

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE **FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s**

In the late teens of the 20th Century, it has been said that America lost her innocence. From poets to politicians all experienced the bitter after-shock of the War to End All Wars. Some turned to God, some to pessimism, some moved to France as exiles and wrote novels about their disillusionment, and some, especially in Hollywood, turned to the hot cha-cha lifestyle.

Hollywood in the 1920s was rife with scandal. In 1923, a young actress Virginia Rappe died suddenly after attending a riotous drunken party at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco, hosted by comic actor Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle.

Mr. Arbuckle was tried for the violent rape and murder of Virginia. After three man-slaughter trials he was finally acquitted. However, the press sensationalized every scrap of information they could glean from others who attended the "party." There were detailed descriptions of kinky sex, drugs and all brands of the demon alcohol.

In 1920 and 1921 several young actors – Olive Thomas, Wallace Reid, Barbara La Marr and Jeanne Eagels all died from narcotic abuse.

Then in February 1922 there was the mysterious murder of director William Desmond Taylor, who was found in his studio bungalow, shot in the back by a rare .38 caliber pistol. The motive clearly was not robbery. Taylor's pockets were stuffed with cash and his 2-carat diamond ring was still on his finger. There were allegations that the 49 year old Taylor was having a torrid affair with a 19 year old actress Mary Miles Minto, and also with her mother Charlotte Shelby, and also with a cocaine addict leading lady Mabel Normand.

His murder remains officially unsolved.

The sensationalistic and often fabricated press drove Hollywood from the entertainment section of American newspapers to the front page. The general American populace began to regard film artists as bohemians and debauchees, perhaps even criminals.

The States introduced nearly 100 bills designed to censor motion pictures in 1921 alone. The rules of the censors in each state varied greatly – a woman could not smoke on film in Kansas, but could in Ohio. A pregnant woman could not be shown on screen in Pennsylvania, but could in New York.

By 1922 the Motion Picture Business had become an industry and in the same year Movie Company presidents formed a Trade Association with former Postmaster General Will Hays as head.

An ex-Republican National Chairman with White House connections, Hays was also an elder of the Presbyterian Church. He had enormous ears and asked photographers most politely to use an ear-reduction lens when snapping picture of him. Clearly, he had a sense of humour.

Within months of the formation of the Motion pictures Producers and Distributors of America – MPPDA or "Association", Hays persuaded many movie industry critics to join a committee on Public Relations, an advisory group on "Public Demands and Moral Standards."

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

General Will Hays assured the National Council of Catholic Women, the Boy Scouts of America and other groups that with their support he could “purify” the movies.

For their part, the movie studios instituted a morals clause, that as part of the standard employment contract, they could regulate performers’ off-screen lives. Many directors and actors had contempt for the idea of “sanitized” movies that restrained their artistic freedom.

Will Hays just wanted Hollywood to become mature enough to bear censure, conservative enough to value goodwill, and shrewd enough to advocate the middle class morals of the majority of film patrons. However, only a handful of producers cooperated with Hays and his idea of self-regulation.

Other film makers such as Cecil B. DeMille, Erich Von Stroheim and Hunt Stromberg continued to produce films that sexually wowed the Flapper Generation.

Hays was determined to convince the studios that self regulation would quell the States’ censors and protect the integrity of their films. But he couldn’t be on the east and west coasts at the same time. He needed a representative on the west coast (where the producers worked) and he needed to be in New York (where the money-minded presidents of the film industry resided).

He appointed Colonel Jason Joy, a former War Dept. Public Relations man, to read the scenarios and scripts and then advise the Hollywood producers on potential problems with the censors. Colonel Joy helped to produce a guideline of “Don’t and Be Carefuls”, based on the rules of censor boards around the country. They included profanity, nudity, drug trafficking, sexual perversion, white slavery, miscegenation, sex hygiene and venereal diseases, scenes of actual childbirth, children’s sex organs, ridicule of the clergy and offences against a race, creed or nation.

