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### **Prostitutes, Charity Girls, and *The End of the Road*: Hostile Worlds of Sex and Commerce in an Early Sexual Hygiene Film**

Miriam Posner

During World War I, an unusual group of watchwomen patrolled the streets around soldiers' training camps: middle-class matrons on the lookout for young women on the verge of committing sin.<sup>1</sup> Once identified, these young women could be grouped into two categories: the charity girl, who might exchange sexual favors for goods, but not cash; and the prostitute, who exchanged sex for money. The first was redeemable, the second a lost cause. As the World War I-era film *End of the Road* demonstrates, this seemingly arbitrary distinction applied not just to sex but also to films about sex.

In the United States, World War I helped to usher in large-scale demographic and cultural changes, and social reformers of the era responded by policing gender roles ever more closely. *End of the Road*, a 1919 sexual health film designed for women, is an artifact of this fraught wartime moment. A morality tale for working women, *End of the Road* offers strict guidance on how to draw boundaries between the world of commerce and the world of sexual love. An artifact of anxiety about changing sexual mores, *End of the Road* demonstrates how that anxiety centered on the intertwining of sex and commerce, and how this

unease extended beyond the film itself and into its tumultuous exhibition history. *End of the Road* documents discomfort about the commingling of sex and commerce, but this tension wasn't confined to the film's subject matter. The film itself became an agent of furious debate when it traveled from a closed viewing circuit into commercial exhibition. The film's rocky exhibition history shows how a film conceived as part of one corpus (in this case, the generation of social hygiene films that appeared around World War I) can, in spite of its producers' intentions, develop entirely different connotations when the context of its exhibition associates it with a different corpus (commercial use). Thus, the same film could be relatively inoffensive in one setting. But charge admission for it, and the film is thrust into a different corpus altogether (exploitation film).

*The End of the Road* was part of a complement of sexual health films that emerged around World War I.<sup>2</sup> The period's sexual health-related releases included *Damaged Goods* (American Film Manufacturing Company, 1914), *Open Your Eyes* (Warner Bros., 1919), *The Scarlet Trail* (John S. Lawrence, 1918), *The Spreading Evil* (James Keane, 1918), *Whatever a Man Soweth* (Beaverbrook, ca. 1919), *The Solitary Sin* (New Art, 1919), and *Wild Oats* (New York City Department of Health, 1919). *End of the Road*, then, is one of a number of World War I-era films, and shares with its cohort concerns about large-scale changes in sexual mores and population trends: the movement of women to urban industrial centers, for example, as well as new patterns of courtship and understandings of leisure time. It

is also quite distinct, though, in that it was designed specifically for female audiences; indeed, it is the first known American sexual-hygiene film intended to be shown to women.

*The End of the Road* is part of a set in another important way. Two U.S. government-sponsored films about venereal disease in fact emerged from World War I, the first conflict in which the US government had film at its disposal: *Fit to Fight*, which details the risk of venereal disease for men, and *The End of the Road*, designed as a companion film for women. Their sponsors intended both films to be shown in noncommercial wartime settings, but both films entered the commercial sphere (with fairly disastrous consequences) following the close of World War I.

So in one evident way, *The End of the Road* can be read as part of a corpus of contemporaneous public-hygiene films. Yet *The End of the Road's* exhibition history helps us to see how the notion of what constitutes a corpus depends very much on context. A film's companions and comparisons can change drastically, not just over time (as, for example, a science fiction film can enter *Mystery Science Theater* territory as it ages), but over space, even within the same cultural context. In one setting, *End of the Road* was salubrious; in another, it was smut.

In its framework, this essay relies heavily on Thomas Elsaesser's notion of the "utility film," cited by the editors in this volume's introduction. Like Elsaesser, I argue that one cannot make sense of this film unless one understands the peculiar

set of historical circumstances from which it originated. It is not at all clear, for example, why a melodrama about department stores and venereal disease was a specifically *wartime* formulation unless one understands the particular shape that discourse about women's sexual propriety took during World War I in the United States. The seedy outskirts of military training camps may seem a world apart from the genteel drawing rooms in which *The End of the Road's* heroines appear. But in fact the two settings — the gritty back-street and the middle-class parlor room — are deeply intertwined. *The End of the Road* was specifically devised as a counterbalance to the liaisons that health reformers feared were forming in the back-alleys of military boomtowns. But one can't, likewise, take *The End of the Road* as a particularly accurate reflection of the way sexuality actually operated for the women whose lives it purports to document. Working women's real-life experience of sex was infinitely more nuanced than the binary framework of vice and virtue that *The End of the Road* offers. For young women in the mid- to late-1910s, sexuality was a matter of negotiation, pleasure, and (sometimes) commerce. These shades of grey are lost in the black-and-white world of *The End of the Road*. So while at first glance, *The End of the Road* seems to document a moment when virtue and vice were cleanly delineated, a closer look at the conditions of its production and exhibition demonstrates that it captures a moment characterized not by consensus but by disunion. Women's sexuality was, during this period as always, supremely personal, context-dependent, and multivalent.

