

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.

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Sapho and censorship

by [Steph McGuire](#) - Tuesday, April 16, 2019, 10:39 PM

Good evening,

I found the video about Olga Nethersole and the play Sapho to be interesting. I did not realize that people could be fined and/or jailed for just appearing to be indecent. I also found it fascinating that “because the character in the play was not punished, Olga had to be punished in real life” (video 1:07 mark). From what I have seen in this video and also what I have read online about the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, it seems like they were looking to find indecency in everything. In 1900 the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice said they confiscated 19,000 obscene photographs and 7,000 songs/poems/etc. (video 2:00 mark). It almost gives the impression that in 1900 people were more obscene than they are now.

Now, we can see men and women almost or even completely nude on television, billboards and even walking down the street. You will even see people handing out “picture postcards” on the strip in Las Vegas. They do not care if they’re being handed to children or adults. I am not a prude, but I almost wish the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice had not disbanded in 1950 (wikipedia). We could use a little bit of censorship these days. I believe that there is a time and a place for such things. (Please remember, I am specifically talking about nudity).

One connection that I saw was people being outraged by Olga Nethersole’s character and calling to have her punished. Then a jury finds her not guilty. I feel like we see a lot of that today with celebrities and politicians. They do something that someone gets offended about and everyone rushes to crucify them. Then we lose interest and they “get off” without any or very little punishment. I guess history really does repeat itself.

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Re: Sapho and censorship
by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 5:07 AM

I agree with you that people were going looking for indecency. Not only could people be arrested for indecency in that time but they could be diagnosed with medical disorders for it. Hysteria was often a medical term given to women who had emotional excess.(Wikipedia) One of the symptoms was sexually forward behavior. While hysteria is no longer a recognized disorder at one time thousands of women were wrongfully diagnosed with it only for the reason that they were sexual beings. The judgement of other people by morals not their own had gotten so bad that they created a medical problem to justify it.

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Re: Sapho and censorship
by [Carisa Snell](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 3:26 PM

Hi Steph,

I agree with your statement that history does repeat itself, sometimes I wish we as a nation could learn a bit more from past failures and fix the way we do certain things. Our responses were similar on this topic, and I agree with most everything you said. I think this case is an example of just how the Progressives of the time exhibited their desire for reform and change.

In the first paragraph of chapter 21 in our book Liberty, Equality, Power, it says that the progressive party had set out to "cleanse and reinvigorate an America whose politics and society they considered in decline." (page 685) I think the key word in that statement is "they", as the progressive party believed their views superior to others. This "superior" mentality, as we have seen throughout history (I'm looking at you Hitler), can be very problematic, as it only takes into consideration those ideals they deem important and is seen as very one-sided. I believe that is in part is what set Olga Nethersole free, because though the reformists at the time charged her and wanted her convicted, her peers (aka those not involved in the charging) saw her work for what it was and the value she exhibited.

I do agree with you though that throughout history many famous people-celebrities and politicians alike-have committed terrible crimes and end up with little to no punishment. Having said that, I think it might me more due to the fact that they're able to "work the system" hiring expensive lawyers and have enough money to make things go away. A current example of that is just the juxtaposition between the small amount of jail time parents are facing regarding the college entrance scandal and those parents who have large fines and jail sentences for sending their child to a school out of their district. ([Here is an article of one such case](#)) We definitely need a better system in place, and I really do wish we could learn from history so it does not repeat itself.

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Re: Sapho and censorship pt. 2
by [Christina Dukes](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 8:48 PM

Evening Carisa and Steph!

I agree with your claims that history repeats itself, although I believe that history repeats itself with slightly altered renditions of previous incidences. For example, time and time again we see genocide occurring and the entire world taking no notice to how severe things are, and then once it becomes widely talked about enough the entire world is in astonishment. The infamous Nazi regime and killing of people of Jewish decent was not the first genocide. People have a natural tendency throughout history to conquer and create a powerful nation, and in turn they do what they need to get to that point. That being said (a little exaggerated and extreme but its a clear point to understand my claim), I believe that people will go to whatever lengths they believe is necessary just to gain the public attention that they want. The people who were the ones to persecute Sapho brought in all kinds of points about the judgement of the actors true identity and character, just to discredit her and make her look like a bad person to the publics view, and then in turn hopefully get the play production stopped (what they really wanted).

I think that people will go to extreme lengths just to get what they believe is morally correct. For example, "Protestant missionaries were among the most active promoters of American interests between 1870 and 1900, most of it directed toward China.....Protestant missionaries considered it their Christian duty to teach the Gospel to the "ignorant" Asian masses and save their souls. Missionaries also believed that their conversation efforts would free those masses from their racial destiny, enabling them to become "civilized". (Textbook Paragraph two, pg. 718). Just because we assume people are doing something right at the time, does not always mean that it is correct. We have done so much throughout our history that we laugh at, and laugh at the thought of how we even thought the notion was correct in the first place was a real occurrence. The missionaries at this time believed that them going overseas and "providing culture to the uncivilized" helped them internally, and also helped the directly influenced. Now, we look at something like this in awe, wondering how we are able to believe that we could've thought a race was doomed for being their race, and we could fix it if we just made them realize how they were being wrong. Just as the persecutors of Sapho had done. They incorporated their morals, and believed that if we are able to see just how wrong it is what the play was doing, they could help fix the problem and stop it from occurring again.

