

The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code

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#931444 in Books The University Press of Kentucky 2001-07-06Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.21 x .84 x 6.141, 1.60 #File Name: 0813190118416 pages | File size: 45.Mb

Leonard J. Leff, Jerold L. Simmons : The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code:

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Best book on censorship of American moviesBy yockoonThis is far

and away the best book I have seen on the various censorship regimes under which American movies have had to labour over the years, comprehensive and delightfully readable. 6 of 13 people found the following review helpful. TOTAL WASTE OF TIME By Zangiku for those who expect actually to learn something from a history book, this is not for you. it sounds like a conversation overheard on a barstool between two specialists in the same field. ("an' remember the time Mae West wore those tassels on her--?" "an' the catholic elite got so upset!" "stop, stop, i'm laughing too hard!") we are not, for example, told anything about the catholic churchmen's campaign to push thru the film censorship regulations to begin with, nor even who Mae West was, let alone exactly what she said did onstage that was loved by her "tittering audiences" and cut from her film versions. lots of itty-bitty details from letters the authors had access to, completely unaccompanied by contexts or explanations of the larger picture. in short, there is no real history here. it reads like one long private joke. there are even lots of fun puns and double entendres in the writing, whoopee! more about the background and agenda of the production code can be learnt in 2 pages from the first chapter of Koppes Black's "Hollywood Goes to War." (for anyone interested in hollywood censorship for real, try Black's "Hollywood Censored" ISBN 978-0521565929.) the only thing of value here is the actual text of the production code in the appendix. that's the one star. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Politics of Show Business By Acute Observer The Dame in the Kimono, Leff Simmons The two authors are university professors in English at Oklahoma State University, and constitutional history at the University of Nebraska. The book is dedicated to their wives. The threats of federal and state censorship forced the movie industry to create a Production Code to protect the morals of America. [People may say they want squeaky-clean pictures, but they also watch sensational movies like "Blow Up".] Show Business is inherently dirty or sexy because it presents the novel and unusual that people want to see. Think of those politicians whose private lives were exposed. Aristotle wrote of the cleansing effects of seeing crimes on stage. Did morality plays in the past centuries provide this like many films in the past decades? The 'Acknowledgments' lists the very many who helped the authors. The 'Preface' tells about the long-suppressed 1931 "Maltese Falcon" movie. The major companies featured sex, wise-cracks, and double entendre to attract paying customers (p.xii). The threat of a nationwide Catholic boycott led to the PCA in 1934 (p.xiii). Some pre-1934 movies are available today. Censorship forced writers to be cleaner and cleverer. Did such classic restraint result in better movies? The authors chose eleven movies to use as examples. This book tells how the Production Code was created, worked, and finally ended. [Around the time when movie theaters went out of business.] Part I (Chapters 1 to 3) starts with the fantasy "America lost her innocence" (p.3). That depends on how far back you go. It could go back to the 1830s when the factory system came to New England to end small owner-operated businesses. When was there ever a lack of scandal among actors and actresses? The censorship bills in 1921 coincided with the economic depression. [The earlier silent films also covered controversial topics, like "The Jungle"] Performers had to sign a "morals clause"; producers and directors did not. Some films are described (p.6). Note how the economic bad times resulted in more calls for censorship (p.8). The Production Code was wanted by Investment Bankers for their growing business (p.11). Sensational movies with sex and violence were profitable (p.14). Violence had a "moral value" (p.15). Falling profits eroded the Code (p.26). Hollywood's business followed the balance sheet (p.35). A new Production Code would prevent state censors (p.37). Investment Bankers were an ally (p.47). The real threat that credible was by the Catholic Church; a boycott would cripple Hollywood (p.52). Part II (Chapter 4 to 11) discusses eleven movies and the censorship conflicts behind their scripts. It seems any story that is dramatic would have censorship problems. A sign of the cross would be objectionable to British censors (like 'Dracula'). A bland movie might not do well at the box office. You will be able to decode scenes from old movies. A saloon with dancing girls represented a brothel. These chapters show a lot of research went into this book. These films are seldom available today on TV (like many other BW movies). [While I've seen a few of these movies on TV, I don't remember much.] You may find some of these details interesting, but it is the finished product that is important, not details of the production. Many know that the book is usually better than the movie; this book explains why. There are a lot more people involved in creating a movie than for most books. Modifying the story could attract those who read the book. This book also explains how movies are made. Money is raised from 'Wall Street' investors, given to Hollywood studios to produce a movie (story, actors, directors, etc.), which is then advertised to generate paying customers. Usually this works well. Sometimes there are clunkers, other times big hits. Many people go to the movies every week so there is an audience for these products.

" The new edition of this seminal work takes the story of the Production Code and motion picture censorship into the present, including the creation of the PG-13 and NC-17 ratings in the 1990s.

From Publishers Weekly To protect American eyes from the depravity of flapper-era films such as *Virgins in Cellophane*, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association developed the "Production Code." This excellent, lively study examines the "raucous debate" sparked by the Code over the morals and ideals of American movies. English professor Leff (Oklahoma State) and American history professor Simmons (University of Nebraska) present the course censorship took in 11 troublesome films from *Gone with the Wind* to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, showing the Code to have been "as integral to movie-making as soundstages and back lots." The authors

focus on Joe Breen, the power behind the Code-enforcing Hays Office, whose tough yet benevolent censorship left him "caught between the need to uphold the Code and the desire to relax its more unreasonable standards." Filled with hilarious anecdotes, this is an important chronicle of film history. Photos not seen by PW . Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Although it is probably Will Hays who is remembered as the enforcer of film morality, it was Joseph Breen (with the unwitting aid of Mae West) who put teeth in the Motion Picture Production Code. Its power was that of the purse: until a certificate was promised, banks did not make production loans. Following a brief overview of the code's establishment, several well-known films which had code problems are examined, from *Dead End* and *Gone with the Wind* to *Lolita* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* . This is a useful adjunct to such works as Murray Schumach's *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor* (LJ 8/64) and Jack Vizzard's amusing *See No Evil* (LJ 2/1/70; o.p.). - Roy Liebman, California State Univ. Lib., Los Angeles Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A readable, intimate account of the rise to near-tyrannical power, and the fall to well-deserved ignominy, of the old Production Code Administration." *Atlantic Monthly* "A valuable insight into our own innocence and naivet." *New York Times Book* "The triumph of Leff and Simmons's fine work is that they have reminded us of how fatuous and inimical a code of conduct can be: how tempting it is as a theoretical answer, and how intrinsically flawed it is as a working solution." *Times of London*