

A brief look at the history of

CENSORSHIP

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Since the 14th century, censorship has been both a moral and political issue in American lives. Religious leaders, politicians, and other organizations have attempted to coerce the American people into what they could read, see, and hear. These influential persons may believe they are doing what is appropriate to “purify the souls” of American citizens; however, I believe it is more suggestive of their use of communistic propaganda (all messages given by any group that insists it is speaking the truth without any evidence to the contrary), and socialist dictatorship (any group that seeks to make its polarized opinions forcefully met in specific groups of enterprise, and demand that its opinion be enforced legally).

Translating the Holy Scriptures from Latin into English was banned in the 14th century. The Roman Catholic Church feared that the translation would be corrupted or misinterpreted. John Wycliff and his reformers, however, completed their first English translation in 1407. The Church immediately banned this newer version. Furthermore the English clergy strictly forbid one to read this new book without obtaining a special license. Following the America Revolution, the Roman Catholic Church finally granted their imprimatur (seal of approval) to the King James Version since it owned that book’s publishing rights. This issue became the fuel that ignited the flames of censorship throughout America.

The prudish sensibilities of the Victorian Age caused many to believe that their biblical figures were incapable of committing “unacceptable behaviors.” After John Bellamy published “*The Holy Bible, Newly Translated*”, others began to produce Bibles

that eliminated anything these individuals felt was obscene. In the twenty-first century one might question whether or not he or she is reading a correct translation of the Holy Book, or only a book that has been reedited multiple times to satisfy the needs of the Victorian people. The debate about accurate versions continue today, as each religious faith claims it is God's appointed choice.

An atheist within the Brooklyn Center Independent School System of Minnesota challenged the teachings of the Bible in 1992. According to this individual, "the lewd, indecent, and violent contents of this book were hardly suitable for children." Others cited more than 300 examples of obscenities in the Bible, making the objection that it "contains language and stories that are inappropriate for children of any age, including tales of incest and murder." These facts make one wonder if censorship has gone too far.

In the early 1900's Christian groups worried that a new form of media was destroying "the souls of" the people. This new form of entertainment was called the motion picture. "*The May - Irwin Kiss*" was the first film to be deemed as offensive. While kissing in public was not prohibited, this film was censored because the critics felt that the couple was unattractive. The next in a long list to be restricted was in 1906.

In Chicago, the YMCA confiscated the film "*Fatina*". According to this organization the film was saturated with obscene gestures that could corrupt the minds of youth. However, the film only contains one element of supposed obscenity--a fully clothed belly dancer dancing. After this incident, Chicago became the first place to

enforce a censorship law, and impressed the chief of police to enforce the new law.

Many states followed this same decision over the course of the next few years.

In 1908 New York Mayor George Clifton refused to license movie producers because of staggering reports that movies were corrupting young minds. This decision was made because of Reverend Zed Capp's new organization: New York Decency for the Cruelty of Children. This organization feared motion pictures were corrupting children's bodies and minds; although, vulgar language and nudity had not been portrayed on the silver screen at this time.

In December of 1914, The Lobby of the International Reform Bureau led by Reverend W.F Crafts decided to take action into its own hands. According to Craft, his organization would rescue the motion picture industry from "the devil and 500 unchristian Jews". Because of these controversies, the Supreme Court decided in 1915, that films were not protected under the first amendment rights. Forbidden were scenes involving prostitution, white slavery, seduction of women, knifings, murders, nudity, habit forming drugs, birth control, abortion, pornification, condemning the church, adultery, gun play, sensual kissing and love making, drunkenness, venereal disease, and lingerie display. Besides these laws, each state also had its own set of rules. In Connecticut, it was unlawful to show a woman smoking; in Pennsylvania it was against the law to display a pregnant woman; and in New York, movies could neither ridicule, nor otherwise be critical of politicians. All these laws remained in effect until 1921,

when Hollywood studios joined together to reform the movie industry, and they appointed William H Hays, the Postmaster General, as the figurehead who would assure the public that Hollywood would straighten up its act. While Hays was attempting to straighten out Hollywood, the fires of censorship found other areas to attack.

In 1928, protesters called for a ban on Duke Ellington's song, "The Mooche". The protestors complained that the lyrics were so provocative that rape had increased across the nation. As the flames began to smolder on this issue, another one was brewing in Boston.

In 1929 Theodore Dreiser's novel, "*An American Tragedy*" was suppressed. The jury decided that New York publisher Donald Friede was guilty of violating the state's anti-obscenity law. During the trial, certain portions of the book were read to an all-male jury. After reading a passage concerning a girl undressing in a brothel, the prosecuting attorney stated, "a woman disrobing in front of a man might not be considered obscene in New York, but it happens to be where I come from." Back in Hollywood, Hays was laying down the law.

He ordered the industry to think of themselves as teachers of children by thinking like a child. To make sure that the industry did not go astray, he ordered that every script must be approved by him before filming began. One impression that Hays did not object to was the illustration of sin but only if the movie's finale punished the sinners. The official code of conduct for filmmakers [aka The Production Code (PCA)] was received

in 1930. It was written by Reverend Daniel Cord, who had been commissioned to write this code by the Catholic lobbyist Martin Quigley. Quickly Hays adopted it and forced filmmakers to accept its standards; however, not every film that Hays approved stayed within this code.

If Hays enjoyed the actor or actress appearing in the film, he often ignored the regulations. An example was the Jean Harlow film, "*Red Dust*". The movie contains one scene featuring Miss Harlow taking a bath in a barrel. This was strictly forbidden by the code; however, Hays found nothing wrong with viewing a beautiful woman taking a bath, and he approved the film. At other times, however, he used his powers very indiscriminately.