This essay joins a number of works that have looked at public health films during this period, notably including Leslie Reagan et al.'s *Medicine's Moving Pictures*, Eric Schaefer's *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, Martin Pernick's "Sex Education Films," and Marsha Orgeron et al.'s *Learning with the Lights Off*.<sup>3</sup> While these works offer important context, they do not focus specifically on sexual health rhetoric addressed toward women. The scholarship on attitudes toward sex during this period is likewise extensive, but film does not receive the focused treatment I give it here.<sup>4</sup> In fact, I argue, the cinematic rhetoric pioneered by *End of the Road* can shed light on aspects of the history of women's sexual health that is not illuminated in other documents from the period. Specifically, *End of the Road's* production history illustrates an important but little-discussed strain of discourse about public health and mass culture during this period. For public health campaigners of the period, film was an attractive mechanism of disseminating a message specifically because it acted something like a pill or an injection, in its ability to be absorbed by the body, its inoculating effects, and its potential application to wide segments of the population.

Several works focus on *End of the Road* specifically, including Stacie Colwell's work on the dissemination of knowledge, and the American campaign against venereal disease during World War I<sup>5</sup>, but my approach, which examines *End of the Road* through the lens of the entanglement of sex and commerce, remains distinct. *End of the Road* is closely linked with *Fit to Fight* (later re-edited and

released in 1919 as *Fit to Win*). I have chosen here to focus mainly on *End of the Road* because, while the two are linked in conception and reception, *End of the Road* has particular lessons to teach us about the application of sexual surveillance to women's bodies specifically.

In the bare outlines of its plot, *End of the Road* is the tale of two young women, whose stories serve as opposing examples of education and conduct. Mary Lee is the fortunate daughter of a modern-minded mother, who educates her daughter in human reproduction. In contrast, Mary's friend Vera is shielded by her mother from the facts of life. As a consequence, Mary grows up to become a virtuous, sexually abstemious nurse, while Vera, a shopgirl, falls in with a fast crowd and contracts syphilis. Many elements of *End of the Road* mirror aspects of popular, general-release films of the period. Its melodramatic plot arc, for example, in which virtue and vice are uncomplicated by shades of grey, is typical for films of the period. Likewise its mannered, baroque acting style is a holdover from the theatrical performance style that films had yet to abandon.

The design for *End of the Road's* exhibition is critical to understanding how it was supposed to work. The film was very specifically written for noncommercial audiences in an educational setting, designed to be shown with the guidance of a trained (live) lecturer who could narrate the film and lead discussions afterward.<sup>6</sup> The Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA), the government agency that

sponsored the film, imagined that it would be shown in closely supervised settings, such as the Young Women's Christian Association, women's clubs, or benevolent societies, where lecturers would first screen the film and then conduct discussions afterward with the young women who were thought to be its primary audience. *End of the Road*, then, was explicitly designed for young women and their mothers, while *Fit to Fight* was specifically designed for an audience of military-aged men. The film's personnel, reflecting its mix of sentimental appeal and uplifting message, were drawn both from the mainstream motion-picture world and from the growing ranks of professional social workers. *End of the Road* was directed by Edward H. Griffith, director of motion pictures for the CTCA, who had also had a pre-war career as a writer and actor with the Edison Company. Richard Bennett, the film's leading man, had also appeared as George Dupont, the young college graduate infected with VD, in *Damaged Goods*. The writer of *End of the Road*, Katharine Bement Davis, was a prominent sociologist, director of the War Department's Committee on Protective Work for Girls. The film featured acting by soldiers, and was filmed by cameramen from the Medical Department of the Army. Shot at the Rockefeller estate in Pocantico Hills, New York, the film stars the professional actors Bennett (as the physician) and Claire Adams (as Mary Lee).

