

CATHERYNE COOKE GILMAN



MOVIE PATRONS queue up in the lobby of the State Theater on Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis, about 1920.

and the MINNEAPOLIS BETTER MOVIE MOVEMENT

Cynthia A. Hanson

"INFORMED PUBLIC OPINION, individual responsibility, and intelligent community co-operative action": to Catheryne Cooke Gilman (1880–1954) of Minneapolis, these were three ingredients essential to successful social service. As executive secretary of the Women's Co-operative Alliance of Minneapolis, Gilman sought to focus public attention on the delinquent conditions of the city and to encourage remedies through education and co-operation. Her work initially embraced concerns as diverse as suffrage, parent training, and procedures in criminal law, but eventually she focused upon elevation of the morality of motion pictures. Her research and criticism of motion pictures attracted the attention of reformers, educators, and members of the motion picture industry in Minneapolis and beyond, and she became an outspoken advocate for the improvement of film. Throughout her lifetime, she served with numerous national organizations dedicated to film reform. However, it was her development of the Minneapolis Better Movie Movement Plan with the Women's Co-operative Alliance in 1920, more than any

other single act in her film reform career, that epitomized her philosophy of social service and raised her to the national stage, where she was forced to abandon her faith in "intelligent community co-operative action" for less collaborative means of change.¹

Her background provided few hints of the prominent roles she would play in various reform efforts. Born in Laclede, Missouri, to a railroad conductor and a homemaker, Catheryne Cooke moved far beyond the small town and scant education of her parents. She completed high school and teacher training, teaching history and social studies. In 1904, she became principal of schools in Keosauqua, Iowa. After eight years of summer studies at Iowa State Normal School, she graduated and enrolled in the University of Chicago to pursue graduate study in history and political science.²

Chicago gave Gilman her first exposure to reform movements. She worked at Hull-House under Jane Addams, its famous director, who was concerned about the potential of film to shape the child's sense of morality. In an effort to harness the power of film to promote the good, Hull-House even hosted a regular "moving picture show." Gilman's work at the Chicago settlement may have alerted her to the need for motion picture reform. Her interest in the settlement house movement led her to abandon her studies and devote her energies to this effort. Working at various houses around the country, she met and married Robbins Gilman, director of University Settlement in New York City. They

¹ Catheryne Cooke Gilman, "A Co-operative Movement in Community Social Service," May, 1923, p. 16, Speeches, poems, articles files, Robbins Gilman and Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul. Except where otherwise noted, all files and correspondence cited in this article are from these papers. On the numerous film reform groups, see Lucile M. Kane, "The Gilman Family Papers," *Social Service Review* 29 (1965): 93–95.

² Biographical information here and below is drawn from Elizabeth Gilman, "Catheryne Cooke Gilman: Social Worker," *Women of Minnesota: Selected Biographical Essays*, ed. Barbara Stuhler and Gretchen Kreuter (St. Paul: MHS, 1977), 190–207.

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moved to Minneapolis together in 1914 to work at the North East Neighborhood House.¹

Gilman quickly became involved in local reform efforts. She spoke around the city on suffrage, child welfare, and other social issues, gaining a reputation as a skillful speaker. In 1916, Governor J. A. A. Burnquist appointed her to the Minnesota Child Welfare Commission. She also became involved in the Women's Welfare League, which produced the offshoot incorporated in 1918 as the Women's Co-operative Alliance.

As executive secretary of the Alliance, Gilman displayed considerable organizational skills. She proposed a committee system to consolidate various reform efforts; she wrote pamphlets and gave lectures on sex education that were progressive and frank; and she created parent-training courses to prepare women for motherhood. Gilman recognized that women could not shoulder the blame for their children's transgressions, so she organized women to work to reduce harmful outside influences. The "block system" assigned each Alliance member a neighborhood block to observe and report conditions, particularly those of saloons, dance halls, theaters, boardinghouses frequented by prostitutes, and motion picture houses.

Her interest in motion picture reform—like that of many women's groups—was an extension of Gilman's general interest in reform, parenting, and child welfare. One assumption that grounded her works was that marriage and motherhood were natural, desirable states for women. Concern for children and mothers, in particular, was an expression of women's traditional role. A second assumption on which much of her work was based was that the solution to social problems lay in education and publicity. This belief was characteristic of the "Progressive" conception of reform: "The Progressives believed that if they publicized bad conditions, if people read their descriptive and factual accounts of problems, society would respond, a solution would arise, and people would back it."²

Gilman's faith in informed public opinion, individual responsibility, and intelligent community co-operative action was firmly rooted in the Progressive tradition. However, the belief that education and publicity alone could solve highly complex social problems indicated the Progressives' "naive faith in their fellow men." It also ignored the possibility that the failure to solve—or even define—social problems might be due to conflicting values rather than mere ignorance. Elizabeth Raasch-Gilman, Catheryne's granddaughter, explained the Alliance's inability to acknowledge other views: "members of the Alliance believed that proper moral behavior was easily defined, that everyone accepted the same definition, that it could be achieved and enforced by law, and that human beings could be saved from their baser instincts by strict enforcement of



CATHERYNE COOKE GILMAN, about 1916

the law. Few in the Alliance doubted what was 'good' and what was 'bad,' nor did they imagine that any offender would question their definition."³

This belief in a moral standard both universally

¹ Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (Reprint ed., New York: Macmillan Press, 1936), 386. Robbins Gilman also had a history of involvement with motion picture reform: he was one of the first group of reformers on the Board of Censorship formed in New York in 1909. R. Gilman to Mary R. Caldwell, Mar. 16, 1925, General correspondence files.

² Carth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), 179; Judith Ann Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 14.

³ Trolander, *Settlement Houses*, 14; Elizabeth Gilman, "Catheryne Cooke Gilman," 198–199.

accepted and legally enforceable contributed to the ultimate failure of Gilman's campaign for co-operative film reform. The success of the better films movement depended upon recognition of that standard—both by audiences, who would patronize “better films,” and by studios, which would supply a “better” product. Public and industry refusal to affirm what reformers deemed “proper moral behavior” not only doomed the movement but led to accusations that “better films” was a euphemism for censorship. Ironically, failure to secure the co-operation of the film industry led to the embrace of censorship by some reform groups; the accusation became self-fulfilling.