In 1931 Joan Crawford and Clark Gable starred in the film, "*Possessed*". Hays immediately complained about this film. He had known that Miss Crawford was originally a star of the forbidden "blue movies" (movies which were pornographic in nature). Her distasteful image had since been "cleaned up" after she was contracted by MGM. Hays was questioned on his non-approval of the film; he responded, "there are two problems with this film: first the title and second the movie itself." Later Hayes instructed the removal of one scene--that of Miss Crawford dropping her coat. He feared people might suspect she was intending to strip. To receive Hayes approval, this was the only scene that had to be eliminated. While Hays feared the title of this film might cause controversy, Variety magazine was fearful of the music charts.

The magazine refused to include certain objectionable songs in its charts. The editors were concerned that the titles of several hit songs on the list might have a negative effect on the magazine. Songs deleted from their list included “Hootchie Coochie Man”, “I’m Gonna Shave You Close”, as well as songs by Gene Autry and Jimmy Rodgers. While Variety was attempting to preserve its integrity, filmmakers were testing Hays’s new production code.

An underground filmmaker released the film, “*Nudist Colony*” in 1933. Hays immediately condemned the documentary because it showed nude white people. According to the PCA, however, it was appropriate to film naked people if in a documentary about such a subject. After this film, Hays rewrote the code to state it was appropriate to show nudity in a documentary, only if it contained women of “darker skin”. It was not appropriate to show nude “white women”. Filmmakers did not show nudity in films for the next 20 years. Furthermore other parts of the code were also rewritten.

Among the most popular actresses in the 1930’s were Barbara Stanwyck and Mae West. However, their portrayals as women who cursed at men, cheated on men, or in any shape or form did a man wrong was considered obscene by the Church. According to many religious leaders, these films concerned prostitution. Filmmakers became outraged by the code and paid Hays little, if any, attention. Hays warned the filmmakers if they did not clean up their acts, then the 100 new censorship laws presented to the Supreme

Court would be enforced.

Again Hollywood ignored Hays and made a new Mae West film, "*It Ain't No Sin.*" During the making of this film Hays hired Joe Breen to enforce movie censorship. Breen edited material in the film that might offend the churches and added a wedding scene to the film's finale. Furthermore he changed the film's title to "*Belle of the Nineties*". Many thought this would end the Mae West controversy; however, it was only beginning.

After viewing "*Klondike Annie*", William Randolph Hearst criticized Mae West insisting she had to be removed from films. Her decline, however, did not come about until after she did the radio play, "*Garden Of Eden*". Censurers were then out for blood. Congressman William Connelly revoked the radio station's license and Hollywood terminated Mae West. It may sound like she did something very disgusting on the radio; however, the illegal incident only involved her smacking a kiss into the microphone and calling it "the first original sin".

In November 1936, William Hays received praise from Pope Pious the XII for enforcing censorship on filmmakers. Following this incident, Hollywood became concerned about another possible World War. Filmmakers concentrated on producing movies that highlighted world problems. Censorship in Hollywood suddenly became less important. With growing concerns of war coming from Europe, censors went after another direct target. Literature!!!

Several books based on the horrors of war were condemned. Among these titles were All Quiet On The Western Front, Johnny Got His Gun, and Adolph Hitler's Mein Kampf. While the censorship of these books may have been a blessing to some, The Grapes Of Wrath drove fear into the hearts of farmers across the nation.

Throughout the United States, book burnings were organized. The firmer the censors attempted to remove The Grapes Of Wrath, the more rapidly it moved onto the bestseller list. Eventually, the battle lines were drawn in Kern County, California.

Previously there had been no registered complaints about this book at the local libraries in Kern County. Soon, however, the libraries' board of supervisors passed the banning resolution that began floating around the country. Kern County librarian Gretchen Knief immediately fought back. In a letter she wrote to the board, she states, "If The Grapes Of Wrath is banned today, what book will be banned tomorrow? And what group will want a book banned the day after that?" In the same letter Knief later stated, "It's a vicious and dangerous thing to begin and in the end may lead to exactly the same thing we see in Europe today. Besides, banning books is utterly hopeless and futile." At the end of the letter she wrote, "Ideas do not die because a book is forbidden. If Steinbeck has written the truth, the truth will survive. If he is merely being sensational and lascivious and all his words are nothing more than fly specks on a large painting, then the book will soon disappear like all modern novels and be forgotten."

Knief was unaware that the group offended by Steinbeck's book was the

Associated Farmers of Kern. Led by Woffard Camp, the organization claimed they were defending their farms and workers by taking a stand against this vile propaganda. Soon articles and editorials began to fill the local newspapers. Many denounced the book as lie-promoting filled with class-hatred. Others indicated that the farm workers of California were better paid and housed than other agriculture workers. However, not everyone was accepting Camp's ideas.

In other parts of California, many criticized the Associated Farmers' complaints. Newspapers across California began to run their own editorials about the situation. In many of these articles, special interest groups stated,

“As for the meeting in San Francisco (in) which Mr. Stienbeck's book was denounced, wasn't it significant that the men and women who have read the book and do not want others to read it assembled in one of San Francisco's most luxurious hotels far from the San Joaquin cotton fields. It is absolutely foolish to try and deny the conditions pictured in Steinbeck's novel. Here in California, most of our pioneers have been run off the land they brought into bearing. Look over the files at the Sentinel for the past 20 years and see the hundreds that have been foreclosed.”

