

HST 203: ONLINE U.S.History Sp19 (Escobar)

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Censorship & Morality

by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, April 13, 2019, 11:54 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Censorship & Morality topic.

To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

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BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, which clearly describes the source and questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Censorship & Morality

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People love a scandal.

by [Jamie Atkins](#) - Tuesday, April 16, 2019, 7:49 PM

The question I had about the Olga Nethersole trail was why was this play such a scandal? Personally I could think of more examples of so-called immorality in theatre than the opposite. What was different about this production that caused such an uproar? The “fallen woman” or “courtesan” was a popular theme in theatre during this period, but mostly as cautionary moral tales, the character in this play is bolder. The main difference talked about in the documentary segment is that she was a “willing participant” in this immoral behavior and since “she wasn’t punished in the play, Olga had to be punished in real life,” (Sapho docu 1:07). There is a general consensus by historians that the treatment of Olga was more heavy handed because of her managerial production role, which also challenged social and gender norms. (Wiki page, Footnoting History Podcast 12/2/16). There was a prevailing fear at this point in history that the female’s widening social roles and freedoms would bring about immorality. These puritanical and sexist concerns were pedelled to the public by conservative religious groups such as: The Society for the Suppression of Vice, The Society for the Study of Life, and The New York Mother's Club ([pbs.org](#) sapho-affair, Wiki page) It was also was a major concern of social reformer Jane Addams (Murrin textbook p. 690). These reasons, good or bad, take a backseat to the main reason that Olga was brought to trail; sensationalism by unscrupulous press, or yellow journalism. It was the New York Press that created this scandal. It was, in fact, an employee of a New York newspaper that filed the initial complaint, which was extremely exaggerated (Footnoting History Podcast). I think this is a clear cut case of newspapers creating public outcry to sell newspapers. I am in agreement with the judge, who reminded the jurors “examine the facts, you are not the guardians of the morals of the community or part of any crusade against vice,”(Footnoting History podcast). This is also a good historic example of “There’s no such thing as bad publicity”(Barnum); whereby the play’s description in news articles, and the arrest, trial and acquittal of Olga, only increased the show’s popularity. There was an outpouring of support for Ms. Nethersole, and in her obituary she is remembered kindly as "representing a growing revolt against the prudery of the turn of the century, and encouraged women's intellectual independence" (NY Times obit 1951)

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Re: People love a scandal.

by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 2:35 PM

Hi Jamie!

I personally agree with your statements and I think you added some great points. I found it fascinating the way society chose to treat Olga Nethersole after her role in Sapho. It was very interesting to read about her trial and how people wanted to punish her directly. Society wasn't realizing that Olga is not the same person as the character she is playing. Olga might've enjoyed playing those roles more than other roles, but that doesn't define her as a person. Olga was working and pursuing her career. This specific role may have been on the more scandalous side, but she took the role to earn a wage. Working and earning money was hard enough for people during this time period, and for woman it was extremely difficult. There was already this negative idea around woman working. To many people it seemed radical and inappropriate; many believed women should be at home taking care of the house etc. I completely agree with what Barnum said as well, "There's no such thing as bad publicity" this really is true. People of society are willing to listen to anything. Unfortunately this happened to Olga, she eventually rose above it, and Sapho only increased in popularity!

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Re: People love a scandal.

by [Jamie Atkins](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 11:43 PM

Hi Breanna,

I completely agree with you there. It was very hypocritical of the press at the time to call for someone's artistic and personal liberty to be infringed upon, all the while enjoying their freedom of the press. I don't mean to bash the press excessively, they are instrumental to our democracy, and did many good things during this time frame, but I think sometimes they went too far.

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Censorship, Morality, and the Effects

by [Kaiser Slocum](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 7:11 PM

Around 1900, there were a lot of people who were resistant to change. New ways of doing things and acting caused a lot of friction. As we know from Chapter 23 of Liberty, Equality, Power by John Murrin, by the end of World War I the changes caused by the war and the radicals that had emerged were quickly eliminated and America reverted to its former ways. The period of time around 1900, I think was a time when censorship was really intense because all the progressives were pushing for change and the conservatives were really on edge and tense. Because of this, as soon as Sapho came out, the conservatives and even some progressives immediately jumped on it. Obviously, Sapho represented a whole new behavior for women and conservative Americans were shocked at this. They did not want this immorality to become common, so they decided to act upon it quickly. Now in the twenty-first century, we see a lot of the consequences that came with the loosening of censorship on movies and other media.

