

Reading Homework

The Hollywood Production Code



The Hollywood Production Code was a set of rules that the studios made for themselves to prevent the government from making laws that restricted their freedom. Hollywood began formulating

these rules in 1931, but they were not enforced until 1934. Interestingly, perhaps tragically, Hollywood's own rules were *much* stricter than any law the government would have (or could have) made. Here is a list of things that could not be shown in any Hollywood film:

1. Pointed profanity – by either title or lip – this includes the words "God", "Lord", "Jesus", "Christ" (unless they be used reverently in connection with proper religious ceremonies), "hell", "damn", "Gawd", and every other profane and vulgar expression however it may be spelled;
2. Nudity
3. Illegal drugs
4. Sex perversion; (this included homosexuality and bisexuality)
5. Prostitution;
6. Sex relationships between the white and black races
7. Venereal diseases;
8. Childbirth
9. Ridicule of the clergy;
10. Willful offense to any nation, race or creed; (but this did not include offending minority groups in America).

Furthermore, there was another list of things the censors warned film makers to be careful about. I include only some of the twenty-five items on the list.

1. The use of the flag
2. International relations (avoiding picturizing in an unfavorable light another country's religion, history, institutions, prominent people, and citizenry)
3. Sympathy for criminals
4. Rape or attempted rape
5. Man and woman in bed together
6. Surgical operations
7. Excessive or lustful kissing*

Where did these crazy rules come from? Most of them came directly from the Catholic Church and other conservative Christian denominations. The Catholic Church especially was determined to censor Hollywood films and it threatened to order all Catholics (20% of the U.S. population) to boycott Hollywood films if their rules were not adopted.

*The rule about kissing was an interesting one. According to the code a kiss could only last for three seconds!