*Prostitutes and Charity Girls: Sexual Mores at War*



Though war makes no explicit appearance in the film, *End of the Road* is very much a wartime film. It reflects a brand of anxiety that stems directly from the domestic training camps preparing soldiers for World War I. In fact, these camps had long been a source of embarrassment to the military. In prior engagements, prostitution, alcohol, and all manner of vice had been permitted to take place unchecked in ad hoc shantytowns surrounding the training camps.<sup>7</sup>

In response, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker authorized the formation of the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) in 1917. Baker charged CTCA officials with replicating the wholesome influence of the domestic environment, the absence of which had been identified as a key factor in soldiers' turn to prostitution and vice in prior engagements. The CTCA promulgated a four-point "American Plan" to prevent venereal disease: education, medical treatment for infected soldiers, recreation, and discipline. Groups such as the Young Men's Christian Association, the Jewish Welfare Board, the American Library Association, and the Salvation Army worked under the CTCA to sponsor activities and clubhouses designed to provide soldiers with the domestic settings that would give them the strength they needed to combat temptation. The Section on Women and Girls, created in 1918, was responsible for keeping an eye on women in the towns surrounding encampments, through patrols, reporting, alternative recreation, and punishment of offenders.

The CTCA, like many social reform organizations of the time, embraced a view of sexual relations that saw the desires of men and women very differently. While women were generally victims of their own sexual impulses, men could exercise a rugged mastery over their desires. Men who succumbed to sexual desire could be recuperated, returning to wholesome American masculinity. Women, on the other hand, were forever soiled by sexual experimentation. Their adolescence, when these desires were most pronounced, was a period of great danger for women. Adolescent girls, then, needed protection from their own destructive wills.<sup>8</sup>

CTCA officials attacked prostitution with a vengeance, eradicating red-light districts through unstinting vigilance and constant patrols. Yet the goal of these efforts, the abolishment of prostitution, remained elusive. One public-health officer complained that ad hoc red-light districts had been found as far as 100 miles away from the camps themselves.<sup>9</sup> Worse, prostitutes showed an infuriating canniness when it came to evading the law. "The single clandestine prostitute, moving secretly from city to city and even changing her residence with significant frequency in each city, is now the main source of infection," reported one CTCA official in 1918. "Hotel appointments, made through the agency of porters and bell-boys, and automobile excursions into the countryside with the chauffeur acting as go-between, now represent the bulk of her business."<sup>10</sup> In spite of the CTCA's

best efforts to occupy soldiers with healthy diversions, training camps were in fact teeming with prostitution, venereal disease, and all manner of louche behavior.

Despairing of their ability to track down and imprison every prostitute, CTCA officials resolved to go after vice at an earlier manifestation: that of vulnerable young women who teetered on the brink of accepting money for sex. They paid particular attention to women whom they identified as on the verge of prostitution. “These are the ‘charity girls,’” one official explained, “the runaway or incorrigible girls, or girls of low mentality who are a menace and a responsibility to the community.” The “charity girl” was in fact a specific, and noteworthy, wartime formulation. She was the young woman — frequently away from her family, in an urban environment — who accepted gifts, meals, and entertainment from men in exchange for sexual favors. These women were not, in reformers' minds, technically prostitutes, because they had not taken the step of accepting cash for sex. They were, however, stepping alarmingly close to a line that hygienists saw as quite bright: the division between the ordinary woman and the prostitute.

But all of our sex offenders are not prostitutes, as that term is generally understood. There is the so-called “charity girl” — the girl who goes with the soldier in return for dinners, automobile rides, or any present he may give her. She receives no money. In some cases she is the daughter of a well-to-do family. In many others she is the wife of a man who works at night, or is often away from home. She is usually promiscuous and, therefore, usually diseased.<sup>11</sup>

The charity girl, contemporary social workers emphasized, was distinctly *not* a prostitute; she was just in thrall to “an atmosphere of romantic glamor around the

man in uniform." It was, however, a slippery slope from charity girl to prostitute. "From her own lover who has gone over seas, perhaps never to return, to other lovers in quick succession, becomes an easy step."<sup>12</sup>

To the frustration of social reformers, cities were newly bursting with just the kind of young, single women who might be susceptible to crossing the line. The advent of industrial capitalism brought an abundance of wage-labor jobs in urban centers. Young women moved to the city in unprecedented numbers, taking up residence in tenements and rooming houses, often in crowded conditions. An industry of leisure, including dance halls, amusement parks, nightclubs, and theaters, awaited them outside the workplace. Unlike the late nineteenth century, when the ideology of separate spheres prescribed the social separation of men and women, this new urban environment was a heterosocial space, where men and women were expected to mix freely. These women stood between two worlds: the expectations for feminine behavior lingering from the Old World and the new patterns of labor and leisure that characterized the new economy.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, as public health reformers sensed to their dismay, mores among working-class women were changing, reflecting the reality of women's everyday lived experience. During their leisure time, women navigated a new array of dance halls, theaters, and other commercial amusements. They also faced economic inequities. These women worked long hours for less pay than their male

