

The Hays Production Code: A Success or Failure?

Kayla Swiston
APUSH
A Block
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How movie ratings came to be used is an intriguing question. Under what circumstances was it deemed necessary to put a ratings system into use? The idea of movie ratings, however, first stemmed from a movie censorship code, called the Hays Code. Essentially, the Hays Code, also known as the Production Code, or the Hays Production Code, is a code censoring movie production that was implemented from the 1930s to the late 1960s to keep a certain level of morality in films. However, for the first four years that the Code was put into use, often called the Pre-Code era, the Code was not closely regulated, and movie producers went wild, creating several films whose morality levels were extremely unconventional, openly suggesting violence, immoral sexual relationships, behavior, and drugs (Doherty 2). To solve this problem, on July 2nd, 1934, the Production Code Administration (PCA) was created to monitor the morality levels of films and to regulate the restraints listed in the Hays Production Code (Lev 87, Walker “Intolerant Alliance”). In the mid-1950s and late 1960s, after a few years of stability of Code regulation, citizens began becoming more obsessed with sexuality, and the Code began to crack and become more loosely interpreted until it finally crashed and burned and the Motion Picture Association of America replaced it with a ratings system (Lev 93, Doherty 1, Walker “Intolerant Alliance”). This then brings up the question of, to what extent was the Code effective in regulating the morality levels of movie production during the time it was implemented? Considering the loose adherence of the Code in the Pre-Code era and in the 1950s-60s, and also that film producers often tested the boundaries of the Code even during times of strict regulation, the Hays Production Code was not very effective in regulating the morality levels of films during the time it was implemented.

Before the government focused on censoring films, in the late 1860s, it had already begun censoring what was believed to be violating the traditional values of modesty, proprietary and

lawfulness for things such as photographs, articles, books, and other things in print. Social critics had been worrying over popular articles, books and sex education for decades. The antismut law of 1865 allowed the US postmaster to intercept inappropriate photographs, obscene books, postcards, and pamphlets. It was not until the twentieth century when movies were the next target of censorship (Wittern-Keller 17). Movies were more graphic, and faster at delivering realistic instruction on romance and crime than any written work the government had censored before, its influence proving to be a bigger threat to the morals of society (18). “Most arts appeal to the mature ... This art [movies] appeals at once to every class – mature, immature, developed, undeveloped, law-abiding, criminal” (Doherty 7). Much like movie critics today, in the 1900s, the National Board of Censorship (renamed the National Board of Review in 1915) was comprised of volunteers to preview and provide feedback for the film before it was showcased. Feedback back then, however, consisted of making recommendations, discouraging immoral and violent content, and sanctioning films for showcasing, while reviews today do not recommend or discourage, they simply comment upon the movie for potential audience members' reference. As the board became more popular, it demanded that films have the board's seal of approval before it would be allowed to be showcased in theaters. For a while the “No seal no theaters” method of approval was accepted because producers received business stability while exhibitors now had somewhat of an insurance policy to fall back on (Wittern-Keller 23). The board's passive persuasion toward what they believed was immoral was not restrictive enough in the eyes of some moralists who “worried about movie content they considered to be “social sewage” - films about straying spouses, wild “dancing daughters”[*Our Dancing Daughters* 1928], gun-crazed gangsters[*Lights of New York* 1928], hard-drinking youths, and seductive foreigners [*The Red Kimono* 1925]”, especially since views differed between the board and the moralists, such as the

board not believing that nudity was immoral (Wittern-Keller 18, 24, IMDb, Handman). The consensus over the effectiveness of the board divided; one side wanted all films to be restricted such that children would be able to watch them; the other side supported the national board's passive method of seeing the film overall, believing that voluntary regulation was a better medium between society and the film industry than direct government censorship, because it could adapt to society's changing culture (24). The board eventually failed, and the issue of whether or not the government should censor the morality of films led to state censorship of films such as *Within Our Gates* in Chicago and New Orleans, and *King of Kings* in Tennessee (Wittern-Keller 27, Handman). A few major studios accepted censorship as a part of doing business, but studios rallied forces against federal legislation, avoiding any further government censorship. State censorship satisfied some, but others wanted “control at the source”. They wanted the film industry to take up the responsibility to restrict themselves both before and during film production (Wittern-Keller 51). In the years leading up to the 1930s, movies were moving on from silent films to sound production, and there were many complaints from the government and churches that the morality level of citizens was rapidly declining (Malti-Douglas 1201, Lev 87). Now that films had the ability to use dialogue in films, more could be portrayed to the audience than before, including discussing topics that were inappropriate for the wide range of audience members, namely the children. The pressure for movie censorship started in the 1900s, but the Hays Code did not become a method of censorship until the 1930s when state censorship of films, which had been successful for a time, failed to appease moralists any longer (Wittern-Keller 17). Reformers were searching for evidence to back their claim that “America needed protection from profit-hungry, amoral producers and their immoral actors”, and with the beginnings of the paparazzi came useful evidence (52). Hollywood publicists eager to tell all

