ABSTRACT

UNCENSORED: GENDER ROLES AND THE DISMANTLING OF THE MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION CODE

by Kathleen Stankiewicz

In 1934, the American film industry decided to undergo self-censorship in order to stifle the public and federal outcries for moral reform in films. The Production Code Administration, under the leadership of Joseph Breen, a Catholic layman, enforced the Motion Picture Production Code or Hays Code for over three decades. The Code was a set of rigid guidelines that covered a myriad of topics ranging from gangsters and violence to drug and alcohol abuse to relations between men and women on the silver screen. The metamorphosis of the Code, that of gradual change towards disintegration, is most evident in subtle changes and eventual transformation of gender roles portrayed in film over the lifetime of the Code. Despite the attempts to enforce patriarchal and Christian views by establishing a rigid set of unchanging masculine and feminine behaviors, gender roles continued to evolve and visibly change, and American films recorded this process.
UNCENSORED: GENDER ROLES AND THE DISMANTLING OF
THE MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION CODE

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Dedication

To: Mom, Dad, Kristin, Jenny, Colleen, & Priceless
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to have many people who encouraged and supported me throughout this process of writing my thesis. For my adviser, Dr. Mary Frederickson, whose infectious enthusiasm and meticulous eye for detail shaped my thesis throughout its many drafts. I also had the wonderful support of my committee, Dr. Steve Norris and Dr. Nishani Frazier who both provided feedback as well as humor to this thesis and my time at Miami University. I would also like to thank Dr. Bruce Drushell, who provided new insights and intriguing conversations on films. I was able to do key research at the Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library in Beverly Hills, California thanks to a grant provided by the Miami University Department of Graduate Studies and the Department of history. I am also indebted to the many workers at the Margaret Herrick Library for their sifting through my requests to help me find the archival materials needed. A constant presence in my life, I am forever grateful for the support from my family, especially my parents – thank you for the support every step of the way.
Introduction

During 2011, the United States Congress considered the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP (intellectual property) Act (PIPA), two bills that specifically took aim to stop the rampant piracy of copyrighted materials, such as film, music, books, and other types of intellectual properties.² Had they passed, these laws would have given the federal government power to prosecute and block access to rogue sites, to limit advertising and payment centers from being used on specific websites, and to order internet providers to block access to known sites of illegal activities.² Not surprisingly, organizations such as the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and theRecording Industry Association of America (RIAA) became some of the strongest proponents of both bills since both industries have suffered severe fiscal losses due to the increasing number of films and songs that can be illegally downloaded on the internet via domestic and foreign sites.³ Initially, SOPA and PIPA had significant congressional backing and passed through the first rounds of voting with considerable majorities. Yet, by early January 2012, internet giants such as Google, English-Language Wikipedia, and Reddit took notice of the legislature, and on January 18, 2012, multiple U.S. based websites, large and small, participated in a blackout, during which no user could access their site.⁴ The January 18th protests demonstrated the power of new media via the internet. Television and film corporations alone had neither the influence nor the means to motivate such a large group of individuals to contact their political representatives and call for a stop to the SOPA and PIPA bills from becoming law.

¹ House Judiciary Committee Chairman and SOPA backer, Lamar Smith (R-TX) stated that “the online theft of American intellectual property is no different than the theft of products from a store. It is illegal and the law should be enforced both in the store and online.” The House Judiciary Committee, http://judiciary.house.gov/issues/issues_RogueWebsites.html. Accessed on May 9, 2012. Under “Bill Information,” also see “Dispelling the Myths Surrounding SOPA.”
² There has also been concern over whether or not the US government has the power to prosecute these sites since many are based in other nations.
³ Both the MPAA and RIAA websites feature tabs for “piracy” on their individual homepages and promotes the idea that the theft of intellectual property affects the average workers within the company, not the film or music stars or the executive boards. See www.mpaa.org and www.riaa.com for additional information.
⁴ While Google simply blacked out its name on its search page, others like Wikipedia had messages that read “Imagine a world without free knowledge.” In conjunction with this action, power players across multiple industries including the New York Times editorial board, musicians, and actors signed petitions voicing their opposition to potential censorship if SOPA and PIPA became law. Jonathan Weisman, “In Fight Over Piracy Bills, New Economy Rises Against Old,” The New York Times, January 18, 2012.
The backlash since the January 18th protests put both bills on hold until policy makers can adequately change the rhetoric to protect the internet from “censorship.” Although the opposition still runs strong, corporations such as the MPAA continue to champion the cause of anti-piracy and encourage individuals to get involved in protecting intellectual property and not purchase or download illegally.\(^5\) Ironically, this was not the first time the MPAA found itself opposing censorship. During the early twentieth century when film was the new media of the early twentieth century, it also faced issues of censorship. Moreover, for over three decades the film industry actively participated in self-censorship as a strategy to stay ahead of those investing in controlling film production and distribution. Whereas the internet in 2012 is protected by the First Amendment and civil liberties advocates such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the film industry paved the way for new media protection under the First Amendment almost seventy years prior. In 1922, Hollywood created the MPPDA (now the MPAA) in an effort to self-censor the film industry and avoid federal censorship. Beginning in 1934, a series of censorship codes governed the American film industry that prohibited certain issues and ideas, particularly those concerning gender, sexuality, and marriage from examination or explication in film. Not until 1968 did films finally come under the protection of the First Amendment and no longer face direct censorship challenges.

The Research:

This thesis addresses the issue of self-censorship and explores the connection between visual representations and American culture by closely examining gender roles in American film from the post-World War II period through the 1960’s. Through an analysis of popular postwar films, with a focus on depictions of gender roles in marriage and family life, this project answers the following questions: Why did the forces that monitored morality in the 1930’s no longer apply in the 1960’s? To what extent did American film produced from 1945 through the 1960’s reflect American culture regarding gender roles within marriage and the family? In what ways, if any, did the Code affect the prevailing gender norms of the time?

With these questions in mind, this project focuses specifically on the Motion Picture Production Code (the Code) and the Legion of Decency’s efforts to establish moral guidelines for the United States film industry to follow. Over the three decades that the Code was in effect,

1934-1968, the Code gradually changed and eventually disintegrated, which is most evident in the subtle nuances of gender roles portrayed in film. Despite attempts to enforce patriarchal and Christian views through the establishment of a rigid and unchanging set of designated masculine and feminine behaviors, gender roles continued to evolve and visibly change, and American films recorded this process. The interactions and relationships between men and women, men and men, and women and women, were at the core of the Code. Using Joan Scott’s definition of gender as a “historically and culturally specific attempt to resolve the dilemma of sexual difference, to assign fixed meaning to that which ultimately cannot be fixed,” this thesis analyzes American films from the pre-Code era (1930-1934) through the immediate post-Code/ratings system of the late 1960’s.  

Prior to the implementation of the Code in 1934, films often featured overt sexuality, drug use, and gangster violence. Actresses such as Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Mae West, and Jean Harlow all electrified the silver screen with their sultry performances, while Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney portrayed mob bosses and gangsters in films with storylines that often closely paralleled modern day accounts. In response to these so called “lewd” films, religious organizations such as the Catholic controlled Legion of Decency protested what they perceived as the lax morals portrayed in U.S. films. Pope Pius XI acknowledged the potential negative influences these films had on the public stating that bad films were “occasions of sin; they seduce young people along the ways of evil by glorifying the passions; they show life under a false light; they cloud ideals; they destroy pure love, respect for marriage and affection for the family.” By the mid-1930’s, under the leadership of William Hays, and later Joseph Breen, the Production Code Administration (PCA), a private film industry office under Hay’s supervision, began to implement and enforce a detailed set of regulations that restricted the representation of subjects regarded as taboo. These rigid rules limited what Americans saw at the movie theater, and also began to indirectly shape American thought and moral identity. Pre-Code films were perceived to have had such a profound impact that the Code justified self-censorship by stating that “IN GENERAL: The mobility, popularity, accessibility, emotional appeal, vividness, straight-forward presentation of fact in the films makes for intimate contact on a larger audience

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7 National Legion of Decency 1940-1941 organizational pamphlet, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, National Legion of Decency Collection, Folder 8, (1941).
8 Ibid.
and greater emotional appeal.” Despite this rigidity by the late 1940’s and 1950’s, the PCA began to impose Code guidelines and specifically to shape the representation of gender relations in films produced in the United States. Although the immediate post-World War II years featured the PCA strongly enforcing the Code, by the mid-1950’s the Code underwent a series of amendments and revisions by the PCA’s administrative New York offices. Once the Code underwent these major revisions, Hollywood began to further push the boundaries of the Code, and by the mid-1960’s the Code became increasingly obsolete, an outdated set of regulations that could no longer contain the changing moral attitudes and values of the American public. Finally, in 1968 the Motion Picture Association of America’s film rating system replaced the PCA’s Code, bringing to an end over three decades of film censorship in the U.S.

Yet, when it was initially implemented, Joseph Breen and the Legion of Decency described the Code as a moral maxim necessary to uphold traditional American values in film. When Breen came the PCA in 1934, he stringently enforced the Code by increasing pressure and fines on the major movie studios such as Warner Brothers and Paramount. Under Breen’s tenure, he insisted that U.S. films were to reproduce a specific vision of American life, which would ensure that “the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.” Utilizing this underlying theme, historians have centered their scholarship of the Code on its repression of images of violence, drug use, and racial integration. They have also interpreted violations of the Code in the 1960’s as a youthful rebellion against traditional values. Leading up to and during this time, however, men and women were dramatically altering the way they participated in American society, yet there has been little scholarship exploring the ways that gender roles challenged traditional marital and familial ideals within film. The dynamic social transformations that took place during the 1960’s undermined conventional values, changed the idea of the “nuclear” family, and gave women economic options outside of marriage. Rather than beginning with the Code’s dismantlement in the late 1960’s, this project

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11 The Motion Picture Production Code.

looks at the long history of the Code, and the increasingly difficult task of enforcement in the post-World War II years, the breakdown of the Code during the 1950’s, and the rapid deconstruction of the Code by 1968. This process can be seen clearly through a close study of gender roles in popular U.S. films during the period from the mid 1940’s to the late 1960’s.

The Code:

Since the Code heavily governed the motion picture industry from the 1930’s through the 1960’s, one of the primary documents utilized in this project is the Motion Picture Production Code, often referred to as the “Hayes Codes,” after the first president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), Will Hayes, who oversaw the beginning of the film industry’s self-censorship. While the Code outlined a variety of specific topics that could or could not be shown in films, at its core was a set of guidelines pertaining to the interactions between men and women on screen. Prior to the creation of the Code in 1930, there were two other sets of guidelines that foreshadowed the increasingly conservative views of male-female and hetero-homosexual relations in the United States. The first set of guidelines followed the exposure of “The Sins of Hollywood” in 1922 by Ed Roberts, a former editor of a Hollywood gossip magazine, Photoplay, which prompted the creation of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). “The Sins of Hollywood” read like a tabloid. It described the debaucheries and lascivious lives that actors, directors, film studio owners, and the like participated in. While it acknowledged that it was a very small percentage of individuals who took part in this lifestyle, the entire society was to blame for allowing this immoral behavior to continue. “They knew of the horde of creatures of easy morals who have hovered about the industry and set the standard of price-decided what good, clean women would have to pay-have to give-in order to succeed.”

The report continued to describe a wide variety of indiscretions, ranging from the “wantonness of their leading women” to “the prominent young people who were living in illicit relationships.” Faced with such accusations, many of which were difficult to defend, the motion picture industry created the MPPDA, and named President Harding’s postmaster general, William Hays to take the helm. Hays’ presence alleviated some of the protests against the industry but by 1927, with the advent of “talkies,” and the expansion of the

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14 Ibid.
industry beyond silent films, the MPPDA felt the pressure from the Legion of Decency, state
government censor boards, and concerned Americans to issue its own rule list.

While “The Sins of Hollywood” exposed the seedy underbelly of Hollywood culture, the
specific content of films themselves became an increasingly divisive issue, nationally and
locally. Many state legislatures passed censorship laws that allowed the censoring or banning of
films. In an attempt to appease the states, the MPPDA created a document entitled “The Don’ts
and Be Carefuls” in 1927. This document provided eleven bullet points of topics that could not
be addressed or represented in film, followed by another twenty-five points that should be
approached with caution. Profanity, drug trafficking, and ridicule of the clergy were all banned
under the new system. Additionally, “the Don’ts and Be Carefuls” called for the removal of “any
licentious or suggestive nudity-in factor or in silhouette,” as well as “sex perversion,”
miscegenation, sex hygiene, and child birth. The “Be Carefuls” list was broader and less
specific than the “Don’ts.” For example, topics to “be careful” about included “arson,” but did
not specify what could or could not be done in relation to arson. Nudity was included in the
“Don’t” column, but issues such as “men and women in bed together,” “the sale of women, or of
a woman selling her virtue,” and “rape or attempted rape” were listed as topics to “be careful”
about. Such conundrums and vaguely written rules made the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” a joke
within the film industry. Although the document outlined the many issues facing the film
industry, there was no way to enforce it because there was no legal consequence for producing,
distributing, or showing a film that included any of the carefully listed contentious or “illegal”
subjects. As the 1920’s gave way to the 1930’s, a groundswell of conservative protestors
demanded more effective film censorship.

This increase in Christian protests for film reform and censorship allowed for the creation
of organizations such as the Catholic Legion of Decency. The Legion worked on a national level
to recommend that Catholics and other Christian denominations boycott certain films or the film
industry altogether in order to push reform. By 1930, a Catholic layman Martin Quigley, together
with Father Daniel Lord wrote the Motion Picture Production Code. Both men wanted the film
industry to agree to a set of professional standards that all studios would honor. In particular,

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Quigley wanted to avoid any protests by the Church believing that it would only lead to “controversy and increasing the box office.” While “The Don’ts and Be Carefuls” simply listed potentially controversial issues in vague terms, the Code provided distinct sections on a multitude of issues, and it included examples in support of what was accepted and what was not allowed. In addition to detailed accounts of what could not be represented, the Code promoted Christian values of traditional life, stating in the section on “General Principles” that “a man may be judged by his standard of entertainment as easily as by the standard of his work.” The Code stressed the moral obligations that the film industry had because it could so vividly present and reproduce actual events. A specific moral sensibility was imbedded into every aspect of the Code. Although written in 1930, initially this carefully constructed moral Code suffered from the same problem that the “The Don’ts and Be Carefuls” had run into: there was no way to enforce such a mandate. In 1934, succumbing to mounting pressures to enact self-censorship, Will Hays created the Production Code Administration and put Joseph Breen at the helm. The Code gave the backbone to the moral ideals the PCA and the Legion of Decency promoted in American film. For the next three decades, Hollywood felt the powerful presence of the Code and the PCA. Over time, however, the Code endured a series of amendments and revisions. Initially, these modifications were minor in scope, but by the mid-1950’s, the Code began to be changed at an increasing rate. Amendments made to the Code over the decades it was in effect, speak eloquently to the cultural changes that re-shaped American society in the decades between the end of World War II and the final years of the 1960’s.

**Historiography:**

This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the Code, a subject that has been scrutinized by historians. While many of the films discussed here have been written about multiple times, few scholars have looked at gender relationships within these films at the time of their initial release and examined the larger implications of the indirect and direct references within specific films. It is intriguing to discover new film details, but it is enlightening to further understand films within the larger narrative of American history and culture. In order to accomplish this goal, this thesis relies on an interdisciplinary historiography. Film historians and

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19 *The Motion Picture Production Code*.  
20 Ibid.
film buffs alike have long been fascinated by the Motion Picture Production Code. Most historical and cinema studies focus on the way the Code censored and thereby limited artistic expression in American film. As constructed by PCA director Joe Breen and the Legion of Decency, the Code was a moral code, with specific language enforcing traditional values and placing a tremendous emphasis on upholding the institution of marriage. Despite these regulations, directors, actors, and screenwriters found ways to use subtle nuances to slowly and deliberately transform the Code over time. The presence of these understated hints in American film from this period make the films more dynamic than once thought.

There have been several useful studies of the Motion Picture Production Code. Much of the scholarship broadly analyzes the Code from its inception in the early 1930’s to its diminution by 1968. Historian Thomas Doherty has written prolifically on the Code, and he was one of the first historians to place the Code in a larger historical context. His works focus on the transition from the pre-Code period of the 1920’s to the early Code era of the 1930’s. Doherty’s *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* highlights the cultural factors that led to film censorship. This work analyzes the implementation of the Code and its immediate effects on the film industry. Due to the scope of the work, Doherty makes only general comments on how the implementation of the Code affected gender roles in film.

Building on Doherty’s work, historians Leonard Leff and Jerold Simmons wrote a seminal work entitled *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920’s to the 1960’s*. This was one of the first works to look at the entire lifespan of the Production Code, and it provides a useful context for examining changes in the Code over time, as well as the relationship between the PCA, the Legion of Decency, and the American film-going public, and the modifications film-makers made over that period. Simmons has recently published an article that follows the Code amendments of the 1950’s that eased censorship of illicit drug use in film.21 Both Leff and Simmons’ discuss the specific films that challenged the Code, however, their studies foreground masculine actors and identities, rather than offering a more comprehensive analysis of gender that encompasses the gender roles of men and women, hetero- and homosexual identities, and the changing construction of the nuclear family.

While there is a comprehensive historiography of works on the Code itself, a limited number of historians have studied the narrow depiction of gender roles, especially women’s roles under the Code, and the cultural impact of this censorship. Tamar McDonald is one of the few scholars to look at women’s roles in film under the Code. In a recently published article, “Carrying Concealed Weapons: Gendered Makeover in Calamity Jane,” McDonald argues that there was more to this good girl film than once believed. On its surface the film seems to portray the traditional values that women should embody. McDonald asserts, however, that the film depicts a deeper questioning of sexuality and gender roles. Although the article aptly deconstructs the film and highlights these themes, there is a lack of connection to the film’s historical context. McDonald does not explore why a 1953 comedy would have underlying themes that questioned sexuality or gender roles. In the same vein, Robert von Dassanowsky attempts to show the sexual liberation of women during the 1960’s through a study of crime comedy in his article “A Caper of One’s Own: Fantasy Female Liberation in the 1960’s Crime Comedy Film.” Dassanowsky sharply focuses on this small sub-genre of film, but he also does not explore the larger historical context of this decade. He acknowledges the Code only in passing by stating that its waning existence helped facilitate the crime comedy’s brief rise to popularity. He fails to scrutinize why this subgenre became popular, and he does not connect it to a comprehensive historical narrative. Like McDonald, Dassanowsky closely analyzes these films but does not make the broader link between the films and the time period in which they were produced. McDonald and Dassanowsky both emphasize the evolution of women’s roles in film, but they do not provide analysis of what caused this evolution during their respective times that the films were produced.