counterparts, which gave them an implicit incentive to take part in the culture of “treating,” in which men paid for their dates’ gifts and entertainment. So on the one hand, middle-class reformers frowned upon treating behaviors as markers of depraved promiscuity; but on the other hand, the financial pressures created by the suppression of women’s wages worked on women from the opposite direction, encouraging them to derive financial benefit from male companionship. It was a double-bind that had everything to do with socioeconomic forces, a state of affairs nowhere reflected in *End of the Road*. To navigate this heterosocial landscape of desire, entertainment, and consumption was to negotiate “subtle and flexible standards of personal conduct.”<sup>14</sup>

So young working-class women did have moral codes by which they gauged their behavior, but these codes often differed significantly from those of middle-class reformers. For many social workers, a slide into bad behavior was irreversible. A woman could be rehabilitated, but she could never fully remove the stain of her sexual transgression. Premarital sex was a “dead line” from which there was no return. For many young women, on the other hand, sexual behavior was not so much like flipping a switch from bad to good as it was a series of nuanced, contextualized decisions. Furthermore, “bad behavior,” for young working-class women of the period, was not a matter of engaging in a particular activity; it was a question of self-respect. A woman who freely chose to court and treat had nothing

to be ashamed of; a woman who was driven to sexual favors by desperation, on the other hand, was an object of pity or derision. As Elizabeth Lunbeck has shown, working women of the period tended to classify a woman as having “gone wrong” not by her engagement in sexual activity but by an attitude of despair.<sup>15</sup>

Reformers, however, tended not to make these subtle distinctions; to the social hygienists of the CTCA, sex was sex. And the training camps, to their supervisors’ horror, seemed to act as magnets for footloose young women. “Young girls are flocking to our camp towns,” lamented one social worker, “attracted by the khaki as well as by stories of the need for workers and the fabulous salaries paid them.”<sup>16</sup> The Committee on Protective Work for Girls, formed in 1917, was a subgroup of the CTCA charged with identifying and diverting the young, sexually active women who surrounded military encampments. Committee members were assigned to act as “protective officers,” patrolling amusement parks, dance halls, and streets in search of vulnerable women, who would then be returned to their homes. Patrollers were “drawn from women's clubs, business women, and paid workers in organizations for girls” and “taught how to observe and interpret the details of evidence which are constantly coming to their attention.”<sup>17</sup> *The End of the Road* might most usefully be seen as an extension of this activity: simply a more efficient way for reform-minded matrons to reach vulnerable women — with the added benefit of melodrama to make the message more palatable. In this respect, *The End*

*of the Road* demonstrates a curious fact about public health films: their tendency in practice to surveil women's behavior, even as they purport to model it. Indeed, the setting for the film's intended screening, the club screening room, supervised by a trained lecturer, offered ample opportunities to observe and police women's behavior.

Neither charity girls nor prostitutes were respectable by middle-class standards. But reformers like those of the CTCA did draw a clear line between the two types of women. The one, who accepted gifts, meals, and entertainment, was vulnerable but could be rescued. An attentive benevolent worker could identify these at-risk women, help them to recover through wholesome activities and lectures, and return them to the fold of virtuous womanhood. The other kind of woman, on the other hand, who took money in exchange for sex, had "crossed the line." She "was deemed dangerous, not only to the young men she allures, but, earning money easily, dressing more showily, furnishes a dangerous example to girls of weak will and unsatisfied desires."<sup>18</sup>

Reformers' beliefs about the difference between the charity girl and the prostitute were not simply theoretical. They had real and profound repercussions for the women so designated. Charity girls found circulating military training encampments could be simply sent home (perhaps with supervision). Prostitutes, on the other hand, were incarcerated without trial and sent to reformatory

institutions, often in remote country locations.<sup>19</sup> So while young women made decisions about sex according to a complicated calculus that reflected the changing world around them, sexual health reformers hewed to a bright line that acknowledged no such complexity.

### *Hostile Worlds: End of the Road and Monetized Sex*

Reformers, then, were quite sensitive to young women's contact with money, particularly when that money might be construed as a payment for sexual favors. Treating, as I've explained was one thing; money in exchange for sex was a very different proposition. Viviana Zelizer offers a convincing explanation for this curious sensitivity to the contact of sex with money, arguing that in monetized economies, rhetoric stringently polices the separation between money and intimacy. Zelizer calls this rhetorical insistence on the separation of money and intimacy the "hostile worlds" view. Americans have piously declared the incommensurability of, for example, money and sex, even as they mount furious court battles about alimony and child support, or negotiate household finances in divorce court.<sup>20</sup> This fastidious rejection of a relationship between love and money is very much in evidence in *End of the Road's* content, in its conception of its audience, and in the conditions of its exhibition (and ultimate suppression).