Soon the battle would be decided. On August 28, 1939, a meeting at the Chamber of Commerce in Kern County ensued. Hopes were high that the ban would be lifted on the book; however, the vote to lift the ban failed on a 2 - 2 vote because the chairperson was absent from the meeting. The book would not be returned to the library shelves until January 27, 1941. After this major battle the censorship ideal seemed to disappear; however, its iron fist would strike in Hollywood once again.

After World War II people's morals began to loosen and Hays resigned from office. His final act of censorship was the Jane Russell movie, "*The Outlaw*". At first Hays complained that Miss Russell showed too much cleavage. To compensate, Howard Hughes took over the project, and he invented a special bra for Miss Russell to wear which helped hide a large majority of her breast line. After the film was completed with the use of this specialized brassiere, Hays approved the movie for release.

During the movie's initial run, critics tore it to shreds. Upset by the critics, Hughes removed the picture from theaters. Three years later, he re-released the same movie with an extravagant ad campaign. Before the film could be shown again, however, Breen revoked the PCA approval and banned its release. Yet Hughes decided to re-release the film without Hays approval. In three states the film was banned because of the size of Miss Russell's breasts. After this some people became angry about the idea of censorship. Shortly thereafter, Hays resigned from office, and his codes were abolished.

Joe Breen stayed in charge of Hollywood's original PCA, and filmmakers began

changing the code little by little.

In 1950 Joe Breen's rule was coming to an end as well. On the horizon, there was a new menace rearing its ugly head. Senator Joseph McCarthy established The Special Committee For Un-American Activities, aka "McCarthyism." During this group's reign of terror, many American's lived in fear that communist spies were living amongst them, and Hollywood was torn inside out. McCarthy targeted filmmakers, writers, and musicians as being a part of the communist party. Many never regained their status after "the red scare" ended. Among the group blacklisted were Dalton Trumbo (accused of writing communist dogma and propaganda in his books and films), Richard Wright (member of the communist party in 1940, and writer), and the folk group, The Weavers.

Following the communist scare, a foreign film startled both the Catholic Church and the PCA. The film, "*The Miracle*" consists of a simple story about a peasant girl becoming pregnant by a shepherd named Joseph. After being impregnated, she believes the child has been conceived immaculately.

Shortly after its premiere, church members picketed the movie. In New York City, Mayor McCaffery threatened to strip all movie theater's licenses if they showed the film. When he made his threat valid, the film's distributor took his case to the Supreme Court. In the court's final decision, they decided that Motion Pictures should be protected by the first amendment. A year later, Joe Breen was removed from office, and the production code was abolished. With this victory, the censorship walls that once

surrounded the movie industry began to crumble. However, censors soon found a new enemy within the Rock and Roll industry.

In February 1954, Representative Ruth Thomas introduced a bill to Congress. She believed certain recordings should be added to the list of pornographic materials that were illegal to send through the United States Mail Service. While Congress was handling this issue, a different debate was occurring in the Senate.

The Senate Juvenile Subcommittee issued a report concerning a link between pop music and youth crime. In response to this investigation, the senators received more than twenty thousand letters; many blamed the media, comic books, and music for the apparent rise in crime. Furthermore, radio stations edited several songs, television networks forced musicians to change their lyrics to certain songs before permitting the artist's performances, and churches began to police dances.

In the September 24, 1954 issue of *Billboard Magazine*, an editorial entitled "Control of the Dimwits" condemned several Rhythm and Blues (R & B) songs for containing sexual references. Police in Long Beach, California and Memphis, Tennessee responded by confiscating jukeboxes and fining its owners. Afterwards, several jukebox vendors removed the questionable recordings. Vendors and radio disc jockeys soon suggested the creation of a committee for the purpose of reviewing all recordings.

Then in October, many of the radio stations banned several songs because of their questionable lyrics. Included under the restriction were "Honey Love" (by the Drifters)

and “*Annie Had a Baby*” (by Hank Ballard and the Midnighters.) The stations would often run announcements informing the public why they refused to play certain songs. Censorship’s bloody roar became quiet for a short time; however, the uproar would scream even louder upon its return.

In April 1955, Chicago radio stations received an average of fifteen thousand complaint letters each week. Each letter protested the stations’ broadcast of rock music. This letter-writing campaign soon spread to other areas. In Mobile, Alabama some radio stations vowed to eliminate all R & B music from their play lists. This campaign eventually influenced *Variety Magazine* to run a series of articles on the subject.

In their three part series, the magazine called for censorship of the recording industry. Each article compared certain R & B songs to “dirty” postcards. Soon these stories were redistributed throughout the country. Following this incident, the magazine warned the recording industry that they needed to “clean up” their act before others took the initiative to set up regulatory measures. Pandemonium over this issue began to run throughout the music industry in the United States.

In Houston Texas, The Juvenile Delinquency and Crime Commission placed a ban on over thirty songs. Their list included “*Honey Love*” (by the Drifters), “*I Got A Woman*” (by Ray Charles), and “*Too Much Lovin’* ” (by the 5 Royales). This group’s review committee soon monitored all nine Houston radio stations. If any station dared to play any song on the banned list, the radio station could be fined, the deejay fired, and in

extreme cases the radio station could lose its operating license.

Meanwhile, officials cancelled rock and roll concerts that were scheduled in parts of Connecticut, New Jersey, California, and Georgia, fearing outbursts of violence.

Fanatical observers deliberately mistook dancing at concerts to be rioting and fighting.

Fueling the fire were rumors that rock music caused youngsters to break out in spontaneous violence. Soon, Rock and Roll television programming was targeted again.

In 1956, CBS cancelled Alan Freed's Rock 'n' Roll Dance Party after a public outrage. During the show a camera focused on Frankie Lymon (black singer of Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers) dancing with a white girl. Many could not handle the idea of interracial coupling on television. This outrage was too much for network censors, and the show was soon canceled.