THE RELATIONSHIP between the industry and reform groups had been one of mutual suspicion from the beginning, and concern about film decency grew almost as quickly as the industry itself. The first public commercial showing of a motion picture occurred in 1896, when Thomas A. Edison demonstrated his Vitascope to a paying audience in New York City. Early motion pictures followed live entertainment on the program at carnivals, amusement parks, vaudeville houses, and legitimate theaters, often functioning to clear the house for the next show. Technological and artistic advancement brought greater acceptance of film, and nickelodeon theaters sprang up across the country from 1903 to 1908. As the motion picture grew more popular, concerned reformers condemned as immoral the often lascivious or violent content of film. Such material, they argued, could twist the minds of impressionable children and members of the lower classes. They also thought the film industry itself was populated by unscrupulous types and that the film community bred immoral behavior.⁶

The growing ferment over motion pictures drew national and unwelcome attention in 1908 when New

York City closed all motion picture theaters, charging the exhibitors with showing immoral films. The exhibitors responded by proposing that local reformers preview their product and either approve or condemn it. The reformers liked the idea, and they formed the Board of Censorship in 1909. When film producers agreed to respect the board's judgments, the group expanded its scope in 1915, renaming itself the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures (NBR).⁷

In 1916 Congress held its first hearings on the establishment of a federal motion picture commission. While the NBR's supervision was extensive, its judgments were suspect because of its close ties with the industry: all board expenses were paid by film producers. Reformers began pushing for a governmental regulatory body. Their efforts intensified after the war, and producers responded by dispatching a corps of “four-minute men” to give short anticensorship speeches to film audiences across the nation. The industry continued to grow with improved technology, the “star” system, and more money to invest in scripts and costumes. Bedroom farces and religious epics featuring titillating sinners and sweaty gladiators populated the screen and outraged reformers. At the same time, the rape and murder trial of comedian Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle and the murder of director William Desmond Taylor focused unkind and unwelcome attention on the film industry itself.⁸

The industry knew it had to act. By 1921, nearly 100 measures for film regulation were being considered by 37 state legislatures. The National Association of the Motion Picture Industry (NAMPI) publicly condemned certain types of pictures in a series of resolutions known as the “Thirteen Points.” Reformers were skeptical, since NAMPI provided no means for implementing its resolutions. In 1922, NAMPI was dissolved and replaced by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. Will H. Hays, former postmaster general in Warren G. Harding's administration, became president of the new organization, which came to be known as the Hays Office. Hays's mission was to promote industry self-regulation and rehabilitate the motion picture's public image. He resolved to discourage the filming of objectionable stories, themes, and treatments, and he asked studios to submit their material for determination of its acceptability according to the Hays Office “Formula.” He established a studio relations department to act as a liaison between the Hays Office and the producers.⁹

Committed to industry self-regulation, Hays sought to prevent censorship: he was personally active in efforts to defeat state censorship bills, and his office provided literature and training for censorship's opponents. Hays recognized the power of local reformers concerned about the morality of motion pictures, and

⁶ Jowett, *Film*, 28, 39; Herbert Blumer and Philip M. Hauser, *Movies, Delinquency and Crime* (Reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1970). The classist assumptions inherent in purifying “the democratic art” are significant—not surprisingly, no attempt was made to censor the amusements of the upper-class population at this time. Charles Matthew Feldman, *The National Board of Censorship (Review) of Motion Pictures, 1909-1922* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 39-41; Richard S. Randall, *Censorship of the Movies: The Social and Political Control of a Mass Medium* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 10.

⁷ Jowett, *Film*, 81, 126.

⁸ Jowett, *Film*, 127-128, 160; Feldman, *National Board of Censorship*, 149.

⁹ Here and below, see Ruth A. Inglis, *Freedom of the Movies: A Report on Self-Regulation from the Commission on Freedom of the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 70, 83-84, 104; Catheryne Cooke Gilman, “Better Movies—But How?” *Woman's Journal*, Feb., 1930, reprint, p. 10, copy in Motion picture files, general articles.

he sought to persuade them of the sincerity of his office and the industry's willingness to co-operate. Gilman herself noted the "high hopes" with which reformers greeted Hays's creation of the Committee on Public Relations, a vehicle for working with public groups. Hopes vanished when Hays, acting consistently with his anticensorship stance, did nothing to prevent Fatty Arbuckle's return to the screen, and protest began again. This time, reformers-cum-moralists were determined to secure federal regulation of the industry.

ORGANIZED EFFORTS for motion picture reform appeared in Minneapolis as early as 1912, when the Motion Picture Committee of the Women's Welfare League identified moving picture theaters as "one of the primary inducing causes of delinquency" and persuaded a number of them to announce the curfew law from the screen. The movement for better films in Minneapolis began in earnest with the work of the Women's Co-operative Alliance in the spring of 1920. The Alliance began by conducting a telephone survey of women's groups to determine the level of motion picture reform activity in the city. An internal memorandum dated May 19 summarized the findings: with one exception, the organizations surveyed had either disbanded their film committees or had never been active in film reform. The one active group—Fifth District Federated Women's Clubs—had achieved little success. The Alliance also wrote to reformers and film committees in major cities across the country, asking for suggestions based on their experience.¹⁰

Through correspondence, Gilman succeeded in enlisting the assistance of the National Committee for Better Films. Her requests for information about how to build a better films movement that was both "acceptable to the movie men" and successful elicited pamphlets, names of contacts in other states, and advice from Orrin G. Cocks, secretary of the committee. He suggested that the Alliance endorse certain shows and work with exhibitors to screen weekly children's features. "In the last analysis," wrote Cocks, "the whole problem for the exhibitor is one of a paying house. This throws much of the responsibility back on social and civic groups to build up sentiment, sell tickets and handle the attendants [*sic*]."¹¹

Acknowledgement of the economic concerns of exhibitors and the need for reformers to create a market became important concerns for the Alliance, shaping its methods and suggesting that Cocks was an important influence for Gilman. The Alliance was encouraged by the response to its inquiries; in spring, it reported that its plan "for a Better Movie Movement was accepted and has gained wide and favorable comment which has come in from all parts of the United States." It also summarized its methods: "Censorship is to be



MOVIE CZAR Will H. Hays, photographed about 1926

avoided, and selection of better films as well as the observation of the type of seating, lighting, sanitation and music is to be substituted."¹²

The firm position against censorship served two purposes. First, reformers had developed a distrust of "voluntary self-censorship" through their experiences with the NBR, which was perceived as a mouthpiece for producers. In 1919, the General Federation of

¹⁰ Women's Welfare League, "History," undated report, 2; "Report of a Telephone Survey of 'Movie' Committees," May 19, 1920; and Women's Co-operative Alliance (WCA), "Fifth Annual Report, 1920"—all in Subject matter files, motion pictures.

