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978-0-521-56592-9 - Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies

Gregory D. Black

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*Hollywood Censored* examines how hundreds of films – Mae West comedies, serious dramas, and films with a social message – were censored and often edited to promote a conservative political agenda during the golden era of studio production in the 1930s. After a series of sex scandals rocked the movie industry in 1922, the Hollywood moguls hired Will Hays to clean the image of movies. As movie “czar,” Hays tried a variety of ways to regulate films before adopting a formal code. Written in 1930 by a St. Louis priest and a Catholic layman, the Production Code stipulated that movies stress proper behavior, respect for government, and “Christian values” – thereby challenging the moguls’ staunch belief that movies entertain, not preach morality.

The Catholic Church further reinforced these efforts by launching its Legion of Decency in 1934. Intended to force Hays and Hollywood to censor movies more rigorously, the Legion engineered the appointment of Joseph Breen as head of the Production Code Administration. For the next three decades, Breen, Hays, and the Catholic Legion of Decency virtually controlled the content of all Hollywood films.

Recounting one of the most fascinating eras of Hollywood, *Hollywood Censored* is based on an extensive survey of original studio records, censorship files, and Legion archives.

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To  
*Gaylord Marr,*  
*teacher*

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