarface* (1932), *The Public Enemy* (1931), *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) and *Little Caesar* (1931), I don’t believe it was possible for the average moviegoer to get quite so technical about what it was that they actually saw. However, it was most likely not a huge leap to see the similarities to their own dreams of success, a desire to have the easy life and escape the humiliating control of those in power, especially after the stock market crash. Those

they had viewed as icons of authority and rules (the wealthy capitalists) had turned out to be just criminals, making them question the entire system they labored under. Furthermore, the newspapers and journals had printed articles for many years that gave a clear impression of what a gangster was, but this impression often lead them to believe that they were fighting the establishment that had tried to steal from them first.

Marked Woman (1937) utilizes the gangster to construct a better idea of who was the source of what ailed society, providing a mask for the real criminals. I would even dare say that it carefully veils a critique of corporate oligarchy through Vanning's purchase of all the clubs in the area. I say this because the film "transmits a sense of compassion for the poor and the exploited," who are socially positioned beneath Vanning. The audience can suture their personality to these men and women to connect with the film (Eckert, 20). They can empathize with Bettie Davis's role and her reluctance to cooperate with the authorities, because the authorities had let them down too.

Marked Woman is based on a "trial reported almost daily in the New York Times between May 14 and June 22, 1936...the trial provides a body of real analogues to the fiction of the film," (Eckert, 12). Vanning is the film version of the real life Charles "Lucky Luciano" Luciana (Eckert, 12). Not surprisingly, the filmmakers altered the prostitutes of the real life case to the more guarded title of hostesses, a thinly veiled identity that satisfied censors who would not want prostitutes escaping the punishment the formula demanded (Eckert, 12-13). Vanning is not so lucky, receiving a life sentence for his crimes at the close of the film. It is not surprising that "attempts to blame the gangster for all important civic ills were, of course, abetted by the tabloid exposes of criminals like Luciano," but Eckert thinks this is "short-sighted" to use them as the source of characters like Vanning and that "we must start with the gangsters found in the

films themselves and note their most common traits,” (Eckert 21). Vanning and the other gangsters are stereotypes of the real life criminals they represented. To avoid glorifying such men, they altered him so that “his most important function, however, is to be the exploiter, to cause civic corruption, and to create existential hell,” (Eckert, 23). This sinister quality was the most important shared trait among them and the trait filmmakers could exploit for the consensus. The reason is that his other traits were quite American. It was not criminal to desire nice clothes, a well styled home, cars and other goods. Though the characters in *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy* and *Scarface* all make special note of their achieving such accolades in life, it was not placed as dutiful citizen consumption but as masked greed. In fact, the masked greed was a key to helping the audience suture themselves onto these characters. They did not see it as greed, but instead saw it as the consumption they dreamed of. For example, the hostesses eagerly going through the dresses the street thief brings them and their subsequent enjoyment of the fine garments as compensation for the life they endure. Many people could empathize with these images following the Crash.

Likewise, *The Public Enemy* can teach several things about history. For example, Briley tells us that “the film reflects the nadir and despair of the early depression years and how well the film reflects its own disclaimer that it sought to identify an important social problem and demonstrate that crime does not pay,” (Briley, 220). Briley is speaking of the temperament of the film, the mise-en-scene. The darkness and sparse sets reflect the look and feel of the times. However, the film is more successful at glamorizing the gangster than the straight laced life, as shown through Tom’s brother, (Briley, 220). In these gangster films listed above, there are several scenes that engage in excessive consumption and the joys that it can bring. In contrast to that, losing their success, failing at maintaining their power, results in poverty and possibly

death. This is exemplified in Eddie's downfall and death in the latter half of *The Roaring Twenties*. Also, there is a message that gangsters are not completely without the possibility of redemption. Eddie dies on the steps of a church after he stops the threat to Jean (the woman he has been in love with) and her husband. It was as if the censors were trying to say, it is never too late to turn back from a life of sin, though you will not escape punishment for what you have done. This message exists to insist the ideology of conformity to the social consensus, and points to the Christian faith that gave rise to it.

The ambivalence of the messages in films from the thirties is a direct result of the Hays Office. Ross agrees with this assertion saying, "from 1934 until abolition in 1968, the censors who ran the Production Code Administration...influenced social, political, sexual, and racial content of every American film," inserting their competing messages into the narratives (Ross, 98). Noriega may support the idea of ambivalence the best when he says: "the film text...is a social process that occupies a contested discursive space. In examining 'the things said' about a film upon its release, we can discern the 'frames of reference' and discourses involved in its reception...reconstruct the historical subtexts of 'interpretive communities'," (Noriega, 35). His statement also supports the idea that film is a historical document that once opened up can reveal a great deal about the culture that produced it. For example, "as long as the industry was determined to reach the largest possible market it was susceptible to economic blackmail, whether it came in the form of a Legion of Decency, state censorship boards, American businessmen, or foreign governments...the entire movie reform movement was to eliminate controversial subjects and ideas from the screen," (Ross, 118). With this many hands in a project, it is of no wonder that the message is ambivalent and it is surprising that any of the stories ever made sense. However, the success of the reform groups was in the leverage they wielded against

the film industry, despite the conflicting messages that they yielded. “The opposition of external censors, in-house censorship by studios and the Hays office, and the prospect of losing one’s job if a producer failed to make money on a film, proved far more influential than audience surveys in deciding what films would be made,” (Ross, 87). These two statements expose both the fears and the values of America in the Production Code era. It can also divulge the reasons for the code’s collapse.

At odds with the ideology of freedom and a maturing culture, “the [1948] consent decrees brought an end to the studio system, which had centralized not just film production, but also film censorship. Theaters could now show *unapproved* foreign and independent films—in 1952 the Supreme Court reversed its 1915 ruling that denied films free speech protection...In the next six years, the supreme court would use the 1952 decision to invalidate all the principal statutory censorship criteria except *obscenity*,” (Noriega, 25). The laws and structures that made the code possible were eroding, and “the Production Code began to collapse in the mid-1950s,” (Noriega, 22). Critics of the code found it to be ineffectual in that what it sought to cut from the material as it could easily be found in their films if a viewer chose to reach beneath the surfaces (Maltby, 573). In reflecting on the gangster image, how it is arguably more glamorous than threatening, is just one example of the codes failure to accomplish its purpose. To this day, the gangster holds an admired status in American culture, and remains a popular topic of television, books and film. After all, the current culture is a product of the previous decades and some of the values have continued even if they have been modified to assure consensus. Couvares assures us “almost nothing is ever final in the realm of culture,” (Couvares, 66). Thus, the modification of values to suit the changing culture will continue, even if it is only a costume change of particularly selected words that won’t affront the sensibility of the audience receiving them.

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