The Mann Act was intended to prevent forced prostitution and debauchery. (0:12 into the Mann Act Audio Report) As this immortality spread, the government was looking to protect women from this and instituted the Mann Act. The Mann Act is important because it declares to U.S. citizens that America is a place where people are not allowed to participate in activities that are unhealthy and unsafe. As a law in itself, the Mann Act is well-meaning and essential to the law system in America. However, this law leads down a slippery slope in which the government starts taking more responsibility of the citizens', dictating what they can and cannot do. Laws are intended to promote the general welfare of the common person, not to dictate exactly what everyone is allowed to do.

I think that the scandals of politicians and celebrities prove that the morality in the U.S. is worsening. During the twentieth century, the amount of these scandals were few and typically just in the working-class population. (Chapter 20 of Liberty, Equality, Power by John Murrin) Now, it appears this degradation of morality has pervaded

even the elite people who are in charge of leading this nation and being good role models to citizens. Even though there is still quite a bit of public humiliation, these scandals are becoming so common that they are being overlooked and downplayed, something that is worsening the conditions in America.

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Re: Censorship & Morality
by [McKay Luke](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 8:34 PM

In chapter 21 of our textbook, we are given an in-depth look progressivism at the turn of the century. Amidst the submerging movements regarding women's rights, machine politicians, labor laws, etc., we see another movement in the form of morality. Jane Addams, arguably the most famous female reformer during the rise of progressivism acknowledged the dangers that alcohol and promiscuity wrought on the American family, particularly the detriment it brought to the relationship men had with their wives (*Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of The American People*, pg. 690). Prostitution was a known issue at this time and we read that "Between 1902 and 1926, more than 100 cities launched investigations of the prostitution trade" (*Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of The American People*, pg. 688). I had no prior knowledge of the Sapho Incident, but I found the public's initial response to the play to be fitting, considering the current social state of the country. The Sapho Incident can be very relatable to things we see today. Now more than ever, with the rise of social media and essentially complete connectivity with the vast majority of the population, we all are presented with a seemingly endless amount of social issues that we are able to form an opinion on. I believe the Sapho Incident can also be compared to certain instances where an issue is publicized and a verdict is determined without a thorough investigation on the incident. As we saw, the jury was quick to determine that Olga Nethersole was not guilty.

I consider myself to be fairly politically moderate and sometimes find difficulty picking sides on issues of morality. I can see and agree to arguments on either side of most social issues. In regard to the Mann act, however, I do agree that this was a necessary act in 1910 and agree that it is a necessary law today. In my eyes the government's job is to be neutral in most cases and imposing certain regulations can restrict freedom of speech. The Mann act, however, helps to restrain human trafficking. In a world without human trafficking, I wouldn't consider prostitution to be a real moral dilemma as I believe people have their own agency and can choose how they live their lives, but we don't live in a perfect world, and certain laws are necessary for the safety of the citizens.

I believe that as a nation we are vastly different in our moral standards than we were a hundred years ago. The Sapho incident, for example, was brought about by just the insinuation of a woman engaging in sexual acts for pleasure and frivolity, let alone the acts actually having been shown. Today It is common for sexual themes or innuendos to be included in media intended for children and adolescents. Pornography and adult content are often normalized and accepted in today's society and are available essentially at any time with the prevalence of smartphones. This is not to say, however, that modern moral dilemmas are nonexistent. As we see from the Spitzer sex scandal, the public is still ready and willing to chime in on moral discrepancies. On page 2 of the Censorship and Morality materials, we can see Governor Spitzer's job approval rate go from 62% in January of 2007, to 35% in February of 2008, after his scandal. In the trailer for *The Rise and Fall of Eliot Spitzer*, we even hear Spitzer himself admitting to the public that he had "Act[ed] in a way that violates [his], or any, sense of right and wrong." To summarize, I believe that issues of morality will always be a part of the United States as long as we are given the freedom to have our own opinions.

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Re: Censorship & Morality
by [Jamie Atkins](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 12:10 AM

Although I think the issue of human trafficking is obviously a righteous and worthy cause to fight and enact laws against, I think the Mann Act, in its original form, was the kind of law that goes against the ideals of America. First, the law was broad and unspecific as it was written. "Any immoral purpose" is not the language law should have in a country where we value the separation of church and state. The fact that it was even put before Congress because of "Rumors, taken as truth, about women being taken and shuttled around the country by a vast network of immigrants," (NPR Mann Act :43) is questionable. These rumors were being amplified and/or started by the "muckrakers" trying to sell newspapers (npr.org The Long, Colorful History of The Mann Act). I

think the W.A.S.P.'s were more concerned with policing women and "protecting them" from "foreign devils" than anything else. I think the way the Supreme Court has amended the Mann Act not only finally made it necessary, but fair, relevant and important today.

