

Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

DeGrazia, Edward and Newman, Roger K. *Banned Films: Movies, Censors & The First Amendment.* New York: Bowker, 1982. 455p. \$24.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper. LC 82-4314. ISBN 0-8352-1509-1 cloth, 0-8352-1511-3 paper.

In recent years, the censorship of films has not attracted quite so much attention as the banning of books. One reason is that the censorship of motion pictures has become very much a part of the American scene in a way that the censorship of books has not. Film censorship as we know it takes many forms: classification (similar to "labeling" of books), review and editing by censorship boards, self-censorship, and perhaps least frequent of all, banning and censorship by lawsuit.

"Birth of a Nation," which was first shown in 1915, has gone down in history as the most-banned motion picture. But film censorship was already well on its way to becoming a solid American tradition. As early as 1908, the mayor of New York closed all six hundred motion picture theaters in the city. He cited safety reasons, but also threatened to revoke the licenses of any that showed movies tending "to degrade or injure the morals of the community." The same city saw the establishment in 1909 of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures which, by 1915, was reviewing virtually the entire output of the industry prior to public viewing. Its motto strikes a familiar note: "Selection, not censorship." This was merely the first of many such groups established by state and local government and the industry itself. The efforts of such bodies were encouraged by a 1915 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that movies were not entitled to constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and

press. This decision stood for thirty-five years.

DeGrazia, a Yeshiva University law professor and First Amendment lawyer, and Newman, a historian and biographer of civil libertarians, have given us a book on film censorship that is both a survey and a reference work. The first 151 pages are given over to a concise account of movie censorship in American life. The second section, and most of the book, consists of the censorship histories of 122 American and foreign films banned from 1908 to 1981 for political, moral, or sexual reasons which have resulted in court cases. They are dealt with in chronological order to "reveal individually the nation's changing life-styles and social concerns." They are cross-referenced by case name and also by movie title in a straight alphabetical arrangement. Additional features such as a glossary of legal terms and lists of acronyms and abbreviations aid the layman in the use of this book. There is also a good index.

Banned Films is a well-written and compact one-volume guide to the history of film censorship in America as well as a reference book on banned films. It is difficult to imagine an academic library that would not benefit from the addition of this volume, especially if the focus of the collection includes the liberal arts, law, or filmography.—*Laurence Miller, Florida International University.*

Compaine, Benjamin M. and others. *Who Owns the Media?* 2d ed. White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry Publications, 1982. 529p. \$45 cloth. LC 82-13039. ISBN 0-86729-007-2.
Who Owns the Media? in its 1979 edition,