Hays’ office sent copies of the Industry Code of Ethics to every newspaper editor in the nation, along with a personally signed letter, that promised a new era in screen history. Hays also forwarded this Code to all of the Hollywood producers, but many of them scribbled “Return to Sender” across the envelope and popped it back in the mail to Hays. Producers were always suspicious of outside interference, even from their east coast company presidents.

In 1929 they sent Colonel Joy on 20 percent of their scenarios. Will Hays’ bright and positive beginnings were fading.

The studios were running wild in the late 1920s – MGM had a sweaty Joan Crawford drop her skirt for a hot Charleston in *Our Dancing Daughters*. First National set afire a theatre in the film *Paris* so that chorines could flee the dressing rooms undressed. In the film *Mating Call*, Renee Adoree swan nude then wore a sheer wet chemise homeward.

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE **FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s**

In February 1929 as religious organizations issued demands for control, Hays learned that press baron William Randolph Hearst would throw his considerable influence behind the movement for Federal Government censorship. Civic and Women's organizations were calling for Federal controls, legislation was pending in both Congress and the States and Hays was surrounded by hostile critics intent on the moral transformation of the movies.

Hays found his savior in Martin Quigley, the publisher of Motion Picture Herald. Martin Quigley was a very wealthy man and a devout catholic. He had been a matchmaker for Hollywood and the Church back in 1926 when he worked with the studios and cultivated relationships with the east coast presidents to have the Catholic Eucharistic Congress of Chicago that year filmed.

Quigley conceived the idea of a code that would include not only the rules and regulations, but philosophy. It would be an industry code agreed upon by both the east coast Motion Picture Presidents and the Church. Quigley received approval to have Father Daniel Lord, a St. Louis University professor, write the document. Basic to the Production Code Lord devised for Quigley were three working principles:

1. No picture should lower the moral standards of those who see it
2. Law, natural or divine must not be belittled, ridiculed, nor must a sentiment be created against it.
3. As far as possible, life should not be misrepresented, at least not in such a way as to place in the mind of youth false values on life.

The Production Code termed movies "entertainment". Motion pictures could reshape the bodies and souls of human beings and they could affect spiritual or moral progress. But they were still "entertainment" – not art. As such, those who produced them were bound to produce "correct entertainment" for the mass audience, for the cultivated and the rude, the mature and the immature, the self-respecting and the criminal. Hollywood must honour the moral responsibilities of the motion pictures.

Will Hays saw the completed Code early in 1930. It was exactly what he was looking for. He knew if he and Quigley and Father Lord could get the producers' approval they would silence all cries for Federal censorship.

Several studio moguls even devised their own, less restrictive Code. They claimed motions pictures were not the creators of standards and values, but merely their mirror. As such, the box office would hold Hollywood depravity in check, movie goers would spend their dimes on pictures they liked, shun those they did not and gradually those producers who offended public decency would fade away. It was an artful defense of screen and studio freedom.

The Production Code, like the moguls Counter-Code concerned morals. The adoption of either Code would concern money. The investment banks poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into the Motion Picture industry and as long as Hollywood turned a profit they showed no desire to control picture content. However, after the October 1929 Wall Street crash, with box offices dwindling and cries for Federal regulation from the Legion of Decency, the money men also began to call for restraint in order to protect their investments.

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

The Hollywood moguls gave in, forming a committee of executives to work with Hays and Lord on the final draft of the Code.

In February 1930 the executives of all major studios formally endorsed the new Production Code. The following month the Association Board of Directors made it Hollywood law.

Colonel Joy who had previously acted as a consultant to the producers was now expected to act as “gate-keeper” of the Code. The new Code rules expected that he would review each member company picture and approve only those that observed the rigid standards of the Code.