about their clients, published magazines; newspapers greedily sought after the life styles and secrets of the stars. As a result, lots of shocking events were revealed and published, such as America's sweetheart, Mary Pickford, running off to divorce and marry her other lover; director William Taylor, who was possibly part of a love triangle, was found shot, and popular actor Wallace Reid died from overdosing on drugs (52). The scandals showed how “corrupt” the movie production was, and reformers used the scandals to push for film censorship. To keep the government from directly having a say in censoring movie production, a group of movie producers created the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) to create a self-censorship guide so they could be censored on their own terms (Malti-Douglas 1201). Will Hays was appointed as leader of the MPPDA and created a list of “Don'ts and Be Carefuls” to replace the Thirteen Points of banned topics, but it was weak and unsuccessful. Father Daniel Lord, a catholic priest who just finished being a religious consultant to the film *The King of Kings*, and Martin Quigley who was the publisher of the *Motion Picture Herald*, offered to write a code for movie producers that would be accepted by churches and other critics. Because of its vulnerable state from the Depression, Hays agreed, and the proposal Lord and Quigley gave became the Hays Code, which, at the time it was written, was seen as “an enlightened document that protected women and children, demanded respect for immigrants, and “sought to uplift the lower orders and convert the criminal mentality. If its intention was social control, the allegiance was on the side of the angels”” (Wittern-Keller 52-56). As mentioned before, in the first four years the Code was implemented, known as the Pre-Code era, it was widely disregarded until the PCA was formed and began reinforcing it. The job of the PCA was to “patrol the diegesis”, the world inside the film, and find language, images and meanings that should be banished from it (Doherty 10). They had to look beyond outer appearances and see

into the film's double entendre's. The Hays Code was extremely strict on themes of sexuality. Married couples had to have separate beds in films, and kissing scenes were very daring and often not allowed on screen (In Lip Service). Even scenes that conjured explicit mental images (things that might be happening off screen) were considered too sexual and were not allowed (Doherty 11). Sexual seduction was not to be made fun of (Walker "Intolerant Alliance"). "Sex Perversion", what the Code referred to as homosexuality, was not allowed to be implied or presented in a motion picture, though PCA-approved films allowed any subject except homosexuality to be presented as long as the conflict of morality had the proper reference (Lev 92,94). The Code even extended to the political scene, preventing controversial political material in films (Lieberman 160). In regard to crime, the Code declared revenge unjustifiable, and in regard to religion, no faith could be ridiculed, and "ministers of religion in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or as villains" (Gilbert 2, Quigley). The Code also had restrictions on the morality of marriages: "The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing" (Quigley). The drug trade was strictly banned as well, since it was immoral, and was not to be brought to the audience's attention. There was no profanity, disrespect to the flag, or miscegenation (intimacy between different races) (Walker "Intolerant Alliance"). The general principals of the Code also included that:

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation. (Quigley)

The Code tried, in every possible category, to clearly define what was acceptable on film, and

what was not.

The Pre-Code era was a time of chaos in the movie industry where the Production Code was not taken seriously and openly ignored. The mid-1950s to the late 1960s also led to several compromises and a more loosely interpreted version of the Code. The morality level in films during the Pre-Code era was horrific, and though it was “pledged in theory to avoid alluring images of sin, crime, and vulgarity, filmmakers were effectively free to ignore the Code in practice” (Walker “Intolerant Alliance”). The first four years the Code was implemented was characterized by a series of “wildly eccentric films” (Doherty 2). There were cases of unlawful sexual cooperation in *Unashamed* 1932, *Blonde Venus* 1932, and *She Done Him Wrong* 1933; Marriage was ridiculed in *Madame Satan* 1930, *The Common Law* 1931, and *Old Morals for New* 1932; Ethnic and racial lines were crossed and ignored in *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* 1933, *The Emperor Jones* 1933, and *Massacre* 1934; Economic injustice and political corruption were portrayed in *Wild Boys of the Road* 1933, *This Day and Age* 1933, and *Gabriel Over the White House* 1933; Crime went unpunished, and good deeds went unrewarded in *Red Headed Woman* 1932, *Call Her Savage* 1932, and *Baby Face* 1933; “in sum, pretty much the raw stuff of American culture unvarnished and unveiled” (2,3). Make no mistake, filmmakers were well aware of the restrictions and guidelines the Hays Code called for during the Pre-Code era. They simply had no motivation to comply with the Code as long as the audience was content with the films content. The fact that audiences still went to watch the films, coupled with the fact that the MPPDA made no move to reinforce the Code gave them no reason not to step beyond the boundaries painted on the ground by the Code; they would face no consequence. As *Variety* greatly put it, “Producers have reduced the Hays Production Code to sieve-like proportions and are deliberately out-smarting their own document” (“Deadline For Film Dirt”). They had created

