

HST 203: History of the United States Sp14 (Escobar Meta 41237 41238)

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Censorship and Morality

by Joe Escobar - Friday, April 11, 2014, 11:50 PM

This forum thread is for Censorship and Morality posts and replies.

After studying the required materials, address the questions in your posts.

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.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post. Do NOT simply leave it
RE: Censorship and Morality

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Of Mice & real Men

by Kenneth Green - Saturday, April 12, 2014, 5:55 PM

In regards to the play Sapho (not Sacco the Anarchist,) it would seem important to consider the state of Women's Suffrage and Women's Rights around the turn of the century. Basically, they had neither the right to vote nor the basic human rights of independence they know today. Women were greatly dependant upon men at this time period, and in that light, the call for the censorship of Sapho is highly understandable. As the first question on this topic suggests, we moderns find censorship of a Play unimaginable. But isn't it easy to see how this Play might have been viewed by women of this era as one of the first Strip Clubs? I can't imagine being a woman in this time-period who believed her bread-winner was out squandering the milk money for her kids on Strippers. And that's a narrow viewpoint, the prevailing morals of the day certainly led to the arrest of this Actress. But it's important to make the point that Prostitution in the early West was legal, and in some instances actually considered beneficial for society. It's no wonder that this case took place in a crowded City like New York, where there was no shortage of women. And looking

through the lens of History, I can certainly understand the concerns.

Regarding the Mann Act, there is a great documentary about the Boxing Champion Jack Johnson from PBS called, "Unforgivable Blackness." This documentary actually makes the case that the Mann Act was passed to entrap the boxing legend. It is necessary today because Prostitution is illegal, and any time morality is legislated it spawns (assholes, sorry no better word) who will prey upon the weak to make a buck. The unintended consequences of legislation intended to protect "specific groups of people" are not always, but in many instances leading them into even worst conditions. Why does human trafficking exist in our world? In most part, due to the laws that create a need for it. (Not to sound crass but casual sex most always involves money, in some form or another.)

Finally, the resignation of Eliot Spitzer (at least in my opinion) does not signal that the morality of the United States "is not very different than it was at the turn of the Century." I'm a Liberal and a fan of Eliot Spitzer he has a brilliant mind. But his problem has less to do with morality than it has to do with the duplicity of public officials. And perhaps that's why sex scandals (at least for Liberals) are less salacious and more about public trust. Be who you are, but be honest about it. The fact Bill Clinton was impeached, but left office with his highest approval ratings underscore morality has changed since the early 1900's. Yet the change is nuance.

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Time changes some behavior don't

by Sherri Patterson - Tuesday, April 15, 2014, 11:55 AM

When I think of Sapho and what happen the actress. I also think of what was going on in the early 1900's. Women didn't have the right to vote. If they did work they were a teacher and they did not date or live on their own. So the fact that the censorship took so harshly to the idea of a woman having such "immoral" ideas as to want to have sex. Yes I can see it having a stir the pot effect as I like to call it. And while the censorship was trying to put an end to the play in the long run they ended up giving it more publicity and probably awakening the American people. Today's people would never even bat an eye at a scene like that. We might even question it as to if that was all they were going to show and maybe even feel a little disappointed. That alone shows how far society has broken away from the strict censorship. I alone do not feel that is such a great thing.

When it comes to the Mann Act of 1910 I do not feel it is an unnecessary evil. I believe it was created with good intentions. I think when you ask was it necessary then you have to ask is it necessary now. Think about all the human trafficking that goes on now and we have a lot of technology to find out about it today. Just imagine how much went on undetected back then. So yes I do believe it was necessary then and is necessary now. I believe when it comes to the Jack Johnson case that it has been proven that they abused the Mann Act. He was punished because he had a white partner and for his dominance over white boxers. The

problem with passing certain laws that are intended to help protect people is that they inevitably can be taken too far. You always have somebody who is always on the far extreme of the spectrum or just that sour apple in the bunch who will bend the law.

In recent years we have had multiple political figures have sexual scandals. Eliot Spitzer, Bill Clinton to name a few. The public reacted different to those in my opinion. Eliot Spitzer ends up disgraced and had resign early. On the other end you have our president finishing out his term and all is good in his world. I believe the public still has some of the public morality it once had when it comes to our public figures in the Government offices. I just believe we are more concerned about what they are doing for our country. I think it depends on how much of a sex scandal it is before we get to concerned.