Although this project focuses on the Motion Picture Production Code, there is also an underlying emphasis on American women’s and gender history. This work makes a unique contribution in the connection between the representations of gender in film and its broader historical narrative. Many historians of women and gender have looked closely at the postwar World War II period. In her highly acclaimed *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Elaine Tyler May critically assesses family life during the Cold War period and posits

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that political and domestic life worked in tandem with traditional values. May uses popular culture, including films, to support her argument. This and other secondary works provide valuable insight into the historical construction of the era, yet while many works analyze the representations of women’s roles and gendered identities in American film, they do not look at these phenomena in relation to the Code.24

Building on May’s connection of the personal and the political, there has been a strong historiographical emphasis on subtle representations of changing sexuality in the post-World War II and Cold War eras. In particular, the presence of non-heterosexual characters in popular films suggests the increasing challenge to the Code throughout the late 1940’s and the 1950’s. Robert Corber combines history and sexuality studies to produce unique works that focus on queer and gendered histories of the Cold War era. In his most recent work, Cold War Femme (2011), he analyzes homophobic rhetoric during the Cold War era and how it “transformed the category of the lesbian.”25 Throughout the work, Corber analyzes the stereotypes of the “butch” and the “femme,” and in doing so, places agency into the hands of the femme. The aesthetic stereotype of the butch made her easily recognizable, while the femme could have been any woman, including a married woman, and thus played into the Cold War rhetoric of the “invisible threat to the institutions of heterosexuality.”26

Prior to Cold War Femme, Corber wrote two works that dealt with homosexuality (focused mainly on gay men) during the Cold War era. The first, In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America, underscored the political rhetoric of the invisible, and claimed that the homosexuals and lesbians who rejected postwar ideals of the traditional nuclear family and the American dream were seen as a domestic threat to national security.27 His second work, Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity, expanded the argument of National Security to include playwrights and screenwriters such as Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal, and

24 Theoretically, Judith Butler’s works parallel these ideas with her assertion of gender as performance and a societal construction. Her works often look to film, especially through the construction of the male gaze, and analyzes how societal ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality are all constructed and reinforced by mediums such as film. For more see, Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (New York: Routledge, 1999).
26 Corber, Cold War Femme, 5.
James Baldwin. Corber analyzes the works of these three gay writers in order to highlight “the operations of power in postwar American society and the modes of resistance those operations both enabled and precluded.”28 This analysis brings to light how political rhetoric of the era oppressed minority groups such as gay men. Similar in approach to May, Corber links the political with the intensely personal subject of sexuality. Collectively, Corber’s works give a voice to historically invisible gays and lesbians of the 1950’s.

**The Shape of the Thesis:**

Before discussing the dynamic changes that occurred in both the American film industry and American culture in the post-World War II era, it is necessary to understand the motivation behind the initial introduction of the Code. Although there is an emphasis on historicizing films from the post-World War II era, it is first necessary to understand the motivation behind the initial creation and introduction of the Code. The first chapter outlines the forces and circumstances that allowed Motion Picture Production Code to come into existence. An analysis of the pre-Code film “She Done Him Wrong” highlights gender roles in film as well as the issues such as overt sexuality and violence that religious groups found threatening. This chapter emphasizes the importance of Joseph Breen, the Production Code Administration, and the Legion of Decency’s attempts to restrict themes on screen in order to promote a moral viewing atmosphere for Americans. Through a comparison of a pre-Code film with a film produced within the confines of the Code, “Wife Versus Secretary,” this chapter underscores the powerful impact that the Code had on the film industry and the films it produced. In addition this chapter also contextualizes gender roles during the Great Depression and into the pre-war period through an examination of women’s roles in the workforce.

While Chapter one focuses on the creation of the Code during the late 1920’s and early 1930’s, Chapter two examines the Code during the 1940’s and early 1950’s with regard to changing American culture due to war. Chapter two employs Gilles Deleuze’s theory of the time-image and explores the gradual fragmenting of the Code from the postwar years through the early 1950’s. This chapter contextualizes the role of the House Un-American Activities Committee’s investigation of Hollywood and its impact on the American film industry. Despite the decade’s reputation as a period of conformity and tradition, this section illuminates the changing gender roles within the family in American society. The chapter also highlights

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evolving gender roles by analyzing two films that present challenges to postwar gender norms. “Adam’s Rib,” explores the growing idea of a married woman who also has a career. “All About Eve” represents the subtle changes films underwent throughout the early 1950’s, emphasizing the mixing of masculinity and femininity in gendered stereotypes.

While Chapter two highlights the subtle nuances within American film, the third chapter examines films that began to overtly push the boundaries of the Code during the late 1950’s and into the1960’s. This section ties the previous two chapters together and shows that although the 1960’s represented a period of tumultuous change, this transformation had been in process for decades. The analysis in this chapter explores the gender dichotomy of the “girl next door” and the vixen or the seductress in popular film and asks how these portrayals influenced and challenged conventional gender norms in American culture. The analysis of two films “Some Like It Hot” and “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” showcase the varying degrees of masculinity and femininity in film. Both films pushed the boundaries of the Code in terms of depictions of sex and their attacks against traditional marriage values. Each film portrayed and openly discussed extra-marital affairs, which were strictly against the Code, yet both received PCA approval. This inconsistency reveals the malleability of the Code.

The final section synthesizes the imposition and deconstruction of the Code as seen through the analysis of gender roles in film. In particular it will highlight the slow fracturing of the Code beginning in the post war years, accelerating in the 1950’s, and culminating with the dissolution of the Code in 1968 and the transition to the ratings system that is still employed today. The conclusion emphasizes that this process is highlighted through a close study of gender roles in films of the 1940’s through the 1960’s. This section also includes a brief analysis of “The Graduate” which marks the complete dismantlement of the Code and the beginning of a new era in the exploration of gender roles through films produced in the United States.
Chapter 1: Imposing the Code

Introduction: The Growing Need for Censorship

While the conditions were right in 1930 to create a means of self-censorship in the film industry, there had been calls to censor film since it became a popular medium at the turn of the twentieth century. As film gained popularity in the early 1910’s through the 1920’s, numerous newly created state censorship boards issued cries for film reform throughout the United States. By 1922, President Harding’s postmaster general, William Hays was dispatched to Hollywood as president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) to provide moral direction and “clean up the movies.” During the silent film era, Hays and his popularly named Hays Office began to lightly censor films by following what was dubbed the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” method.29 Famed movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn supposedly described the initial creation of the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” as not being “worth the paper it was written on.”30 This dubious scheme consisted of little more than a two column list, which vaguely highlighted issues but gave no real direction. Under the “Be Carefuls,” the guidelines simply listed “man and woman in bed together.”31 The method was cavalierly written down and historian Thomas Doherty describes it as “a singsong, childlike list of bromides and taboos [that] failed to address the real threat and promise of the motion picture medium.”32 Despite the carefully constructed guidelines, Hays and his office had no way of making the movie studios comply with their suggestions. It would take an increase in public uproar sparked and supported by religious groups before the Code could actually be created, imposed, and enforced. In 1933, “She Done Him Wrong” represented the breaking point between uncensored Hollywood and conservative America. And, in mid-1934, with the creation of the Production Code Administration, the Code went into effect.

The appearance of the Code, however, was not the first instance when traditional values called for censorship. In the early 1870s, a Civil War veteran and a member of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Anthony Comstock began advocating for the censorship of illicit materials in the mail. During the Civil War, Comstock witnessed many of his fellow soldiers

29 The Don’ts and Be Carefuls. The “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” were created in a response of the growing public scandals of Hollywood actors, many of which included, taboo sexual relations, murder accusations, and drug/alcohol abuses.
30 As quoted in Doherty, Thomas, Pre-Code Hollywood, 2.
31 The Don’ts and Be Carefuls.
lusting after inappropriate materials and abusing liquor. Comstock’s main goal was to provide protection to children from these images, however, the materials he often pursued were those meant for adults, such as pamphlets about contraception. Nevertheless, in 1873 the Comstock Act became law and made it illegal to send any “obscene, lewd, or lascivious” materials through the postal service. Much like the 1870’s, the 1920’s also marked a time of cultural conflict between the traditional lifestyles and increased youth radicalism to rebel against authority.

Out of Comstock’s advocacy came other groups, most split along gender lines. Comstock’s cause was mainly supported by men, while women branched off in other temperance groups or clubs. Many women’s groups organized around broad lines of prohibition and support of the family. By the turn of the century, groups such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union began to grow and move beyond issues of prohibition, supporting the Progressive reforms of Jane Addam’s Hull House and tackling obscenity, albeit in a different way than the men’s groups. Many of these groups were not opposed to educational literature being mailed, rather they used their organization to promote the health of women by advocating for spiritual and mental well-being of women. By the 1910’s and into the 1920’s, women’s groups were combatting the potential “sexual vulnerability of urban women,” due to their increasing participation in “public work” and their self-support in urbanized parts of the United States.

As films became more popular throughout the early twentieth century, women’s clubs, such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, took notice. By the 1920’s, they protested the dark screening room environments where films were viewed and the mixed sex audiences, as well as the corruptive potential of film itself by linking these issues to the growing danger of juvenile delinquency and an overall loss of control over the youth. Numerous women’s groups, including the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, attempted to reform the motion picture industry through consumer pressure and open dialogue with the film companies. These efforts fell on deaf ears as the film industry focused on lost profits rather than the moral high ground.

Towards the end of the 1920’s, Will Hays, president of the MPPDA, created the Studio Relations

34 Black, 9. See also, Wheeler, 47.
35 Wheeler, 23.
38 Wheeler, 77, 83.
Committee (SRC), the precursor to the PCA, and welcomed the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae to view and discuss issues within films. True to Hays’ form, he created the meeting to appease the reformers and make them feel as though they had moved steps closer towards the reforms they sought. Ultimately, this meeting allowed the groups to vent and felt that they had reached the film industry without any real changes occurring.

While these individual women’s groups were not successful in their efforts to reform the film industry, their values reflected those of most American Christians. While the SRC meeting proved a failure for the women’s groups involved, it was fruitful in that Christian denominations and Catholics found common ground on the issue of motion picture reform. Although there were distinct differences between sects as well as social and class affiliations (oftentimes prompting negative connotations between denominations), Christian Americans began to rally around Catholic organization. While Protestant religious organizations were local, Catholics had a strict organization with strong communication between the local, state, national, and international branches. A Protestant spokesman for the Washington Federation of Churches stated that, “We mean business in this thing. We have made up our mind to put an end to disgraceful and indecent motion pictures and I believe that with such a splendid start made by the Catholics, and with the Protestants joining hands we shall be able to get results.”

This combination of multiple Christian denominations openly calling for reform, spearheaded by Catholic organization in the Legion of Decency eventually caused Hollywood to capitulate to self-censorship.

Yet, with the advent and success of talking pictures in 1927 with the release of “The Jazz Singer,” movies gained new momentum, as well as new enemies, not to mention more attention from old foes. Because of the success of talkies, the industry then switched its production to solely talking pictures in 1930. Film with sound, talking pictures or “talkies,” took the nation by storm. Far more popular than silent films, the unique and rich combination of visual and audio projection provided a critical boost to the industry just as the Great Depression threatened to turn many of the grand movie palaces built in the 1920’s into vacant shadows of a lost era.

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39 As quoted in Doherty, Pre-Code Hollywood, 321-323. Doherty’s interpretation, backed by primary sources, concludes that although the reform was Catholic led, it also had Protestant support. This is supported by the incorporation of leading Protestants in high ranking positions of the Legion of Decency. On the other hand, Black in Hollywood Censored, beginning on page 34 (directly stated on page 35) that this was a solely done by Catholics.

40 Doherty, Pre-Code Hollywood, 2.

41 Robert Sklar, Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies, (New York:
nation’s strongest film studios barely survived, but those that did enticed Americans back to the movies by creating sexually charged and violent films that drove audiences to share their small incomes at the movies. These sultry films caused a domestic and international backlash that initiated further film censorship, and shaped the production of films for the next three decades. As the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” proved increasingly useless, many states created their own censorship and review boards. While many censorship boards had been in place for some time, they were now busier than ever in attempts to appease the public and tame Hollywood.

Although Quigley and Lord wrote the Code in 1930, it would not go into effect for another four years. Films produced during this short time frame, 1930-1934 starkly contrasted those produced after the implementation of the Code. The pre-Code films dealt directly with taboo themes rather simply alluding to them. Film historian Thomas Doherty asserts that “in pre-Code Hollywood the fissures crack open with rougher edges and sharper points. What is concealed, subterranean, and repressed in Hollywood under the Code leaps out exposed, on the surface, and unbound in Hollywood before the Code.”42 Films produced before the Code embraced sex, violence, and immorality. Actors like James Cagney played the role of the American gangster, simply trying to make his way in the world that had turned its back against him. It is not surprising that gangster films were popular with a rise of rural crime sprees that caught the country by storm. The infamous public enemy number one, John Dillinger, and other popular criminals like Bonnie and Clyde were all making mayhem across the United States.43 Films like Little Caesar captured this discontent and helplessness that Americans felt when the Great Depression hit and President Hoover’s administration sat by seemingly watching it all happen. Since Americans seemed to sympathize with these convicts, crime in film was usually treated with more laxity under the Code when compared to themes of sex and sex perversion.

The increasing vulgarity in film prompted local Catholic churches to require members in their congregations to take oaths that they would protest all motion pictures deemed inappropriate by the Church. The Legion of Decency’s ranking system gave a letter classification that told the potential viewer whether or not the Church approved the film. The rankings ranged from: A-I, Unobjectionable for General Patronage; A-II, Unobjectionable for Adults; B,

42 Doherty, Pre-Code Hollywood, 3.
43 For more on the rise of public sympathy on “outlaws” such as John Dillinger see Elliot Gorn’s work Dillinger’s Wild Ride: The Year that Made America’s Public Enemy Number One, (New York: Oxford UP, 2011).
Objectionable in Part; and C, Condemned for All. The films rankings would then be distributed at mass in bulletins and by the 1940’s in pamphlets created specifically to report film rankings by the Legion of Decency. While this seems limited to one religious group, this had the possibility for terrible ramifications. First, Catholics made up a large portion of urban population, which consequently was where the most profitably movie houses were located. In order to prosper, the movie moguls had to change the types of movies they made. Secondly, although a Catholic organization in principle, the Legion of Decency went beyond the Catholic border, and many Christian denominations shared similar values and the Legion included prominent Protestant clergymen within its ranks. Although other Christian denominations had similar feelings towards films, there was a precedent for Catholic involvement in the film industry that went beyond Hollywood. Since the inception of film, the Vatican and other European based Catholic organizations took a particular interest in European film, and extended its hand to America with the rise of the American film industry. The Legion took note of its European counterparts and implemented similar techniques of protest in the United States. In effect, Christians across the United States began to critically judge the film industry and the images it put on screen through a powerful, national organization.

In addition to the threat to Christian morals films posed, anti-Semitism was another driving force behind the reforming of the American film industry. During the early 1930’s, Hollywood noticed of the rising threat of Hitler and Nazism in Germany. Some films produced at the time indirectly took stabs at the new fascist regime. As Hitler’s grip became more apparent, some films began to overtly attack the regime. Although anti-Semitism in America was not nearly as widespread as in Germany, it was strong enough to reshape the film industry in two ways: the censorship (thus loss of profit) of U.S. films abroad and heightened potential for domestic individual and group protest because the vast majority of the movie moguls were

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44 National Legion of Decency 1940-1941 organizational pamphlet, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, National Legion of Decency Collection, Folder 8, (1941).
45 Ibid.
46 Kevin Rockett, “Protecting the Family and the Nation: the official censorship of American cinema in Ireland, 1923–1954,” Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television (2008): 283-300. This article gives perspective on the censoring, especially Catholic censoring, of American films abroad. He links Irish censorship to the larger hand of Vatican censorship that was present in Europe from the 1930’s through the 1960’s (some countries more so than others).
Jewish immigrants, or of Jewish ancestry as were many of the screenwriters and the characters within the films.\textsuperscript{47}

By the early 1930’s German Nazis began to strictly censor American films claiming that a particular instance within the film promoted anti-German or pro-Jewish sentiment. For example, Germany censored the film \textit{Hansel and Gretel} (1933) due to its apparent “contemptuousness of German folk songs and fairy tales.”\textsuperscript{48} Typical censorship involved cutting specific sequences or scenes cut out of a film, but German censorship was far more vicious, if one aspect of a film was deemed inappropriate, the entire film was banned. The increase in German censorship was noticed in Hollywood. The Weimar Republic (Germany) of the 1920’s once boasted an intellectually open society that was particularly fond of American film. In addition to the acceptance of American film, the Weimar Republic also had an increasingly vibrant artistic atmosphere which included the creation of a progressive film industry. Yet, as Hitler rose in stature, American producers began to rethink their business if they wanted to continue to make money abroad.\textsuperscript{49} Although international censorship of American films was not limited to Germany, the severity of German censorship prompted the move towards self-censorship through the Code in order for Hollywood to continue to make profits in domestic as well international markets.

Germany’s characterization of the immorality that Hollywood supported and created on screen soon became adopted by some Americans, especially those with similar anti-Semitic sentiments. As anti-Semitism became more widespread in Europe with the rise of Hitler and the Nazi government, the U.S. experiences a resurgence of organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, an increasing scientific interest in eugenics, and a cultural emphasis on racial and ethnic stereotyping. As the Depression deepened, ethnic tensions permeated domestic American culture. The predominantly Jewish movie executives became targets for anti-Semites and some began boycotting their films as a way to subversively bring down their empires of wealth. Hollywood’s image of exuberant luxury along with the many scandals during the 1920’s coupled with the continued profits in the film industry caused many Americans to resent the film industry. This resentment of wealth in the midst of the Depression prompted the racially charged caricatures of Jewish stereotypes of the Jewish studio executives.