In Florida 1956, the police ordered Elvis Presley to stand still during his performance. He was warned that if he moved, he would be arrested on obscenity charges. Later officials in San Diego, California issued a similar warning. Presley was instructed that unless he removed all dancing and gestures from his performance, he would not be able to continue performing in San Diego. Many other protests continued against rock music throughout the next few years; however, in Hollywood the motion picture industry was changing rapidly.

In 1956 the film "Garden Of Eden" challenged the original PCA ruling on nudity, and was banned; however, a New York City court ordered the ban removed. The Court

stated that nudity was not obscene to people who lived in nudist colonies, and nudity itself was not vulgar. The vulgarity appeared only in the limited mindsets of some viewers. Unable to stop this movie from being shown, censors continued to pursue the removal of obscene literature and rock music.

Many books condemned by The Special Committee for Un-American Activities remained banned from libraries across the nation. Several of the questionable authors changed their names and began to write screenplays and novels once again. While censors did not realize this was happening, they still found fault with many of the new novels being released.

Throughout the 50's, William Faulkner's "Sanctuary" remained on The National Organization for Decent Literature's disapproved list; although in 1949, the Supreme Court had ruled that the book was not obscene. Many other books were also on that list. These included Henry Miller's "Tropic of Cancer" and "Tropic of Capricorn", John O'Hara's "Appointment In Samarra", and Allen Ginsberg's "Howl and Other Poems".

In 1956, Ginsberg's book passed through U.S. Customs without incident. However, in 1957 the second printing was seized in San Francisco by Customs. Before the book was ever printed, the publishing company had contacted the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). During their conversation, the ACLU informed the publisher they would defend him if the book was challenged. Thus when the local attorney general's office requested permission to destroy the book, the ACLU got involved and

the district attorney dropped the charges.

Despite clearance from Customs, the San Francisco police (who claimed the book was obscene) seized the book. When the case went to trial, nine literary experts were called to defend the social importance of the book. Finally, the court decided that, “unless the book is entirely lacking in ‘social importance’ it cannot be held obscene.” It later added that while the book may contain “unorthodox and controversial ideas” (expressed through coarse and vulgar language) the work was nevertheless protected by the first amendment. As this argument ceased, censors concentrated their focus on Rock ‘n’ Roll.

In 1957, Elvis Presley made his third and final appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Concerned with parental protests, producers of the show instructed the cameramen to film Elvis from the waist up. After his performance, Sullivan addressed his audience, and stated “what a fine and decent young man Elvis was”. Although eighty percent of the population watched that performance, the “*New York Times*” called the performance “filthy”. This report caused several radio stations across America to pull Presley’s records and claim his music obscene. While prejudicial thought surrounded Presley’s performance, the White Citizens Council (WCC) in Alabama concentrated on different matters.

Asa Carter, executive president of the WCC, ordered the removal and destruction of jukeboxes throughout the state. Carter stated that the NAACP had brainwashed

teenagers with “vulgar music”. If this continued, black music would “mesmerize large numbers of white youth and destroy civilization.” In Chicago a similar idea was expressed when Cardinal Stritch banned popular music from all Catholic-run schools. Although black prejudice ran high in rock music, another prejudice was expressed in Hollywood.

In 1959 the movie “*Suddenly, Last Summer*” caused an uproar with censor boards across the United States. Many were upset because the storyline dealt with the taboo subject of homosexuality. However, before the debate could begin, the film’s producers reminded the concerned citizens of Hay’s original code--“all sinners must pay for their sins by the movie’s finale”. Since the gay man is beaten to death in the film’s finale, the movie was in compliance with the PCA.

During the 1960s, John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and the war in Vietnam began. Throughout this decade much debate raged throughout the country. Literature, movies, and music was criticized throughout the country as anti-war propaganda. Although the censorship laws remained mostly unchanged, the movie industry itself was changed forever.

In 1965, one of the main opposing forces of the motion picture association was forced to close their doors. The Legion of Decency had staged campaigns against the film industry since the 1930’s. Their final protest happened after the movie premiere of “*The Pawnbroker*”. When this protest did not win support, the organization shut down

their operation. Many were disturbed by the films portrayal of nudity and strong violence which was strictly forbidden by the code. However, since the movie was about Nazi Concentration Camps, the Supreme Court did not believe the movie was in violation of any previously stated censorship law.

Finally in 1966, Jack Valenti took over the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). In 1968 the MPAA disregarded all the old production codes and, in turn, created a ratings system. For example, G-rating (general audiences), M-rating (which later became PG for parental guidance suggested), R-rating (restricted material, no one under 17 allowed without a parent), and finally an X-rating (no one under the age of 18 allowed).

When the X-rating first appeared it was intended for pornography. Movies such as Academy Award winner "Midnight Cowboy", "Myra Breckenridge", "Carnal Knowledge", and Stanley Kubric's "A Clockwork Orange" were released with an X-Rating. In an unusual twist of fate, the Georgia Supreme Court considered the latter three films obscene. However, when "Deep Throat", America's first legal pornographic motion picture, containing scenes of people engaged in the actual performance of sexual intercourse, the same court did not find the film obscene. Movie critics praised the film and considered it a work of art. Yet, this film would change the meaning of an X-rated film forever.

Soon adult rated theaters flourished throughout American cities. In an effort to

prevent these theaters from flourishing, President Richard Nixon created a bill that would enforce federal censorship. Nixon's "Stop the Smut" campaign was to be carried out by four entities: conservative members of congress, the FBI, the postal service and local police. However, there was a problem with Nixon's campaign.

