

HST 203: History of the United States Sp17 (Escobar Meta 41054 41053)

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Censorship & Morality

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Forum 1

Censorship & Morality

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Censorship & Morality

by Joe Escobar - Friday, April 14, 2017, 6:38 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.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes which question(s) you are addressing . Do NOT simply leave it RE: Censorship & Morality

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Re: Censorship & Morality

by Eden Stellavato - Saturday, April 15, 2017, 1:41 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?

Sapho was most likely trying to make a statement, knowing, and understanding the “touchiness” surrounding censorship at the time. The Prevalence of censorship around the turn of the century, clearly shows why the play was so popular. People were intrigued...and surprised enough to stir up commotion which led to the scandal, trial, and increased popularity proceeding trial. If we’re talking about compelling, to me, at (1:05) when the historian explains that “because the character wasn’t punished in the play, Olga had to be punished in real life” stood out to me. Sapho couldn’t be punished because it was play, so they punished AND arrested Olga in real life. Even movies today are similar to what happened at (1:05). Being punished and arrested you wouldn’t see today, but many people blast certain actors for their approach to sexual relations in films apposed to off screens.

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Sapho: Too available or instructive?

by Michaela Ensele - Monday, April 17, 2017, 7:51 PM

While watching the video it surprised me that the actress herself got arrested. Olga was charged with violated public decency, by a sympathetic jury was found not guilty and was released. I found it interesting that the “Guardians of Morality” took it upon themselves to stop peep shows and other situations pertaining to women sexual exposure. I wonder what side of the political spectrum these folks were on? My guess is that they were more towards the left side of the spectrum, progressives possibly.

The fact that women in the 1900s weren't scene as “sexual creatures” doesn't surprise me much because even in today's society women are more ridiculed for engaging in sexual acts then men are. I find it ironic that the end result to arresting Olga and putting her on trial “expanded the audience far beyond what the play would have been”(3:05 in Sapho video). This is a big way in how events spread today in the United States. The media has become such a huge important way our society portrays certain events that without it many people wouldn't have heard or even cared about the occurrence in the first place.

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How censorship and prohibition influenced America

by Justin Onusko - Monday, April 17, 2017, 8:15 PM

During 1900 censorship was increasing throughout America, and the thought that a woman could enjoy sexual relations was virtually a criminal idea. (Sapho video 1:37) Social justice was also starting to become a popular belief with young protestant women during this time period. (Lecture) It appears that this group was trying to uphold an image for all women across the United States when it is not truly applicable to everyone. In other words, they were pushing their beliefs onto the entire country. There was a disconnect between the protestant middle class and working class.(Lecture) This can be seen through prohibition. The role that saloons played in keeping morale high for working class immigrants was immense. (textbook pg.690) Having the ability to meet up in a public place and speak in a native language was hugely important for this class of citizens. (textbook pg. 690)

A current issue which has similarities to the censorship of sex and prohibition is the argument for pro life. Abortion is legal in the United States due to the supreme court case of Roe v Wade, however there are still groups of people across the country who say that life is a basic human right. This bears resemblance to the same group of people in 1900 that wanted to censor Sapho.

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Re: How censorship and prohibition influenced America

by Jordan Selker - Thursday, April 20, 2017, 12:23 PM

While I do agree that these issues may share a common theme of morality, I believe theme to be very dissimilar causes. Debate on abortion is not that of censorship, and opponents are not trying to keep it out of the media, they're trying to abolish the practice. The progressivists of the 1900's may have promoted abstinence from alcohol, they were still reproducing, in fact they viewed the family as "The foundation stone of American Society" and urged that "The government, especially municipal government must work to enhance the family life." (Gwendoline Alphonso, "Hearth and Soul: Economics and Culture in Partisan Conceptions of the Family in the Progressive Era, 1900–1920," *Studies in American Political Development*, Oct 2010, Vol. 24 Issue 2, pp. 206–32) So while they protested the display of sexual acts in public, they did not discourage the act itself, as it would be the only way to produce a family, their foundation stone of American Society. The debate on abortion is what is moral to commit, the debate with sapho is what was moral to portray; which I believe to be a critical distinction.

Most abortions are unknown to parties outside the directly involved, in fact stories of successful abortions almost never make it to the public. In the case of Sapho, the public was the main concern, in the issue of abortions, it's a human's private life and choices that are attempted to be controlled. While I'm sure many progressivists were pro-life, I see their movement to be more of a social reform, rather than a personal one.

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Re: How censorship and prohibition influenced America

by Matthew Brownlee - Friday, April 21, 2017, 12:25 PM

I'm not sure I see the connection to abortion. Though it is true that there are people on both sides, pro-life and pro-choice, I don't see any other real similarities. Pro-lifers want to abolish the practice altogether, not just censor its depiction.