Inception of the Code: 

In 1929, the film “The Trial of Mary Dugan” featured Norma Shearer as the title character, playing a serial mistress on trial for the murder of her last beau. In one particular instance, the censor boards of Chicago banned the film only to allow it to play after public outcry. Unfortunately for the film, a local Jesuit priest, Father Dinneen, saw that the film was playing and caused an uproar. Initially wanting a mass protest, a fellow Catholic, Martin Quigley, persuaded Dinneen towards the creation of a moral document to improve films. Quigley was the creator of *The Motion Picture Herald*, which took a faith-based look at film and business. Following Dinneen’s outburst, the men met to discuss the creation of guidelines for the film industry to self-regulate. Dinneen agreed under the condition that a fellow Jesuit help with the task. At Dinneen’s request, Father Daniel Lord, a Jesuit educated priest and prolific writer, helped Quigley bring the Code to fruition.50 The Code authors, Quigley and Father Lord purposely created a document that covered a myriad of topics that could not be shown, alluded to, or had special circumstances surrounding their use. Topics ranged from costumes and settings to profanity and ideas of criminality. Even as amendments were made to the Code throughout the 1940’s, 1950’s, and 1960’s, special circumstances seemed to dominate taboo topics.51 Themes such as violent crime, vulgarity, obscenity, profanity, and sex perversion all had their own guidelines under the Code. Although it did not have its own category, the relationships between men and women and especially women’s roles were seemingly defined and limited within every section of the Code. For instance, the section labeled “Locations” had guidelines pertaining to brothels and bedrooms. This particular section of the Code argued that “certain places are so closely and thoroughly associated with sexual life or with sexual sin that their use must be carefully limited.”52 Over the thirty years that the Code existed, themes such as crime more readily made it passed the censors, but ideas about sex, sex perversion (which ranged from same-sex relationships to nymphomania), and women’s virtue were restricted by the chastity belt of

51 For instance, film historians studying film produced under the Code use queer theory to argue that the rare glimpses of gays and lesbians in film were often portrayed as the villains and found themselves dead in the end. These tragic representations further pushed gay Americans into the closet, and it was evident throughout the life of the Code. Unlike themes of sex/sex perversion, issues involving crime, violence, and drug use found their way into mainstream film at a much quicker rate, in some form during the 1940’s and explicitly in the 1950’s.
52 *The Motion Picture Production Code*. 
the Code. The Code echoed the patriarchal values of Christianity, despite the dynamically shifting postwar culture of the late 1940’s and 1950’s.

Unlike “The Sins of Hollywood” of 1922 and “The Don’ts and Be Carefuls” of 1927, the Motion Picture Production Code, penned by Quigley and Lord, gave precise directions to the motion picture industry to self-censor and promote films with strong moral fibers.\(^53\) Although the language of the Code was rigid at its inception, over time dynamic cultural changes opened it to interpretation. Certain themes of infidelity or obscene language could be portrayed if a film used the theme sparingly and tastefully, such as Rhett Butler’s use of the word “damn” at the end of “Gone with the Wind.”\(^54\) Unfortunately for the movie moguls of MGM, Warner Brothers, and the like, when the Code initially went into effect in mid-1934, the Production Code Administration dogmatically adhered to its principles by following vigorous protocol from pre-production through a film’s release. In the preamble of the Code, the writers, Catholic layman Martin Quigley and Father Daniel Lord, outlined that the purpose of this code was to promote moral guidance and thought in film: “The moral importance of entertainment,” they wrote, “is something which has been universally recognized. It enters intimately into the lives of men and women and affects them closely; it occupies their minds and affections during leisure hours, and ultimately touches the whole of their lives.”\(^55\) This zealous statement from the preamble of the Code underscores the significance of high moral standards in every film produced and emphasized the powerful influence that films had on American life and culture since their inception. This sentiment also expressed the attitude that collective religious groups (in this case Catholics and like-minded Christians) felt threatened by films and the film industry. The preamble set the tone for the rest of Code’s argument regarding the necessity of large movie corporations being held accountable for what they produced.\(^56\) In essence, the Code itself

\(^{53}\) Today, there are a few versions of the “original” Code in existence, but the differences are only subtle wording, no form has any of the major general principles or working principles missing. Doherty provides two different versions of the Code in the appendix in Hollywood’s Censor, both of which are based on the version present in Breen’s secretary’s possession. He chose this version based on the fact that it was the one Breen often sought. This version also matches the version online at [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/film_censorship.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/film_censorship.cfm). This is the original 1930/1934 version, amendments are made to the Code over time; those will be discussed in their respective chapters of this thesis.

\(^{54}\) “Gone With the Wind,” directed by Victor Fleming, 1939. The famous line “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.” was allowed in the film because it was part of the original literary work (in some form).

\(^{55}\) The Motion Picture Production Code.

\(^{56}\) The main “large corporations” refer to the major studios such as MGM, Warner Brothers, RKO, Paramount, Columbia, Universal, United Artists, and Fox.
established the film industry’s obligation, albeit one that industry leaders were unwilling to meet, to regulate the content that it produced, distributed, and exhibited. This framework reinforced the United State Supreme Court decision in Mutual Film Corporation v. Ohio (1915) in which the government ruled that because films were a business, not an expression, they were not privileged to the freedom of speech.\textsuperscript{57} Infused by the religiosity of its creators, each section justified the limitations through judgments of what was considered “morally right and morally wrong.”\textsuperscript{58} It explicitly referred to both ideas of Catholic/Christian morality, as well as natural law. To a certain extent, these principles were evident throughout the lifetime of the Code (1934-1968). Over the decades, transforming cultural milieus within the United States resulted in an increasingly lax interpretation of the Code. The Code itself gradually changed and then ultimately disintegrated. This metamorphosis is most evident in the subtle changes and eventual transformation of gender roles portrayed in films over the life of the Code. Despite the attempt to enforce patriarchal and Christian views by establishing a rigid set of unchanging masculine and feminine behaviors, gender roles continued to evolve and visibly change and American films recorded this process.

The “General Principles” of the Code reinforce Christian morality or as Breen later referred to it as “natural law.”\textsuperscript{59} Similar to other moral documents, this section of the Code describes films in terms of good and evil. The Code stated that film “enters intimately into the lives of men and women and affects them closely; it occupies their minds and affections during leisure hours and ultimately touches the whole of their lives.”\textsuperscript{60} It equated motion pictures as a type of art, which also had the ability to be either morally good or bad, but since film was widely distributed, it had an obligation to promote only morally acceptable behavior and ideas. Although film could depict crimes, it could not depict a crime in such a way that sympathy would fall to the crime itself or the criminal-the audience had to know that evil never won.

The second section of the Code, “Working Principles” and “Principles of Plot” bolstered the “General Principles” by explicitly stating the theoretical ideas in plain terms. In this section, the Code maintains that evil could not be presented “alluringly” in the film. Furthermore, it articulated that “throughout the presentation, evil and good are not confused and that evil is

\textsuperscript{57} Thomas Doherty, Hollywood’s Censor, 32-33.
\textsuperscript{58} The Motion Picture Production Code.
\textsuperscript{59} Breen, Joseph Breen Letter Statement.
\textsuperscript{60} Motion Picture Production Code.
always recognized clearly as evil.”\textsuperscript{61} In an effort to make the Code as explicit as possible, it defined that government (United States) and religious institutions (the Catholic Church and Christianity) should never be shown in a negative light or fall on the side of evil.

The remainder of the Code tackled issues of plot material. The Code addressed the issues delineated in “the Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” but expanded, in intricate detail, how these themes could be used and treated in a film and how they could not be. The biggest strength of the Code (and perhaps its biggest weakness) was its ability to specifically outline and justify its reasoning for allowing or banning subject matter. Topics such as crime, violence, vulgarity, obscenity, and race relations were each given ample discussion, promoting their use in ways that “decent groups of men and women by the dictates of good taste and civilized usage” would accept them.\textsuperscript{62} Yet, what is perhaps the most prolific and most regulated theme of the Code is the relationship between men and women on screen. While there was no section distinctly labeled “men and women” they were the subjects of concern and the relationship between the two seems to hit at every level of the Code. Themes such as love triangles, adultery, seduction and rape, scenes of passion, sexual immorality, pure love, impure love, vulgar and obscene dancing, arousing costumes, sex perversion, miscegenation, sex hygiene and venereal diseases, childbirth all have their own sections where the Code outlined what could and what could not transpire on screen. Furthermore, there were only two specific “Locations” that needed to be treated with serious caution under the original Code: brothels or “house of ill-fame no matter of what country,” and bedrooms.\textsuperscript{63}

Although the Code included guidelines on a variety of topics, one of its central focuses was defining moral relationships between men and women. The patriarchal views of the strong nuclear family become the core of this morally weighted document. While the Code never directly made statements about homosexuality, it consistently implied the illegality of same-sex relationships by discussing them in terms of “sex perversion” and “impure love.” The Code justified this claim by stating that “in the case of impure love, the love which society has always regarded as wrong and which has been banned by divine law.”\textsuperscript{64} This dogmatic set of guidelines shaped Hollywood films over the next three decades. With such rigidity in its inception, over

\textsuperscript{61} Motion Picture Production Code.
\textsuperscript{62} Motion Picture Production Code.
\textsuperscript{63} Motion Picture Production Code.
\textsuperscript{64} Motion Picture Production Code.
time amendments to the Code had to be made in order for the Code itself to survive. With World War II as the catalyst for major transformations in American culture, the Code’s strength waned. Until then, the Code and the PCA’s enforcement of the Code remained a barrier that Hollywood had to work consistently to overcome.

Once the PCA had the power to enforce the Code, it prompted drastic changes that become evident when comparing two films from the 1930’s, “She Done Him Wrong” released in 1933 and “Wife Versus Secretary” released in 1937. Separated by only four years, the juxtaposition of these two films embodies the tight grip the Code had on the film industry once the Production Code Administration finally had the power to enforce it. Once Hays put Breen in the role of PCA director, he began to systematically review films, enforce the principles of the Code, and withhold the seal of approval for films that were too risqué.65 Both films dealt centrally with gender roles, but in entirely different ways. Wildly popular at its release, the famed May West film “She Done Him Wrong” has come to represent the overt sexuality and ostentatiousness of the pre-Code film era. “She Done Him Wrong” represents a plethora of films from the pre-Code period that combined licentious and criminal behavior such as “Blond Venus,” “Public Enemy,” and “Baby Face.”66 In sharp contrast, “Wife Versus Secretary,” demonstrates the tight grip the Production Code Administration had on the film industry. During the early Code era, films like “The Women,” “Bringing Up Baby,” “The Holiday,” and “You Can’t Take it with You,” were under heavy guidance from the PCA, barely exposing difficult themes.67 The juxtaposition of these two films illustrates the radical changes that took place within the film industry as well as in the dominant American culture during this time. Given the opportunity, movie moguls in Hollywood would have continued producing the popular films of the pre-Code era.68 Unfortunately for them, the Great Depression triggered the rise of outspoken conservative religious groups who, in increasing numbers, began to protest the vulgarity of the silver screen. Catholics, in particular, recited pledges at mass vowing not to attend films that the Church deemed objectionable.69 If the moguls wanted their dwindling empires to survive the

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66 Each of these films presented themes that spurned the need for the actual implementation of the Code.
67 Although there are hints of larger issues within these films, for the most part, they are representative of the restrictions that the PCA enforced on film once it gained its power.
68 Black, 6.
worst economic downturn in U.S. history, they had to appease the masses. This public outcry, along with the rise of influential religious organizations like the National Legion of Decency, created the conditions for mass censorship and refining of films produced and released in the United States. While the 1920’s pushed the ideas of a puritanical and Victorian lifestyle to the periphery, the beginning of the 1930’s, clouded by the downtrodden times of the depression, brought forward a revival of traditional morals and conventions that began to take precedence over the past decade’s “progress.”

**Pre-Code Era: 1930-1934**

At first, the simple action of creating a Code appeased most of the opposition, but only for a short time. Thus, from 1930 through mid-1934, films were not subjected to the scrutiny of a governing body. The films of the pre-Code era provide a distinct look into the changing perception of gender roles in the United States at the onset of the Great Depression and through the early 1930’s. The iconic flapper of the 1920’s no longer had a place in American society once the stock market crashed. The pre-Code era, often type casted as a period of liberal films, underscores the struggle between the radical ideals of the 1920’s clashing with the rising conservatism of the 1930’s. The flapper represented both a sexually liberated woman as well as a financially independent woman. Her ability to have a job (sometimes a career) and a steady income provided the means to stay single longer, lowering marriage rates and increasing divorce rates. During the depression, marriage rates continued to stay low as couples simply couldn’t afford marriage or the possibility of caring for children. Despite the impact of the depression on unemployment, women were still a present and growing constituency within the workforce. During this time frame, popular portrayals of women began to minimalize the glorification of the single career woman. Films like “She Done Him Wrong” and “Libeled Lady” featured women using their sexual prowess to get the job done, not necessarily their intelligence. At the same time, traditional views of men as the breadwinners and women in the home began to take over, prompting the notion that women should leave the few available jobs to men. These values,

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70 Contrary to popular thought, the film industry was hit by the Great Depression. Although it had an easier time than others recovering, the corporations faced extreme issues with declining movie attendance, balancing the exuberant spending of the 1920’s and the debt it created.

71 Woody Guthrie’s “So Long, It’s Been Good To Know Yuh” had a refrain that captured the idea of young people not marrying during the depression. "Sweetharts sat in the dark and sparked,/They hugged and kissed in that dusty old dark./They sighed and cried, hugged and kissed,/Instead of marriage, they talked like this: "Honey..." Followed by the chorus. Full lyrics can be found at his official website: [http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/So_Long_Its_Been_Good.htm](http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/So_Long_Its_Been_Good.htm).
however, did not fully permeate the screen until the Code was in effect. In the meantime, the pre-Code films portrayed women in the working world, including the ill-reputed brothels. Actresses like Jean Harlow, Barbara Stanwyck, and Mae West took on roles as prostitutes or as women using their sexuality in a manipulative manner, to an extent promoting ideas of sexual liberation breaking from conventional mores and attitudes.\(^{72}\) Throughout the early 1930’s, the films of Mae West evoked a powerful sexuality that dominated the screen that seemingly could not be contained. No matter the picture, West knew how to dress her body, accentuating every curve and leaving just enough to the imagination. Her characters seduced men on and off screen. In “She Done Him Wrong,” West’s character Lou, works at a questionable nightclub where the walls are adorned with her nude portraits. Throughout the film, West skillfully utilized her famous double-entendres escalating the sexual tension from simmering under the surface to boiling. One could not mistake Lou’s intentions or purely economic motivations.

Throughout the film, it becomes evident that Lou has an uncanny way with men with and an exceptional ability to persuade her many suitors to procure her beloved diamonds. Relishing a challenge, Lou begins to fall for Captain Cummings, a young temperance leader, and attempts to seduce him. Each time the pair runs into each other on screen, Lou cannot help but ask him to come around sometime. Even though Captain Cummings somewhat unwillingly turns down her advances, it is clear that it is only a matter of time before he is tangled in Lou’s web. It is at this point in their relationship (of sorts) that she declares, “Don't be afraid. I won't tell...Come up. I'll tell your fortune...Aw, you can be had.”\(^{73}\) Lou boldly assesses his character and asserts that despite his denials of her advances, it is only a matter of time before he comes around.

This scene exudes the “immoral” atmosphere of the pre-Code films that conservative Americans and religious groups alike were protesting. West’s character’s name, Lou, is unisex, but strategically used to imply the idea of her as the alpha in the picture. She pursues men, and they may ask for sexual favors, but that does not mean they will receive. Although the film is set at the turn of the twentieth century, the picture portrays the antithesis of puritanical Victorian values. Lou’s loose morals allow her to openly seduce Captain Cummings who is, for all intents and purposes, a temperance leader and a supposed man of God. Later on in the film, the audience learns that he is actually an undercover federal agent investigating some of the lesser patrons of

\(^{73}\) “She Done Him Wrong,” directed by Lowell Sherman, 1933.
the nightclub, but Lou is not aware of this until the end of the film. She is not partial to the ideals of marriage unless a man could support her need for diamonds. Perhaps the most prominent theme in the film is Lou’s self-determination and selfishness. These two qualities allow a woman to dominate a man rather than a submissive partner in a relationship. Even as one of her former lovers attempts to kill her, his love for her stops him. Rather than return the favor, Lou knowingly sets up his downfall. Despite these moral dilemmas, she still follows some traditional values. Throughout the film she treats the vast majority of characters with kindness and gives financial support to religious institutions. This conundrum of character represents a woman’s ability to live outside the traditional realm while still supporting it. The character of Lou overtly defies traditional societal values about how a woman should act and what her goals should be in 1930’s America.

Throughout the film, man after man falls victim to Lou’s charms. Unlike the others, Captain Cummings does not struggle to contain himself. Although he eventually falls for Lou, his dual role (since he is undercover) provides an intriguing look at masculinity during the depression era. As a temperance leader, he takes on the persona of a somewhat (physically) weak man. His goal is to save the fallen, and while he does help some young men, it is not through the religious persona but through his actual job as a federal agent. His true identity highlights the increasing role of authority (government) in bringing America back to its former greatness. As part of the New Deal, President Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a specific government agency with the focus of providing work for men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, to keep them employed and out of trouble with the law. Captain Cummings true self represents the guiding force back to normalcy. At the end of the film, Lou and Cummings are united under terms that suggest an equal standing between the two, rather than one being dominant over the other.

Films like “She Done Him Wrong” unleashed serious domestic and international backlash. Religious groups argued against films such as this, which were stifled after the creation of the Code. The lack of enforcement, however, unleashed another surge of activism that resulted in the creation of the Catholic National Legion of Decency in 1933. American Catholics had a very structured organization that allowed for the group to actually gain a sort of (soft) power over the film industry. The Legion was nationally organized and communicated regularly with

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dioceses across the country as to what actions to take against the motion picture industry. The group’s goals were in tandem with the Code. The Legion of Decency focused its efforts in boycotting the film industry until films promoted more moral behavior. In addition to pressuring film executives directly, the Legion of Decency called for the government to take firm action against the film industry executives, producers, and screenwriters.