Its sad to say, but I believe that naturally something like this is going to happen again, but its just human nature and our determined stubbornness to believe that the ideals we base our entire lives off of is wrong.

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Re: Sapho and censorship
by [Devon Olsen](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 9:45 PM

Hi Steph,

I enjoyed your take on the Sapho video. I think that the times were less about understanding and more about punishment and regulatory practices. As such, Nethersole undoubtedly drew the short straw with the circumstances that surrounded her arrest. I found the line you shared fascinating as well from the 1:07 mark of the film. I think it is a very strange mentality to have, however I believe it portrays the times well. It is almost as if she portrays a character that is indecent, but cannot be charged with any crimes, due to legalities and rights as citizens. However if her character is not able to be charged, the actress who does have rights and citizenship should be charged.

I was unaware that the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice had been involved with as many confiscations of media as they were beyond the Sapho video's information. I think your point of the potential for the obscenity in the 1900s being more prevalent than now is interesting. However, I do not fully agree. I only say this because from a vague perspective the obscenities we face now are different than they were in the 1900s. I think people are more crass than before, but I also think that society accepts the obscenities more now. I do not agree with that behavior, but I also think that it brings about more racial bias, gender inequality, slander, and of course offensive statements to others. Also, as you mentioned, the movies/shows now show a lot more skin than previous. Lingerie is more provocative, and revealing than it was even in the 50's. Sex icons are unhealthily thin versus the full figured sex symbols of the earlier years (Marilyn Monroe for example). However, all that being said, the times are changing, and society is becoming slightly more accepting with these particular topics.

I agree with you on that last paragraph 100%. Society is buyable, and its remarkably frustrating for those who just have their way paved with cash in hand for them. For those of us that work our tails off, for very little pay are at a disadvantage because of this. I also agree that the "fire" burns fast and hot to start with any political of celebrity scandal. It does seem to fizzle off quickly and lose momentum shortly afterwards. I think that there has been a multitude of progress, but I also think there is a long way to go. Thank you for your thoughts, I appreciate looking at the morality and censorships conflicts in out country with a new perspective.

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Sapho and the Progressive Movement (Chapter 21 and Sapho video clip)
by [Kara Miner](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 5:01 PM

After watching the video about Olga Nethersole "Sapho" and the events that took place afterwards I could not believe that Ms. Nethersole got arrested, just for portraying a character in a play (Sapho and Olga Nethersole Video). At this time protecting the moral integrity of the people clearly was extremely important. I find it very interesting such a small display of sexuality was considered so immoral. Watching the short clips of the play having Ms. Nethersole character being carried up stairs happily seemed almost innocent compared to today's media. In

today’s time, carrying a woman up stairs in such a way would probably be allowed in a G rated movie. When Sapho came out, the mere suggestion of a woman having any kind of sexuality was so unforgivable that the “guardians of public morality” had Olga Nethersole arrested (Sapho and Olga Nethersole Video). In today’s time you would only get charged with public indecency for doing something like streaking fully nude. While 1900 was very different times, I am still astonished by the fact that the public wanted to censor a work of art for something so small.

In 1900, the Progressive movement was growing and working to “cleanse and reinvigorate an America whose politics and society they considered in decline” (Liberty, Equality, Power pg. 685). This included ridding society from immoral entertainment Sapho being a good example, saloons, and the overall sexual revolution (Liberty, Equality, Power pg. 690). I find the ideology of the Progressive movement extremely interesting because the same group of people who opposed sexual liberty ironically was the strongest advocates for achieving equality and more power for the people. An example of this would be the initiative and referendum first adopted by our very own Oregon. These gave citizens more power over the government and overall increasing civilian liberties (Liberty, Equality, Power pg. 690). To me, these beliefs largely contradict each other.

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Mann Act
by [Sarah Willis](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 10:29 PM

Concerning the Mann Act, was this law necessary then? Is it necessary today? What can happen when the government attempts to regulate the behavior of its citizens? What are the unintended consequences when experts pass legislation attempting to help or protect a specific group of people? I do believe the Mann Act was necessary then because of the abductions and kidnappings in chinatown. I do think it is very necessary today people are more aware of the traficing rings and child sex trade as well as prostitution rings. When the government attempts to regulate too much it becomes more about what they don't want to happen rather than what is best for the people and what we want for our country.