If film-makers wished to challenge Joy’s rulings they could appeal to a committee of three west coast producers – the so-called Hollywood jury. The Hollywood jury had members chosen in rotation to serve on the jury for a specific length of time. The problem with the jury was the three producers were in favour of self protection and screen freedom. They certainly were not going to turn down another producer’s film as they might be submitting one of their films to that very same producer when it was his turn to sit on the jury.

Story and screenplay submissions to the MPPDA increased from 48 in 1929 to 1,200 in 1930.

During the first seven months of 1930 the studios seemed intent on changing their post-war preoccupation with crime and sleaze to high-minded historical dramas and literary classics. It appeared to be a direct result of the Manhattan company presidents controlling the Hollywood producers.

But toward the end of 1930 the presidents relaxed their grip. Domestic movie attendance was down 10%. They demanded cuts to studio rosters and production costs. To the producers in Hollywood it was clear that studio executives who produced run-away hits would keep their inflated salaries, swimming pools and limos. Those who didn’t would end up in the soup lines.

The studios filled the movie houses once again with images of sex and violence. The more sensational the picture, the more competitive the studio. The more competitive, the more profitable.

In August 1931 Hollywood was facing the full brunt of the Depression. Theatre attendance was declining rapidly. In desperation the Manhattan company presidents okayed films with prostitutes, sexual sin and violent gangsters.

The Public Enemy was a 1931 Darryl Zanuck feature for Warner Brothers. Zanuck wanted sex and violence. He wanted everybody in the movie to be tough, tough, tough without a shred of morality or conscience. During its first week at the Strand theatre on Broadway, *The Public Enemy* surpassed the box office record set three months earlier by another violent gangster movie *Little Caesar*.

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

Cries for Federal regulation and censorship rose up once again. An anxious Will Hays hoped for a miracle as he ordered a public relations man he had hired back in 1930 to go west and help face down the producers. That public relations man was Joe Breen.

Now enter stage right – Mae West. The Brooklyn born bomb-shell had founded her career on *Sex* her boldly titled 1926 Broadway play. Mae wrote a new play in the spring of 1928 called *Diamond Lil* that was also a smash success. It included unmarried sex, white slavery and innuendo.

Two studios, Universal and Paramount were frantic to acquire the rights to make *Diamond Lil* into a motion picture. Will Hays deemed *Diamond Lil* an immoral play and for two years was able to hold off any studio purchasing the rights.

But Paramount in 1932 was on the verge of bankruptcy. They knew a *Diamond Lil* picture could be made inexpensively and would be a box office success. The populace couldn't get enough of Mae West. Her move from New York to Hollywood was covered daily by the press.

Paramount purchased the rights and the screenplay for *Diamond Lil* centred on Mae "one of the finest women who ever walked the streets." The film was titled *She Done Him Wrong* but Mae's character was all *Diamond Lil*. Paramount would proceed with *She Done Him Wrong* barely mindful of the Code. Other Hollywood executives would protect, then create their own imitations of *She Done Him Wrong*.

Hays had given up on Colonel Joy and replaced him with a former school superintendent James Wingate. He had been a director on the New York Board of Film Censors for five years. Hays hoped as a former director of censor he could speak both to and for the nation's local censors, relating their concerns to Hollywood and Hollywood's back to them. But the Hollywood moguls found Wingate deaf and blind to their issues. He had not the temperament for confrontation.

Hays ardently wished the studios success. He wanted the Motion picture business to grow back into a vibrant industry.

In May 1933 Hays called an emergency session of the Motion Picture Association Board. He lectured and pleaded with the Board members. The States had upward of 1,000 bills for Federal regulation of motion pictures pending. Should the Hollywood producers continue to ignore the Production Code, Hays would be forced to lobby for Federal censorship.

Warner Brothers understood and agreed with Hays, but other studios like RKO and Paramount were so desperate for cash they ignored his pleas.

Hays finally lost faith with Wingate in December 1933 and made Joe Breen his Assistant to the President of the MPPDA and placed him solely in charge of the west coast operations.