¹¹ Created by the NBR, the National Committee for Better Films published lists of "approved" films and furnished the lists to community groups. By alerting potential viewers to these films, the committee aimed to elevate the public's taste and generate demand for "better" films. Jowett, *Film*, 128. See also Cocks to Gilman, June 18, 29, 1920; Gilman to Cocks, June 11, 24, 1920, General correspondence files.

¹² WCA, "Fifth Annual Report, 1920," [3].

Women's Clubs rejected co-operation with the industry, embracing the idea of federal regulation. Bessie Leach Priddy of the federation noted that the industry had "persistently ignored local movements for better motion pictures." She condemned the "nauseating" efforts of the Board to "dupe and delay" reformers: "Their stream of literature and bulletins pouring into every corner of the land, at enormous expense, is the . . . Industry's attempt to furnish well-intentioned, reform-bent ladies with harmless 'busy-work.'" ¹³

Florence Butler Blanchard, chair of the federation's motion picture committee, echoed Priddy's disillusionment in a letter to Gilman: "I am sorry not to be able to give you a working plan of cooperation between the community and moving pictures men, but so far as I know no such plan is in existence at the present time. This cooperation movement has had serious and conscientious trials throughout the country for the last twelve or fifteen years, a notable example of which is furnished by the National Board of Review starting as the National Board of Censors. All these earnest efforts through this voluntary censorship plan have met the same rock of disaster—the 'inability to enforce their standards.'" ¹⁴

By focusing on cultivation of a taste for "better films" among movie house patrons and forcing exhibitors to respond to market pressures, Gilman and the

Alliance hoped to avoid the enforcement difficulties associated with industry promises of self-censorship. Her colleagues in the Alliance articulated this position as well. Rhoda K. Rypins, who directed the research and investigation arm of the Alliance, told the moving picture committee that it "should arouse the community to express themselves and thus choose the films that they want to see." This task was consistent with the Alliance's goal of "avoiding superimposed plans upon those least able to assert themselves." ¹⁵

The second purpose served by the opposition of censorship was to avoid the sinister possibility that a censoring board would misuse its power. Such bodies tended to exercise a capricious extremism in their decisions: "The [state and city prior-censorship] boards were not designed to reflect diverse elements in the community, and in their task orientation they often came to represent the interests of a few active censorial groups. Under these circumstances, extreme decisions on emotionally charged questions of public morality were not surprising. They were, in fact, compounded by a willingness of some boards to give themselves over completely, from time to time, to the idiosyncracies of their members." ¹⁶

The potential for censorial abuse was explicitly cited by Gilman as a rationale for opposition. "From the beginning," she explained, "it was decided that censorship was but shifting the responsibility from those who should be vitally concerned, to a *political censor*, who might or might not be interested in the private and public morality of the community [emphasis added]." ¹⁷

Gilman had created for herself an enormous task that she did not always approach with her usual enthusiasm. More than once she considered resigning from her position with the Alliance. Her daughter's bout with smallpox and her own illnesses taxed her energies and her attention. Moreover, she may have been less than certain about her fitness for the leadership of the Minneapolis better films movement. "I have never been a movie enthusiast," she told Cocks, "and am not exactly the individual to do the work. I am planning, however, to rest very heavily upon the National Committee and secure other people here in Minneapolis to carry on the movement. I can do my [sic] best work in organizing a group and find that after the organization is well done, it makes little difference what the work is for them to do." ¹⁸

THE LARGEST WORK of the Alliance in the service of motion picture reform was very much an organizational effort. Taking as its motto "Selection—Not Censorship—the Solution" (the slogan of the NBR), the Alliance developed an approach based on the recognition of market forces. "The managers of motion pictures," wrote Gilman, "have maintained that they gave

¹³ The General Federation of Women's Clubs was a national body whose Minnesota ties included 10 district groups comprising the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs and Alice Ames Winter, a Minneapolis woman who served as national president from 1922 to 1924. The Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs and the Fifth District Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs were among 20 organizations also represented by the WCA. See "The Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs," *Who's Who Among Minnesota Women*, ed. Mary Dillon Foster (n.p., 1924), 206; "Organization Chart of the Women's Co-operative Alliance," reprint publication no. 30, newspaper clippings files, Minneapolis Collection, Minneapolis Public Library. See also Bessie Leach Priddy, "Civics Report," *General Federation Bulletin*, Jan., 1919, p. 1–15.

¹⁴ Blanchard to Gilman, Aug. 1, 1920, General correspondence files.

¹⁵ WCA, Minutes, Moving Picture Committee Meeting, Aug. 16, 1921, Subject matter files, motion pictures; Gilman, "A Co-operative Movement in Community Social Service," 1.

¹⁶ Randall, *Censorship*, 21.

¹⁷ Gilman, "A Co-operative Movement," 5.

¹⁸ Gilman's files contain two unsigned letters of resignation, dated June 3 and Nov. 26, 1920. Daughter Catheryne, Jr., apparently had smallpox in November, 1920. Husband Robbins expressed concern about his wife's fatigue in correspondence with his father, Theodore: "a change would be a rest to her." Catheryne, Sr., suffered from chronic, stress-related "bladder trouble" that was extremely painful; at one point she became so ill that she required a trained nurse. R. Gilman to T. Gilman, Nov. 30, Dec. 5, 1920, Feb. 9, 1921, and T. Gilman to R. Gilman, April 18, 1921; C. Gilman to Cocks, July 7, 1920—all in General correspondence files.



THE CRYSTAL THEATRE between 3rd and 4th streets on Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis, 1923, offered ten-cent admission prices and alluring film titles such as this to moviegoers.

the people what they wanted. *So far as the managers were informed, perhaps this is true* [emphasis added]. The problem, Gilman argued, was that managers were uninformed about audience preferences due to "the lack of a medium through which the people could register their full approval or disapproval of films." In preparation for developing a plan of action, the Alliance Research and Investigation Department conducted a survey of the motion picture houses in Minneapolis. According to Gilman, the purpose of the survey was fourfold: to weigh the general quality and especially the particular appropriateness for the more youthful audience of movies being shown in the city; to determine the conditions of ventilation, sanitation, and other health aspects of local motion picture houses; to ascertain to what extent the curfew law was announced in and enforced in and around the theaters; and to seek the co-operation of theater managers in improving curfew enforcement and conditions in general.¹⁹