Zelizer traces anxiety about the intermingling of intimacy and commerce to the competing virtues, originating in nineteenth-century social analysis, of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*: loosely, community-oriented sentiment on the one hand and rational self-interest on the other.<sup>21</sup> The two values, in this view, must never become confused for fear of contamination. The efficient operation of industrial capitalism required its evacuation of sentimentality. Likewise, the sphere of sentiment needed protection from the ruthless machinery of the rational market. As Eva Illouz has pointed out, this rhetorical separation of love and commerce is ironic, given the central role of the market in creating the imagery and language we associate with romantic love.<sup>22</sup>

*End of the Road* conforms to this rhetoric of hostile worlds in its themes, characterization, and imagery. Vera — the character who contracts venereal disease — is led to her downfall specifically through a series of contacts with the marketplace. From the outset of the film, on the other hand, Mary (the future nurse) is situated well within a circle of feminine domesticity, carefully isolated from contact with the workings of the marketplace. Early in the film, for example, Mary and her mother, both dressed in white, begin their discussion of reproduction with a mother hen and her baby chicks, a sweetly sentimental marker of maternal care. When Mrs. Lee describes her pregnancy, the film cuts to another scene of maternal domesticity: Mrs. Lee is sewing before the fireplace. Vera Wagner's mother, on the

other hand, is consistently associated, thematically and visually, with commerce and consumerism. Mrs. Wagner is pictured reading a popular romantic novel, too preoccupied to give Vera her attention. While Mrs. Lee wears simple clothing, Mrs. Wagner is given to feathers, lace, and other such frippery. When Mrs. Wagner rejects Arthur, Vera's young suitor, it is not because of his personal qualities, but because Arthur's bank balance does not meet Mrs. Lynch's expectations.

As Vera and Mary grow older, they follow their mothers' examples: Mary distances herself from any connection with commerce, while Vera takes the opposite path. At the girls' graduation, Mary, the valedictorian, appears in a simple, girlish dress, while Vera, fussily adjusting her hair and gown, wears an ornate ensemble. Tellingly, Mary chooses nursing as her profession — depicted here as an extension of feminine domestic care. Vera, on the other hand, is urged by her mother to become a shopgirl, the better to “find a rich man.” In a superimposed image, Vera first imagines her future in a simple cottage but is chastised by her mother. Urged on by Mrs. Wagner, Vera replaces the daydream of a simple life with an image of a fast car, dapper husband, and large mansion.

While Mary blossoms into a nurse under the tutelage of the physician Philip Bell, Vera finds a situation at a large New York City department store, believing it to be her best chance of meeting a rich man. Vera works behind the counter, displayed like the goods that surround her. When she makes a date with Howard

Lord, the dandy she meets at the store, it is because she's besotted with Howard's car. Later, Howard and Vera negotiate Vera's fate over the shop counter, Howard promising Vera a luxurious life if she becomes his mistress. When Vera makes her fateful decision, it is amidst the opulent surroundings of the apartment where Howard promises to install her. And when Howard finally decides to leave Vera, he pays her for her time, giving her \$1,000. Each decisive moment in Vera's decline into disrepute is pointedly underlined with a financial transaction.

### *Sexual Health and the Cinematic Marketplace*

If the message of *End of the Road* is clear, the film's postwar fate is interestingly messy, showing how a film conceived as part of one genre can take on ribald associations when it becomes attached to another. Following the war, CTCA, seeing an opportunity to expand its message, contracted with Public Health Films to release the film to general audiences. It must have seemed a reasonable decision. *End of the Road*, after all, had been well-received in the churches and YWCAs where it had screened during the war — why not expand the reach of its message? *End of the Road's* commercial run, however, did not go as planned. Once the film began to circulate in the commercial sphere, its message was suddenly not salutary but sensational. Just as, in *End of the Road*, women are

condemned for mixing sex with commerce, sexual hygiene films themselves became salacious when they entered the marketplace.

