

CLASSWORK: The Influence of Hollywood & Growing Concerns

“Hollywood Fans the Flames”

In the '20s, flaming youth learned to burn more brightly by imitating the antics of the stars in Hollywood movies. Girls copied the romantic techniques of great **vamps**¹ like Theda Bara, studied sex appeal from Clara Bow (*right*) and learned the art of smiling from Mary Pickford.



One of the most popular screen flappers was Joan Crawford, who drew huge crowds in 1928 to her film about decadent youth, *Our Dancing Daughters*. Millions of girls watched breathlessly as Crawford drank, kissed and, best of all, showed how to cross and uncross one's hands on one's knees while doing the Charleston. The film was so successful that she made a sequel, *Our Modern Maidens*. In this one Crawford played a married woman who flirts with a bachelor, gets divorced and scandalous!—lives happily ever after.



What Crawford did for the girls, Rudolph Valentino (*right*) did for the boys. Following his lead, American men learned to tango, and to pop their eyes and bare their teeth while making love. Advertising copywriters did their part, too; one movie ad promised "brilliant men, beautiful jazz babies, champagne baths, midnight revels, petting parties in the purple dawn, all ending in one terrific smashing climax that makes you gasp."



The films really were not quite that exciting, but they didn't have to be; they sparked the nation's youngsters anyhow. "Those pictures with hot love making in them," one 16-year-old girl told a writer, "they make girls and boys sitting together want to get up and walk out, go off somewhere, you know."

1. What influence did Hollywood have on America's youth?

¹ A **vamp** was the combination of the Flapper and a more erotic woman. Flappers had a limit to how far they would go with their behavior, but vamps didn't not have a limit. Vamps were more daring & more rebellious.

LOOK at the movie posters below:



2. Why might these posters and the films they are advertising worry some Americans? What messages are they sending to America's youth?

“Concerns about the Film Industry”

Reformers of the Progressive era took a highly ambivalent view of the movies. Some praised movies as a benign alternative to the saloon. Others viewed nickelodeons and movie theaters as breeding grounds of crime and sexual promiscuity. In 1907, the *Chicago Tribune* threw its editorial weight against the movies, declaring that they were "without a redeeming feature to warrant their existence...ministering to the lowest passions of childhood."

That year, Chicago established the nation's first censorship board, to protect its population "against the evil influence of obscene and immoral representations."

3. What does “CENSORSHIP” mean?

Many middle-class [Americans] regarded the movies with horror and struggled to regulate the new medium. A presidential study concluded that films encouraged "illicit lovemaking and iniquity." A Worcester, Massachusetts newspaper described the city's movie theaters as centers of delinquent activity, and reported that female gang members "confessed that their early tendencies toward evil came from seeing moving pictures." Several bills were introduced in Congress calling for movie censorship.

In 1907, and again in 1908, New York's mayor, under pressure from various religious and reform groups, temporarily closed down all of the city's nickelodeons and movie theaters. The drive to censor films spread... [especially] after a 1915 Supreme Court ruling that movies were not protected by the First Amendment because they "were a business pure and simple.."

4. What concerns did some people have with films? (Give 2 specific examples.)