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Mann Act and Progressive impulses- Optimistic then Pessimistic

by Evan Young - Monday, April 17, 2017, 9:26 PM

The Mann Act or white slave traffic act was put forth to stop “immoral” actions that would harm society. This can be seen as the pessimistic part of progressive impulses (class notes) . Where change is forced on citizens for the greater good. This act was unnecessary and was used to punish immoral acts based around how they saw the world. And in the video many people who did anything sexual outside the norm were punished using this law like Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin was prosecuted in 1944 for his relation with an actress. (PBS video) Before the Mann Act progressives can be seen as optimistic about america society because this side shows people will choose to be good and not do “immoral” acts. When the play showed the lead actress having relations with a man The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice or SSV wanted the lead actress to be arrested. This SSV was an extension of the government's reach because it was chartered by the New York state legislature which gave it the power to search, seize and arrest. (Wikipedia - SSV) This backfired when the popularity of this story increased the play's audience tenfold. This failure of the SSV and court systems could be related to the Mann Act being signed into law.

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Progressive Impulses

by Michaela Ensele - Saturday, April 22, 2017, 12:59 PM

You share a good point that the Mann Act was put into affect by the pessimistic concept of progressive impulses. I like how in class Joe used the example of Eugene not allowing plastic bags because they are bad for the environment and how LCC is a non smoking campus so they make you smoke in the parking lot in a small section. Jane Addams fits well into the progressive impulse spectrum that was given to us in class because she was a progressive women that created the first settlement house known as “Hull House”. The goal was to help the poor become more educated by “using Christianity and morals to help decaying society.”(class notes) Jane Addams and many other women used these places to force the poor (mostly immigrants) to do good. She is also one of the people that supported prohibition, again forcing people with a law to the right thing.

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Sapho and PMRC

by Amelia Salzman - Monday, April 17, 2017, 9:29 PM

I can definitely see the similarities between Sapho and the PMRC. One obvious similarity is that most average people weren't bothered by the play or the music. It was the want of a few people, intended to effect the masses of audiences. It is an interesting in the time of progressive activism. It is a time of trying to change things for the better, to try and find the balance between change for the betterment of people lives and change for the reasons of personal preference and personal morality. I think that in these two cases it was over the line to try and censor the work of these artists. It is easy to understand wanting to have regulations. Like the example in class of the campus ban on smoking, but at the point where we try to censor and band things like music and plays it is in my opinion, a waste of time. Like pointed out in the video focusing Sapho more people went to see the play because of the

court case then would have without the public fight against it. In the PMRC video it discusses the purpose of the Music was to rebel. The court case seemed to only fuel the fire of rebellion for listeners.

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Re: Sapho Censorship

by Gabe Sorber - Monday, April 17, 2017, 10:25 PM

One of the first things I thought of when watching the video was that its blows my mind to think that Ulga (The actress playing Sapho) was to go to court for being carried upstairs to a bedroom, and from what the man says in the video it doesn't seem like the audience saw anything "inappropriate"happening. It blows my mind because nowadays its hard to find a channel or movie where theres no kissing or sexual scenes in the program.

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Re: Sapho Censorship

by Gabe Sorber - Monday, April 17, 2017, 10:41 PM

After watching the video over again I saw something that our professor has talked about in class. He brought up the example of trying to crackdown on soda drinking in New York by reducing the size of cups they sell. This had some unforeseen effects on the environment because people would just by twice as many cups. This applies to the video because the man in the video says that this case was in every newspaper in America. The unforeseen effect in this case was letting all of America know more about these cheap "inappropriate" pictures, poems, catalogs etc. and letting the people know that they wouldn't have any lawful repercussions for having such items(Given that the case was over in fifteen minutes).

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Not-so-free Speech

by Jordan Selker - Monday, April 17, 2017, 11:14 PM

While the story of Sapho may seem ridiculous by today's standards of morality, through the FCC, the government still regulates what is said and hands out hefty fines for crossing the line. While internet, cable television, and satellite radio remain exempt, free-to-air broadcasts are still fined for profane language. These words are used widely across society, in our schools, music, movies, televisions shows, by our parents, our siblings, and our peers, yet we try and pretend that kids don't and shouldn't hear them. Each of these profane words have countless synonyms, and will be learned and heard regularly by any human by the time they're in school. We can't censor the meanings of the words, for instance by replacing the m in damn with an r, you've done nothing to change what is meant, you've just done it in a more socially acceptable fashion. These nuances of profanity are far outdated, and anyone taking personal

offense to obscene language is either on their way to a nursing home or have their head stuck in a bible. In a country based around the principles of free speech, we hang on to outdated censorship regulations that debase our country's very fundamentals.

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Sapho and the PMRC

by Jordan Selker - Tuesday, April 18, 2017, 12:52 PM

Do you see any similarities or differences in this PMRC censorship example and that of Sapho, which span a period of 80 years? How are these both examples of conservatism? Is this a case of optimistic or pessimistic reformers, and does it involve another case of unintended consequences?