Joseph Ignatious Breen was a former journalist, consular officer and public relations man for the Catholic Church. He was born the son of devout Catholic Irish immigrants who settled in

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

Philadelphia. He prided himself on being a Philadelphia street-fighter in his youth. He was tough and brash and larger than life. He knew when to glad-hand and when to back-stab. He understood and respected power but he would not be cowed by the Hollywood producers. He could see clear through the tinsel in tinsel-town. Where Wingate had recommended – Breen demanded.

Breen listened to the film-makers, he met with directors and told them he understood the importance of their stories. But he firmly told them the Production Code reserved the right to reject certain scenes. He applied constant and considerable pressure on the studios but was not given the go-ahead to hurt them where it mattered – with huge fines if they disobeyed the Code.

In 1934 Mae West's new film *Belle of the Nineties* was released and an outraged Catholic Church preached boycotting immoral films such as this right across the country. Box office revenues had improved by 1934 but the loss of Catholic patronage would cripple Hollywood. Hays met with Breen and Quigley in May of 1934 to formulate an industry response. They agreed that only a complete revamping of the west coast Hays office would pacify the Church.

What the Catholic bishops demanded was full and uncompromising enforcement of the Production Code. They required mandatory script approval before filming began and the end of the troublesome Hollywood jury, and appeals process that moved directly from the Code office to the New York Board of Directors and a binding agreement that no Theatre owned and operated by an Association member would screen any motion picture not carrying a Code seal.

In this time period most major studios also owned their own chain of theatres.

Hays saw great value in the Church's proposal. At long last his office might rein in the unruly west coast producers and bring order to the industry.

On June 21, 1934 the Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures endorsed the reform proposal. Breen was crowned Director of the new and much more powerful Production Code Administration.

Hays not only ordered member studios to submit all treatments and scripts to Breen and to direct all appeals to New York, he also announced that the Association would levy a \$25,000 fine on any producer who released a picture that violated the Code.

After 1934 no picture without the Production Code seal could secure a decent theatrical release profit.

Producers viewed Joe Breen as a warden, but most of them liked him. He understood narrative and could help them weave their stories through the applications of the Production Code. By 1935 Joe Breen had well earned his *Film Weekly* title "The Hitler of Hollywood, the Mussolini of American Film".

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

He was an imposing figure in Hollywood, a land where image mattered. He cashiered properties, re-wrote screenplays, supervised directors and edited films. The moguls used his technical expertise, but they could not intimidate him. He was a superb administrator and negotiator. In late 1934 through 1935 the Code was the Word and the Gospel according to Breen.

But it was still a battle to keep the producers in line. They still submitted unbelievable scripts.

It was now 1936 and the Depression was easing, theatre attendance approached pre-depression levels.

Joe Breen had his challenges. David Selznick, more than any other producer in Hollywood constantly pressed Breen for concessions on Production Code enforcement. They tussled through *Anna Karenina*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Selznick was reluctant to give up any scene, he submitted last minute script changes and often asked for Code approval before the writers have even finished writing the screenplay.

When Selznick obtained rights to Margaret Mitchell's story of the Old South, Joe Breen would treat *Gone With The Wind* to standard Agency policy.

Selznick knew the barriers he would encounter with this film, showing Melanie in child-birth, the amount of bloodshed in the war scenes, Rhett Butler's several nights of love in a house of prostitution, and the martial rape scene between Rhett and Scarlet. With his screenwriter Sidney Howard, Selznick changed brothel to saloon, whores to dancing girls, and long shots rather than close ups of the dead and dying soldiers.

Joe Breen also wanted this film to be a great success. He wanted to work on compromise with Selznick. Breen suggested filming the child-birth scene focused on Scarlet or Prissy rather than Melanie. For the husbandly rape scene, Breen suggested Rhett take Scarlet in his arms, kiss her and walk up the stairs – the scene fades out, there would be no throwing her on the bed. Breen rejected language in the film in particular "nigger" and "damn". In one meeting as a concession, Breen agreed to allow Belle Watling to be portrayed as a prostitute.