a Code to follow, yet they were not being vigilant about following it. One fine example of a film from the Pre-Code era to elaborate on is *Red Dust*, published 1932, right in the middle of the four year chaos the film industry called freedom. In this film, absolutely nothing is subtle or ambiguous in meaning, and the Code violations are glaring all throughout the film. The main male, Clark Gable is at a bar getting drunk when he finds beautiful, blond, Jean Harlow on his lap, ever so becoming in her clothes getting tossed to the floor as they enjoy each other's company. Six weeks later, Harlow leaves Gable temporarily while in comes Mary Astor, a timid, shy, but most importantly, a *married* woman. Harlow comes back, yet her advances are ignored as Gable makes his own moves on the sweet and innocent Mary Astor. Eventually, after a huge monsoon hits, a soaked Astor is swept away, and Gable is able to achieve his goal of tussling in bed with Astor. However, after enjoying her company, he decides to return to Harlow. While Gable and Harlow comfort each other in bed, Astor walks in, gets insulted by Gable and ends up shooting him in her fit of rage. Astor returns to her husband repentant and distraught, though Harlow comes to her aid, defending Astor's complicity in the forbidden love affair. Afterward, Gable is nursed back to health by Harlow, they fall back into each others arms, and cue ending credits (Doherty 14-15). Essentially, this film ran head first into the Code walls, sending illicit love affairs, kissing, explicit mental images, seduction, and violence barriers crumbling to the floor in a sad state of disregard for the Code regulations. *Red Dust* portrays nearly all the messages being sent by films in the Pre-Code era in all its rule-breaking glory. Moving into the mid-1950s and 1960s where the PCA is introduced, however, filmmakers had to be more subtle with the messages they attempted to portray in their films. In the 1950s, sexuality was becoming more emphasized as more and more citizens became obsessed with the topic, though movies could not openly adapt to target those subjects, because the Code was aimed to prevent those

exact subjects from surfacing in films. Now the film industry's enforcement of morality conflicted with audience and industry conditions, providing a dilemma (Lev 89). In the end, audience opinion won out against the government's opinion on censoring films, and many films began straying from the Code restrictions time and time again. For example, *Tea and Sympathy*, produced in 1956, had a lot of controversy about adultery and homosexuality before it was finally released. The film is about an eighteen year old boy who acts differently from others and is often made fun of because of the assumption that he is homosexual. His teacher offers to make clear whether or not he is homosexual, and he ends up sleeping with her. She convinces him that with what had happened, it is clear that he is heterosexual. However, the teacher is married, and later, there is reason to assume that her husband may actually be homosexual (92). At first, the PCA was not at all pleased with the plot containing any reference to homosexuality or forbidden love affairs. In the end, they were not entirely content either, but after many revisions, the PCA finally agreed to compromise, as long as what was traditionally morally "correct" was incorporated into the message of the film, and they resolved the issue of homosexuality that was brought up, along with showing that the boy's affair with his married teacher was wrong (92). While the PCA might have been effective in censoring the most obvious breaches of the Code, if audiences supported films that still managed to overstep the boundaries of the Code, encouraging filmmakers and producers to create more films including forbidden subjects, then it is inevitable that eventually the Code would crack. December 11th, 1959, the Hays Production Code was revised to accommodate the changing culture and popular opinions of society. Controversial matters such as abortion, childbirth and drug addiction were allowed to be presented in films, as long as filmmakers and producers added the proper restrictions on it, making clear what is and what is not to be accepted in society. Miscegenation, which was severely looked down upon in

the original Code, no longer was mentioned anywhere in the new one. Opposite that, language and brutality were even more specifically disapproved. There were restrictions against profanity, and brutality was specified down to certain actions, such as physical violence, abuse and torture (93). In 1959, a ratings system became a hot topic. Screenwriter James Poe suggested to Hamilton that since the nation was becoming obsessed with sex, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) should create a system of classification to separate films for children and films for adults (94). That began the more rapid decline of the Code before it finally broke, and the present day ratings system took its place beginning 1968. As proven by the Pre-Code era, the Code, when it was first implemented, was not an effective device for film censorship. In the mid-1950s and late 1960s, the Code, after a few years of strict censorship, began to loosen and crack, slowly becoming ineffective as the masses became obsessed with subjects censored by the Code.