The film began its commercial run in the spring of 1919. Where it was permitted to be shown, *End of the Road* was in fact a commercial success. That May, *Variety* reported that *End of the Road* was “playing to capacity in the fifth week” of a Brooklyn run.<sup>23</sup> In Chicago, screenings were “booked solid” with “Every theatre playing report[ing] capacity houses.”<sup>24</sup> And it even seemed to accomplish its intended effect of raising awareness of venereal disease; the Chicago Social Hygiene League told the *Exhibitor's Herald* that *The End of the Road* “has brought more cases to their dispensary in the past three months than they had in the entire year of 1918.”<sup>25</sup> So women, at least in broad terms, seemed to respond fairly positively to the film, apparently appreciating the discussion of women’s sexuality, however oversimplified.

In many locations, *End of the Road* also met with a positive reception from local women's clubs and reform organizations. In Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles, women's civic clubs organized group screenings of the film.<sup>26</sup> More than 500 Boy Scouts attended a screening (accompanied by their fathers) in Atlanta.<sup>27</sup> “To my mind this picture is wonderful,” said the vice president of the Atlanta Woman's Club. “I urge every mother to go with her daughter to see it and every father to take his son. Every man and woman in Atlanta should see it.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite this popular acclaim, the film lit a firestorm of debate within the motion picture industry. Film executives blanched at the film's controversial subject matter; worse, the year 1919 saw the release of a number of other sex hygiene films in addition to *Fit to Win* and *End of the Road*, including *The Spreading Evil*, *Open Your Eyes*, *The Solitary Sin*, *Wild Oats*, *A Victim of Sin*, and *The Scarlet Trail*. Faced with this barrage of VD films, movie executives — already nervous about film's low-class connotations — feared that the medium would slip from one corpus, the wholesome body of social hygiene films, and into another, the seedy ranks of the exploitation film. The fact that it was in part the government saddling the industry with these controversial films inspired incredulity, not confidence. “We have no word of criticism for Government officials who see the peril of disease and wish to warn the public of it,” avowed the *Exhibitor's Trade Review*. “We cannot understand, however, why it is that these same officials persist in giving endorsements to every picture of the sort that comes along.”<sup>29</sup>

Actually, fictionalized treatments of sexual hygiene were not entirely new to American audiences. Eugene Brieux's theatre play *Damaged Goods*, about a man who passes VD on to his wife and child, presented controversial subject matter but, unlike *End of the Road*, received general critical acclaim. Produced in New York City in 1913, *Damaged Goods* presented a stern sermon on venereal disease.<sup>30</sup> Critics questioned venereal disease's suitability for stage presentation, but agreed

that the importance of the issue and the somber tone of the play justified the explosive subject matter.<sup>31</sup> Soon, *Damaged Goods* also appeared on screen. Produced by the American Film Manufacturing Company from a scenario by Harry Pollard, the film version of *Damaged Goods* was released by Mutual in 1914. The film, critics noted approvingly, was “free from taint which inheres in most of the ‘sex problem plays,’” according to the *Moving Picture World*. “It does not parade evil in order that good may come of it.” Audiences, too, gave the film their approbation; in Detroit, three policemen were enlisted to control the crowds the film generated.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to *Damaged Goods*, *End of the Road* and its like appear to have been too frank for movie-industry authorities. Shortly after *End of the Road's* release, in July 1919, representatives of the National Association of the Moving Picture Industry resolved “war to the bitter end on anyone making or showing salacious pictures and obligating themselves to submit every film to National Board of Review.”<sup>33</sup> On September 20, 1919, an ad appeared in *The Moving Picture World*, signed by Surgeon General Rupert Blue, advising that “the Public Health Service has withdrawn its indorsement of the films, *Fit to Win*, *End of the Road*, and *Open Your Eyes*, and all other pictures dealing with venereal diseases that have been shown or are to be shown commercially.”<sup>34</sup>

The Catholic Church condemned *Fit to Win*, arguing that the film flouted Catholic prohibitions against prophylaxis and birth control. Other groups condemned the film's representation of soldiers' sexual behavior, complaining that the film shows “a carelessness and lack of moral responsibility in sex matters which casts an unmerited reflection upon the decency of the average American home and of the Army.”<sup>35</sup>

Why did *Fit to Win*, *End of the Road*, and their cohort of sex hygiene films meet with so much controversy? Eric Schaefer identifies three reasons. First, these films — particularly *Fit to Win* — mention the use of prophylaxis (as a last resort), thus earning the ire of the Catholic Church. Second, *Fit to Win* presents a view of American soldiers that is not entirely spotless, a view that angered some observers. Finally, *Fit to Win* and *End of the Road*, in contrast to *Damaged Goods*, posited a kind of egalitarianism, subjecting both middle- and lower-class protagonists to similar fates. In *Fit to Win*, the five soldiers come from disparate classes, ranging from college student to boxer to cigar salesman. In *End of the Road*, venereal disease is a shared affliction of both upper-class matrons and flighty shopgirls. In Schaefer's analysis, this vision of shared fates among disparate social groups may have been acceptable during the war, when Americans were accustomed to rhetoric about the need to pull together in the national interest. But following the

war, such assertions of equality among classes looked less like patriotism and more like dangerous radicalism.