In 1970 Nixon appointed a task force, Federal Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (FCOP) to research the censorship problem. After they concluded their research, they gave the president the following report:

Research indicates that pornographic materials do not contribute to the development of character deficits nor operate as a significant factor in antisocial behavior. In some cases, there is no evidence that exposure to pornography operates as a form of misconduct in neither youths nor adults.

Shocked by the reports findings, the senate decided in a vote of 60 to 5 to reject the report, and begin federal censorship. This report was not seen by American citizens until the Watergate scandal ended.

The United States Supreme Court in 1973 gave each state the right to set up their own community standards. According to Chief Justice Warren Berger "it is neither realistic nor constitutionally sound to read the first amendment as requiring the people of Maine or Mississippi to accept public depictions of conduct found tolerable in Las Vegas

and New York.”

Immediately after the Supreme Court’s ruling, Jack Valenti, head of the MPAA, told the press:

“If a child is instructed in the home to have respect for values, to be set right about fair play, honest living, and a sense of decency--no movie, no book, no television show will corrupt him or her. On the other hand, if the parents abandon their responsibilities, no censor or government is going to be able to correct what is wrong.”

Within a few months after the Supreme Court’s decision, Charles Keating Jr. formed the Citizen’s For Decent Literature (CDL) organization. The most publicized film the CDL targeted was “*Pretty Baby*”. This movie starred twelve-year-old Brooke Shields in a story about child prostitution. Even though the film was banned all around the world, because of “Miss Shields nude scenes”, the courts never found the film to be obscene. It has been rumored that the movie was not censored because the courts could not define exactly what “obscene material” meant. In other words, the word “obscene” was, in itself, too ambiguous.

This was not the last time Charles Keating’s CDL would be heard. After losing their battle against this film, Keating set his sights on *Hustler* publisher, Larry Flynt. In 1977 the CDL (armed with the Cincinnati Police Department) arrested Flynt for

producing obscene material and for being involved in organized crime. During the trial Flynt's attorney, Alan Issacman, attempted to introduce into evidence 25 other men's publications similar to Hustler magazine; however, the judge disallowed it. In the trial's finale, the judge asked Flynt if he had anything to add before he proceeded with the verdict. Flynt screamed, "You have not made one rational decision during this trial and I do not believe you will make one now." With this final comment, the judge sentenced him to 25 years in the state penitentiary for rude and unlawful conduct. Six months later, an appeals court released Flynt.

Immediately upon his release, Larry formed the American's for Free Speech organization (AFS). During this groups first meeting, members of the press and other publications were present (by invitation only). Flynt made a huge impact with his first speech.

During his speech, Larry pointed out several major points. For example: (1) Murder is illegal yet if a person takes a picture of a murderer committing the actual crime, that photographer is usually rewarded. (2) Sex is legal, yet a person could be imprisoned for taking a picture of a naked woman. He then asked the question, "What is better to teach our children--sex or murder?" (3) History has, for years, shown many men shedding their own blood for a concept we call "freedom". Yet "thou shall not kill" is one of the first five sins listed in the Ten Commandments. He asked, "What is more obscene-- war or sex?" During this speech, Flynt showed graphic pictures of these

concepts to further enforce his point. By the presentation's finale, many press members realized they finally had an organization that could protect their rights under the first amendment. Their victory, however, was short-lived.

In Georgia, a retailer was arrested for selling a copy of Hustler magazine. Hearing this news, Flynt immediately flew to Georgia along with other members of the press. When they arrived, neither the police nor the other citizens would give the group any information about the incident. In an attempt to uncover the truth, Larry bribed a storeowner with \$1,000 dollars to let him rent the store from the owner for one hour. The shop owner agreed. Minutes later, Flynt was arrested for selling a single copy of Hustler magazine to a member of his own group pretending to be a citizen of Lawrence, Georgia.

Attorney Issacman managed to get Flynt out of jail on bond, and Larry returned home for a short time. Larry was then introduced to Ruth Carter Stapleton, President Jimmy Carter's sister. Soon the two discovered they had a common goal--to relieve people from sexual repression. Both believed that sex was a God-given gift. Days after their meeting, Flynt was baptized, and began attending church regularly. Hearing this news, the district attorney of Georgia wanted to cut him a plea bargain, but Flynt refused.

When Flynt finally appeared in court, he proved he did have the right to sell his publication. However, his victory soon turned to tragedy. Only minutes after leaving the courtroom, both Flynt and his attorney were shot. The attack left Flynt permanently paralyzed from the waist down. Rumors circulated that Larry's assassin was a member

of the CDL; although, no one has ever been prosecuted for this “crime”.

For the next five years, Flynt remained hidden from the public eye. Fearing another assassination attempt and living with constant pain, he stayed locked inside his home. The next time the public saw him, he was being arrested for refusing to comply with a court order to reveal how he obtained a stolen copy of the FBI’s report on the arrest of John Delorean for cocaine possession. In court, Flynt continued to defy authority figures. When the judge asked Larry how he obtained the tapes, he told jokes, stories, and recited poetry. Each time the judge found him in contempt of court. Finally, Larry came to court wearing an American Flag as a diaper. The judge had seen enough. After several weeks of attempting to get information about the stolen tapes, the judge sentenced Flynt to 15 months at a federal psychiatric hospital.