While the PMRC and Sapho incident do share similarities over the concerns of sex and violence in popular media and a similar result of increased popularity of the aforementioned media, the means of which both issues were handled are quite dissimilar. The PMRC had a much less aggressive and controlling platform, and as mentioned in the video, took measures to stay outside the definition of censorship. While some members may have personally wished for the downfall of rock; as an organization, the PMRC looked only to "develop guidelines and/or a rating system." This was intended to reduce the likelihood of this music reaching the ears of children, but not censor it by any means. This is an important distinction from the Sapho incident, who made no attempts to solve their perceived issue of public indecency by means of warnings or guidelines, but instead promptly walked over the first amendment in a failed attempt of authoritarian oppression. I'm sure the members of the PMRC were quite aware of incidents like Sapho, and used their knowledge of history to guide them to a more acceptable goal.

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Cultural attitudes are still similar today

by Matthew Brownlee - Tuesday, April 18, 2017, 7:04 PM

Though society has overall become less puritanical over the past century, there is still a similar stigma about sexuality. The Eliot Spitzer case is evidence of that, as the forum materials show that his approval ratings plummeted from 62% to 35% over the course of a year for something that had nothing to do with his actions and policies in office. Bill Clinton was impeached!

In the digital age, many peoples' attitudes may trend back in the 20th century direction, since it'll be easier to access messages and media relating to a sex scandal, and all the grimy details will come to light, causing us to have a harsher view of someone's character.

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Demoralizing Acts

by Michaella Ensele - Tuesday, April 18, 2017, 10:52 PM

The public humiliation of someone who is in politics or who is a celebrity that have been caught in a sex scandal can affect their approval ratings in a highly negative way. Society holds them to such high standards and views them as a superior therefore putting them on a pedestal making them the tallest person in the room. This can dramatize when people notice celebrities' potentially demoralizing acts.

When the topic of celebrity sex scandal comes up I think of Tiger Woods. This man was held in such high regards to so many people that when this sex scandal came to light everyone was not only shocked but very angry. The media affects the public tremendously. When a headline can turn from "Woods was considered the greatest golfer of all time and a uniquely American success story, a multi-ethnic superstar dominating a historically white sport"(New York Times) to "Tiger Woods Cheating Scandal."(New York Times) it can affect the public's opinion in only a matter of days. This definitely signals that the morality of the United States isn't very different than it was at the turn of the 20th century, in fact now with the mass media it is probably even more rigorous.

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Re: Demoralizing Acts

by Amelia Salzman - Friday, April 21, 2017, 11:56 PM

You have a good point about the changed perception of the public after a scandal. (Tiger woods is a great example) When I was looking at the materials found the part that stood out the most to me was how much Spitzer's approval rating dropped. This made me think of the video about Sapho, toward the end of video it said that because of the court case and the drama surrounding the play it brought in more crowds to see it. It seems like the public wants the freedom to watch and be entertained by scandal but doesn't support people actually being in scandals. For me this is a interesting balance of progressive values of the general public today and back then. It is easy to study the view points and morals of the progressive leaders of the time but I really think this shows where average people fall on the scale of progressive morals. It seems we defend the freedom of our own entertainment but we fully support the punishment and control of public figures personal lives. Very interesting

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Re: Demoralizing Acts

by Michaella Ensele - Saturday, April 22, 2017, 7:06 PM

I couldn't agree more that the approval rating of Spitzer declined because of the public knowledge of the situation. Once the media locks in on a story people seem to have so much more to say. The ridicule that we put upon public figures is very powerful.

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Swapped roles but same story



by Andrew Erkert - Wednesday, April 19, 2017, 6:29 PM

As far as differences, I see the gender roles are different in each case. The heavy metal bands were males and they were up against the “senators wives” and many middle class women. The PMRC who were represented by women, were protesting against the men of the bands due to their “immoral media.” In Sapho however, the roles were swapped. Men were criticizing the woman for being immoral in the play. They were offended that she was portrayed as having the free will to openly have sex with someone for pleasure. This kind of thing must’ve seemed quite radical to the oppressive men of the time.

They are similar in the respect that they were attempts to censor an entertainment outlet and both failed because they ended up increasing the popularity of the products. This in turn created an entertainment culture that continued to advance more and more liberally to where now people make songs that would’ve been **apocalyptic** to people of the Sapho days. Wars would’ve started over the kind of music that is freely broadcasted around in our times and I don’t see it as a bad thing. I am glad people are free to make music as they please. It would be quite the sight to see though if you could give the people from back then a listen to some music from now.

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exceptionalism in America...

by Joshua Grigsby - Wednesday, April 19, 2017, 7:51 PM

After reading/listening to the provided material, I'm honestly not surprised. 100 years ago, at the beginning of the century, the populous of America possessed a completely different mindset than we do now. Half (or a little over half according to the popular vote) seem to have completely given up on our nations ethos. As much as I can understand a lack of faith in leadership, I am disappointed to see how many people have given up. America is not identified by its current president, but rather the people that elected him. To react in the way that many did says more about them than it does our leadership. Based off of this last election and the mindset I'd say we have lost our exceptionalism. I love this country. Are there faults? Absolutely. Despite the many issues our country does possess, I find that comparatively, our countries laws and way of govern far exceed any country I have been to.

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