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The Perfect Image



by Roy Fernandez - Tuesday, April 15, 2014, 12:03 PM

The prevalent state of censorship in 1900 was generally conservative, in the sense that it was still seen as immorally incorrect for nudity or sexual themes to be openly exposed to the public. Specifically for women, it was unheard for the female body to be publicly revealed and female sexual tendencies or desires to be displayed, as discussed in the video on Sapho. In regard to Sapho, what I found most appalling was not only the fact that women were expected to fulfill that modest “housewife” role, which was of no real surprise considering the time period, but of the fact that women being considered as sexual beings who found pleasure in sex was seen as “scandalous” and “dangerous.” Our biological needs are essentially what make us, both males and females, human. The denial of the fact that women have sexual desire just like men would be denying the fact that they are human, making it an absurd notion.

Concerning the Mann Act, also known as the “White Slave Traffic Act” according to the news report, it is clearly an unnecessary law both in that time and present day. Although its purpose was to prevent prostitution in prosecuting sex traffickers attempting to transport women across state lines, an unintended consequence proved to be the “interference in private sexual relations of consenting adults (Textbook pg. 710).” An example of this would be the case of African American boxing champion Jack Johnson, who was arrested for allegedly transporting a white female by the name of Lucy Cameron, who actually happened to be his secretary and consensual lover. The key word in this case would be consensual (and possibly racism, an unfortunate reality still being prominent during this time—certain whites were bitter about Johnson beating up other white boxers AND taking their white women as lovers). Because of this, the Mann Act is not only flawed, but it sacrifices the freedoms of its citizens by restricting them from moving from state to state without even knowing whether the relations between a male and female are consensual or not.

In response to the case of Governor Eliot Spitzer’s sex scandal, I would answer both yes

and no to the question of the United States' morality not being very different from that of the turn of the 20th century. I believe that yes, there are still a number of people who tend to be more traditional and sustain a certain level of modesty when it comes to the topic of sex and sexual relations known to the public, such as the majority were in 1900. Yet, the fact that in modern day we acknowledge that we are all human and have needs regardless of sex and are also a lot more open about it publicly and via the media, shows that we have progressed and our culture has evolved since the start of the 20th century. But, this still doesn't change how we view our leaders. We all have an image of that "perfect" leader in our head, and naturally, it doesn't include an individual who partakes in impure, aka "immoral," unclean, call them what you will, practices. This enables us to explain what happened with Eliot Spitzer. Regardless of the details, New York Governor Eliot Spitzer was undeniably involved in a sex scandal, therefore tainting his reputation as sure, a person, but that's not what caused his approval ratings to drop. It was the ruination of his image as an ideal American leader; that he was no longer that "perfect" image in the minds of NY citizens caused them to doubt his ability and quality of leadership, leading to his downfall in his eventual resignation.

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Re: The Perfect Image



by Sherri Patterson - Wednesday, April 16, 2014, 5:48 PM

You say that the Mann Act is unnecessary then and now. I happen to totally disagree. I believe it was needed then and is needed even more now. I think that people abused it back then. But any law can be abused and bent. The individuals who brought Jack Johnson up on charges knew that his relationship was consensual. They were simply abusing their power and the law to punish him. The bigger picture that the law was made to protect the innocent and that is being forgotten here. Until we can make all humans behave fair and just and treat everybody equally. We are going to have to remember that just because and individual is a person of power, doesn't mean they will not abuse it.

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Re: The Perfect Image



by Roy Fernandez - Friday, April 18, 2014, 4:09 PM

Although I agree that laws can be misused and used to exploit people, such as the individuals who prosecuted Jack Johnson primarily because of his skin color, I still believe that there were better alternatives to the Mann Act back then. The reason being that it was up to the discretion of the prosecutors of what is "immoral" or considered "debauchery." Fortunately, after its most recent alteration in 1986, the Mann Act now applies to "any sexual activity for which any person can be charged with a criminal offense." With this necessary change that it lacked in 1910, it can now accurately fulfill its purpose in preventing prostitution and sex trafficking in modern day.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mann_Act#Effects_and_alterations_of_the_Mann_Act

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Re: Censorship and Morality

by Austin McQuaw - Wednesday, April 16, 2014, 5:36 PM

Like the others, I am not surprised that Sappho was seen as inappropriate. The culture traditionally saw it that way and some people just don't appreciate that sort of display.

Though, if I remember correctly, it was probably fairly mild. I'm not sure about the play as a whole. I am very surprised by the reaction. The production wasn't just shutdown, some of its members were arrested. This seems like an odd conclusion even considering the culture. Although, much worse things have been done in our past and in all of history.

I am not sure of the necessity of the Mann Act. I'm not surprised that it was passed given the time period and the catalyst. As others have mentioned, it seems that it serves a good purpose today in regard to human trafficking. I surely don't like the loopholes and all of the uses of the Mann Act. The Mann Act is a good example of the consequences of legislation.