One may believe that surely, since there is no present day Production Code in use, of course toward the beginning and toward the end there would be instability and ineffectiveness; it is the stability in the middle that truly shows how effective it was. If that were true, then even so, looking deeper into the films produced in the years of stricter Code regulation, it will be found that they were not without their own struggles against the Code, some inching their way just beyond the lines drawn by the Code. During the times of strict Code regulation, film makers still tried to find loopholes in the system. They created systems of codes of representation where something could outwardly seem innocent, yet more “mature” audience members would be able to find the “deeper meanings” placed in the movie, and producers could deny ever putting them there by using the excuse that the Hays Production Code prevented them from allowing such meanings into their films (Balio 41). The Code made some compromises with films, acknowledging that there were some things hidden in films that only mature and sophisticated

adults would understand that younger children would not. For example, the film *Make Way for Tomorrow*, produced in 1937, was subject to many compromises. The story is about a grandmother who had moved in with her daughter-in-law's family, and the PCA had problems accepting the actions of the granddaughter Rhonda who was being intimate with a married man. In the film, Rhonda was watching a film reluctantly with her grandmother, when, in the middle of the movie she snuck out with a man, before returning later to pick up her grandmother. It could be deduced that since the man had not been presented to her parents, and did not pick her up from her front door, then they had an immoral relationship. Further into the movie, Rhonda has not yet returned home, and her grandmother and mother are worried. They receive a call that is able to be interpreted by adults that she stayed out with the man while younger audience members would simply understand that the daughter did something bad. In an early draft of the screenplay, it was revealed that Rhonda had initially been with her lover in a hotel and had to be taken back home by authorities. The head of the PCA, Breen, pointed out the issue of the granddaughter and the married man together in a hotel, and concluded that it was to be solved by rewriting the scene to remove any indication of adultery or loose sex (Doherty 11-13). Even with the compromises, however, there were still subtle hints in the movie that there were traces of Code violations, though they were left alone because of the argument that it could only be understood by more mature audiences. The film *The Moon is Blue*, produced in 1953, tested how much they could stretch the boundaries of the Code, concerning changing attitudes about sexuality. It is an adaptation of a popular stage play, and it had no revealing costumes or immoral behavior, but there was a lot of dialogue about sex. The story is that a young woman named Patty O'Neill meets an architect named Don Gresham on top of the Empire State Building and decides to go home with him to have some drinks and dinner. Occasionally joined by Gresham's upstairs

neighbors, playboy David Slater and his daughter Cynthia, they talk about seduction, virginity and marriage. After a lot of misadventures, Patty leaves in the early morning, but Don finds her the next day on top of the Empire State Building again to propose (Lev 89). In regards to appearance and behavior, nothing had violated the Code, but the dialogue was considered “inappropriate”, and the film was consistently disapproved by the PCA in the draft and final stages. However, United Artists and Preminger released the film anyway without the seal. The movie got mixed reviews, but in the end, three state censorship boards banned it, but four approved it. As a large result of the controversy over it, *The Moon is Blue* became a big hit. “Film historian Tino Balio reports that it “was shut out of many theaters, but where it did play it broke box-office records.”” (90). Though it was risky, United Artists and Preminger won their gamble of releasing a film without a Code Seal, suggesting the Production Code was no longer compatible with audience expectations and needs in the 1950s (90).

The Code seal stamped on Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) did not keep Ingrid Bergman and Cary Grant from simmering with erotic passion and flaunting the sacrament of marriage, nor did it temper the plight of the dispossessed or strangle the voice of protest in John Ford's version of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) (Doherty 3).

The Code was losing influence, and much of the filmmakers' defiance toward the Code was a result of the Great Depression since audiences were not as willing to spend money on such bleak entertainment. Many graphs on weekly motion picture attendance essentially state that there was a rapid decrease from the 90 million in 1946 to the 40 million in 1960 (Lev 7).