Stacie Colwell argues that the outcry that greeted *End of the Road* stemmed in part from the film's "effective orphanage by its promoters and producers in the face of the rising public censorship."<sup>36</sup> During the war, the CTCA represented a forceful coalition of diverse interest groups. Following the end of the conflict, however, the government disbanded the CTCA, ordering some of its member agencies absorbed into government bodies and some released into civilian life. Without the backing of a strong coalition, *End of the Road* was defenseless against attacks by censors and critics.<sup>37</sup>

Schaefer and Colwell both make important points, but press reports about the exhibition of *End of the Road* and its ilk hint at another reason for the controversy. Discourse surrounding the films suggests a distinct discomfort with VD films' entrance into the marketplace, as opposed to military encampments and chaperoned private venues. The NAMPI (National Association of the Motion Picture Industry) itself told the Surgeon General that it would withdraw its complaints about the film, provided that "the film is not distributed through commercial channels for profit" and that "the financial returns from the exhibition fees be devoted to some public purpose and not to the profit of some commercial organization."<sup>38</sup> The NAMPI in particular appears to have been quite sensitive to



the prospect of these films, which deal with exceedingly private matters, entering the commercial marketplace. Safely ensconced in women's clubs, military camps, and noncommercial venues, these films were unobjectionable. But once tickets were sold at a profit, *End of the Road* and *Fit to Fight* were engaging in a kind of commerce, and associating themselves with a kind of film, that looked alarmingly similar to other, more seedy transactions.

*End of the Road* and its cohort also had the misfortune of entering the marketplace at a moment when the industry was drawing lines between "educational" and "entertainment" films. In the first 15 years of cinema's history, such distinctions did not abide; nonfiction "actualities" regularly shared bills with story films. Some films we might think of as specialty scientific films — Jean Comandon's 1909 films of microbes, for example — were mainstream fare at movie theaters. But following World War I, the designation "educational" began to describe films that circulated outside of the commercial circuit. Kay Sloan attributes this change to the increasing popularity of feature-length film, while Lee Grieveson argues that the prospect of censorship encouraged the film industry to market film as a harmless diversion.<sup>39</sup> The reaction to *End of the Road* and its ilk in the trade press supports Grieveson's assertion, but it also suggests that exhibitors were alert not to inflammatory material per se, but specifically to inflammatory material that entered the marketplace. *End of the Road* and other sexual hygiene films did not

discredit film exhibitors when screened for free. It was only when theaters showed these films for a profit that these topics became scandalous.

NAMPI succeeded in its campaign to censor the two films. No theater that showed *End of the Road* or *Fit to Win* would be permitted to lease films from NAMPI's member distributors, thus effectively cutting off a theater's supply of mainstream films. This moment in fact had important implications for the American film industry. By identifying *End of the Road* and *Fit to Win* as illicit (albeit lucrative) materials, and by forcing theaters to choose between mainstream and marginal films, NAMPI helped to create a separate category of shadowy "exploitation" films: a genre of films distinct from the mainstream movie industry and with their own dedicated theaters, where off-limits subjects could be broached.<sup>40</sup> The censure brought down on *Fit to Fight* and *End of the Road* simultaneously had the effect of evacuating teaching films on controversial subjects from the marketplace, moving them into classrooms and other noncommercial venues.<sup>41</sup>

The outcry over *End of the Road* and *Fit to Win* made it abundantly clear that there were certain films for which it was not appropriate to exchange cash for tickets. But anxiety can often be traced to an undercurrent of social change, and this may well have been the case for the producers of *End of the Road*, and for the critics who decried its commercial exhibition. World War I offered a loosening of

labor restrictions for women, and while these changes were often temporary, they were accompanied by changing standards of sexual behavior and evolving perceptions of what women might do with their leisure time. The imagined “new woman” of the 1920s was not truly emancipated from older restrictions on work and sexual behavior, but she did represent an altered understanding of how women might function in American society. A sophisticated consumer, the new woman moved easily through the workplace and the marketplace. As *End of the Road* demonstrates, the intermingling of sex, labor, and money was not uncomplicated for women, but it was also, increasingly, part of their reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Deeter Rippin, “Social Hygiene and the War: Work with Women and Girls,” *Social Hygiene* 5, no. 1 (January 1919): 126.