Selznick continued to push. He wanted to show hot times at the Red Horse Saloon. Breen would not approve. But he would allow conversation describing the interior of this "saloon". "Were you really there?" Mrs. Meade asks, "What did it look like?" "Does she have cut glass chandeliers and plush curtains and dozens of mirrors?"

Selznick did not press the issue of the word "nigger." But he was adamant to retain Rhett Butler's tagline at the end of the movie. Selznick was prepared to carry "damn" to the Motion Picture Association Board if necessary and that's exactly where he ended up.

Joe Breen joined the Selznick's and Jock Whitney at the Riverside theatre preview of *Gone With the Wind* which included the final scene with "damn". Coming out of the film Joe Breen pulled Selznick aside and praised *Gone With The Wind* as "without a doubt the greatest motion picture ever made."

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

By 1941 Joe Breen was tired. He was 50 years old. He had a wife and six children but he never seemed to have any time to spend with them. The PCA work was draining. Breen's team laboured on an average of 154 films and scripts a month.

The second World War was raging in 1941 and American films were banned in Germany and the occupied territories. Due to this profits were down and studio heads raced to purchase sordid and salacious new properties that just piled the work on Joe Breen. Columbia pictures sought clearance for *Tobacco Road*, Warner's bought rights to *Kings Row* and MGM submitted a treatment for *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Breen had decided to resign his position with the Code Administration. He gave a month's notice. During that month he noticed a marked increase in the number of films submitted for review showing more and more of women's breasts. He was sending ten films a week back to the studios for the removal of breast shots. One film he screened seemed beyond redemption.

"In my more than ten years of critical examination of motion pictures" Breen wrote Hays, "I have never seen anything quite so unacceptable as the shots of the breasts of the character "Rio". "This is the young girl who Mr. Hughes recently picked up and who has never before, according to my information, appeared on the motion picture screen." "Throughout almost half of the picture the girl's breasts which are quite large and prominent, are shockingly emphasized and in almost every instance are substantially uncovered."

The endowed young girl was Jane Russell. The picture was Howard Hughes *The Outlaw*.

The Saturday before Breen's final week with the Code Administration he sat down to screen the completed Hughes film with his team. There were thirty-seven specific shots of Russell's breasts in the peasant blouse that would not pass code. Hughes defiantly announced he would appeal to the Association's Board of Directors. The Board were much more lenient than Breen and required Hughes to make only minor cuts that amounted to only 60 seconds of film.

However, the States censors of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Maryland demanded significant cuts before *The Outlaw* would be approved for screening in their states, despite the Board's Seal of Approval.

Breen didn't react. He had accepted the position of Production Head at RKO. He was moving up and would no longer have to tangle with men like Howard Hughes.

Will Hays dilemma was finding another Code man who when needed could face down the likes of Louis B. Mayer, Jack Warner and Harry Cohen. Hays replaced Breen with Geoff Shurlock temporarily until a new permanent Director could be hired – then ignored the problem hoping that the mild-mannered Englishman would grow into the job. The arrangement proved unsatisfactory for all concerned.

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on Sunday December 7, 1941 directed the concerns of American moralists toward more urgent matters.

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE
FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

Howard Hughes was among those who caught the war fever. He laid aside his battles with the States censors and poured his energy into the war effort. *The Outlaw*, for now, was abandoned.

Meanwhile, Joe Breen was not settling well into his RKO position. In the early spring of 1942 he took his family on an extended vacation in Mexico. On his return he had lunch with Will Hays and once again was appointed Director of the Production Code Administration.

Breen's authority expanded and hardened. The moguls understood that Breen loved the motion picture business as much as they did. But what rankled film-makers most about Breen was his invasive scrutiny of the micro, not the macro, matters. All conceded that crooks must be punished and the wages of sin were death, but eliminating the sight of a baby in diapers, or a small street urchin blowing a raspberry???