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Re: Censorship & Morality

by [McKay Luke](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 9:38 PM

Thank you for your reply. I can absolutely agree with you- the Mann act did come with grey area and its ambiguity did have flaws. Upon rereading my post I see how I overly emphasized my support of it. I should have clarified that I believe the essence of the Mann act was what was necessary for the time. I believe some attention needed to be brought before the people of the problem of prostitution and human trafficking, but it could have been delivered better. In today's America, I do not believe such an act would be brought before Congress. However, in a time when an actress can face arrest for simply portraying a promiscuous and sexually aggressive woman, a proposal such as the Mann Act doesn't seem so far fetched. But again, I would say that an act from a hundred years ago does not deserve validation today simply because it did at the time.

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Olga Nethersol as an Unsung Trailblazer for Women

by [Kati Stuart](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 9:26 PM

The *Sapho* indecency trial is a well-known step in the transition from the era of [Victorian morality](#) as it existed in America, particularly as regards attitudes toward onstage depictions of gender, intimacy and sex. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapho_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapho_(play))). Sapho shows the beginnings of a shift from moral high horse conservatism to a somewhat softer more liberal view on sex and women being awarded the opportunity to be free. While the initial reaction to the play by some was harsh and it was immediately condemned by Anti-Vice groups as well as yellow journalists (1:13 into Sapho video). The result of the court case shows a more reasonable view from the "regular" public as her trial was dismissed within 15 minutes and she was released. There was still a long way to go for women, but I believe it was the foundation for the sexual expression we see today. Sapho took place in New York City in 1900, two decades later in Greenwich Village a borough of NYC the term "feminism" was born (Liberty, Equality, Power Pg.677). These two occurrences in such close proximity and the constant battle by the women of New York cannot be a coincidence. These women fought for what was actually moral, to be treated like a human being regardless of gender, not for the suppression and censorship of individuality like the Anti-Vicers attempted to do. Being a strong independent woman is still something that carries some negative stigma today, yet is looked at as something to aspire to. From the beginning of this country to in some cases now young girls were and are told that sex should only occur within a committed relationship and if she partakes in sex for personal enjoyment she is obviously a devil worshipping floozy. Without the efforts and bravery of women like Olga, we could be observing a completely different landscape at the current time. We as a country have come incredibly far since Olga's arrest, but without her igniting a spotlight for women to follow birth control may not have been offered for decades, women would not be allowed to wear pants, our current state could look very similar to that of "Handmaid's Tale" and almost no one would be pleased with that scenario.

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Sappho and What She Challenges

by [Kalea Nyby](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 10:11 PM

Consider Sapho and comment on the state of censorship prevalent in the United States in 1900. What do you find most compelling about the entire episode. Do you see any connections to issues today?

In all honesty I wouldn't expect anything different from the 1900's when it comes to the state of censorship the country had. It took the United States years on years on years to progress to what it is today; even though we had the constitution, that doesn't mean that everything american citizens were promised was enforced, or not every citizen of america was treated the same way. The state of censorship in 1900's was instead of he said she said, it was more along the lines of if anyone said, that's what happened. For example Olga Nethersoles was accused of violating public decency. Because the state accused her, they fined her and sent her to court to proceed for extra

charges. Olga wasn't allowed to speak for herself. She had chosen to play the role of Sapho and she probably had her valid reasons. In the short video it says that "women weren't thought of as sexual creatures" and if the scandalous nature of the play was what enticed Olga to play the part, she didn't have the freedom to say so. She didn't have the freedom to say so because it wasn't the norm for: one, women to be thought of as "sexual creatures" and two, for woman to speak up in general.

I found the most interesting part of the whole episode to be the ending, where the guilty found Olga not guilty and how the whole arrest brought more positive attention to the play and Olga as an actress than it brought negative attention. I found it to be interesting because it's an unpredictable ending. It's also so relatable to modern day society because if something is out of the norm and challenges governmental traditions, then it's always more than likely supported and positively enforced by the public. This connects to so many issues that happen daily such as speaking out against modern day racism, women's equality, and sexual fluidity.