While locked away, both Larry and the entertainment industry made a new enemy. Reverend Jerry Falwell was one of the most famous evangelistic preachers in the country at that time. In 1983, Falwell discovered that *Hustler* magazine placed a spoof of him in their magazine. In 1984, Falwell sued Flynt over the tasteless joke; however, Larry counter-sued Falwell for placing this spoof in several of his fund raising ads without getting the magazine’s permission. After insulting Falwell in the courtroom, Flynt was ordered to pay the reverend \$200,000 for emotional distress. It took another three years to get this decision reversed. Meanwhile, the flames of censorship were gaining new grounds in Washington through the Parental Music Resource Center

(PMRC).

Since the 1950's parents had attempted to outlaw Rock 'N' Roll. This almost became a reality when the PMRC was formed. Stories of young men and women committing suicide after listening to certain songs, drug and alcohol abuse appearing in young people, and preachers preaching about the dangers of rock music were fueling the fire.

Satanic rituals, drug abuse, free love, lust, and murder were themes that many preachers used to strike fear in their congregations. After hearing these revelations and listening to one of her younger daughter's records, Tipper Gore (wife of ex-vice president Al Gore) helped form the PMRC.

It requested that a rating be placed on recordings found to be obscene. Before the record companies could answer to the group's charges, the PMRC had set a hearing date in the state senate. In response three artists arrived to respond to the women's charges: Dee Snider (lead singer of Twisted Sister, and public enemy number one of the PMRC), Frank Zappa, and John Denver.

During the hearing, the senate constantly harassed both Zappa and Snider about the lyrics in their songs. The senate seemed unconcerned about John Denver's presence-- it was common knowledge that the folk singer had been petitioning Washington for authorization to fly on a space shuttle mission. Nevertheless, the senate was later surprised by Denver's testimony. After taking the stand, Denver immediately proved that

music censorship was inherently wrong. He testified that his song, “Rocky Mountain High”, was initially taken out of context, which caused many radio stations to ban the song. These stations believed his song was about “getting high” on drugs. The Senate was shocked by his testimony, and they had nowhere to turn, until another loop-hole appeared in the fabric of censorship.

The record companies were attempting to pass a new law that allowed them to generate tax money from the sales of home recording equipment and blank tapes. To make certain the bill would be passed, the record companies issued a statement that they would carry a warning label on albums containing explicit material. However, before the labels were produced, many record stores began manufacturing their own warning labels.

The problem with the record store labels was that sometimes records not containing offensive material were labeled as such. For example, Frank Zappa’s “Symphony from Hell” was labeled at one record shop. The shop owner only knew that Zappa’s name appeared during the PMRC hearings. The recording he labeled, however, was an instrumental which contained no lyrics or vulgar content of any kind. While waiting for the new labels to appear, both Jerry Falwell and Charles Keating fell from grace.

In 1986, Larry Flynt decided to appeal the Jerry Falwell case. A year prior to his decision, Larry had lost his wife from complications caused by the AIDS virus. While attempting to find some comfort over his loss, he accidentally stumbled across Jerry

Falwell's program. While watching the program, Larry became angered over two of Falwell's remarks: "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve", and "The AIDS virus is a plague from God to cleanse the scum away from the Earth."

Finally in 1987, Larry presented his case to the United States Supreme Court. In a unanimous decision, the court sided with Flynt. They could find no fault with the spoof that *Hustler* magazine published. The Court stated:

At the heart of the first amendment is the recognition of the fundamental importance of free speech. Freedom to speak one's mind is not only an aspect of individual liberty, but essential to the quest for truth and the vitality of society as a whole. In the world of debate about public affairs, many things done with motives that are less than admirable, are nonetheless protected by the first amendment.

Falwell was infuriated and threatened to sue the Supreme Court; however, he would never receive his chance.

Scandals rocked both the church and the CDL. Within a few months, Reverend Jim Baker was accused of raping Jessica Hahn, and later, he was convicted on a different crime--tax evasion. Shortly after Baker's fall, several other preachers slowly fell from grace. Tax evasion, prostitution, and other scams became the issue not censorship. After the smoke cleared, Charles Keating would take the greatest fall. He was found guilty of

distorting over 2 million dollars through the Savings and Loan scandal.

While the smoke surrounding much of the censorship campaign cleared away, it would soon reappear and challenge the music industry. In 1986, the families of two young men sued the heavy metal band Judas Priest, claiming that their album “*Stained Class*” encouraged the young men to commit suicide. During the case, the young men’s parents argued that the band had placed subliminal messages throughout their recording. The subliminal messages supposedly made the suggestion to kill yourself. Record stores across the nation pulled the record from their shelves. Finally in 1990, the judge found that neither the band nor the record label was liable for the boys’ deaths. Rather, they were caused after the boys spent three days both drinking alcohol, and smoking marijuana.

During this time Maryland delegate, Judith Toth, introduced legislation aimed at amending that state’s obscenity laws. She proposed that retailers should segregate rock albums and tapes, and place them among other obscene materials. In her proposal, she suggested that customers needed to be required to provide identification before browsing or purchasing the product in question. This legislation was eventually turned down. Many other events happened throughout the music industry during the 1980’s, however, none compared to the problems seen in the 90’s.

While many waited for the parental advisement warning labels to appear on recordings, the movie industry was changing. In 1990, the MPAA decided that two new

ratings were needed: (1) Pg-13 would appear for questionable movies that contained minor nudity or language not found in PG films, but yet was too mild for R-Rated films; and (2) NC-17 would take the place of the original X-rating, since pornographic films had taken over that rating. Few films have used these ratings since their emergence; in fact, only 4 films have ever been rated NC-17.