I believe that the morality of the United States has changed greatly over the years. At this point the issue taken up with public figures like Spitzer may have less to do with the sexual acts. I believe that our culture appreciates honesty and integrity. When someone you need to be able to trust does something to damage that trust, there will be a negative response.

Also, people are probably ready to harp on public figures at all times. They are criticized constantly. (I once watched an interview with President Bush where he refused to speak out about President Obama. Part of his response was to empathize by saying something like "I'm not surprised people are criticizing the president." Hopefully this seemed relevant to you all!) When their integrity wavers, people will take advantage of the situation to attack that person. However, the reaction of the critics in general seems to be different. I believe that the perspective on morality has shifted.

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look at it this way...

by Morgan Reid - Thursday, April 17, 2014, 11:07 PM

In regards to the Sappho scandal, or any scandal involving politicians for that matter, I would say it's obvious that approval ratings are vital and really paint a picture of what the individual stands for. However, we need to seriously stand back and take a closer look at the big picture. So there's a sex scandal, and we may question the politician's morals. Okay, fair enough. But does what he chooses to do in his private life really affect the job he would do in office? This is where it gets tricky. The way I see it, we don't vote/respect for officials because they weren't in a scandal at the time we voted for them, so why would one not vote/lose all respect for someone solely based on the scandals they're involved in? Look at former President Clinton for example. Huge scandal. Still, he is arguably known as one of the best presidents. Go figure.

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A Test of Character

by Roy Fernandez - Friday, April 18, 2014, 3:35 PM

This is definitely a valid point. Despite having claimed that Spitzer's approval ratings declined because of what occurred in his private life, I must also acknowledge that this may not always be the case with everyone. Personally, I believe that a president should not only be an effective leader and do his job well, but he should also be a role model to the people; a trustworthy, righteous individual. Even in his "private" life. Yes, as I mentioned, there are partial exceptions to this. In Clinton's case, although he was involved in a scandal with Monica Lewinsky, he is still widely regarded as a great president. His accomplishments as a president and his perseverance in overcoming the unfortunate situation he was in allowed him to remain in the good graces of the American people at the end of the day. He still possessed admirable characteristics as a person and as a leader. Although Spitzer ended up resigning due to not being able to handle the pressure, it is important to know that Clinton, despite ultimately being impeached for perjury and obstruction of justice, still maintained a positive public image and left office with the highest ending approval rating of 73% approval.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewinsky_scandal

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impeachment_of_Bill_Clinton

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_image_of_Bill_Clinton

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Re: kissing congressman

by Sherri Patterson - Saturday, April 19, 2014, 5:08 PM

Our political officials private lives are defiantly something that everybody want to know about. The most current event I would like to point out is Congressman Rep. Vance McAllister from Louisiana and his current scandal he is involved in. He was caught on film passionately kissing his scheduler in his office. It is going to take some time to see what kind of damage it does to his voting numbers, but there has already been a huge fuss made over it. They are talking about having the FBI look into who leaked it. And he is making his forgiveness speeches trying to cover his butt. And of course they lady who was involved has been fired and her life destroyed. It is always interesting watching these thing's unfold you never know how the public is going to react.

<http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2014/04/08/husband-on-kissing-congressman-he-has-wrecked-my-life/>

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The Devil in the blue dress?

by Thomas Stevens - Saturday, April 19, 2014, 7:41 PM

I can't argue censorship here, but morality perhaps. Some people say that Republicans will try to weaken a politician by hammering a scandal again and again until eventually people believe it. Look at Benghazi, but what did Obama have to do with that? Perhaps it could just be an attempt by the political machine at [Fox News](#) to derail a future Hillary Presidency. The Clinton scandals cost American taxpayers almost \$80 million, although some may also argue that it helped to contribute to Al Gore's loss of the Presidency. @#

The truth of the matter is that politicians will always cheat because they can. Clinton admitted to that during an interview. % Most cheaters have done so even before they came into power. The difference is that when they do come into power they have a spotlight on them and they cannot escape the illumination. We should not pretend that politicians can be moral or at least be faithful.

[Kenneth Starr](#) the lead prosecutor during the Clinton Administration is now the President of [Baylor University](#) in Texas, which is considered a conservative university.

@ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewinsky_scandal

<http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/04/01/counsel.probe.costs/>

% <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/clinton-cheated-because-i-could-16-06-2004/>

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I feel a storm coming

by Thomas Stevens - Friday, April 18, 2014, 12:35 AM

Sapho was prosecuted because she "portrayed" a violation of the Mann Act, which was certainly ridiculous because there was no "actual" violation. The Mann Act was later amended to help curb prostitution; however, in my opinion, existing prostitution statues would already apply making the Mann Act unnecessary and arguably unconstitutional. The Mann Act should have been repealed instead of being amended. Progressives helped to push the law through because they were against public displays of sexuality, even if it was just portrayed in public. Yes, it was inconsistent once the "morality" clause was thrown out. Also, in my opinion, Progressives were reacting against the Victorian Era that had taken

such a hold of British culture, much like many parents reacting against the rock music of the 1980's. # Fortunately for Olga the jury in her case realized the absurdity of the charges and set her free.

Government has frequently tried to regulate behavior of its citizens. President Reagan appointee, [James Watt](#), who served as U.S. Secretary to the Interior banned The Beach Boys from playing a Fourth of July concert on the Washington Mall. Watt stated that the [Beach Boys](#) and rock music, "attracted the wrong element". In lieu of the Beach Boys, Watt selected entertainer [Wayne Newton](#) to play the 1983 Fourth of July concert. Watt later resigned after publicly mocking affirmative action. Time Magazine named Watt one of the ten worst Cabinet members in modern history.

Governor Spitzer resigned after being caught in a sex scandal involving a prostitute. It was during his tenure as a prosecutor that Spitzer brought cases against others involving prostitution. When he was caught violating the law that he had pursued against others he was seen as a hypocrite.*

In my opinion, morality can change like the weather, one day the wind blows from the North, the next day from the South. The difference comes from whom is in power.

#http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_era

*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliot_Spitzer

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The inequality and overdoing of the Mann Act toward women and society in the early 1900s

by Hao Nguyen - Saturday, April 19, 2014, 4:22 PM

In the early 1900s, the Mann Act was passed by President Taft on the positive purpose of preventing women from being "immoral", due to the push of transporting women across the state lines for prosecution. The facts which I find compelling are the inequality between men and women back then, plus, the unpredictable consequences impacting directly the society of the Mann Act.

In fact, it turned out as not well as it had been expected. By the Mann Act, society created a negative bias toward women's sexual tendencies which was claimed "dangerous" and "scandalous" in the audio. As the classmate said, the biological needs make both men and women human. Yes, it actually does! By saying that, women must have had the equal recognition as men in sexual beings, and the freedom of sexuality as long as those were appropriate. The inequality besides women's voting rights, education, working conditions,

etc. had shown obviously in this situation. Those following unfair treatments contributed to the evolvement of women's activism during the early 1900s in order to enfranchise women from the traditional America.

At first, the Mann Act was proposed for curbing the "immoral purposes", but finally it went further than its original purpose, it gave the government the right "to interfere in the private sexual relations of consenting adults" (Textbook pg 710). In the case of African American boxing champion Jack Johnson who was accused of "transporting his white secretary across the state lines", is it a shortage if we miss the involvement of racism in this accusation? "That Johnson and Cameron's relationship was consensual and would culminate in marriage didn't deter the authorities, who wanted to punish Johnson for his dominance of white boxers and his relationship with a white woman" (Textbook pg 710). What would have happened if his lover had been a black woman instead of a white one? Maybe he wasn't arrested.

The Mann Act was necessary back then, and of course, now as long as it is controlled within its limitation without any personal bias or racism, etc., and people don't encroach it for any further purposes. This can be used to equate the society and protect the public morality away from inappropriateness.

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An Unnecessary Act

by Jennifer Rose - Saturday, April 19, 2014, 10:15 PM

Personally, I'm not too surprised on the censorship depicted in the clip about Sappho. I think that the student who commented on the dehumanizing nature of this on females is right on the money.

The idea that a woman would be in charge of her own body and willingly participate in sexual acts is today thought of as "radical", but was against progressive politics at the time.

It's confusing to me as to why women would be the driving force behind the Mann Act, which restricts a woman's rights. The Mann Act is vague, very ambiguous and dehumanizes women. Honestly, I wonder why women want to shoot themselves in the foot like that, but I do find the differences between what is considered progressive now and in 1910 interesting.

A common theme of the progressive movement and reforms in general is that reformers will benefit their own very well. The women behind the mainstream progressive movement seem to be middle-class white women who weren't immigrants and didn't need to worry about money. The Mann Act was racially motivated and created out of xenophobia and muckraking. Muckraking wasn't a bad thing in and of itself, but in the case of the promotion of the Mann Act the reporting was something closer to yellow journalism and was even used to justify not just a figurative, but literal war on black men or immigrants. I call this a literal war because terror was inflicted on black men during this time period, and many black men were lynched. Of course the Mann Act did not by itself cause the lynching of

innocent black men, but it sure did perpetuate a racist culture.

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