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Ambiguity of the history of the Mann Act
by [Christina Dukes](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 11:47 PM

The Mann Act was an act passed by president Taft in 1910 that disallowed the movement/travel of women across state lines, since during this time prostitution and human trafficking were prevalent issues that the public was growing more and more concerned with. Throughout the book in the past few chapters that we have read thus far, there is a central trend of morality and conservative values that were continuously being shown to have different occasions in which a member of the public tried to thwart different conservative values. For example, in the book it mentions "*Vice commission sprang up in every major city to clamp down on prostitution, drunkenness, and pornography. The campaign for prohibition- a ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages- gathered steam. Movie theatre owners were pressured into excluding "indecent" films from their screens. Many believed lurid tales of international vice lords scouring foreign lands for innocent girls who could be delivered to American brothel owners. This "white slave trade" inspired passage of the 1910 Mann Act, which made the transportation of women across state lines for immoral purposes a federal crime.*" (Liberty, equality, power. p. 680).

This quote is a fairly long one, but I think it reiterates exactly the central theme of what I want to claim. In this quote it mentions how the moral values of the beginning of the 19th century were in constant fear of being disobeyed and people would start up subdivisions of groups to try and stop this trend from occurring. With the progressive sense of literally everything near the turn of the 19th century, a lot of individuals thought that with the possibility of change there existed a change of course in long standing morals of privacy and intimate relationships. With the fear of values being disrespected, the nation tried to create changes to help stop movement towards "bad" or immoral behavior. A lot of instances involving sex, sex trade, alcohol and substance abuse, and everything in association to these particular problems, each had an act or a law imposed to help prohibit such actions.

Specifically, with the Mann Act of 1910 the government was growing a large concern for the prevalence of prostitution, sex trade, and other illicit sex acts. In order to try and assist in preventing these problems from occurring, they tried to impose a law which would in turn stop transferring of individuals throughout the country, in an effort to desist brothels. I believe that the Mann Act was a very good act to come into effect, especially in the time that it did. It had good reason, good suspicion, reasonable evidence, and overall public concern (not just the government.) I believe that the constant reinforcement of the Mann act as an active law in today's America helps to

try and prevent the modern version of prostitution and human trafficking as well. Imposing more crimes to those who are part of the criminal offense will hopefully detour the offenders, as the crimes they commit are punishable to a more severe consequence. I believe that since this ideal of dehumanization of people is still a current issue that we see today, it is necessary to keep this law enacted and integrated.

However, I do not necessarily agree with the first institution of an offender of this act. Jack Johnson was convicted in 1913 as the first person to have disobeyed this act and was persecuted for his crimes. There has been a long standing debate about his particular involvement in his case and his crimes, as it is said to be an unjust ruling from the courts that is sparked by a white race superiority feud. His investigation of white trafficking of his white woman confidant began shortly after a big fight of his, in which he defeated a white male. His relationship with this white woman was now thought of as a prostitution type situation, and he was subjugated to a court with a white judge and an entirely white jury. The details in his case were extremely biased all throughout in terms of deliverance of the "events" as well as the entirety of his judicial process. The verdict found him guilty of disobeying the law and he was sentenced to a year of time served and had to pay a \$1,000 fine. Fast forward to today, and now the court systems and various other political officiates are diving into the real drive behind sentencing him. It is thought now (which I agree to given the circumstances I explained above), that his conviction was driven by a racial superiority of the white court systems over a black male that had shown to prove himself dominant over a white male (which at the time was a wrong thing to do.)

If you think about the amount of money that he was forced to pay it is an extremely high amount. Monetary value in the United States generally has an inflation rate of 3.08 % per year (taken from personal knowledge and interest in economics), and if you were to apply this to the \$1,000 fine that he was forced to pay, you would come to a current value we know as around 26.5k. This money plus time spent in jail were significantly high for this specific case- which also happened to be the first conviction against anyone who disobeyed the law, and sets the tone for the law/ laws broken involving this specific act.

Of course, when the government imposed the Mann Act it took them awhile to convict anyone in the first place. I believe that this is because people always find ways to avoid the governments authority and rules, in more clever manners. It's just like how a lot of the abused substances we see today are a trend of focus since they are illegal, it becomes more illusive to get them, it becomes more popular and favorable, theres a spike in usage, more becomes abused, and in turn more laws are disobeyed in response to attempting to allude this law. Generally, I have seen that as the government helps to regulate its citizens, generally people act out in defiance in the opposite manner or they create the issuance that is trying to be regulated, as more severe than it was before.

Take for example the clip on Sapho referenced in class. Sapho was a play that gained popularity and notoriety solely based on the circumstance that the arresting of the actor and director/ court case made the play more known to the general public. In response, more people see it, know about it, the ideals get spread farther and more often, and the problem of the "illicit content" within the play is now worse than it ever was or ever could have been without the case (Sapho video). I believe that since the government has tried to regulate the citizens starting a century ago, it has created a more secretive and offensive scenario of prostitution and its associated operations than how it was before. When a law is in effect, people will constantly find ways to undermine authority and continue to do what they are doing. This undermining creates several other problems associated with it since more laws are broken trying to protect the initial problem. (example: drug dealing can lead to weapons charges, violence charges, assisting in various charges, etc.) These are what I believe to be the unintended consequences of legislation being passed that attempts to help particular problems or protect certain groups of people.