The survey was conducted in September, 1920. Alliance members Matilda V. Baillif and Grace M. Guilford collected the data, visiting each of the 62 Min-

neapolis motion picture houses during the month. Each visit consisted of viewing a full program (21 daytime and 41 evening programs) and interviewing the manager. The survey sheet included one question on advertising and 23 questions concerning film content, allowing the workers to note the portrayal of such "objectionable" themes as "habit-forming drug use made attractive," "risque or lewd actions," "irreverence," "obscenity, immorality, or vulgarity," and "gunplays, holdups or robberies." An additional ten questions on "local conditions" allowed workers to assess ventilation, sanitation, lighting, curfew enforcement, fire escape routes, and whether the house served as "a trysting or spooning place" for young people. Question seven clearly demanded an interview with the house manager: "Is the manager willing to co-operate to improve conditions?" The workers reported that, "with

¹⁹ WCA, *The Minneapolis Better Movie Movement Plan and the Report of a Survey of the Minneapolis Motion Picture Houses* (Minneapolis: WCA publication no. 38, Feb., 1921), 9, hereafter *Minneapolis Plan*, copy in Subject matter files, motion pictures.

one exception," they were "cordially received by the managers or their assistants who seemed sincere in their promise of co-operation."²⁰

The findings generally were encouraging. The workers concluded that approximately three-fourths of the dramatic films they observed "were of good quality and were proper for immature youth or children to see." Two-thirds of the houses had proper ventilation, and three-fourths of them had good sanitation. Lighting was generally good, and managers were uniformly agreeable to the announcement of curfew from the screen at the proper time. Improvements suggested by the Alliance included wider seats and installment of toilets. The workers also expressed concern about the quality of comedic films: "not of a particularly high class," these films found their humor in "ridicule of the law, objectionable exposure of person, questionable dancing, immorality . . . or vulgarity."²¹

The results of the Minneapolis survey were presented to the public on October 28, 1920. The Alliance held a "Better Film Movement Mass Meeting" in the mayor's reception room. A program for the meeting shows Gilman heading a list of a dozen speakers with her "Report on Survey of Motion Pictures in Minneapolis made by the Women's Co-operative Alliance." Newspaper accounts place the audience of Alliance members at 300, and Gilman estimated the number of theater managers in attendance at 35 or more. The *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* noted that response from exhibitors was largely favorable: "Theater men present commended the women for their intimate knowledge of motion picture conditions in Minneapolis as contained in the report."²²

The Alliance published a booklet in February, 1921, that summarized the survey findings. It presented a rosy picture of the movies in Minneapolis. Gilman observed that "much more good [was] found than bad." Indeed, the conclusion of the report may have left readers doubting the severity of the need for reform: "As a

concluding word it may well be said that the motion picture house in its present form offers at a very reasonable cost good and accessible entertainment to the masses in Minneapolis. As time goes on it is hoped that all constructive agencies will utilize this very vivid method of presentation for education as well as for entertainment and with so much that is commendable in the field one can well afford to exert one's self to have this good . . . more widely recognized."²³

Indeed, Gilman's revision of rough drafts of the report suggest that she may have been concerned about presenting too favorable a picture. An example illustrates. Page ten of a typewritten draft contains the following passage: "The current news features offered weekly or oftener by most of the motion picture houses are certainly to be commended. They give so vivid a presentation of the world's activities that they are highly educative as well as entertaining." With Gilman's editing, the passage read: "The current news features offered weekly or oftener by most of the motion picture houses give a very vivid presentation of the world's activities. These together with the nature film offerings are highly educative as well as entertaining, and are all certainly to be commended." Gilman's revisions generally involved toning down praise of motion pictures or inserting reminders of the responsibility of producers and exhibitors to support quality fare (such as nature films). They all appeared in the published report, which was mailed to universities, public libraries, and better film organizations across the country in response to their requests for information about the Minneapolis plan.²⁴

PUBLICITY of the survey results was followed by escalation of Alliance activities for better films and national attention for Gilman and the Alliance. The Alliance organized a hierarchy of committees to facilitate reform. Residential Better Movie Committees of parents, teachers, ministers, movie house managers, and other concerned individuals formed around each of the neighborhood picture houses. The 20 houses in the loop district were covered by the Central Better Movie Committee, made up of representatives of the Residential Committees. Members of the Central Committee also formed study groups to develop higher standards for educational, religious, and recreational films. Gilman saw a definite advantage in such a loosely structured system: "By decentralizing the work and providing for each community to function according to its best public opinion," she wrote, "many of the old dangerous points have been overcome."²⁵

The movement mushroomed. Members of the various theater committees were named regularly in the society pages of the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*. In January, 1921, alone, the Alliance reported 25 meetings

²⁰ *Minneapolis Plan*, 16, 18, 24.

²¹ *Minneapolis Plan*, 15, 17, 31.

²² Better Film Movement Mass Meeting Program, Oct. 28, 1920, Subject matter files, motion pictures, and Gilman to Cocks, Jan. 31, 1921, General correspondence files; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Oct. 29, 1920, p. 12.

²³ *Minneapolis Plan*, 6, 31-32.

²⁴ Although the publication credits Baillif, drafts in the WCA files bear editing marks in Gilman's handwriting. Minneapolis Better Movie Plan (draft), 6, and "Distribution of Publication #38," WCA internal memorandum, Nov., 1921—both in Subject matter files, motion pictures.

²⁵ *Minneapolis Plan*, 7; Catheryne Cooke Gilman, "Women's Co-operative Alliance Better Movie Movement," WCA internal memorandum, Oct., 1921, and WCA, *Sixth Annual Report, 1921*—both in Subject matter files, motion pictures.

of local motion picture committees and 155 new members. Alliance district secretaries spoke to neighborhood groups and enlisted the assistance of school, church, and movie house representatives. Before winter's end, the Alliance could boast that it had the "co-operation of most of the [movie house] managers" and that "several theatres reduced or took off entirely the objectionable serial. In some places special programs planned for children were put on."²⁰

The 1920 survey was followed by others. A survey form entitled "Report for Moving Picture Committee To Be Sent to the Producer" allowed workers to register their approval or disapproval of films and contained a space for the signature of the house manager. Marjorie Evans introduced the new survey to an Alliance Better Movie Committee meeting on November 15, 1921. Each woman on the committee was to view five films a month. She would fill out one survey form to give to the manager at the end of the showing and send a duplicate to the committee to be mailed to the film's producer. Rheua Schroedel, director of the research and education department of the Alliance, indicated that workers could ask their friends to complete surveys, but that friends should keep in mind the Alliance's concern for young viewers: "When asking friends to use the slips always be sure that they view the picture with the mother's viewpoint as to what is good or what harmful to her children. We are urging the mothers to visit their local theatres since it is here that children are attending in large numbers and the Managers need the mother's help by telling him what sort of pictures his community wants."²¹

