

In sum, this book is a celebration of a distinctive national university's coming of age, while reflecting the growing sophistication of its state as a site of excellence in faculty research and scholarship, student learning and achievement, and athletic triumph. While rarely critical, it highlights the many contributions that Iowa State has made over the past 150 years, growing from humble origins to become a great center of academic and cultural accomplishment. One can only hope that the university's future is as bright as its past.

Banned in Kansas: Motion Picture Censorship, 1915–1966, by Gerald R. Butters Jr. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. xvi, 348 pp. Illustrations, notes, table, appendix, bibliography, index. \$44.95 cloth.

Reviewer Jerold Simmons is professor of history at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is the coauthor of *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s* (1990).

Those of us who work in the field of film history owe a debt of gratitude to Gerald Butters and the University of Missouri Press for producing *Banned in Kansas*. This fine work is the first fully developed scholarly history of a state censoring agency, and it fills a serious gap in the literature. As Butters points out, earlier studies of censorship have generally concentrated on the Motion Picture Association's Production Code Administration or the Catholic Legion of Decency, devoting only an introductory chapter or two to the creation of the state censors before moving on to their central subject. Aside from two master's theses centering on the Pennsylvania and Kansas boards of censors and Laura Wittern-Keller's excellent dissertation on legal challenges to the state boards, we know very little about the staffing, operations, or regulations governing the state agencies that censored America's movies. Butters has taken a large step toward filling that void.

The Kansas State Board of Review, like similar boards in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, and New York, was a product of the progressive impulse to protect the public from harmful products and ideas. As this carefully researched study illustrates, progressives such as William Allen White and Arthur Capper joined with clubwomen, ministers, and other concerned Kansans in an effort to convince the legislature to create an agency to prevent the poisoning of young and impressionable minds. The Kansas State Board of Review was the result of their efforts. Established in 1913, it only began functioning in 1915 after the U.S. Supreme Court upheld state authority to censor. For the next half-century, before Kansans could watch any motion picture, that feature had to be inspected and approved by the State Board of Review.

Through most of its history, the Kansas Board of Review was composed of three middle-aged, married women appointed by the governor. They possessed no particular qualifications for the post or any special appreciation of film. They were chosen for their financial contributions to or political work for the governor who appointed them. They were paid a modest salary (\$1,800 per year in the 1930s) to protect Kansas theater patrons from film content that was "cruel, obscene, indecent or immoral," or that could "tend to debase or corrupt morals" (186). Those standards, though hardly precise, allowed the censors to remove any film content they found objectionable. Their work was conducted in a small screening room on the upper floor of a Kansas City firehouse, where they spent each day sitting in overstuffed chairs viewing three or four motion pictures. Beside each chair was a buzzer that, if pushed, would alert the projectionist to mark an offending scene or passage for later deletion by the distributor.

Butters devotes a majority of his account to the initial decades (1915-1934) when the board buzzed the projectionist frequently. It routinely eliminated scenes of drinking, women smoking, gambling, unmarried or married couples in suggestive postures, gangsters killing policemen, and virtually anything that might threaten "Christian" values. Between June 1924 and May 1925, the board required cuts in 18 percent of the films and special features it watched. Relatively few pictures were banned outright, and those that were nearly always conveyed the story of a young woman's fall from virtue. During those early years, the board's authority went virtually unchallenged. Distributors cut their films without protest, and most Kansans seemed barely aware of the board's activities.

With the creation of the Production Code Administration in 1934, motion picture decency was enforced in Hollywood. Joseph Breen and his staff were empowered to remove the sex, violence, and other offensive content from studio productions before the film could be released. Breen's effectiveness left little for state censors to do. After 1934 their work was largely confined to foreign films and independently produced exploitation pictures that sought to cloak sexual content under the cover of public health.

By the 1950s, the buzzers had nearly fallen silent. In 1953 the board ordered cuts in only three films. It prohibited the exhibition of three others, but the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the decision on one of those films (*The Moon Is Blue*). Butters does a solid job of guiding readers through the litigation and court rulings that eventually brought an end to film censorship in Kansas.