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Judging Others by Personal Standards
by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 11:56 PM

The problem I have with the Mann Act is the terms debauchery and immoral purpose. Merriam Webster defines debauchery as extreme indulgence in bodily pleasures and especially sexual pleasures, behavior involving sex, drugs, alcohol, etc. that is often considered immoral. There's that word immoral again well let's look at the definition for immoral. Merriam Webster's definition of immoral: not moral; very informative. Well onto their definition of moral: principles of right and wrong behavior. Highlighting my point who is to say what is right or wrong? Right and wrong is not black and white it has a lot of gray areas. Just like people, Joe pointed this out in the spectrum videos. That people are not all on one end of the spectrum or another. Some people fall in between or in the gray areas.

Religion has often played a part in what people believe is right and wrong. But not everyone is religious and not everyone who is religious is devoutly religious. So how can laws that are meant to govern free people judge others by constantly differing moral codes. People could be arrested by a police officer with a high moral code but then

released by one with a low moral code and vice versa. This law was eventually changed to exclude these words for others but this did not happen until 76 years later. The laws original intent to stop women from being abducted for unwanted sexual activity was obviously good and meant well. But it left large gaps in it that have caused it to be used to discriminate and wrongfully convict people.

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The Ever Changing Concept of Morality
by [Rudy Pastrano](#) - Thursday, April 18, 2019, 12:27 AM

Morality has always been a ever changing concept with a subject, idea, and/or lifestyle a one point being taboo to the next a accepted part of society. There are many examples of this over the generations from the 1920's Flappers short dresses and dancing to the 1960's Hippies free love and open drug usage. At the forefront of these changes are usually teenagers and young adults who rebel against the social norms of their generation. Of course the older more rigid people of society view this as a danger to their way of life and as a result crackdown and censor them and anything they consider immoral. The play Sapho was a good example of how a change to the social norm no matter how small or simple results in action being taken as the lead actor Olga was arrested for "violating public decency" due to her role as Sapho and her characters seductive traits and many lovers and not being punished at the end of the play.(0:25 into the Sapho video). Luckily for Olga a some witnesses of the play didn't think it was offensive at all and in fact instructive along with a sympathetic jury lead to her being not guilty, (2:30 into the Sapho video) ironically after the incident the play became more well known and received bigger audiences and overall became more accepted. (3:00 into the Sapho video). Morality will always be a concept that changes and in turn changes how the majority view the world.

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Morality Application to Laws
by [Trey Husko](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 6:01 PM

Rudy,

Similar to you I shared similar thoughts on morality in one of my posts how they're something always changing. I think this can also apply to certain laws. In the NPR Audio clip the reporter said "all laws are a product of their time" (18 seconds into the audio clip). As a society I believe we should always be open to change including of past laws. There exists some laws today that are in place because of something that was viewed as being immoral many years ago in a different time place. Take prostitution for example (which I don't hold strong beliefs toward either side), it's illegal at the state-level in almost every state and it's one of those laws that was put in place mostly due to the morality of it. There are larger groups today that do believe prostitution should be legal and I could see it becoming legal in more places as more people's morality towards it changes. Other countries like the Netherlands do have legal prostitution that's regulated.

Our moral views are definitely something that will always be changing and, as a result, laws change to reflect that.

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Re: The Ever Changing Concept of Morality
by [Sarah Willis](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 11:03 PM

I agree with you morality is always changing. I think what was not moral in the past becomes exceptible over time when it is around and indoctered into our lives more as well

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Sapho and the morality compass
by [Devon Olsen](#) - Thursday, April 18, 2019, 12:46 AM

In the Sapho Episode, I find many parts of this compelling. But the part that sticks out to me most is the fact that a fictional character portrayed in a play is the subject of disapproval. But in that time, the public and the "morality police" couldn't separate the character of Sapho from the actress Olga. The fact that they actually threw her in jail, and went to trial due to indecency in a play that was not doubt not recommended for younger audiences is a hard one for me to grasp. I do see some connections from then to now, and am disappointed that there are still these problems. This problems are the disrespect of women, and objectifying them. I also disagree with the thought that the "perfect" womens body is not a healthy one necessarily. This problem has gotten so out of hand that there is actually a woman by the name of Valeria Lukyanova who went through many many surgeries so that she could actually look like a real life barbie doll to strive for the "perfect" body. I am disgusted by the fact that people feel like they need to fit the body type of fictional toys that are horribly/unhealthily proportioned. The connections today to the problems faced by Olga back in 1900 are numerous. The problem with the so-called "morality police" and their judgements on what is just versus unjust are not founded on anything besides societal norms.