**Culminating Tensions: Implementing the Code, 1934**

Due to the increasing uproar against films from conservative American groups like the Legion of Decency, Hollywood began to buckle under the pressure and decided to “self” censor films. By mid-1934 the MPPDA created and empowered the Production Code Administration to interpret and enforce the Motion Picture Production Code that was written in 1930. In order to make the movie companies comply with the PCA, each film would receive a seal of approval, if no seal was given and the film still released, a fine would incur to both the producers of the film and movie house that illegally showed the film. A Catholic diplomat, Joseph Breen became the head of the PCA in 1934, and the movie industry was never the same. Breen became an exceptionally efficient censor because he had the power to execute censorship, and he systematically developed a highly effective administration process of Code enforcement that his predecessors never had. In a letter to Arthur DeBra, a MPPDA official in the New York administrative office, written in December of 1944, Breen outlined what the Production Code Administration was and how it went about getting the job done. Although this letter is from ten years after the PCA’s founding, it illustrates the uniform system by which the PCA censored a film throughout its first decade of existence. It becomes evident from the letter that the unilateral approach to censorship stayed the same throughout the thirty year life of the Code; the only component that truly changed was the interpretation of the films. In this fifty-five page letter, Breen systematically broke down each section of the Code and described its meaning and how the PCA went about evaluating each film in terms of the Code.\(^75\)

Throughout the letter, Breen attempted to reframe the idea that the PCA only dealt with the finished product, when in reality, the PCA became involved with a film when it was only a script, making sure that the general storyline was acceptable. Breen described this process as the “Irish Bull procedure” or that the PCA “endeavors to stop it before it starts.”\(^76\) The PCA would

\(^{75}\)Breen, *Joseph Breen Letter Statement*.

\(^{76}\)Breen, *Joseph Breen Letter Statement*. 

arduously follow a film from pre-production through post-production, making sure that the final product they saw would not change once it was released in the theatres. Administrators would send back either short letters or exhaustive ones explaining how a script would violate the Code in whole or part. Breen and the PCA went through a strict routine with each film that consisted of reading drafts and revisions of scripts, visiting sets to see the movie in progress, and viewing the final product before allowing a stamp of approval.

In addition to outlining the arduous censorship process, Breen also made it clear that the Code was a moral code based on “natural law,” with deep roots in Christian doctrine.77 Natural law, as described in this letter, described traditional marriage and relationship roles between men and women, where man had the dominant role in both family and society and woman was his submissive counterpart. This insight spoke to the traditional values that the Code was meant to uphold. Similarly, an oral history of Alfred Van Schmus, who worked in the PCA office starting in 1949, provides testimony that corroborated the process of getting a film up to Code and the underlining morality of the Code. Van Schmus’ insights also provide invaluable information on the transformation of the Code, especially during the mid-1950’s.78 This account demonstrates that the Code was malleable, not rigid like many film historians argue. Van Schmus also discussed in detail how the Code would react to the shifting social climate in America. His account highlights that the Code was changing prior to the 1960’s, evidence that it changed over a longer period of time than originally thought. Although Van Schmus’s testimony speaks to the later decades of the Code’s life, he provides a firsthand account that illustrates the extent that Breen’s systematic approach was always a part of the Code enforcement.

Film Under the Code:

When comparing the pre-Code film “She Done Him Wrong” with a film created under the Code, like “Wife Versus Secretary,” the influence and enforcement of the Code on Hollywood pictures is strikingly apparent. Although “Wife Versus Secretary” was released just four years after “She Done Him Wrong,” the differences in the two films demonstrate the effectiveness of the PCA’s enforcement of the Code. The film follows a happily married couple, Linda and Van played by Myrna Loy and Clark Gable. Despite the happy relationship, Linda cannot turn a deaf ear to the comments her friends make about Van’s exceedingly attractive

77 Breen, Joseph Breen Letter Statement.
secretary, Whitey (Jean Harlow). Of course these comments are predicated on Whitey’s beauty and the assumption that men cannot control themselves. Nevertheless, even Van’s mother warns Linda against it, stating that “My dear, men are like that. So honorable and wise in some things and just like naughty children in others. You wouldn’t blame a little boy for stealing a piece of candy if left alone with a whole boxful, will you?” Eventually Linda voices her concerns to Van, causing the couple to quarrel.

Despite the salacious comments, Whitey is in a relationship of her own with Dave (James Stewart), and they seem quite close to being engaged. When Dave finally gets a raise at work, he tells Whitey that he will make enough for her to quit her job and for the couple to marry. She hesitates to quit and Dave suspects that she has, in some way, been seduced by the lifestyle she sees others leading at work. Whitey and Van, both experiencing hardships in their relationships, turn to their work. Whitey accompanies Van on a business trip to Havana in order to draw up plans for a large business merger. Working feverishly to accomplish their goal, Whitey and Van are quite successful and spend a night out celebrating. Slightly intoxicated, the attraction between the two is obvious, but nothing takes place. Unfortunately, Whitey answers Van’s phone late at night, which confirms Linda’s worst suspicions. Despite the circumstances both couples reconcile in the end. As Dave and Whitey are reunited, he summarizes the main issue that plagued both relationships. “Gosh, all the fighting and worrying people do, it always seems to be about one thing. They don’t seem to trust each other. Well, I’ve found this out. Don’t look for trouble where there isn’t any, because if you don’t find it, you’ll make it. Just believe in someone.” This final line attempts to bring the important values of marriage to the forefront. Mutual trust and mind free of irrational emotions make a marriage work.

“Wife Versus Secretary” raises issues that stress the overall importance of traditional marriage and trust. There is no real issue between Linda and Van until Linda voices her insecurities and reveals how impressionable she is to the views of others. Even after the accusations and misunderstandings, Van stays faithful to her, up until he believes he can no longer have her back. Linda plays the good wife, who has followed her role, including her eventual forgiveness of Van’s indiscretions (because she never fully believes that nothing transpired between Van and Whitey). Simply put, Linda’s purpose throughout the film is to be Van’s wife. She is defined by keeping her husband happy and peeking his interests in a non-

79 Wife Versus Secretary, directed by Clarence Brown, 1936.
intellectual manner. The marriage begins to deteriorate when Linda openly questions Van and gives into the gossip that fuels her “womanly” emotions. As if to symbolize Eve’s temptation of Adam, it is only after the accusation of infidelity that Van realizes Whitey’s beauty and availability. As Linda plays the good wife, Whitey plays the devious single woman, who is seduced by the corporate world. She returns to Dave only after Van and Linda are reunited. The film highlights happiness through traditional gender roles and an adherence to rational love. Linda’s irrational emotions push Van towards Whitey. Similarly, Dave’s jealous accusations cause a rift between himself and Whitey. Once both sets of couples conform to the traditional roles and values, they are happily reunited.

At first glance, when comparing “She Done Him Wrong” and “Wife Versus Secretary,” the female protagonists are two radically different women. On the one hand Lou is a woman of questionable morality and ethics, while Linda represents the return to the traditional feminine role. There were only four years between the productions of these two films, but one can see the effectiveness of the Breen Administrations as well as the influence of changing moral values within the United States. The most direct comparison between the two films can be made in the way couples were reunited at the end of each film. In “She Done Him Wrong,” Lou and Cummings stand equal to one another, while in “Wife Versus Secretary” the couples experience traditional gender roles in ways that reinforce male dominance and female submission. Yet, gaps are still evident within this system. In the Code film, “Wife Versus Secretary,” there is still the presence of the vixen (Whitey) and the lure of a life outside the traditional norms. Although the main moral of the film may promote the traditional values of marriage and women submitting to their male partners, there are still subtle themes of life outside of marriage and women moving beyond societal constraints within the film. The Code’s treatment of the bedroom is also present. “She Done Him Wrong” took place in the two spaces later banned by the Code – the bedroom and the brothel. Although the bedroom is still used in “Wife Versus Secretary,” it is de-sexualized and at times even transformed into an office. When Whitey answers Van’s hotel room phone late at night and Linda assumes that he is having an affair, the audience has visual evidence that Van and Whitey did not sexually consummate their relationship. The presence of the Code shaped “Wife Versus Secretary,” just as surely as the absence of censorship was reflected in “She Done Him Wrong.”
From this description of the Code and the PCA’s duties, it is evident that Breen’s unilateral approach to film censorship was far more effective than the Hays Office. While the Breen administration and the Code itself were heavily influenced by Catholic/Christian values, censorship changed over time due to changes in American culture. Backed by the Catholic Church, the Legion of Decency had a strict interpretation of what should be shown on screen. Yet, in comparing the Legion of Decency ratings of films to the PCA’s seal approval, it becomes evident that the Legion was far more rigid in the moral values they wanted conveyed in film, and the PCA was willing to make exceptions and alter their values depending on the social atmosphere. A popular example would be the PCA approval of the 1939 film “Gone with the Wind” and the Legion initially rating the film a “C” or “Condemned for All.” The PCA made an exception to film’s use of “damn” in the last scene of the film where Rhett Butler famously turns away from Scarlett O’Hara. But the film featured much more than a curse word – Scarlett took advantage of men and marriage to accomplish her own goals, while Red often took company with the good-natured madam of the local brothel, Belle. The Legion of Decency would eventually give the film a less severe rating (B, Objectionable in part), but they still condoned the film as promoting loose moral values on screen. This particular instance demonstrates that these groups, as much as they were working towards the same goal, had very different interpretations of promoting morality on screen. “Gone with the Wind” went directly against the Code through its use of profanity, depictions that questioned the sanctity of marriage (adultery and domestic abuse), and the behavior of the two protagonists, Rhett and Scarlett, being morally questionable. Yet, the film still passed the PCA’s test of approval. The PCA’s approval of “unique instances” eventually allowed for numbers of seemingly small fractures in the system to build over time. It seems that as soon as the Code was in place, Hollywood found ways to push it apart from the inside. Very rarely was the Code amended. Perhaps if the wording had been more ambiguous the Code could have survived longer; however, the dogmatic wording eventually allowed for the Code to become outdated document for the American film industry.

As the climate of the 1930’s turned from a pre-occupation with economic depression to concerns about the rise of fascist regimes in Europe, the American film industry also changed course. With the Code constantly in mind, Hollywood continued to make films that referenced to Americans current economic worries and tenuous political atmosphere. As the United States became more involved in World War II and the economy began to recover, Americans returned
to the movie theaters *en masse*. A transformative event in American culture and society, World War II brought dramatic changes within the film industry as well. As American producers became more familiar with the Code and the way the PCA enforced it, they crafted new ways to subvert the restrictions of the Code. This did not happen all at once, but gradually over the course of World War II and the immediate postwar years. American films once again examined the broad cultural terrain of gender dynamics and sexual relationships on silver screens across the nation.
Chapter 2: Subverting the Motion Picture Production Code 1940 – 1952

Introduction:
With the onset of World War II, many Americans no longer subscribed to the deviant antics of the popular film genres of the 1930’s. The gangster films and the sexually charged movies that catapulted actresses such as Mae West and Jean Harlow to fame waned in popularity and replaced by films that reflected the concerns of war. Wartime films also contained a complex of social and sexual conundrums, while representing a patriotic view of the war. These films focused on masculine macho-men nobly moving forward to do their duty, as well as changing representations of masculinity and femininity through a subtle mixing of gendered stereotypes that engaged the evolving gender roles of wartime. As the United States mobilized for war, men and women took on new responsibilities. Men assumed essential new roles in the military; women became invaluable assets in the workplace, as well as the home. Women became visible participants in the private as well as the public spheres of American society, and their involvement in industry and the military pushed the American war effort forward.

As women became associated with the masculine qualities reflected in the iconic posters of “Rosie the Riveter,” men became associated with the expression of emotions released by the turmoil of war. Too harsh to hide, the inherent evil within war radically transformed the men who witnessed it. Past generations of soldiers had seen carnage, but nothing like the methodical genocide of the Jews or the impact of the Atomic bomb. Wartime films like “Casablanca” hint at the emotional confusion of soldiers. In “Casablanca,” the main character Rick, although not a uniformed soldier, is hardened by war. Rick blends the stern, noble masculine characteristics with emotional and somewhat irrational behavior. Yet, with the soldiers returning home, the postwar years brought the effects of this extreme devastation home, forever altering American culture.

Despite the war, Hollywood still produced around four hundred feature-length films each year between 1942 and 1945. In some areas near factories that worked around the clock for the

82 Winkler, 42.
83 Winkler, 41-42. Although the number of feature-length films produced actually decreased during the war, this did not account for the number of newsreels, government, and military films that Hollywood also produced during this time. See, Robert Sklar, Movie-Made America.
war effort, the theaters never closed. Many historians have often attributed that the overall increase in movie-goers during the war with the idea that many Americans wanted to escape the war through film.84 Film critics and historians alike have described war-time films as lacking any real depth that dealt with the current political turmoil. To an extent, this categorization is apt, but it ignores some key elements. First, although films of the 1940’s featured previews of upcoming films before the show, they also featured the newsreels and other informative presentations on the war, doing one’s part on the home front, and foreign news. Indeed, many of these shorts presented the war in an optimistic and patriotic point of view; nevertheless, the war was never far from American consciousness. Rather than characterize wartime films as escapist, it is more accurate to describe it as reflective. Hollywood war films, and especially postwar films, reflected Americans (and much of the world’s) struggle to come to terms with the war and its short-term and long-term effects.85 As the war unfolded, movies evolved toward more emotionally complex narratives. Once an Allied victory was in sight films began to feature more multifaceted storylines and confront the difficulty of soldiers’ deaths. While wartime films like “Casablanca” had World War II as the backdrop, immediate postwar films like “The Best Years of Our Lives” brought it front and center re-integration of veterans became the main topic.86

Released just a year after the end of the war, the film “The Best Years of Our Lives” followed three returning U.S. servicemen who were each physically, mentally, and emotionally transformed by the war.87 Fred, who was a high ranking Army Captain during the war, was returning to his lowly job as a soda jerk and an absent wife. Al, an Army Sergeant had a family and position at a bank to return to, but the war had changed him to the point where he made risky business deals and abused alcohol. Homer was the most physically affected by war, losing his arms when his ship sank. Although his fiancée stays by his side, he cannot help but feel that she is only with him out of pity, not love. Through these three characters, the film focused on the struggles servicemen faced when readjusting to civilian life, and in doing so, underscored “the emotional toll that war exacts even on the winners.”88 Despite the seemingly happy and resolute

84 Winkler, 42.
86 Davis, 128.
88 Davis, 127.
ending, throughout the film the audience comprehends the tragic impact of the war and how it altered the lifestyles of average Americans.

World War II modified the plane of normalcy in America forever by drastically altering men and changing women’s roles both in society and the home. During the film, Homer has a particularly hard time dealing with his deformity and he confessed his dismay to his fiancée Wilma: “This is when I know I'm helpless. My hands are down there on the bed. I can’t put them on again without calling to somebody for help. I can’t smoke a cigarette or read a book. If that door should blow shut, I can't open it and get out of this room. I'm as dependent as a baby that doesn't know how to get anything except to cry for it.”

89 Women were putting their broken men back together, not the other way around. In addition to the complex marital relations, contemporary critics of the film suggest that there are heavy subthemes of male surrender to women, further underscoring the independence that many women gained during the war years.90 American men bore damaging scars of war that were too obvious to ignore. Homer’s physical scars reflected a new theme in American culture. The film brings to light the complications in returning to civilian life and marriage. Al and his wife Milly, played by Myrna Loy, have to begin their relationship again. Neither is the same as before the war. This pairing is particularly poignant in that Myrna Loy’s reputation was based on her ability to portray the perfect housewife-no one was immune from the difficult postwar transition back to normalcy.91 The pain and atrocities of war were no longer private, personal battles. Homer could not hide his arms from public view. From this point forward, the political and the personal became forever intertwined for Americans.

**Historical Narrative:**

Although the war prompted the mixing of defined gender roles, after the war Americans sought to return to their pre-conflict lives and the traditional values of the early twentieth century. Political life in the post-World War II era became clouded with ideas of rebuilding the American family, improving the economy, and preventing another catastrophic war. The postwar years were burdened with the combination of the damaged men returning from war, the emergence of the atomic bomb, and the communist menace at home and abroad. In the shadow

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89 “The Best Years of Our Lives.”
90 Francis Davis and Richard Beidler often address this theme in this in particular as well as others.
91 Davis, 129. For more on the career and reputation of Myrna Loy, see Emily Leider’s *The Only Good Girl in Hollywood* (2011).
of the mushroom cloud, both politics and personal life became deeply entwined. With the baby boom in full swing, politicians like Adlai Stevenson encouraged women regarding their duties in the home and men in returning back to the workplace. Despite the call for the return of traditional gender roles and conformity the immediate postwar era, gender roles were still transforming allowing the feminization of masculinity and the masculinization of femininity.

During WWII the United States fought a uniformed war and soldiers easily identified their targets. During the ensuing years of the Cold War, however, America engaged in an ideological conflict that caused increasing nervousness and paranoia. The enemy during the Cold War was Communism embodied in Stalin’s Soviet Union. While there was a true threat with the potential of nuclear attacks, especially after the Soviets successfully tested their own atomic bomb in 1949, there was also a perceived domestic threat. Because communism ideologically threatened the security of capitalism, Americans were increasingly suspicious. The Red Scare and the rise of Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy’s attack of communist sympathizers in the government made Americans question the loyalty of even their neighbors. While McCarthy was the face of the anti-communist crusade in the U.S., he was only one of the many politicians championing the cause. As historian Ellen Schrecker contends, although he lent his name to an era, anti-communist crusades were far more salient before and after McCarthy’s brief rise. Anti-communists crusaders wanted to maintain American security at any cost.