And he would just not budge when it came to breasts and they didn't even have to be homo sapien breasts. A RKO film *Little Men* featured a cameo appearance by Elsie the Borden Cow. "All this dialogue with regard to milking is highly dangerous and must be handled so as to avoid vulgarity and otherwise unacceptable emphasis," Breen warned. "At no time should there be any shots of actual milking, and there cannot be any showing of the udders of the cow, they should be suggested rather than shown."

For 18 months *The Outlaw* had been gathering dust in Hughes' warehouse. He was now on the search for the perfect theatre to screen his masterpiece. Hughes promotional team plastered Jane Russell and her 38-inch bust on the front of every fan magazine as well as Life, Look, Pick, Click and Esquire. Russell had become a major star without ever having appeared in a motion picture.

Hughes settled on February 5, 1943 at the Geary Theatre in downtown San Francisco for the premiere of *The Outlaw*. He planned a gala affair and brought two trainloads of reviewers from Hollywood. The reviewer from Time magazine called *The Outlaw* a strong candidate for the "Flopperoo of all time."

Nevertheless the brief theatrical run had grossed \$158,000 by the end of March.

Then Hughes withdrew *The Outlaw* from exhibition, deciding not to distribute the film nationally. Always secretive, Hughes never offered any explanation.

In September 1945 after serving the studios and the American public well for 23 years, Will Hays stepped down as President of the MPPDA.

The Board decided on his replacement – Allen Johnston, a prior President of the Chamber of Commerce. Johnston was handsome and smooth mannered, a super salesman. His first act of office was to change the name of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America to the MPAA – Motion Picture Association of America.

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

In 1945 Howard Hughes presented the second release of *The Outlaw*. He organized one of the most vulgar advertising campaigns in motion picture history. From billboards to magazines, newspapers and radio came the compelling question "What are the two great reasons for Jane Russell's rise to stardom?" and. "How would you like to tussle with Russell?" Over Los Angeles a skywriter spelled "The Outlaw" followed by two huge circles, each carefully dotted in the centre. Billboards promised "Not a scene cut – exactly as filmed."

The box office soared. Long lines of patrons awaited the opening at four Los Angeles movie theatres. Elsewhere *The Outlaw* played to packed houses.

Johnston and his staff were inundated with letters demanding to know how such a scandalous and degrading film could have received the Code Seal. Johnston acted decisively, less than a week after the picture opened he charged Hughes with having openly and repeatedly violated the Association's advertising code. The Board voted to remove the Seal from *The Outlaw*.

Many in Hollywood agreed with Howard Hughes that the Motion Picture Association discriminated against them and violated their first amendment rights.

Breen had always believed the Production Code embodied fundamental principles of Christian morality. Yet he also recognized that the Second World War had unleashed forces that Hollywood could not ignore. The 1930 Code outline against violence and murder, adultery and illicit sex now seemed old-fashioned. Breen knew he would have to accept the changing American society and ease up.

The Second World War had ended and the Cold War began. There were new independent directors, many of them European who had little in common with the studio moguls and produced pictures that had little in common with the Hollywood product. They would inspire American writers and directors and puzzle American producers and American studios. They would test Joe Breen and the Production Code Administration.

The films of a small group of Italian film-makers, dubbed the Neo-realists, displayed in their films a grasp of the human condition that made Hollywood films seem slick and stylized. The new Italian films were uncompromising. They were filled with harsh detail, depiction of slums with garbage and crumbling buildings, broken, worn furniture and clothing, with humanity twisted and destroyed by forces beyond their control. Their films evoked discussion and analyzation.

Roberto Rosselini who directed *Open City* and Vittorio DeSica *The Bicycle Thief* were two of the more prominent of the Neo-realists. Released in Italy in 1948, *The Bicycle Thief* won acclaim throughout Europe. Critics called it "Brilliant and Devastating". It won film awards in Italy, Britain and Belgium. *The Bicycle Thief* was the most universally praised feature of the post-war decade.