The conformation of the ideas of right and wrong in the 1900s vs now should be significantly different, however for each step of progress we make, there is another half step back to the "old ways." In many ways the morals we see as "progressives" are making headway in the right direction, but the process is slow, and in very small steps at any given time. However for the progress we do make, in general they are being more widely accepted, for example: the idea of homosexual marriage becoming legal gives me hope, and gives hope to the "progressives" in this country that are truthfully more left, and open-minded. In Sapho's case, the era was not correct for that forward of an idea. The idea that this women can have many different lovers would still cause duress to some folks in this country, and the idea of females seeking sexual pleasure, unfortunately is not fully accepted in this country as a whole. I would wager that there is a large portion of Americans that acknowledge that women have sexual needs as well as men, and I would also wager that the idea of this being fully accepted could be offensive to a lot of middle america. The times are changing, but the ideals of the past have a way of hanging around.

-Devon

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Progressive morality compasses
by [Christina Dukes](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 1:07 PM

Devon,

I read your post and I thought a lot of what you said to be very true and a very good example of a lot of the debate about morality. I do agree that with time, progressiveness and growth within societies allow the social norms and morals to be changed and adjusted (like how you mention that we now are able to allow homosexual marriage in some instances and states but at the time of the 1900's there is absolutely no way that the notion would have even been allowed). I slightly disagree with the fact that you claim that Sapho's character was not able to be disassociated from the real life person Olga, since they were able to disassociate her from her performance character, but since she is the actor and director of the play she had a key role in the influence of the play. The play itself was a run off version of an incorporated French play at the time, and was slightly altered in order to fit the play that Olga herself wanted to write. Since she is the one who directed "such a horrendous and obscene imagery" of a play to be written, performed, and continuously previewed and shown time over time to the general public, she was the drive force behind persecution. She allowed herself to act in a inappropriate way, and since people were offended at the outcome of the play (being carried willingly to perform an illicit act with a man), they had a default reason that they could actually charge her with. Its sort of how you can see people do anything now in current days, have someone or some group disapprove, and in order to persecute the individual they don't like (because they were involved in something unfavorable to them), they find legal or more solid evidence at something else (and sometimes completely unrelated), just to get the person into trouble. For example, take how Kevin Hart (a famed American celebrity) was supposed to host the Oscars this year, and someone somewhere on social media who didn't like Kevin Hart brought up to account all of his "flaws" and "misjudgments" of the past, just to discredit his character. With social media, now things like this blow up very fast and becomes a trend that everyone around the world can know about in just hours. With the heat on him, instead of dealing with the issuances of him still hosting and him being in the spotlight under persecution of judgement, he took a judgement call and stepped down from hosting the Oscars in an attempt to save his career. The main detail that was brought up to call him a bad person, was his deliverance of a joke a few years back during his stand up live performance talking about how if he finds his son demonstrating a "gay act", he will do anything in his power to shut that thought down. The gay community and those who support them has

risen of course throughout the years, and now since this comment was illuminated, more people became outraged and now don't like or support Kevin Hart. I think the same issuances with Olga back in 1910 is displayed in current times but in different forms, but its a little harder to notice.

I do agree though that with the development of a community and nation throughout time, there are always people that are part of the group that try to slow down or stop progressive movements. Another example of your post, how people are always trying to stop movements from happening and for "every step we move forward there is a half step back". I feel like this is always going to be an issuance just because of human emotional involvement. People don't like change and they are not willing to change their values sometimes. Examples can include technology, energy, immunizations, medicine, science etc.

The point you made about times changing and ideals of the past still hanging around, is something that I believe is just subject to the human nature. It takes generations of people and of families for an ideal to fully be accepted or changed, and a lot of the time I think people don't realize that the 1900's may seem like a very long time ago, but realistically there is still a ways to go before the values and morals that us younger generations find "weird" and "crazy" are completely eradicated. You can maybe think about how theres practices in medieval times that a lot of us find very cruel that were basic punishments. Places like England - a widely industrialized and technologically advanced nation - used to practice laws that punished animals on trial for harming humans, required certain professional men to wear corsets, some forms of bread were made to make you high and if cooked wrong it could kill you (and people loved them), there were beheadings, and public executions. The list goes on and on, but I just included an example of how ideals can be so wild to us and we are in awe how they were even allowed or thought of as "okay", but it was a social norm at one point in time. I do fully agree with you about your level of frustration with the speed of advancement and how there are determinants that stop progressive movements, but I believe that it is simply because humans don't have the consistent level of optimism that they should in order to allow a quicker and more faced paced development/change! Overall, you had some great key points you mentioned and great examples for them as well.

