**Path to (Self-) Censorship in Hollywood, 1920-34**

(Remember – Supreme Court has said (1915) that censorship is not unconstitutional)

Middle class reform movements in early 20th century USA (cf. Women’s suffrage and Prohibition in early 1920s)

The ‘Aquarian Age’; cult of sun-tanned California beauty; sun-drenched swimming pools and fast sports cars; wild parties, drugs and sex; especially “movie-struck girls” (Mary Pickford told her female fans to stay home)

Movement toward some sort of censorship

Payne Fund Study – because of movies American youth is “sex-wise, sex-excited, sex-absorbed”; movies are “a training ground for lovers.”

The scandals: in 1921 “Fatty” Arbuckle accused of rape in death of Hollywood actress in St. Francis Hotel; two hung juries; finally found Not Guilty; but career ruined.

‘The Sins of Hollywood’ 1922 – “wild orgies at road houses”; sex, drugs, and prostitution.

Hollywood reacts to avoid external censorship: Will Hays and the MPPDA (The Hays Office)

 Cheerleader; public relations for Hollywood.

 “Dos and Don’ts” list; but vague and voluntary.

The creation of true self-censorship

1. The Great Depression, 1929+

Impact on the studios: crisis – Paramount and Fox go bankrupt;

Hollywood looking for audiences, particularly more men….

1. Transition to sound, 1927-29

The nature of sound movies: language and realism and tendency away from fantasy of silent films increase possibility of “abuse”– 1927+.

Result: Motion Picture Production Code 1930

 Maintain strong moral standards; no ambiguity; clear right and wrong.

its content – “wholesome entertainment”; “sympathy”; crime; profanity; religion; race; national references; emphasis on sexuality; absolute prohibition of nudity; bedrooms.

 Elements of moderation: “dictates of good taste”; “essential to the plot”; “compensating moral values”

 No enforcement arm created

But continuing “abuses”– 1930-34:

‘Baby Face’

Risqué Hollywood musicals – e.g., Busby Berkeley’s “We’re in the Money” (Ginger Rogers); “Pettin’ in the Park” (Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler) from ‘Golddiggers of 1933’

 Catholic Church organizes the Legion of Decency; threatens boycott.

Result: the studios bend: organize the Production Code Administration (Breen Office 1934) to enforce the Code.

Provisions and impact (remains in vigor until 1966); most of pressure exercised at screenplay level.

Impact on Hollywood films in late 30s: costume dramas and historical epics; nostalgia for “pre-Code” films (really 1930-34)