

## From the J-Vault: Censorship & Sensitivity

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Last month, **the US Supreme Court struck down** a California law banning the sale of violent video games to children. Defenders of the law used various (unsuccessful) lines of reasoning, such as arguing that harm to children takes priority over other concerns, and arguing that minors do not have the same free speech rights as adults. None of the law's defenders, however, could be seen *explicitly* endorsing censorship, or even using the word "censorship".

But that's only because times have changed.

**This week, from the J-Vault: *Objectionable Films* (1915)**

This little report from the November 1915 Bulletin of the National Conference of Jewish Charities was obviously not particularly noteworthy at the time, but viewed from 2011, it provides a fascinating glimpse into a time when there was a "National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures".

The National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures has just issued a special bulletin to all producers and directors of motion pictures in the United States. This is the first definite step taken by the Board to check the vilification of the Jewish race in the "movies." Acting in co-operation with the Jewish Community (Kehillah) of New York City, Maurice Simmons, chairman of the Committee for the Protection of the Good Name of Immigrant Peoples, has been in constant touch with the National Board of Censorship. The libeling of the Jew in the "films" had assumed alarming proportions and was the subject of complaint all over the country.

Don't you wish we still had a "Committee for the Protection of the Good Name of Immigrant Peoples"? Americans used to be much better at naming things. Also, isn't it quaint to reflect that there used to be a time when Jews were portrayed in "movies" and "films" as falling into a set of stereotypical roles? **Oh, wait a minute...**

On a more serious note, it may come as a surprise to modern American Jews, who are accustomed to seeing Jewish communal institutions stand generally on the side of civil liberties, that in 1915 Jewish community institutions apparently felt no tension about, or even any need to explain, appealing to the National Board of Censorship.

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