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Re: Censorship & Morality
by [Trey Husko](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 4:27 PM

Today, as a society, the United States is much more open-minded and willing to change compared to in the 20th century when any scandal could ruin a celebrity’s career or politician’s reputation. Charlie Chaplin, for example, saw his popularity plummet in 1944 following being prosecuted under the Mann Act. However, he was acquitted, yet his public image never fully recovered. (1:28 into NPR Report). In the 20th century people were much more likely to disprove of anyone who did something that could be deemed morally wrong. Olga Nethersole got punished as a result of what her character did in the play and was arrested and charged for violating public decency (1:10 into Sapho Video). Later people did come to her support, but something like what happened with Olga would never happen today. People’s moral beliefs have changed over time. Morality isn’t some black and white idea, but instead are ever-changing malleable thoughts. What was thought to be morally wrong 100 years ago could be acceptable under today’s society.

I think a great example of a celebrity who highlights the shift in our country’s overall morality standards is Tiger Woods. The biggest athlete in the sport of golf, saw his career and popularity completely spiral out of control following the reveal he had multiple sexual mistresses in 2010. Following time in rehab and over 9 years later he won The Masters, the biggest tournament in golf, less than a week ago. During the tournament he had the biggest crowd of any competitor and people were chanting his name and the crowd erupted when he won. If this were the early 20th century he would never have had the support he did. Of course there are few who still hold his past against him, but they are the minority to the millions who wanted Tiger to succeed. This goes to show that people are willing to accept you again in our society.

The same is not completely true for politicians however. Recently Anthony Weiner (a democratic congressman) was in the midst of a major sex scandal that saw him fall out of popularity. Elliot Spitzer’s disapproval rating increased by 34% following a sex scandal with a prostitute (according to the Job Approval image). While his wrong-doing might not have been significant I think this goes to show people do hold the people that represent our government to a higher standard than celebrities. Media often goes after politicians harsher than they do other celebrities as they are the ones who represent us so it’s fair to try to avoid controversy in the people that run our government.

The United States people’s morality has changed from what it was once. There are things you still shouldn’t do, and as a country we might not have progressed the furthest on every idea involved in morality, but people are much more forgiving and open to the idea of change or rehabilitation compared to what was the case at the turn of the 20th century.

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Re: Censorship & Morality
by [Devon Olsen](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 9:24 AM

Hi Trey,

I like the way you have used many different sources for your forum post, and I feel like you did a nice job with the in text citations. In your first paragraph you did a really nice job of tying the Mann act and the Sapho play together. You also referenced the sources you used in this paragraph very well. I really enjoy NPR when they talk about subjects that could be perceived as controversial. In my opinion Charlie Chaplin was at odds with the societal norms, and as such was persecuted by those that did not agree with his portrayals. He had endured both adulation and controversy in his storied career (Charlie Chaplin official website, Biography page). Even though he was acquitted of his charges, as you mention he was still adversely affected in his career. I also agree with you about what you said for Olga Nethersole. I think you are right that she wouldn't be persecuted the same way, but I do believe there would be a portion of society that still didn't accept her for who she portrayed in Sapho. Even though this was a fictional play, and done much in part to inform society that women have sexual needs as well, for the era this play took place in, this was unheard of. The character portrayed by Nethersole, Fanny LaGrand eventually conforms and married the father of her child. That said, she was presumably having a child out of wedlock, and this was unacceptable for the 1900s ("Daudet's 'Sapho' Dramatized," *The Nation* , Volume 42, Jan. 14,1886, p. 32.).

Your example of current affairs (no pun intended) with referencing Tiger Woods' allegations and later convictions is an excellent exhibit for morality in this day and age. It is an interesting story how Tiger Woods can be convicted as a sexual predator, but get help, go to rehab and turn his life around. He is a sensational athlete and he deserves the win. I think that society today is definitely more accepting and open-minded about things that could be considered morally questionable. The circumstance you explain about Tiger Woods' support and fanbase at the tournament shows just how far we've come in our moral beliefs. The progress is notable, but still far from complete.

Another story that I have read into a little bit with this forum is the summary of the 1932 film, "Tarzan, the Ape Man". This film doesn't so much challenge the morality and censorship from what is accepted by society as the play "Sapho" did, however it still brings about some really important moral conflicts we as a country face day in and day out. In this film, there are numerous instances of insensitivity to racial differences, and ethical principles with regards to the poaching of Ivory from elephants in the African wild. In the movie, the westerners are portrayed as white, wealthy and privileged. The African natives that serve as their guides and slaves are depicted as savage, primitive, brutally violent and complacent with regards to human life ("History through film", page 608, *Liberty, Equality and Power. 7th edition.*). I feel like this raises another morality conflict within the United States.