With the number of North American movie spectators consistently dropping, studios and independent producers were under pressure to find new, more sensational subjects and thus revive audience interest. They pushed against the restraints of the Production Code in a variety of ways: with more revealing costumes for women (THE FRENCH LINE, 1954); franker attitudes toward adultery (FROM HERE TO ETERNITY, 1953); and well-made treatments of previously forbidden subjects (THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN ARM, about drug addiction, 1955; TEA AND SYMPATHY, about the fear of homosexuality, 1956) (89).

True, the Hays Production Code was reinforced much more strongly between the Pre-Code era and the mid-1950s, but while on the surface, the movie producers complied with the Code, underneath, they were constantly attempting to knock on the door to the freedom beyond the Code, using methods of hinting and double meanings. The Code's compromises and eventual revisions gave it less control and influence over films, especially when movies without the Code's Seal were still able to do well.

Taking into account the loose adherence of the Code in the Pre-Code era and the 1950s-60s, and also the fact that even during times of strict regulation, film producers often tested the boundaries of the Code, it can be concluded that the Hays Code was not very effective in regulating the morality levels of films during its time of implementation. During the Pre-Code era, films had glaring Code violations, though the MPPDA made no move to reinforce the rules and punish any who violated them until 1934 when the PCA was created. During the brief time of stability in Code regulation, filmmakers and producers still made subtle attempts to stretch the Code boundaries as far as they could, in order to keep audience members interested. In the mid-1950s, the Code began losing its influence, and gradually became more and more loosely interpreted, until it was finally overturned and the MPAA ratings system replaced it in 1968. Though the Hays Production Code ultimately crashed and burned, it was what inevitably brought about the MPAA ratings system in 1968, which was still in effect during the first decade of the twenty-first century. There is a lot of controversy about the ratings systems still today, about what makes things PG, PG-13 and R, and what qualifies as “mature” enough to view the movie, much like films subject to the Hays Code. Perhaps the MPAA system is on the same path of destruction as its predecessor, the Hays Production Code.

Word Count: 4227

Works Cited

Balio, Tino. *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939*. New York: Scribner, 1993. Print.

This source did not help me as much as I thought it would; I only have one notecard that I took away from it. But it did have a good take on how film producers attempted to get around the Hays Code restrictions. I used it in my first body paragraph, discussing the Pre-Code era violations.

“Deadline For Film Dirt.” *Variety* 110 (June-July 1933): 65. Print.

This source was one of my primary sources, and it was a newspaper reflecting on the Hays Code's effectiveness, and providing viewpoint from that era. I used it in my first body paragraph, discussing the Pre-Code era's chaos.

Doherty, Thomas. *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999. Print.

This source gave me essentially all my knowledge about the Pre-Code era, and gave many references to all of the Pre-Code era film violations. It is used in my background paragraph and in my first body paragraph, discussing the Pre-Code era.

Gilbert, Nora. *Better Left Unsaid: Victorian Novels, Hays Code Films, and the Benefits of Censorship*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2013. Print.

This source was very helpful in telling me of the restrictions on the Hays Code and general background information about the Code. I used it in my background paragraph.

Handman, Gary. "Banned Films: Media Resources Center UCB." *Banned Films: Media Resources Center UCB*. Library of University of California, Berkeley, 08 Dec. 2011. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

This provided a list of banned films. It gave examples of films that were banned during certain times, and it also gave the reason why it was banned, along with a summary of what the film was about. It also provided specific places that the films were banned in, which was really helpful. I used it in my first body paragraph as an example of corrupt films.

IMDb. "Lights of New York." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

This gave a description about the type of movie I was trying to give examples of, and I put it in my first body paragraph to show the “corrupt” themes reformers wanted censored.

IMDb. "Our Dancing Daughters." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

This source is the same as above, but it was a different link, so I suppose I have a

different citation for it. It also gave a description about the type of movie I was trying to give examples of, and I put it in my first body paragraph to show the “corrupt” themes reformers wanted to censor.

“In lip service: the evolution of the big-screen kiss.” *Sun-Herald* [Sydney, Australia] 10 Aug. 2014; 4. *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*. Web. 6 Nov. 2014.

This was a very strange read, but it gave emphasis on how much sexuality was disapproved of in films during the time the Hays Code was in use. It touched on the problems of kissing and how marriage was viewed on the screen. I used it in my background paragraph.

Lev, Peter. *Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003. Print.

