



William Harrison Hays

First President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association of America, Will H. Hays had a distinguished career as a politician before that, most notably as Chairman of the Republican National Committee (1918-21) and as U.S. Postmaster General under Warren Harding (1921-22). As Postmaster General, he was an outspoken opponent of sending obscene materials through the mails. Thus, when Hollywood's producers and studio heads decided to form their own watchdog organization after several

major scandals during the early 1920's (Arbuckle, Wallace Reed), they felt that Hays was the perfect man for the job. Beginning in 1922, and for more than two decades thereafter, it was a job that Hays took very seriously, and it reached its apex with the adoption of the so-called, highly restrictive Hays Code in 1934. By the late 1940's, however, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that films were protected under the First Amendment, and Hays felt his power starting to slip. As American films went in new and different directions, the various restrictions in the Hays Code began to erode under Hays and his immediate successors, Joseph Breen, Eric Johnson, and Jack Valenti, the latter of whom essentially scrapped the Hays Code in 1967 in favor of the present-day rating system. For good or ill, Will Hays was a force to be reckoned with in the history of American films, and his influence is still being felt, and debated, today.

Hays Office:

Film regulation body in the USA 1922–45. Officially known as the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, it was created by the major film companies to improve the industry's image and provide internal regulation, including a strict moral code.

The office was headed by Will H Hays (1879–1954). A Production Code, listing all the subjects forbidden to films, was begun 1930 and lasted until 1966, when it was replaced by a ratings system.