Filmmakers feared the NC-17 rating since previous films released under this rating failed at the box office. Another problem with the NC-17 rating was that most newspapers and video stores refused to advertise or display the films. When the movie "Basic Instinct" was first rated it received an NC-17 rating. Fearing the movie would be boycotted, the producer re-edited the film so it would receive an R rating. Since this time filmmakers have censored their movies in order that they do not receive the questionable rating. While filmmakers were finally censoring themselves, the censorship debate raged on in the music industry.

In 1991, the new parental advisory stickers were placed on questionable recordings. In Missouri, legislators introduced a bill forbidding the sale of recordings they believed were obscene. However, an exception was made to those albums that carried a parental advisory sticker. Similar legislature was soon introduced in twenty other states. While these laws appeared appropriate on paper, music-loving citizens questioned the politicians' agenda.

Despite claims made by conservative anti-rock crusaders, statistics showed that a

large majority of Americans did not consider music labeling a major priority. Only 22 percent of American adults were concerned about the music their children listened to, and another 24 percent of parents believed that the concept was wrong and music did not need to be labeled. Yet, the law had already been changed.

Soon after the new labels appeared, Wal-Mart announced it would not carry any stickered albums in their stores. In response, the recording industry produced censored versions of albums. Often times this “cleaner version” contained only a minor change in the album cover’s artwork or a single word being eliminated from a song. This would soon change directions. Most musicians did not place obscene language or obscure sexual references in their music. Since warning stickers were now being placed on recordings, many musicians believed they could be “As Nasty As They Wanted To Be”.

Rap artists 2 Live Crew tested the new labels with their “dirty” rap music, and new album “*As Nasty As We Want To Be*”. Many lawsuits followed the release of two recordings. Jack Thompson (lawyer and evangelist) wanted to keep 2 Live Crew albums from the hands of children whatever the cost. Before his protests, few had ever heard of the band. If Thompson had not attacked the group, they may never have reached the level of fortune and fame they later received.

No one would dare question that the album was indeed filled with vulgar language and sexual references. The real question was whether or not the album was obscene. In 1993, the Supreme Court decided the group’s albums were protected by the

first amendment, and they refused to hear Thompson's appeals. This was the last time that 2 Live Crew appeared in court. When the band's legal troubles ended, they slipped from the public's mind. Their later albums failed to appear on the charts and produced little interest in the group's musical talent. Eventually the band went bankrupt and they have not been heard from since. Throughout the nineties other restrictions were placed on the music industry and its young listeners.

Many schools restricted their students from wearing T-shirts the school board felt were objectable. Other schools banned the use of portable tape decks, fearing students might be listening to questionable recordings. While these actions have never been debated, they could be perceived as prejudicial behavior.

In 1998, a free concert to be performed by the Indigo Girls for a South Carolina High School was canceled after the school's principal learned that the performers were gay. After this cancellation, the group's performances at two Tennessee schools were also cancelled. Shortly thereafter thirteen students from these schools were suspended after they protested against the cancellations. The director of South Carolina ACLU chapter quoted, "Homophobia in the south is becoming what race was thirty years ago." In Washington, prejudicial behavior became an issue when many Republicans attempted to impeach Bill Clinton. President Clinton, however, formed an unlikely alliance with Larry Flynt.

During Clinton's impeachment trial, Larry offered a million dollar reward to

anyone providing proof that other Congressional members had engaged in extramarital affairs. Quickly, the hypocritical Republicans became appalled by Flynt's offer and hoped that the threat would simply fade away. Their fears were soon to become a reality. House Speaker Bob Livingston resigned from office to prevent his affairs from becoming public information. Next, Representative Bob Barr (the first congressman to call for Clinton's Impeachment) was exposed as an adulterer. Included in Flynt's findings on Barr was that the pro-life activist once coerced his second wife into receiving an abortion. While these findings helped prove hypocrisy in the government, it did not stop the impeachment of Bill Clinton. While the public's attention was tuned into the impeachment hearings, a tragedy that would change the careers of many musicians exploded.

On April 20, 1999, terror screamed from the halls of Columbine High School. Two students walked into the school wearing trench coats and carrying a duffel bag filled with guns and homemade bombs. Eighteen-year-old Eric Harris and seventeen-year-old Dylan Klebold entered the school's cafeteria, threw a bomb into the air, and began shooting. Two hours later, thirteen people were dead, and twenty others injured. The two assassins then turned the guns on themselves, and shot themselves in the mouth. While the media was attempting to make sense of the situation, a witch-hunt was brewing.

The murderers were fans of the "Goth" culture. While the exact origins of this culture is unknown, it is believed that any teenager who dresses in black gothic clothing

(similar to the dress style of witches) and listens to “death” metal music, is a part of this group. In the weeks that followed politicians, parents, and special interest groups called for the censorship of music, movies, web sites, and games. Many believed these forms of entertainment turned the boys into ruthless killers. Rock musician Marilyn Manson became the primary target during the aftermath.

Many cities and states banned his albums and cancelled his concerts. ABC’s 20/20 ran a special on Marilyn Manson and the “Goth” culture, while the New York Times ran an article about the tragedy that focused attention on the band. Schools boycotted the band’s T-shirts forbidding students to wear them. Dale Shugars, Michigan State legislator, called for an investigation on the bands role, if any, in the massacre. However, the startling fact, later disclosed, was that neither boy had liked Marilyn Manson nor his music. This was not brought to light until several months after the tragedy. Since the backlash, Manson’s career has never recovered.

While this is only an overview of censorship in the twentieth century, I believe it shows the shallowness in the mindsets of certain individuals. Rather than trying to discover the true source of our country’s problems, they would rather blame easier targets. While the public’s attention is taken up with issues such as these, they may be drawn away from other issues that are of far more importance to the public.