As Communist paranoia spread throughout the United States, major Hollywood studios produced films reflecting this tenuous time. In the 1949 film “Conspirator,” Elizabeth Taylor’s good natured, yet flighty American character, Melinda, falls in love with and marries a Major in the British Army named Michael played by Robert Taylor. Their marriage begins happily enough, but the audience and soon Melinda come to see Michael’s odd behavior. As the film unfolds Michael’s role as a Communist spy within the English military becomes clear. When Melinda confronted Michael about his actions he stated he would give up his double life, but he

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93 May, 31.
94 In particular, Robert Corber’s three works, *In the Name of National Security: Homosexuality in Cold War America*, and *Cold War Femme*, each deal with the use of political rhetoric during the Cold War era and its impact on the construction of gender, with an acute analysis of gays and lesbians during this era.
continued to spy in the name of Communism. Eventually, he is forced to choose between his allegiance to the Communist Party and his wife. This dramatic confrontation between husband and wife portrayed the idea that a secret allegiance to communism could be hidden anywhere, even within one’s most intimate relationships, a marriage, or the family. Communism’s evils had the ability to penetrate the sanctity of marriage and break the strongest of bonds. Supporting the theme that anyone could be a Communist sympathizer, Melinda and Michael’s nationalities play an intriguing role in this mind game. Melinda, an American, has to question her strongest ally Michael, an Englishman. During World War II, the United States and England experienced an extremely strong and mutually beneficial relationship. Yet, at the end of the war, the two allies began to have a somewhat strained relationship. Although the two nations remained allies, “Conspirator” promoted the concept of questioning even the closest of relationships because communism could spread anywhere.

The film “Conspirator” was a cultural response to the growing visibility of Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy and his relentless pursuit for Communists and Communist sympathizers. During what was frequently referred to as McCarthy’s “witch hunt” under the auspice of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), he successfully called into question American loyalty among government employees. McCarthy and HUAC also required individuals in the film industry to report on their past Communist affiliations and give names of other “Red” sympathizers. The “Hollywood Ten,” a group made up of primarily screenwriters and directors who refused to name others or speak at the hearings were eventually unable to work or be affiliated with any film productions through the 1950’s and into the 1960’s. In the case of the Hollywood Ten, one cannot simply blame McCarthy. Like other U.S. industries, Hollywood was also infused with fervent anti-communists. During the 1930’s (the first Red Scare), the movie moguls themselves were the first threat since the vast majority were Jewish and foreign born, both large groups within the Communist Party. Additionally, in the immediate postwar years, Hollywood workers, ranging from technical crews to executives, created a myriad of groups denouncing communism in films and known communists working for the industry.98

97 James T. Patterson, Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974, (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 128-131. In the immediate postwar years, the U.S. began to worry that the economic burden faced by many Western European nations would allow them to fall to the Soviet Union. Truman’s response to prohibit this fate was the European Recovery Plan (ERP) closely followed by the Marshall Plan.
98 John Belton, American Cinema/American Culture, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 78-79. Belton also connects this with the anti-trust trials. Also see, Sklar, Movie-Made America, 256-267, for more on the Hollywood Ten.
Although paranoia hit Hollywood, it did not deter the film industry from creating films that subtly address the political conflicts that permeated the United States in the 1950’s.

As part of the ideological struggle between communism and capitalism, both the Soviet Union and the United States engaged in a propaganda battle. The United States utilized the growing wealth and consumerism of the middle class to promote capitalism as the ultimate winner. In her work on mass consumption during the postwar years, historian Lizabeth Cohen argues that Americans built security through consumption. By spending their money on goods, American consumer spending allowed for “a critical part of a prosperity-producing cycle of expanded consumer demand fueling greater production, thereby creating more well-paying jobs and in turn more affluent consumers capable of stoking the economy with their purchases.” This form of “warfare” manifested itself in 1959 in the “Kitchen Debate” between then Vice President Richard Nixon and the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. In the Kitchen Debate, the United States presented a state of the art kitchen that they argued every American family could afford. Loaded with luxury appliances it demonstrated the lifestyle that capitalism promised. This particular kitchen instance showcased a comfortable lifestyle that starkly contrasted with the few culinary amenities available in the Soviet Union.

But the debate was not limited to a simple show and tell of American luxury and consumerism. The goal of the machines within the American kitchen was to make life easier on the housewife. Khrushchev noted that the kitchen would not be effective in the Soviet Union because the idea of a housewife no longer existed. The ideological confrontations between the two nations came to head over kitchen designs. This clash between Nixon and Khrushchev over consumerism touched on the primary differences between their socio-political values, yet both men ignored significant issues: Khrushchev disregarded that the heavy post-war burden shouldered Soviet women who became construction workers, engineers, and physicians, as well as the primary breadwinners and caregivers in many families in a country devastated by over 22 million wartime casualties. On the other hand, while Nixon promoted a lifestyle that white, middle class Americans could barely afford, he neglected minority groups in the U.S. who struggled to obtain basic food and shelter. While the debate highlighted the ideological issues

99 May, 8.
101 Cohen, 236.
102 May, 19-21.
between the two nations, it also spoke to the dichotomy of the war. Indeed, consumerism was on the rise in the U.S., but for whom? While a growing middle class in the U.S. embraced this new consumer culture, many more Americans, rural and urban, ethnic minorities and native-born alike, were a long way from realizing their own version of the American dream.¹⁰³ This ideological battle between democracy and communism became a recurrent presence in American film.

The Code:

While the Red scare permeated political rhetoric, it also reached Hollywood in the form of the Hollywood Blacklist. The Hollywood Blacklist and the overall feeling of Communist paranoia greatly enforced the principles of the Code, as they both promoted the acceptance of traditional values.¹⁰⁴ While films produced during the war promoted the ideal of a strong and independent American woman, postwar films overwhelming began to portray more traditional gender roles. Hollywood felt the political pressure of the Cold War and began to craft complex and implicit ways to hint at taboo themes. Through a combination of writing, acting, and directing, films promoted traditional ideals while subtly and subversively hinting at ideas of non-traditional gender roles and the other, individuals who did not necessarily conform to heterosexual norms. Although the Code was for the most part rigid on this point, the issues that loomed beneath the surface and the subplots within the majority of films at the beginning of the 1950’s and throughout the rest of decade suggest that change was gradually becoming more overt.

The Code did not go through any significant amendment changes until the mid-1950’s. The first major changes made to the Code allowed for drug trafficking to appear in films. Most Code historians argue that those amendments were made in response to director Otto Preminger’s release of “The Moon is Blue” (1953) and “The Man with the Golden Arm” (1955)

¹⁰³ Cohen, 239. Cohen argues that the relationship between citizen and consumer helped create an atmosphere conducive to grassroots actions led by many minority groups, especially during the early 1950’s and the Civil Rights Movement.
¹⁰⁴ While there are some changes to the Code in terms of wording, especially the preamble, there are no significant changes to the Code until the 1956 amendment that allowed for the portrayal of drug trafficking/use in film. This amendment change came, in large part to both the changing culture and the film, “The Man with the Golden Arm.” For more on this see, Jerold Simmons, “Challenging the Production Code: The Man with the Golden Arm,” Journal of Popular Film and Television 33, (2003): 39-48, accessed August 23, 2011.
without Code approval.\textsuperscript{105} While Preminger’s successful release and showing of these films challenged both the Code and the PCA’s authority, it also suggested that Hollywood had been moving towards this moment since 1934 when the Code was adopted. By continually undermining the Code through subtle themes and subplots, Hollywood made the cultural fractures under the Code’s surface visible. Films produced in the immediate postwar era helped set the nation on a new cultural course, while simultaneously undermining the authority and relevance of the production Code itself.

In November of 1944, Joe Breen sent a letter to Arthur DeBra, one of the executives at the New York offices of the MPPDA.\textsuperscript{106} Breen’s letter meticulously described the PCA, its goals, and how it went about accomplishing them. The fifty-five page letter suggests that the PCA had found its rhythm in terms of censoring films by the end of its first decade. In describing the procedure of the PCA, Breen asserts that “our procedure in a way is a sort of ‘Irish Bull’ procedure: where there is likely to be any difficulty, of trouble, we endeavor to stop it before it starts.”\textsuperscript{107} With this sort of mentality and involvement in a film, one must question how the individuals of the PCA reacted to the changing cultural climate during and after World War II. Although the PCA adhered to the guidelines of the Code quite strictly, the war allowed for some leeway. War-time films reflected both the loss of life and livelihood experienced by many American men, and the independence that women gained through participating in the workforce. Additionally, after the war there was an increase in violence in American films and by the mid-1950’s criminal violence such as that so frequently portrayed in the pre-Code period begins to reappear. While it may seem that the Code was stagnant due to the lack of major changes to the Code and the systematic process of the PCA, there seems to be a distinct change in the way the PCA interpreted it because of the use of subversive tactics in films.

The seemingly static nature of the Code at this time is quite deceptive, however. The previously mentioned scene from “The Best Years of Our Lives” between Homer and Wilma, takes place in a bedroom between an engaged but unwed couple. In this scene, Wilma must help

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. “The Moon is Blue” challenged the use of curse words/obscenity/foul language in film. Certain words began to sneak their way on film (such as “damn” and “hell”), but ultimately another amendment to allow distinct swearing was not approved until the mid-1960’s and the film production of “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”

\textsuperscript{106} The MPPDA and PCA in Hollywood dealt specifically with enforcing the Code and American films, while the New York office dealt with mainly foreign film and any of the disputes brought against the PCA’s enforcement of the Code. I discuss this relationship further in chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{107} Breen, Joseph Breen Letter Statement.
Homer undress and ready for bed. Intimate scenes such as this demonstrate the changing realm of men and women’s relationships in the postwar era. When analyzing this scene in relation to the Code’s views on the bedroom and marriage, it does not technically break the Code, but this scene begins to bend the rules and makes the Code more malleable. This film becomes a template for 1950’s film production under the Code. Increasingly, films contradict the Code, implicitly or explicitly, in full or in part. The entirety of film may support the objectives of the Code, but poignant scenes, such as the one between Homer and Wilma, push the boundaries of censorship at a gradual rate during the postwar years and throughout the 1950’s. Each of the three major relationships in the film reflect the many issues men and women had in the postwar years. After spending the majority of their time in homo-social worlds, the two sexes had to come to terms with being in a mixed-sexed world. Many women made their way into the workplace and wanted to continue on a different path than their predecessors. While this tug-of-war of the sexes subtly took place in the years directly after the war, the entire process of redefining interactions between men and women began to rapidly accelerate by the 1960’s.

Theory:

The end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War era mark a transformation in American identity. In his first cinematic work, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* (1983), Gilles Deleuze framed his views on European cinema and classic Hollywood films prior to World War II. These films followed linear narratives that reinforced traditional identity. Deleuze posited that a film exists on multiple planes. The movement-image exists on the plane of transcendence and reterritorializes dominance, thus reinforcing the traditional view of identity. The movement-image concerns the development of forms and formation of the subjects. Since the movement-image focuses on the subject, time is indirect. Time does, however, typically follow a linear trajectory or progression. Film historian David Martin-Jones categorizes the movement-image as ‘both/ and’ meaning that time is continuous and uninterrupted during the course of a film. In Deleuze’s *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* (1985), he asserted that during and after periods of historical transformation, specifically World War II, films experimented with narrative time and in doing so questioned traditional views of identity.

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The counterpart to *Cinema 1* is *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* (1985). In *Cinema 2* Deleuze asserted that during and after periods of historical transformation, (European) films experimented with narrative time.\(^{111}\) The emergence of Italian cinema (beginning in 1960) and the French New-Wave after World War II represented this experimentation for Deleuze. Throughout *Cinema 2* he often referred to the work of French director Jean-Luc Godard, who Deleuze considered the epitome of the French New-Wave. The time-image exists on the plane of consistency, deterritorializing the movement-image, meaning that the time-image typically starts in the present and works its way backwards through time. This allows the time-image to promote the questioning and dismantling of the accepted narrative or the movement-image. In the time-image, the labyrinthine model becomes evident. A time-image film jumps around in time; it usually does not follow a linear trajectory. Jones categorizes the time-image as ‘either/or,’ creating discontinuous time.\(^{112}\) The film is then working through a labyrinth of time and space. Jones explains this concept well, reiterating that throughout the labyrinth, the film questions history. Moving backwards in time highlights the challenge of choosing the past that makes sense in retrospect, but that choice does not necessarily make that past a “true” past. Using these time-images allows directors and academics alike to question the creation of identity in a particular work.

In a similar vein, in 1976 historian and philosopher Michel Foucault published his seminal work *The History of Sexuality*, which also pointed to the idea of a transformative event’s impact on culture. This multivolume work took a critical look at how and why societies repressed open discourse on sex and sexuality. Foucault focused on the development of sexual repression during the nineteenth century or the Victorian era. He claimed that prior to the restrictive culture of the nineteenth century, sexual discourse was, for the most part, open and not taboo. This included discussions of non-heterosexual relationships that would later be termed as “the other.” In his explanation of why this phenomenon happened during the Victorian era, he asserted that the increase of sexual repression coincided with the increasing industrialization and capitalism in the Western world, arguing that,

> By placing the advent of the age of repression in the seventeenth century, after hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression, one adjusts it to coincide with the development of capitalism: it becomes an integral part of the bourgeois

\(^{111}\) Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 12.

\(^{112}\) Jones, 25.
order. The minor chronicle of sex and its trials is transposed into the ceremonious history of the modes of production; its trifling aspect fades from view.\(^\text{113}\)

The post-World War II era presents conditions similar to those resulting from the rise of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The United States experienced an economic boom and the continued production and consumption of goods. As the U.S. began to experience this time of prosperity, political figures began to argue for the acceptance of traditional gender roles with American society. The baby boom suggests Foucault’s argument of sex for procreation (rather than pleasure) during times of economic prosperity coupled with the imposition of traditional values and gender roles that prompt a political and public discourse on keeping sex normatively heterosexual and private.

In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault also argued that as a society pushed to further repress atypical sexuality (the other), the more it would come to light. During the late 1940’s, as senator McCarthy brought the communist threat front and center, he targeted homosexuals in the government, the army, and the society at large.\(^\text{114}\) Although many historians have tended to characterize the 1950’s as a decade of conformity and consensus, biologist Alfred Kinsey powerfully counters this in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). Kinsey’s works exposed a previously unrecognized realm of sexual behavior and otherness in sexual practice. These studies document that a surprising percentage of men and women had sexual liaisons outside of marriage, and also engaged in same sex relationships, and had recurrent thoughts of these same partners.\(^\text{115}\) As McCarthy drove societal repression and conservatism, Kinsey research simultaneously brought a more complex sexual reality to the surface. This cultural dichotomy of sexual repression and the illumination of the other can be seen in a close reading from films from the same era.

Movies:

Released in 1949, “Adam’s Rib” follows a married couple Adam and Amanda Bonner played by Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn. Adam is a rising assistant district attorney, while Amanda is a cutting edge defense attorney. The film centers on a trial which puts the


\(^{115}\) Corber, *In the Name of National Security*, 63-64.
couple at odds, Adam representing the state of New York and Amanda defending a woman, Doris Attinger, accused of attempting to kill her husband. After her husband has not returned home a few nights, Doris becomes enraged, buys a gun, and proceeds to find him. When she finds her husband in the arms of another woman, she begins to shoot randomly throughout the room, although not fatally wounding anyone. Amanda takes a bold approach to this trial, claiming that had any man committed this crime he would be acquitted and that this trial was not just for the freedom of Doris Attinger, but the equality of women under the law. This line of defense underscores the themes of marriage and equality (and equality within marriage) throughout the film. The entirety of the film takes a complex look at the role of marriage, especially the emergence of the “new woman” in the postwar years.\textsuperscript{116} This literal battle of the sexes is represented with Adam and Amanda’s home and business relationship.\textsuperscript{117} In addition, this theme is central to the trial of Doris Attinger as well as in the relationship between the Bonners and their piano playing neighbor, Kip.

The most intricate look at marriage is through the many layers of the Adam and Amanda’s marriage. Although they both have high powered law careers, in keeping with gender roles, Adam works diligently for the state of New York, while Amanda has the range to work for her “cute causes.”\textsuperscript{118} Throughout the first half of the film the relationship seems to stay happy, but there are subtle details that suggest the impending marriage troubles, all of which revolve around Adam’s ability to perform his role as husband and a district attorney. From the onset of the film, there is a distinct difference in the amount of time spent in the home versus the office. In particular, Adam often returns late, while Amanda always seems to be home to plan dinner. Despite her early arrival home, the home lacks children and while she plans dinner, she does not cook it, the maid does. There is a disconnect between Amanda and the home. She is more in her element when performing in the courtroom than in the kitchen. On the other hand, Adam seems more at ease in the home once he gets there. When the couple decides to stay in for dinner, it is Adam who dons the apron, skillfully assembles the ingredients, and begins preparing the meal.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{116} Cynthia Lucia, “Women on Trial: The Female Lawyer in the Hollywood Courtroom,” \textit{Cineaste}, 19, (December 1992), 32. This article is based on her larger work with the same title.

\textsuperscript{117} The title of the film is quite telling of this battle, referring to the biblical creation of woman from man. Even the names of the main characters, Amanda seems to derive from Adam, and connect to biblical themes of creationism.

\textsuperscript{118} “Adam’s Rib,” directed by George Cukor, 1949.

\textsuperscript{119} This is a similar motif that can be seen throughout Tracy and Hepburn’s on-screen pairings like “Woman of the Year.”
Understated touches such as these push a gender role reversal in the film. Both Adam and Amanda are performing their gender roles in counterintuitive ways. As a husband, Adam takes on some traditional “women’s work” and he clearly plays the more emotional role throughout the film. In her analysis of the film, Cynthia Lucia asserts that Adam “gives voice to the faltering security and dominance of the postwar American male who encountered a ‘new woman’ at home and at work.” The antics Amanda pulls in the courtroom deeply affect his masculinity, especially when he is lifted into the air by a female circus performer. During the trial’s closing statements, Amanda delivers a flawless performance defending both her client and womankind, while Adam loses his composure and fumbles through his lines. In the courtroom battle, Adam’s lack of composure causes Amanda to win the trial.