<sup>2</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality, 1909-1925* (London; New York: Routledge, 1988), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie J. Reagan, Nancy Tomes, and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Medicine’s Moving Pictures: Medicine, Health, and Bodies in American Film and Television* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007); Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Martin S. Pernick, “Sex Education Films,” *Isis* 84, no. 4 (December 1, 1993): 766–768; Devin Orgeron, *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Timothy J Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (Norton, 1992); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Nancy K Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering During the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); David Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene: Women, Prostitution, and the "American Plan," 1900-1930* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Stacie A. Colwell, "The End of the Road: Gender, the Dissemination of Knowledge, and the American Campaign Against Venereal Disease During World War I," in *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender, and Science*, ed. Paula Treichler (New York: New York University Press, 1998). PAGES ??? See also Pernick, "Sex Education Films," and Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>7</sup> Bristow, *Making Men Moral*. Pages ???

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Lunbeck, "'A New Generation of Women': Progressive Psychiatrists and the Hypersexual Female," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 3 (October 1, 1987): 513–543, doi:10.2307/3177879.

<sup>9</sup> George J. Anderson, "Making the Camps Safe for the Army," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79, no. 1 (1918): 149, doi:10.1177/000271621807900115. COMPLETE pagination

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Additon, "Work among Delinquent Women and Girls." Pages ???

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- <sup>12</sup> Rippin, "Social Hygiene and the War: Work with Women and Girls," 126.
- <sup>13</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*. PAGES ???
- <sup>14</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 112.
- <sup>15</sup> Lunbeck, "A New Generation of Women," 532.
- <sup>16</sup> Additon, "Work among Delinquent Women and Girls," 155.
- <sup>17</sup> Rippin, "Social Hygiene and the War: Work with Women and Girls," 133.
- <sup>18</sup> Katharine Bement Davis, "Social Hygiene and the War: II. Woman's Part in Social Hygiene," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 4, no. 4 (October 1918): 533. Complete pagination ?
- <sup>19</sup> Martha P. Falconer, "The Segregation of Delinquent Women and Girls as a War Problem," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79, no. 1 (1918): 160 –166, doi:10.1177/000271621807900117.
- <sup>20</sup> Viviana Zelizer, *The Purchase of Intimacy* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 24.
- <sup>22</sup> Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=6839>.
- <sup>23</sup> Colwell, "The End of the Road: Gender, the Dissemination of Knowledge, and the American Campaign Against Venereal Disease During World War I."
- <sup>24</sup> "End of the Road Booked Solidly in Chicago District," *Exhibitor's Herald and Motography* 9, no. 4 (July 19, 1919): 34.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> "Health Lecture to Women," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 12, 1919; "Attend Film

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Showing: Women's City Club Members Hear Startling Statistics," *Los Angeles Times*,

August 26, 1919; "Amusements," *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 31, 1919. PAGES ???

<sup>27</sup> "Boy Scouts to See 'End of the Road,'" *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 29, 1919.

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<sup>28</sup> "Amusements," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 2, 1919. PAGES ???

<sup>29</sup> "The Decision in the Fit to Win Case," *Exhibitor's Trade Review* (July 26, 1919): 607.

<sup>30</sup> Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*. PAGES ???

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> "National Association Wins Fight to Bar 'Fit to Win' in New York," *Exhibitor's Herald and Motography* 9, no. 5 (July 26, 1919): 72.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Spencer Lashley, John Broadus Watson, and United States. Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board, *A Psychological Study of Motion Pictures in Relation to Venereal Disease Campaigns* (United States Interdepartmental social hygiene board, 1922).

<sup>36</sup> Colwell, "The End of the Road: Gender, the Dissemination of Knowledge, and the American Campaign Against Venereal Disease During World War I," 111.

<sup>37</sup> Colwell, "The End of the Road: Gender, the Dissemination of Knowledge, and the American Campaign Against Venereal Disease During World War I." PAGES ???

<sup>38</sup> "Association Goes After Fit to Win," *Moving Picture World* 40 (May 24, 1919): 1141.

<sup>39</sup> Kay Sloan, *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-*

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*Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*. PAGES ???

<sup>41</sup> Martin S. Pernick, "More than Illustrations: Early Twentieth-Century Health Films as Contributors to the Histories of Medicine and of Motion Pictures," in *Medicine's Moving Pictures: Medicine, Health, and Bodies in American Film and Television*, ed. Leslie Reagan, Nancy Tomes, and Paula A. Treichler (Rochester N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 19–35.