I think there is still a severely inappropriate, and widely accepted racial bias among americans. I do think it has gotten umpteen hundred times better than it was in the early 1930s but still has a nasty way of coming back to the forefront. In recent news there has been a number of African American churches that have been intentionally burned in the south, primarily in the news has been the state of Louisiana. Jenny Jarvie of the LA times is responsible for the article that stated that "They were modest brick buildings, without soaring Gothic spires, elaborate rosette windows or roofs carved of 12th century timber. But the three houses of worship that burned down over the last month in a rural part of south Louisiana were longtime pillars of their African American congregations. To those who prayed there, they were no less sacred than the historic Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris." She writes this in her article featured on April 17th in the LA times titled "Notre Dame Fire Inspires Giving for Black Churches in Louisiana." She goes on to talk about how the racial tensions in the south have gotten more and more common, and more extreme. She shares with the reader her thoughts on the problem at hand. As soon as the 800-year-old Notre Dame de Paris there were pledges to rebuild it and assist financially to do so. This brought about a widely spread cry in the south, when the crowdfunding efforts to

rebuild the three black churches amassed a total of \$50,000. The Notre Dame funding efforts to raise 1.8 million dollars was nearing its goal within days. The \$50,000 that was raised for the churches in the south began in March, and continues to this day. The southern African American society feels like they have been unjustly treated, and the racial bias that is present in the south hasn't gotten any better (Jarvie, paragraphs 19-21, LA Times article).

All of this goes to say that the country hasn't done a good job of acknowledging the problems at hand as a whole. Is there progress, yes. Is it better than it was in the early 1900s, yes. Are societal norms keeping pace with the progress we as a country have made, yes. Has the problem been solved, No, but is is on the right track.

Great read, and great response to the Censorship and Morality forum. Thank you for sharing!

-Devon

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Peoples Priorities
by [Trey Husko](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 9:26 PM

Thanks for the reply Devon!

I have to say that's one of the thing I'll never understand is how people are more than willing to throw money at something that will get its' fair share of funding (i.e. Notre Dame) but at the same time watch on the news daily of things happening around them and at most think to themselves "oh that's terrible" and then move on. The Flint Michigan water crisis still has "an estimated 2,500 lead service lines still in place as of April 2019" (Wikipedia "Flint Water Crisis") and all the pipe replacing isn't expected to be completed until late 2019 when the initial change happened in 2014. This is just one the **MANY** events in recent history and I could go on and on listing others but why do people's morals choose something like the *Notre Dame*, that *will* be rebuilt and get the money it needs, to be the thing they decide to donate funds towards.

It's definitely a problem with today's society and morality that I don't see ever completely changing. People are always going to be more likely to help something that has the publicity of like the *Notre Dame* but I think we can do better to help those in need who *actually* need it.

Again thanks for the reply and I agree we've made progress but there's much more we can do better as a nation.

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Freedom but Regulated?
by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 5:11 AM

Freedom and liberty are two of the biggest principles that America was founded upon. Neither of these principles make me think of regulation of behavior. They make me think that I am free to do what I want within the law. When people start to try and regulate others on their own moral beliefs that could cause people to believe that their freedom is being taken by others morality. The first amendment to the constitution grants people the freedom of religion and speech. People are free to follow whatever religion with whatever set of moral codes that they want. But if people start to try and regulate others by their own religious moral code that goes against the first amendment. Then we have freedom of speech, the freedom to say what we want no matter how licentious or offensive. Some people believe that cursing is wrong but I do not if someone was to try and tell me that I could not curse then I would say they were violating my first amendment right to say what I want.

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Re: Censorship & Morality: Sapho opening the door to Suffragists.

by [Carisa Snell](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 11:50 AM

In the video about Sapho and the “morality police” of the 1900’s, it shows the lengths at which those in leadership roles wanted to censor American citizens. I found it really compelling that they could arrest and charge Olga Nethersole, the director and star in her adaptation of the french book Sapho, with “violating public decency” (1:17 minute mark in the Sapho video) because a character in the play hinted at being scandalous. Not only was her play based on a French novel (known throughout history for being more open about their sensuality) but it also was not an “open” display of public indecency, but rather hinting at the fact that the character was about to embark on something considered indecent. It gives me a little relief though that the jury did in fact find her not guilty (2:52 minute mark in the Sapho video), indicating to me that the public was overall more accepting of the fact that women can also enjoy pleasure.

I think it says something about the leadership at the time that for the most part men were permitted to indulge in lewd acts and act immorally as long as it was not talked about, meanwhile women could be arrested for doing the same thing. The idea that women enjoying pleasure could be seen as “scandalous” or “dangerous” (1:36 minute mark from the Sapho video). From historical records we know that even presidents like Thomas Jefferson during that time period was having affairs and fathering children with his slave ([Number one on this list](#)), yet at the time the “morality police” were confiscating “19,000 obscene photographs...7,000 circulars, catalogs, songs, and poems” (2:01 minute mark in Sapho video) in order to keep the public away from these “immoral” objects. Here is the thing though, it’s common knowledge that when someone is being kept away from something they want, they’ll normally find a way around the obstacles to get to it. This was just the case with Nethersole’s “Sapho” play, because after the not guilty verdict and her play reopened, the crowds were even larger.

I think that events like these probably had a lot to do with the progression towards the suffragist movement and helped women find the courage to stand up for themselves. There is a lot to be said about the empowerment one feels when the feelings they have are validated, and I know that I personally would have been emboldened to stand up for myself and my rights if I witnessed something like this case. I found it significant that a witness called the play “constructive” (2:40 minute mark in the Sapho video), showing (some) viewers had an open mind.

