

# Censorship of the American Theatre in the Twentieth Century: Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama

Censorship of the American theatre has a long and complex history. From the early days of the Republic, when plays were often banned for political or religious reasons, to the present day, when plays are still sometimes censored for obscenity or violence, censorship has been a constant presence in the American theatre.



## Censorship of the American Theatre in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama Book 16) by John H. Houchin

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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There are many different reasons why plays have been censored in the United States. Some plays have been banned because they were considered to be too controversial or offensive. Others have been banned because they were thought to be too sexually explicit or violent. Still others have been banned because they were seen as a threat to national security.

The impact of censorship on the American theatre has been significant. Censorship has led to the cancellation of performances, the suppression of plays, and the imprisonment of playwrights and actors. It has also created a climate of fear and self-censorship, which has made it difficult for playwrights to write freely and for theatres to produce challenging work.

Despite the challenges, censorship has not been able to silence the American theatre. Playwrights and actors have continued to find ways to express themselves, even in the face of censorship. The American theatre has a long and proud tradition of free speech, and it is a tradition that will continue to thrive in the years to come.

### **The Early Years of Censorship**

The early years of the American theatre were marked by a great deal of censorship. This was due in part to the fact that the theatre was seen as a place of moral corruption. In the Puritan colonies, for example, plays were often banned because they were thought to be too frivolous or immoral.

In the early years of the Republic, censorship was also used to suppress political dissent. Plays that were critical of the government or the ruling class were often banned. This was especially true during the Federalist era, when the government was concerned about the threat of revolution.

### **The Rise of Commercial Theatre**

The rise of commercial theatre in the late 19th century led to a relaxation of censorship. Commercial theatre owners were more interested in making money than in promoting morality. As a result, they were more willing to produce plays that were controversial or offensive.

This relaxation of censorship led to a golden age of American theatre. Playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller wrote plays that explored complex social and political issues. These plays were often controversial, but they were also enormously popular.

## **The Red Scare**

The Red Scare of the 1950s led to a new wave of censorship in the American theatre. The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) investigated the theatre industry, and many playwrights and actors were blacklisted. This made it difficult for these artists to get their work produced.

The Red Scare also led to the creation of the Motion Picture Production Code. This code was a set of guidelines that Hollywood studios had to follow in order to get their films approved by the government. The code prohibited the depiction of nudity, sex, and violence. It also banned the use of profanity and blasphemy.

The Motion Picture Production Code had a significant impact on the American theatre. Many plays that were considered to be too controversial or offensive for the movies were also banned from the stage.

## **The Sexual Revolution**

The sexual revolution of the 1960s led to a further relaxation of censorship in the American theatre. Plays that were once considered to be too sexually explicit were now being produced without incident.

This relaxation of censorship led to a new wave of experimental theatre. Playwrights such as Sam Shepard, Lanford Wilson, and David Mamet

wrote plays that explored taboo subjects such as sex, drugs, and violence.

## **The Present Day**

Today, censorship is still a factor in the American theatre. However, it is much less common than it was in the past. Playwrights and actors are now more free to express themselves, and theatres are more willing to produce challenging work.

There are still some plays that are banned from production. However, these plays are usually banned for reasons of obscenity or violence. Political censorship is rare in the United States today.

## **The Impact of Censorship**

Censorship has had a significant impact on the American theatre. Censorship has led to the cancellation of performances, the suppression of plays, and the imprisonment of playwrights and actors. It has also created a climate of fear and self-censorship, which has made it difficult for playwrights to write freely and for theatres to produce challenging work.

Despite the challenges, censorship has not been able to silence the American theatre. Playwrights and actors have continued to find ways to express themselves, even in the face of censorship. The American theatre has a long and proud tradition of free speech, and it is a tradition that will continue to thrive in the years to come.

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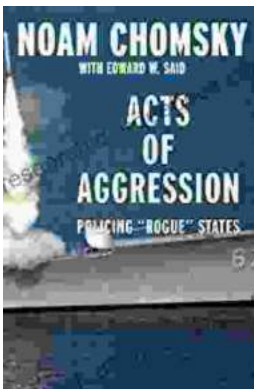


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