Throughout the film, the physical comedy and bickering between the couple leads them to a brief separation. As part of the defense Amanda brings in dozens of key witnesses, each one an extraordinary woman in her field. She plans to use their testimony to prove her idea that women can perform equally to men in all fields. When asked to choose three, she presents the court with the overachieving female academic (multiple degrees, etc.), a female foreman, and a female strongman. All of these women worked in fields dominated by men, but each has proved her worth by regularly exceeding expectations. During the trial and at the bequest of Amanda, the female strongman proceeds to physically lift Adam up in the air and make a mockery of him in the process. This outlandish happening, so loaded with the symbolism of the capacity of women to prove themselves stronger and better than men, prompts Adam to move out of the couple’s home, leaving Amanda distraught. In all fairness, Amanda executed this prank after considerable provocation. Prior to this courtroom show, the couple was in their home, giving each other massages. They are discussing the case and coming upon a contentious point, Adam spanks Amanda’s rear end as if he were punishing a child. While he views it as something playful, Amanda accuses him of meaning it because of his “instinctive masculine brutality” and she proceeds to cry in a momentary lapse of emotion. As Adam comes back in the room to reconcile, Amanda has regained her composure, proclaiming “let’s all be manly,” and she kicks Adam in the knee. From the onset, Amanda’s and Adam’s relationship was outside of the norm, but this fight pulls them back into the dominant patriarchal view, which is further supported in the way they reconcile. When Adam leaves after the courtroom episode, he claims that he no

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120 Lucia, 32.
longer wants a career woman wife or a competitor, but a traditional wife. Amanda’s career upsets the balance of the home. Her deviation from prescribed gender roles has pushed her husband away. Even though she wins the case, her life is not fulfilled.

Much to Adam’s dismay, their neighbor Kip is almost always close at hand, waiting to steal Amanda away. While Adam plays the role of jealous husband, the audience never quite worries about Kip succeeding. Kip’s role in the film is not to seduce the brainy Amanda, rather it is to bolster Adam’s manhood. As Kip leaves the Bonner apartment one evening, he is lauding Amanda’s efforts to promote the equality of women under the law and proclaims that “you've got me so convinced, I may even go out and become a woman.” Adam and Kip hint to the varying shades of masculinity that begin to emerge in the post-World War II era. They are not the typically hardened war men, but they show a varying degree of emotion, including the contemptuous qualities of jealousy and fear that used to be associated with women, not men. After Adam moves out of their apartment, Amanda is in Kip’s apartment where she talks endlessly of Adam and Kip chases her around in a comedic attempt of seduction. After seeing their silhouettes in the window, Adam enters Kip’s apartment with a gun and beings to stage a replication of Doris’s attack of Warren and Beryl. During this scene, Kip hides cowardly behind Amanda. Once Adam proves his point, he puts the gun in his mouth and takes a bite of the licorice weapon. At Adam’s high moment of triumph in proving his point that no one has the right to take advantage of the law, Kip is brought low, a coward in the corner.

While “Adam’s Rib” questioned gender roles through occupations and marriage, the film “All About Eve” displayed the varying degrees of masculinity and femininity in the postwar era. Released in 1950, the main plot of film followed a social critique on a woman’s age and its role in theatre and, by extension, in cinema and society. Through the main character Margo, an aging stage legend, the film explored what career and personal roles a woman should accomplish by a certain age. Just turning forty, she began to feel the sting of ageism from her close friend and playwright, Lloyd Richards, her younger boyfriend, Bill, and the presence of her new idolater, Eve. Although seemingly sweet and innocent at the beginning of the film, it becomes evident that Eve is playing her greatest role yet – Eve. She weaves a cunning web of lies and trickery in a plot to take over Margo’s next coveted role and usurp her theatrical

121 “The Celluloid Closet,” directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, 1995. This film is based on the book with the same title by Vito Russo.
authority. Within this plot, multiple subplots expose the varying shades of masculinity and femininity that were also present in post-World War II society, shedding light on “the other” during the height of the Blacklist in Hollywood and rampant McCarthyism.

The three male leads in the film were: Bill Simpson, Margo’s boyfriend and director; Lloyd Richards, playwright; and Addison DeWitt, a theatre critic. Bill plays the role of the loyal and dutiful boyfriend well, evading Eve’s attempted advances. Bill is an idealized version of the postwar masculine man, his intentions and actions are noble and forthright. Whereas Bill represented ideal masculinity, the character of Addison boasted a quite different take on masculinity. As the narrator of the film, he has inside information on Eve, and keeps the audience informed of her antics. Addison is impeccably dressed and well-spoken, but he is surrounded by an off-putting air. Although he seems to take advantage of women sexually, his game is to dominate, thus representing the antithesis of Bill. Addison is only interested for as long as a woman poses a certain challenge. His calculating disposition, however, does not seem to be limited to women. His character suggests that he would take advantage of any opportunity, regardless of sex. He is calculating, manipulative, and the most effeminate of the three men. Even though Lloyd has an affair in the film, the audience views Addison more suspiciously.

Throughout the film, Eve begins to execute her small advances to taking over Margo’s career and attempts an affair with both Bill and Lloyd and Margo and Karen begin to question Eve’s innocence. Over the course of the film, Margo experiences increasing neurotic episodes where she believed that Eve was plotting to sabotage her. Although she was ultimately right in the end, for a good portion of the film, the surrounding characters and the audience witness Margo’s spiraling as a reflection of her personal choices to have a career rather than a traditional family life. As Margo proceeds to binge deeper into an alcoholic state, Eve takes advantage of Margo and weasels her way into being Margo’s new understudy.

Over the course of the film, there is a queerness about Eve’s infatuation and adulation of Margo. In a brief, but telling scene, Eve holds one of Margo’s stage costumes up to herself in the mirror, seemingly pretending to be Margo. Eve’s obsession moves beyond wanting to learn from the best, but wanting to be the best. Eve gazing into the mirror suggests a deeply

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124 Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, ed., Queer Cinema: The Film Reader, (Routledge: New York, 2005), 5. In the introduction, the editors describe the term queer broadly, aligning it with the idea of a spectrum of sexuality, rather than a binary of heterosexual or homosexual.
narcissistic personality. Mirrors represent the idea of gazing upon oneself, similar to the perception of homosexuality at the time—love of your same sex, not the opposite. This subtle allusion is reinforced by her attempts to steal Bill, her close relationship with Karen, and her overall want of Margo’s career.

Subversive elements such as this hint at the creation of a “femme” in Cold War films—a lesbian hiding in plain sight. What makes this film so apt to show the other is that it was intentionally done. The writer and director, Joseph Mankiewicz intentionally created the character of Eve as a lesbian, and told actress Anne Baxter to play her as such. Davis also played Margo with a bit of curiosity, and while the character is certainly queer, she is not to the same extent that Eve is. Over the course of the film, Margo realizes how Eve has connived her way into her life and stealing her future roles. There are subtle allusions to the relationship through both Margo and Eve’s costuming and other techniques. The arc of Margo and Eve’s relationship follows closely to the main plot of the film. At the beginning, Margo succumbs to Eve when Bill leaves for Hollywood, and the relationship deteriorates and fuels much of Margo’s rage at Bill’s birthday party.

The relationship within the film that highlights the idea of “the other” most authentically is that between Addison and Eve. From the outside they are a heterosexual “couple,” yet at the end of the film, Addison’s reveals that his attraction to Eve is built on the fact that they are so similar—they cannot love or be loved. When Eve is about to get her break out role through Addison’s conniving and connections, the audience learns just how much Eve was willing to do to become famous. As she tells Addison her different accomplishments, such as the affair with Lloyd and stealing the role from Margo, she tells him half-truths. Despite her attempts, Addison is clever and has anticipated her course of action, and taken preventative measures to keep ahead of her. Rather than allow her independence, Addison demands that she be with him based on

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125 Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*, 2nd Edition, (Routledge: New York, 2003), 80. The time period of the film, 1950, is one where gays/lesbians were still very much in the closet. Over the years, queer readings have become more sophisticated, queer readings draw from small instances or allusions, because that the films themselves are limited in this scope. For more on queer instances in classic Hollywood see, Vito Russo’s *Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, (Harper & Row: New York, 1987).
126 Corber, *Cold War Femme*, 29.
127 Not surprisingly, Bette Davis was one of the main actresses drag queens chose to emulate, for this role and many others. Oddly enough, Joan Crawford, Davis’s Warner Brothers nemesis, was another inspiration for drag queens. Both actresses have a large gay and lesbian following, mainly at its height during the pre-Stonewall days.
129 Corber, *Cold War Femme*, 44.
their innate similarities. They both plot, scheme, and manipulate to get what they want. This deep attraction to a similar personality shows that the two are one and the same rather than opposites, and further pushes the idea of non-traditional relationships.

The final scene of the film brings the motifs of the other full circle. After receiving her award, Eve returns to her apartment to find a young woman, Phoebe, has let herself in. Put off at first, Eve eventually allows her to stay and do some menial tasks for her, mimicking the initial meeting between Margo and Eve. This is reinforced by Eve’s changing tone, from somewhat perturbed to that of seduction, over the course of her and Phoebe’s (who is the president of one of Eve’s local fan clubs and attends an all girls’ school) conversation. During this time, Addison returns to give Eve her award that she had forgotten in the taxi. Phoebe answers the door, and Addison understands that the vicious cycle is happening all over again. Phoebe takes the award and puts on Eve’s evening cape that she left on the bed. Donning the cape and award, Phoebe gazes at herself in the mirror, imaging that she has just accomplished everything Eve has done. As she gazes upon herself, the camera shows the multiplying mirror images that show Phoebe from every angle.

Both “Adam’s Rib” and “All About Eve” were released when the Code was strictly adhered to, yet these subtle amalgamations of gender norms within the films hint at the inherent flaws within the Code itself. For the most part, the Code effectively dictated the content of films produced in Hollywood during the postwar era. At first glance, many film historians have attributed the Code and the PCA with limiting the depth of films from this time, but this era is also known as Hollywood’s Golden Age. Films like “All About Eve,” produced in a time colored by conformity to traditional values tactfully allude to the gradual changes in American society. Much like Kinsey’s challenge to McCarthy’s ideas of social repression, a close reading of films from this time suggest that dynamic cultural changes were on the horizon. Specific amendments to the Code eroded its effectiveness, but those fissures were made possible due to gradual changes in American culture after the demise of Senator McCarthy and a growing American tendency to raise questions about politicians and the government.

Although many popular films from the 1950’s conformed to traditional gender ideals, throughout that decade and well into the 1960’s films begin to more readily and openly reflect changing American attitudes and ideals. Actors like Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Montgomery Cliff shoot to stardom for their portrayals of rebellious youths who embodied the
mixing of gendered stereotypes. While actresses like Marilyn Monroe continued to move against the traditional view of women during an era defined by images of June Cleaver. The films of the immediate postwar years and the early 1950’s provided a necessary groundwork of subverting the authority of the Code. World War II had a dramatic impact on Americans, which became an increasing presence in American film. As American producers subtly worked around the Code they created the conditions for the Code reform and revisions that would take effect by the middle of the decade.
Chapter 3: Dismantling the Code, 1955 – 1966

Introduction:

In the opening scene of “Rebel Without a Cause,” the audience views a young man, Jim Stark, brought into the police station for “plain drunkenness.” Through Jim Stark’s inebriated gaze, the audience meets two other troubled youths, Judy and Plato. Jim, Judy, and Plato find themselves at the police station for different reasons (drunkenness, family troubles, and animal cruelty), but each of these charges originates from the same root – extreme discontent due to parental neglect. Jim’s parents suffer from an imbalanced relationship, where his mother dominates his weak-minded father. Judy’s father runs an overbearing patriarchal family, where men and boys are praised and women fall to the side. Plato’s parents are divorced and absent. The break-down of the nuclear family and its production of youth discontent permeated films of the 1950’s. Through the three main characters, the film portrays the “youthful torment, the restless nature, and the craving for acceptance” of the new generation. Like all films, “Rebel” also faced the PCA. The film garnered special attention because its themes were appealing to teenagers at a time when the United States supposedly faced a dramatic increase in juvenile delinquency. In an effort to curb the appeal of youthful rebellion, the PCA requested that the fight scenes be cut in length and violence and that the passion between Jim and Judy be portrayed platonicly, without arousal of illicit passions. Nevertheless, the death of James Dean, who played Jim Stark, just weeks prior to the release of “Rebel” pulled crowds of Americans into theaters to see his remarkable performance.

During the 1950’s, the class dichotomy of the youth culture, represented in the poodle-skirts and letterman jackets of the “preps” and the leather jackets of the “greasers,” stressed the emergence of a break in societal norms. The “preps” represented the clean-cut version of white-collar America, while the “greasers” represented the blue-collar, working-class Americans. American youth increasingly questioned their parents and the authority figures who dictated their lives. With the anti-communists still on a crusade, despite the fall of McCarthy himself, traditional societal ideals and conventions of domesticity were still prolific in American life,

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132 Simmons, “Rebel,” 56.
especially suburbia. The restlessness of this teenage generation coincided with the arrival of a new generation of leading men in Hollywood like James Dean, Marlon Brando, and Montgomery Cliff. Youthful rebellion against authority was not limited to the silver screen. Literary works began to openly question the status quo through the Beat movement. Works such as Allen Ginsburg’s *Howl* were so potent that their influence carried into the following decades. As in film and literature, musical styles underwent a dramatic shift with the advent of Elvis Presley and a new genre dubbed “rock-n-roll,” the words themselves a not-so-subtle-play on sexual intercourse. Free expression carried the day with greater frequency as film, literature, and music, reinforced the inclination of young men and women to counter the cultural ideals of marriage, family, religion, and patriotism promoted by their parents’ generation.

Although many film critics and historians denote this era as a male dominated rebellion, women also took part, but their transformation within film was indirect in comparison to men. While “greasers” depicted the male rebellion, the vixen or a sexually liberated woman returned to film in the 1950’s. A prominent film figure in the 1930’s, the vixen returned through actresses like Marilyn Monroe. Many historians, however, do not associate the vixen as part of the rebellion because she was only representative of sexual deviance. Yet, in a time when societal conventions defined a woman based on her virginity and chastity, sexual openness certainly attacks traditional Christian notions of gendered stereotypes. But the female counterpart to male youth rebellion was not limited to the vixen. Often overlooked, the emergence of the tomboy became a subtle, yet equally effective way to subvert the dominant culture. Actresses like Doris Day and Debbie Reynolds often took on non-traditional character roles as the “tomboy” throughout the decade. Film and literary critic Leerom Medovoi describes the role of the tomboy and the vixen as a way “to champion, anti-domestic female identity” that, “serves as an important precedent for the explicitly feminist and queer politics of female identity that would arise in the decades to follow.”

Film from the mid-1950’s portrayed the evolving gender roles more explicitly than other decade since the adoption of the Code.

While the Code’s wording was stagnant during the very early 1950’s, it radically changed in 1956 prompted by the releasing and showing of films without Code approval. Films from the

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134 Goodman, 268.
135 Medovoi, 267.
early part of the decade brought subversive tactics to the silver screen against the Code. These films, coupled with the increasing tensions of the political and cultural climate pushed the Code towards revision in order to stay pertinent. In 1954, Joseph Breen retired after two decades at the PCA. With Breen no longer in charge in conjunction with the subversive tactics from the early 1950’s, director Otto Preminger successfully released two films without Code approval. With Preminger’s success, the PCA agreed to completely revise the old Code in 1956. Yet, these changes could not have been conceived without the correct conditions. The 1950’s play an intriguing role in historical memory. Remembered as a decade of conformity, there were tensions coalescing beneath the surface, and with the cultural angst, represented by the rebellious youth of the 1950’s and its counterparts, it infused a young generation’s mindset towards the dynamic change of the 1960’s.

**Historical Narrative:**

By the mid-1950’s, many Americans became disillusioned with political figures. The immediate post-World War II years catapulted Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy to fame as the figurehead of the anti-communist crusade. As he gained momentum in HUAC, he also gained many enemies, and by the early 1950’s he found himself running into more deterrents. In 1952, he claimed that there were potential threats within Eisenhower’s cabinet and advisers. Rather than acquiesce to McCarthy’s accusations, Eisenhower wielded his executive power and denied him any information on the President’s personal associates. Still attempting to be a presence, McCarthy then made his last outrageous claim. As if accusing the executive branch of possible red-sympathies was not controversial enough, in 1954, McCarthy then turned his attention to making accusations with the U.S. Army.

During the Army-McCarthy hearings, McCarthy went head to head with the Army’s lead counsel, Joseph Welch. The two Joseph’s seemed to be polar opposites physically and mentally. Welch was soft-spoken, well-mannered, and intelligent, while McCarthy was unkempt, overly vociferous, and domineering. Since this was a televised hearing, appearance played a key role in Americans reaction to the hearings. Welch appeared well-prepared, calm, and professional,

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137 Patterson, 265-266.
while McCarthy’s chronic alcoholism had left him looking disheveled and ill-kept. Due to the limited daytime programming on television, over twenty million Americans watched the hearings. The number of people watching had the potential to further engage Americans with the issues of anti-communism, but it ended up working against McCarthy in a way he had never expected. In a tactic that may have worked in an untelevised setting, McCarthy decided to attack a young man, Fred Fisher, who had briefly worked with Welch. In the midst of Welch’s cross examination of a witness, McCarthy interrupted Welch to lay claim that Welch’s law firm housed red sympathizers. McCarthy lashed out to not only discredit the innocent Fred Fisher, but he wanted to taint Welch’s reputation by association. But Welch met McCarthy’s unattractive demeanor with fortitude, famously saying, “Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?” In one day, McCarthy sealed his fate. Americans had lost trust in his crusade. Even the Senate, which had once enthusiastically supported his cause turned from him. Even Richard Nixon, who had briefly helped McCarthy with earlier cases and was the current vice president, turned his back on McCarthy.

With McCarthy’s political rhetoric of anti-communism no longer menacing their lives, Americans began to notice other domestic issues. During the 1950’s, many social issues began to come to fruition. What made the 1950’s a truly dynamic time for emerging issues such as youth rebellion, civil rights, and women’s rights was that each movement crafter its major goals during this decade. For example, African Americans had been fighting for equal rights for the better part of two centuries and many organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were founded at the beginning of the twentieth century. But the 1950’s represents a time when legal action met with grassroots activism turning into a national campaign for the support of black equality. Certainly the movement would take many directions from that point forth, but it gained an unprecedented amount of momentum when coupled with the other rising issues of the day.