This source was also a big source of films that had lots of compromises and controversy, but it was also super helpful with all of my background research. This gave me a lot of the information I needed to create the meat of my argument. It provided me with violations, compromises, changes, and details about certain films that proved to be especially outstanding during the time of the Hays Code's implementation and I used it throughout my paper.

Lieberman, Robbie. *History in Dispute*. Detroit: St. James, 2005. Print.

This source was not too helpful, but it gave me information about how politics was being affected by the Hays Code. It had a lot to do with films proving they were anti-communist, so I did not use it much. But I used it in my background as well to show that politics was also a censored area for film.

Multi-Douglas, Fedwa. *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007. Print.

This source gave me a lot of my background research. It gave me the groundwork for my overall paper and the minor problems that led to the creation of the Hays Code to begin with.

Quigley, Martin, and Daniel Lord. "The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code)." *The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code)*. Matt Bynum, 12 Apr. 2006. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

This source was the key prime source. It is the Hays Code, and it helped a lot with all of the regulations listed in the background paragraph. I used it to show the wide variety of restriction the Code encompassed in my background paragraph

Walker, Jesse. "Intolerant Alliance." *Reason* 1 Mar. 2001: n. pag. Web. 02 Jan. 2015.

This source helped with the nooks and crannies; it was actually the last source I used. It covered more restrictions, some more violations and some more info about the PCA in

my background paragraph. This helped with more specific dates on when the Hays Code collapsed, and provided reactions to the Pre-Code era.

Witern-Keller, Laura. *Freedom of the Screen: Legal Challenges to State Film Censorship, 1915-1981*. Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky, 2008. Print.

This source helped so much on the background leading up to the Hays Code, and other background in general. It gave an idea of all the factors that gradually built up into creating the Hays Code. There were a few weaker versions of the Hays Code (ex. the Thirteen Points of banned topics) that I did not know was existent.

Bibliographic Reflection

Writing the Junior Thesis has always been my worst fear going through history class each year. All freshman ever hear from juniors about the thesis is that it's a horrible paper of lengths unimaginable and incomparable to any essay written so far. Not being a great essay writer, I panicked a lot and dreaded the day I was assigned this paper created by Satan himself. I tried to mentally prepare myself for the daunting task, but I'm not great at being optimistic, so I settled for telling myself that the entire junior class would suffer through it with me, so it wasn't like I'd slowly go insane by myself.

When I finally received the assignment, I nearly bashed my head on the desk when we were told we could write about anything history related, because honestly that's the worst thing you can tell me. If you don't give me more restrictions, there's just too many possibilities, I don't even know where to start! My friend who went through it during the summer came to my rescue and gave me a list of topics she had wanted to do but ended up tossing aside for a different idea. I looked up each of them and decided on a topic I thought I would actually have fun researching. I had always wondered why we had a ratings system, and this was about a code that led up to it, so it seemed like a topic I'd be interested in learning more about.

Most of my sources came from a trail of binge reading about the background of the Hays Code. I typed "Hays Code" into Questia.com and I clicked on all the links on the first page and just studied the words they provided me as much as I could, trying to suck all the knowledge from them. For the most part, it worked. My other sources came from questions brought up by sources I was reading from already. The most useful sources were the books by Lev, Doherty and the Hays Code site I found, because they gave me the bulk of my information about the Hays Code and what I put into my paper.

I really enjoyed reading about all the code violations and how much controversy there was about kissing, women wearing too little and violence, because when I think about the movies we have today, I can only imagine the reactions the PCA would have to them. They would not be happy. At all. I really really really hated the pressure of getting everything done by the deadline though, because it was really stressful. Without the deadlines, I would've just procrastinated though, so I am still very grateful for them.

Finally, I reached my final draft with the help of hot chocolate, determination, help from friends (though I'm not sure them making fun of me for not doing this during the summer really counts as them supporting me, because they were pretty much just rubbing it in my face that they were stress free while I was busy pulling out my hair in frustration), and really helpful feedback from my teacher Mr. Bedar.

I learned a lot from this process, I'm sure, I'm just blanking on how to phrase them. I have this really big feeling of achievement and enlightenment now that I'm done with it, but I can't put it into words. I suppose I've learned that when you're doing something that really interests you, you're more motivated to work on it, and it doesn't feel so much like awful homework anymore. Until the deadline starts creeping up and you realize you have to have fun faster. I've also learned that as much as I hate people reading my work and as much as I stink at writing essays, feedback is really important to making your paper better, because they see things that you as the writer might miss because what you've read and understood hasn't necessarily been read and understood by the people you're presenting your argument to.