The American distributor of this film Joe Burstyn, thought this fine film should not be relegated to the art houses, but should be shown in first run theatre right across the U.S. Joe Breen liked *The Bicycle Thief* and with some minor changes it could earn his approval. Breen found

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s

only two scenes troublesome. The first when the leading character's small son pauses beside a Roman wall apparently to relieve himself. His back is to the camera. The second was a chase of the bicycle thief through a house of ill repute even though the inside of the bordello and its occupants showed nothing remotely sensual.

Breen informed the distributor of the film he would grant a seal if these two scenes were edited. Burstyn damned Breen's decision and appealed to the Board of Directors. Five days before the hearing *The Bicycle Thief* won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. The picture was awarded the Seal un-cut.

Breen was worried the Production Code Administration was on shaky ground. In 1948 the Supreme Court had handed down a divorce decree that forced all major studios to sell their theatre chains. Now these theatres were independent and free from corporate supervision, they could easily decide to screen films that lacked a Code Seal.

At the beginning of 1950 fewer than one million homes contained television sets. By Christmas of that year the number had quadrupled and 600 theatres had permanently closed their doors. The soaring birth-rate kept young couples at home and the migration of families to the suburbs distanced patrons from the downtown theatres. The populace were spending their money on houses, cars and appliances.

Studio executives were searching for properties that would lure Americans back to the theatres.

Although they were both in their forties, William Wyler and Elia Kazan were considered the new breed of Hollywood film-makers. They were independent, uncompromising and fiercely committed to cinema as an art form. "It's not the business of the motion picture industry to be the guardians of children" Wyler told *Variety* "That's the job of parents."

Wyler and Kazan sought to bring two compelling Broadway dramas *Detective Story* and *A Street Car Named Desire* to the screen. They went toe-to-toe with Joe Breen and the outcome was while neither side triumphed, both won enough concessions to claim partial victory and amend the Production Code to allow previously forbidden subjects "if they were absolutely necessary to the plot of a film."

In March 1953 *Variety* shouted "Breen Losing Power – After 19 Years of Rigid Self-Regulation, the Film Industry Apparently Is Ready to Drop the Production Code Authority. No Announcement Has Been Made But There Are Definite Signs that The Code Has Outlived Its Usefulness."

In the fall of 1954 sixty year old Joe Breen resigned. That year at the Academy Awards he had been given a special Oscar "For Service To The Industry" inscribed "To Joe Breen – For His Conscientious, Open-Minded and Dignified Management of the Production Code Administration".

Geoff Shurlock once again succeeded Joe Breen as Director of the Code.

DISCUSSION ON THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE **FROM 1921 TO THE 1960s**

The mid-1950s brought American Rock and Roll and a new generation of young rebels who deemed their Parents middle-class suburban lifestyles confining and sterile.

The Association undertook a major Code re-write and lifted all remaining taboos from film except nudity, sexual perversion and venereal disease.

In June 1962 the premiere of a picture about the love affair between a middle-aged man and a 12 year old child would land the knock-out punch to the Hollywood Production Code. The film was Lolita, the child-actor 13 year old Sue Lyons, and the director a young Stanley Kubrick.

Hollywood and the world around it had certainly changed. The studios moguls, Hays and Breen were all deceased. The role of the producer in Hollywood had changed and become less formidable. The roll of the director in Hollywood had also changed and become more powerful.

The Classification and Rating Administration replaced the Code. Explicit sex and graphic violence could now be included in a first run film as long as the rating was "X". How strictly the various theatres enforced entry age is another story.

So we miss Joe Breen who looked out for the common good of the masses, who believed imagination could retain the vision of a film while still following the Code rules? Do we now consider ourselves adult and savvy enough to censor ourselves and our families? And, can we really accomplish that in this cyber society we live in where anything is available to anyone with the simple click of a key?