Prior to exploring the rise of these three different movements (women, youth rebellion, and civil rights), the advent and popularity of television played a pivotal role in shaping American culture during the 1950’s as well as publicizing each of these movements across the

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140 Patterson, 270.
141 Patterson, 267.
142 Patterson, 269.
Television played an integral role in each of these movements, and also competed with the film industry to entertain Americans. During the immediate postwar years and into the 1950’s, following the trend of increased consumerism, more American homes now had a television set than ever before. By 1953 approximately three-fourths of American homes had a television. As home entertainment became more prolific, the film industry had to restructure how it could compete for entertainment dollars. This competition between television and films also prompted the film industry to look at its own organization and increased the call for the Code’s reform. As film began to lose profits to television, individuals within the film industry wanted to oust the Code and produce more alluring films. As seen with the Army-McCarthy hearings, television also played an increasing role in politics. McCarthy’s career suffered immensely due to his crass actions seen by some twenty million viewers. The role of television in politics became integral yet again during the 1960 presidential election between then-Senator John Kennedy and then-Vice President Richard Nixon. In addition to its roles in politics, as TV became Americans preferred choice of entertainment, programming began to evolve, and soon shows began to depict the nuclear American family in shows like *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver*. Throughout the 1950’s and in the following decades, television played a transformational role in American culture and politics, keeping Americans up-to-date on current events, providing entertainment for all ages, and shaping cultural discourse around gender roles and sexuality in the process.

Throughout the postwar years and during the 1950’s, the number of women in the workforce continued to increase. World War II started the trend for women’s involvement in the workplace and while many women did quit their wartime jobs with the return of American soldiers from abroad, many stayed on in the workforce, or re-entered the workforce in the 1950’s. In 1950, roughly fifty-two percent of women were in the workforce, and by 1960, that...
percentage had increased to sixty percent.\textsuperscript{147} Despite calls for a return to domesticity and motherhood, which the baby boom of the 1950’s and 1960’s clearly indicated was happening, American women were increasingly doing their jobs in the home as well as in the workplace. Often historians categorize this happenstance as a paradox, but Susan Hartman argues that the dichotomy of working women and housewives were not a paradox but signify a transition in American women’s history.\textsuperscript{148} While politicians often encouraged the domestic life for women, Hartmann asserts that there were opinion leaders within the Department of Labor advocating for the increased role of women in the workplace and in education.\textsuperscript{149}

Yet, while women certainly began to show a larger presence in the public sphere, there were still issues to face. During the war, women had a variety of jobs that included work typically dominated by men such as welding, construction, and heavy manufacturing. At the end of the war, however, most of these jobs either vanished or were taken by returning servicemen. By the end of the 1950’s, when almost sixty percent of women were working, roughly seventy-five percent of those women were in female-only jobs.\textsuperscript{150} Sex-segregated employment, which often led to sex-segregated wages, created an inherently unequal workplace. Sex discrimination, however, was not limited to the workplace. In the case of higher education, due to the G.I. Bill, there were increasing numbers of youths graduating high school and attending college. Yet, women were often limited in their choice of major to those that promoted themes of domesticity. There were also minimal spaces allotted for women seeking higher education.\textsuperscript{151} These notions of sex discrimination throughout the 1950’s became some of the basic tenets of the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960’s and into the 1970’s.

Although sex discrimination in education and the workplace played a vital role in shaping the women’s movement, the issue of domesticity itself became a major platform issue for feminists during the late 1960’s. In 1963, Betty Friedan published \textit{The Feminine Mystique} which argued that the plight of American women was the “problem with no name.” Friedan contended that domesticity left the vast majority of women yearning for a life with more purpose and

\textsuperscript{147} Patterson, 32-33.  
\textsuperscript{149} Hartmann, 86.  
\textsuperscript{150} Patterson, 33.  
\textsuperscript{151} Patterson, 367.
meaning, but were limited to the prescribed roles of being a “housewife” due to the dictates of American society. In hindsight, it seems clear that Friedan’s analysis missed the fact that women, particularly many working-class and African American women, were already on the road to being equally engaged in the world of work both inside and outside of the home. But as a manifesto for many women, particularly those in the white middle-class, The Feminine Mystique articulated many women’s want for a life outside of the home, a life that transcended traditional norms.\(^\text{152}\) Her work underscored the importance of women being accepted as a viable part of society, on an equal footing with men.

Films of the 1950’s also hinted at these changes in women’s culture. Taking a cue from the creation of the rebellious men of the 1950’s, the decade also marked the emergence of the tomboy figure. The decade’s quintessential “girl next door,” Doris Day’s image morphed from the tomboy to the career woman. At the beginning of the decade, she often took on roles that promoted an unconventional view of women, but with Day’s looks she could get away with. In the 1953 musical “Calamity Jane,” loosely based on the western spitfire Calamity Jane, Day played the title role.\(^\text{153}\) Throughout the film she dons men’s clothes and is even mistaken for a man by other women.\(^\text{154}\) As Day became increasingly popular, she took on one her most famous roles as Jan Morrow in 1959’s sex comedy, “Pillow Talk.” The end of the film enforces the romantic comedy stereotypes of the happy ending, however, it is the character Jan that plays at the idea of rebellion. Thirty-something Jan has a career as an interior designer, she lives alone, and her status as a “virgin” is made clear. Jan works in a man’s world, but does not succumb to men’s rules. As Brad Allen, played by Rock Hudson, attempts to seduce her, she only acquiesces on her own terms, rather than his.\(^\text{155}\) Perhaps not as overt as the male rebels of the same time, nevertheless, instances such as this gives credence to a close reading of subtexts of films.

As women refined their roles in society, so too did men. Although on the periphery of society, the 1950’s welcomed an advent of cultural and social changes, which were heavily male-dominated from the onset. In particular, the Beat movement was not simply a small group of men

\(^{152}\) For more on the deconstruction of Friedan’s arguments see, Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique” in Not June Cleaver.

\(^{153}\) Tamar MacDonald, “Carrying Concealed Weapons: Gendered Makeover in Calamity Jane,” Journal of Popular Film and Television 34, no. 4, (2007), 179-187. This work further explores gender roles and the relationships within the film, highlighting the blurring of gender roles in 1950’s films.

\(^{154}\) Corber, Cold War Femme, 159-161.

\(^{155}\) Corber, Cold War Femme, 174-183.
looking at the world from a different perspective. At first it simply seemed like some hedonistic youths experimenting with drugs and discussing a society in complete opposition to the one in which they lived, but served as an attempt to move Americans away from rigid conservative ideals. Writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac greatly influenced the creation of the hippie and countercultures of the late 1960’s. Ginsberg’s controversial poem *Howl* was attacked because of its use of overt depictions of homosexual references. Works of the Beat movement put taboo subjects at the center and exposed the many different “others” of society. As literature began to evolve, so did music. The crooners of the 1940’s did not sit with the rebellious youth. Just as “Rebel Without a Cause” gripped at their angst to prove themselves, rock-n-roll provided a much needed respite from the older generation’s domination of their likes. The emergence of Elvis Presley began to change the styling of popular music. Presley’s music spoke to a generation of young men, who wanted to be him, and young women, who adored him. As rock-n-roll transformed over the next decade, music would take on a life of its own during the 1960’s. Music began to have a virulently political base that would voice the opinions of a generation.

Similar to the women and youth movements emergence in the 1950’s, civil rights gained momentum in the 1950’s. In 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Brown v. the Board of Education* that segregation based on the notion of “separate but equal” was illegal. In one of the major triumphs for African Americans, the *Brown* ruling prompted for Americans, especially in the South, to consider the role of race in American society. With the failure of the Reconstruction in South after the Civil War, blacks had been subjugated to a myriad of Jim Crow laws and black codes that restricted their civil liberties. While the *Brown* decision deemed all school segregation illegal, many states refused to comply with the federal law, and from this

157 Farber, 172-173.
158 Farber, 60. This section also discusses Presley’s ability to “bleach” his songs.
moment forward, each president would have to deal with civil rights, especially desegregation, in some form or another.

While *Brown v. Board* represented a milestone towards equality for blacks, it also brought out the extremely conservative, white supremacists of the South. Governors like George Wallace of Alabama would proclaim “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!”¹⁶⁰ In 1955, the violent racial tensions reverberated throughout America with the senseless killing of a young teenage boy. Emmett Till was an African American boy from Chicago visiting family in Mississippi.¹⁶¹ Accused of whistling at a white woman, young Till was lynched. Back in Chicago, Till’s mother requested an open casket viewing to show the horrific and brutal nature of her son’s attack. The two men who killed Till were put through a mockery of a trial, only to be acquitted despite the strong evidence against them.

The Till case heightened racial tensions in the United States. The longstanding racial divide in America was one of the key criticisms of the U.S. by the Soviets.¹⁶² African Americans could fight for democracy abroad, but still did not enjoy its blessings at home. Over the course of the 1950’s and throughout the 1960’s, non-violent figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. rose to guide the movement forward towards the quest of equality.¹⁶³ Through sit-ins, bus boycotts, freedom rides, and freedom schools, the movement attained national visibility as well as repeated setbacks and fragmentation. By the mid-1960’s, leaders such as Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party took the movement in a different direction, one often marked by increasing levels of violence.¹⁶⁴

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¹⁶¹ Harvey Young, “A New Fear Known to Me: Emmett Till’s Influence and the Black Panther Party,” *Southern Quarterly* 45, no.4 (Summer 2008), 22-47, 23.
¹⁶² Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004). In this work, Von Eschen looks at the paradox of African Americans promoting democratic values abroad despite not having full freedom while in the United States. She specifically analyzes the tours of jazz musicians abroad during the early years of the Cold War.
¹⁶³ This is merely a cursory look at a movement. There are many comprehensive and detailed works that provide a plethora of detail to the Civil Rights movement. In particular, Taylor Branch has written prolifically on Martin Luther King, see *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years and At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68*.
¹⁶⁴ Peter Ling, “The Media Made Malcolm,” *History Today* 62, no. 1, (January 2012), 49-55. This article provides an intriguing look at how the media crafted Malcolm X’s image, although it moves against the norm, claiming that Malcolm X benefited from the media’s characterization, much like MLK Jr.
The Code:

In 1950, Joseph Breen, the “Irish-bull” enforcer of the Code, experienced declining health. Unfortunately, like many men of his generation, he smoked religiously, and was diagnosed with lung cancer. After undergoing emergency surgery to have a tumor and the majority of one of his lungs removed, Breen felt the pressure to retire. But the changing climate in Hollywood worried Breen. The debate over the need for the Code heightened. As the movie industry became more outspoken against the Code, the PCA faced increasing attacks from the media and even, the United States government. The Supreme Court took notice of the active role film played in American culture, and in 1952 essentially reversed the 1915 decision that films were not protected by the First Amendment. With this new found freedom, Hollywood slowly began to move beyond the Code. To be sure, the court ruling did not render the Code unnecessary, the major film studios still subscribed, but it did weaken the force of the giant of censorship that had dominated American film since 1934, and opened it to attacks from a small but growing number of independent film studios.

The first director to really test the waters around the Code was Otto Preminger. In 1953 he released “The Moon is Blue” under United Artists without the seal of approval from the PCA. The film was considered mediocre but the Legion’s condemnation of the film only fueled Americans to go see it. If anyone thought this might be a one-time attempt by Preminger, they were sorely mistaken. Just two years later, Preminger released “The Man with the Golden Arm” starring Frank Sinatra and Kim Novak. While “The Moon is Blue” featured suggestive dialogue (e.g. the use of the word “virgin”), “The Man with the Golden Arm” centered on a man dealing with a heroin addiction. It was perfect timing on Preminger’s part. Breen had retired in 1954, and the new PCA director, Geoffrey Shurlock wanted to find common ground before another film was released without Code approval. The subversive films of the early 1950’s coupled with the removals of Breen and McCarthy, the time was ripe to challenge the Code. The Shurlock-Preminger pairing was not a battle of the Code versus the director; rather the two worked

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167 As it was “self-regulation,” the elite Hollywood studios often ignored the few minor studios that did exist.
together in an attempt to use the film to alter the Code’s treatment of drug use in films.\(^{170}\) Despite this collaboration, the New York offices rejected the film outright, refused to approve it, or to amend the Code. They soon regretted their decision as film critics and Americans joined Hollywood’s cries to modernize the Code. Similar to “The Moon is Blue,” Preminger released “The Man with the Golden Arm” without approval via United Artists who then broke all ties with MPAA. With this open challenge and encouragement to move around the Code, the executive board in New York called for a complete reworking of the Code.

The Code had gone through trivial tweaks throughout the course of its life. Usually, these changes were minor wording that tended to fill in loop holes rather than create them. The 1956 overhaul produced a markedly different Code. Whereas the original (and the versions with minor changes derived from it) explicitly stated that “illegal drug traffic must never be presented,” the revised Code asserted that “drug addiction or the illicit traffic in addiction-producing drugs shall not be shown if the portrayal…”\(^{171}\) What used to be an explicit “no” in the Code was now “proceed with caution.” As the entire Code underwent revision, drug and drug trafficking was not the only section to go under construction. The sections of brutality, dancing, and special subjects all changed. Brutality went from being any form of violence to “excessive and inhuman acts of cruelty and brutality shall not be presented.”\(^{172}\) Prior to the 1956 revision, there was a provision in the Code on “Dances” stating that any “dances suggesting or representing sexual actions or indecent passion are forbidden,” and “dance which emphasize indecent movements are to be regarded as obscene.”\(^{173}\) This entire section was removed from the new Code. With sweeping changes such as these, the new Code resembled the broad generalizations of its predecessor, “The Don’ts and Be Carefuls” than the religiously infused Motion Picture Production Code of 1934.

One of the few Code provisions that remained unchanged during the 1956 revisions was the section on “Sex Perversion.” This was perhaps one of the few sections of the Code left intentionally broad because it allowed for more to be censored, rather than less. In the case of sex perversion, it was entirely forbidden by the Code. Under the auspice of intentionally broad meanings, sex perversion included (but was not limited to): homosexual relationships, lesbian

\(^{170}\) Simmons, “Challenging the Production Code,” 42.
\(^{171}\) *Motion Picture Production Code.*
\(^{172}\) Ibid.
\(^{173}\) Ibid.
relationships, and nymphomania. In the case of “BUtterfield 8,” the PCA first rejected the film based on its main plot, and claimed that “the basic problems presented by this story stem from two sources: first, it would appear to us to be an unacceptable portrayal of a nymphomaniac—both in theme and in detail; second, the handling of the subject of marriage appears to be a basic violation of the provision of the Code which requires that the sanctity of the institution of marriage be upheld at all times.”\(^{174}\) This specific instance underscores that despite the amendments to the Code in 1956, it was not entirely changed. The basic institutions of marriage and the potential threat of sex perversions (in this case through nymphomania) was still not a bargaining chip for the Code. It would take another two years before sex perversion became permissible on screen.\(^{175}\)

The combination of Breen’s retirement and the modernizing of the Code gave films the opportunity to explicitly explore more taboo themes. There is a particularly intriguing oral history of Alfred Van Schmus who worked in the film industry beginning in 1941, and later worked for the PCA in 1949. He came to the PCA at the beginning of its transition era. In discussing the 1950’s, Van Schmus found that

> Yes, the 1950’s started awakening, or opening up, liberalizing, slowly. Television took over so much of the type of material that movies had made their bread and better on for years and years. The westerns, the musicals, domestic comedies, that sort of thing, so the liberalizing, in a way, made our job tougher. Because creative people are bright people, and they saw what was happening, so they wanted to be treated with more understanding for their material.\(^{176}\)

Van Schmus’s reflection on the 1950’s as a period of transition of the Code from the old Breen regime to the new regime echoes the cultural changes of the era. Working intimately with the Code, Schmus understood that his job as a liaison between the Code and the film industry required an interpretation that fit with the current social and cultural climate of the times. “We would follow what we could sense the public was showing a desire for or be willing to accept, that sort of thing. So I think the Code was a responsive instrument over the years, and perhaps too slow.”\(^{177}\) Van Schmus’s testimony provides insight into the implementation and the interpretation of the Code during this culturally evolving decade. It further proves that the PCA

\(^{174}\) Geoffrey M. Shurlock, “Letter to Robert Vogel,” (October 12, 1959), Margaret Herrick Special Collections,

\(^{175}\) “The Children’s Hour” became the first film to break the “sex perversion” barrier. This was director William Wyler’s second attempt at making the film.


\(^{177}\) Hall, “Alfred Van Schmus Oral Interview,” 231.
gave way to an increasingly lax interpretation over the life of the Code, which ultimately allowed for films to subversively undermine the Code’s core principles, and eventually render it obsolete. With the revised Code in place, Hollywood rapidly began to produce films that continued to challenge the principles of the Codes and the PCA’s authority.

**Code Breaking Films:**

In particular, two films, “Some Like it Hot” and “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf” touch on the drastic changes that films underwent in reaction to the Code revisions. Without having to go into too much detail, the issues that the old Code would have immediately responded to are present in a simple synopsis. The films presented in this section of film analysis are markedly different from the past chapters because the iron grip of the Code was no longer an issue. The 1956 Code revisions allowed the creative teams in Hollywood to continue to push towards reform. This new found freedom of expression allowed for films to deal with more provocative themes. While there was still a Code, it became a guiding presence rather than the law.

The 1959 film, “Some Like it Hot” featured Tony Curtis as Jerry, and Jack Lemmon as Joe, two band players who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Jerry and Joe witnessed a mob killing, and in order to not be the next victims they must flee Chicago. The two broke men are faced with making a humiliating choice to save their lives—they must pose as young women and join an all-women’s band and choir for a free train ride to Miami. As Jerry and Joe transform into Daphne and Josephine, Jerry/Daphne begins to take an interest in the lead singer, Sugar, played by Marilyn Monroe. For the duration if the film, the two men switch between their real identities and their women’s costumes, more often going on dates as women then as men. Whereas the film analysis from the previous chapters often focuses on the subversive and subtle hints to move around the Code, “Some Like it Hot” mixed overt tactics with the subversive to continue to push the boundaries of the Code regarding gender and sexuality.