A third survey seemed to focus on the "objectionable" comedies identified in the 1920 report. Survey forms allowed workers to record audience characteristics (children or adults; nationality), the first laugh in the film and "any bigger laugh." This survey likely was not completed.²²

The better films work of the Alliance drew the attention of national figures in motion picture reform. In December, 1920, *Educational Screen* magazine ran an article on Gilman and her film work that brought letters of inquiry to the Alliance. Adele F. Woodward, president of the National Motion Picture League, invited the Alliance to become part of her organization; Gilman accepted. Orrin Cocks wrote Gilman that the work of the Minneapolis Better Movie Movement "is more effective than any other form which I know of in the country, with the possible exception of the Indiana Endorsers of Photoplays." He asked Gilman to permit him to circulate the survey report nationally: "We are more than interested in your statement about the report being printed for circulation in Minneapolis, and are certain that it can be used in a number of different communities where people fear that it is such a new



THE BLUE MOUSE THEATRE, 1920, between 7th and 8th streets on Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis

experiment that they should go elsewhere. . . . We have found exhibitors in a number of cities ready to take up this same kind of work, if they are assured that they will receive co-operation from [the public]. . . . To all such, I should like to send this report."²³

²⁰ *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, Society secs., Dec. 19, 1920, p. 10. Dec. 26, 1920, p. 11, Jan. 30, 1921, p. 7, Feb. 27, 1921, p. 10.

²¹ WCA, Minutes, Better Movie Committee Meeting, Nov. 15, 1921, and Rheua Schroedel, undated, untitled WCA memorandum, both in Subject matter files, motion pictures.

²² WCA files contain an undated form for this survey, completed by a woman from East Orange, New Jersey; the files also contain an undated memorandum entitled "Plan for Moving Picture" that outlines the distribution and collection of the survey forms within the committee system; Subject matter files, motion pictures. Gilman to Mrs. G. M. Peterson, Feb. 5, 1923, indicates that the study of comedies was incomplete but might be developed in the future; General correspondence files.

²³ Jennie M. Crabbe to Gilman, Jan. 31, 1921; Woodward to Mrs. Leopold Metzger, WCA president, April 25, 1921; Gilman to Woodward [sic], May 3, 1921; Cocks to Gilman, Feb. 8, 1921, General correspondence files.

Among the requests for copies of the survey was that of Turner Jones of Southern Enterprises, Inc., who had seen a copy at the Hays Office in New York City. Pauline Barber, Alliance recording secretary, sent a letter to Will Hays saying that she was pleased that he had seen the report, asking for an evaluation of it "from a producer's viewpoint," and saying that it seemed to have "very definite national value." Hays's assistant—Ralph Hayes—immediately wrote back for additional copies, and Gilman sent them. One month later, Gilman received an invitation to a dinner at the Radisson Hotel in Minneapolis at which Will Hays was the guest of honor.³⁰

HAYS AND GILMAN discussed her work and apparently he was impressed. He sent her a wire on September 16, summoning her to New York for a discussion of the better films plan. The *Minneapolis Journal* reported that Hays and Gilman would soon outline "a nation-wide plan for better motion pictures." At Hays's request, she stayed in the East for several weeks, directing a Massachusetts survey of 10,000 clergy, educators, and social and civic club leaders to measure the demand for better films and the potential support for a national plan. She returned to Minneapolis in November and announced the national plan to the press. An untitled 12-page report in the Alliance files outlines the principles and goals of "the national motion picture study" and provides a sense of what the plan involved.

³⁰ Jones to Gilman, June 30, Barber to Hays, July 10, Ralph Hayes to Gilman, July 15, Gilman to R. Hayes, July 22, W. A. Steffes to WCA, Aug. 24—all in 1922, General correspondence files.

³¹ Barber to Theo Hayes, Sept. 18, 1922, General correspondence files. The Hays-Gilman conference was reported in the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Sept. 19, 1922, p. 9. Gilman's survey immediately preceded a Massachusetts referendum in which a censorship proposal was soundly defeated. Her measure of public support, coupled with the public's rejection of censorship, probably encouraged those who thought that the solution to the motion picture problem lay in community action and educated public demand; Jowett, *Film*, 167. Much of the local newspaper coverage of the Hays-Gilman meetings can be found under Mrs. Robbins Gilman (Catherine), newspaper clippings files, Minneapolis Collection, Minneapolis Public Library. The Gilman Papers in MHS contain several survey forms, including one entitled "Minnesota Study: Preliminary Study on the Production of Better Films." Undated reports in the WCA files summarize the results of Gilman's visit with Hays and describe the national plan; Subject matter files, motion pictures.

³² WCA, *Seventh Annual Report*, 1922, Subject matter files, motion pictures.

³³ Starkey to Gilman, Feb. 12, 1921, and Cubberley to Gilman, Mar. 9, 1921, General correspondence files.

³⁴ Gilman to Theo Hayes, Mar. 12, 1921, Oct. 3, 1922, Sept. 17, 1924, and Theo Hayes to Gilman, Sept. 19, 1924, General correspondence files.

A pilot study over several states based on the Minneapolis Plan would determine its suitability on a national scale. The next step would have been the division of the United States into nine regions and the selection of "Regional Advisers." These individuals would attend quarterly meetings to report to the Hays Office on community organization and results.³¹

All things considered, 1922 was a good year for the film workers of the Alliance. The year-end annual report noted the increase in size of the Better Movie Committee from 458 to 653 members and boasted that "The motion picture survey has had the greatest public recognition of all the work of the year." A new publication with suggestions for a national movement, "Citizens' Solution of the Motion Picture Problem," was developed and "multigraphed to answer several hundred inquiries upon it."³²

As Gilman and the better films workers geared up for national action, rumblings of dissatisfaction were heard in Minneapolis as exhibitors began to view Alliance demands as unrealistic. Henrietta Starkey, proprietor of the Star Theatre in Le Sueur, complained that co-operation with the better films committees was unprofitable: "my business dropped to \$4 gross receipts on Fridays, even the members of the [women's] club refused to appear. I lost considerable money through this." She continued: "On looking at the names of the signers of these petitions I find that with very few exceptions, these ladies never attend motion pictures. It seems strange that those who do not attend should want to regulate the amusements of those who are movie fans." J. F. Cubberley of Associated First National Pictures of Minnesota, Inc. echoed her sentiments: "To the hardened film man it is really amusing to see some of the requests that the women make for pictures. . . . it is really funny to try to think of some man with money invested in a theatre trying to make money on the pictures they ask for."³³