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Differences in Morality
by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 11:16 PM

Recently in the past few years there has been many sexual assault scandals involving celebrities and politicians. My fall term writing 121 class, the first portion of the class we discussed sexual assault cases between politicians. Sexual assault is a horrendous act, and I have watched many cases through the news; and the politicians have to work tremendously hard to dig them out of the hole they are in. They have to share their statements through court, explaining themselves to the press, spending thousands of dollars, and much more. It is not only politicians either, celebrities often put themselves in situations like this too. The 20th and 21st century are very similar in terms of morality and sexual assault. Although, I think the 20th century had many serious issues with prostitution and sexual abuse; the 21st century has done worse. Prostitution is illegal in the US, but there are still over one million prostitutes and over 300,000 arrests regarding prostitution. Before 1910 prostitution wasn't illegal but it was extremely shameful. After the Mann Act was passed it was much easier to control. I couldn't find an exact statistic for the US but in the world there over 21 million who are enslaved by sex trafficking. There is a huge amount of rape cases every year and survivors are coming forward each day. Almost everything in our world today is sexualized and sex is constantly being idolized. Celebrities, world leaders, companies, it's really all around us. It is extremely toxic and forces many people to be in bad situations. The 20th and 21st centuries do have many things in common and this subject is certainly one of them. Unfortunately with our 21st technology it can make for sexual assault cases to be solved quicker, but they can also be quickly hidden.

-Ochab, Ewelina U. "Human Trafficking Is A Pandemic Of The 21st Century." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 26 July 2018, www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/07/26/human-trafficking-is-a-pandemic-of-the-21st-century/#33c14dd36195.

-"How Many Prostitutes Are in the United States and the Rest of the World?" *Should Prostitution Be Legal?*, ProCon, 1 Nov. 2018, prostitution.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=000095.

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Re: Provoking the guardians of public morality
by [Autumn Pitzer](#) - Thursday, April 18, 2019, 11:28 PM

The film on Sapho notes that," it provoked the guardians of public morality." This was the first film of its time and was forcing people to advance, to view women and sex differently. The film featured a women in the arms of a man heading up the stairs and she wasn't resisting-Sapho video 58 sec.

This woman was pictured as a sexual being that could experience pleasures and could and did have multiple partners. But this newfound idea that was forcing people to see women in a progressive light was not approved of by all and because the character wasn't punished in the play Olga had to be punished- Sapho Video 1:12 sec

Olga was shut down and arrested; her trial went on for weeks. Olga was arrested under the charges of public indecency but after only a 15 minute deliberation she was found not guilty. The film was found to be instructive and not offensive and was reopened bringing in mass crowds. A New York police officer admitted to watching the film 6 times while on duty. The most compelling thing to me was the way women were viewed after this play and how threatened people were by this. I pictured Olga demonstrating a woman as a person, which could feel and make her own choices about her body. This made me think of the abortion controversy. Abortion is a moral issue concerning the rights of the fetus and a women’s right over her own body.

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Re: Censorship & Morality "morals have changed not the scandals"

by [Seth Mayfield](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 5:57 AM

(Sapho, :40/:48/1:55) Olga Nethersole played a woman who chose to have an ‘illicit’ relationship with a man at the end of Sapho. New York society for the suppression of vice who had just finished boasting about the confiscation of various forms of pornography, turned their attention onto Olga. During this time Prostitution was a growing trend for working women (textbook, pg 690). I feel prostitution went against the women’s suffrage movement. (textbook, 697) The goal is that women and men are equal. If women are selling there bodies and men aren't how are they equal? (Sapho, 1:18) Now Olga was arrested for breaking public decency laws. The case was thrown out.

Prostitution nowadays is morally wrong for both, but mainly the payer. A scandal like Sapho would be laughed at. (Client 9 trailer, 0:39) Now with Governor Spitzer, he was caught with a prostitute, for real. He is a person of power and we trust him to be on the up and up. That being said, for the most part, people could care less about a person's sexual activities. The only real stipulation being sex out of marriage unless you have an open relationship. Spitzer was married with three kids. I think out morality has changed since the 20th century. The scandals still happen, but what's justified as a scandal has changed based on our morales.

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Re: Censorship & Morality out comes from conservatives

by [Seth Mayfield](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 7:10 AM

New York society for the suppression of vice and PMRC are both examples of conservatism. (Sapho, 40) For Olga Nethersole the use of an ‘illicit’ women in a play; went against New York society for the suppression of vice on moral standing. Women (textbook, pg. 697) were fighting to gain the right to vote but was going no were. Conservatives wanted women to sat at home and raise a family, have no say in politics. PMRC wanted to have some kind of warning for objectionable musice. (UC Berkeley Study,2th/8th par.) Conservatives are hard to waver from what is know. Along with the fear of being a catalyst for their actions. In PMRC case the change in the type of music and the fear of change it may bring. The fear is that the kids may fight back from hearing these songs.

Olga Nethersol was Arrested and found not guilty. (PMRC, 6:50) Pmrc, on the other hand, won their case to have a warning label on objectionable music. In both cases, the fights had the opposite effects. The play and objectionable music became more popular as an outcome.

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