Think about the effects censorship has had upon our country. Has anything changed? Has anything improved? How has the press attempted to change their

coverage of wars and other political events? These are only a few questions that come to mind. Whether or not we approve of pornographic material being shown is not the real issue. Whether or not we want to live under the rule of dictatorship is. In many ways the issue of censorship can be destructive to our first amendment rights.

During this new millennium we have seen the development of new technology become reality. Recently I watched the extras on certain DVD's and was shocked by the behind-the-scenes material. On "*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*", the director explained how this film was almost given an X rating.

During "*The Making Of Fast Times At Ridgemont High*" segment, she explained how a scene involving a young girl losing her virginity had to be edited. During this scene, a man takes off his pants, and exposes his penis to the audience. The MPAA found this scene revolting. In response, they told the filmmakers that the scene had to be cut. However, the movie also contained three short scenes that showed female nudity. So, in turn, the MPAA was not concerned because the film contained female nudity, but were only concerned with the male nudity. I believe that this exposes prejudice in and of itself. Many women argue that films demean females constantly. With the MPAA decision to edit only one particular scene in the film proves that the feminist argument may be truthful.

Another film, "*Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*", was also affected by the MPAA rating. The film's director, Kevin Smith, had to make numerous cuts in order to

keep his film from receiving an NC-17 rating. This film contained no nudity and little violence. Critics believed certain comments about the gay community were vulgar. However, these scenes were written by Smith's older homosexual brother. After carefully watching the forbidden scenes contained on a separate disc, I discovered that the only gay bashers I could find was the MPAA.

In this age, people need to accept the fact that we do have homosexual people living amongst us. If the MPAA was concerned with the strong language, they might want to take a closer look at television shows like *Jerry Springer*, *Maury*, or *Jenny Jones*. For television all nudity and vulgar language may be cut; however, the subject matter is identical to that found throughout this movie. Our minds create images of what is said somewhat like if the scene was actually shown to us.

Are the codes too ambiguous? Recently, I discussed this paper with a friend. His only comment was that my paper proved nothing. "Snuff Films" were illegal and proved that censorship committees were doing their job. However, he was wrong.

In nearly every video store across America, a customer can rent a "snuff film". The "*Faces Of Death*" series, "*Banned From TV*" series, and "*Shocking Asia*" all contain scenes of people being killed. "*Faces Of Death*" focuses on executions (electric chair, gas chamber, firing squad, etc.), animal attacks, and terrible accidents. "*Banned From TV*" contains suicides, muggings, robberies, and other assaults. "*Shocking Asia*" is the worst serial film of all the chains. It contains subject matter the same as both films,

plus open heart surgeries, sex change operations, clubbings, rapes, and more. These films are for anyone who can stomach this supposed form of entertainment. Maybe it is time for each individual to decide what can and cannot be shown in his or her own home, since the censors are not showing signs that they are doing their job well.

Think about these facts next time you see the first amendment being attacked. Think about how this might effect you. Remember, protecting this right is part of everyone's responsibility. For without it, someday a paper like this one may be considered obscene. While this might not be a huge tragedy, it could be to someone who questions why we censor certain materials in the first place.

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About the author

Since I have a billion things to accomplish before bedtime, this page will not be re-edited. I started examining the idea of internet publishing in 2001, shortly after the 9/11 tragedy. I have always been interested in two things -- movies and music. I love to entertain people and upset those with different viewpoints.

My internet debut began with the creation of a webpage (<http://www.angelfire.com/scifi2/starwarsspoof/main.html>). Shortly after the pages creation, it was abandoned (due to financial reasons). When I attended college in 2002, I quickly became interested in internet films. Later that year, I created my first film for the now defunct Buffy Verse website. Although I attempted to publish my creation on their site, 20th Century Fox cited copyright infringement against the site and it was closed.

Later in the year, the war in Afghanistan was erupting and the United States found another enemy on their war on terrorism--Saddam Hussein. The war in Iraq always troubled my thoughts. The world witnessed Osama bin Laden claim responsibility for the 9/11 attack; yet, the congress was looking towards Iraq and the illusion of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Furthermore, PBS aired a special concerning the possible Iraq invasion, hours before the first bombs dropped on Baghdad. This confirmed my suspicion that Dick Cheney had preplanned the attack months before President George W. Bush was inaugurated. This led me to create the now infamous "Armageddon" music video. Although I was criticized for this video, I have not given up my belief that the Second Gulf War is an unjust war. I have nothing against our fighting men and women; however, I am against the crooked politicians who placed our troops in jeopardy without a good reason.

After finishing this video, I wrote this censorship book. Originally it was suppose to be a seven page thesis on the subject; however, I became intrigued with the subject. Soon my seven page thesis became a 35 page book. I thought once about releasing it as a film, but I could never find the time for such an extensive project.

Since this book was written I have completed 4 short films, 2 feature length films, created several web pages, and focused on advertising my work on several different sites.

(I still have not made the big time; however, I have made a lot of friends who can point me in the right direction.) At the present time I am finishing recording my first full length album with my band “A Stoner’s Dream” (formerly known as Lunar Eclipse). We hope to have this project on line soon.

If you would like to know more about me or you want to see my other work, click on one of the Url’s listed below.

<http://www.myspace.com/illegalcopypresentations>

<http://www.myspace.com/illegalcopypresentations2>

<http://www.myspace.com/astonersdream>

<http://www.myspace.com/lunoreclipse>

<http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=Darrell%20Wright>

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<http://www.ifilm.com/myifilm/hardcoredlw>

<http://www.vidilife.com/index.cfm?f=profile.main&intUserAccountID=689250>

There are more URL’s available; however, these are the main ones I use.

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