Gilman expressed her growing concern to Theodore L. Hayes, an associate of Moses L. Finkelstein and Isaac H. Ruben's Twin City Amusement Trust Estate of Minneapolis with whom she previously had enjoyed a co-operative relationship: "certain elements in the city have made the continuance of our work extremely doubtful unless our friends come to our assistance immediately." He split with her over whether the motion picture situation had improved.³⁴

Gilman confessed her doubts to Alice Belton Evans of the National Committee for Better Films: "I have worked very closely with the producers' situation," she wrote. "Too closely, perhaps, to be very hopeful of any great results coming suddenly from any plan." The Hays position on Fatty Arbuckle's return to pictures had also led Gilman to question the producers' sincerity, prompting a flurry of correspondence between the



THEODORE L. HAYES, dean of Twin Cities' theatrical entrepreneurs

Alliance and the Hays Office. The growing resistance from producers and exhibitors, coupled with the "betrayal" perceived in Hays's support of Fatty Arbuckle, left many reformers disillusioned. Enthusiasm for community organization in support of "better films" waned. Among the casualties was the Gilman-Hays plan for a national motion picture study.³⁵

Gilman turned her attention to the Federal Motion Picture Council, a national organization of Protestant reformers that advocated federal regulation of the film industry's product and practices, and "one of the very few non-industry organizations which managed to organize national meetings to discuss the subject of moral reform for the movies." She attended the 1924 National Motion Picture Conference in Washington, D. C., where 300 delegates heard her address on "Newer Aspects to the Citizens Solution of the Motion Picture Problem." She gained a position on the executive committee of the FMPC and was elected to the vice-presidency in 1925. Her speech that year on "Motion Pictures and Morals" was the only address of the conference printed in full, appearing in *Educational Screen* and *New York Civic Forum*.³⁶

Frustration with the industry's unwillingness to cooperate was apparent in Gilman's 1925 speech. She opened her remarks by condemning the state of the motion picture: "There has been enough said in reference to the motion pictures by friends and foes alike to

close for all time the question as to whether motion pictures are improving morally. They are not improving morally and there are no evidences that they will do so as long as the producers are incapable of understanding normal American family life, ethical, religious or legal ideals. The American people should become sensitive and resent the implications made by the producer of the motion picture that commerce and not ethics should direct the reaction to the subject."³⁷

Much of Gilman's address consisted of attacks upon the industry. She observed the "failure on the part of the producers to appreciate the demands of parents and ethical leaders, as well as a complete inability to conceive pictures for a more discriminating public." The measure of the industry's character, she argued, was its product: "They can only understand what they have seen and felt, hence the pictures 'Greed,' 'Manhandled,' 'The Enemy Sex,' 'The Golden Bed.'" Her recitation of provocative advertising blurbs for such films served as further indictment of the industry.³⁸

Gilman's answer to the motion picture problem represented a marked departure from the goals that she had championed earlier. Modeled after the Residential Better Movie Committees of Minneapolis, her solution called for members of schools, churches, social and civic groups to form committees around each local movie house. The committees would be charged with two tasks: the establishment of "higher ethical, moral, and religious standards upon which the production of motion pictures can be based," and the procurement of federal legislation for the control and enforcement of these standards. In addition to externally enforced standards, Gilman called for changes to the structure of the industry itself. By organizing "large numbers of people . . . interested in the control of the actual making of films," reformers could prompt "high and technical specialization in the motion picture industry." She described in detail her proposal for "industrial organization" to produce educational and religious films for screenings in schools and churches.³⁹ Standards for these films would be developed by community-based committees. With greater public involvement in film production and the enforcement of federal standards governing film content, reformers hoped to eliminate the moral offense perpetrated by the motion picture.

³⁵ Gilman to Evans, April 20, 1923, Barber to Hays, Dec. 23, 1922, Gilman to Hays, Feb. 9, 27, 1923, Courtland Smith (Hays's secretary) to Gilman, Feb. 8, 1923—all in General correspondence files.

³⁶ Jowett, *Film*, 178; WCA, Administrative Department Report, 1925, and *Tenth Annual Report*, 1925, Subject matter files, motion pictures.

³⁷ Catheryne Cooke Gilman, "Motion Pictures and Morals," *Educational Screen*, Mar., 1925, p. 159.

³⁸ Gilman, "Motion Pictures and Morals," 159, 164.

³⁹ Gilman, "Motion Pictures and Morals," 162, 163.

FINKELSTEIN • RUBEN THEATRES

STATE WALLACE REID Commencing Today
"Too Much Speed"
 FALLMA AND HIS BAND SUPREME
 ARTHUR DEFEW

LYRIC Commencing Today
 SIR JAMES M. HARRIE'S
"Sentimental Tommy"
 With Gareth Hughes, May McAvoy, Mabel Taliferro.

NEW GARRICK Starting Today
ELSIE FERGUSON
 In
"SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE"
 NELSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

STRAND Now Playing
JUSTINE JOHNSTONE
 In
"Sheltered Daughters"
 Leonard Telph at the Organ

THE NEW ASTER NOW PLAYING
TOM MIX
 In
"Hands Off"

NEW GARDEN NOW PLAYING
PRISCILLA DEAN
 In
"Reputation"
 Wed.—Conny Talmadge In
"Lessons In Love"

LORING Reopened at 14th.
Mary Pickford
 In
"THROUGH THE BACK DOOR"
 Wed.—Wanda Hawley In
"The House That Jazz Built"

LAGOON
 Sunday, Monday, Tuesday
TOM MOORE
 In
"Made in Heaven"
 Wed.—Conway Tourle In
"The Road to Ambition"

THE NEW LYNDALE TODAY ONLY
KATHERINE MacDONALD
 In
"Passion's Playground"
 Tomorrow—Charles Ray In
"13 and Phyllis"

THE 1921 movie advertisement seen on the left contained titles offensive to the motion pictures reformers led by Catheryne C. Gilman. Despite their efforts, however, by 1926, titillating ads such as the one at the right were common in the newspapers of Minneapolis.