The Legion of Decency, although becoming somewhat obsolete by the late 1950’s into the early 1960’s, certainly had an opinion about “Some Like it Hot.” Although the Legion had reformed its own rating system, it still gave the film a “B or objectionable for all.” In a letter written to Geoffrey Shurlock, PCA director, from the very Reverend Monseigneur Thomas Little, Legion executive secretary, describes the Legion’s objections in precise language. “This film, though it purports to be a comedy, contains screen material elements that are judged to be
seriously offensive to Christian and traditional standards of morality and decency. Furthermore, its treatment dwells almost without relief on gross suggestiveness in costuming, dialogue, and situations.”

Little’s description of the film applies the basic tenets of the old Code under the Breen administration. Little further argued that the film’s cross-dressing and the possible implications made it an outright attack on traditional notions of American life. “The subject matter of ‘transvestism’ naturally leads to complications; in this film there seemed to us to be clear inferences of homosexuality and lesbianism. The dialogue was not only ‘double-entendre’ but outright smut.”

The objections raised by the Legion point to the fundamental differences between it and the PCA. While the two organizations had started with the same goal in mind, to reform the motion picture industry, the PCA had come to understand that in order to have any continuing role in the film industry it had to modernize the Code and reform its interpretation and apply its principles in light of the major cultural changes that had taken place since the 1930’s.

In Shurlock’s response to Little, he addressed each of the issues that the Legion deemed immoral or objectionable. First, Shurlock argued that the Legion’s negative perception of the film was not widespread. In fact, all of the reviews on the film out at the time of the letter praised the film, including two publications from The Motion Picture Herald, Code creator Martin Quigley’s publication. In response to the accusations of cross-dressing (“transvestism”), Shurlock argued that it had been a common theme in theater, dating back to Shakespearean plays, including As You Like It. He does acknowledge the potential harm in the subject matter if it was dealt with inappropriately, but he felt that this was not the case with “Some Like it Hot.” The only issue Shurlock and Little seem to agree on was the unacceptable “exaggerated” costuming for Marilyn Monroe throughout the film.

The dialogue between these two men prompts an intriguing look into the politics of censorship. The Legion no longer had the impact on either the film industry or the PCA that it once had. In addition the fact that the film passed the censorship review speaks to the ever evolving culture of the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. In his letter, Little argued that there was a desperate moral need for censorship, more than ever, at this point in the film industry. His plea, however, went unanswered, as did his accusations of homosexual themes in the film. These

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178 Father Little to G. Shurlock Letter.  
179 Father Little to G. Shurlock Letter.  
180 Father Little to G. Shurlock Letter.
accusations were not completely unfounded. Throughout the film, Jerry attempts to seduce Sugar in multiple ways, and he eventually kisses her near the end of the film while he is dressed as Daphne. In addition, Josephine (Joe) catches the attention of Osgood, a wealthy older millionaire who wants to marry her/him. At the end of the film as Joe attempts to let Osgood down easily and eventually outright tells him he is a man, Osgood delivers a powerful line that reflects a new openness and acceptance on sexual issues: “Nobody’s perfect.” But the sex farce was not the only issue with the film. Originally it was to feature a more gruesome mob scene at the beginning of the film. The original scene was to allude to the 1929 St. Valentine’s Day Massacre. With this reference in mind, “Some Like it Hot” seemed to take lessons from its predecessors of the pre-Code era.

From the Code revision in 1956 through the early 1960’s there is a rapid acceleration of progressive themes that movies take on. Films began to feature violent crime, provided more sexual innuendo, dealt with sex on a more open plane, and eventually allowed for the taboo of the taboo, sex perversion, to slowly make its way to the silver screen. Films of the early 1960’s began to provocatively grasp with the massive changes in American culture, especially among the younger generations. Actresses like Shirley MacLaine, for example, began to embody the emerging flower child who often took the off-beaten track. In 1961 MacLaine, along with Audrey Hepburn, starred in “The Children’s Hour,” which was the first film to portray overt themes of lesbianism. This was director William Wyler’s second attempt at making a successful film version of the Broadway play, but the film came under scrutiny because of Martha’s decision to commit suicide at the end of the film.

By the mid-1960’s, the film industry was ready, yet again, to make another overt stab at the Code. This time, it was the adaptation of the play “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” set to star the larger than life couple, Elizabeth Taylor and two-time husband, Richard Burton. The work portrayed an aging couple George and Martha and their volatile relationship, coupled with newcomers Nick and Honey. What seems to be a simple invite for a late-night drink turns into two hours of emotional and mental attacks that often make the audience cringe. The entire film is based on the interpretation of dialogue, which is often difficult due to incomplete allusions to information the audience is not privy to. As dialogue is the primary focus of the film, it was also

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181 “Some Like it Hot,” directed by Billy Wilder, 1959.
the detrimental issue for the PCA. Originally released in 1966, Warner Brothers first began to introduce the film to the PCA in 1963, knowing full well that it would need special accommodations in order to get the film made.

Throughout the life of the Code, there had always been a section on profanity and inappropriate or derogatory slurs. While this section was open like much of the rest of the Code, “Who’s Afraid” prompted another look at this idea simply because the dialogue was infused with profanities and sexually based references that were blatant. Double-entendres were only used in the film as a way to further offend the other party. The entirety of the film follows the two couples as they continue to binge drink, and watch as Martha and George pull Nick and Honey down the rabbit hole of those disillusioned with marriage. Like “Some Like it Hot,” each aspect of the film screams for the Code to censor it based on its longstanding principles. Lines such as “And I’m gonna howl it out, and I’m not gonna give a damn what I do and I’m gonna make the biggest god-damn explosion you’ve ever heard!” struck a nerve with the audience. As the dialogue is vital to the heart of the work, Warner Brothers had to find a way to keep the dialogue and still make it beyond the censors. With the curious case of “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” where a husband and wife continue to belittle one another’s existence coupled with fervent alcoholism and mockery of a happy life, the Code took its last step towards total reform.

Much like “The Man with the Golden Arm” coming at a key moment, so, too, did “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” Shurlock originally did not let the film past the PCA, citing the multiple infractions in language in the film. Shurlock’s tenure at the PCA, however, was soon coming to a close. In response to Shurlock’s censoring of the film, Warner Brothers appealed to the executive board in New York and won. But this was no small win. Shurlock was soon replaced by Jack Valenti, and more changes came to the MPAA. Shurlock’s leaving meant that the PCA said farewell to one of the few remaining of the old Breen regime. While Shurlock was not as dogmatic as Breen in his interpretation of the Code, he certainly believed in the Code’s importance. Similar to his predecessors, Jack Valenti had the proper qualifications for the job—he had political connections as a former aide to President Lyndon Johnson and he was Catholic. But despite his political connections and religions credentials, Valenti ushered in a new era in terms of American censorship. He completely revised and reformatted the Code to feature a ratings system, and “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” became the first film to test the new criteria.

The film, rated for audiences 18 years and older, was a critical success at both the box office and nominated in all of the major Academy Awards categories (except “Best Film”) and received five Oscars total, including “Best Actress.” In the case of ‘Who’s Afraid,’” Van Schmus asserted that the film was seminal in moving from the old Code to the new Code. “Well, see, that’s part of that transitional period. We’re trying to say that, ‘Well, we think it’s okay if some people can use this kind of language in a film, but we can’t officially say that everybody can use it.’ That’s sort of the transformation of the old Code interpretation into a new Code interpretation.”

From 1956 to 1966, the Code underwent more serious changes than at any time before. Prior to the mid-1950’s, only minor tweaks to block up loopholes were added to the Code. Yet, by 1956, the PCA capitulated to the growing cries from Hollywood and overall changing culture within the United States. The first Code revision, while it opened up the film industry to increased freedom of expression was still a recognizable version of the original Code. But this revision coupled with the radical changes beginning to happen in American society prompted the creation of innovative films that pushed the boundaries of the Code at any possible chance. During the late 1930’s, through the 1940’s and into the early 1950’s, films still had to use subtle means to subvert the Code and make it to the distribution stage. These actions certainly greased the wheels and allowed for directors like Preminger to make the claim that change was necessary and then overtly ignore the Code and its seal of approval. Yet, none of the accelerated changes in the late 1950’s and 1960’s would have been possible had Hollywood not always attempted, in some way or form, to bend the Code in response to public feedback, to make it malleable, and to incorporate reforms as American society and culture changed in the decades after World War II. With the rating systems success in 1966, the film industry continued to create films that more aptly reflected the ever-changing American culture of the late 1960’s.

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Conclusion

“The Graduate” and the Code’s Demise:

With the successful release of “Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” and the implementation of a new ratings system, the film industry moved with rapid speed to produce films more overt and reflective of the times. As the turbulence of the 1960’s began to take over public consciousness, Hollywood continued to push for completely phasing out the Code in favor of the ratings system. Films such as “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” featured an interracial couple, not simply appearing on the screen together, but in love and discussing marriage. This point in Hollywood history marked, as film historian Bert Cardullo described as, a time “when American film began to take up in earnest the burden and question of America as a society: its self-consciousness and self-division, the very face and movement of its historical present, the weight and ache of its momentous past.” During the 1960’s more than ever before, Hollywood produced films that spoke directly to the political and changing social and cultural climate in the United States. Films with heavily laden counterculture themes permeated the screen. Films such as “Easy Rider” openly questioned American identity through the main characters’ journey across the United States. In light of the open forum of counterculture, women, men, and everyone in between began to advocate for civil liberties often denied by both the government and traditional values. These films represented more than a break from the Code, they represented a new cultural standard, a new art form that reflected a more open atmosphere of free expression within American culture.

One of the films that captured the frustrations of the counter culture of the 1960’s, especially the evolution of gender roles in American society was “The Graduate.” The film follows Benjamin as he returns home after graduating from college. While in college, Benjamin was a model student, participating in athletic and academic clubs, in addition to earning excellent grades. As his parents rave about his accomplishments, the audience begins to see the inner turmoil that haunts Benjamin. Despite his accomplishments, he is unsure of what he will do for the rest of his life. He spends his summer loafing about his parent’s house while they discuss his future goals. It becomes clear that he has no goals of his own, or even a sense of direction. Benjamin’s character openly questions the validity of societal dictates. This combats the

assumption that a college degree meant a future, and continues the 1950’s youth challenging being part of the societal machine. In the case of Benjamin, despite four years of university education, he has no idea what to do with his degree.

As Benjamin represents the discontent and questioning of American youth during the 1960’s, Mrs. Robinson reflects the unhappiness of American women in a domestic environment that meets every external material need, while ignoring the existence of an inner life starved for emotional connection. Mrs. Robinson was living an unhappy life in an unhappy marriage, and she embodied Friedan’s “problem with no name.” While her husband was wealthy, she is clearly bored with the life she feels society predestined for her. At Benjamin’s graduation party, Mrs. Robinson notices a similar discontent in Benjamin and she proceeds to attempt take control of her own life by seducing Benjamin. She pursues Benjamin, and eventually sleeps with him. While a sexual liaison may seem a far-fetched way to regain oneself, in the case of Mrs. Robinson it provided a break from her socially dictated role. She had to marry Mr. Robinson because she became pregnant out of wedlock, and that fateful instance pushed her into the role of mother and subsequently housewife. What was powerful about the character of Mrs. Robinson (and the performance of Ann Bancroft) was that her character was not a stretch; she could have been any unwed mother from the 1950’s seeking a life beyond the one society that forced her to accept. With the Code no longer in the way, “The Graduate” overtly portrayed Mrs. Robinson’s seduction of Benjamin and their continued extra-marital affair. While Mrs. Robinson does not have control of her marriage, she does have control of Benjamin and the sexual relationship they have. Mrs. Robinson not only embodied the discontent of many American women, but her character was also a powerful representation of film without the limitations of the Code.

Since the release of “Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” the PCA, under the tenure of Jack Valenti, threw out the old Code and replaced it entirely with a ratings system making it possible to produce films that explore difficult and challenging subjects, such as “The Graduate.” What made the switch so successful was that each film was judged on its own terms and given a rating, which prevented some groups of individuals from seeing a film rather than the direct

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187 Benjamin’s trouble accepting society’s path suggests an alignment with Tom Hayden’s “Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society,” (1962). This particular statement summarized how a younger generation of Americans began to openly question the motives of their government, their role in society, and proposed a way to change the current system to be more inclusive and reflective of actual democracy.
censorship of all films. The original ratings system, although similar to the one in place in 2012, ranged from “G” to “X.” A G-rating in 1968 meant that a film was appropriate for a general audience; M-ratings were intended for mature audiences; R-ratings prohibited anyone under the age of sixteen from seeing a film, unless accompanied by an adult; and X-ratings did not allow anyone under the age of sixteen into the theatre, and the film was not given the MPAA’s approval. Initially an X-rating did not scare off many movie-goers, and it was not until the mass marketing of pornography and its “XXX” ratings that the two very different ratings became associated (“X’ would later be changed to “NC-17”). In fact, in 1969, the film “Midnight Cowboy” featuring Jon Voigt and Dustin Hoffman was rated X, but it was also nominated for an Academy Award. This film, like the other emerging American and European art films of the 1960’s directly challenged heterosexual notions. Through its use of the cowboy figure, it questioned the triumphal narrative of America “winning” the West. Kevin Floyd takes an interesting approach to the cowboy figure in his article “Closing the (Heterosexual) Frontier,” with his first pointed example in that the year “Midnight Cowboy” won for best picture, John Wayne won his first Academy Award for “True Grit.” A comparison of these two vastly different representations of the cowboy figure spoke to the changing character of Hollywood and the emergence of two parallel histories of the American West, the first contained the positivist narrative of struggle and success dominated by strong, heterosexual men and women recounted in “True Grit;” the other a counter-narrative of unfulfilled dreams and male friendship, the story of two anti-heroes who attempt to make their way in the alienating urban landscape of New York City. “Midnight Cowboy” was a psychologically complex film the production of which marked the final dénouement of twentieth century censorship. Marked with an “X” rating, the film equivalent of the scarlet “A” Hester Prynne was forced to wear in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s nineteenth century literary classic, “Midnight Cowboy” took highest honors at the Academy Awards in 1969.

“Midnight Cowboy,” like many other post-Code films underscored the emergence of a new American cinema. Similar to the French New Wave of directors Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, American film became edgier, adding in new camera styles and techniques

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188 Doherty, Hollywood’s Censor, 333.
190 Floyd, 101.
along with new frontiers of topics. “Midnight Cowboy” would be one of many newly emerging films to discuss homosexuality in film. After the Stonewall riots in June of 1969, films on homosexuality exposed a lesser seen part of American society. Films such as “Boys in the Band” (originally a Broadway play) highlighted the gay community and the struggles these individuals regularly faced. It would, however, take some time before films on homosexuality could move beyond the self-deprecating and negative resolution of “Midnight Cowboy.” Beyond homosexuality, American films began to showcase a different type of film making that also worked to move against traditional norms. If the linear narratives defined Code films, then the films of the late 1960’s, completely moved away from this concept. Much like the European art cinema of the 1960’s that Deleuze venerated in Cinema 2: the Time-Image, films began to experiment with character mentality and narrative flow to question traditional notions of identity. Films such as “Easy Rider,” for example, attempted to enhance the drug scenes by adding camera movement and colored-filters to realistically portray a drug trip that the audience could visually experience. Beyond attempting to portray an acid trip, it also worked with the larger theme of the film, which questioned ideas of patriotism and nationalism. Although the Code was ostensibly gone by 1968, its presence and some of its goals and principles linger on in the revised ratings system of the twenty-first century. While the rating system is now based on a G, PG, PG-13, R, and NC-17 system, each rating highlights the representation of specific issues within a film. These topics echo the morality concerns of the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” of the 1920’s and range from violence and nudity to profanity and drug use. Much like Joseph Breen, when Jack Valenti took over the PCA, he maintained his position for over the next three decades. Unlike Breen, Valenti was a skillful reader of the changes happening in American society, and he regularly tweaked the ratings system to respond to current cultural conditions as necessary. Despite his retirement and death in 2007, the MPAA in 2012 resembles the one he left. While there are issues of illegal piracy that plague the movie industry, a cause Valenti began to champion in 2004, he retired as a venerated “giant who loomed over two of the world’s most glittering stages: Washington and Hollywood.”

Although the ratings system may seem like a completely other world when compared to the Code, it is evident that the Code still had some resonance in reforming the types of films

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191 Farber, 258-259.
192 Breznican Anthony, “Father of Movie Ratings, Jack Valenti dies at 85,” USA Today.
produced in America. On the MPAA’s website it describes the role of movie ratings as providing parents with “basic information about the level of various elements in the film, such as sex, violence, and language so that parents can decide what their children can and cannot see. By providing clear, concise information, movie ratings provide timely, relevant information to parents, and they help protect the freedom of expression of filmmakers and this dynamic American art form.”193 This excerpt combines the principals of the old Code with the new Code. On the one hand, it provides information to make movies family friendly, while at the same time protecting the film makers’ freedom of expression.

Although the Code was eventually phased out of use, it still left a distinct mark in both Hollywood and American history. The Code was a product of the emerging need to reform the film industry and the American morality during a time of economic depression. Despite the restrictions of the Code, Hollywood and American producers found creative ways to subvert the Code and provide complex subplots that often hinted at larger issues beneath the glitz and glamor of Hollywood’s golden age. These subversive tactics created a tenuous air in Hollywood that provided the groundwork for the larger Code changes and revisions in the mid-1950’s. Yet, while the Code was in place, the PCA worked to uphold its main tenets and promote morality in the film industry. Over time, however, the Code was no longer reflective of the ideals that many Americans held. As the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War Movement, and the Women’s Movement coalesced during the 1950’s, films changed to reflect a growing discontent within American society. By the mid-1960’s that discontent and the rejection of traditional values, along with a rapidly changing American cultural landscape, prompted the emergence of a less contentious film rating system that restricted access to film content primarily by age. By the end of what some historians have called the “Decade of Discontent,” the outmoded Motion Picture Production Code finally met a timely death.

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