



Dirty Words and Filthy Pictures: Film and the First Amendment

By Jeremy Geltzer

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From the earliest days of cinema, scandalous films such as *The Kiss* (1896) attracted audiences eager to see provocative images on screen. With controversial content, motion pictures challenged social norms and prevailing laws at the intersection of art and entertainment. Today, the First Amendment protects a wide range of free speech, but this wasn't always the case. For the first fifty years, movies could be censored and banned by city and state officials charged with protecting the moral fabric of their communities. Once film was embraced under the First Amendment by the Supreme Court's *Miracle* decision in 1952, new problems pushed notions of acceptable content even further.

Dirty Words & Filthy Pictures explores movies that changed the law and resulted in greater creative freedom for all. Relying on primary sources that include court decisions, contemporary periodicals, state censorship ordinances, and studio production codes, Jeremy Geltzer offers a comprehensive and fascinating history of cinema and free speech, from the earliest films of Thomas Edison to the impact of pornography and the Internet. With incisive case studies of risqué pictures, subversive foreign films, and banned B-movies, he reveals how the legal battles over film content changed long-held interpretations of the Constitution, expanded personal freedoms, and opened a new era of free speech. An important contribution to film studies and media law, Geltzer's work presents the history of film and the First Amendment with an unprecedented level of detail.

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Editorial Review

Review

"An important reference book for scholars of the law and cinema." (*Kirkus Reviews*)

"... clarity, combined with scholarly authority and a graceful narrative style...makes Jeremy Geltzer's *Dirty Words And Filthy Pictures: Film And The First Amendment* so compelling... valuable both as a specialized movie-history text and a meditation on morality, freedom of expression, changing notions of what constitutes the scandalous, and how, well, nothing ever stays the same." (*The New York Times Book Review* 2016-06-05)

"*Dirty Words* tells the inside story of Hollywood's fight for freedom of speech. It's filled with great characters—from moviemakers who pushed the edge to the censors who pushed back." (Garry Marshall)

"*Dirty Words & Filthy Pictures*'s scope is impressively broad, and to the best of my personal knowledge virtually complete; it appears to leave no pertinent censorship situation unmentioned and makes fascinating reading. This book should be the ultimate resource for information regarding film censorship for some time to come." (E. Leonard Rubin, Adjunct Professor of Entertainment Law, John Marshall Law School, and former Adjunct Professor of Copyright Law, Northwestern University School of Law. Former Vice President, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary for Playboy Enterprises. Currently in private practice at the Chicago law firm of Querrey & Harrow)

About the Author

Jeremy Geltzer is an author and entertainment and intellectual property attorney who has worked for major movie studios, including Paramount, Warner Bros., Disney, and Lionsgate. Prior to his legal career, Geltzer was a writer and producer at Turner Classic Movies. He has also taught film history and theory at Georgia State University and lectured on issues of copyright and fair use.

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