PANTAGES STARTS TODAY
 WHERE EVERYBODY GOES, NOW

The SURPRISE PICTURE OF THE YEAR
A Spicy Tale for the Sophisticated Adult Mind

"OTHER WOMEN'S HUSBANDS"
 With a Great Comedy Cast INCLUDING
 MONTE BLUE • MARIE PREVOST • PHYLLIS HAVER • HUNTLEY GORDON

"OH, YOU BLONDE MAMMA"

A REAL WOW!
 He was the answer to Cleopatra's S. O. S. S. (send on someone snappy) and he thought he could "pick 'em, persuade 'em, park 'em, pet 'em, and put 'em back."

He Was a High Stepper, But His Little Mrs. Wasn't Exactly Old-fashioned Herself.

AS JOHN COLTON, AUTHOR OF "RAIN," WOULD SAY
"THE WISDEST OF HUSBANDS FALL, BUT IT'S A WISE WIFE WHO CAN CATCH 'EM ON THE FIRST BOUNCE"

LOOK AT THIS VAUDEVILLE BILL!

Broadway's Dancing Favorite
MAZETTE & LEWIS CO.
 A Gorgeous Stepping Oddity Packed With Surprises
"DANCE PARISIAN"

The Jovial Jannaker
BEN SMITH
 A Dealer in Smiles, Chuckles and Laughs Who Carries His Samples With Him, Offering
"AIN'T THAT TERBILL?"

A Typical Musical Comedy
"JUST THE TYPE"
 WITH JACK WEST AND FRANK DURANE

A DASH OF SPANISH
MELVA SISTERS
"HAPPY ENTERTAINERS"

PER SNAP MUSIC DANCING
AUSSIE & CZECH
"HOLDING THE LAND"

No Increase In Prices — 1,500 Seats at Matinees, 25c—Nights, 25c, 50c—Sat. and Sun. Nights, 50c

Although Gilman's vision was far-reaching, her presentation omitted several points that would prove more problematic to a less committed audience. She offered no support for her assumption of the corrupting influence of film on behavior. Taking this relationship for granted, she made only passing reference to "the disastrous results . . . [that] prevail when millions of our people are daily being impressed with the apparent universal disregard for home, church, and government." Perhaps her failure to support her claim about the effects of film was an extension of her assumption that proper moral behavior, though undefined, was clear to all audiences; hence, there was no need to offer evidence to the skeptical.⁴⁰

On the other hand, she may have believed that whether proper moral behavior was clear to everyone was not the issue; her real concern may have been that the people who did know proper moral behavior had the means to teach it to others. The assumed link between immoral film and immoral behavior was fundamentally elitist. Reformers who professed a desire to see "the democratic art" fulfill its potential often acted on a belief that lower-class audiences were uniquely susceptible to its suggestions. The limits of Gilman's faith in the "democratic art" became apparent when she began to attack values embodied in the Constitution. Denying the "constitutional right [of producers] to exploit youth under the guise of legitimate business," she argued that "a constitution permitting such a short-sighted policy is not worth saving."

Her attacks were not aimed at the First Amendment; motion pictures were not included as protected speech until 1952. Gilman viewed the motion picture industry as a business to be regulated, and her attacks on the Constitution represented challenges to the legitimacy of business practices. Her observation of the producers' lack of understanding or appreciation of American values takes on a new dimension when one considers that the industry was largely built by immigrants, for immigrant and working-class audiences. When she stated that "a pure democracy in entertainment is as impossible as a pure democracy in government, in society, or religion," her view of the motion picture became clear. It was a powerful tool to be used in the perpetuation of proper moral behavior. Federally enforced standards represented a step in the eventual wresting of industry control from the hands of its morally deficient founders and placing it in the custody of an elite group of community leaders.⁴¹

The success of Gilman's proposal, however, rested upon the problematic assumption of the existence of a universally accepted, legally enforceable moral standard, a fundamental weakness of the better films movement. Gilman made a sincere attempt to grapple with the subjective definition of morality. Recognizing that

"no one person can decide what anyone else may enjoy or reject," she proposed that committees of "educators, social, civic and religious leaders" assume responsibility for studying motion pictures and recommending standards. "Carefully selected committees of educators" would assure that "only the best in science, art, drama, and literature" would be the subjects of educational films. Production of religious films would be governed by standards developed by committees of theologians, standards "based upon sound theology, untinged with sectarianism."⁴² Gilman's committee network was designed to place the development of standards at the grass-roots level, allowing for considerable community input. Nevertheless, the proposal assumed that acceptable standards were possible, an assumption that ultimately contributed to its failure before a wider and more critical audience.

Gilman's audience of like-minded reformers, however, greeted the speech with enthusiasm. Her 1926 address, "A Survey of the Motion Picture Problem," reiterated her new "hard-line" approach to film reform and received a similar response. She was again confrontational, calling the industry a "school of crime," offering film titles and advertisements as proof of moral depravity, and detailing the history of the better film movement and the broken promises of the industry. She supported the Upshaw Bill as the solution to the motion picture problem. Sponsored by Georgia Representative William D. Upshaw, the bill incorporated the industry's own "Thirteen Points" as standards and provided for federal licensing of films. Gilman seemed to hope that the use of those standards would silence complaints over subjectivity, and she characterized them as "a common ground" for all concerned.⁴³

THE OPENING ADDRESS of the 1926 National Motion Picture Conference, "A Survey of the Motion Picture Problem," generated much interest in film reform. Gilman reported that the conference resulted in a great deal of correspondence for the Alliance, as well as federal interest: "As a result of a nation-wide appeal, and the Conference . . . in Chicago, a date for the hearing before the Committee on Education in the House of Representatives, Washington D. C. has been sent [*sic*] for April 14, 1926." Gilman had high hopes for the hearing. With two bills under consideration, action

⁴⁰ Here and below, see Gilman, "Motion Pictures and Morals," 162.

⁴¹ *Burstyn v. Wilson*, 343 U.S. 495 (1952); Gilman, "Motion Pictures and Morals," 162, 163.

⁴² Gilman, "Motion Pictures and Morals," 163.