Comparatively, I think that in today’s society we still see people in leadership roles trying to censor and stave off immorality. One example is the hot topic of abortion and a women’s right to choose. I’m not looking to debate this topic here, however, it parallels to this topic quite nicely with the fact that current day “morality police” are wanting to make decisions about what is best for American women and their bodies based on their own morals. However, morality has definitely changed in a hundred years. In the Sapho video when they were showing how basic and boring the first movies were, it made me question how desensitized we’ve become to entertainment today. We have underwear clad models on billboards, show love scenes on basic television nightly, and hardly react to deadly gunfights or zombies in movies. Though I appreciate all of the progress we’ve made in the last century, I wonder if, even just a minuscule amount, we should look back at the early “morality police” and question if we’ve gone too far.

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Reiterating

by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 3:52 AM

I do not think that the Mann act is necessary today. When it was first put into legislation it was a relatively new concept. No other laws like it were in place which is probably why this one was allowed to remain in play even after seeing how it could be misconstrued to discriminate. But nowadays sex trafficking is well known and admonished worldwide. There are international laws put in place by the United Nations and other world organizations to combat trafficking of humans. In the past the world was more divided than it is today. Each country acting independently of one another. Now countries for the most part try to work together to live peacefully together. The majority of countries have come to the conclusion that trafficking human beings is wrong and have taken steps to prevent it. With all the international laws and the overall attitude against trafficking, a law that has so many gray areas and

been used historically to discriminate should not still be in action. If the people really feel like we need a law to specifically outlaw this then a new one could be made that doesn't include so many ill defined regulations and bad history.

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Timeline of Morality
by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 2:46 PM

Many people will think that people's thoughts on morality have loosened a lot since the time of progressivism. But in reality, it has always been in flux throughout history and location. Having times of loose and strong interpretation of different moral codes. Plus, different morals in different countries. In the time that Sapho came out the morals of the time got Olga Nethersole arrested but not even a hundred years later we see outright sex in movies, plays, and television shows. It is not just that we have evolved as humans to this standard over time. Hundreds of years before Sapho was produced there were far dirtier plays made. Even the works of Shakespeare were riddled with sexual innuendos. Even today morality is not the same everywhere. While some people may think that America is very lax morally, there other places in the world where one can see complete nudity in television commercials. Still other countries are extremely strict on morality with some middle eastern countries having dress codes on women. So, while morality in America has changed since then, it is more in its normal fluctuation that it is constantly undergoing.

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Backfired
by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 6:10 PM

Heavy metal groups and Sapho were both judged by other peoples sense of morality rather than the people involved. Both were persecuted and attempts made to end them. In the end Sapho and heavy metal groups were allowed to continue performing. Sapho had no regulations and musics only one was an explicit language sticker. The biggest connection in the two was that in trying to end something that was offensive to a small minorities modalities they ended up blowing it up and making it more popular then it had previously been. All the attention they gave these perdomances in the media was exactly that extra attention. People flocked to see the play and buy albums afterwards. In the Sapho film it said that "they succeeded only in expanding the audience far beyond what it would have been without the arrest".(3:00) In the PRMC video rock legend Frankie Banali states that the stickers were not a punishment at all. In fact they were almost a reward, they boosted sales. Banali stated that the sticker on your album "guaranteed you that your record was going to be purchased by disgruntled kids".(7:13) In both cases a small group of people were offended by something but because they made such a big deal over them it had the opposite effect that they wanted. It backfired on them and made these immoralities more enticing than ever.

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Re: The Mann Act
by [Declan Jensen](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 10:26 PM

The Mann Act was likely as necessary when it was created as it is today: sex trafficking existed and it still does today (although I doubt it was to the same extent given our transportation progression) but it infringes on a woman's bodily autonomy simply because of the way the law is used. The "official" reason for its creation, however, sounds just as hysterical and along the same lines as the contemporary"bad hombres" rhetoric: "By 1907, there were rumors, taken as truth, that women were being forced into prostitution and shuttled around the country by vast networks controlled by immigrants" (0:41 into NPR audio report). Sex trafficking was and is a serious problem, but it's clear that the "concerns about the country's moral underpinnings" (0:38 into NPR audio report) were the real reason for the act and that the legislators were not trying to protect anybody: women were suddenly able to support themselves by using their bodies or sexual fantasies (in books or however else) and because we are a "Christian Nation," the racist, sexist, white Christians had to repress this. Today, the problem remains: women still aren't allowed to use their bodies to support themselves because it is "immoral," despite the fact that men will still pay thousands of dollars to have that "scandalous" pleasure for just a few hours. Any law that makes it illegal for a woman to use her body as she pleases (so long as she is consenting) is archaic and should be amended or even repealed. If you don't like prostitutes, you don't have to pay for one. Start believing women when we tell you we have been assaulted and that will make the prosecution against sex traffickers easier.

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