⁴³ Catheryne Cooke Gilman, "A Survey of the Motion Picture Problem" (Brooklyn: Federal Motion Picture Council, 1926), 1, 2-3, 7, copy in Motion picture files, general articles.

seemed a possibility. "This promises to be an epoch-making occasion," she wrote. "[O]ne of these bills may live through the Committee and come up before the House for a vote."⁴⁴

Sadly, neither the bills nor Gilman escaped the committee unscathed. Gilman's appearance was a spectacular failure. She toned down her virulent attacks on the industry, using only the description of the history of the movement to illustrate the bad intentions of producers. Nevertheless, her combativeness surfaced in a series of nasty exchanges with committee members. Her initial statement featured stunningly poor audience analysis. "I regret very much," she said, "that all of us who are here sitting in judgment on this matter have not worked with this matter as we have for years, long enough for you to become satisfied that you should work for the idea of a Federal commission. I believe that you are listening in the dark and that you don't know of what we are speaking."⁴⁵

In addition to opening her remarks by calling the committee ignorant, she appears to have been evasive and defensive in her answers to audience questions. She was repeatedly challenged on issues such as the utility of state censorship laws and the link between film and behavior. In support of her contention that film could be a corrupting influence, Gilman claimed that a U.S. Navy report concluded that motion pictures were "debasing to the morals" of servicemen. The shift from urban workers and immigrants to military personnel as targets of corrupting films, though calculated to appeal to patriotism, did not play well in Congress. Representatives Florence P. Kahn of California and Millard E. Tydings of Maryland challenged Gilman's interpretation of the report, suggesting that the Navy's complaint concerned aesthetics, not morals: The films "were so poorly constructed that they did not contain a good plot or did not have any merit." Exchanges on this and other issues became heated, and laughter (noted in the record at the conclusion of her morning testimony and at a joke made by the speaker who followed) suggests that the audience may have been in great need of a tension release.

The resumption of testimony in the afternoon was no more relaxed. Challenged to provide the details on

the implementation of federal regulation, Gilman compared the federal regulation to the meat packers' bill and copyright law—both disproven in heated exchanges. Her cherished committee plan took the stiffest lashing. Representative E. Hart Fenn of Connecticut asked Gilman to explain the meaning of the bill's provision that committee members should possess "a knowledge of the psychology of youth and the laws and arts of dramatic expression."

Fenn: Will you kindly tell me what the laws of art and dramatic expression are?

Gilman: Well, those that are very definitely cited in the—

Fenn: (interposing). Where?

Gilman: Well, in dramatic criticism, of course.

Fenn: That is criticism, that is not the laws and arts. What are the laws and arts of dramatic expression?

Gilman: Well, in dramatic criticism, of course.

Fenn: Then your bill is faulty in that respect, that you set up certain requirements that have not been defined.

Gilman: No, I am not a psychologist or a dramatic critic or a teacher.

Fenn: I am not speaking of dramatic critics; I am speaking of the laws and arts of dramatic expression, and also what is the psychology of youth? . . .

Gilman: If there is such a thing.

Fenn: If there is such a thing? That is what I wanted to find, if there was such a thing.

The exchange with Fenn continued at length and concluded with Fenn lecturing Gilman on the definition of a valid law: "My dear lady," he chided, "whole laws have been stricken out by the Supreme Court because of the dotting of an 'i' or the crossing of a 't' or a word improperly used." He suggested that her inability to define "laws and arts of dramatic expression" or "psychology of youth" might doom her legislation to a similar fate. The committee then turned for clarification to Canon William Sheafe Chase of Brooklyn, a long-time leader in the better movies movement. Eventually the chairman instructed the committee to return its attention to Gilman. Clearly rattled by her experience, she concluded her testimony by reading statistics on state censorship, expressing her commitment to the "protection of boys and girls," and expressing "the most sincere desire to have this bill made right if it is not right."⁴⁶ The conciliatory words probably were too little, too late; her poor audience adaptation, defensiveness, and inability to provide basic details on the implementation of federal standards had seriously damaged her credibility.

Gilman's drubbing from Congress dealt the Minneapolis movement a serious blow. Calling the hearings "interesting, illuminating, and discouraging," she ap-

⁴⁴ WCA, Administrative Department Report, Mar., 1926, Subject matter files, motion pictures.

⁴⁵ Here and three paragraphs below, see House Committee on Education, "Proposed Federal Motion Picture Commission," 69th Cong., 1st sess., April 15, 1926, p. 94, 97–103, 107, 110–112.

⁴⁶ House Committee on Education, "Proposed Federal Motion Picture Commission," 108, 115. At the time of his appearance before Congress, Chase was general secretary of the Federal Motion Picture Commission; Jowett, *Film*, 167–171.

parently severely curtailed her public activities in pursuit of film reform, refusing invitations to speak on the topic for more than two years. Her reception by Congress may have been even less cordial than the record indicates; correspondence between Gilman and Mary Caldwell of the Tennessee Women's Christian Temperance Union suggests that the remarks of an NBR attorney who rose at the end of her speech and called her a "liar" were edited from the record.⁴⁷

COUPLED with the continuing erosion of local industry support, Gilman's Congressional experience showed that the better films movement could not rely upon education and publicity in the Progressive faith that people would act. The market forces that Gilman initially had seen as the key to the movement's success ultimately proved to be its undoing. Producers and exhibitors would not handle products that audiences would not patronize. Furthermore, audiences had developed a taste for the titillating: "The public in fact had grown tired of moralizing. . . . Hollywood had discovered the box-office appeal of sophisticated 'sex' and film makers throughout these years [1922-35] were in intense competition to find new ways of presenting old sexual themes to an overeager audience. It was the continued prevalence of these themes and their success with the audiences that most disheartened those who had hoped that the industry would accede to a workable form of self-regulation."⁴⁸

Gilman wrote and spoke out for film reform through the 1930s, "clearly and unequivocally" opposing co-operation with the motion picture industry in reform efforts. She feared that the involvement of

women's groups was allowing producers to shift the blame and hold those groups responsible for the conduct of the industry. The better films movement may have failed, but it provided essential direction for later reformers, leading to the development of nationwide film standards in the form of the Motion Picture Production Code and the Catholic Legion of Decency.⁴⁹

Progressive reformers such as Catheryne Cooke Gilman and her colleagues in the Women's Co-operative Alliance may have fought a losing battle, but their efforts and experiences were instrumental in the success of those who followed. Only someone whose idealistic vision of the potential of film had been bruised by hostile legislators and unco-operative industry figures could offer the following advice to her fellow reformers: "If ever there was a time when co-operation with the industry to secure better pictures was justifiable, that time has long since passed."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ WCA, Administrative Department Report, April, 1926, Oct., 1927, Aug., 1928, Subject matter files, motion pictures; Caldwell to Gilman, May 18, June 7, 1926; Gilman to Caldwell, May 25, 1926, General correspondence files.

⁴⁸ Jowett, *Film*, 187.

⁴⁹ Gilman, "Better Movies--But How?" 10; Jowett, *Film*, 233-259.

⁵⁰ Catheryne Cooke Gilman, "Are Movies On the Mend? No." *Parent-Teacher Broadcaster*, Mar., 1930, reprint copy in Motion picture files, general articles.

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